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The Role of Family Experiences for Adolescents' Readiness to use and Participate in Illegal Political Activity

Abstract

This study used reactance theory as a starting point to explain what role a perceived undemocratic and controlling family has for adolescents' readiness to use illegal political activity. Additionally, we examined whether adolescents' readiness to use illegal political means was related to actual political behavior, which has been lacking in research. Data came from a longitudinal sample of 424 younger ($M_{\text{age}} = 13.44$) and 296 older ($M_{\text{age}} = 16.62$) adolescents collected in a mid-sized city in Sweden. Results showed that adolescents who perceived their families as undemocratic and controlling increased in readiness to use illegal political means over time. In addition, but only for older adolescents, readiness was associated with an increase in actual political behavior. The findings highlight the role a perceived family environment has on adolescents' development of political values and behaviors in today's democratic societies.

Keywords: political attitudes, illegal political activity, family processes.

The Role of Family Experiences for Adolescents' Readiness to use and Participate in Illegal Political Activity

Adolescence is a period associated with an increased engagement in the broader society and a time when young people develop their political belief system. This development involves the process of acquiring political values, attitudes, and behavior (Easton, 1975; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997; Youniss, Bales, Christmas-Best, Diversi, McLaughlin, & Silbereisen, 2002). Young people are often eager to express their opinions (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987), and most adolescents come to embrace conventional norms of a democracy. Some adolescents, however, express values and attitudes that challenge the norms in contemporary democratic societies (Kuhn, 2004). One indication for this alternative route can be seen in preferences for illegal political activity, which means that adolescents consider influencing social and political matters using political tactics moving beyond what is commonly regarded as legal (Kuhn, 2004). With interest in illegal political activity, this study covers three aspects. First, using the family as the starting point, we offer a theoretical explanation why some adolescents consider using illegal political means. Second, we test whether attitudes in favor of illegal political means are related to actual illegal political activity. Third, we examine whether different processes take place for adolescents in early and middle adolescence and for boys and girls. Knowledge about these aspects is highly needed to fully understand adolescents' political socialization.

Illegal political activity comprises various behaviors, ranging from civil disobedience acts, through animal liberations, to political violence. In this study, we draw on the work by Brady (1999), and we define illegal political activity in terms of individuals' political activities that attempt to exert influence on opponents or decision-makers, by using non-legal means. In addition to the multifaceted character of illegal political activity, these activities are also

characterized by an involvement spurred from various kinds of motives. One useful theoretical stance suggests that political orientations are better understood if the style (character) by which they are expressed is separated from their content (ideological motive and strength). Concerning adolescents, however, illegal political activity peak in mid-adolescence, regardless of the underlying ideological motive and strength held by the ones involved (Dahl, 2014a; Watts, 1999). The opportunities for adolescents to be involved in illegal political activity are dependent on factors such as the political system and the public acceptance of these means. The willingness to be involved in such activity, however, might be a result of other factors, such as their upbringing.

To date, knowledge about the importance of the family for adolescents' political socialization is rather established. The family constitutes a base for the development of political values (e.g., Flanagan, Bowes, Jonsson, Csapo, & Sheblanova, 1998; Flanagan, Gallay, Sukhdeep, Gallay, & Nti, 2005), and democratic aspects in the family have been linked to attitudes in line with conventional norms of a democracy (Flanagan et al., 1998). In contrast, low levels of democracy in the family and high levels of punitive parenting style have been linked to adolescents' system-challenging political attitudes (Kuhn, 2004; Schmid, 2012). Hence, how a family functions is of importance for adolescents' political socialization. However, democratic aspects and parenting style might also capture a general family climate or context. For example, parenting styles have been conceptualized as a context containing different parenting practices (Darling & Steinberg, 1993), in which behaviors considered as democratic might be included. In this study, we refer to a family's function and climate as the family environment. Of specific interest is research suggesting that an undemocratic and controlling family environment is linked to an increase in adolescents' readiness to use illegal

political means (e.g., Kuhn, 2004). Despite this research, however, there is a lack of theoretical understanding about the mechanisms underlying the link between an undemocratic and controlling family environment and adolescents' readiness to use illegal political means.

One explanation why an undemocratic and controlling family environment is linked to adolescents' readiness is embedded in adolescents' perceptions of their family. Adolescents probably view the control and the lack of democracy as constraining and limiting, and their readiness might stem from these perceptions. This idea derives from reactance theory (Brehm, 1966; Brehm & Brehm, 1981), which describes how people react to external control that they perceive as non-legitimate. When a person experiences external control as a threat to their personal freedom, it will produce negative emotions. This negative emotional state motivates the person to regain control and when this is not possible, it might result in a strong reaction. Concerning adolescents, reactance theory might be a good starting point to explain how processes that take place in undemocratic and controlling families are related to an alternative political development. Of specific focus in the reactance theory is the *reaction* to an environment perceived of as controlling. In an undemocratic and controlling family, adolescents might not have the possibility to develop as autonomous individuals—which is essential for their political development—and they might react to this environment by increasing in readiness to use illegal political means.

Concerning the first part of the family environment, which is of interest in this study, both parents and adolescents have an important role in creating a democratic family environment (Persson, Stattin, & Kerr, 2004; Stattin, Persson, Burk, & Kerr, 2011). Parents may contribute to this development by involving adolescents in decisions made in the family (Silk, Morris, Kanaya, & Steinberg, 2003)—a process also referred to as autonomy granting. This process

describes parents' encouragement of adolescents' autonomy in decision-making and individual expression (Silk et al., 2003). Among other things, autonomy granting has been associated with low levels of problematic behaviors among adolescents (Dobkin, Tremblay, & Sacchitelle, 1997; Silk et al., 2003). On the contrary, parents who do not involve adolescents in decision-making contribute to a non-democratic family environment. Additionally, adolescents also exercise democracy-compromising strategies (Persson et al., 2004), for example by managing the information that they give to their parents (Marshall, Tilton-Weaver, & Bosdet, 2005; Tilton-Weaver & Marshall, 2008). In general, adolescents react to the level of warmth and openness in their parents (Stattin et al., 2011), which might explain the level of information that they offer to their parents and constitute one of the mechanisms underlying how adolescents contribute to the democratic climate in the family. Empirically, parents' negative reactions to adolescents' disclosure seems to make adolescents feel less connected to their parents and, in turn, make them disclose less about daily activities (Tilton-Weaver, Kerr, Pakalniskeine, Tokic, Salihovic, & Stattin, 2010). Low levels of disclosure about daily activities have, in turn, been linked to several adjustment problems among adolescents (Kerr & Stattin, 2000), and might, conceptually, be related to illegal political activity as well. That is, adolescents' readiness to use illegal political means might be a way for them to express their dissatisfaction concerning an undemocratic family environment, which they, themselves, are contributing to.

Concerning the second part of the family environment, reactance theory suggests that the subjective experience of control is more important for peoples' reactions, and should be what they react negatively to, rather than the objective control. In line with this idea, adolescents' feelings of being over controlled by their parents have been associated with adjustment problems (Kakihara, Tilton-Weaver, Kerr, & Stattin, 2010; Larson & Richards, 1991; Nix, Pinderhughes,

Dodge, Bates, Pettit, & McFadyen-Ketchum, 1999). Similarly, adolescents' perception about their parents' non-legitimate control puts constraints on the parent-child relationship (e.g., Fuligni, 1998; Smetana, 1988, 2000), and readiness to use illegal political means might be a way for adolescents to show their resistance of this. In sum, adolescents' readiness to use illegal political means might be a reaction to a family environment perceived as undemocratic and controlling.

There are, however, alternative ideas that may explain why some adolescents consider using illegal political means, over and above their experiences of their families as undemocratic and controlling. One idea is that readiness to use illegal political means express a political opinion formed on the basis of a general political interest (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). In line with such idea, previous studies have shown that interest in politics is associated with adolescents' illegal political activity (e.g., Dahl, 2014b; Schmid, 2012). Hence, it is possible that adolescents who might consider using illegal political means are highly interested in politics and that this interest explain why they develop a non-conventional political standpoint, rather than them coming from certain family environments. In this study, we test this alternative explanation.

Even if some adolescents are willing to use illegal political means, it is still unknown if these attitudes are related to participation in such activity. Few studies have examined adolescents' illegal political behavior, and the reason may lie in the difficulties of defining and measuring political behavior (Watts, 1999) as well as in the infrequent character of actual illegal political action (Kuhn, 2004). Despite this, earlier research offers possible ideas concerning the association between political attitudes and behaviors (Ajzen, 1991; Eckstein, Noack, and Gniewosz, 2013). On the one hand, it has been suggested that extreme beliefs do not always

produce extreme behaviors. In fact, conventional and less extreme attitudes can also be expressed with aggressive means (Watts, 1999). Similarly, "the attitude-behavior congruency" suggests that the chance that an attitude leads to a behavior is lower the more unconventional the behavior is (Barnes & Kaase, 1979). Hence, in accordance to this line of research, attitudes in favor of illegal political activity may not necessarily be related to actual illegal political behavior. On the contrary, young adults' intentions to participate in political protest have been shown to predict actual protest participation (Kelloway, Francis, Catano, & Teed, 2007), which suggests a link between readiness to use unconventional political means and adolescents' actual participation in such activity. To summarize, the literature offer conflicting ideas about whether adolescents act out their attitudes, and there is a need to examine this association further.

One important issue when studying illegal political activity is the societal context in which it is performed (Dalton, van Sickle and Weldon, 2009; Mayer and Schmidt, 2004; Torney-Purta, 2004). One reason is that the public acceptance of these political means is not only dependent on their illegal character (Wolfsfeld, Opp, Dietz, & Green, 1994), but also on the context in which they are performed. Our contextual starting point was a western democratic country: Sweden, which is a well-established, parliamentary democracy, characterized as a strong welfare state (Holmberg, 1999). The number of young people who have performed illegal political activities is difficult to estimate. According to a recent report (Swedish Security Service, 2009), in each of the extremes on the left-right continuum, about 100 young individuals was reported being involved in illegal political activities driven by their ideology. The number of sympathizers with political groups on the ideological extremes was, however, greater. A comparison of 14 year-olds in 28 countries showed that 10% of the Swedish youth were positive to the use of illegal political activity (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001). This share is equivalent to

the other Nordic countries, but two or three times lower than what was observed among youth in for instance Chile, Greece, and Italy. In this study, we focused on the illegal character by which political orientations are expressed, regardless the underlying ideological motives. Hence, we examined the style of the political action and we focused on the reason why adolescents acquire preferences for illegal political means.

Certain additional factors may be of importance when examining adolescents' illegal political attitudes and activity. Age is such a factor. As noted above, illegal political acts have been shown to differ depending on adolescents' age, with a peak in middle adolescence (Watts, 1999). Younger adolescents might have fewer opportunities to participate in illegal political activity because they spend more time with their parents, and thus have less unsupervised leisure time compared with older children (Larson & Richards, 1991). Further, there are additional factors within the family that might work in combination with adolescents' age to explain differences concerning attitudes about and participation in illegal political activity. For example, autonomy granting has been connected to the development of independency and self-competence (Silk et al., 2003), which might be especially important for older adolescents who are about to enter adulthood. Therefore, a lack of involvement in family decisions could be an aspect of the family environment to which older adolescents react more than younger adolescents. In addition to age, adolescents' gender and family SES might be important factors. First, research has shown that boys have more positive attitudes toward illegal political means, and they are also more involved in such activities than are girls (Cameron & Nickerson, 2009; Gavray, Fournier, & Born, 2012; Oswald & Schmid, 1998). Additionally, an undemocratic and controlling parenting style has been associated with readiness to use illegal political means among girls, but not among boys (Schmid, 2012). Second, the relation between political activity and SES has

proven rigid (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995; Verba et al., 1995), why it is important to take this factor into account.

In this study we examined whether adolescents' perceptions of their family environment were related to their attitudes about and participation in illegal political activity, and we tested whether this was different depending on the adolescents' age and gender. Using reactance theory as a starting point (Brehm, 1966; Brehm & Brehm, 1981), our first hypothesis was that adolescents who experienced their families as undemocratic and controlling would react to this environment by becoming more accepting to the use of illegal political means. On the contrary, adolescents who experienced their families as democratic and not controlling were expected to stay strictly opposed to the use of illegal political means. We performed a path analysis in order to predict changes in attitudes in favor of illegal political activity from family characteristics, while, at the same time, controlling for the possible effects of SES and political interest. Second, to test whether attitudes were associated with behavior, we compared adolescents who increased in accepting attitudes concerning illegal political means and adolescents who did not endorse such attitudes on their over-time changes in actual illegal political behavior. Concerning age differences, we expected that a lack of involvement in family decisions would be more important for readiness among older adolescents than among younger adolescents. We tested also whether the association between attitudes and behavior was more pronounced depending on the adolescents' gender and age. Finally, based on earlier research, we expected older adolescents and boys to be more involved in illegal political activity than younger adolescents and girls.

Method

Participants

Data were derived from a longitudinal project. Data collections started in 2010 and took place annually in a city with about 130,000 inhabitants. Adolescents were strategically selected from both vocational and theoretical programs to include adolescents with different ethnic and social backgrounds. The city was similar to the whole country concerning immigration rate (14.8% and 14.7%, for the city and for the country, respectively), income level (27,876 USD and 28,972 USD, for the city and for the country, respectively), and unemployment rate (9.5% and 8.4%, for the city and for the country, respectively). Before the start of the project, an ethics board approved all measures and procedures. Participation was voluntary and adolescents could end their participation in the project at any time. For adolescents below the age of 17, parents were given information about the project and had a chance to withdraw their child's participation (only 2% did so). Adolescents filled out questionnaires during school time and the response rates ranged from 81% to 94%.

For this study, we used data from the first two time points (T1 and T2). The sample consisted of 720 adolescents divided into two age groups ($M_1 = 13.44$; $M_2 = 16.62$), which covered the developmental period of interest: early and middle adolescence. This developmental period contains the peak of illegal political activity (Watts, 1999), and we were able to capture possible increases in attitudes in favor of illegal political activity and participation in such activity over a 1-year period. This time span has normally been used when examining changes in adolescents' political attitudes and behaviors (Dahl, 2014b; Dahl & van Zalk, 2014). Among the younger adolescents ($n = 424$), there were slightly more girls ($n = 224$) than boys ($n = 200$). The majority of the adolescents lived with both their parents (78.5%). Among the older adolescents ($n = 296$), 186 were girls and 110 were boys, and 67.2% lived with both their parents. Only 6.7% of the younger adolescents and 8.2%, of the older adolescents were born in

another country, and the most common countries of origin were Kurdistan (adjacent parts of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey) and Somalia.

Measures

Subjective SES. Adolescents responded to five questions regarding their perceptions about the economic situation in their family (Ekström & Östman, 2013), and these were averaged into a composite measure of subjective SES. Examples of the questions were: “If you want things that cost a lot of money (e.g., a computer, skateboard, cell phone) can your parents afford it” and “If you compare yourself with other persons in your class, do you have more or less money?” Response options ranged from 1 (*Absolutely not / I have a lot less money than other persons in my class*) to 4 or 5 (*Yes, absolutely / I have much more money than other persons in my class*). Cronbach’s alphas were .76 and .81, for the younger and the older adolescents, respectively.

Family measures. Despite possible changes in family dynamics during this developmental period, adolescents reported about their family at T1 only. These were used to predict changes in adolescents’ political attitudes.

Involvement in family decisions. Six statements were used to measure adolescents’ perceptions about their involvement in decision-making in the family, parents’ encouragement of adolescents’ individual expression, and additional democratic processes taking place in the family (Persson et al., 2004; Stattin et al., 2011). Examples of these statements were: “Your parents ask you when decisions are made in the family,” “You think you have an influence on and take part in what is happening in your family,” and “When you are discussing at home, you usually get to finish what you have to say.” Response options ranged from 1 (*Don’t agree at all*) to 4 (*Agree totally*). Cronbach’s alphas were .82 and .88, for the younger and the older adolescents, respectively.

Adolescents' feelings of being over controlled. This measure consisted of five questions concerning adolescents' feelings of being over controlled by their parents (Kerr & Stattin, 2000). Examples of the questions were: "Do you think that your parents control everything in your life" and "Do you think that your parents intrude into what you do in your free time?" Adolescents answered on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Yes, always*) to 5 (*No, never*). Cronbach's alphas were .74 and .83, for the younger and the older adolescents, respectively.

Adolescents' democracy-compromising behaviors in the family. Adolescents' reported about their *secrecy* and *disclosure* (Kerr & Stattin, 2000), which are two types of adolescents' information management (Marshall et al., 2005; Tilton-Weaver & Marshall, 2008), and have been used earlier to measure adolescents' democracy-compromising behavior in the family (Persson et al., 2004). The *secrecy* scale consisted of two questions: "Do you keep a lot of secrets from your parents about what you do in your free time" and "Do you hide a lot from your parents about what you do at night and on weekends?" ($r_s = .56$ and $.61$ between the two items [both $p < .001$] for the younger and the older adolescents, respectively). The response options for this scale ranged from 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Very much*). The *disclosure* scale consisted of three questions: "Do you tell your parents about how you are doing in the different subjects in school," "Do you usually tell how school was when you get home (how you did on different exams, your relationships with teachers, etc.)," and "When you have been out in the evening, do you want to tell your parents where you went and what you did?" The response options for this scale ranged from 1 (*Keep almost everything to myself / Never*) to 5 (*Tell almost everything / Very often*). Cronbach's alphas were .70 and .72, for the younger and the older adolescents, respectively.

Political and behavioral measures. At T1, adolescents reported about their political interest. They also reported on their attitudes about and participation in illegal political activity both at T1 and at T2.

Political interest. This measure consisted of two items: “How interested are you in politics,” and “How interested are you in what is happening in the society?” ($r = .52, p < .001$ at T1). The response options ranged from 1 (*Very interested*) to 5 (*Not at all interested*). These items were reversed so that high values represented high interest in politics.

Readiness to use illegal political means. To measure attitudes concerning illegal political activities, adolescents were asked what they thought about breaking rules in purpose of changing something in the society. This measure was developed for the project and it included the following statement and response options: “If I think that something is wrong,” 1 (*I will stay within the law. The law declares what is right. We must stick to decisions we make together. If something should be changed, that should be done within the boundaries of the law*), 2 (*I can consider breaking the law. If decisions taken by politicians are wrong, then it is right to break the law. I will consider breaking the law if needed*), and 3 (*I can consider breaking the law even if other people get hurt. When the law is completely wrong, drastic means are sometimes necessary*).

Actual participation in illegal political activity. Adolescents reported whether they, during the last 12 months, had been involved in five activities (see Table 1). Response options were: 1 (*No*), 2 (*Yes, occasionally*), and 3 (*Yes, several times*). The activities for this scale were chosen based on the ideas of the study by Wolfsfeld and colleagues (1994), to capture the multifaceted ways in which adolescents attempt to influence political decision-makers or their decisions in a non-legal way. The prevalence of these activities is not assessed by any juridical

status. Instead, illegal political activity is to be understood as a style of political involvement that subsumes politically motivated unlawful acts that could result in criminal punishment if sentenced so by the courts (Dahl, 2014a). Items were reformulated to fit the context of young, Swedish people and piloted twice.

Adolescents' reports on the five items were summed into an index of illegal political activity. Because of the sensitive nature of this measure, some adolescents might feel reluctant to answer these questions, which might have a negative effect on the validity of the results. In the project, however, the level of missing data for illegal political activity (16.4%–16.7% and 22.7%–23.0%, for T1 and T2, respectively) was similar to the level of missing data for legal political activity (16.4%–17.0% and 22.7%–23.0%, for T1 and T2, respectively), and should, therefore, not specifically affect the results of this study. Additionally, and as expected, this measure was skewed—the majority of the adolescents reported that they had never participated in any illegal political activity. Transformations, however, did not make the variable less skewed and the untransformed variables were used in the analyses. Cronbach's alphas were .96 and .97 at T1, and .94 and .96 at T2, for the younger and the older adolescents, respectively.

Creation of a “Stable Legal” and an “Increasing Illegal” group

We used the question concerning adolescents' “readiness to use illegal political means” described above to create groups based on their answers at T1 and T2. This measure was dichotomized for the purpose of separating adolescents who thought they would stay within the law and adolescents who might consider breaking the law. In total, 1,377 adolescents answered the question at both T1 and T2. Because we were interested in examining increases in attitudes in favor of illegal political activity between T1 and T2, all adolescents needed to be negatively disposed to the use of illegal political means at T1. Of the 1,377 adolescents, 720 were included

in our sample because they all answered the first option on the readiness question at T1, and, thus, were against the idea of using illegal political means. This inclusion criterion was based on ideas drawn from reactance theory and our operationalization of the main concepts of this theory. In reactance theory, the reaction to external non-legitimate control is in focus. In this study, we operationalized adolescents' reaction to an undemocratic and controlling family environment with an increase in attitudes in favor of illegal political activity. For this reason, we excluded adolescents who reported readiness to use illegal political means already at T1.

We divided the 720 adolescents into one "Stable legal" group and one "Increasing illegal" group based on their reports on this question at T2. Adolescents in the "Stable legal" group ($n = 485$) chose the first option also at T2, and thus, expressed no thoughts of using illegal political means over time. This group was used as a reference group as it represented what would be considered a conventional political socialization. The "Increasing illegal" group included adolescents who chose the second ($n = 216$) or the third ($n = 19$) options at T2. Thus, they reported no attempts of using illegal political means at T1, but at T2 they reported that they might consider this. An Independent sample t-test using all study variables showed no significant difference between adolescents who chose the second alternative and adolescents who chose the third alternative at T2. Therefore, these adolescents were combined into the same group. Although no mean differences were found, it should be noted that the second and the third response options expressed rather different viewpoints of social change. While the second response is likely to reflect a pro-social critique and a willingness to reach social changes that are better for all people (without harming others), the third option can be understood similarly to what Passini and Morselli (2009) referred to as anti-social disobedience: people's eagerness to change societal matters despite the risk of harming others..

For the younger adolescents, the “Stable legal” group consisted of 278 adolescents and the “Increasing legal” group consisted of 146 adolescents. For the older adolescents, there were 208 adolescents included in the “Stable legal” group and 89 in the “Increasing illegal” group.

Missing Data Analyses

We used Logistic Regression analysis to test whether adolescents in our sample ($n = 720$) differed from adolescents who were lost through attrition ($n = 185$). The adolescents who were lost through attrition were all against the use of illegal political means at T1, but did not respond to the readiness question at T2, and were, thus, excluded from the sample. The two groups were compared on adolescents’ and parents’ demographic characteristics and all study variables at T1. None of the predictors were significant in explaining the attrition. Thus, adolescents who were included in our sample did not differ from adolescents who were lost through attrition.

Statistical Analyses

To test whether an undemocratic and controlling family environment predicted increases in adolescents’ readiness to use illegal political means, we conducted a logistic regression analysis in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012) arranged as a path model with the WLSMV estimator and Delta parameterization. In this analysis, the predictors were: perceptions about being involved in family decisions, feelings of being over controlled, secrecy, and disclosure, all measured at T1. These variables were used to predict membership on the categorical variable measuring readiness to use illegal political means (“Stable legal group” versus “Illegal increasing group”). All intercorrelations among the predictors were estimated in the model. In the next step, we performed two multiple group comparisons to test whether different factors were of importance for older and younger adolescents and for boys and girls. As the chi-square for WLSMV cannot be used in a regular chi-square difference test, we used the DIFFTEST

command structure of the Mplus language to test for differences between the groups on all regression paths in the models. In these models, we controlled for SES, political interest, and gender/age. Overall, nonresponse was low for the separate variables (maximum 5,5%), but we used Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) to handle the missing data in these analyses.

To test whether adolescents who became more positive to the use of illegal political means differed from adolescents who stayed negative to the use of illegal political means over time, in their changes in actual illegal political activity, we conducted one repeated-measures General Linear Model (GLM). In this analysis, all possible interactions were included between Time (changes in illegal political means between T1 and T2) on the one hand and readiness (“Stable legal” versus “Increasing illegal”), age, and gender on the other. These interactions were used to examine differences in changes as a function of adolescents’ attitude, age, and gender. The “Time X Readiness” interaction tested whether attitudes were associated with behaviors, and thus, a test of the main question. The two 3-way interactions tested whether this association was a function of the adolescents’ age (“Time X Readiness X Age”) and gender (“Time X Readiness X Gender”). Further, as one of our hypotheses proposed that older adolescents and boys should be more involved in illegal political activity than younger adolescents and girls, the “Time X Age” and “Time X Gender” interactions were important as they examined the possible differences in behavioral change as a function of age and gender. Finally, the “Time X Readiness X Age X Gender” interaction examined whether attitudes were related to behaviors, and if this was a function of the adolescents’ gender and age. In all analyses, SES was included as a covariate.

Results

Descriptive Results

Table 1 shows that the share of adolescents involved in illegal political activities ranges between 3% and 8%, suggesting that illegal political activity is a low-frequency phenomenon. Additionally, in Table 2, results from Independent Sample t-tests are reported for the comparison of younger and older adolescents and boys and girls. Effect Sizes (ES) were calculated using Cohen's *d* (Cohen, 1988). First, younger adolescents reported more feelings of being over controlled and less secrecy than older adolescents. Additionally, older adolescents reported more interest in politics compared with younger adolescents. Second, boys reported more illegal political activity than did girls at both T1 and T2. Girls, however, reported higher levels of disclosure than did boys.

Does an Undemocratic and Controlling Family Environment Predict Changes in Adolescents' Readiness to use Illegal Political Means Between T1 and T2?

We performed a path analysis to test whether the family variables predicted membership on the readiness variable ("Stable legal" versus "Increasing illegal"), including SES and political interest as additional predictors. The intercorrelations among the predictors are reported in Table 3. All correlations were in the expected direction and most were moderate in strength. The results from the path model are reported in Table 4. For the younger adolescents, secrecy significantly predicted increases in attitudes in favor of illegal political activity ($\beta = 0.17, p = .013$). For the older adolescents, involvement in family decisions was a significant predictor, showing that perceptions of being shut out from decisions taken in the family were linked to an increase in attitudes in favor of illegal political activity ($\beta = -0.19, p = .022$). Adolescents' political interest and SES were not significant predictors.

In a second step, we performed two multiple group comparisons using a DIFFTEST procedure in order to examine whether the regression paths in the model were different in

strength for (a) the two age groups (when controlling for gender) and (b) for boys and girls (when controlling for age). Equality constraints were placed on each path, which offered a test of differences between the groups on that specific path. Despite the fact that some of the paths were significant in one of the age groups and not in the other, none of the paths were significantly different between the groups. The final model testing for age differences with equality constraints on all paths showed a good fit to the data, $\chi^2 = 5.39 (7)$, $p = .613$; RMSEA = .00; CFI = 1.00; TLI = 1.03 (for results, see Table 4). Additionally, boys and girls did not differ significantly on any of the paths, and the final model with equality constraints on all paths showed a good fit to the data, $\chi^2 = 4.73 (7)$, $p = .693$; RMSEA = .00; CFI = 1.00; TLI = 1.04. Taken together, the results suggest that adolescents who perceived their families as undemocratic and controlling increased in acceptance of illegal political means. Adolescents with the opposite family experience kept their strict attitudes.

Is Adolescents' Readiness to use Illegal Political Means Associated with Actual Participation in Illegal Political Activity?

To test the second question of this study, we conducted one repeated-measures GLM with participation in illegal political activity at T1 and T2 as the repeated measures. Out of the five interaction terms, only one was significant in predicting changes in behaviors: the "Time X Readiness X Age" ($F(1, 651) = 4.89$, $p = .027$). This result is depicted in Figure 1 where it is shown that older adolescents who increased in readiness to use illegal political means, increased more in actual illegal political activity over time compared with adolescents who kept their attitudes against the use of illegal political activity¹. Among the younger adolescents, those who increased in readiness to use illegal political means did not differ from adolescents who reported no readiness to use illegal political means, in their changes in illegal political activity.

Discussion

In this study, we examined the role of the family environment on adolescents' readiness to use and actual involvement in illegal political activity. We started with the idea that adolescents who experience their family as undemocratic and controlling would react to this by becoming more accepting to the use of illegal political means. The results supported this idea, but different aspects were important for the younger and the older adolescents. In addition, the results supported an attitude-behavior congruency idea where attitudes were associated with behaviors among the older but not the younger adolescents. By offering a theoretical explanation concerning the influence of the family environment and by examining actual illegal political activity, this study adds important knowledge to research about adolescents' political socialization.

Despite somewhat weak effects, the results of this study suggest different processes for younger and older adolescents. As expected, for the older adolescents, not being involved in decision making in the family was an important predictor for increases in readiness to use illegal political means. None of the other family variables were significant for older adolescents. Among the younger adolescents, secrecy predicted increases in readiness to use illegal political means. Middle adolescence is a time when parents and adolescents develop working strategies concerning authority and control (Fuligni, 1998; Smetana, 2000), and keeping secrets might be one way for these young adolescents to have an active role in this process. Adolescents might view their parents' control as intrusive, and therefore keep some information from their parents, while parents think they should still be able to control what their adolescents are doing outside the home. Indeed, parents and adolescents often disagree about authority of different issues (e.g., Fuligni, 1998; Smetana, 1988, 2000). In addition, as a way for adolescents to avoid

parental intrusiveness, by keeping some things secret, adolescents can regulate what their parents get knowledge about and, thus, think they should be able to control (Marshall et al., 2005; Tilton-Weaver & Marshall, 2008). All in all, the results of this study propose that readiness to use illegal political means might be understood as a reaction against an undemocratic and controlling family environment. The specific aspects of importance, though, were dependent on adolescents' age.

In this study, we tested one alternative explanation: that adolescents' readiness to use illegal political means was a result of their political interest. This idea was not supported by the findings. With both positive and negative effects on illegal political tactics, earlier studies have not been able to give a coherent picture of the role of political interest in these ages (Gavray et al., 2012; Schmid, 2012; Watts, 1999). The results in this study suggest that political interest is not the main reason why adolescents become more willing to use illegal political means. Such changes are more likely outcomes originating from adolescents' perceptions of their family.

For the older adolescents, increases in attitudes in favor of illegal political means were related to increases in actual participation in illegal political activity. This was not found for the younger adolescents. There are several possible explanations for this age difference. First, compared to older adolescents, younger adolescents have less unsupervised leisure time (Larson & Richards, 1991), which might also mean fewer possibilities to partake in illegal political activity. Hence, even if they are willing to use illegal political means, they might not have the same opportunities as older adolescents have to act out on this. Second, younger adolescents might have more respect for authority figures, and the negative consequences of being caught using illegal political means might stop them from getting involved in such activities. Among the younger adolescents, those who increased in readiness to use illegal political means were

more secretive than the younger adolescents who stayed restrictive to illegal political means over time. This might be an indication of their respect and fear for negative consequences: they keep secrets about their free time simply because they are afraid of what would happen if they tell their parents. However, it is also known that preferences for illegal political activity peak in mid-adolescence (Dahl, 2014a; Watts, 1999), and that this is a time when autonomy-strive might be especially intense. For this reason, involvement in illegal political activity could be understood as a challenge of authority—irrespective of the context in question (parental, school, societal) (Dahl & Stattin, in press). Third, peers occupy much of the time during adolescence (Larson & Richards, 1991), and studies have shown the importance of peers in the development of political attitudes (Campbell, 1980; Dostie-Goulet, 2009; Kandel, 1978). Specifically among older adolescents, peers might work as a venue for discussions about politics, but also for participation in illegal political activity (Dahl & Van Zalk, 2014; Kuhn, 2004). To summarize, adolescents' readiness was linked to participation in illegal political activity, but only for the older adolescents.

We found few differences as a function of the adolescents' gender and SES. Our results support earlier research showing some general differences between boys and girls. Boys were more engaged in illegal political activity than were girls at both time points, and girls reported more disclosure than did boys. However, despite these mean-level differences, boys and girls did not differ in their changes in illegal political activities over time. Additionally, the association between readiness to use illegal political means and behaviors were not different for boys and girls. Second, earlier research has shown an association between SES and legal political activity, but we found weak support for the effect of SES on readiness to use and involvement in illegal political activity. In this study, we used a measure of subjective SES and

it is possible that an objective SES measure would be a stronger predictor for these types of activities.

There are complex associations among the variables examined in this study. For example, even if not in focus for this study, bi-directional processes are possible, such that adolescents' political attitudes and activity might influence the family environment and not just being influenced by it. Additionally, even if behaviors are often referred to as results of attitudes, it is possible, and likely, that adolescents' participation in illegal political activities might influence their attitudes concerning such activities as well. Finally, parent might influence multiple areas of adolescents' political socialization. It is likely that parents not only influence their adolescents' political attitudes, but also their general political interest (Dostie-Goulet, 2009). These issues were not in focus for this study, but are important for future research to examine.

This study had some limitations that should be mentioned. First, because the adolescents did not report about their fathers and mothers separately, we do not know whether there was a difference between adolescents' perceived influence of their fathers and mothers on their political socialization. Adolescents normally identify themselves more with their same-sex parent than with their opposite-sex parent (Starrels, 1994), which might be important in the development of political attitudes. For future studies, it is necessary to distinguish between fathers' and mothers' influence on adolescents' political attitudes and behavior. Additionally, our family variables did not measure what adolescents define as a family. For example, when asked about decision-making in the family, it is possible that some adolescents thought about "family" as including only the parents, whereas other adolescents defined it as including siblings or additional relatives. In this study, we were not able to control for potential differences in definitions and the results do not inform about specific underlining processes in the family.

Instead, the results inform more about a general family environment, and how this environment is linked to adolescents' political socialization. Second, the groups that were compared in this study (older versus younger adolescents and "Stable legal" versus "Increasing illegal") included unequal numbers of participants. For the readiness variable, this was according to expectations: fewer adolescents should endorse attitudes in favor of illegal political means. Despite our expectations, however, unequal sample sizes might increase the risk of making a type-2 error if there is a large difference in the variances between the groups. In this study, the differences were very small (the largest difference in variance was 0.02), and it is unlikely that the unequal sample sizes had any substantial impacts on the results. Even so, the results should be interpreted with the unequal sample size in mind. Third, the findings in this study are in line with what would be expected by theory, but they are fairly weak and not fully conclusive. A fourth concern is the potential generalizability of the results in this study. Studying adolescents' development of illegal political activity in the Swedish political context is likely to have some particular implications for our understanding of this phenomenon. However all, political contexts are different, and the results from this study might only be generalizable to other western democratic countries.

Besides the limitations, this study had several strengths and goes beyond earlier studies on several aspects. It offers a theoretical explanation about why some adolescents show readiness to use illegal political means, which put earlier empirical results into a theoretical framework. Further, in addition to adolescents' readiness to use illegal political means, we also examined their actual political activities. Considering the fact that adolescents' illegal political activity seldom has been the focus of prior political socialization research, the findings of this study are important contributions to the understanding of adolescents' development of political values,

attitudes, and behavior. Finally, we used a large normative sample from a longitudinal project to test for changes in attitudes and activity over time, and we examined adolescents' gender and age as moderators. Therefore, the results of this study offer important knowledge about the development of political beliefs and participation in political activity among different groups of adolescents.

Adolescence is a period of change, and for some adolescents this might involve an alternative development route. This study highlights the role an undemocratic and controlling family environment has in the development of attitudes in favor of illegal political activity. Importantly, not all adolescents act out on such attitudes, but this study showed that there is, certainly, a group of adolescents where so is the case. The association shown in this study should, therefore, be taken seriously. However, even if adolescents have less positive perceptions of their families, it should be possible to break the link between attitudes and behavior. This study offers a deeper understanding about this association and the mechanisms behind it. The next step is to provide adolescents with alternatives ways of expressing their opinions, which are beneficial for the development of their political belief system and for the society at large.

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Footnotes

¹A mediation model was performed using the “readiness to use illegal political means” variable as a mediator for the link between the family variables at T1 and changes in illegal political activity between T1 and T2. None of the indirect effects were significant, and results are, therefore, not included in this study. Additional information about these analyses can be obtained from the authors.

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages of Illegal Political Activity across Age and Item.

	Response	Younger adolescents		Older adolescents	
		T1(%)	T2(%)	T1(%)	T2(%)
Written political messages or	(0)	397(94)	393(95)	284(96)	275(94)
painted political graffiti on walls	(1)	16(4)	11(3)	4(1)	7(2)
	(2)	8(2)	9(2)	7(3)	10(4)
Participated in illegal action,	(0)	397(94)	391(95)	284(97)	276(95)
demonstration, or occupation	(1)	16(4)	12(3)	2(1)	9(3)
	(2)	7(2)	9(2)	8(3)	5(2)
Broken the law for political	(0)	388(92)	385(93)	279(95)	279(96)
reasons	(1)	23(6)	16(4)	9(3)	7(2)
	(2)	10(2)	12(3)	7(2)	9(2)
Participated in political activity	(0)	386(92)	387(94)	282(96)	277(96)
where property was damaged	(1)	21(5)	14(3)	6(2)	7(2)
	(2)	12(3)	11(3)	7(2)	6(2)
Participated in political activity	(0)	396(95)	396(96)	286(97)	279(96)
leading to fighting with political	(1)	14(3)	6(1)	2(1)	6(2)
opponents or the police	(2)	8(2)	10(3)	7(2)	7(2)

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations on all Study Variables for Younger versus Older Adolescents and Boys versus Girls, Separately.

Variable	Younger adolescents		Older adolescents		<i>t</i> (df)	<i>p</i>	95% CI		Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
Involvement T1	3.35	0.49	3.35	0.56	0.04 (716)	.969	-0.08	0.08	0.00
Disclosure T1	3.56	0.81	3.50	0.80	.996 (709)	.320	-0.06	0.18	0.08
Secrecy T1	2.25	0.89	2.41	0.90	-2.33 (709)	.020	-0.29	-0.02	0.18
Over control T1	2.45	0.65	2.24	0.69	4.10 (706)	<.001	0.11	0.31	0.31
Illegal activity T1	1.09	0.32	1.06	0.31	0.88 (714)	.378	-0.03	0.07	0.07
Illegal activity T2	1.08	0.31	1.07	0.31	0.27 (703)	.788	-0.04	0.05	0.02
Political interest T1	2.17	0.67	2.40	0.73	-4.35 (688)	<.001	-0.34	-0.13	0.35

	Girls		Boys		<i>t</i> (df)	<i>p</i>	95% CI		Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
Involvement T1	3.34	0.52	3.37	0.52	-0.64 (715)	.525	-0.10	0.05	0.05
Disclosure T1	3.65	0.81	3.40	0.78	4.14 (708)	< .001	0.13	0.37	0.31
Secrecy T1	2.32	0.94	2.32	0.84	-0.05 (708)	.962	-0.14	0.13	0.00
Over control T1	2.39	0.69	2.33	0.66	1.22 (705)	.225	-0.04	0.16	0.09
Illegal activity T1	1.04	0.25	1.12	0.39	-2.95 (714)	.003	-0.12	-0.02	0.22
Illegal activity T2	1.05	0.27	1.11	0.35	-2.40 (702)	.017	-0.11	-0.01	0.18
Political interest T1	2.32	0.78	2.22	0.64	0.80 (718)	.425	-0.08	0.19	0.05

Table 3

Intercorrelations among the Predictors in the Path Analysis.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Involvement T1	.	.31***	-.27***	-.33***	.14*	.11	-.01
2. Disclosure T1	.38***	.	-.40***	-.13*	.03	.14*	-.23***
3. Secrecy T1	-.26***	-.31***	.	-.35***	.05	-.05	.02
4. Over control T1	-.26***	-.14**	-.31***	.	.01	.04	-.06
5. SES T1	.20***	.13**	-.04	-.09	.	.09	.24***
6. Political interest T1	.20***	.26***	-.12*	-.03	.05	.	.17**
7. Gender	.05	-.11*	.00	-.06	.10*	.03	.

Note. $n = 720$. Correlations above the diagonal are for older adolescents and correlations below the diagonal are for younger adolescents.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 4

Prediction of Group Membership (“Stable legal” Versus “Increasing illegal”) from all Family Variables, controlling for SES and Political Interest.

Predictor	Model with freely estimated paths				Model with equality constraints			
	Younger		Older		Difference test comparing younger and older adolescents			
	adolescents		adolescents					
	β	p	β	p	χ^2	p	β	p
Involvement T1	-.02	.790	-.19	.022	3.04	.081	-.08	.110
Disclosure T1	.01	.903	.11	.206	0.83	.363	.06	.312
Secrecy T1	.17	.013	.06	.512	2.10	.147	.12	.023
Over control T1	.07	.312	-.01	.899	1.54	.214	.04	.412
SES T1	-.03	.691	.05	.567	1.48	.224	-.01	.863
Gender	-.00	.962	-.02	.855	.02	.903	.00	.981
Political interest T1	-.02	.807	.03	.689	0.21	.644	-.01	.925

Note. $n = 720$.

Figure 1: $n = 720$. Changes in participation in illegal political activity between T1 and T2 among older adolescents in (a) the “Stable legal” group and (b) the “Increasing illegal” group.