

Youths' Political Efficacy

*To my beloved mother Eva-Lena,
who nourished my efficacy beliefs and carried them
at times when I've been unable to.*

Örebro Studies in Political Science 37



SOFIA SOHL

**Youths' Political Efficacy:
Sources, Effects and Potentials for Political Equality**

Cover: Painting of Malala Yousafzai, photo taken in
Houston, TX (July 2014) by Grace Johnson.

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Title: Youths' Political Efficacy:
Sources, Effects and Potentials for Political Equality
Publisher: Örebro University 2014
www.publications.oru.se
trycksaker@oru.se

Print: Örebro University 08/2014

ISSN 1650-1632
ISBN 978-91-7529-038-6

Abstract

Sofia Sohl (2014): Youths' Political Efficacy: Sources, Effects and Potentials for Political Equality. Örebro Studies in Political Science 37.

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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Acknowledgements

This dissertation has sometimes felt like *Mission Impossible*, something that I was not supposed to take on. Three times I was asked to apply for doctoral studies by the person who later became my supervisor. Three times I replied with a firm *No*, resulting in mutterings about me being more of an activist/practitioner, descriptions which I share. I wanted to go out and do some *real* work, not to sit and ‘think about some specific issue’ for four years. Yet, a seed was sown, and cultivated by my newly found soul mate. She convinced me to at least apply, since the theme connected to the position was close to my heart: youth and politics. Still, I went to the interview feeling quite indifferent about it all. I thought *I* could never write a whole book. My efficacy beliefs were quite low. During the interview, a future colleague did, however, declare that writing a dissertation is 90% transpiration and 10% inspiration, which I interpreted as 90% persistence and 10% academic stuff. I then decided that I wanted to take on this ‘challenge’ since I did believe that I was quite persistent. So, suddenly, I was afraid of *not* getting the opportunity, but to my surprise I was accepted!

Now, almost five and a half years later, I am very happy things turned out the way they did. The dissertation is finished and along the way I have learnt a lot, both academically and personally. Nonetheless, writing a dissertation is not a piece of cake. Today, I think 90% transpiration means fighting different obstacles (primarily your disbelief in your own abilities), and 10% inspiration means the joy of achievement and learning. For both parts, I needed plenty of love, support and encouragement.

To my supervisor, Erik Amnå, thank-you for dragging me into research education, guiding me through it, being such a time magician (always finding time despite being the busiest person I have ever met), and being an activist/practitioner like me (always finding a solution).

With tears in my eyes, I can’t find the right words to thank my assisting supervisor, Cecilia Arensmeier, without whom I would have left the academic world long ago. Thanks for all your efforts (speciellt alla heja-rop), and I hope you know what an *ausgezeichnet* person you are!

I would also like to thank my colleagues at Youth & Society – I have gained much knowledge from your experiences, and you have helped me develop as a person in many different ways. A special thank-you goes to Metin Özdemir for all his help with Paper 3 in this dissertation, and to Marie, Tara and Hebbah for valuable support, discussion and *fikas*.

Further, I owe a lot to my colleagues at the Political Science Department. All the seminars, opportunities to teach, and fruitful discussions have

helped me not only endure my time as a doctoral student, but have contributed substantially to the dissertation. Thank you all!

Nevertheless, there are some people to whom I would like to give my special thanks. Viktor Dahl, thanks for being there throughout the whole process, giving academic and invaluable moral support. Ali Abdelzadeh, thank you for being there and helping me decode the world of statistics. Renée Andersson and Anna-Lisa Fransson, you have made my last year much more bearable and joyful – I hope I can support you in the same way. Sten Berglund and Jan Olsson, thank-you for commenting on the final manuscript (Sten, ditto for my first dissertation draft), and Marcia Grimes (Gothenburg University) for valuable input at the final seminar. I thank Erik Hysing for productive comments and inspirational but also down-to-earth discussions of political science and doctoral studies, Agneta Blom for the insight into transpiration/inspiration, and Anki Andersson for helping me through my first teaching experiences. Jenny Lindström and Linnea Nilsson, thanks for the indispensable practical and social support.

Ett stort tack ska också riktas till min familj och mina vänner. Mamma Eva-Lena och *Papi* Juan, tack för att ert hus och era hjärtan alltid är öppna för mig, mina bekymmer och min glädje. Älskar er! Pappa Torsten, tack för att du fick mig att upptäcka friluftslivet, utan den kontrasten hade jag varit förlorad i akademien. Systrarna Anna, Josefin och Linnea, tack för att ni finns där! Alla kära vänner, tack för att ni hjälpt mig att bli den jag är. Äventyrsvännerna Karin, Anders, Marcus och Jenny – tack för att ni håller mig nere på jorden, får mig att känna mig trygg och tar mig ut på äventyr! Universitetsvännerna Wille och Oskar som hjälpte mig genom grundutbildningen – nu är självplågeriet äntligen över, jag slutar skolan!, Jonas & Jonas – thanks for all the lovely moments with Fadderiet och Ulrika – tack för alla morgnar på gymmet. Herzlichen Dank auch an meine österreichische Verwandtschaft – für eure Geduld mit meinem Deutsch und die erhol-samen Tage mit euch, die mir Energie für das Weiterschreiben gaben!

Now, there are just two people left. *Snutten*, without your imminent arrival, I would not have had the same motivation at the end of this journey – Danke för att du kom! Last but by no means least, there is the person who is closest to me, the one who got me to pull through, and who constantly boosts my efficacy beliefs. Cornelia Liebl, jag älskar dig mer än allt annat. You are my best friend and partner in crime. Your never-ending support, encouragement, practical assistance, endless energy sources, but foremost, your love is what makes it all matter.

With you, *Life is wonderful!*

Sofia Sohl, Örebro 30th July 2014

List of papers

This compilation dissertation includes the following three papers, which henceforth will be referred to by their roman numerals.

- Paper I** Sohl, Sofia (2011), Pathways to Political Efficacy – Theoretical Considerations and Empirical Illustrations on Youths’ Acquisition of Political Efficacy: *Politics, Culture and Socialization*, 2(4), 389-414. Reprinted with permission of the publisher.
- Paper II** Sohl, Sofia & Arensmeier Cecilia (2014), The School’s Role for Youths’ Political Efficacy – Can School Boost Students’ Political Efficacy in a Compensatory Manner?: *Research Papers in Education*, published online May 8th 2014. Reprinted with permission of the publisher.
- Paper III** Sohl, Sofia & Özdemir Metin (2014), Potential Leverage Effects of Political Efficacy on Youths’ Political Participation. Manuscript to be submitted.

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1. The importance of political efficacy

One book, one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world.
(Malala Yousafzai speaking for the UN at the age of 16 on July 12th 2013)

This citation from the 16-year-old Malala Yousafzai not only captures what can be seen as the core of political efficacy – a person’s beliefs that *s/he can* make a *political* difference in society. It also points to the power of *perceived* beliefs. Despite everything speaking against her,¹ Malala Yousafzai still believes in her capacity to change something she thinks is wrong. This dissertation is inspired by young people like Malala.

The objective of this dissertation is to contribute to knowledge on political efficacy in three respects: 1) to bring theoretical and empirical understanding of the concept further, 2) to investigate the sources of political efficacy and its effects on political participation, and 3) to discuss the value of political efficacy in the light of political equality.

In general, political efficacy² refers to feelings of (political) competence and that it is worthwhile engaging in politics. It has been studied since the 1950s (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954), but in many different ways, and with various meanings and measures attached to it (see, e.g., Morrell 2003 and Chapter 2 below). Despite the discrepancies, most scholars agree that the perception of strong political efficacy is a political resource for the citizen.

In democratic societies, citizenship comes with both rights and expectations. Some of the most important rights are an equal say in the decision-making process (voting equality), the right to express opinions freely, and the right to demonstrate. Democracies also need active, enlightened citizens, with reasonable control over the political agenda (Dahl 1989, 2000). Citizens are expected to keep themselves updated about politics, to vote in elections, and even to take further action or give their opinions when they see the need. This means that citizens need to be equipped with resources, e.g., education, time, money and information (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995).

¹ Malala survived after being shot in the head by the Taliban on her way to school in Pakistan at the age of 15 after she openly spoke out for girls’ right to education.

² Sometimes, the acronym PE will be used to denote political efficacy.

These resources have, however, proven to be unequally distributed among citizens. The highly educated, wealthy and otherwise advantaged are more politically active and informed, and are also better represented in public debate and institutions (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, Gilens 2012, Westholm and Teorell 1999). This is a problem for democracy, since unevenly distributed resources distort the idea of everyone having an equal say and influence in political matters.

Thus, one of the major preoccupations among political scientists concerning political (in)equality is the question of who takes political action and who does not. In this regard, socioeconomic status (SES) (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, Verba and Nie 1972) has proven to account for much of the variation in political participation. People of high socioeconomic status tend to participate more than their counterparts. Over the last 60 years, however, a large number of studies have also shown that one of the strongest driving forces in political participation, of both young and old, is political efficacy (see, e.g., Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954, Almond and Verba 1963, Milbrath and Goel 1977, Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995, Beaumont 2010, Pollock III 1983, Levy 2013, Caprara et al. 2009).³

SES creates a structural base for political inequality, due to its rigidity over the lifespan and by it being transferred over generations. Political efficacy has, on the other hand, been shown to be more malleable by nature; boosting young people's political efficacy may have long-term effects on their political participation beyond the effects of socioeconomic status (Beaumont 2011), which would be beneficial from a democratic point of view. This relative dynamic of political efficacy also makes it interesting from the perspective of political socialization. If citizens' efficacy beliefs are changeable, answering the questions of how, where and from what this quality of citizenship develops can shed some light on what makes some people become active citizens while others remain passive.

Thus, there are good grounds to pay political efficacy attention as an important aspect of citizenship, especially with a focus on its development among youths. The three main reasons are: 1) political efficacy has an intrinsic value as a quality of citizenship, 2) political efficacy strengthens democratic participation by making citizens politically active, and 3) politi-

³ Political participation is, indeed, a very important part of a democratic society, and it is generally agreed among political thinkers that high participation rates are beneficial (see Nilsson 2005 chapters 1-3, for an overview). Nevertheless, it should be noted that citizens should also be free to abstain from politics. What is more important is that they all feel that they can and dare to take political action if they want to. See the discussion below.

cal efficacy carries the potential to remedy some of today's political inequality, provided that it can be stimulated among the least advantaged at an early age. In other words, political efficacy can be considered both as a free-standing positive citizenship quality and as a means for the achievement of other positive features of a functioning democracy.

1.1 Political efficacy as an important citizenship quality

When it comes to the intrinsic value of political efficacy, theories of general self-efficacy beliefs provide a useful starting point. General self-efficacy beliefs are beliefs in one's capacity to execute tasks and attain goals (Bandura 1997). These beliefs "influence thought patterns, actions, and emotional arousal" (Bandura 1982, p. 122), which in turn help a person to cope with different situations in life. People with strong self-efficacy beliefs have higher performance rates, accomplish more, and are more balanced psychologically. Efficacious people are also more persistent, and less likely to give up in stressful or difficult situations (Bandura 1982, 1997). There are similar findings about political efficacy beliefs being connected to positive citizenship characteristics, such as political knowledge, political interest, political trust, feelings of community, etc. (Almond and Verba 1963, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, Carmines 1978, Anderson 2010). Self-efficacy also relates to self-reliance and general confidence (Bandura 1997), which leads some scholars to equate political efficacy with political confidence (Beaumont 2011, Petersson, Westholm, and Blomberg 1989, Jarl 2004).

These are qualities, or resources, that are beneficial for any individual. A feeling of political (self-)efficacy can therefore be seen as a personal quality that is important per se, not just as a means for increasing political participation. With political efficacy comes a political confidence that makes a person confident, and ready to take action to try to change the things that s/he finds wrong in society.

It is important not to forget that, in a democracy, everyone should have the right *not* to participate if they do not want to. The crucial point is that everyone feels capable of taking part if they see a need and want to participate. This feeling is important, both for the individual citizen – who is more likely to take action in her/his own interests – and for democracy at system level since a citizenry with a feeling of political confidence is generally more likely to be active. A similar point of view is expressed in the plea for the concept of *stand-by citizenship*. The emphasis here lies on citizens' rights, interest and capacities, rather than on their actual behaviours. Citizen passivity is not considered problematic if it is chosen by citizens themselves, and if citizens are able to act if they have reasons to do so (Amnå

and Ekman 2014, Ekman and Amnå 2012). Thus, political efficacy is to be considered as important in itself; it carries an intrinsic citizenship value.

1.2 Political efficacy and political participation

As stated above, however, it is also clear that political efficacy is connected to political participation. It has been established that the political participation of citizens is an essential part of a functioning democracy (Dahl 1989, 2006, Verba 2003). As (Nilsson 2005, p. 1) puts it:

The central position of political participation within a democracy is uncontested. Democracy is built on the participation of the citizens. Without participation there is no democracy. Without citizens participating as subjects, democracy is meaningless. In all theories of what democracy is and should be, participation is a central aspect. The active participation of citizens is a key indicator of the state of democracy, but not the only one and not necessarily the most important one [My translation].

The words of Nilsson point to two things about democracy in relation to political efficacy. One is that a democratic society must have some minimum level of activation on political matters among its citizenry in order to count and prosper as a democracy. Otherwise, the democracy is not a democracy in the sense that the people govern themselves. The second is that, even if political participation is a central democratic issue, it is, as Nilsson points out above, “not necessarily the most important one,” which connects to the issue of being free to choose or to stay passive (see, e.g., McBride 2013).

Irrespective of one’s view on the latter point, previous research has found that political efficacy is a factor that is strongly connected to political participation, both for adults (see, e.g., Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954, Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995, Caprara et al. 2009) and for youths (see, e.g., Beaumont et al. 2006, Beaumont 2011, Levy 2013). People with a higher belief in their competence or capacity to take political action are more disposed to do so, meaning that a politically efficacious citizen is also likely to be an active one. The higher the political efficacy of the citizenry, the higher is its general participation in political matters.

There are, however, indications of a decline in conventional participation related to the representative systems of today’s liberal democracies, i.e., in voting, campaigning, and joining a political party (Galston 2004, Crick 1998, Norris 2003, Dalton 2004). Since the time of Aristotle, people and political thinkers have perceived new generations as problematic, in terms of both societal participation and decadence. Putnam’s *Bowling Alone* reinforced the image of passive and almost apathetic youth in the

early 2000s (Putnam 2000), reinvigorating a public and scholarly discussion on whether to blame youth, or to reconsider how politics is defined and to acknowledge different modes of political participation (O'Toole 2003, O'Toole, Marsch, and Jones 2003, Sloam 2007).

It is also important that all citizens feel capable of taking political action, so that no political voices are excluded. Even 'trouble-making' youths, who are critical, dissatisfied and/or disobedient, are part of the citizenry. By challenging the scope and boundaries of democracy, they too can be seen as a resource for a democratic society (Abdelzadeh 2014, Norris 2011, Dahl 2014). All citizens, irrespective of things like social background or political conviction, benefit from having the political efficacy to make their grievances heard. All this connects to one of democracy's core values: political equality.

1.3 Political efficacy as a potential equalizer

The third reason why political efficacy, and especially *youth* political efficacy, is a significant citizenship quality concerns political equality. Equal worth of citizens and equal opportunities are vital to a democracy. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995, p. 10) make this point as follows:

Democracy rests on the notion of the equal worth of each citizen. The needs and preferences of no individual should rank higher than those of any other. This principle undergirds the concept of one man, one vote as well as its corollary, equality of political voice among individuals.

A democracy needs equal opportunities to allow each citizen's voice to be heard as equally as possible, and to ensure that everyone's interests are considered equally valuable. Sartori (1987) argues that a society must always seek and fight for equality, but also considers that there are limitations to it, since equality in one area (or for some people) never should mean less equality in another area (or for some other people). Striving for political equality among all should not cause a loss of political equality for anyone in particular.

It is here that political efficacy comes in. Every existing democracy has flaws, which can often be traced back to inequality, or socioeconomic factors such as education, income, living area, ethnicity, and other more stable variables (Milbrath and Goel 1977, Verba, Nie, and Kim 1978, Ødegård and Berglund 2008). Socioeconomic factors are connected to political resources, such as political knowledge, skills and interests, which give greater opportunities for participation (see, e.g., Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Teorell, Sum, and Tobiasen 2007, Schlozman and Brady 2012).

When political participation follows structural divides, it means a bias in terms of who, and whose interests, get heard and represented (Wlezien and Soroka 2011, SOU 2000:1, Bennulf and Hedberg 1999, Petersson, Westholm, and Blomberg 1989).

Further, Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992) show that intergenerational class mobility is low and that parents' work status to a large extent affects the future socioeconomic status of their children. Thus, SES is something that people are born into. It is a rather rigid systemic and inheritable political costume that either hinders or helps its wearer to reach her/his civic potential.

So, if the more rigid SES factors are hard to change due to their static nature, is there anything that can be done to remedy at least some of the political inequality? I argue that political efficacy could be (or at least be part of) a possible remedy. As seen above, previous research points to the role of political efficacy in explaining political participation. Not surprisingly, political efficacy is also related to SES (Abramson 1983, Finkel 1985, Hayes and Bean 1993). The important aspect, however, is that the effect of political efficacy beliefs seems to go beyond the effect of SES (see, e.g., Hayes and Bean 1993, Beaumont et al. 2006). Studies have found that it can be the least advantaged who gain most when political efficacy beliefs are stimulated (Beaumont 2011). Political efficacy has a more alterable and dynamic nature compared with socioeconomic status, and can be enhanced more easily throughout life (Beaumont 2010). Also, it seems that the school can be a key to reaching the least efficacious youths. In addition, if youths' political efficacy is boosted at an early age, it is likely that they also retain such efficacy up into adulthood. All in all, this means that political efficacy may be a potential means to remedy some of the political inequality we face in modern democracies.

1.4 Political efficacy with youth in focus

Political efficacy is an important citizenship quality, since it not only heightens political participation and the general political confidence of citizens, but also awakens hope for dealing with one of democracies biggest difficulties, namely political inequality.

In light of this, the socialization of political efficacy becomes central from a democratic point of view. The development and effects of *youths'* political efficacy are in focus. Previous research shows that political efficacy beliefs are developed early in life, and despite the relative alterability of political efficacy compared with largely unchosen socioeconomic factors, it is likely to be quite stable over time. That is, once you have political efficacy, you are likely to keep it (Keen and Hall 2008, Yates and Youniss

1998). So, if children's or youths' political efficacy can be boosted early on, there is a chance that they will grow up as confident citizens, ready to act if needed.

Furthermore, political efficacy should be seen both as important in itself and as a means for political participation. As argued above, political efficacy is important not only as a personal quality, but also as a driving force for political participation. As Almond and Verba (1963, p. 257) put it:

In many ways, then, the belief in one's competence is a key political attitude. The self-confident citizen appears to be the democratic citizen. Not only does he think he can participate, he thinks others ought to participate as well. Furthermore, he does not merely think he can take part in politics; he is likely to be more active.

Thus, from the point of view of democracy, it is important to learn more about what political efficacy entails, about its sources and effects, and especially if and how it can work towards mitigating political inequality. Learning more about youths' political efficacy is interesting since young people are socialized into political beings from an early age (Flanagan 2013). Thus, how political efficacy develops is a matter that contributes to the field of political socialization.

In this dissertation, I take on these learning objectives from a youth perspective, and, consequently, I intend to provide new knowledge on the socialization of youths' political efficacy.

1.5 Aim and research queries

The purpose of this dissertation is grounded in the overarching question of why youths' political efficacy is important and what difference it can make from a political equality perspective. This broader query converts into the aim of this dissertation as follows:

To conceptually develop and empirically study the development of youths' political efficacy and its effects on youths' political participation, emphasizing political equality.

This aim converts, in turn, into three sets of research queries that guide the dissertation:

1. What is political efficacy? What are the limitations of dominating perspectives on and definitions of political efficacy, and how can they be conceptually developed?

2. How does youths' political efficacy develop? Which are the most important factors in such development?
3. Which effects does youths' political efficacy have on political participation? Which consequences can youths' political efficacy and youths' development of it have for political equality?

Another way of describing the overall aim is that it takes an interest in what political efficacy is, its sources and effects, and whether it has the potential to mitigate political inequality. This aim permeates the whole dissertation and will be reflected upon more closely in the concluding chapter (6). The research questions connect more directly to the empirical papers (see below).

1.6 Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation has two parts, the *kappa*⁴ and the *papers*. The *kappa* provides an introduction, a presentation and discussion of the concept of political efficacy, and also a synthesis and discussion of the research project (as a whole) and its overall contribution to the field (including the papers). The three papers provide the empirical base for the dissertation.

Figure 1 below provides an overview of the general organization of the dissertation. It aims to visualize how its different parts – the theoretical framework, the papers, and the *kappa* – fit together.

The basic idea is to study youths' political efficacy from input to output, and also to discuss its meaning for democratic society in general and for political equality in particular. This means that I start by discussing what political efficacy is and then investigate empirically what drives its development:⁵ the input side, i.e., what political efficacy is and what the sources of political efficacy are (papers I and II as well as the *kappa*.) I then move

⁴ I have searched for a suitable English equivalent to the Swedish word *kappa*, which is used to denote the introductory, summarizing and discussion parts of an academic dissertation at this level. I have, however, not been successful, since the *kappa*, at least in my case, is rather more than an 'introductory paper', 'summary' or 'dissertation framework', which are some of the suggestions I have received. The *kappa* in this dissertation provides more than an introduction to the dissertation, a summary of the findings, or the presentation of the framework that has guided the work. This *kappa* provides an introduction, a synthesis and a concluding discussion on the dissertation project as a whole and its contributions to the field. In the dissertation project, the empirical papers, the broader research project from which it emanates, the *kappa* itself, and the work leading to its completion are all included.

⁵ The *pathways* referred to in the overview will be presented in Chapter 3 - *The socialization of political efficacy* – below.

on to the empirical study and discussion of the effects of youths' political efficacy: the output side, i.e., which effects enhanced levels of political efficacy have (papers II and III as well as the kappa).

Thus, the papers overlap to some extent in their discussions as well as in their empirical orientations. The overarching questions of why youth political efficacy is important and what difference it makes from a political-equality perspective are visualized in a developmental (or process) perspective going from input to output. This question is dealt with foremost in the discussion in the kappa (but also to some extent in the papers), which brings the three studies together by examining the empirical results in relation to the socialization of political efficacy and to political equality. Thus, the kappa functions as a sort of framework for the three papers, and also provides a synthesis of the dissertation project as a whole.

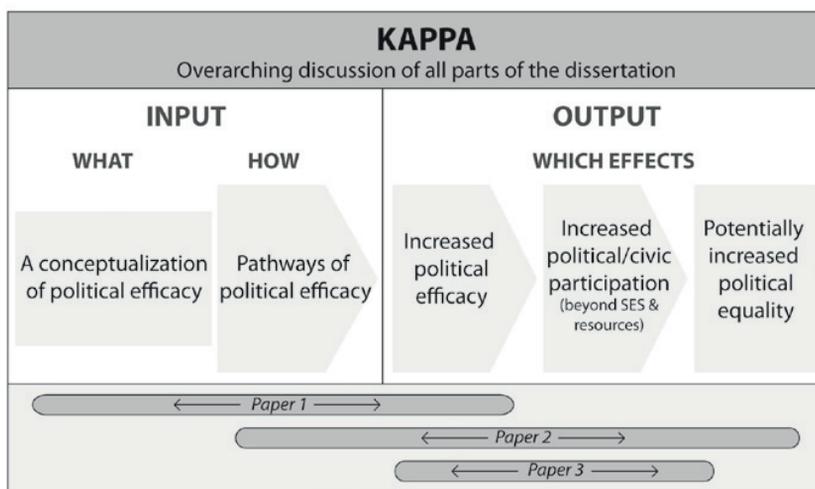


Figure 1: Overview of the dissertation

1.6.1 The three papers – what, how and which effects

At a general level, my three guiding research queries correspond to the three papers in the dissertation. They do however overlap theoretically and at a discursive level, as well as empirically to some extent. There follows a short introduction to the papers in relation to the dissertation's aim and research queries.

What and *how* – pathways to political efficacy – Paper I

In the first paper, I discuss *what* political efficacy actually entails by considering previous approaches to the concept in political science and psy-

chology. A merged perspective, with a focus on people's beliefs in their capacities to perform political actions, is presented. This perspective will also be addressed in greater depth in Chapter 2, *The concept of political efficacy*. In the second part of the paper, a theoretical idea about the development of political efficacy is empirically tested. The aim is to explore and discuss *how* political efficacy develops among young people. Four main pathways, along which youths gain political efficacy, are tested (as presented in Chapter 3, *The socialization of political efficacy*).

How and which effects – boosting youths' political efficacy – Paper II

In the second paper, the discussion of *how* youths' political efficacy develops is continued by considering the impact of the school context. The main question is whether and in which ways schools and teachers can help students gain political efficacy. The study also explores whether schools can provide an equalizing environment in relation to students' social background. Thus, the paper reflects upon *which effects* any potential gain in youths' political efficacy can have, at an individual as well as a societal level, in the light of political equality.

Which effects – political efficacy and political participation – Paper III

In the third paper, the question of *which effects* political efficacy has on political participation is scrutinized. Three common predictors of political participation – political knowledge, political interest and political efficacy – are tested in relation to youths' online and offline political participation using a longitudinal design. In addition, the interaction effects of having political efficacy beliefs in combination with political knowledge or political interest are tested. In this way, any potential leverage effects of having political efficacy together with other important citizenship qualities are explored.

1.6.2 Outline of the kappa

The kappa introduces and discusses political efficacy in a broad perspective (Chapter 1). Chapter 2 deals with the concept of political efficacy, and takes its starting point in the findings of Paper I. In the chapter, the limitations of previous research regarding the conceptual nature of political efficacy are discussed, and also how the concept can be developed.

In Chapter 3, the dissertation is put into a theoretical context by presenting and discussing a framework for the socialization of political efficacy. First, the broader field of political socialization is described and linked to youths' political efficacy. Then, four pathways for developing political efficacy are presented and reflected upon. Finally, there is a discussion of

the relation between political efficacy and political participation, including potential reciprocal effects between the two.

Chapter 4 presents the methodological considerations taken up in the dissertation. Among other things, there is reflection on research and methods in a more general sense, discussion of the methodological approach, and presentation of the data material and the operationalization of measures. The chapter ends with a discussion of some methodological issues, and various methodological limitations and strengths.

The findings of the dissertation are presented in Chapter 5. The three sets of research queries provide a structure for the presentation, so that both the findings in the papers and those in the kappa are included.

Finally, the findings are discussed from a scholarly and a societal point of view in Chapter 6. This concluding discussion brings the research queries together in light of the aim and theoretical framework of the dissertation.

2. The concept of political efficacy

Despite the frequent treatment of political efficacy in research on political behaviour and attitudes over the last fifty years, consideration of its conceptual nature has been rather scarce. The theoretical discussion seems to have come to something of a standstill, at the same time as numerous empirical studies involving the concept are still being undertaken.

As argued in the introductory chapter, political efficacy is to be regarded as an important citizenship quality. There is, however, a lack of conceptual coherence and clarity as to what political efficacy actually is. Various definitions are presented throughout the literature, but reflections on these are often palpably missing, or the content of the concept is just assumed. There are also many cases where the concept, and its measurement, is used without any explanation of what it is. Probably, this is partly due to the frequent use of political efficacy as a control variable, which leaves little room for lengthy conceptual clarification.

In this chapter, I examine how political efficacy has been understood in previous research, and I discuss the limits of the conceptualizations and, to some extent, also the measurements of political efficacy. Further, I argue for what I see as an improved perspective, and ask how research concerning political efficacy can move forward conceptually. This is in order better to understand what research on this citizenship quality actually means, how better measurements can be developed, and how more finely tuned and clearer empirical studies can be performed.

The chapter describes a meta-analysis that can move the theoretical and conceptual discussion of political efficacy further in a fruitful manner. It is an in-depth elaboration on the findings and discussions about the concept of political efficacy presented in Paper I.

2.1 How political efficacy has been defined and conceptualized

How political efficacy is seen and conceptualized in different studies is presented below. Four different themes are brought up to illustrate the various milestones in how political efficacy has been defined, studied, and understood. The overview is not exhaustive, and is somewhat stripped of nuances, which is partly due to the broad variation in how scholars have treated, measured and defined the concept. At times, it seems like there are as many ways of understanding what lies in the concept of political efficacy as there are scholars who use it.

2.1.1 An all-encompassing conceptualization – the early view

The term *political efficacy* was first introduced by Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954) in relation to a study of national elections in the United States. It was presented in an appendix, where the following pioneering and often-cited definition is to be found (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954, p. 187):

Sense of political efficacy may be defined as the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process, i.e. that it is worth while [*sic*] to perform one's civic duties. It is the feeling that political and social change is possible, and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change.

This first definition points to a general sense that it is worth engaging in politics, that there are grounds for being active in politics. It encompasses both an individual's assessment of external factors, such as the government, the political system, and political actors, and internal factors, such as the individual's ability to understand politics and have the motivation to get involved in political activities. Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954) also refer to "political and social change," meaning that some form of outcome or result must be envisaged. This can be seen as part of both the internal assessment (Can *I* play a role in bringing about change?), and the external assessment (Does the political process make "political and social change" possible?).

Thus, this first account of political efficacy covers many aspects, and captures a sort of general assessment that it is *worthwhile* to engage in politics (regardless of whether the reason is a feeling of civic/moral duty or a desire to bring about a particular change in society). The multifaceted definition is also mirrored by the five items⁶ with which Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954) measured political efficacy, including assessment of whether politicians care about one's opinions, and whether one can have a 'say' (impact) on what government does.

⁶ The following items were used by Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954) on a dichotomized response scale (Agree or Disagree):

- *I don't think public officials care much what people like me think.*
- *The way people vote is the main thing that decides how things are run in this country.*
- *Voting is the only way that people like me can have a say about how the government runs things.*
- *People like me don't have any say about what the government does.*
- *Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.*

Another example of the early multifaceted view of political efficacy is found in a study of children's acquisition of regime norms by Easton and Dennis (1967). In the study, they toss and turn the meaning of the concept, and describe how it is contested. According to Easton and Dennis, political efficacy exists in three forms: as a norm, as a set of dispositions, and as a conduct or behaviour. The conduct refers to an instrumental view that a person acts or does not act efficaciously in the sense that s/he can influence society or not. The norm (which is the focus of the study) is somewhat vague, and refers to acquisition of support for the current political system, something similar to diffuse support. The set of dispositions mentioned by Easton and Dennis came later to be established as internal and external political efficacy. Clearly, Easton and Dennis (1967, p. 26) see political efficacy as a complex phenomenon that encompasses a number of interwoven sentiments:

... a person must sense his competency at the level of his political self-identity. He must construct a psychic map of the political world with strong lines of force running from himself to the places of officialdom. He must come to believe that when he speaks other political actors will listen.

Easton and Dennis seem to imply some sort of autonomy or personal agency on the part of the individual on the one hand, and responsiveness of the political system or political actors on the other. As can be seen, it is hard to pinpoint any clear single meaning of what political efficacy is to Easton and Dennis (1967).⁷

There are also other examples of scholars using and discussing this early multifaceted way of conceptualizing political efficacy. One is Abramson (1972, 1977) who, following in the footsteps of Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954), mixes both perceived action capacity and system responsiveness into the concept of political efficacy. Finifter (1970) connects sense of political efficacy to some form of reversed powerlessness. She measures it as the perceived likelihood that one would succeed if one tried to change a law or regulation, which mixes expected outcome and perception of one's own capability. Finifter (1970) also includes items referring to the

⁷ Easton and Dennis (1967) also go deeper and explore five possible sub-dimensions of the concept: I) the responsiveness of the system towards the individual, II) the autonomy of the individual (that "I" can make a change), III) basic political knowledge relating one's own political role to the "political system" (comprehensibility – connecting the internal and external dimensions), IV) access to means of influence, and V) resistance to fatalism (to be stuck in the role of "being ruled" by "rulers").

perceived responsiveness of the people in power, although not explicitly connecting this to political efficacy.

In sum, sense of political efficacy is viewed as related to a feeling (or not) of political alienation through the perception of having, or not having, power, and it is measured as some form of perceived likelihood of a certain outcome. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) address the concept in a similar way, focusing on how much influence a citizen feels that s/he has (power), and also assessment of whether people in power will listen (outcome).

The problem with these early definitions and operationalizations is that they are too inclusive, and try to capture too many aspects of political life, attitudes and perceptions. Subsuming separate attitudes or assessments in one concept leads to confusion over what is actually being studied, measured and meant by having a sense of political efficacy. The concept becomes too broad and all-encompassing. These objections are, however, not new, since many have pointed to the conceptual inadequacies (see, e.g., Acock, Clarke, and Stewart 1985, Caprara et al. 2009, Murphy 2011, Madsen 1987). Nevertheless, the definition presented by Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954), its operationalizations (including all or just some of the original items), various forms of the all-inclusive one-dimensional view, and mixed scales for external and internal efficacy are still used today (see, e.g., Kenski and Stroud 2006, Nabatchi 2010, Pasek et al. 2008, Cohen, Vigoda, and Samorly 2001, Anderson 2010, Marien, Hooghe, and Quintelier 2010). All this suggests a need to readdress the issue.

2.1.2 A two-dimensional conceptualization – the predominant view

Not all researchers, however, see the concept of political efficacy as one-dimensional, and as encompassing some or all of the aspects described above. A two-factor structure, with the dimensions *external* and *internal* political efficacy, has been presented by Lane (1959, p. 149):

It [political efficacy] has, of course, two components – the image of self and the image of democratic government – and contains the tacit implication than an image of the self as effective is intimately related to the image of democratic government as responsive to the people.

These two dimensions are touched upon by both Easton and Dennis (1967) and Abramson (1972, 1977), but not explicitly argued for, or used, in such a manner. The two-dimensional structure suggested by Lane (1959) did, however, pave the way for political scientists to address the issue of political efficacy. The *external* dimension is meant to capture a belief in the responsiveness of the political system (the government, public officials, poli-

ticians, the voting procedure, etc.). The *internal* dimension is related to image of the self and beliefs about how effective one can be in politics as an individual.

The dimensions have, however, been treated very differently in various studies and by various researchers. So-called *external* efficacy has been defined in terms of diffuse support, or a two-factor dimension based on specific and diffuse support, or a mixture of voice and influence, or a form of political trust and political alienation (Kent and Niemi 1981, Ulbig 2008, Balch 1974, Iyengar 1980, Reef and Knoke 1999, Craig, Niemi, and Silver 1990).

Similarly, the *internal* dimension has been developed in diverse ways. The general description of an individual's perception of her/his capabilities or competence in influencing the political system has had many different starting points. Definitions have included: interest in politics, cognitive capabilities, ability to perform certain actions, ability to influence government, political knowledge, political information, and the intention to change something (Finifter 1970, Balch 1974, Miller, Miller, and Schneider 1980, Abramson 1983, Craig, Niemi, and Silver 1990, Niemi, Craig, and Mattei 1991, Yeich and Levine 1994, Morrell 2003, Caprara et al. 2009).

Despite this array of views on the two main components of political efficacy (which connects it to other concepts in political science), it seems that taking a two-dimensional view at least solves part of the problem of being too inclusive and vague. The list of researchers who argue for a more distinct separation is long (see, e.g., Finkel 1987, 1985, Abramson 1983, Niemi, Craig, and Mattei 1991, Craig, Niemi, and Silver 1990, Morrell 2003, Murphy 2011, Zimmerman 1989, Caprara et al. 2009, Craig and Maggiotto 1982).

In 1980, Miller, Miller, and Schneider presented a conceptualization of political efficacy that can be seen as quite representative of the general comprehension of the concept's dual-dimensionality even today. According to Miller, Miller, and Schneider (1980, p. 253), internal efficacy "indicates individuals' self-perception that they are capable of understanding politics and competent enough to participate in political acts such as voting," whereas external efficacy "measures expressed beliefs about political institutions rather than perceptions about one's own abilities ... The lack of external efficacy ... indicates the belief that the public cannot influence political outcomes because government leaders and institutions are unresponsive."

The two-dimensional understanding of political efficacy, in accordance with Miller, Miller, and Schneider's description, is to be seen as the predominant view within political science today. The problem is that a coher-

ent, clear and unambiguous view of the nature of political efficacy is lacking. Researchers studying political efficacy, or using it as an independent or control variable, still have their own particular ways of defining and measuring it. Different aspects are often bunched together, even within the two dimensions. Some examples are the perception of action capabilities and cognitive abilities (understanding/having knowledge) in the case of internal efficacy, and alienation and diffuse support in the case of external efficacy. Accordingly, the possibilities of comparing results from different studies in a sensible way are limited, since there are so many ways of defining and measuring the two commonly used dimensions. Without theoretically clearer and more stringent conceptualization, studies of political efficacy are hard to evaluate and compare.

2.1.3 A self-efficacy conceptualization – views from psychology

Another viewpoint on the concept of political efficacy is found in psychology. Psychologists' interest in the concept derives from an interest in self-efficacy beliefs as drivers of human behaviour. In 1977, Albert Bandura introduced a comprehensive theory of self-efficacy beliefs based on social cognitive theory⁸ and his own previous work (Bandura 1971, Bandura, Jeffery, and Gajdos 1975, Bandura and Adams 1977, Bandura, Adams, and Beyer 1977, Bandura 1977). In order to be able better to discuss and understand the view of *political* (self-)efficacy with psychological prefaces, there is a need to comment on self-efficacy beliefs in general.

The theoretical underpinnings of self-efficacy beliefs place the individual and her/his perception of herself/himself in focus. This makes so-called *external* political efficacy irrelevant to (most) psychologists. There are, however, two main lines of thinking about the mechanisms behind self-efficacy beliefs, which derive from motivational and cognitive theories (Gecas 1989). The former argues that motivation is the key to self-efficacy beliefs and behaviour, while the latter focuses on perceptions of control and (task) execution agency.

Influential proponents of the motivational line are White (1959), McClelland (1975), and Ryan and Deci (2000). Motivation theory emphasizes “experiences of causal agency,” and that people are motivated to “produce effects on the environment, to make things happen” (Gecas 1989, p. 292). This can be seen as overlapping with the way Campbell,

⁸ Social cognitive theory (or social learning theory) is concerned with how people learn things through observation, taking into account their own cognitive abilities, rather than focusing only on the influence of the environment (as was common before) (Wilkenfeld, Lauckhardt, and Torney-Purta 2010).

Gurin, and Miller (1954, p. 187) and some of their followers in political science define and think about *political* efficacy (beliefs). That is, it is “worth while [sic] to perform one’s civic duties” and that “social change is possible.”

Cognitive theory, on the other hand, focuses on beliefs about (or perceptions of) about control and ability to execute actions, not on the *motivations* for holding such beliefs or having such perceptions. Rotter’s (1966) theory of external and internal locus of control is an example of the cognitive line of thinking. Nevertheless, the most influential proponent is Bandura (1997), whose theories dominate current research on self-efficacy beliefs.

Important when contrasting the views of Bandura (1997, 1977) on self-efficacy beliefs and the views on *political* (self-)efficacy in political science is that Bandura clearly distances himself from any motivational explanation. In the words of Gecas (1989, p. 294):

From the perspective of social learning theory, centred on self-evaluation processes, Bandura distinguishes between efficacy expectations and outcome expectations. An efficacy expectation is a belief that one can successfully perform a particular action. It is a judgment of one’s personal efficacy. An outcome expectation is an estimate that a given action will lead to a certain outcome (Bandura 1977: 193). The former is a belief about one’s competence, the latter is a belief about one’s environment.

Thus, Bandura leans towards a more instrumental view on the concept of self-efficacy. People’s efficacy beliefs depend on whether they think they can perform a specified type of action, which fits well with the following definition by Bandura (1982, p. 122):

Perceived self-efficacy is concerned with judgments of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations.

Accordingly, psychologists generally see self-efficacy beliefs as people’s evaluations of their capacities to execute specific actions (even if there are still advocates of a rather more motivational stance). The fundamental idea is that people do not take on actions that they do not think they can complete regardless of what the actions may mean in terms of outcome. With the introduction of *political* (self-)efficacy beliefs, Bandura’s firm convictions do, however, seem to loosen up a bit, especially regarding the matter of *influence*. Indeed, Bandura (1997, p. 483) reflects upon *influence* (outcomes) when describing political self-efficacy:

Perceived political efficacy involves people’s beliefs that they can influence the political system.

Judging from this, it does seem that psychologists too can (and do) view a political (self-)efficacy belief as something more than merely a perceived capacity to execute a given and concrete task. One has to consider the outer social world (political system/society) surrounding the individual. Following this idea, the underpinnings of *political* self-efficacy beliefs would therefore be slightly different from those that Bandura might regard as underlying *general* self-efficacy beliefs. Possibly, political self-efficacy beliefs would be more similar to how a group of researchers (including Bandura himself) put them in the opening sentence of a study of efficacy beliefs in the family (Caprara et al. 2004, p. 247):

People do not undertake activities that they feel are beyond their capabilities, nor are they inclined to pursue ambitious goals, or to persevere in the face of difficulties, unless they believe they can produce the desired results by their own actions.

The citation indicates that there has been a slight shift towards considering outcome expectancies even among psychologists who derive their theoretical underpinnings from social cognitive theory.

Before summing up perspectives on political efficacy in psychology, there is one further aspect that requires attention. By contrast with the multifaceted views adopted by many political scientist on political efficacy, psychologists generally agree that self-efficacy beliefs, including political self-efficacy beliefs, should be as ‘domain-specific’ as possible when they are measured (Pajares 1996, Wollman and Stouder 1991, Bandura 1989, 2006b).

Domain specificity means that efficacy beliefs should be measured and defined within a specific domain in order to get the best prediction of a specific behaviour. Academic self-efficacy beliefs (beliefs about the capacity to execute specific academic tasks) generate a better prediction of academic achievement than does an omnibus measure (the general belief that one is ‘academically capable’). It is also on the basis of this line of thinking that Bandura extends the general theory of self-efficacy beliefs to include ‘domain-specific’ *political* efficacy (Bandura 1997).

This view on domain-specificity also explains why psychologists are fairly uninterested in what is referred to as external political efficacy, or at least why they are reluctant to include something like perception of the responsiveness of the political system into the concept of political efficacy. Psychologists are primarily interested in individuals, and their perceptions and behaviours in relation to themselves, rather than in the individual’s role in relation to a broader political system, or the concept of citizenship.

Summing up, the perspectives of psychologists on the concept of political efficacy are a lot narrower than the two views presented by a long line of political scientists. The foundation for a psychologist's view lies in self-efficacy beliefs, which put the individual and her/his perception of her/his capacities to execute specific tasks in focus. A dividing line is found, however, in discussing the mechanisms behind holding these beliefs. Are they based on motivation, which means also considering outcome expectancies? Or, are they purely assessments of control in relation to the particular task disregarding its extended meaning for the individual? Mostly, the latter view is adhered to, but when it comes to *political* (self-) efficacy beliefs it seems hard to avoid the issues of influence and outcome expectancies. Despite this, the conceptualization of political efficacy found in psychology is shallow in its discussion and definition of the *political*. Domain specificity and a focus on the so-called *internal* side of political efficacy are accepted and make sense. Political self-efficacy, however, also includes *politics* (political actions and political behaviours) meaning that account has to be taken of the particularities of the political context (see the discussion below).

2.1.4 A multidisciplinary conceptualization – a combined view

Judging from the three themes mentioned above, it is clear there are some differences in the way the nature of political efficacy is conceived. Although the borders between different research disciplines are not totally clear-cut, it is obvious that the two main disciplines studying political efficacy – political science and psychology – have different starting points, and thus different views on the concept. Starting in the late 1980s the two fields have, however, gradually started to grow closer to each other (see, e.g., Zimmerman 1989, Madsen 1987). More recently, there has also been an increased interest in the concept in other disciplines (see, e.g., Levy 2011).

The rapprochement has meant that a more multidisciplinary perspective is slowly being adopted. Scholars from different disciplines have, since the 1990s, described the concept in increasingly similar ways. In broad terms, political efficacy is described as a perception of (personal) capacity to *influence* the political system, although there is, of course, some variation in the actual wording. For example, the psychologists Yeich and Levine (1994, p. 259) say that political efficacy "... is a term used to represent an individual's perceived ability to participate in and influence the political system," whereas the political scientists Cohen, Vigoda, and Samorly (2001, p. 734) refer to "...one's perceptions of one's capability to understand and influence the decision-making process in the political system." The political scientist Sylvester (2010, p. 1) suggests that (internal) political

efficacy is “...the belief that I am competent enough to make a difference in political outcomes,” and the educationalist Levy (2013, p. 357) describes political efficacy as “...the belief that one’s own political action can influence the political process.”

As can be seen, these descriptions are quite broad, but all include the expectation of a certain impact (influence or the making of a difference), an aspect that the psychologists Caprara et al. (2004) also find important (see citation above). So, psychologists seem to have acknowledged the importance of *outcome* to a greater extent, while political scientists have tried to focus more on the individual and *internal* dimension of the concept (see, e.g., Morrell 2005, 2003, Beaumont 2011).

Nevertheless, there are still different components or ideas about political efficacy that are mixed together by different researchers. The focus, though, is increasingly on the *internal* aspect, and most political scientists consider both dimensions when using the global term *political efficacy*. Many studies (mainly by political scientists) provide some form of knowledge or understanding of politics in the measurement and/or definition of (internal) political efficacy using a scale from Niemi, Craig, and Mattei (1991).⁹ Levy (2011), in his dissertation, uses different scales for different studies, and divides what he refers to as internal political efficacy (IPE) into *IPE/knowledge* (understanding/known politics) and *IPE/skills* (argumentation/persuasion/speaking abilities – not necessarily about politics).

Most psychologists shy away from this way of mixing the components into one measurement. Instead, the focus is on the capacity to fulfil courses of action. Even though Caprara et al. (2009) discuss the importance of producing desired results (influencing politics) and understanding politics, their measurement of political efficacy focuses solely on how confident people feel about their abilities to execute specific actions. Thus, they leave out any judgments on potential outcomes or any abilities to understand politics. Caprara et al. (2009) are thus closer to self-efficacy beliefs and Bandura (1997), whereas most political scientists cling to the general view of political efficacy as two-dimensional, with one of two measurements/items tapping political knowledge/understanding, which is in line with the view of Miller, Miller, and Schneider (1980).

⁹ The following items are included:

I consider myself well-qualified to participate in politics.

I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country.

I feel that I could do as good a job in public office as most other people.

I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people.

Some researchers also refer to versions of this scale (Craig, Niemi, and Silver 1990).

In sum, it can be said that even if the overall view has become more multi-disciplinary (with motivation and outcome expectancies acknowledged, and a focus on individual perceptions of the self), there are still conceptual discrepancies between researchers into political efficacy. This causes problems when studying the theoretical base of the concept in terms of how political efficacy develops or what mechanisms are at work when feelings of political efficacy translate into behaviours. In particular, political scientists have recently become more concerned with the factors affecting political (self-) efficacy beliefs, which take up a large part of this dissertation. For this purpose, a clear idea about what political efficacy entails is needed, which calls for clarification and refinement in terms of conceptualization and measurement. There is still much confusion and many mix-ups, and there are even researchers using the old one-dimensional view. There is also a need to arrive at a more precise concept that consolidates self-efficacy theory and the *political* in political efficacy. So, in what follows I will give my view on a conceptualization of political efficacy that is guided by consideration of the shortcomings laid out above. It should be seen as an input into the ongoing discussion over how to understand political efficacy conceptually.

2.2 Conceptual development - moving political efficacy further

As others before me (see, e.g., Gecas 1989, Beaumont 2010, Caprara et al. 2009), I argue for an approach to political efficacy that implies a conceptual merger, a bridging of academic disciplines, theoretical thoughts, empirical findings, and conceptual views. Such an approach reveals the theoretical underpinnings of the concept, and facilitates valid empirical studies on the development of political efficacy.

Taking into account both the line of thinking in the political science tradition, and contributions from the field of psychology, three main conclusions are drawn. These are presented in Paper I, but here I develop and argue for them further. In this way, an important theoretical base for the general discussions in this dissertation is provided. The arguments made for the conceptual development of political efficacy will pave the way for a more refined, stringent, and, in some sense, complete understanding of political efficacy. I argue for an understanding of political efficacy as *an individual's perception of her/his abilities to execute political actions aimed at producing political change in society*.¹⁰

¹⁰ The definition here is revised slightly at a linguistic level compared with Paper I. (In Paper I, the definition is: *The perception of an individual's own abilities to execute actions aimed at producing a change in society*.)

2.2.1 Conceptual refinement

The first argument I propose is that so-called external political efficacy (EPE) should be separated from political efficacy, conceptually, measurement-wise, and linguistically (in terms of terminology). It is more appropriate to denote and treat EPE as an independent concept, namely as *perceived system responsiveness* (or the like).

Such a consistent and distinct separation is possible, and needed, or indeed motivated, due to the different characteristics of so-called internal and external political efficacy (see, e.g., Hayes and Bean 1993, Niemi, Craig, and Mattei 1991, Caprara et al. 2009). The dimensions relate to other concepts within political science and psychology (such as political interest, general self-efficacy, self-esteem and political participation) in different ways (see, e.g., Zimmerman 1989, Yeich and Levine 1994), but do not always correlate with each other in the same manner (or even to any larger extent). An example is the study of a modified version of the so-called *Gamson Hypothesis*¹¹ by Craig (1980), which concerns the interaction effects of both internal and external political efficacy on so-called unconventional or extra-parliamentary political participation. He concludes that a high belief in one's own capabilities or 'competence' (internal efficacy) to participate together with perceived unresponsiveness of the political system (external efficacy) foster action outside the conventional channels of participation.

Many studies also indicate much stronger connections of system responsiveness (EPE) to various forms of trust, political alienation, cynicism and other 'critical attitudes', etc. (Craig and Maggiotto 1982, Craig 1980, Craig and Maggiotto 1981, Norris 1999, Reef and Knoke 1999) than to internal political efficacy. Instead of either using an all-encompassing concept, or treating sense of political efficacy as two-dimensional under one conceptual roof, there should be a separation of the so-called dimensions. Let the individual's perception of the responsiveness of the political system stand on its own ground, and be called perceived system responsiveness. It is important to be clear about what one is studying, and using the same term for two concepts causes unnecessary confusion as well as undermining the specific qualities of each. What have been denoted as *internal* political efficacy and *external* political efficacy are not the same thing, neither conceptually nor linguistically.

¹¹ The Gamson Hypothesis is well described by a citation from his own work: "a combination of high sense of political efficacy and low political trust is the optimum combination for mobilization – a belief that influence is both possible and necessary" (Gamson 1968, p. 48).

Nonetheless, it is still important to keep perceived system responsiveness in mind when studying political efficacy. It is both natural and empirically grounded that an individual's perception of her/his own abilities is influenced by, or at least connected to, the individual's perception of the openness and/or responsiveness of the political system.

Such separation is also necessary to bring the perspectives on political efficacy of political scientists and of psychologists together (my first argument). This, in turn, will facilitate discussion and development of the theoretical underpinnings of the concept. In relation to these theoretical concerns, political scientists have a lot to gain from the theories of self-efficacy (my second argument). Psychologists have, at the same time, a lot to gain from political scientists regarding the nature of politics and political action (my third argument).

2.2.2 The self and political action in focus

Connected to the first argument, there is a need to clarify the so called *internal* dimension¹² conceptually. The most problematic flaw in previous research, and particularly in political science, is that researchers keep insisting on a multidimensional view – both in conceptual and measurement terms. As described for the all-encompassing conceptualization, many components were/are put into the concept. This becomes a bit clearer on the two-dimensional view, but taking away the system-responsiveness dimension altogether is a better way of acquiring an even more refined and unambiguous concept.

Nevertheless, several components are still assembled in the dimensions, which allows the problem of multidimensionality to persist, despite gradual amelioration through a number of measurement studies (see, e.g., Niemi, Craig, and Mattei 1991, Craig, Niemi, and Silver 1990, Morrell 2003, McPherson, Welch, and Clark 1977). Here, I shall refrain from any further discussion of potential refinement of the conceptual nature of system responsiveness (the so-called *external* dimension) in order to focus on what I see as the core of political efficacy, which has the self and political action in focus. First, however, I want further to clarify why the previous views on political efficacy are problematic.

Even when political efficacy is clearly separated from system responsiveness, researchers have still ended up with definitions and measurements that include, as I see it, quite different components. Three general components are often mixed: 1) a general feeling that one can exert influence

¹² Henceforth referred to as political efficacy, or political self-efficacy (beliefs) if not otherwise stated.

(affect political outcomes), 2) perceived ability to participate (execute political actions), and 3) understanding politics/the political system (having certain skills/knowledge/competencies).

Bringing all or some of these components together into a single concept is problematic for many reasons. Morrell (2003, pp. 589-590) criticises the previous ways of measuring political efficacy, and argues for better coherence by stating the following:

Standardizing the measure of internal political efficacy will (1) ensure that researchers are validly and reliably measuring the concept, (2) increase our ability to compare results across studies, and (3) help us better understand this important construct and how it influences our political world.

Morrell is primarily interested in finding a standardized measure of the concept, which would make comparison between, and thus evaluation of, different studies easier. I agree with the importance of these points, and acknowledge that Morrell presents a statistically reliable and improved measure. But, since he is basing his measurement on the Niemi, Craig, and Mattei (1991) scale, which includes the aspect of understanding politics as well as feeling competent to participate politically, I question the validity of that measurement.

This is partly due to his third reason for clearing out the inconsistencies in previous research. My interpretation is that Morrell (2003) also wants to derive a better conceptual understanding of political efficacy by improving how it is measured. As should be clear by now, I agree that this is an imperative task, but I do not agree that it is purely a question of measurement. As I see it, full validity of the concept cannot be obtained by seeing and measuring it in a multidimensional way. Morrell (2003) still includes the evaluation of understanding or having knowledge/information about politics into the measurement, as do many others (see, e.g., Murphy 2011, Feldman et al. 2007, Pasek et al. 2008, Sylvester 2010, Levy 2011).

Nevertheless, I find the plea for standardizing the measurement of political efficacy made by Morrell (2003) appealing. I would, however, like to add a need to theorize more about the concept, so as to be able to answer questions like: From where and how does an individual's political efficacy come about?, and What mechanisms are at play when political efficacy beliefs are turned into political action?. There is a need to be clear about the core of political efficacy. Earlier, political efficacy was mainly studied as an independent variable, but if we want to know more about it as a dependent variable, having a multidimensional view becomes problematic. For the reasons I have given, there is a need for a more parsimonious and

stringent way of seeing and discussing political efficacy so that researchers know what they are measuring in the first place.

Thus, I call for a more coherent interdisciplinary approach, where political scientists would benefit from drawing on the psychological theories of self-efficacy beliefs. There is mutual understanding across disciplines that (internal) political efficacy revolves around self-image. Conceptually then, the core of political efficacy should be about judgement of the self.

Further, I argue that the focus should lie on belief in one's capacities to do things. Clearly, the early all-encompassing view in political science is too broad. Empirical studies show that items concerning internal cognitive processes and perceptions of the self as capable of performing an action are in fact better predictors of political participation (Caprara et al. 2009, Yeich and Levine 1994). The items in a political efficacy measure (scale) need to be clear and focused, not tapping into other concepts, an idea that is derived from the conception of 'domain-specificity' explained above. Thus, reasonably, it is the self and self-assessed abilities in relation to courses of actions that should be kept in focus, as proposed in the social cognitive theory of self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura 1997). Measures including different components tend to be ambiguous and hard to interpret, both for the respondent and the researcher (see, e.g., Cohen, Vigoda, and Samorly 2001, McPherson, Welch, and Clark 1977, Acock, Clarke, and Stewart 1985).

Focusing on the self and executing political actions is needed in order to be able to theorize about and understand the development of political efficacy beliefs. The more general view of perceived political competence used by prominent political scientists includes an assessment of the self in a political setting (society) that is rather diverse (e.g., the scale suggested by Niemi, Craig, and Mattei 1991), which makes it harder to trace the origins of the assessments or beliefs. Such an inclusive approach, with its accompanying measures, risks blurring vision in relation to the mechanisms behind both the acquisition and effects of political efficacy. It is likely that things like understanding and being informed about politics, or generally feeling that one is qualified to participate in politics, are affected by factors (or differently by the same factors) other than the feeling that one can execute certain political actions. In order to be able to look into the 'black box' of political efficacy, the concept needs to be disentangled theoretically, and each component studied in its own right. In this way we can, in the words of Morrell (2003, p. 590) "... better understand this important construct and how it influences our political world."

This is an argument that goes in line with Caprara et al. (2009) who created a scale that focuses on the assessment of the individual's abilities to

perform specific political actions. This scale is, however, like most of the previous scales, designed to measure political efficacy in an adult population. In order to access developmental roots, there is a need to have political socialization in focus, by adapting measures to the (political) reality of young people.

Further, there is a need to respect and take into account the particularity of reality in terms of the *political* or *politics*. Although the focus should be on the self and the execution of actions, these actions need to be *political* actions. So, research on and measurement of political efficacy would benefit from taking into account some of the theoretical underpinnings of self-efficacy beliefs and social cognitive theory as well as the action-orientation of much of the psychology literature. But, on the other hand, these perspectives do not fully capture the wholeness of *political* efficacy. The concept needs to be connected to the political sphere, and to the implicit expectation of being able to make a difference for (or in) society in political mode.

2.2.3 Retaining the *political*

My third argument is that political efficacy concerns the *political*. Which-ever the course of action to be assessed, in relation to an individual's abilities, it needs to be political in the sense that it is aimed at making a difference in society (affect politics). It is essential to adhere to the political context, and admit that *political* efficacy beliefs have something more to them than just the mere perceived ability to execute any random task.

In part, this entails admitting that *influence*, and thus expectations of consequences of one's actions, play a role in perceptions of one's political efficacy. Thus, there is a motivational aspect, namely that it is worthwhile to act (even if success is not achieved every time), as is presented by the pioneers in the field (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954) and developed in the recent multidisciplinary view (see Section 2.1.4). Political efficacy is about more than the instrumental belief that one can control and execute a task regardless of its outcome (Bandura's theory of self-efficacy beliefs, see Section 2.1.3). The *political* in political efficacy makes it particular in relation to other domains of self-efficacy beliefs.

The question is then: What is this particularity? What is it about the *political* and *politics* that makes political efficacy special? There are some aspects of the political, illustrating its particularity, which are worth discussing in relation to these questions.

The political is concerned with: 1) *the social sphere*, 2) *power*, and 3) *process*. In his introduction to political analysis Hay (2002, p. 3, original italics) describes the political or politics as follows:

... the political should be defined in such a way as to encompass the entire sphere of the social.

... politics and the political as concerned with the distribution, exercise and consequences of power.

... politics is not defined by the *locus* of its operation, but by its nature as a *process*.

As Hay (2002) states, the political is found within the *social sphere*. This does not, however, mean that anything goes, that everything can be considered political, but rather that the political only happens where there are social relations. Thus, the political and politics occur in some form of society, where groups of individuals are seen as a collective (citizens or 'the people'), but, at the same time, all social relations are not to be considered political. The private (relations) still exists, and there are things that are 'non-political'.

In order to understand the political, the concept of power also needs to be addressed. In the citation above, and in Hay's further explanations, there is an Eastonian base. Hay (2002) replaces Easton's terminology of 'authoritative allocation of values' (Easton 1965, see, e.g., p. 3, 50 and 57) with the more inclusive concept of power, and how power is distributed and exercised, and what its consequences are. In a way, the allocation of (scarce) resources can be seen as an effect of power. Hay argues that it is the power relations within social relations that are of interest for political analysis,¹³ and he also considers the consequences of power as connected to the use and distribution of resources

On the other hand, Hay's definition of power (below) in itself seems more inspired by Dahl (1957, pp. 202-203) "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do." Hay (1997, p. 50) defines power as:

... the ability of actors (whether individual or collective) to 'have an effect' upon the context which defines the range of possibilities of others.

¹³ Compare Easton (1965, p. 50) "Furthermore, what distinguishes political interactions from all other kinds of social interactions is that they are predominantly oriented toward the authoritative allocations of values for a society" with Hay (2002, p. 3) "What makes political analysis political is the emphasis it places on the political aspect of social relations."

Actors 'having an effect' on the possibilities of others points in the direction of having 'power over' something or someone. This does not prevent allocation of resources or values from being part of the exercise of power. This view is also supported by Lundquist (1993), who argues that politics can be defined broadly in terms of exercise of power, somewhat less broadly by the authoritative allocation of values, and more narrowly by governmental activities.

Further, the citation illustrates the importance of social relations for Hay's (2002) view on what constitutes the political. As with the political and politics, power is found where someone can exercise it over someone else, in the social relations embedded in the collective (society).

Finally, there is the issue of politics or the political as a process. Hay (2002) claims that politics is not something that is found just in particular institutions or specific arenas, or something that can be said to have a pre-defined content. Rather, it is something that is done or is happening. Politics depends on 'someone doing it' and is not found in any specific arena, which takes us to the etymology of the concept of statesmanship – making a state or society. As Flanagan (2013, p. 2) argues;

... politics is about more than party affiliation and elections. Politics concerns membership in communities and the processes and practices whereby we work with fellow members of those communities to determine the kind of communities, society, and world we want to live in. That process is rooted in development and begins before citizens are old enough to vote.

Viewing politics and the political as something that concerns power relations between people or groups of people in an ongoing process is, of course, a broad perspective. Nevertheless, it is in line with recent research suggesting that views on what counts as a political action are getting broader (Norris 2002, Dalton, Scarrow, and Cain 2004), and that young people in particular have broadened their participatory repertoires (Zukin et al. 2006, Hooghe 2004), as well as their views on politics (O'Toole 2003).

The broad perspective presented here might seem to go against the two previous arguments concerning refinement and focusing on the self, but, on the other hand, it makes a point of its own. Political efficacy is particular in relation to other domain-specific efficacy beliefs, since the political by nature is a broad concept. Political efficacy is different from, for example, academic or sports efficacy because political actions are aimed at having an impact on others in a way that academic or sports tasks/actions are not. This point becomes even clearer and more understandable when reflecting on the origins of Bandura's (1977) theory, namely that self-efficacy beliefs

are various kinds of phobias. People's (and perhaps especially young people's) academic or sports performances, or someone overcoming a spider phobia, pass by unnoticed by the general public. The whole aim of political actions is to affect others or their opportunities, either positively or negatively. By executing a political action, be it signing a petition or attending a demonstration, the individual has to take a stand in relation to others for a cause that affects other people.

Thus, political efficacy is to be considered less instrumental than other types of self-efficacy beliefs. First, there is a social aspect to it – *the social sphere*. Politics is about the relations that people – citizens – have with each other in a society, which gives it a collective component. Second, there is an impact aspect to it – *power*. Politics is about the distribution, exercise and consequences of power, where the actions of some affect the situations of others in society. Here, there is also a connection to the discussion on motivation and influence by Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954), who stress that citizens must feel that it is worthwhile to act. Third, there is an activity aspect to the political/politics – *process*. This is, of course, shared by other types of self-efficacy beliefs, in the sense that they are all about performing domain-specific actions (doing something). But what is special about politics (at least when considering it broadly) is that it cannot be reduced to any specific content or place; it can take place anywhere within the social sphere. The discussion over what the *political/politics* entails needs to be addressed when doing research on political efficacy, whether it be by developing a measure for it, by analysing its effects or the mechanisms behind them, or by investigating the origins of political beliefs.

2.2.4 Conclusion – a better conceptualization of political efficacy

Based on previous research on the concept of political efficacy, ending up with the three arguments laid out above, I view political efficacy as:

an individual's perception of her/his abilities to execute political actions aimed at producing political change in society

The concept of political efficacy concerns the individual's perception of the abilities s/he has in relation to undertakings that are political in the sense that the outcome expectation is to effect a change in society from a political point of view. I argue that account must be taken of the larger picture (the political), but without ending up with questions about evaluating or understanding the political system, or merely seeing an individual's abilities instrumentally in relation to a given task.

In the conceptualization above there are traces of the four other conceptualizations found in previous and current research (see Section 2.1 and Table 1). Putting it simply, the strengths of each of the conceptualizations are brought together more stringently by taking the three arguments for further development of the concept of political efficacy into account (see Section 2.2 and Table 2). An overview of the strengths and limitations of previous conceptualizations is offered in Table 1, while, further below, Table 2 offers an overview of the three arguments for how to achieve conceptual development that provides the basis for the conceptualization presented in this dissertation.

Table 1 – Strengths and limitations of previous conceptualizations of political efficacy

Conceptualization	Strengths	Limitations
Political efficacy as <i>all-encompassing</i>	Political influence highlighted.	Too broad and inclusive – several components are mixed together.
Political efficacy as <i>two-dimensional</i> (external and internal)	Acknowledges the two main components of the one-dimensional (all-encompassing) conceptualization. Progress on the development of measurements, leading to some incipient conceptual discussions.	Too scattered and under-theorized. Sub-components mixed into the two main components. Strong focus on finding a <i>reliable</i> measurement at the expense of construct validity.
Political efficacy as <i>self-efficacy</i>	Provides a firm base for dealing with theoretical questions about where political efficacy comes from, and what mechanisms are in play when studying the effects of political efficacy on, for example, political behaviour. Includes domain-specificity, paving the way for clearer and unambiguous operationalization.	Narrow in its focus on the individual and isolated from the political context. Often disconnected from the questions of influence and motivation.
Political efficacy as <i>multidisciplinary</i>	Dismantles some of the interdisciplinary boundaries by 1) acknowledging the importance of influence/motivation, and 2) placing the self in sharper focus.	No thorough discussion of the <i>political</i> context. Inter-subjectivity not obtained despite progress made in closing the conceptual gaps both between and within research fields. Leaves a variety of understandings intact, thereby preventing fruitful comparisons.

From the all-encompassing conceptualization, it is important to retain the motivation and influence aspects, although this needs to be discussed further. From the two-dimensional conceptualization, it is possible to draw the conclusion that political efficacy should not include *perceived system responsiveness*. From the self-efficacy conceptualization, a firm base for theoretical investigations of peoples' political efficacy is presented, including tools that facilitate empirical studies of the origins and mechanisms of political efficacy as a resource for citizens. The multidisciplinary conceptualization takes an important step towards a fruitful conceptual merger, where the benefits of several research fields are combined.

The strengths of all four conceptualizations of political efficacy contribute to a more developed conceptual understanding of political efficacy. They do, however, need to become better integrated to obtain stronger inter-subjectivity concerning political efficacy. The recent theoretical and conceptual progress in terms of merging understandings of what lies at the core of political efficacy, presented in the multidisciplinary approach, is fruitful and comes closest to how I ideally see the concept. Nevertheless, I view further refinements and improvements as both possible and productive. By addressing the issues presented in Table 2, an even better conceptualization can be obtained.

Table 2 – Arguments for further theoretical development of the concept of political efficacy

Conceptual refinement	Focus on the <i>internal</i> political efficacy dimension allowing <i>external</i> political efficacy to be considered a concept in its own right (<i>perceived system responsiveness</i> or the like).
The self and action in focus	Clear up any remaining mixing of components within <i>internal</i> political efficacy by focusing solely on the individual's perception of her/his abilities to execute actions.
Retaining the political	Acknowledge the particularity of the political context. The actions should be <i>political</i> . Here, influence and outcome expectancies are vital ingredients. Also, discuss the nature of the <i>political</i> (i.e., power relations that are being constantly reshaped within the social sphere).

The conceptualization of political efficacy I argue for is based on the arguments above. Perceived system responsiveness is excluded. The focus is on the self and assessment of abilities in relation to action, omitting assessment of any other abilities (e.g., understanding politics). The action must be *political* in that the individual is related to the social sphere and power relations within the collective. Political efficacy is concerned with

the individual, and her/his assessment of personal ability to influence her/his political reality.

By using the strengths of previous conceptualizations further to elaborate the concept of political efficacy, a more refined and stringent conceptualization that takes into account the particularity of the political can be obtained. This does not only pave the way for better construct validity for operationalization of the concept, but also facilitates comparable empirical studies, which was the previous focus when the concept per se was discussed. The great advantage is that a refined and stringent conceptualization can contribute to inter-subjectivity, and enable research on theoretical questions regarding the origins and effects of *political* efficacy. This is especially important for this dissertation, which aims to investigate and discuss both the effects of political efficacy (PE as independent variable), and the development of youths' political efficacy in the context of political socialization (PE as dependent variable).

3. The socialization of political efficacy

The focus of this dissertation is on the development and effects of youths' political efficacy. Hence, it is necessary to turn to the field of (political) socialization to provide a theoretical framework.

This chapter has four main parts. The first puts political efficacy into the context of *political socialization*. The second presents and discusses a theoretical framework for the development of political efficacy – *the roots*. The third presents theoretical ideas (or, more accurately, the lack thereof) about how political efficacy turns into political participation/civic engagement – *the fruits*. The fourth discusses how *the roots* and *the fruits* are connected by discussing the interplay between political efficacy and political participation – *reciprocity*. Finally, all the parts are put together to present the theoretical framework that guides this dissertation.

3.1 Political socialization

The broader context of this dissertation is political socialization, a (sub)field of research which became popular in the 1960s and 1970s (Cook 1985). Although recent discussions and research have developed and broadened our view of political socialization, the core questions and definitions spelled out in the 1960s and 1970s are still important and relevant. Researchers' interest still concerns what Easton (1968, p. 125) and Greenberg (1970, p. 3) defined as political socialization:

... those developmental processes through which persons acquire political orientations and patterns of behaviour (Easton).

... we will define political socialization quite loosely as the process by which the individual acquires attitudes, beliefs and values relating to the political system of which he is a member and to his own role as a citizen within that political system (Greenberg).

The general research question within political socialization is how an individual develops within the political sphere and what this development entails: the how and what of becoming a member of the group you are surrounded by (citizenship development). When looking at the more recent literature, this main research question seems to persist, albeit with some small elaborations. One example is provided by Sapiro (2004, pp. 2-3), who accentuates the combined macro and micro levels of political socialization:

Political socialization as a field can be defined by a pair of interlocked macro- and microlevel phenomena. At the macro level, political socialization

frames research on how politics and other political societies and systems inculcate appropriate norms and practices in citizens, residents, or members At the micro level, political socialization frames research on the patterns and processes by which individuals engage in political development and learning, constructing their particular relationships to the political contexts in which they live.

Another example comes from Amnå et al. (2009), who argue that political socialization research needs to take youths' own agency into account, and also simultaneously to examine multiple contexts.

Despite having a more holistic view, including agency and multiple context analysis (see above), and some other developments in theoretical thinking on political socialization (see below), researchers in the field still seem interested in the same questions about the processes and mechanisms that are involved in children's and youths' *political* development. Why and how do youths become politically (or civically) engaged or not? Why and how do youths acquire or not acquire prevailing citizenship norms?

Another thing that has more or less remained the same since the heyday of political socialization in the 1960s and 1970s is the focus on different agents of political socialization. As early as in the 1960s, Langton and Karns (1969) distinguished between five important socialization agents: family, peers, school, (adult) organizations, and mass media. Some 45 years later, these are still the agents (or contexts) referred to in the political socialization literature (Quintelier 2013a, Amnå 2012).

In relation to the agents of political socialization, there is, however, one important change that has occurred. This is the view on youths themselves as agents, and concerns the *active agency* or *human agency* perspective that Amnå et al. (2009) describe. Today, many researchers in the field at least try to see youths as active agents of their own socialization. Amnå (2012, p. 621) summarizes developments as follows:

The general, but contested, idea that the socialisation of adolescents is and remains a result of others' efforts to exert influence over their minds is indeed, although often implicitly, challenged by the current selection of articles. Instead more or less deliberate choices by adolescents themselves seem to lie at the centre of a less-developed approach to the study of political socialisation.

But, even if researchers are trying to include and study the influence youths exert upon their own socialization process, it seems rather hard to grasp. As a consequence, it is easy to fall back on traditional unidirectional models where youths are seen as passive recipients of adults' active political socialization efforts (Gordon and Taft 2011, Youniss et al. 2002).

A final question that lingers on in discussion of political socialization concerns which age groups to look at. Age is a factor that accounts for some of the variation in political participation (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), and so it also becomes an issue for political socialization. In her studies, Watts (1999) finds that age carries a lot of information about youths' political development. This seems to go in line with the so-called *formative years hypothesis* (Niemi and Hepburn 1995, Jennings 2002). A relatively large amount of cognitive as well as attitudinal development seems to take place in the adolescent years, which make them crucial in studies of political socialization processes.

There is, however, the view that the study of (early) childhood is also important. Both older studies (Easton and Dennis 1969, Dennis 1968) and more recent studies (van Deth, Abendschön, and Vollmar 2011, Abendschön 2010) argue that political socialization starts early, and that we should not neglect the importance of studying young children in attempting to understand the development of political socialization. Still others claim that political learning and change take place throughout the life span, and is a life-long process, which means that we should also include adults in research on political socialization (Hess and Torney 1967, Almond and Verba 1963). Quintelier (2013b) concludes that political socialization can be studied in all age groups, depending on the research question posed and the field in which the researcher positions her/himself. According to Quintelier, some level of socialization is found across the entire life span. Influential research, however, does point to the importance of early identity formation, and of how early experiences and identity-seeking form us as social beings (Erikson 1959, 1968). Thus, it is reasonable to suppose that the sensible adolescence period is extra important for the formation of *political* identity (see, e.g., Sears and Funk 1999, Flanagan 2013), even if gradual development takes place over the life course.

3.1.1 Youths' political efficacy and political socialization

This dissertation fits well into discussion of the general questions of political socialization. It studies the sources, effects and potentials of political efficacy as a citizenship quality: how and why youths become politically efficacious, and what this means for individuals as well as for society and democracy at a broader level. In this dissertation, the micro and macro levels are connected by looking at how political efficacy develops among youths at an individual level, what the effects are in terms of participation, and also what this means at a societal level.

Also, I adhere to the agency perspective, i.e., that political socialization cuts both ways. Youths are socialized by others but also by themselves

through their empowerment and their own choices. The importance of youths' own agency and free will can be taken into account without dismissing the moulding effects of the surroundings. Political efficacy fits well into this perspective since it is a (personal) citizenship quality that youths carry with them as a source of their agency, but it is also gained through the influence of others.

Further, I agree that one should try to have as holistic a perspective as possible, i.e., to try to include various agents or contexts of political socialization in both theoretical and empirical studies of the issue. This is also the objective of this dissertation and important for the study of the development of political efficacy.

Of particular interest, however, is the school as a socialization arena. Studies show that schools create a stability for young people that they do not get elsewhere (see, e.g., Svensson 2012). Thus, the school is important for youths in general, and especially for the ones who are disadvantaged in other respects (Quintelier 2008, Schwarzer and Connor 2013, Andolina et al. 2003).

In relation to political efficacy, there are studies that show how young people's political efficacy can be boosted by efforts in school, and that this positively influences political engagement (Hayes and Bean 1993, Beaumont et al. 2006). There are also studies indicating the long-lasting effects on political participation and political efficacy of participating in programs designed to increase youths' political efficacy and participation (Yates and Youniss 1998, Keen and Hall 2008, Pasek et al. 2008, Flanagan 2013). Thus, it is likely that that once you gain political efficacy, you will keep it. The ways in which school and teaching really matter for youths' political development in general and political efficacy in particular is, however, not very well researched or understood. Political socialization in schools in relation to political efficacy is paid special attention in this dissertation, even though parental and peer influences are also considered.

As for which age groups to look at, I am convinced by Quintelier's (2013b) argument that political socialization occurs at all ages. Also, people's political efficacy beliefs have been proven to be malleable by nature, and are theoretically under constant change. At the same time, the adolescent years seem extra sensitive in relation to the formation of political identities and characteristics since a lot is going on in the lives of teenagers. This makes an empirical focus on these years appropriate for studying the development of political efficacy. It would be interesting to investigate whether the perception of one's abilities to execute political actions stays the same or varies throughout adulthood, but this falls outside the scope of this dissertation.

To conclude, the broader contextualization in this dissertation is found within the field of political socialization, and the focus is on the development of youths' political efficacy beliefs (*the roots*), and the effects of these (*the fruits*). In the next section, I turn to the former, and introduce a rather new theoretical framework for the development of political efficacy.

3.2 Pathways to political efficacy – the roots

Despite the recent revitalization of, and scholarly interest in, political efficacy (see Section 2.1.4), it is still not widely studied as a dependent variable. The majority of previous studies have looked at the effects of having high political efficacy beliefs (*the fruits*), but not at what lies behind this powerful predictor of political participation (*the roots*). This is a gap that was highlighted in the early 1980s by Abramson (1983). He also claimed that the whole field of political socialization was in great need of theoretical development, which still seems to be the case (Quintelier 2013b).

Beaumont (2010) does, however, take up the challenge by explaining and theorizing about where a sense of political efficacy comes from, and how it develops. By analyzing data of both a qualitative and quantitative nature from a sample of nearly 1000 college students on courses and programs aimed at promoting political engagement,¹⁴ Beaumont comes to three important conclusions about the state of the art in research on political efficacy, and develops a theoretical framework to clarify the pathways along which young people develop their sense of political efficacy.

Beaumont (2010) conclusions are as follows: 1) It is established that political efficacy is important, but we know very little about how it works; 2) Previous and current research seem overly focused on the measurement of the concept and not at all with studying/creating hypotheses and theory about it; and, 3) Most research so far has investigated sense of political efficacy in isolation, and thus disregards the importance of contexts and dynamics in its development.

Based on the work of Bandura (1982, 1997, 1977) and social-cognition theory, she proposes four pathways to political efficacy.¹⁵ According to Bandura, an individual's self-efficacy is derived from mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological/affective states. These sources were originally identified in empirical studies of phobias (Bandura, 1977, 1982), and are therefore unlikely to be optimal in studies of political efficacy. Beaumont (2010), however, redevelops Bandura's

¹⁴ For more details on the program and data used for the study, see Beaumont et al., 2006.

¹⁵ A presentation of the pathways to political efficacy is also found in Paper 1.

theory to make it more suitable for the study of political efficacy and the early acquisition of political efficacy among youths.

The first pathway is *Skill-building political mastery experiences*. The idea is that political efficacy is increased by actual hands-on and guided real-world political experiences. Youths themselves must act and do politics – execute political actions. These actions are, however, not bound to be political in the sense of being connected to party politics. A broader sense of the *political* is used, enabling the actions to be more like civic engagement, which is in line with the wide-ranging perspective on *political/politics* presented in Chapter 2. The actions performed should, however, not be too easy. Rather, they have to challenge the individual in order for her/him to gain a feeling of accomplishment. Naturally, however, experiences of degree of difficulty do vary between individuals.

Nevertheless, the connection to Bandura's (1982) mastery experiences¹⁶ is clear; the actual performance of a given task leads to increased belief on the part of an individual in her/his capacity to perform it or similar tasks again. Mastery experiences are thought to be the strongest determinants of an individual's political efficacy (Bandura 1982, 1997, Beaumont 2010).

Beaumont (2010) calls the second pathway *Models of political efficacy and involvement*, which refers to role models in the political arena. The idea is to provide youths with examples of people with different backgrounds, qualities, and characteristics, who have accomplished something within politics or civil society. These could be people who are similar to the youths themselves, or people who are outsiders or minorities not fitting into the norms and moulds of society but still able to accomplish things against the odds. Sometimes, the latter seem more important as role models. The crucial aspect is that youths feel a connection to and can identify with these people in some way. Either youths want to follow the unique role model's examples, or get the courage/will to try something by adopting the view that 'if s/he can do it, so can I' in the more everyday-life role model.

This pathway can be linked back to Bandura's (1982) idea of vicarious experiences; seeing another person performing a task increases your own belief that you are able to perform the same or similar tasks if you can identify with that other person. Humans are imitators and learn from each other's behaviours.

As a third pathway, Beaumont (2010) refers to how *Social encouragement, supporting relationships, networks and inclusion in political community* provide important foundations for gaining stronger beliefs in one's

¹⁶ Also called 'enactive attainments'.

capacity to act and make a difference in society. According to Beaumont, people will make greater efforts to accomplish their actions/goals if they are persuaded and/or encouraged to try and make a difference. The effect is also heightened by getting to hear that one's own abilities are good enough to succeed. These kinds of boosts seem natural in making individuals more inclined to believe that they can perform a certain task, and thus increase their efficacy beliefs.

Moreover, Beaumont also finds that it is important for youths to feel that they have someone to turn to – that they are part of a larger community. This gives the youths a sense of security, as does having an adult around who offers feedback, reflection, and discussion over the things one can do and one's role in society, etc. This sort of supportive environment seems beneficial for youths' development of political efficacy beliefs, since they get the courage to try, and have someone to fall back on, if they do not succeed in their political actions. The value of discussing previous, actual and prospective political participation is also something that is emphasized by other scholars in the arena (Yates and Youniss 1998, Kahne and Westheimer 2006, Torney-Purta and Amadeo 2003).

The third pathway is represented by verbal persuasion as a theoretical underpinning of self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura 1982), but Beaumont (2010) takes this further by adding social inclusion, networks and reflection over society and the political as important surrounding factors. In other words, she includes a social and political context.

The last of Beaumont's (2010) pathways is referred to in terms of *Empowering and resilient political outlooks*. This is the least clear of the pathways, which gives rise to some difficulties in terms of operationalization (see Paper I and below). Beaumont argues that youths, with a more optimistic and bright view of the future and of society as a whole, are more likely to feel less cynical, apathetic, and hopeless in relation to what they perceive as politics. This can be interpreted as an inclination towards the inclusion of (or, at least, a connection to) system responsiveness. If young people are guided into looking upon society and the political in realistic terms (so that they neither overestimate nor underestimate their capacities), a more constructive view of the political system can be attained. This can, in turn, provide the feeling of actually having something to contribute, as well as the power to make a difference in accordance with realistic goals.

Beaumont's fourth pathway does not directly correspond to Bandura's (1982) account of affective states, but provides an accurate and relevant substitution when it comes to the political realm. Having a resilient and empowering outlook on politics and one's role in society is certainly related to feelings of confidence and well-being, which I would see as the affec-

tive states most closely connected to having a sense of political efficacy. And, although there are scholars (see, e.g., Gamson 1968, Norris 1999, 2011, Abdelzadeh 2014) who claim that some political discontent is not necessarily negative for democracy and participation, feelings of apathy and hopelessness are intrinsically discouraging. Again, an important development of Bandura's theory consists in Beaumont's explicit inclusion of the political context. But, bringing more social and contextual factors into the theory does, at the same time, make the pathways less mutually exclusive.

3.2.1 Comments on using Beaumont's pathways

Although the pathways presented by Beaumont (2010) in many ways stem from a fruitful merger and more coherent view of political efficacy, which I appreciate, they are at the same time quite broad and vague. This makes it harder to apply them as an effective theory of political efficacy beliefs in the same way as psychologists use Bandura's (1982, 1997) theory of self-efficacy beliefs in empirical analyses. It can easily be concluded that the pathways are not mutually exclusive, and clear differentiations between them are often lacking. As an example, a role model can be anyone who encourages an individual but, at the same time, also someone who provides a foundation for adopting positive outlooks. The broadness of the pathways, in particular the fourth one, also make them open to interpretation. Both these issues can, of course, create considerable measurement problems at an operational level.

On the other hand, the framework is rather recent, and more studies are needed empirically to investigate the theoretical ideas before one can get closer to a more operational theory. This is also what this dissertation aims to contribute, by investigating the four pathways empirically.

Despite the above-mentioned drawbacks, the pathways also represent a theoretical framework where the theoretical base of social-cognition theory and self-efficacy beliefs is integrated into the contextual premises of the political. In her own words Beaumont (2010, p. 525), claims to offer "a multi-perspective view of the sense of political efficacy ... to illustrate the interplay of social and psychological processes in political life," which paves the way for interesting empirical analysis with *political* efficacy as an outcome.

3.3 Political efficacy as a predictor of political behaviour – the fruits

Despite the large number of empirical studies showing evidence of the effects of political efficacy (*the fruits*)¹⁷ on political behaviour (see, e.g., Rudolph, Gangl, and Stevens 2000, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, Beaumont 2011, Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954, Caprara et al. 2009 and Chapter 1 in this dissertation), surprisingly little is known about why there are such effects. To my knowledge, there are no studies, except those taking a psychological stance based on the theory of self-efficacy beliefs, that explicitly deal with the mechanisms underlying the link between political efficacy and political behaviour. Accordingly, in this dissertation, I use the framework of self-efficacy beliefs to describe why political efficacy translates into political participation.

As presented above (see Chapter 2, especially Section 2.1.3) there are two main theoretical ways of explaining how self-efficacy beliefs translate into behaviour: motivational theories, and cognitive theories. Motivational theorists (see, e.g., White 1959, McClelland 1975, Ryan and Deci 2000) claim that a person will behave in a certain way if s/he feels capable of affecting her/his environment by such behaviour. Thus, thinking about self-efficacy beliefs in this way includes the aspect of being motivated to have some form of influence on the external world. Cognitive theorists (see, e.g., Bandura 1997) take a more instrumental view, focusing on feelings of control over given situations. People are more likely to behave in a certain way if they believe that they can manage certain behaviours, in the sense that they have control over their actions regardless of the outcomes of those actions. People do not undertake actions that they do not think they can complete.

The theoretical ideas above were, however, not developed with *political* efficacy in mind. More specific explanations of the mechanisms underlying a person's political efficacy and her/his political participation are lacking. Accordingly, I will use a vaguer theoretical framework, inspired by both Bandura's (1997) fundamental idea that people do not take actions they do not think they can manage, and White's (1959) notion of *effectance motivation*, in which actions are taken when people are motivated to affect

¹⁷ Although the mechanisms behind the potential equalizing effects of political efficacy on political participation are not explicitly theorized about in this dissertation (in neither the papers, nor the kappa), they will be discussed as one of the *fruits*, outcomes or implications of political efficacy (primarily in the kappa). The studies discussing these effects (i.e., increases in political efficacy being greater for the least advantaged, in terms of SES, when they are stimulated) are presented in Section 1.3 (see, e.g., Hayes and Bean 1993, Beaumont et al. 2006, Beaumont 2011).

their surroundings. This is in line with the conceptualization of political efficacy and view of politics presented in Chapter 2, and also with the view that it is worthwhile to act.

The ideas discussed above are mainly relevant to Paper III (and to some extent to the concluding discussion) and function as a proxy for a more robust future theoretical framework explaining why *political* efficacy beliefs affect *political* behaviours.

3.4 Political efficacy and political participation – reciprocity

Within the broader framework of political socialization, two main ideas guide the empirical parts of this dissertation: that political efficacy is developed along four pathways (Section 3.2), and that political efficacy influences political behaviour (Section 3.3). The discussions in the papers and the kappa are, however, also based on reciprocity between these two theoretical lines of thinking.

Based on Bandura (1982), Beaumont (2010) suggests that youths' political efficacy is best developed through their own mastery experiences, i.e., by performing actions that can be considered political. At the same time, there is an abundance of research showing that political efficacy affects political behaviour (see, e.g., Rudolph, Gangl, and Stevens 2000 and Chapter 1 in this dissertation, Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995, Beaumont 2011, Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954, Caprara et al. 2009). Thus, there is reason to believe that there is reciprocity, or a virtuous circle, between political efficacy and political participation, where the one stimulates the other. Executing political actions boosts an individual's political efficacy beliefs, which in turn stimulate future political participation.

One of the first to suggest such a relationship was Finkel (1985). He studied the reciprocal effects of two political activities, voting and campaign involvement, and two classic dimensions, external and internal political efficacy. The study was longitudinal and had an adult sample. Finkel found support for reciprocity between the activities and external political efficacy (system responsiveness), but an effect only of internal political efficacy on political participation (and not the other way around). The explanation for these results given by Finkel is that there are closer connections between these two types of activities and beliefs about the responsiveness of the government than there are between these activities and individual self-assessment.

On the other hand, there is much research on various political or civic engagement projects (within and outside school) that supports the idea that youths do increase their political efficacy beliefs by taking part in political activities (see, e.g., Levy 2011, Pasek et al. 2008, Beaumont et al. 2006,

Levy 2013, Sohl 2011). Also, in a study by Valentino, Gregorowicz, and Groenendyk (2009), the idea of reciprocity is supported in an adult sample where links were found between political efficacy, emotions and various forms of political participation (mainly campaign activities, such as contacting a politician, attending a rally or donating money).

Based on these studies and Bandura's and Beaumont's theoretical frameworks, I find it reasonable to assume that there is a reciprocal relationship between youths' political efficacy beliefs and their political participation.¹⁸

3.5 Theoretical framework guiding the dissertation

The idea of a reciprocal relationship between political efficacy and political participation connects the *roots* and *fruits* of political-efficacy socialization. The pathway of relevance to this *reciprocity* loop consists of mastery experiences, which can be equated to political participation. Mastery experiences make up the pathway (or source) that theoretically works best in acquiring political efficacy beliefs according to both Bandura (1997) and Beaumont (2010).

As described in Section 3.1, the socialization of political efficacy is understood within the broad framework of *political socialization*. The core question within political socialization revolves around the formation of people's political attitudes, behaviours, competences, etc., i.e., how people are formed as citizens (most often with young people in focus).

Included in the socialization of political efficacy is the entire chain from developing political efficacy beliefs to how these beliefs influence political behaviour. This, in turn, is assumed to affect political efficacy beliefs. Thus, the socialization of political efficacy beliefs is, in this dissertation, seen as a continuous loop with three links: *the roots* of political efficacy, *the fruits* of political efficacy, and *reciprocity* between the two. The ideas behind each of these links come from questions posed about political efficacy beliefs in the existing literature. Put together, they generate a broader perspective, which constitutes the aggregated theoretical base for this dissertation. This meta-theoretical framework overlaps the research queries posed, and thereby guides the empirical investigations and discussions of the results. The framework is illustrated in Figure 2.

¹⁸ It does, however, fall beyond the scope of this dissertation to specify how this reciprocal relationship works, e.g., in terms of which mastery experiences best boost efficacy beliefs, at which age boosting might occur, or why some political activities are better predicted by political efficacy beliefs than others.

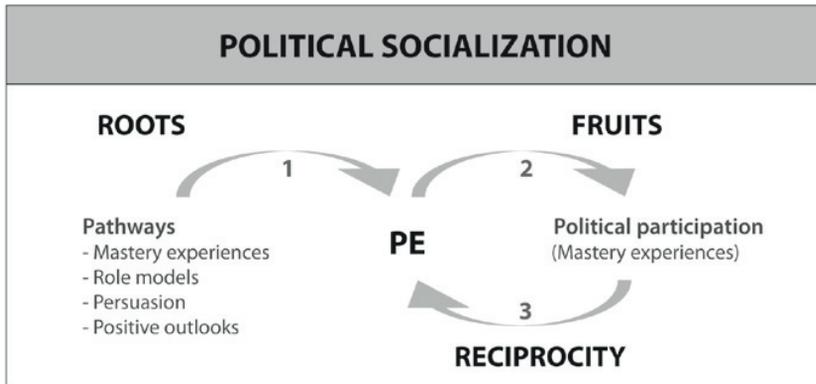


Figure 2: Meta-theoretical framework guiding the dissertation

Beaumont’s (2010) theoretical framework of four pathways to political efficacy (mastery experiences, role models, persuasion and positive outlooks) are considered as the *roots*, or sources, of political efficacy. This link is illustrated by Arrow 1 in the figure above.

The *fruits*, or effects, of political efficacy empirically studied in this dissertation comprise various political activities (political participation). Political efficacy is found to affect subsequent political participation. This link is illustrated by Arrow 2 in the figure above.

The last link within the theoretical framework consists of potential *reciprocity* between political efficacy and political participation. There are both empirical and theoretical reasons to suppose that people who take part in political activities also increase their political efficacy, which, in turn, contributes to further political participation by virtue of being mastery experiences. This link is illustrated by Arrow 3 in the figure above.

In addition, this dissertation also discusses how youths’ political efficacy relates to political equality. That is, however, a discussion at macro level, since it concerns the core values of a democratic society – a perspective that is not explicitly theorized about in the framework above. Nevertheless, potential equalizing effects¹⁹ will be discussed as an effect/outcome (or *fruit*) of political efficacy in Chapter 6 of this kappa, and to some extent in the papers.

In this dissertation, I investigate the development (*roots*) and outcomes (*fruits*) of youths’ political efficacy (expected to be partially *reciprocal* ac-

¹⁹ Previous studies of this effect – that an increase in political efficacy is larger for the least advantaged when political efficacy is stimulated – are presented in Section 1.3 (see, e.g., Hayes and Bean 1993, Beaumont et al. 2006, Beaumont 2011).

ording to previous research.) The four pathways to political efficacy are tested in Paper I, and used as a theoretical base in Paper II. In Paper III, the effects of political efficacy on political participation are examined.

Thus, the framework in Figure 2 is not meant as an empirical model to be tested as a whole. Instead, it offers a framework for understanding the findings of the dissertation in a more holistic way within the broader field of *political socialization*.

4. Methods and methodological considerations

In the previous chapters, I have presented and discussed the issue of youths' political efficacy in theoretical terms. The next undertaking is to consider how practically to study the sources and effects of political efficacy. The question of what political efficacy is has already been dealt with in the systematic meta-analysis of previous research and discussions of the concept above. To my knowledge, the conceptual nature of political efficacy has only been thoroughly considered in this way by Beaumont (2010). Other studies and researchers have approached the matter quantitatively, primarily by trying to find out how to measure the concept in the best way by using factor analysis, reliability tests of various scales, etc. (see, e.g., Yeich and Levine 1994, Niemi, Craig, and Mattei 1991, Morrell 2003).

The vast majority of empirical studies of political efficacy have also adopted quantitative approaches. Most of them are based on survey data investigating the connection between political efficacy and political behaviour (see, e.g., Caprara et al. 2009, Almond and Verba 1963, Zimmerman 1989), or between political efficacy and other characteristics (perception of government responsiveness, SES, education level) (Wu 2003). Others have investigated the mediating and/or moderating effects of political efficacy (see, e.g., Hoffman and Thomson 2009, Cohen, Vigoda, and Samorly 2001). There are, however, some rare cases where a mixed method, or a more qualitative approach, has been used to study political efficacy. For example Yates and Youniss (1998) used a mix of pen-and-paper surveys and participant-authored reflective essays with focus group discussions in a study that implicitly deals with the concept of political efficacy.

As for studying the development of political efficacy, there are examples of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. In addition to the studies of Bandura (1977, 1982, 1997), which quantitatively investigate the development of general self-efficacy, there are some recent studies that deal with the development of *political* efficacy. As mentioned above, the theoretical idea of the pathways to political efficacy is based on both interviews and surveys as empirical material. Thus, Beaumont (2010) has used both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to build up her theoretical idea. She has, however, also partly verified at least some of her pathways in two studies where she tries to see whether youths gain in political efficacy from taking part in various civic education programs. In these studies (Beaumont 2011, Beaumont et al. 2006), she primarily uses survey data. Others have also recently looked at factors influencing youths' political efficacy. Primarily, these studies have been based on quantitative methods (see, e.g.,

Murphy 2011, Ekman and Zetterberg 2011), but there is also at least one example of a multi-method approach. Levy (2013, 2011) used both ‘pen-and-paper’ qualitative interviews and observations to explore how schools can foster political efficacy. But, as discussed above, he does not actually measure political efficacy in the sense I define it; rather, he measures political knowledge, and skills like being able to speak well and persuade others. Finally, most of the above-mentioned studies are cross-sectional, with the exception of Beaumont (2011), Beaumont et al. (2006) and Levy (2013, 2011).

This chapter will first reflect upon research in general and lay out its ontological and epistemological points of departure, and briefly discuss quantitative and qualitative methods. I will then discuss the methodological approach chosen to deal with the research question posed. A section where the procedure for data collection and treatment of the data material follows, as well as a discussion of how the variables were operationalized. Finally, I discuss some methodological issues, such as validity, reliability and generalizability. The chapter ends with a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the dissertation.

4.1 Reflections on research and method

As a social scientist, I am interested in non-material phenomena, in particular how individuals relate to other individuals in the society that they make up. In my view, there is an objective reality. This reality is, however, also (partly) socially generated, continuously but without being totally relative. This means that we can obtain some form of insight into or knowledge about it. If we study the world around us, we can gain insight into it. Such knowledge is, however, not to be seen as fixed or true in an absolute sense; rather, it is provisional and will change/develop with new insights/knowledge.

Thus, I take the ontological view that there is a form or *reality* that we can study, but that this reality is not totally fixed and is affected by the actors within it. My epistemological view is that knowledge is achievable, but not absolute. I view knowledge as cumulative and fuzzy, in the sense that it is always portrayed and viewed in the eyes of the beholder. This, however, does not mean that gaining knowledge about the (social) world is pointless. Ideas drive research and societies forward, and we can gain insight/knowledge by systematically investigating and studying what happens around us, and contrasting our observations with those of other people.

Both my ontological and epistemological views are inspired by the *critical realist approach* to research. As Danermark et al. (2002, p. 202-203) put it:

Critical realism concurs with the criticism of the empiricist/objectivist ideal of science concerning neutral empirical observations: all knowledge is conceptually mediated and consequently concept-dependent. Unlike relativism/idealism, however, critical realism contends, first, that there is a real world independent of our knowledge about it, and second, that it is possible to gain knowledge about this real world: facts are certainly theory-laden, but they are not theory-determined. However, knowledge is always fallible and more or less truthlike, and its usability varies in various social situations, since there are many different levels and forms of social practice.

Critical realism also presents a view on the use of methods that I appreciate. Instead of seeing quantitative and qualitative research methods as parts of two separate paradigms with opposing ontological and epistemological bases (see, e.g., Read and Marsh 2002), a critical realist sees the two types of methodological approaches as combinable. It offers a third option where there is no incommensurability between explanatory and interpretative methodological approaches. Instead, a critical realist promotes the use of both quantitative methods on a large scale (extensive research designs) and qualitative methods which go into greater depth (intensive research designs). As I see it, there is no antagonism between the two approaches, since research should be question-driven and not method-driven (unless the method itself is the object of study). The way Danermark et al. (2002, p. 204) concludes illustrates this position:

It does not therefore exclude any method *a priori*, but the choice of method should be governed, on the one hand by what we want to know, and on the other by what we can learn with the help of different methods. [Original italics.]

Thus, the question here becomes which methodological approaches and methods are most helpful in answering the questions posed in this dissertation. This will be considered in what follows.

4.2 Choice of methodological approach

Considering the research queries, the theoretical approach, and previous research on the issue, I argue that a primarily quantitative approach is the most fruitful for this dissertation. At the same time, the value of qualitative methods should not be underestimated, and part of the dissertation is based on a more qualitative approach, although with no specified methodological technique.

So, with the aim of the dissertation in mind, both qualitative and quantitative methods may be suitable. It is possible to use quantitative methods for discussing the concept of political efficacy, which incorporates the aim

of *conceptually developing the idea of political efficacy*. This task has been undertaken in quantitative ways by many (as shown above). The risk of going about the problem in this way, however, is to end up with the question of how best to measure political efficacy and get stuck at the level of operationalization. I see it as more important to start with the definition of the concept itself, and here a more qualitative approach is more fruitful. With systematic meta-analysis of previous research and discussions of the topic, it is possible to obtain a more nuanced and fruitful understanding of the conceptual nature of political efficacy. This would be harder to capture using quantitative methods. Systematically reviewing and critically scrutinizing studies, definitions, discussions and thoughts in previous works (see, Esaiasson et al. 2003, chapters 2 and 6) have informed my approach to developing the concept of political efficacy.

The aim of *empirically studying the development of youths' political efficacy* could be approached using qualitative methods (e.g., in interviews and observations) as in Beaumont (2010) or Levy (2011). However, since the theoretical framework used for this inquiry is set, and my objective is to test it more generally, there are grounds for adopting an extensive quantitative approach. I want to explore and discuss *the most important factors* in youths' political efficacy. Here, I also make some modest claims for generalizability, which are more easily handled using a quantitative approach (Esaiasson et al. 2003).

Moreover, the majority of previous studies of political efficacy have used quantitative methods, with high claims for generalizability. That does not, however, automatically mean that this is the best way of doing research on political efficacy. More qualitative approaches would most probably also be fruitful in gaining new insights. On the other hand, the question of the *effects of political efficacy on political participation*, especially in relation to *political equality*, is better approached from a broader perspective, since it is not limited to the experiences of a small group of individuals. These issues connect to broader societal questions in terms of democracy and citizenship, for which a more extensive approach is appropriate.

So, even though more in-depth qualitative methods might generate interesting insights and results, I argue that, apart from the first research query (described above), quantitative methods will generate findings that are more in accordance with the general aim of this dissertation. Using quantitative methods will also make it easier to relate the findings to a more general discussion of political equality at societal level.

4.3 Data material and operationalization

In what follows, there is a brief presentation of the data material used in the empirical analyses in this dissertation (the three papers), how it was gathered, and what measures were used (i.e., how the variables were operationalized). More detailed descriptions and rationales behind the specific methods of analyses are given in each of the papers.

4.3.1 Data samples and procedure

All three empirical studies are based on data from a community-based longitudinal project. The project as a whole aims to find out more about the how, what, when and where of youth political socialization by studying different contexts and raising questions from multiple theoretical perspectives. The overall research question addressed by the project is: *Through what mechanisms and processes do adolescents and young adults develop their civic engagement?* (see, Amnå et al. 2009 for more information on the project).

The target sample in the project comprises Swedish youths 13 to 30 years-old. There are two main cohorts,²⁰ which are followed over six years, and used for the analyses in this dissertation. The cohorts are: Cohort 1 – students from lower-secondary school (*Högstadiet*, the last three years of compulsory school), and Cohort 2 – students from upper-secondary school (*Gymnasiet*), in a major Swedish city. Also, questionnaires were sent to the parents and friends of the members of these cohorts. There are around 900 students in each cohort. Close to half the participants in the sample are female, and approximately a quarter have parents born outside the Nordic countries.

Schools were strategically chosen to capture a broad range of socioeconomic variables, such as income, education and ethnic background. The variation in the samples showed satisfactory similarity to national socioeconomic variation and to the unemployment rate in Sweden,²¹ although there was a slight overrepresentation of participants with a foreign background and a somewhat higher proportion of mothers with higher education. The reason for this broad variation is most likely a high response rate.

²⁰ The research project from which the empirical material in this dissertation stems also includes older cohorts, where the participants were 20, 22 and 26 years-old at the first wave of data collection. These, as well as the parent and peer data, are, however, not used for the empirical studies presented here.

²¹ Comparison was made on ethnic composition of the population, average income and education. Data were retrieved from Statistics Sweden (the national administrative authority for statistics), www.scb.se.

Cohort 1 had a 94.2% response rate in the first wave, and an 89.5% rate in the second wave; Cohort 2 had an 84.8% rate in the first wave, and an 81.0% rate in the second wave).

The overrepresentation on certain characteristics can be regarded as unproblematic for the empirical studies and the overall results of this dissertation. In papers I and II, representativeness is not of primary importance. The studies are more explorative, and the first paper is also largely directed at the conceptual nature of political efficacy. The main objectives of the studies in papers I and II are to discuss ideas and to perform explorative tests of theories or hypotheses. For Paper III, there is also no cause for concern. First, the response rate is very high and the sample large, and there is no reason to regard slight overrepresentation on any one characteristic as problematic. Second, an overrepresentation of immigrants is more likely to strengthen than weaken the results of this study since previous research points in the direction that immigrants are a disadvantaged group in relation to resources and political participation (see, e.g., Verba et al. 1993, Fennema and Tillie 2001).

Participants in the cohorts used (13-16 year-olds, and 16-18 year-olds) filled in pen-and-paper questionnaires in their classrooms during regular school hours. Trained research assistants distributed the questionnaires and informed the students of their right not to participate and that confidentiality of their responses was assured. If a person chose not to take part in the study, s/he stayed in the classroom and was free to do other work. No teachers were present when the participants were filling in the questionnaires. Before the study took place, parents were informed about the study by regular mail and received a postage-paid card to return if they did not want their children to take part. Only one percent of parents did not allow their children to participate. No participant was paid for participation in the study, but each participating class received a contribution to their class fund.

In Paper I, the first wave of data from both younger cohorts was used. All 7th graders in the lower-secondary schools and all 1st year upper-secondary school students were targeted. For the empirical part of Paper II the same two cohorts were initially targeted, but, in the end, only the older cohort was used. The rationale behind this decision is spelled out in detail in the paper. Two waves of data were used to capture change in political efficacy over time. The longitudinal design was also adopted for Paper III, using two waves of data for the same cohorts as in Paper I. For further details on the samples, see the papers in question.

Regarding Sweden as a case, there are both drawbacks and benefits from a methodological point of view. The most obvious drawback is that the

possibility of generalization beyond the Swedish cultural and political context is limited. On the other hand, Sweden can also be regarded as something of a critical case in some regards (see below). A related drawback is a lack of comparability with other countries, such as poorer or less democratic countries, that would enable the results to be viewed from a supranational perspective. Having only one country as a case does, however, provide greater possibilities in a longitudinal design. The resources in a project can be focused on several waves rather than on more cases. There is also a gain from concentrating resources on one case in that it enables better/more measures to increase response rates. Further, most Swedish youths attend school to a great degree, which makes the sample even more representative.

4.3.2 Measures – operationalization of variables

Altogether, 26 different variables were used in the empirical studies in this dissertation. In the following section, I will present these in more or less detail. All are described, and some are discussed in-depth in the papers, while others are paid extra attention in this chapter.

Political efficacy – the first-order dependent variable

Needless to say, political efficacy is the central variable in this dissertation. It is not only the main focus at a general level but also central to each paper. So, taken as a whole, it can be regarded as the dependent or outcome variable, and the concept of interest, in this dissertation, although it is also used as an independent variable in the empirical analyses performed for Paper III.

Political efficacy was measured on a scale created by a multidisciplinary research group²² of which the author is a member. The construction of the measure is in line with the results of an investigation into the concept of political efficacy (see Chapter 2 and Sohl 2011). The project also has a broad conception of political participation (Amnå et al. 2009, Ekman and Amnå 2012), which corresponds to the wider view of politics discussed in this dissertation. A particular focus on youth was included in the measurement to match the measure of the political conditions facing young people (Beaumont 2010).

In line with the conceptualization of political efficacy presented in Chapter 2, political efficacy was measured as a one-dimensional concept focus-

²² The group manages the Political Socialization Program at YeS (Youth and Society) at Örebro University, Sweden, under the supervision of professors Erik Amnå, Mats Ekström, Margaret Kerr and Håkan Stattin.

ing on performing *political* actions. We asked our students to rate their perceived ability to perform eleven different actions using the following stem question: *If I really tried, I would be able to...* . Some examples of the actions listed are *actively contribute to the work of organizations trying to solve social problems, participate in a demonstration in my hometown, and write a letter to an editor about the problems in my school*. One item was removed after reliability tests. In all three papers, and for both cohorts, the internal consistency of the scale was high at both time points (Cronbach's alpha >.9). The response scale included four options, ranging from 1 (*would definitely not be able to*) to 4 (*would definitely be able to*).

According to Bandura (2006b, p. 307) “the efficacy belief system is not a global trait but a differentiated set of self-beliefs linked to distinct realms of functioning.” As discussed above, this means that one should aim for the scale used to be domain-specific, which, in this case, means that the items should belong to the political realm and what is regarded as political action. As discussed in Chapter 2 and Paper I, political efficacy is best approached as a one-dimensional coherent concept where the political is in focus. The scale used in this dissertation does this, and is similar to the one developed by Caprara et al. (2009), which shows high explanatory power in relation to political behaviour. The difference, however, is that the items used for the present scale put youths and their reality in focus. The political actions listed in the items are constructed and chosen to match the political reality and perceptions of youths (see, e.g., O'Toole 2003, Bandura 2006a, Amnå et al. 2009). Thus, the scale encompasses activities that lie beyond traditional party politics and decision-making procedures, and is adapted to the settings in which young people find themselves, e.g., the school. The measure is therefore highly suitable for exploring the development of political efficacy.

Since the measure is new and has not been used before, it is not easy to compare our results with those of previous studies. And, despite its high internal consistency and the relatively strong impact it has on political participation (see Paper III) and other relevant measures (see all papers), it is possible that it can be improved. The face validity of the items and their relevance to youth would benefit from an in-depth qualitative study of the political reality of young people. This would enable a better picture of how youths see their own surroundings to be obtained, without being dictated by researchers' preconceptions.

Political participation – the second-order dependent variable

Another variable that can be considered as a dependent, or outcome, variable in the dissertation is political participation. It is, however, dealt with

at a theoretical level on the basis of the results of previous research, and also as an empirically dependent variable in Paper III. That is, increased political participation is discussed as an important effect of having political efficacy. This is well established in previous research, and is found in Paper III. Thus, political efficacy becomes an important citizenship quality from a political-equality point of view by virtue of its positive relation to political participation. This, however, is not the only reason for regarding political efficacy as a central quality of citizenship (see Chapter 1).

In this dissertation, political participation is defined in broad terms and with youths' perspectives and political realities in mind (Ekman and Amnå 2012, O'Toole 2003). Amnå et al. (2009, p. 29) argue that:

Measures must include elements of community involvement such as memberships in local groups, networks, organisations, and political consumption, voluntary work, donations etcetera.

When studying political socialization today, one should also adopt such a broad perspective, which takes into account civic-identity development, and also connects engagement in/for formal institutions and actions concerning electoral processes to civic engagement in broad terms (Amnå et al. 2009). It is also important to take into account modern technology, which has changed the way the world works in many ways. The Internet is today an integrated part of everyday life for young people in the Western world. It also entails a new media landscape and new possibilities to act politically (see, e.g., Bakker and de Vreese 2011, Östman 2012).

Two measures of political participation were used, *offline political participation* and *online political participation*, at two time points. Offline political participation was measured by asking respondents to indicate whether they had performed any of eight political activities within the last 12 months. The response scale included the options: 1 (*no*), 2 (*yes, very occasionally*), and 3 (*yes, several times*). The offline political activities were: *contacted a politician or public official, distributed leaflets with a political content, collected signatures, worn a badge or a t-shirt with a political message, attended a public meeting dealing with political or social issues, donated money to support the work of a political group or organization, written an article, e.g. in a student or association's newspaper, and taken part in concerts or a fundraising event with a political cause*. The scale showed high inter-item reliability at both time points (Cronbach's alpha = .89 using both cohorts).

Online political participation was measured by asking respondents to indicate whether they had performed five political activities online within the last 2 months. The response scale included the options: 1 (*no*), 2 (*yes*,

very occasionally), and 3 (*yes, several times*). The online political activities were: *discussing societal or political questions with friends on the net, visiting a website of a political or civic organization, seeking information about politics or societal issues on the web, reading about politics in a blog, and watching videos or film clips about political or societal issues*. The scale showed high inter-item reliability at both time points (Cronbach's alpha = .83 using both cohorts).²³

As can be seen, the questions aim to capture a broad spectrum of political activities, and the objective is, like with political efficacy, to capture the political realities of youth. The items are adapted so that the examples come from arenas that these age groups often frequent, such as schools, concerts or video-providers on the Internet.

Central measures and methods in Paper I

The central objective of Paper I is to explore and discuss *how* political efficacy develops among youths by empirically testing the four pathways to political efficacy presented by Beaumont (2010). Thus, the focus of the analysis (apart from on political efficacy) is on Beaumont's four pathways: *Skill-building political mastery experiences, Models of political efficacy and involvement, Encouragement, supporting relationships, networks and inclusion in political community, and Empowering and resilient political outlooks*. The operationalization of these pathways is discussed in Paper I and will not be repeated in detail here.

A few remarks, however, can be made at a more general level. As mentioned when discussing the pathways above, it can be argued that Beau-

²³ As with the political efficacy scale, neither of these scales has been used in their exact form before, although the items and stem questions are similar to those for scales found in previous research. They were designed within the project, making them less easy to compare with previously used scales. Both offline and online political participation are, however, generally correlated with political interest, political efficacy and gender in a way that would be expected from previous research (politically interested boys with high political efficacy beliefs are more likely to be politically active) on the cohorts used. On the other hand, the results are mixed or insignificant concerning other standard correlates, such as political knowledge (no significant correlation with offline political participation), immigrant status (immigrants seem to participate more) and socioeconomic status (no significant correlations). This can, of course, be a result of how these control variables were measured, but may also be a sign that these assumed connections are not important for youths in Sweden. This is, however, not the place for such a discussion. Generally, there should be no problems using the scales, judging from the items themselves and previous research on the political activities that are relevant to youths.

mont's theoretical idea is not overly distinct, and the pathways are somewhat 'fuzzy'. It is, in other words, not crystal clear what is meant by the various pathways, which leaves room for interpretation in terms of their operationalization. On the other hand, a new framework should maybe be given the benefit of the doubt until it settles down with support from empirical studies. For this, the data set for this dissertation is highly appropriate. It offers great opportunities to test various concrete measures of each pathway as well as several socialization contexts. In the empirical analyses in Paper I, three different measures of each pathway are used and compared. Naturally, one can also discuss the measures per se, and how they might not fit perfectly with the ideas of Beaumont (2010). Quite simply, they were not created or put into the questionnaire for this purpose. But, on the other hand, the variety in the data set provides a good way to explore and start to think about operationalization of the pathways.

The principal methods used in Paper I were bivariate analysis and single two-step hierarchical OLS regression. The analytic strategy is fully described in the paper.

Central measures and methods in Paper II

Paper II investigates whether, and in what ways, the school context and teachers can help students gain political efficacy, and discusses whether the school environment has equalizing effects in relation to students' previous background. Two components are in focus (apart from political efficacy): the *social background* of the students, and *school factors*. As with Paper I, the rationale for and argumentation about the measures are given in detail in the paper, but there are also some things worth mentioning here.

The older cohort attending upper-secondary school (*Gymnasiet*) is used in the analysis. In Sweden, there are two general types of education programs at this level: vocational programs preparing students for more-or-less direct entry to the labour market, and academic programs preparing students for continued higher education before entering the labour market. In the paper, we use *educational program* as a measure of the social background of the students, since education functions as a proxy for socioeconomic status (Hooghe and Quintelier 2013, Flanagan, Syvertsen, and Stout 2007). There is a high correlation between parents' education and their children's education, and educational choice is also an indicator of future educational attainment.

There are, of course, other measures that capture youths' socioeconomic status, such as parents' income, occupation, education, etc. There is some information about these things in the data set. Using the parental data would, however, have entailed rather large dropout; the parental response

rate was 58% for Wave 1, and 47% for Wave 2. It would also have been problematic due to statistical skew since a large majority of responding parents are well-off, and most likely to have high or very high socioeconomic status. With this in mind, as well as recent research suggesting that young people's own reports of socioeconomic status are as good as, or even better than, measures of their current and future socioeconomic status (Quintelier and Hooghe 2013), selection of educational program was chosen as our measure.

The second important element in Paper II comprised *school factors*. Full details of the rationale and motivation for operationalization are given in the paper, but there are some general matters worth bringing up here. We used five different measures to capture three broad categories: teaching styles (*deliberation* and *engaged teaching*), other people's behaviour towards the students (*teachers' as well as peers' treatment*), and how the students felt in school (*well-being in school*). The school factors can be interpreted and categorized into Beaumont's (2010) framework of pathways to political efficacy. In the study, another way of operationalizing the pathways is tested, which is more concretely related to the issue of political equality. School is a suitable arena for testing since practically all youths attend school; only a few students do not complete their upper-secondary-school education. As with the pathways in Paper I, the measures leave some room for improvement, since nor were they constructed primarily to meet the aim of this particular study. Nevertheless, the richness of the data material makes it possible to test the main hypothesis of the paper, i.e., that students with positive experiences in school who attend vocational programs gain more in political efficacy than their fellow students on academic programs. Several different measures of students' experiences in school were used.

The central methods used in Paper II were multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and paired t-tests. The analytic strategy is presented fully in the paper.

Central measures and methods in Paper III

Paper III investigates the effects of having political efficacy on youths' political participation. The analysis tests whether there are any interaction effects on political participation between political efficacy and two other important predictors of political participation. These predictors are *political interest* and *political knowledge*. So, as well as political efficacy, there are two other key measures in this study.

Political knowledge was measured by the mean response score to seven questions on general political and societal facts. The aim of the knowledge

items was to capture whether respondents were updated on political matters as well as having basic knowledge about their society. The response scale included four options, of which only one was correct. The questions were about the EU, Swedish prime ministers, Swedish laws, foreign aid, and foreign politics. No internal consistency test was performed, since the measure was not created to form a coherent scale for any underlying dimension. Instead, each item works as separate test of how informed or knowledgeable the participant is. This means that respondents cannot be expected either to know or not to know the correct answer in any systematic manner. The response to any one question is not intended or expected to determine responses to the other questions; rather, it is the theme or difficulty level of each question that determines variation in the responses.²⁴

Political interest was measured by two items asking respondents to state their interest in politics and societal issues. The response scale ranged from 1 (*not interested at all*) to 4 (*very interested*). Often, political interest is measured by straightforwardly asking about interest in politics (see, e.g., Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). For this measure, however, we added one item where the word *politics* was changed to *societal issues* to capture those youths who are in fact interested in what broadly can be denoted as *politics*, but who have a negative image towards the specific term. This makes the measure more suited to youths' perspectives.

The central methods used in Paper III were moderated regression analysis in Mplus to detect interaction effects, and simple-slope testing to confirm significant interactions. The analytic strategy is presented fully in the paper.

Other variables used

Age, gender, immigrant status, perceived political knowledge, and subjective SES have been used as covariates in the different papers. These were chosen on the basis of previous research (see, e.g., Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995) and, since they proved to be correlated with political efficacy, they are also in the data material at hand.

Age, gender and immigrant status are not considered problematic in terms of measurement in this dissertation. *Age* was measured by the participant stating her/his age in years, and, for *gender*, respondents were asked to check one of two boxes (male or female). *Immigrant status* was meas-

²⁴ In Paper III, the overall level of correct responses was 61% (Question 1: 52%; Question 2: 57%; Question 3: 50%; Question 4: 59%; Question 5: 90%; Question 6: 66%; Question 7: 53%).

ured by the mean score on two items (one for father's origin, and one for mother's origin) and coded in three categories: 0 = Both parents born in non-Nordic country, 1 = One parent born in Sweden or other Nordic country, 2 = Both parents born in Sweden or other Nordic country). Due to demographic and political similarities between Sweden and the other Nordic countries, all respondents with parents born in the Nordic region were placed in the same category.

Subjective SES was measured by the mean score on five items, where the respondent was asked to estimate the financial situation in the family, e.g., if their parents could afford expensive items, or if their parents complained a lot about the family's financial situation. There were different response scales for different questions, which necessitated z-transformation of all items before the mean score was calculated. The scale shows high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha >.7), and, in terms of content, the items have acceptable face validity.

What may be problematic using the *subjective SES* scale is the very fact that it is subjective. One can question how accurately 13-17 year-olds are able to respond to the items. But, on the other hand, it might also be that the subjective feeling of being poor or wealthy is what matters most for feelings of political efficacy, and is therefore a better control than objective wealth in the family. It was more important, however, to have an objective measure for Paper II, where social background and discussion in relation to the democratic role of the school are of prime importance.

In Paper I, a single item addressing *perceived political knowledge* was used instead of the factual political knowledge scale. It was measured simply by asking respondents the following question; *Do you think that you have good knowledge of societal issues, such as politics, global warming, and news from other parts of the world?*. Five response options were given, ranging from 1. *much less knowledge than my peers* to 5. *much more knowledge than my peers*. In Paper I, this measure was chosen since it provided better control for the pathways and political efficacy. Not only did it show much stronger bivariate correlation with political efficacy than the factual knowledge measure, but it also tapped into the belief systems of the respondents.

4.4 Methodological issues

In this final section of Chapter 4, I will briefly discuss the validity, reliability and generalizability of this dissertation. And, I will sum up its limitations and strengths.

4.4.1 Validity, reliability and generalizability

Validity generally refers to the extent to which one really investigates what one intends to investigate, but it is also concerned with whether a study fulfils its aims and answers the research questions posed. Usually, however, validity is discussed in terms of how well the theoretical definitions in an investigation concord with their operational definitions (Bjereld, Demker, and Hinnfors 2009). Most often, this latter aspect concerns the validity of the measures used.

Discussion of the aim and research questions of this dissertation is left for the next subsection (Limitations and strengths) and the Concluding discussion (Chapter 6). Here, I will reflect upon validity in relation to the measures. Two aspects are important: face validity, i.e., intuitive perception of an operationalization; and content validity, i.e., whether an operationalization covers most or all of the facets of the theoretical definition (Bjereld, Demker, and Hinnfors 2009).

Overall, the validity of the measures in this dissertation is satisfactory. Without repeating the comments made above, most measures are well adapted to what they are aimed at measuring and to the context of the respondents (youths). Intuitively, the measures seem relevant for their purposes. In the case of the *pathways*, however, content-concordance can be considered somewhat uncertain. This stems, of course, from a lack of clarity in the theoretical definition, and is not to be considered problematic for the research queries and aim of the dissertation as a whole. The work on the pathways is rather explorative, and an underlying objective is to take a first step in creating better conditions for validating these pathways. Another worry with regard to content-concordance concerns whether (factual) *political knowledge* is seen theoretically in a traditional narrow manner (concerned only with electoral politics and political institutions). However, this dissertation adopts a broader perspective on what politics/the political is, which makes this less of a concern.

On the whole, I claim that the validity of the measures is satisfactory, and that any alternative operationalization of the measures is unlikely to alter the general results of the dissertation to any significant extent.

Reliability concerns how things are measured (Bjereld, Demker, and Hinnfors 2009). At a general level, it is about how a collection of data is made and the statistical reliability of the measures used. The reliability of the measures used here can be considered high. The collection was made systematically by trained assistants and under the supervision of an experienced research group. There is also no reason to believe that the participants were influenced in any undue way, or that they would answer differently if asked the same questions again by the same or another research

group. Most of the measures had been used before, based on thorough discussion and previous research, or were similar to previous measures but adapted to youth. The measures are stable over time (comparing the waves of data) and show high or very high internal reliability.

This dissertation makes no global claims of **generalizability**, but the results can be considered representative of Swedish students/youths. The sample is large, and the response rate is very high. Comparisons between the sample and the general population also show that they are similar in many respects.²⁵ All of this suggests that the results give an accurate picture of a larger targeted population, i.e., youths in Sweden. The vast majority of Swedish children and youth attend both the compulsory part of school (nine first school years, ages 7-16) and the upper-secondary part. Also, the school system in Sweden is based on a principle of equality in education, meaning that schools are very similar to each other regardless of location and who runs the school (private or public). All schools have the same mission, obligations and national curriculum to adhere to (Swedish Education Act, 2010:800, Chapter 1). The results may also be applicable to the Nordic countries due to similarities in cultures and political systems. There are, however, slight discrepancies between the school systems and values in the Nordic region, which may make a difference here.

On the other hand, Sweden might also be considered a critical case due to its particularities in being a relatively equal society with a strong welfare system, high social and political trust, relatively high political participation, and a stable democratic system. The norms of equality and political equality are strongly rooted in society as well as in the school system. The values and norms of equality, democracy and human rights are applicable to all schools in Sweden (including both lower- and upper-secondary school) (Swedish Education Act, 2010:800, 1st Chapter 1§, 4-5§, 8-9§). Thus, all students are offered the same education, and all students have the right to special support to achieve the goals of the curriculum if they need it. In this way, the school already tries to compensate for any disadvantages students might have when entering school to make their education equivalent to others.

Given this context, the equalizing effects, particularly of the school, in political efficacy development might be underestimated. If effects of this kind are found in a society where there are (relatively) small cleavages between people, it is also likely that they adhere to less equal societies. Thus,

²⁵ Comparisons were made on ethnic composition of the population, average income, and education. Data were retrieved from Statistics Sweden (the national administrative authority for statistics), www.scb.se.

some of the findings might be applicable to a broader range of societies than Sweden (and the Nordic countries).

There are also no reasons to believe that interaction effects between political efficacy and political interest and knowledge should differ between people from different countries at individual level. The mechanisms behind such findings should be the same regardless of social or political preconditions at system level.

4.4.2 Limitations and strengths

As in all research, there are some limitations to this dissertation, but it also has strengths which deserve to be mentioned.

One of the most apparent limitations is that some of the measures were not constructed for the purpose of the studies conducted. In an ideal world, a researcher would always have the possibility to test, retest and adapt the measures for the objectives of every single study and analysis performed. In such an ideal world, I would have had more suitable variables to choose between for the study of the pathways and school factors. I would also have had more than one knowledge measure, a broader measure of SES, and a higher parental response rate. On the other hand, the data at hand give unique opportunities to approach the questions posed in this dissertation. The richness of the material makes it possible empirically to test several potential measures of the pathways and school factors, and to examine the effects of political efficacy longitudinally. The dissertation also presents insights into various contexts of socialization in relation to political efficacy, which is made possible by the breadth of the material. On the whole, therefore, I regard the material used as one of the prime strengths of this dissertation.

Another limitation is that the effects found in the empirical studies are often quite small, which possibly reduces the salience of the results. On the other hand, one should not expect too much change between the waves since they were separated by only one year. People in Western societies today seem to stay in their youth for a longer period, and the transition from adolescence to young adulthood and to adulthood is no longer as distinct as it was (Johansson 2007). Young people stay in education longer, marry and have children later, to mention some of the markers of adulthood that have been pushed forward in age. This has led researchers to refer to the concept of *emerging adulthood*, denoting a period where youths are becoming adults, explore their identities, have feelings of instability and being 'in-between', and reflect on their future possibilities, etc. (Arnett 2006, 2000).

Thus, it is reasonable to argue that the socialization process, including the political socialization process, is stretched out over a longer period of time, which makes the process slower, with small changes accumulating along the way. This does not mean, however, that the small changes that do occur along the way are insignificant to the longer trajectory. It is also important to look at these steps. Nevertheless, it would be beneficial to look at the questions brought up in this dissertation over a longer period of time in future research. Additionally, some of the results might show small effects due to the particular setting (social, cultural and political) of Sweden. In a strong welfare state, with small differences in terms of social and political stratifications, it is probably hard to detect larger differences.

Another strength of the dissertation is that it investigates youths' political efficacy from different angles (conceptually, where PE comes from, and what PE means), from a multidisciplinary base (a transdisciplinary conceptualization), in different socialization contexts (school, family, peers), and with multiple methods. This makes it possible to obtain a fuller picture of youths' political efficacy and its development.

The research is also conducted in a new context (Sweden) since most previous research primarily stems from U.S. samples. For the reasons discussed above, Sweden might also present somewhat of a critical case due to its relatively equal, democratic and stable society. If effects are found here, these are likely also to be present in other societies with greater social and political cleavages.

Finally, the dissertation rests on a firm base of previous research on political efficacy, which also provides good material for answering what political efficacy conceptually entails. There are more studies than those cited, but the ones included definitively provide a representative picture of the research field, which strengthens the validity of the conceptual study.

Thus, the material offers a firm ground for my conclusions. A concept can never be taken as true and definite, knowledge is not fixed, and the objects studied in social research are also affected by its actors (Danermark et al. 2002). Nevertheless, I still argue that the view presented here has high validity considering what we know today.

5. Conceptual and empirical findings

In this chapter, the findings of the dissertation are presented thematically, structured by the research queries; *What*, *How* and *Which effects*. Each theme is based on results from one or more of the papers and/or the kappa. The *What* (Section 5.1) presents the conceptual findings, and the *How* (Section 5.2) and *Which effects* (Section 5.3) present the empirical findings.

5.1 *What* – the concept of political efficacy

The findings for the first set of research queries on the concept of political efficacy are based on the results in Paper I and in the kappa (Chapter 2). The first part of Paper I offers an overview and discussion of previous research that ends up in three main conclusions, which are then used as arguments for a more transdisciplinary merged view of political efficacy. With the conclusions drawn in Paper I as a base, an extended discussion is presented in the kappa, which more thoroughly takes on the research queries of *what political efficacy is* by looking at *the limitations of dominating perspectives on and definitions of political efficacy and how they can be conceptually developed*.

The findings from the meta-study of the previous literature on the concept of political efficacy show that there are four main ways of conceptualizing political efficacy. They stem primarily from two disciplines. In *political science*, the term political efficacy was first brought up in the 1950s, while, in *psychology*, the interest in political efficacy comes from theories of self-efficacy beliefs and social cognition formulated in the 1970s. The four main conceptualizations of political efficacy identified, and their strengths and limitations, are summarized below.

- *PE as an all-encompassing conceptualization*

The all-encompassing view stems from the first definition of political efficacy in political science, which includes feelings of having an impact on the political process as an individual citizen. It incorporates the feelings both that one is capable as a person of acting politically and that political change in society is possible.

The strength of this conceptualization is its focus on political influence. The major limitation is that it is too inclusive. It mixes several elements into one concept, making it hard to disentangle why and how people feel politically efficacious.

- *PE as a two-dimensional conceptualization*

The two-dimensional view distinguishes two main dimensions of political efficacy, *internal* and *external* political efficacy. The internal dimension is referred to as an individual's perception that s/he is able to understand politics and take part in political actions, while the external dimension concerns people's beliefs about how responsive the political system is to public attempts to exert influence.

The strength of this conceptualization is that it acknowledges and discusses two main dimensions which paves the way for studying and discussing them separately. This makes research closer to more refined and stringent measures. Its major limitations are, however, that the two dimensions are still multi-faceted, with sub-components mixed together in each of them, and that they are foremost discussed in operational terms. Both construct validity and theoretical underpinnings are not thoroughly discussed.

- *PE as a self-efficacy conceptualization*

The self-efficacy conceptualization is derived from theories of self-efficacy beliefs in psychology. It disregards the so-called *external* dimension, putting the self in focus. Political (self-)efficacy beliefs are seen as an individual's judgements about her/his capability of executing given courses of actions regardless of outcome expectancies. The view also entails that self-efficacy beliefs are domain-specific, meaning that one can have strong efficacy beliefs in one area (e.g., sports) but weak ones in another (e.g., politics).

The major strength of this conceptualization is that it provides a firm base for dealing with theoretical questions concerning political efficacy. The major limitation is that it is too narrow in its focus on the individual, which means that it disregards the particularity of the *political* domain.

- *PE as a multidisciplinary conceptualization*

The multidisciplinary view brings together the conceptualizations of political efficacy in political science and psychology. This is achieved by an even stronger separation between so-called *internal* and *external* political efficacy, where the focus is increasingly on the *internal* dimension as political efficacy. The importance of outcome expectancies and *influence* is also accentuated by researchers in psychology.

The strength of this conceptualization is, of course, that it is more parsimonious, and that interdisciplinary boundaries are torn down. Its major limitations, however, are that there is still no thorough discussion of what the *political* in political efficacy is, and there are still many variations in terms of both conceptualization and measurement of the concept.

On the basis of these views and their strengths and limitations, three main arguments for how the concept of political efficacy can be developed are put forward. These are presented briefly in Paper I and then discussed further in Chapter 2. In brief, the arguments are as follows:

- *Conceptual refinement*
A modified version of the so-called *internal* political efficacy dimension should constitute political efficacy. So-called *external* political efficacy is to be regarded as *perceived system responsiveness*, both conceptually and linguistically.
- *The self and the political in focus*
A more stringent, refined and coherent conceptualization is obtained by clearing up the remaining mixing of components within *internal* political efficacy by focusing solely on the individual's perception of her/his abilities to execute actions.
- *Retaining the political*
The particularity of the political context must be maintained. Actions related to political efficacy must be *political*. Influence and outcome expectancies are vital ingredients when discussing the nature of *politics* (power relations that are constantly being reshaped in the social sphere).

These arguments provide a foundation for a better conceptualization of political efficacy, which further merges the two main research disciplines within which political efficacy is studied. I propose that political efficacy is seen as:

An individual's perception of her/his abilities to execute political actions aimed at producing political change in society.

5.2 *How* – youths' political efficacy development

The findings on the second set of research queries concern *how youths' political efficacy develops* and *which factors are most important in such development*. The findings are based foremost on the results in papers I and II.

In Paper I, the four pathways to political efficacy (mastery experiences, role models, encouragement and empowering outlooks), presented by Beaumont (2010), are tested using three different measures for each pathway. As discussed above, the pathways are formulated somewhat imprecisely. This means that they are quite hard to pinpoint with exact measures, and hence the use of several measures for each pathway. The paper also investigates different socialization contexts, such as the family, school and peers, by using the different measures.

The results show that at least one measure per pathway predicts youths' level of political efficacy beyond the effects of SES, age, gender, immigrant status, political interest, and political knowledge. For *mastery experiences*, significant results are found for general political mastery experiences (an index of various political actions taken) and being a member of a political association. Friends and teachers as *role models* are significant for youths' development of political efficacy, and teachers also seem to play a role by providing *encouragement*. The latter is also found for parents. For the fourth pathway, *empowering outlooks* there is also one measure that proved significant for youths' political efficacy (feeling hopeful about the future in relation to climate change). The effects are small and of similar magnitude across the pathways, but with a slight indication that *role models* are particularly important. Nevertheless, these results lead to the overall finding that all the pathways to political efficacy are relevant, but no certain conclusions on the relative importance of each pathway or any specific socialization context, can be drawn. Teachers are, however, found to be important both as role models and in terms of encouragement, indicating that the school might be an important arena for youths' political efficacy.²⁶

In Paper II, the role of the school in youths' political efficacy is investigated, again with Beaumont's (2010) framework as a theoretical base. Comparisons over time are made for the political efficacy levels of groups of students, based on type of education and experiences of the school and

²⁶ It should, however, be noted that mastery experiences in school (e.g., being part of the student council) did not prove to be a significant predictor of youths' political efficacy. This might, however, be due to the impact of general mastery experiences and being a member of a political association, which probably share much of the variance with mastery experiences in school.

teaching environment. Different school context factors are studied, which can be understood in terms of the four pathways to political efficacy. Political *deliberation* in the classroom is seen as a mastery experience of politics. Experiencing *engaged teaching* on political issues/civics can be understood as the teacher being a role model and/or a source of encouragement. Both *teachers' treatment* (being fairly treated and acknowledged by teachers) and *peers' treatment* (having nice and helpful schoolmates) can be understood as encouragement through inclusion in safe social networks and as gaining positive/empowering outlooks on the general social setting (society). *Well-being in school* can be understood as feeling safe and secure, allowing a positive/empowering outlook on life.

The results show that all student groups increased their political efficacy over time, which would suggest some form of general age or time effect. There are, however, some differences between the groups that are worth noting. As expected, students on academic programs have higher levels of political efficacy than students on vocational programs at both time points. Thus, having an advantaged background is quite important for youths' level of political efficacy.

When comparing students having positive versus negative experiences of the school-context factors, the results indicate that these experiences seem to matter less for students with a more advantaged background (on academic programs), whereas both the levels and development of political efficacy differ much more between students on vocational programs. The political efficacy level of students who experience a positive (contributing) school and teaching environment on a vocational program is both higher initially and shows a stronger positive development over time than that of their program peers with negative experiences.

Further, the study does not point to any specific school-context factor as being particularly important for youths' development of political efficacy in general. Rather, the effects of the factors (or pathways) seem group-dependent, although the results indicate that the two factors related to what happens in the classroom under the supervision of the teacher (*deliberation* and *engaged teaching*) are more important at a general level compared with the social-environment factors (*well-being in school*, *teachers' and peers' treatment*).

Moreover, mastery experiences, role modelling and encouragement (at least from teachers) can be interpreted as being the main pathways for the generally more disadvantaged (low SES) youths' political efficacy development, although no definite conclusions can be made in this regard. Nevertheless, the findings in this dissertation point in the direction of the school being an important arena for youths' political efficacy development.

5.3 Which effects – youths' political efficacy and political participation

The findings for the third set of research queries presented here primarily concern the *effects of youths' political efficacy on political participation*, and are based on the results in Paper III (empirical findings). *Which consequences youths' political efficacy and youths' development of it have for political equality* are also discussed on the basis of the empirical findings in Paper II, and are further discussed from a macro perspective below.

In Paper III, the overall question concerns the effects of political efficacy, political interest and political knowledge on political participation. Thus, it touches upon our general inquiry into political socialization: What makes young people engage in political behaviour? In the study, both direct effects of the three predictors and the potential moderating effect of political efficacy are investigated. In the light of previous research, it is no surprise that the results show direct effects of political interest and political efficacy on political participation. The study confirms that the higher the political efficacy beliefs of a young person, the more s/he participates in various legal political activities. The lack of effect of political knowledge is surprising and hard to explain within the scope of the study (see Paper III for further discussion).

What is even more interesting, however, is that the results show a leverage effect of political efficacy when combined with political interest. Even though political interest has a positive effect on political participation in itself, it seems to be amplified by having strong political efficacy beliefs. For youths with stronger political efficacy beliefs, there is a stronger positive effect of their political interest on political participation over time. Political efficacy can thus be regarded as a lever of the effect of political interest on political participation. However, no interaction effects on political participation of political efficacy and political knowledge were found.

The interaction effects have, to my knowledge, not been previously studied, which make the findings interesting from both a theoretical and a democratic point of view. The findings give support to the argument that political efficacy can be seen as an important citizenship quality. Potentially it could also have consequences for political equality, which I will return to from a more theoretical perspective in the concluding chapter.

Part of the aim of Paper II was to see whether school can contribute to more equal development of political efficacy across student groups with different social backgrounds. If the least resourceful youths could close in on the more resourceful in terms of political efficacy, it would mean that political equality is improved, not only by raising the political efficacy levels of the least advantaged but also in terms of possible increased political participation of the least advantaged in society.

There are no clear results concerning this issue in the analysis performed for Paper II. As seen above, all students' efficacy levels increased over time, which is a good sign, but there is no support for the idea that students on vocational programs are closing the gap on students on academic programs in terms of political efficacy. The results do, however, indicate that it is more important actively to try to stimulate the political efficacy of students on vocational programs since those who have negative experiences of various school settings show no development. The findings suggest that positive experiences, especially of engaged teaching and deliberation, help students on vocational programs to boost their efficacy (on academic programs, development generally occurs regardless of experience). Thus, the school appears to have the potential to help youths on vocational programs gain more of this important citizenship quality, which they might not have done without positive experiences in school. In terms of democracy and political equality, this should be considered beneficial, and will be discussed further in the coming chapter.

6. Concluding discussion – The roots and fruits of political efficacy

The overarching objective of this dissertation has been to contribute to knowledge of political efficacy in several respects: to bring theoretical and empirical understanding of the concept further, to study empirically the development of political efficacy, to investigate the effects of political efficacy on political participation, and to discuss the value of political efficacy in light of political equality. In this concluding discussion, I connect the findings of the dissertation to this broader objective using the theoretical model presented in Chapter 3.

First, I illuminate the knowledge gained about *the roots* of political efficacy by discussing the findings on its conceptual nature as well as the empirical findings concerning youths' development of political efficacy. Then, I clarify the knowledge gained about *the fruits* (effects) of youths' political efficacy by discussing the findings regarding effects on political participation. Finally, I discuss what difference political efficacy can make from a political-equality point of view in terms of the potential reciprocity between political efficacy and political participation (connecting the *roots* and the *fruits*).

6.1 The roots of political efficacy

The most important conclusion with regard to conceptual development of political efficacy is that researchers need to continue to discuss how the concept should be understood. In my view, this is part of the input side, constituting a kind of prerequisite for research development and for finding the vital mechanisms behind political efficacy. Without conceptual coherence and clarity, further theorizing about the socialization of political efficacy is hampered. Understanding the sources and mechanisms behind the development of political efficacy requires a firm conceptualization to fall back on.

It is also important to be clear about what one intends to measure when using political efficacy as a predictor or control variable. Without knowing what one is investigating, it is hard to make clear interpretations of the results or why these results occur, e.g., those that try to explain the link between political efficacy and political participation. Taken together, in the light of previous research and the lingering conceptual confusion over political efficacy, a more refined and stringent concept is called for, which this dissertation contributes to.

Based on a thorough overview and discussion of previous research, the dissertation offers a conceptually developed view of political efficacy by arguing for three main improvements. Political efficacy should be separated conceptually from system responsiveness (so-called external political efficacy). Political efficacy should focus on people's beliefs in their capacity to take political action. Political efficacy needs to retain its attention on the *political*. This means having a multidisciplinary perspective, where self-efficacy beliefs are in focus, but without losing track of the *political* in political efficacy beliefs. In this dissertation, I offer a more refined and stringent view on political efficacy in these respects. In turn, this brings further clarification, which can lead to clearer, more coherent and less ambiguous research and results in relation to the concept, in terms of both measurement (empirical studies) and theoretical development.

The conceptual development of political efficacy can also be regarded as a contribution to the broader field of *political* socialization, where theoretical gaps are still to be found. In their quest for a theory of the political socialization of youth McIntosh and Youniss (2010, p. 37) argue that:

...such a theory needs to take account of the peculiar nature of political engagement and cannot simply rely on an extension of what we know about cognitive, social, or emotional development in other settings. Our approach starts with the elements of what it means to be political in a democracy that encourages active citizen involvement.

Thus, taking into account the *political* in political efficacy is of importance for the concept's place within the field of political socialization. It is crucial to incorporate new political realities and the particularity of the *political* (see, also, Sapiro 2004, Flanagan 2013, O'Toole 2003), which is emphasized in this dissertation with regard to the conceptual nature of political efficacy.

Connected to this, Quintelier (2013b, p. 139) highlights the lack of use of the actual multidisciplinary base of political socialization, and states that researchers in this field need to shift their emphasis from "what people learn to how they are learning it." Political socialization researchers need to look at the processes and mechanisms of youths' political development and not only at the outcomes (see, also, Amnå et al. 2009), and also to integrate theories from different disciplines (Quintelier 2013b). The interdisciplinary conceptualization of political efficacy presented here offers a base for such thinking about the socialization of political efficacy by integrating conceptual viewpoints from several research fields.

By highlighting the *political* in political efficacy at the same time as merging the perspectives on the concept from different disciplines, this

dissertation shows that political efficacy is a concrete link, or bridge, between research fields, which is useful in the pursuit of a more multidisciplinary field of political socialization.

Taking account of the political and integrating socialization theories from different disciplines is also connected to the framework of four pathways to political efficacy presented by Beaumont (2010). In this framework, she takes a political perspective on the theory of self-efficacy development by Bandura (1997). In two of the papers, the empirical validity of the four pathways is established, both by testing various measures of each pathway and by applying the framework in a school setting to examine the role of the school in youths' development of political efficacy. The studies offer a glimpse into what the most important facets of the pathways are. In Paper I, there are indications that role models are quite important for youths' political efficacy at this age, and that the school (including teachers/teaching) is an arena of particular interest. When focusing on the school as a specific socialization context (Paper II), the findings suggest that what happens in the classroom in terms of deliberative climate and teaching style is more important than the social-climate factors, such as well-being or how people treat each other, and especially so for students on vocational programs.

Thus, this dissertation also contributes new insights into *the roots* of political efficacy in a more concrete manner than by just bringing further conceptual clarity and refinement. It provides a direct input into an already formulated framework for the development of youths' political efficacy. The exploratory, and also the longitudinal, studies show that Beaumont's (2010) pathways are a good starting point, and provide a foundation for further studies.

Some insights into the operationalization of measures are made, but there is still a need to pinpoint more clearly what the pathways entail. Here, I see that future research must work with interaction between theoretical discussions, issues of conceptualization, and empirical studies where the operationalization of measures is tested. There is a specific need for longitudinal research.

6.2 The fruits of political efficacy

The second strand in this dissertation concerns the effects of political efficacy on political participation. In the theoretical framework, these are regarded as the *fruits* of political efficacy, things that have been the focal points of previous empirical research. Discussing and continuously investigating its outcomes are important for a holistic understanding of the socialization of political efficacy.

There are also new theoretical insights gained in this dissertation regarding the effect of political efficacy on political participation. In Paper III, it is shown that political efficacy works as a lever of political participation when combined with political interest. Political efficacy seems to work as a catalyst for political participation by facilitating the transformation of psychological engagement into political action. Such an interaction effect offers insights into the mechanisms at play when political interest and political efficacy are turned into political behaviour (the link from political efficacy to political participation in the theoretical framework). It has for long been established that both interest and efficacy are important predictors of political participation in their own right, but establishing interaction effects shows the complexity of political socialization processes, where many different aspects and contexts are in play in the development of citizenship.

Further, the findings indicate that political interest and political will are not one and the same thing. Interest and motivation to take action may very well come from, or be facilitated by, political efficacy. This is, in turn, a confirmation that political efficacy has a motivational side to it, and not only a strict cognitive side. In other words, youths are more inclined to act politically upon a latent psychological engagement (political interest) if they are also motivated to do so in terms of believing that they are capable of making a difference.

This is an important finding in relation to the school and its mission to teach democracy and stimulate active citizenship. It highlights something about the link between education and political participation, which is still a rather underexplored field, with research showing mixed effects (Persson 2013). The potential of Swedish schools to cultivate democratic competence has, however, been found by others (see, e.g., Ekman 2007, Almgren 2006). The findings of this dissertation suggest that stimulating students' political knowledge and/or political interest might not be enough to get them to participate (more). In order for education to translate into actual political action, schools might also need to reconsider how to work with strengthening students' political efficacy. Paper II shows that schools can boost students' political efficacy, which can be viewed as part of their democratic mission per se. That is, political efficacy is an important citizenship quality in its own right, but might also have effects on political participation, thereby promoting active citizenship. This connection between the *roots* and the *fruits* of political efficacy, and the potential *reciprocity* between them, can be further discussed from a political equality perspective.

6.3 Reciprocity – the political equality potential of political efficacy

The results of this dissertation provide grounds for a discussion of the potential implications of stimulating youths' political efficacy in relation to political participation and political equality. In line with Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995), many scholars have thoroughly discussed political equality in relation to political participation. But, it is only recently that scholars have also begun to discuss political equality in relation to political efficacy, and youths' political efficacy in particular. Beaumont (2011), Levy (2013) and to a lesser extent Murphy (2011), all point to the importance of citizens' political efficacy for political equality. If the political efficacy of the least advantaged (youths) can be stimulated, participation may become more equal across different social groups.

The empirical findings show that political efficacy can be increased along different pathways, and that any increase does not primarily depend on socioeconomic status. There are even indications that the least advantaged benefit most from an environment (in school) that stimulates their political efficacy. The findings also confirm that political efficacy influences people's political participation. The greater the belief of individuals in their own capacities to act politically, the more they participate.

These conclusions strengthen the idea of being able to increase political equality with the help of political efficacy. Thus, my contribution to the discussion of political efficacy and political equality is simply to support the view of the above-mentioned researchers.

Studies of different extracurricular and civic-volunteering programs show that mastery experiences of real-life political, or civic, participation are of importance, and in many cases benefit the least advantageous the most. This suggests that there are reciprocal effects of political efficacy and political participation. The reciprocal claim can, however, neither be confirmed nor ruled out by the empirical findings in this dissertation, since the link from political participation (mastery experiences) to political efficacy, and the link from political efficacy to political participation, are not tested in the same model. Nevertheless, general mastery experiences and classroom deliberation do seem positively to affect the development of political efficacy, and political efficacy is shown positively to affect political participation, which supports the hypothesis.

I also find that positive school factors, such as encouraging and supportive teachers, make a difference for all students, regardless of their background. There are indications that these factors are more important for less advantaged students, since the differences between having contributing (positive) experiences and non-contributing (negative) experiences in school are larger among students on vocational programs. So, groups of

students who, to a greater extent, lack politically encouraging parents and friends might still increase their political efficacy if the school stimulates this important citizenship quality.

From an equality and democratic point of view, boosting all students' political efficacy – and, in particular, that of the least advantaged – must be seen as something normatively good at a societal level. If low SES (disadvantaged social background) can be mitigated somewhat as a root of political inactivity, new light is shed on the issue of political equality. Increased political efficacy can contribute to increased political participation regardless of social stratum, and work as a sort of remedy for political inequality. This is particularly interesting, since changing beliefs in students' own competence is feasible in a way that furthering the education of parents, the social setting or family income is not. Previous research has also shown that there are long-term effects of participation, stemming from increased political efficacy in youth (Pasek et al. 2008).

In Sweden, mandatory (compulsory) schools have two main missions: to provide students with knowledge, and to foster students as democratic and active citizens (Skolverket 2011). In light of the findings of this dissertation, a recommendation for policy makers would be to take political efficacy into account in pursuing its second mission. This dissertation shows that there are ways of boosting youths' political efficacy. The pathways require more political and civic activities, volunteerism, engaged teachers, and deliberation in the classroom. In Sweden, there is already *work practice* in the school system, but much less *democratic practice*. Schools need to include activities that stimulate youths' political efficacy, and not only to teach them the ABC of politics and/or trigger their political interest. In this way, the potent reciprocal relationship between the *roots* and *fruits* of political-efficacy socialization has the potential to mitigate at least some of the disadvantageous effects of social background on citizenship and political inequality.

In finishing, I would like to highlight two things that make political efficacy vital from a democratic and societal point of view. I maintain that it is crucial to see political efficacy as beneficial in itself, and not only as a vehicle for increasing political participation. A democratic society needs both active and passive citizens. It is also a democratic right not to participate, but it becomes problematic when passivity is determined by social structures that are largely unchosen, and systematically make some groups of people active and others passive. Non-participation is fairly unproblematic if it is self-chosen, but it is important that all citizens feel that they can participate if they want to, which makes political efficacy a citizenship quality with an intrinsic value.

In relation to this, I also consider that political efficacy is important for everyone in the respect that it should be possible for all political voices to be heard. A democratic society should not judge who is a good or bad citizen; rather, political efficacy is important regardless of social background or political convictions. Also, critical, dissatisfied and disobedient citizens are all part of democratic society; they challenge democracy and its core values, which forces democracy constantly to evolve. Also, they benefit from holding the political efficacy beliefs that enable them to make their grievances heard, which in the long run enriches democracy. Some examples are Mahatma Gandhi, Astrid Johansson, Nelson Mandela, Emily Davison, and Irena Sendler.

These 'disobedient' citizens are sometimes also the front-runners of democracy in societies where the core values of democracy are still not adhered to, making political efficacy crucial for all citizens, regardless of the political system. This can be illustrated by the title the 'disobedient' Malala Yousafzai (2013) gave her book: *I am Malala: the girl who stood up for education and was shot by the Taliban*.

Svensk sammanfattning

Politisk självtilltro: dess källor, effekter och potential för politisk jämlikhet

Nyckelord: politisk självtilltro, politisk socialisation, ungdomar, politiskt deltagande, politisk jämlikhet, skolan

En bok, en penna, ett barn och en lärare kan förändra världen.

(Malala Yousafzai, tal till FN:s generalförsamling 12:e juli 2013 [egen översättning])

Citatet från Malala Yousafzai fångar det som kan ses som kärnan i den politiska självtilltron (*political efficacy*)²⁷, en persons tilltro till att hon/han kan göra skillnad i samhället. Samtidigt pekar det på vikten av hur en person uppfattar sin egen förmåga. Trots att hon har oddsens emot sig (en ung tjej i ett starkt patriarkalt samhälle) så tror Malala på sin egen förmåga att förändra det hon tycker är fel. Denna avhandling är inspirerad av ungdomar som Malala.

I avhandlingen undersöks politisk självtilltro i syfte att; 1) bidra till teoretisk och empirisk begreppsutveckling, 2) studera hur politisk självtilltro utvecklas och vilka effekter det har på politiskt deltagande, 3) diskutera politisk självtilltro utifrån ett politiskt jämlikhetsperspektiv. Till grund för avhandlingen ligger tre delstudier som uppmärksammar vad politisk självtilltro är, hur ungdomars politiska självtilltro utvecklas och vilka effekter detta kan ha på politiskt deltagande. I kappan fördjupas resultaten från delstudierna ytterligare och de diskuteras också ur ett vidare jämlikhets- och demokratiperspektiv.

Vikten av politisk självtilltro

Generellt beskrivs den politiska självtilltron till känslan av (politisk) kompetens och att det är värdefullt att engagera sig i politik. Detta kan ses som en viktig del i det demokratiska samhället där medborgarnas deltagande och engagemang är grundstenar. Politisk självtilltro utgör en vital medborgarresurs ur åtminstone tre perspektiv. För det första är det i sig av vikt att

²⁷ Politisk självtilltro är en mer eller mindre vedertagen svensk beteckning av det engelska begreppet *political efficacy*. Den terminologiska betydelsen är dock inte fullt ut densamma.

medborgare känner sig kapabla att delta oavsett av vilken anledning de skulle vilja göra det. Sedan är det förstås även en demokratisk rättighet att välja att inte engagera sig. Centralt är emellertid att alla medborgare känner att de har möjlighet att påverka om de skulle vilka, och i detta avseende är politisk självtilltro mycket viktigt.

För det andra är det grundläggande för demokratin att det finns ett aktivt medborgerligt deltagande. I den aspekten är politisk självtilltro viktigt eftersom den är starkt sammankopplad med medborgares faktiska deltagande, ju högre politisk självtilltro en person känner desto troligare är det att denna faktiskt också engagerar sig politiskt.

För det tredje finns det indikationer på att den politiska självtilltron kan vara betydelsefull ur ett politiskt jämlikhetsperspektiv. Tidigare forskning visar nämligen två saker. Den första är att effekterna av att ha politisk självtilltro på deltagande sträcker sig bortom effekterna av individers socioekonomiska status. D.v.s. politisk självtilltro synes till viss del kunna väga upp den negativa inverkan faktorer såsom klass, kön, utbildningsbakgrund etc. har på politiskt deltagande. Den andra är att det främst verkar vara de minst resursstarka som vinner mest på att deras politiska självtilltro stimuleras (både i termer av starkare tilltro och politiskt deltagande).

Begreppet politisk självtilltro – en meta-analys av begreppets konceptuella natur I avhandlingen görs en omfattande genomgång av tidigare forskning kring politisk självtilltro. Syftet är att reda ut den begreppsliga förvirring som rått sedan begreppet introducerades av Campbell, Gurin och Miller 1954. Från tidigare forskning utmejslas fyra huvudsakliga konceptualiseringar av politisk självtilltro, den *allomfattande*, den *tvådimensionella*, den *självtillit-sinriktade*²⁸ och den *multidisciplinära*.

Den *allomfattande* innebär att flera olika element infogats i begreppet, såsom individens politiska kunskap, individens tro på sin egen förmåga att göra skillnad och uppfattningen om hur mottagligt det politiska systemet är för påverkan. Denna konceptualisering innebär således en sammanvävd kombination av en persons subjektiva uppfattningar om sig själv och om det politiska systemet.

Den *tvådimensionella* innebär en uppdelning av begreppet i två huvudsakliga dimensioner, en intern och en extern. Fokus för den interna ligger på individens egen förmåga ur olika aspekter (t.ex. uppfattningen om sin egen politiska kunskap och förståelse, sin möjlighet att föra politiska sam-

²⁸ Benämns som "a self-efficacy conceptualization" i avhandlingen men får här beteckningen den *självtillit-sinriktade* i brist på bättre översättningsmöjligheter av begreppet *self-efficacy*.

tal och göra sig hörd, sin förmåga att ta till sig politisk information) och för den externa på individens uppfattning av det politiska systemet (t.ex. huruvida röstning är en effektiv metod att påverka, om politiker i allmänhet lyssnar på vanliga medborgare, om politiker bryr sig om vad vanliga medborgare tycker).

Den *själv tillitsinriktade* lägger fokus på individens uppfattning om sin egen förmåga att utföra politiska aktiviteter. Basen för denna konceptualisering hittas i psykologins kognitionsteori (mer specifikt i *self-efficacy theory*) där en individs känsla av kontroll över förestående uppgifter oavsett vad dessa leder till eller huruvida individen är motiverad att utföra dem, är centralt.

Den *multidisciplinära* kombinerar den inom statskunskap vedertagna *tvådimensionella* konceptualiseringen och den *själv tillitsinriktade* genom att fokusera på individens uppfattning om sin egen förmåga men samtidigt behålla tanken om att de politiska aktiviteter som utförs ska generera i ett visst politiskt inflytande.

I avhandlingen diskuteras styrkorna och svagheter i alla dessa synsätt och slutsatsen blir att det fortfarande finns stora oklarheter i begrepps-förståelsen och -användningen vilket resulterar i att intersubjektiviteten kring begreppet politisk själv tilltro blir lidande. Tre förbättringar för att göra begreppet mer stringent och tydligt föreslås därför. För det första bör begreppet renodlas genom att den externa dimensionen av begreppet tydligt avgränsas från begreppet politisk själv tilltro och istället benämns och används som någon form av uppfattad systemmottaglighet (*perceived system responsiveness*). För det andra bör begreppet sätta individens uppfattning om sin förmåga att utföra politiska aktiviteter i fokus, d.v.s. ej blanda samman detta med andra förmågor såsom politisk kunskap, förståelse eller förmåga att övertyga. För det tredje bör den politiska aspekten i den politiska själv tilltron tas i större beaktning. Detta genom att erkänna att politiska aktiviteter är särskilda i termer av att vara kopplade till maktrelationer i den sociala sfären.

Mot bakgrund av den kritiska genomgången landar avhandlingen i följande konceptualisering av begreppet politisk själv tilltro: en individs uppfattning om sin egen förmåga att utföra politiska aktiviteter som syftar till att göra politisk skillnad i samhället.

Det teoretiska ramverket – socialisation av politisk själv tilltro

Det teoretiska ramverket sätter in studiet av ungdomars politiska själv tilltro i det bredare forskningsfältet politisk socialisation. Huvudfrågan inom detta fält kan beskrivas som medborgarutveckling, d.v.s. på vilket sätt

medborgare i ett samhälle utvecklar politiska attityder (t.ex. intresse), förmågor (t.ex. kunskap), beteenden (t.ex. deltagande) etc.

Ramverket består av tre delar som tillsammans ger en övergripande bild över socialisationen av politisk självtilltro: 1) hur politisk självtilltro utvecklas (dess källor), 2) hur politisk självtilltro kan påverka framtida politiskt deltagande (dess effekter) och 3) hur de två förstnämnda delarna påverkar varandra (ett potentiellt reciprokt förhållande).

När det gäller den första delen presenteras fyra *vägar* (källor) till politisk självtilltro: *egenupplevda politiska erfarenheter*, *politiska förebilder*, *uppmuntran och stöd* samt *positiva (livs)åskådningar*. Vad beträffar den andra delen uppmärksammas att det finns en brist på teoretisk kunskap om hur och varför personer med hög politisk självtilltro tenderar att ha ett högre politiskt deltagande än de med låg politisk självtilltro. Några tänkbara förklaringar framförs i psykologins teoribildning om kognition (en person tar sig inte för saker den inte tror att den kan hantera) och motivation (en person måste känna motivation för att utföra en viss handling samt ha en känsla för att handlingen kan påverka omgivningen). Empiriskt visar forskning att den positiva korrelationen mellan politisk självtilltro och politiskt deltagande är stark. Att det finns en ömsesidig förstärkande relation mellan dessa två delar uppmärksammas i den tredje delen av det teoretiska ramverket. Detta genom att politisk deltagande är att betrakta som *egenupplevda politiska erfarenheter* (se ovan) som i sin tur påverkar den politiska självtilltron (en potentiell positiv spiral). Ramverket vägleder avhandlingens delstudier och fungerar som ett teoretiskt underlag för den sammanfattande diskussionen i kappan, snarare än som en teoretisk modell som testas empiriskt i sin helhet.

Metodologiska överväganden och tillvägagångssätt

Avhandlingens ontologiska och epistemologiska bas hämtas från den kritiska realismen. Utgångspunkten är att det finns en objektiv verklighet som dock är delvis socialt genererad. Det går således att nå kunskap, eller insikter, om verkligheten. Denna kunskap är dock inte att se som sann och evig, utan den utvecklas i takt med ny kunskap/nya insikter (något av ett föränderligt kumulativt förhållningssätt). Den kritiska realismen menar också att det inte finns någon motsättning mellan de två metodologiska paradigmen kvalitativ och kvantitativ forskning. Istället ses båda som fruktbara och kombinerbara beroende på vilken forskningsfråga som ställs.

I avhandlingen används främst kvantitativ metod då de tre delstudierna baseras på ett longitudinellt datamaterial där c:a 4000 ungdomar ingår. Den del av datamaterialet som används i de statistiska analyserna består av enkäterundersökningar bland c:a 2000 elever på sju högstadieskolor och

tre gymnasier i en medelstor svensk stad. Skolorna valdes så att det ingick skolor av olika storlek, med olika huvudmän (privata eller offentliga), från olika geografiska platser (med tanke på olika områdets socioekonomiska sammansättning) och gymnasier med olika inriktningar (med fokus på yrkesförberedande eller studieförberedande program). Den begreppsliga utredningen baseras dock på ett kvalitativt förhållningssätt där tidigare forskning kritiskt granskas innehållsmässigt och systematiskt.

Resultat

De begreppsliga resultaten av avhandlingen har redan presenterats ovan och de kommenteras därför inte ytterligare här. Avhandlingen har tre huvudsakliga empiriska resultat. För det första testas de fyra ovan nämnda vägar (källorna) till politisk självförtro genom ett flertal mått för respektive väg. Testerna av *vägarna* till politisk självförtro visar generellt att dessa har empirisk relevans då minst ett sätt att mäta respektive väg visar ett signifikant samband med politisk självförtro. Vidare visas i samband med detta att skolan spelar en viktig roll för utvecklingen av ungdomars politiska självförtro.

För det andra visar analyser av olika skolfaktorer möjligen betydelse att elever på teoretiska gymnasieprogram (t.ex. Natur- och Samhällsvetenskapliga programmet) ökar sin politiska självförtro oavsett hur de upplever skolan, undervisningen och sina lärare. Elever på de yrkesförberedande programmen (t.ex. Maskinteknik, Fordonsprogrammet och Hotell och restaurang) får dock en större effekt av positiva upplevelser av skolfaktorerna som testas (*deliberativt klassrumsklimat, engagerande undervisning, rättvisa lärare, snälla klasskompisar och trivsel i skolan*). Stimulering av den politiska självförtro i skolan verkar därmed generellt viktigare för mindre resursstarka elever.

För det tredje visar avhandlingen att ungas politiska självförtro påverkar deras politiska deltagande, både online och offline. Ju starkare politisk självförtro, desto högre deltagande. Här framkommer också en hävstångseffekt där ungdomar med högt politiskt intresse får en skjuts i sitt deltagande om de också har en stark politisk självförtro. Den politiska självförtro kan därmed ses som en utlösare eller igångsättare som underlättar omvandlingen av ett latent politiskt engagemang till faktiskt deltagande.

Sammanfattande diskussion – politisk självförtro i ljuset av politisk jämlikhet
Sammantaget betonas i avhandlingen vikten av ett mer renodlat och stringent synsätt på politisk självförtro. Detta innebär en ökad begreppslig klarhet som också kan leda till tydligare och mer sammanhängande forskning

med bättre teoretiskt underbyggda och mer konsekventa empiriska studier. Detta är inte minst viktigt i förhållande till forskning om politiskt socialisation och teoribildningen kring hur politisk självtilltro utvecklas och vilka mekanismer som ligger bakom dess effekter på politiskt deltagande.

Resultaten kan också diskuteras utifrån möjliga policy-implikationer i förhållande till demokratins värden såsom högt medborgerligt deltagande och politisk jämlikhet. Med ett ömsesidigt förstärkande förhållande mellan politisk självtilltro och politiskt deltagande borde aktiva insatser för att öka ungdomars politiska självtilltro leda till ett ökat politiskt deltagande generellt. Dessutom indikerar resultaten att sådana insatser har möjlighet att öka den politiska jämlikheten mellan olika sociala strata. Om de minst resursstarkas politiska självtilltro kan stimuleras möjliggörs ett mer aktivt deltagande i dessa grupper.

Skolan har en speciell roll i detta sammanhang då denna institution i princip når alla ungdomar under deras uppväxt och dessutom har ett demokratiskt uppdrag som går ut på att fostra demokratiska och politiskt aktiva medborgare. Idag finns redan *arbetsplatspraktik*, där elever får förbereda sig för ett kommande arbetsliv, som en del av läroplanen. På liknande sätt är det möjligt att tänka när det gäller förberedelserna för det fullvärdiga medborgarskapet. Resultaten och diskussionerna i den här avhandlingen visar på vikten av politisk självtilltro som en central medborgarskapsresurs, dels i sig själv, dels för individers aktiva deltagande i politiken, och slutligen som en potentiell faktor för att nå ett något mer politiskt jämlikt samhälle. Att egna politiska erfarenheter stimulerar denna medborgarskapsresurs visas också. Sammantaget talar detta för att någon form av *demokratipraktik*, där eleverna får tillfälle att få *egenupplevda politiska erfarenheter*, också bör ha sin plats i skolan.

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Politisches Selbstvertrauen: Quellen, Effekte und Potenziale für politische Gleichstellung

Keywords: Politisches Selbstvertrauen, politische Sozialisation, Jugendliche, politische Gleichstellung, politische Partizipation, Schule

Ein Buch, ein Stift, ein Kind und ein/e Lehrer/in können die Welt verändern.
(Malala Yousafzai, Rede vor der UN-Generalversammlung, 12. Juli 2013
[eigene Übersetzung])

Das Zitat von Malala Yousafzai erfasst, was als Kern von politischem Selbstvertrauen (political efficacy) gesehen werden kann, der Glaube einer Person, dass er/sie zu einer Veränderung in der Gesellschaft beitragen kann. Zugleich weist es auf die Bedeutung hin, wie eine Person ihre eigenen Stärken wahrnimmt. Obwohl Malala als junges Mädchen in einer stark patriarchalischen Gesellschaft alle gegen sich hat, glaubt sie an ihre eigene Fähigkeit das zu verändern, was sie als falsch erachtet. Diese Dissertation ist von jungen Menschen wie Malala inspiriert.

Das Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es, zum Verständnis des politischen Selbstvertrauens in dreierlei Hinsicht beizutragen; 1) durch die Weiterentwicklung des theoretischen und empirischen Verständnisses des Begriffes politisches Selbstvertrauen, 2) durch das Untersuchen der Quellen des politischen Selbstvertrauens und dessen Effekte auf politische Partizipation, und 3), durch die Diskussion von politischem Selbstvertrauen in Hinblick auf politische Gleichstellung. Der Dissertation liegen drei Teilstudien mit mehr empirischen Charakter zugrunde, die folgende Fragen behandeln: Was ist politisches Selbstvertrauen? Wie entwickelt sich politisches Selbstvertrauen von Jugendlichen und welche Effekte kann dieses auf politische Partizipation haben? Im theoretischen Rahmenwerk werden einerseits die Ergebnisse der Teilstudien weiter vertieft, andererseits in Betracht auf politische Gleichstellung und Demokratie diskutiert.

* * *

Die Bedeutung des politischen Selbstvertrauens

Generell wird politisches Selbstvertrauen als das Gefühl von (politischer) Kompetenz beschrieben, sowie dass es wertvoll erscheint, sich politisch zu engagieren. Dies kann als ein wichtiges Fundament einer demokratischen

Gesellschaft gesehen werden, in der die Partizipation und das Engagement der Bürger/innen als Eckpfeiler betrachtet werden. Politisches Selbstvertrauen ist mindestens in dreierlei Hinsicht eine wichtige Ressource für Bürger/innen. Erstens ist es wichtig, dass Bürger/innen das Gefühl haben, die Fähigkeit zu besitzen teilnehmen zu können, unabhängig davon aus welchen Beweggründen sie dies tun möchten. Natürlich ist es auch ein demokratisches Recht sich dafür zu entscheiden, sich nicht zu beteiligen. Zentral ist jedoch, dass alle Bürger/innen das Gefühl haben, dass sie die Möglichkeit zur Partizipation besitzen, und in dieser Hinsicht ist politisches Selbstvertrauen sehr wichtig.

Zweitens ist es wesentlich für eine demokratische Gesellschaft, dass es eine aktive Bürger/innenbeteiligung gibt. In dieser Hinsicht ist das politische Selbstvertrauen wichtig, weil es stark mit der tatsächlichen Partizipation der Bürger/innen verbunden ist. Je mehr politisches Selbstvertrauen eine Person hat, desto wahrscheinlicher ist es, dass diese sich auch tatsächlich politisch engagiert.

Drittens gibt es Indikationen dafür, dass politisches Selbstvertrauen aus einer politischen Gleichstellungsperspektive wichtig sein kann. Bisherige Forschung weist auf folgende Sachverhalte hin: Der erste beschreibt, dass sich die Effekte, die aus politischem Selbstvertrauen auf Partizipation folgen, über die Effekte des sozioökonomischen Status von Einzelpersonen erstrecken. D. h. politisches Selbstvertrauen scheint teilweise den negativen Einfluss von Faktoren wie Klassenzugehörigkeit, Geschlecht, Ausbildungshintergrund, etc. auf politische Partizipation ausgleichen zu können. Der zweite umfasst, dass es sich hauptsächlich um die am wenigsten Resourcestarken handelt, die am Meisten davon profitieren, dass ihr politisches Selbstvertrauen stimuliert wird (sowohl in Bezug auf mehr Vertrauen als auch hinsichtlich eines höheren Grades an politischer Partizipation).

Der Begriff politisches Selbstvertrauen - eine Meta-Analyse des konzeptionellen Charakters des Begriffes

Die Dissertation beinhaltet eine umfassende Analyse der bisherigen Forschung bezüglich des Begriffes politisches Selbstvertrauen. Ziel ist es die Begriffsverwirrungen, die seit der Begriffseinführung von Campbell, Gurin und Miller 1954 geherrscht haben, zu eliminieren und in diesem Zusammenhang eine neue Konzeptualisierung des Begriffes zu erarbeiten. Aus der bisherigen Forschung werden vier hauptsächliche Konzeptualisierungen des politischen

Selbstvertrauens herauskristallisiert, die *Allumfassende*, die *Zweidimensionale*, die *Selbstvertrauensorientierte*²⁹ und die *Multidisziplinäre*.

Die *Allumfassende* beschreibt, dass mehrere unterschiedliche Elemente in den Begriff inkludiert werden, wie zum Beispiel politisches Wissen, Glaube an die eigene Fähigkeit eine Veränderung bewirken zu können sowie Wahrnehmung der Responsivität des politischen Systems bezüglich Einfluss von Bürger/innen. Diese Konzeptualisierung stellt somit eine verflochtene Kombination der subjektiven Wahrnehmung von sich selbst und der Wahrnehmung des politischen Systems dar.

Die *Zweidimensionale* impliziert eine Aufteilung des Konzepts in zwei Dimensionen, eine interne und eine externe. Der Schwerpunkt der internen Dimension liegt bei den eigenen Fähigkeiten der Bürger/innen bezüglich verschiedener Aspekte wie z. B. der Wahrnehmung des eigenen politischen Wissens und Verständnisses, der Möglichkeit politische Diskussionen führen zu können und sich Gehör zu verschaffen sowie der Fähigkeit sich politische Information aneignen zu können. Die externe Dimension fokussiert auf die individuelle Wahrnehmung des politischen Systems und deren Responsivität, wie z. B. ob die Teilnahme an Wahlen eine effektive Methode für Beeinflussung ist, ob Politiker/innen in der Regel auf gewöhnliche Bürger/innen hören beziehungsweise ob Politiker/innen sich darum kümmern, was gewöhnliche Bürger/innen denken.

Die *Selbstvertrauensorientierte* konzentriert sich auf die individuelle Wahrnehmung der eigenen Fähigkeit politische Aktivitäten ausführen zu können. Der Ausgangspunkt dieser Konzeptualisierung ist in Teilen der Kognitionstheorie der Psychologie zu finden (vgl. *self-efficacy theory*), wo das individuelle Gefühl der Kontrolle über bevorstehende Aufgaben zentral ist, unabhängig davon, wohin diese führen, oder ob eine Person motiviert ist, sie auszuführen.

Die *Multidisziplinäre* kombiniert die in der Politikwissenschaft akzeptierte *zweidimensionale* mit der *selbstvertrauensorientierten* Konzeptualisierung durch das Fokussieren auf die individuelle Wahrnehmung der eigenen Fähigkeiten und das gleichzeitige Beibehalten der Annahme, dass die politischen Aktivitäten, die durchgeführt werden, politischen Einfluss haben.

Die Dissertation diskutiert die Stärken und Schwächen eines jeden dieser Ansätze und kommt zum Schluss, dass es noch immer große Unklarheiten im Begriffsverständnis und der Anwendung der Begriffe gibt, was zur Folge

²⁹ In der Dissertation wird diese als *a self-efficacy conceptualization* bezeichnet, bekommt hier jedoch die Bezeichnung *Selbstvertrauensorientierte* mangels besserer Übersetzungsmöglichkeiten des Begriffes *self-efficacy*.

hat, dass die Intersubjektivität des Begriffes politisches Selbstvertrauen darunter leidet. Darum werden drei Verbesserungsvorschläge gemacht, um den Begriff stringenter und deutlicher zu machen. Erstens sollte der Begriff eingengt werden durch das Abgrenzen der externen Dimension des Begriffes politisches Selbstvertrauen, indem diese als Form von wahrgenommener Systemresponsivität bezeichnet und verwendet wird. Zweitens sollte der Begriff die individuelle Wahrnehmung der Fähigkeit, politische Aktivitäten durchführen zu können, in den Fokus stellen, d. h. ihn von anderen Fähigkeiten, wie z. B. politischem Wissen, Verständnis oder Überzeugungsvermögen, deutlich abgrenzen. Drittes sollte dem politischen Aspekt im politischen Selbstvertrauen mehr Achtung geschenkt werden. Dies durch das Anerkennen, dass politische Aktivitäten in Anbetracht der engen Verbindung zu Machtverhältnissen in der sozialen Sphäre spezifisch sind.

Ausgehend von dieser kritischen Überarbeitung mündet die Konzeptualisierung des Begriffes politisches Selbstvertrauen in dieser Arbeit in Folgendes: Politisches Selbstvertrauen ist *die individuelle Wahrnehmung der eigenen Fähigkeit zur Durchführung von politischen Aktivitäten, um eine Veränderung in der Gesellschaft zu erzielen.*

Das theoretische Rahmenwerk - Sozialisation des politischen Selbstvertrauens
Der theoretische Rahmen setzt das Studium des politischen Selbstvertrauens von Jugendlichen in das breitere Forschungsfeld der politischen Sozialisation. Dieser Bereich beschäftigt sich hauptsächlich mit Fragen zur Bürger/innenentwicklung, d. h. auf welche Art und Weise Bürger/innen in einer Gesellschaft politische Attitüden (z. B. Interesse), Fähigkeiten (z. B. Wissen), Verhaltensweisen (z. B. Partizipation) etc. entwickeln.

Diese theoretische Grundlage der Dissertation besteht aus drei Teilen, die gemeinsam ein umfassendes Bild über die Sozialisation des politischen Selbstvertrauens formen: 1) wie sich politisches Selbstvertrauen entwickelt (Quellen), 2) wie sich politisches Selbstvertrauen auf künftige politische Beteiligung auswirkt (Effekte), sowie 3) wie diese beiden Teile interagieren (eine potenzielle reziproke Beziehung).

In Bezug auf den ersten Teil werden vier mögliche Wege (Quellen) zu politischem Selbstvertrauen präsentiert: selbst wahrgenommene politische Erfahrungen, politische Vorbilder, Ermutigung und Unterstützung sowie positive (Lebens-)Einstellungen. Im zweiten Teil wird aufgezeigt, dass eine Lücke im theoretischen Wissen besteht, inwiefern Menschen mit hohem politischen Selbstvertrauen tendenziell eine höhere politische Beteiligung haben als solche mit niedrigem politischen Selbstvertrauen. Einige mögliche Erklärungsansätze sind in der Psychologie zu finden: in der Kognitionstheorie (eine Person nimmt sich keine Dinge vor, die sie nicht glaubt auch

bemeistern zu können) und Motivationstheorie (eine Person muss motiviert sein, um eine bestimmte Handlung durchzuführen sowie das Gefühl haben, dass das Agieren die Umgebung beeinflussen kann). Empirische Forschung zeigt, dass die positive Korrelation zwischen politischem Selbstvertrauen und politischer Partizipation stark ist. Es wird auch aufgezeigt, dass es sich um eine sich gegenseitig verstärkende Relation zwischen diesen zwei obig beschriebenen Teilen handelt. Die politische Partizipation ist als selbst wahrgenommene politische Erfahrung zu betrachten und beeinflusst somit wiederum politisches Selbstvertrauen (eine potentiell positive Spirale). Das theoretische Rahmenwerk stellt somit mehr eine komplettierende, parallele Darstellung der Teilstudien der Dissertation dar und dient mehr als theoretisches Fundament für die zusammenfassende Diskussion als ein theoretisches Modell, das empirisch in seiner Gesamtheit getestet werden soll.

Methodische Vorgangsweise und Überlegungen

Die ontologischen und epistemologischen Ausgangspunkte dieser Dissertation können vom kritischen Realismus hergeleitet werden. Als Ausgangspunkt wird eine objektive Realität betrachtet, die jedoch teilweise sozial generiert wurde. Es ist sozusagen möglich, Wissen oder Einsicht über die Wirklichkeit zu erlangen. Dieses Wissen ist jedoch nicht als wahr und ewig in einem absoluten Sinn zu betrachten, sondern wird im Takt mit neuem Wissen/neuen Einsichten entwickelt (wie in Form einer wechselhaften kumulativen Verhaltensweise). Der kritische Realismus geht auch davon aus, dass es keinen Widerspruch zwischen den beiden methodologischen Paradigmen der qualitativen und quantitativen Forschung gibt. Stattdessen werden beide als wertvoll und kompatibel betrachtet und abhängig von der gestellten Forschungsfrage gewählt oder kombiniert.

In dieser Dissertation wird hauptsächlich ein qualitativer Ansatz mit drei Teilstudien, die auf ein longitudinales Datenmaterial mit circa 4 000 Jugendlichen basieren, gewählt. Der Teil der Datenmaterialien, der in den empirischen Analysen verwendet wurde, besteht aus Umfragen an circa 2 000 Schüler/innen in sieben ‚Mittelschulen‘ (*Högstadiet*, 13-15 jährige Schüler/innen) und drei ‚Gymnasien/Oberstufenschulen‘ (*Gymnasier*, 16-18 jährige Schüler/innen) in einer mittelgroßen schwedischen Stadt. Die Schulen wurden so gewählt, dass Unterschiedliche sowohl bezüglich Größe, Verantwortungsträger (privat und öffentlich), Stadtteilen (unterschiedliche sozioökonomische Zusammensetzungen) und Schulformen (sowohl studien- als auch berufsvorbereitende Bildungsgänge) vertreten sind. Für die begriffliche Konzeptualisierung wurde jedoch ein qualitativer Analyseansatz gewählt.

Ergebnisse

Die konzeptionellen Ergebnisse der Dissertation wurden bereits im obigen Abschnitt präsentiert und werden hier nicht weiter erläutert. Darüber hinaus weist diese Dissertation drei empirische Ergebnisse auf. Zunächst werden die vier oben angeführten möglichen Quellen des politischen Selbstvertrauens durch unterschiedliche Operationalisierungen für jede Quelle getestet. Die Ergebnisse bestätigen deren empirische Relevanz, da mindestens eine Operationalisierung der jeweiligen Quelle einen signifikanten Zusammenhang mit politischem Selbstvertrauen aufweist. Weiters kann in diesem Zusammenhang gezeigt werden, dass die Schule eine wichtige Rolle für die Entwicklung des politischen Selbstvertrauens von Jugendlichen spielt.

Das zweite umfassende Ergebnis basiert auf denselben theoretischen Ausgangspunkten, wobei unterschiedliche Faktoren innerhalb des Schulkontextes auf deren Einfluss auf das politische Selbstvertrauen von unterschiedlichen Schüler/innengruppen getestet werden. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass das politische Selbstvertrauen von Schüler/innen, die theoretische Zweige in der Oberstufe gewählt haben (z. B. naturwissenschaftliche oder sozialwissenschaftliche Vertiefung), unabhängig davon wie sie die Schule, den Unterricht und ihre Lehrkräfte erleben, zunimmt. Die Ergebnisse für Schüler/innen in berufsvorbereitenden Bildungsgängen (z. B. Maschinenbau, Mechatronik oder Hotel und Restaurant) zeigen jedoch einen größeren Effekt auf das politische Selbstvertrauen von positiven Erfahrungen der getesteten Schulfaktoren (deliberatives Klassenklima, engagierter Unterricht, gerechte Lehrkräfte, freundliche Klassenkameraden und Zufriedenheit in der Schule). Die Förderung des politischen Selbstvertrauens in der Schule erscheint somit wichtiger für im Allgemeinen weniger ressourcenstarke Schüler/innen.

Weiters zeigt die Dissertation auch auf, dass das politische Selbstvertrauen von Jugendlichen deren tatsächliche politische Partizipation beeinflusst, dies sowohl online als auch offline. Je stärker das politische Selbstvertrauen ist, desto höher ist die Partizipation. Darüber hinaus kann ein verstärkter Effekt für Jugendliche mit hohem politischem Interesse bestätigt werden. Diese weisen, wenn sie auch ein starkes politisches Selbstvertrauen haben, eine überproportionale Steigerung des Partizipationsgrades auf. Das politische Selbstvertrauen kann somit als auslösender Faktor oder Trigger interpretiert werden, der die Transformation eines latenten politischen Engagements zu einer faktischen Teilnahme erleichtert.

Abschließende Diskussion - politisches Selbstvertrauen im Hinblick auf politische Gleichstellung

Insgesamt betont die Dissertation die Bedeutung eines verfeinerten und stringenteren Ansatzes in Bezug auf politisches Selbstvertrauen. Dies bedeutet mehr begriffliche Klarheit, die zu einer deutlicheren und kohärenteren Forschung sowohl auf empirischer als auch auf theoretischer Ebene führen kann. Dies ist wesentlich sowohl in Bezug auf die Forschung über politische Sozialisation als auch für den theoretischen Rahmen, wie sich politisches Selbstvertrauen entwickelt und welche Mechanismen den Auswirkungen des politischen Selbstvertrauens auf politische Partizipation zugrunde liegen.

Darüber hinaus beleuchten die Ergebnisse die potentiellen Folgewirkungen eines aktiven Förderns des politischen Selbstvertrauens von Jugendlichen. In Anbetracht der vermuteten, sich gegenseitig verstärkenden Beziehung zwischen politischem Selbstvertrauen und politischer Partizipation führen mit hoher Wahrscheinlichkeit aktive Maßnahmen, um das politische Selbstvertrauen von Jugendlichen zu erhöhen, zu einer generell höheren politischen Teilnahme. Weiters zeigen die Ergebnisse, dass solche Interventionen das Potential besitzen, die politische Gleichberechtigung zwischen unterschiedlichen sozialen Schichten zu erhöhen. Wenn das politische Selbstvertrauen der am wenigsten Ressourcestarken stimuliert werden kann, ermöglicht dies eine aktivere Partizipation in diesen Gruppen.

In diesem Zusammenhang hat die Institution Schule in Schweden eine spezielle Rolle und zwar deshalb, da sie im Grunde alle jungen Menschen während deren Adoleszenz erreicht und auch einen demokratischen Auftrag hat, unter anderem mit dem Ziel der Erziehung der Jugendlichen zu demokratischen und politisch aktiven Bürger/innen. Heute ist bereits ein *Arbeitspraktikum*, wo sich Schüler/innen auf das kommende Arbeitsleben vorbereiten, Teil des schwedischen Lehrplanes. Die Diskussionen und Ergebnisse dieser Dissertation heben die Bedeutung von politischem Selbstvertrauen als zentrale Ressource für Bürger/innen hervor. Dies sowohl für sich allein stehend, als auch für die aktive politische Partizipation des/r Einzelnen, und schlussendlich auch als potentieller Faktor, um eine politisch egalitärere Gesellschaft zu erreichen. Weiters kann auch gezeigt werden, dass eigene politische Erfahrung das politische Selbstvertrauen von Bürger/innen stimuliert. Obig Angeführtes spricht dafür, dass die Schule als Institution eine Form von *Demokratiepraktikum* in Anbetracht ziehen sollte, wo Schüler/innen die Möglichkeit bekommen, *selbst wahrgenommene politische Erfahrungen* zu machen.

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