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### Inequalities in education for democracy

*Governance and supply of educational opportunities in the civic domain*

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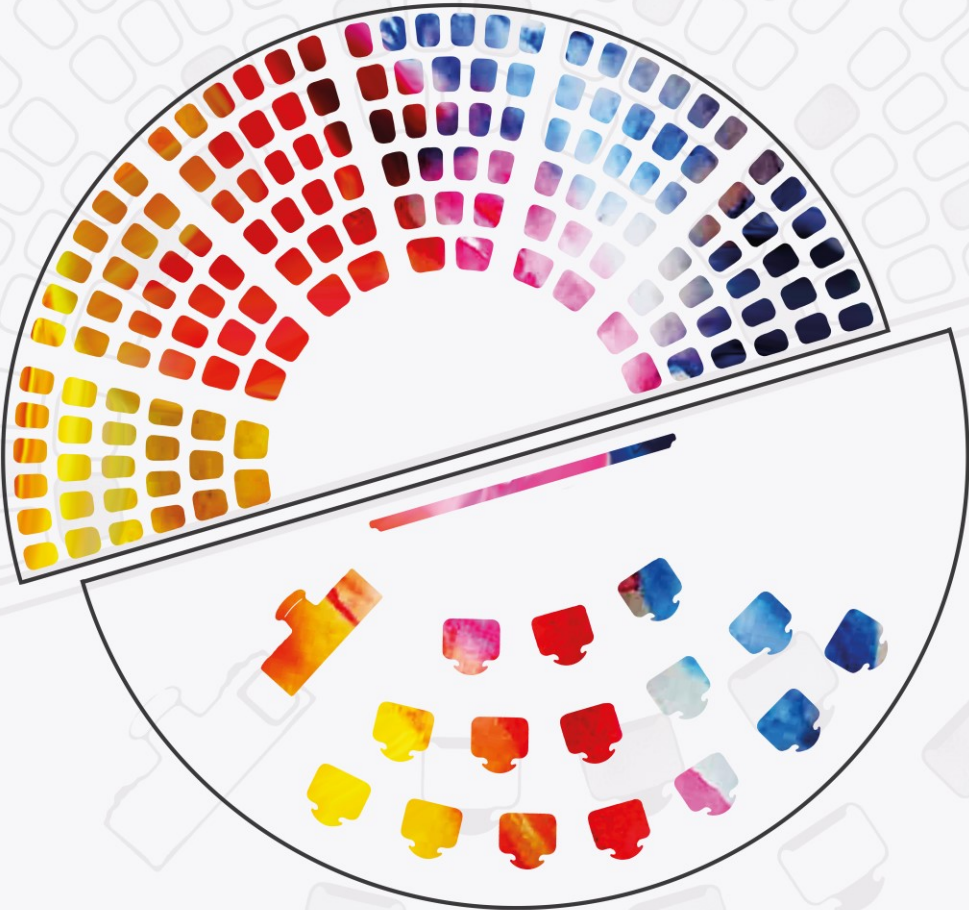
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# INEQUALITIES IN EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

GOVERNANCE AND SUPPLY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN THE CIVIC DOMAIN



Hester Ina Mennes

# Inequalities in education for democracy

*Governance and supply of educational opportunities in the civic domain*

Hester Ina Mennes

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Inequalities in education for democracy

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ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor  
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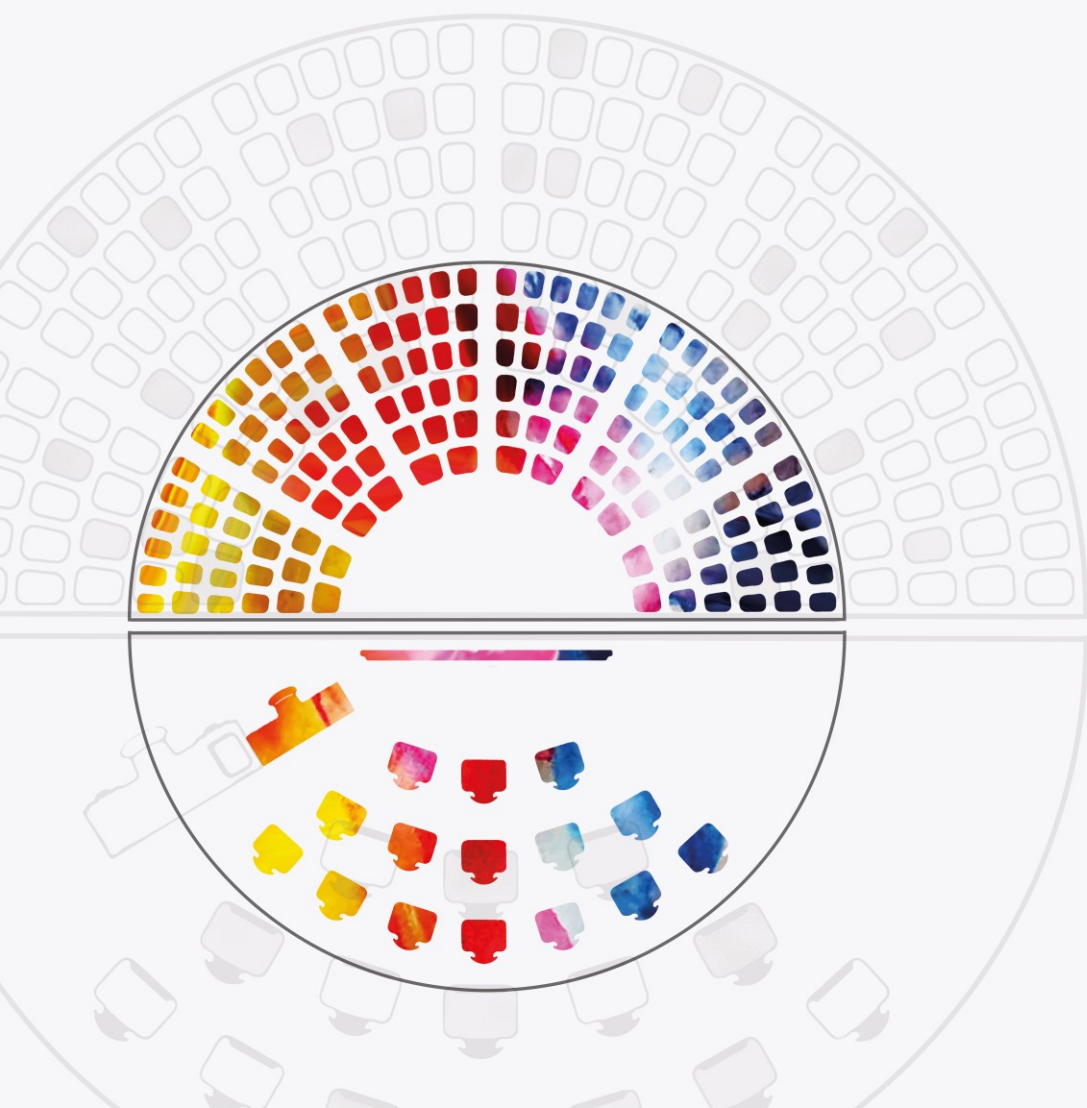
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## Contents

Chapter 1	Introduction	7
Chapter 2	Are schools' qualification and democratic outcomes related? The role of schools' student composition and tracking	23
Chapter 3	Inequalities in democratic outcomes among young citizens: The role of access to and participation in democratic activities in school in 15 countries	43
Chapter 4	The role of selection versus school factors for different open classroom climate experiences in the Netherlands	67
Chapter 5	The role of curricular standardization in stratified civic learning in 14 European countries	91
Chapter 6	General discussion and conclusion	115
References		131
Appendices		151
Summary		163
Samenvatting		169
Contribution of the authors		177
Publications and presentations		181
Dankwoord		185
Over de auteur		191





# Chapter 1

Introduction

## Introduction

Inequalities manifest early in life, already in school. We often think of schools as a place of chances for students; to learn new subjects and skills, to earn a degree in a field of interest, to form friendships and relations. For governments, too, schooling is a vehicle of opportunity: to train the workforce, to invest in a country's economy and welfare, to promote social cohesion and sustain democracy. Schools reify such learning opportunities, meaning that they provide students with the kinds of inputs and processes necessary to reach certain achievements or outcomes (Elliott & Bartlett, 2016, p. 1). In doing this, the equality or equity of these opportunities is often topic for debate. Equity in education refers to the ideal that "access, participation and progression to obtain a quality education are available to all and that personal or social circumstances – such as gender, socio-economical or immigrant background – are not obstacles to achieving educational potential" (OECD, 2021, p. 16). By offering students learning opportunities, schools can address whether students' personal or social circumstances challenge their learning experiences. That is still highly relevant; countries across the globe face persistent educational inequalities, meaning that students' background forms an important driver of their educational chances and success (OECD, 2021). In some countries, educational inequalities are even on the rise. In the Netherlands, for example, the educational inspectorate reports that inequality in students' educational opportunities have increased over the past decade (Dutch Inspectorate of Education, 2022). As a result, equality of opportunity is thereby a relevant consideration for educational practice and policy.

Often, attention for educational equality focuses on academic outcomes; students' scholastic performance, like numeracy or literacy test scores, or their likelihood to pursue a particular degree or labor market qualification (Dijkstra & De la Motte, 2014). Yet recently, attention also grows for inequalities within the civic domain of education: the ways in which schools contribute to students' equipment to navigate and sustain democracy and society. The notion that education socializes students as citizens is far from new. Philosophers as far back as Aristotle reflected on the ways in which education contributes to persons' development as citizens and as members of society (Levinson, 2014), part of what scholars refer to as the *socialization* function of schooling (Balantine et al., 2021; Biesta, 2010; Durkheim, 1956; Fend, 1974; Peschar & Wesseling, 1995; Van de Werfhorst, 2014). Recently, however, countries make the civic task of schools more explicit by formalizing it: governments judicially attribute a role to schools to exert influence on the civic development of students (Eurydice, 2012, 2017). This means that schools fulfil a formal obligation to invest in their students' civic development, and that accountability of schools can now also involve their civic education (Eurydice, 2012, 2017). This trend takes place against a background of differences between schools in their realization of civic education (Schulz et al., 2018a): some schools offer more and different civic educational practices to their students than others. Relatedly, research indicates inequalities between students in the civic educational practices they

experience (Campbell, 2019; Hoskins et al., 2017; Sampermans et al., 2021; Schulz et al., 2018a), and differences in what students gain from these practices in terms of a variety of civic outcomes (Campbell, 2008; Deimel et al., 2020; Hoskins et al., 2017; Neundorf et al., 2016). Put differently, educational inequalities can apply to multiple functions of education; not only to students' academic or scholastic learning, but also to their civic learning opportunities in school. In the vast body of research on educational inequality, these civic educational inequalities do not receive much attention yet. At the same time, there are particular aspects of these civic educational inequalities that motivate new research. In the following, three of these aspects are highlighted.

The first aspect concerns the significance of equality in light of the civic or social function of education. Education can fulfil multiple functions (Balantine et al., 2021; Biesta, 2010; Durkheim, 1956; Fend, 1974; Peschar & Wesselingh, 1995; Van de Werfhorst, 2014; Witschge, 2022), among which is qualification: preparing students for the labor market or for future education. Citizenship (or broader, socialization), as an educational function prepares students for the integration in society and democracy. For the qualification function, equality of educational opportunities often concerns a meritocratic requirement. In general, equality of opportunity can refer to the requirement "that people's outcomes [...] should be determined only by their efforts and talents, rather than by predetermined circumstances such as their social or family background, gender, or ethnicity" (Anderson, 2016, p. 195). Reasoning from a meritocratic principle, differences between students in their educational experiences and outcomes should thus reflect a difference in efforts or talents. For the civic educational task, such a meritocratic principle is less straightforward. Civic education prepares students to navigate and sustain democracy, and within democracy, equality is a core principle (Dahl, 2007, 2020; Miller, 1999). In deliberative, liberal democracies, citizens are equal in the sense that they all have a right to vote and that their interests ought to be given equal consideration in democratic decision making processes that affect them (Dahl, 2007; Dworkin, 1987; Verba, 2003). This makes equality in learning opportunities particularly relevant in the civic educational domain; as all students are equal as citizens, inequalities in terms of the preparation students receive to navigate and benefit from democracy, are weighted differently – but not less heavily - than for other educational domains. This underscores the relevance of more attention for inequalities in the civic educational domain, as a contribution to the already existing body of research on educational inequalities for scholastic or academic outcomes.

Secondly, the available empirical research on civic educational inequalities often concerns students' civic outcomes, for good reason, but attention is less often focused on schools' role in the manifestation of these inequalities; what schools supply and how this relates to students' learning opportunities. Research shows that social inequalities exist in a variety of civic outcomes among adolescents (Deimel et al., 2020; Hoskins et al., 2017; Isac et al., 2014; Schulz et al., 2018a). These patterns mirror gaps in civic and political outcomes in later age groups (Gallego, 2007, 2010,

2014; Hoskins et al., 2008; Marien et al., 2010; Stolle & Hooghe, 2011). As such, the cleavages that scholars witness between groups in society appear already to be manifest among young citizens, which motivates research on what accounts for these differences. The school, and education in general, is one research direction that is considered. Schools can diminish, reproduce or even accelerate these gaps by means of the (civic) learning opportunities they offer to students. At the same time, students' civic outcomes are shaped by many actors besides the school, like family and friends (Flanagan & Sherrod, 1998; Jennings, 2009; Jennings & Bowers, 2009; Niemi & Hepburn, 1995). For a deep understanding of how schools contribute to students' civic outcomes, research could focus on what kind of civic learning opportunities schools offer, and to what extent students use and benefit from this supply. Here, the distinction between equality of outcome versus equality of opportunity is relevant: while the former concerns the distribution of (civic) outcomes among students, the latter refers to the distribution of benefits and obstacles that students face, which determines their chance to reach particular (civic) outcomes, i.e., their opportunity to do so (see also O'Neill, 1976; Westen, 1985). Roemer (1998, p. 2) posits that realizing equality of opportunity implies that there is some sort of 'starting gate', that distinguishes individuals' opportunities to pursue particular outcomes from their choices to do so. Before this point, schools can play a role in compensating for benefits and obstacles that students face, thereby equalizing students' chances to reach particular civic outcomes if they wish to. By focusing research merely on (in)equalities in students' civic outcomes, schools' role in these benefits and obstacles is left out of view. This motivates more research on how schools realize civic learning opportunities, whether students benefit from these opportunities in terms of the civic outcomes they wish to pursue, and whether this happens in an equitable manner.

The third aspect of civic educational inequalities concerns a governance lens: educational system and policy characteristics that embed and steer countries' civic education. Countries' educational systems have been designed in a way to serve multiple educational tasks; the system sorts, selects, and qualifies students for their working lives, besides preparing them for their roles as members of society and democracy (Hopper, 1968; Van de Werfhorst, 2014). This means that civic educational inequalities are embedded in a stratified educational system, with tracks that supply students with different educational experiences as preparation for their working lives, but potentially also different educational experiences as preparation for democracy and society. Another characteristic of educational systems concerns the extent to which they are standardized (Allmendinger, 1989; Bol & Van de Werfhorst, 2016; Horn, 2009); whether schools' supply of education is constructed and imposed on schools at a central level of governance, and whether schools are held accountable for their educational supply. For governments, moreover, the education system shapes what instruments policymakers have to exert influence on schools' supply of civic education and the distribution of this supply across students (Dijkstra & De la Motte, 2014). Scholars have investigated the relevance of educational system characteristics for educational inequalities, like tracking (Brunello

& Checchi, 2007; Schütz et al., 2008; Van de Werfhorst & Mijs, 2010), or forms of standardization and school accountability (Bol et al., 2014; Schütz et al., 2007). Yet these studies often focus on academic achievement, and the role of institutional and policy characteristics is less well-established for inequalities in the civic educational domain (Dijkstra & De la Motte, 2014). Given the emerging trend of governments that formalize schools' civic task as a judicial responsibility, the quest for insight in the role of educational systems and policies has grown. Educational system characteristics determine the infrastructure in which schools' reify their civic education. Effective educational governance requires insight in the role of this infrastructure, which tends to be relatively fixed, versus other steering instruments that governments employ. For the civic educational domain, these insights are currently still scarce.

In this dissertation, I aim to examine these three aspects of civic educational inequalities in further detail, by asking: *To what extent are there inequalities in civic educational learning opportunities, and how are these inequalities related to the context in which these learning opportunities take place?* Context here refers to several kinds of factors. First, it entails the ways in which schools reify their supply of civic education besides other educational tasks. Second, context concerns the role of educational system characteristics that embed this supply, for example, tracking and educational standardization. Moreover, governments' educational policies and responsibilities contextualize whether and how inequalities in the civic educational domain manifest. In this dissertation, I therefore examine to what extent inequalities in civic educational learning opportunities for students are related to (1) schools' civic educational supply, (2) to educational system characteristics, and (3) how these inequalities relate to governments' educational responsibilities?. By researching these factors, I aim to shed light on all three aspects that underscore the relevance of research on inequalities in civic educational learning opportunities.

Within the scope of the dissertation, I focus on secondary education in the Netherlands, in comparative view with other European countries. The Netherlands is an interesting case for research on this topic. Since 2006, Dutch secondary schools carry a civic task that is formally captured in Article 2.2 of the Dutch Law on Secondary Education (in Dutch, 'Wet op het Voortgezet Onderwijs', WVO, Hoofdstuk 2, Artikel 2.2). In 2021, the Senate of Dutch parliament approved a more concrete elaboration of what this task legally entails, i.e. to contribute to students' knowledge of and respect for democratic rule of law and democratic core values. Meanwhile, the recent formalization of schools' civic task is met by a great variety in the ways and extent to which educators realize this task (Dijkstra et al., 2021). School autonomy is relatively high in the Netherlands (Ehren & Baxter, 2021), which combines with the observation that schools in the Netherlands show large differences in the civic education they offer to their students (Dijkstra et al., 2021). At the same time, some studies suggest that forms of educational standardization (or more specifically centralization, as an antipole of school autonomy) correspond with smaller inequalities in students' civic outcomes, like ethnic tolerance (Janmaat &

Mons, 2011) or civic engagement (Witschge & Van de Werfhorst, 2016). Moreover, the Dutch educational system is highly stratified and characterized by early tracking (OECD, 2016b). This means that students are separated in classrooms, or even schools, offering different tracks at the age of 11 or 12 already. In general, a variety of tracks exist in the Netherlands (Munniksma et al., 2017), yet they can broadly be divided in vocational oriented education, and general or academic education, sometimes also called prevocational or preacademic, to indicate the prospect more than the actual attainment. Compared to other OECD countries, educational tracks in the Netherlands start early; only a handful of countries sort their students at a younger age, where most track around the age of 15 or 16 (Woessmann, 2009). Research shows that educational tracking matters for (inequalities in) civic outcomes of students, like civic attitudes or forms of civic and political engagement (Hoskins & Janmaat, 2016; Janmaat et al., 2014; Witschge et al., 2019; Witschge & Van de Werfhorst, 2020), as well as for students' civic educational experiences in school (e.g., Munniksma et al., 2017; Nieuwelink et al., 2019; Sampermans et al., 2021). Relatedly, Dutch secondary schools are relatively segregated in terms of their socioeconomic student composition, meaning that tracks associate with particular compositions in terms of students' backgrounds (Vogels et al., 2021). For socioeconomic background, studies also show a relation with a variety of students' civic or political outcomes (e.g., Dassonneville et al., 2012; Munniksma et al., 2017; Schulz et al., 2018a), as well as with civic educational experiences in school (e.g., Deimel et al., 2020; Hoskins et al., 2017). Dutch schools' civic task is thus to be realized in a stratified educational system, which makes attention for civic educational inequalities all the more relevant for the Netherlands, specifically in relation to tracking (also known as school type differentiation, Van de Werfhorst & Mijs, 2010) and standardization (i.e., school autonomy versus centralization). To gain insight in the role of these education system characteristics, I examine countries across Europe, where a trend towards formalization of schools' civic tasks is visible, although the pace and intensity of this trend differs between national contexts (Eurydice, 2012, 2017).

In what follows, the remainder of this chapter introduces the core concepts used throughout the dissertation. I first reflect on the meaning of citizenship, and the reasons why governments invoke schools to promote it. Second, I discuss the relevance of equality of opportunity in the civic educational domain, in relation to democracy at large, and relative to opportunities for students in other educational domains, for example in terms of their qualifications and occupational prospects. In doing so, I aim to have laid out the relevance of examining inequalities in civic educational learning opportunities in schools. I then introduce the chapters ahead and the methodology I adopted to answer the research question central to this dissertation.

### **The concept of citizenship**

In basic terms, citizenship refers to one's legal rights and duties as a member of a nation. This often involves one's right to vote in elections, or one's duty

to pay taxes, for example. Many conceptions of citizenship, however, approach citizenship in a way that transcends its notion as a mere legal status. For example, Marshall distinguishes between social, civil and political citizenship, representing citizens' relations with each other, with their communities and their governmental institutions respectively (Marshall, 1950). More recently, Schulz and colleagues conceptualize (active) citizenship also as participation, besides a legal status (Schulz et al., 2016, p. 15). Citizenship can involve a set of rights and duties, behaviors, knowledge and predispositions that characterize citizens' relations with each other and with the state, regardless of (or in addition to) their legal status. These conceptions evolve over time, and some scholars argue that citizenship is increasingly approached as a matter of virtue more than as a legal status (Schinkel, 2010), or as a set of cultural dispositions that inform citizenship's meaning (Duyvendak et al., 2016). Other notions of citizenship transcend national boundaries, referring to citizens' relation to the global community, like world or cosmopolitan citizenship (Carter, 2013) or digital citizenship (Mossberger et al., 2007). As these approaches demonstrate, philosophers, scientists and policymakers often conceptualize citizenship as something else or more than a legal status, constituted by a set of behaviors, knowledge and predispositions.

Within the scope of this dissertation, the focus lies on one such a set, along the political axis of citizenship (Marshall, 1950); young citizens' civic knowledge, their intended political participation, and their civic self-efficacy. In line with many citizenship frameworks (for an overview, see Geboers et al., 2014), this set includes knowledge, behavioral skills or intentions, and attitudes or predispositions that can be argued to be valuable from the position of an individual citizen, as well as for democracy's functioning at large. From a citizen's perspective, these outcomes can assist an individual to exercise one's citizenship as one sees fit, and to voice one's interests. For example, civic knowledge refers to what someone knows about democratic processes and principles, and it can facilitate individuals' navigation of routes and rules of political influence. Moreover, it can clarify the link between public policies and interest groups and facilitate reasoned judgements about civic topics (Galston, 2001). Yet understanding democracy does not mean that someone actually voices one's interests. Citizens can express their voice within democracy actively, for example, by voting in national or local elections. This is a relatively minimal yet vital form of participation in democracy (Marien et al., 2010). Thirdly and relatedly, confidence about one's ability to understand and take part in democracy may assist citizens in their political and civic participation, because scholars link individuals' sense of efficacy with actual participation (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006), also specifically for forms of civic or political participation (Condon & Holleque, 2013; Hoskins et al., 2016; Solhaug, 2006). Self-confidence in one's ability to participate in political processes is often referred to as 'political self-efficacy' or 'internal political efficacy' (Craig et al., 1990), or when considering citizenship more broadly, it concerns civic self-efficacy (for a discussion, see Eidhof & De Ruyter, 2022). These outcomes are not only useful for individual citizens: for democracy at large, resilient

functioning of democratic processes relies on informed and active citizenry (Thomassen, 2007). For example, the legitimacy of political decisions requires representative electoral participation among citizens (Lijphart, 1997), and democratic knowledge and a sense of self-efficacy may increase the likelihood of such participation among citizens (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006).

These three outcomes (civic knowledge, students' intended political or democratic participation, and their civic self-efficacy) are particularly relevant to consider in light of political inequalities: across democracies, citizens with a more privileged or a more educated background tend to have more knowledge of democracy (Fraile, 2013) and are more likely to participate electorally (Gallego, 2010; Marien et al., 2010). Research also shows that they are more likely to seat in political positions (Bovens & Wille, 2017), and that policy responsiveness tends to benefit their interests over citizens with a less privileged or educated background (Schakel, 2020; Schakel & Van der Pas, 2021). Disparities like these challenge the democratic principle of equality, that every citizen affected by a political decision should have the opportunity to exert influence on that decision, equally as other citizens (Dworkin, 1987). One assumption underlying this dissertation, is that democratic knowledge, political participation and civic self-efficacy equip citizens to reap such opportunities. These outcomes can form "resources for citizens to employ their capacities for civic action" (Marien et al., 2010, p. 190), and inequalities therein may threaten how equal such opportunities really are. Therefore, in light of societal disparities in these outcomes and in democratic representation and responsiveness, I focus on schools' role in stimulating these democratic outcomes in particular.

### **Citizenship and education**

There are several reasons why schools are often considered a suitable institution to stimulate citizenship. Institutions like schools can offer young citizens the 'opportunities to gain an enlightened understanding of public matters', which Dahl considers "a requirement for democracy" (2020, p. 79). From a collective perspective, one prominent reason to turn to schools for civic education is that it can assist a state to perpetuate itself (Levinson, 2014); in the same way that citizens rely upon democracy, democracy depends upon its citizens to function and flourish. Some scholars pose that democracy is "not a natural condition" (Reichert & Print, 2018, p. 318), and that it has to be learnt and passed on in order to sustain it. While strong democratic institutions, rules and processes can form a vital foundation for the continued functioning of democracy, a political culture is needed to maintain this functioning. In their seminal work 'the Civic Culture', for example, Almond and Verba (1963) gave prominence to the idea that democracy requires norms and values about the significance of sharing a society. Such a culture fuels the functioning of democratic processes in civil society. Therefore, besides perpetuation, civic education is also a means for governments – and the citizens it represents – to promote their civic ideals, like liberty, solidarity or equality (Levinson, 2014). In the Netherlands, for example, schools ought to stimulate students' knowledge of and



support for core values, that are anchored in the Dutch constitution, including freedom of speech, equal treatment and autonomy' (WVO, 2021, Article 2.2, 1a).

The assumption underlying governments' turn to schools for civic education is that democracy can be learnt, and that schools can teach it. It is not surprising that governments grant this task to schools, even though schools' effectiveness to fulfil it is empirically not well established. In general, a strong link exists between education and democracy. Worldwide, countries' average years of schooling associate with democratization (Glaeser et al., 2004, 2007), and research emphasizes countries' distribution of education, where a more equal level of education among citizens associates with more sustainable democracy (Castelló-Climent, 2008). Within countries, citizens who enjoyed more years of education have more knowledge of democratic and civic matters (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Fraile, 2013; Grönlund & Milner, 2006) and a greater propensity to take part in a variety of political and democratic processes compared to citizens who had fewer years of education (Gallego, 2007, 2010, 2014; Hoskins et al., 2008; Marien et al., 2010; Stolle & Hooghe, 2011). Put differently, both between and within countries, education links with democracy.

The causality of this relationship and the mechanisms underlying it, however, are less well established (Acemoglu et al., 2005; Berinsky & Lenz, 2011; Kam & Palmer, 2008, 2011; Kunst et al., 2020; Mayer, 2011). This is where research on civic and citizenship education is relevant, which aims to provide students with "the knowledge, understanding, and dispositions that enable them to participate as citizens in society" (Schulz et al., 2018a, p. 1). Citizens acquire knowledge about and skills for democracy through a process called political socialization (Flanagan & Sherrod, 1998; Jennings, 2009; Jennings & Bowers, 2009; Niemi & Hepburn, 1995), which counts the school as one such socializing actor (Banks & Roker, 1994; Quintelier, 2013a). An early review showed that the effectiveness of civic educational practices that schools employ for this socialization long received little attention (Schuitema et al., 2008). Over the past decades, studies have been dedicated to the effectiveness of a variety of civic educational practices, with mixed results. Some research suggests that schools indeed contribute to students' civic outcomes, yet only modest at best, especially in comparison to other socializing actors like parents or friends (Isac et al., 2014). Based on an international sample of 31 countries, for example, Isac and colleagues identified a role for schools regarding students' civic knowledge, yet not for other outcomes like civic engagement (Isac et al., 2014). Similarly, a review by Manning and Edwards (2014) demonstrates no relation between civic educational practices and political participation. Geboers and colleagues (2013) identified more relations between civic educational practices and civic outcomes, although modest at best. In contrast, other studies attribute a more significant role to schools in the political socialization of students (e.g., Campbell, 2019; Schulz et al., 2018a).

Some scholars explain these mixed findings regarding schools' effectiveness by highlighting the possibility that it is not education itself that equips citizens to

navigate democracy and society, but that education serves as a proxy for other resources owned by individuals who enjoy longer education. Kam and Palmer (2008, 2011), for example, examined political participation, and found that differences in participation among individuals with more versus less years of education are already present at the beginning of higher education. This matters, as higher education is the period that differences in years of education start to disperse, which is often used as a measure of educational attainment (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Fraile, 2013; Grönlund & Milner, 2006). Put differently, even when individuals enjoyed the same number of years of education, differences in political outcomes are present, as a function of the number of years they expect to be in education. In the American context, Verba and colleagues (2003) also identified a role for individuals' parental background for a variety of political outcomes, which nuanced the significance of individuals' own educational experiences. Similarly, across European countries, Gallego (2007) found a consistent role for socioeconomic background factors for different forms of political participation, compared to educational attainment: individuals with particular social backgrounds may be more likely to pursue particular forms of education, and to participate politically. This would explain why a persistent link is found between education and forms of democratic and political engagement. At the same time, besides such proxy or confounding effects, other research indicates that schools can play a role in students' democratic outcomes, through their supply of civic educational practices (Campbell, 2019). In sum, the empirical support for schools' role in students' democratic and civic outcomes is thus far mixed.

Despite the ongoing debate regarding the mechanisms underlying the relation between education and democratic citizenship, these findings have not led to the dismissal of schools as a site for political socialization, broadly for three reasons. First, research emphasizes that change in people's civic outcomes is most likely during (early) adolescence, and that civic outcomes tend to solidify towards adulthood (Hooghe et al., 2015; Russo & Stattin, 2017). This makes secondary or even primary education a more logical period in the lifespan to exert influence on students' civic outcomes. Moreover, little is yet known about the quality of civic educational practices, which hinders evaluation of the role of schooling in general (Campbell, 2019). Relatedly, in some countries, civic educational practices are not well-established or organized yet in schools (Eurydice, 2012, 2017), making it less likely that strong effects will occur. Both reasons form alternative explanations for a lack of effect of schools in the civic domain, leaving the door open for further research. Lastly, there is an important practical consideration to turn to schools: given that education is compulsory in many European countries until at least early adolescence (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2021), schools – and by extension, governments – can reach practically all young citizens via their provided education. For scientists, this motivates further research to untangle to what extent and in what ways schools contribute to students' democratic outcomes.

### **Schools' reproduction of civic educational inequalities**

As laid out in the previous section, both individual citizens as well as states may benefit from civic education: it can enable individuals to exercise their democratic citizenship as one sees fit, for example by voicing their interests, and it can help states to self-perpetuate and to sustain healthy democratic functioning. As such, these interests can thus coincide, although not necessarily. It is possible that individuals' personal convictions or interests do not coincide with what civic education promotes, or that individuals benefit differentially from what civic education offers. This introduces tension for the values and facts that civic education brings forward. One example of such tension concerns the strand of theory where schools' civic or socialization function is to maintain or 'structure' society, stratifying students in a societal hierarchy (Meyer, 1977). One of the founding fathers of sociology of education, Émile Durkheim, put such a perspective forward in his structural functionalist approach. He posited that schools fulfil a socialization function as they imprint shared social values in young citizens, crucial for fostering solidarity in society and maintaining its social order: "Education is then, only, the means by which society prepares, within the children, the essential conditions of its very existence" (Durkheim, 1956, p. 71, translated by Fox). According to Durkheim, education promotes a particular ideal of how a person should be, which applies equally to all citizens, yet "beyond a certain point it becomes differentiated according to the particular milieux that every society contains in its structure" (Durkheim, 1956, p. 70). Parsons (1959) has further elaborated this perspective on education, arguing that schools teach values that order society, pending that societal order is reached in a meritocratic way. Also, before Durkheim and Parsons, in the Netherlands, the idea that education can prepare for different societal and political strata was known; Thorbecke, who is also the founder of the Dutch constitution, envisioned the Dutch education system in such a way that some educational orientations were potentially better fit to prepare for democratic governance than others (Elffers, 2022). These standpoints illustrate the possibility that (civic) education may (un)intentionally promote an order in society and democracy where some citizens may feel better prepared to navigate the democratic system than others, despite equal standing as citizens.

In present day democracy, the equal consideration of citizens' interests is a core democratic principle (Dahl, 2007), and the idea that schools would intentionally reproduce inequalities between citizens in terms of civic learning opportunities is therefore seldomly defended or promoted. Thorbecke's line of reasoning is still relevant, as it sparks reflection on the question whether civic education contributes equally to students' equipment to navigate and participate in democracy and society – as equal citizens. This highlights equality of educational opportunity as a relevant consideration within the civic educational domain. Equality of opportunity can refer to different things, also in the context of civic education. Civic educational equality of opportunity can mean that the supply of civic education is similar for all students; that every student is offered the same civic curriculum, civic learning activities, or the

same topics for discussion in the classroom, for example. However, in elaborating on the meaning of equality of opportunity, some scholars propose that it is not only the supply (or input) that matters, but also the personal and social circumstances that shape whether an individual is enabled to use that supply; ultimately, an opportunity is only real insofar someone can use what is supplied to them to reach their goals. This is a view that scholars attribute to John Rawls (1971, Marrero & Rodríguez, 2012) and to Amartya Sen (1992, Beckley, 2002) – Sen’s capability approach posits that not only the means offered to individuals but also individuals’ circumstances determine whether they have a capability, or a *real opportunity* (Sen, 1992, p. 7), to pursue a personal objective. Robeyns (2006) and Saito (2003) apply the capability approach to education, and highlight that education could thus contribute to the opportunities (or freedoms) that individuals can have. At the same time, they also notice that the capability approach does not prescribe particular outcomes but focuses on individuals’ freedom to choose such outcomes, yet education often involves some prescribing of outcomes (e.g., in terms of knowledge), for particular reasons and with inherent tensions. What I draw from these discussions, is that for the civic educational domain, it introduces the notion that not only schools’ supply of civic education should be considered, but also the available learning opportunities that flow from this supply for different students. While supply of civic education may be equal, whether students use and benefit from this civic educational supply in terms of their democratic outcomes may differ as a function of students’ personal or social circumstances. In this dissertation, I therefore consider both schools’ supply of civic educational practices and students’ experiences with this supply.

Several potential challenges to equality in civic educational learning opportunities in school have been identified for the Netherlands. First, even if schools do not intentionally promote different civic learning opportunities across students (for the Netherlands, see Van Goethem et al., 2022), the Dutch educational system in which civic education is to be realized is structured via different educational tracks, like vocational or general/academic, that prepare for different educational orientations. The education in these tracks likely differs because of the different qualifications and educational routes they prepare for. However, some studies suggest that tracks also correspond with different civic educational experiences for students (e.g., Nieuwelink et al., 2019; Ten Dam & Volman, 2003). Put differently, tracking can associate with inequalities in students’ civic (learning) outcomes too. In addition, for the qualification function of education, the focus often lies on scholastic outcomes like numeracy and literacy, and research shows persistent social inequalities in reading or math performance (e.g., Jehangir et al., 2015; Lafontaine et al., 2015; Martins & Veiga, 2010), which can indicate unequal learning opportunities regarding qualification. Little is yet known about how inequalities regarding qualification relate to inequalities regarding citizenship. The possibility exists that inequalities in learning opportunities for both domains overlap, which signals an accumulation of educational inequalities. This motivates to research both educational functions conjunctly. Lastly, besides tracking, education systems also differ in terms

of standardization; the extent to which governments construct standards in education that entail the same level of educational quality for all students (Allmendinger, 1989). In the Netherlands, standardization is low for civic education: school autonomy is historically embedded in the Netherlands, also regarding schools' freedom to design their civic education (Dijkstra et al., 2021). This means that central steering is limited, and that civic educational learning opportunities for students may differ not only between tracks, but also schools.

### **Dissertation outline**

In the following chapters, I describe the empirical research that I conducted to answer the research question of this dissertation. For all chapters that present empirical analyses, I used data from the 2016 wave of the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (abbreviated ICCS), administered by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA, 2018). This survey study was conducted in 24 countries worldwide, among which is the Netherlands (Schulz et al., 2018a). Major strengths of the ICCS data are its quality in terms of national representativity and international comparability (Köhler et al., 2018; Schulz et al., 2018a). Moreover, by including both student, teacher and principal data, the ICCS data allows including different stakeholder perspectives in the studies. This multi-perspectivity of the ICCS data is a major advantage: I can investigate what schools supply in terms of civic education (from the perspective of teachers and principals), and how students perceive and experience the opportunities that flow from this supply. Students' perspectives and experiences have a central position in each of the empirical studies, yet, I can contextualize them by schools' intentions and efforts, through the ICCS teacher and principal data. For cross-sectional data like ICCS, these different sources are also an advantage in terms of endogeneity risks (Antonakis et al., 2014, p. 105). Another advantage of the ICCS data is the fact that it contains data from a variety of countries, which allows me to research the Netherlands in a comparative view. Given that educational systems are designed at the country level, the ability to compare different country contexts is important. In contextualizing civic learning opportunities, I consider not only what happens within schools, but also the characteristics of the educational systems in which these schools are embedded.

Table 1.1 summarizes each empirical chapter's research question and research design. In *Chapter 2*, I contextualize civic learning opportunities by considering another vital function of education; qualification, i.e. preparing students for the labor market. In this chapter, I rely on the Dutch subsample of ICCS 2016 and combine this with data from the Dutch Inspectorate of Education and Statistics Netherlands. Combining these sources of data allowed me to examine to what extent schools' qualification and civic outcomes relate, and thus, whether inequalities in both educational domains may overlap. I study to what extent schools' student composition in terms of socioeconomic resources and vocational versus academic tracking play a role in the relation between schools' civic and qualification outcomes.

The chapter demonstrates that a focus on civic outcomes of students tells little about schools' supply of civic learning opportunities. Results show an important role for socioeconomic resources of schools' student composition for schools' average civic outcomes, but the supply of schools in terms of civic educational practices is not considered in this study. This motivates a closer examination of schools' realization of civic learning opportunities for students, and its role in civic educational inequalities.

Therefore, in *Chapter 3*, I examine several democratic outcomes of students in relation to civic educational learning opportunities, where I distinguish between equality in schools' supply, in students' participation in this supply and the extent to which students equally benefit from this supply. I draw from Dewey's (1899) theory on schools as a *miniature community*, or a *mini polity* (Flanagan, 2020), meaning that schools serve as place where democracy can be practiced: in school, students can familiarize themselves with the ways in which democratic processes consider their opinions and interests, as well as others'. In this chapter, I focus on schools' supply of democratic activities and students' participation in them (Keating & Janmaat, 2016; Mager & Nowak, 2012; Maurissen, 2020; Torney-Purta, 2002). I do so by means of student and principal data from a selection of European countries that participated in ICCS 2016.

In *Chapter 4*, I focus on another civic learning opportunity that is linked to a variety of civic outcomes; an open classroom climate for discussions (e.g., Alivernini & Manganelli, 2011; Blankenship, 1990; Campbell, 2008; Dassonneville et al., 2012; Gainous & Martens, 2012; Gniewosz & Noack, 2008; Godfrey & Grayman, 2014; Isac et al., 2014; Knowles & McCafferty-Wright, 2015; Martens & Gainous, 2013; Persson, 2015). In this chapter, I examine students' differential experiences of openness in classroom discussions, as a function of expected educational attainment and socioeconomic background. I focus on two kind of factors that could account for such differences; on the one hand, selection factors (like students' interest in political topics and discussion about these), and on the other hand, school factors, like school type (i.e., tracks), school resources (i.e., teacher training) and school climate (i.e., social belonging among staff and students). I test the relative importance of each of these factors, using the Dutch 2016 ICCS sample, with student, teacher and principal data.

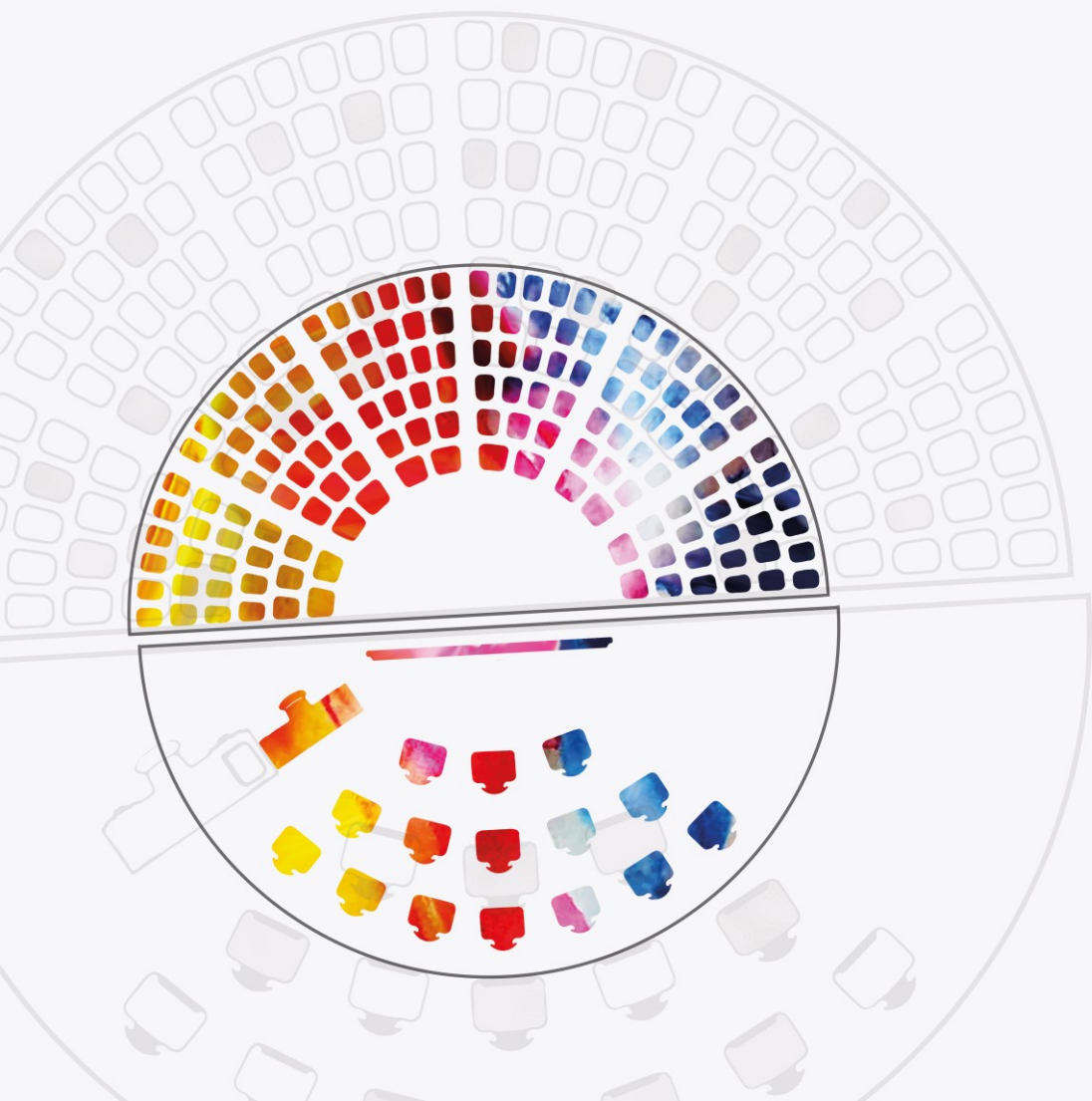
In *Chapter 5*, I adopt a broader lens, considering also the governance context in which civic learning opportunities are embedded. In this chapter, I examine inequalities in students' civic learning at school, focusing on the significance of curricular standardization, via schools' use of standardized curricular sources, as well as via countries' centralized educational governance. Previous research links forms of educational standardization to smaller inequalities in students' civic outcomes (e.g., Janmaat & Mons, 2011; Van de Werfhorst & Mijs, 2010; Witschge & Van de Werfhorst, 2016). Therefore, in this chapter, I examine standardization as a characteristic of education systems (Bol & Van de Werfhorst, 2016; Horn, 2009), specifically standardized civic curricula as well as the role of centralized educational

governance. Schools' civic educational supply can be shaped by countries' level of standardization, as centrally imposed standards may leave less room for differences between schools and thus between students in terms of the education they receive (Horn, 2009). In order to investigate these educational system and governance characteristics in relation to inequalities in civic learning, I compare countries within the European Union, using student, teacher and principal data from fourteen European countries that participated in ICCS 2016.

Lastly, in *Chapter 6*, I summarize all empirical findings and answer the research question central to this dissertation. I then reflect on both the limitations and contributions of my findings, which has resulted in a number of recommendations for future research. In addition, I discuss implications of my findings for educational practitioners and policymakers concerned with inequalities in education for democracy.

Table 1.1. *Outline of research design of each empirical chapter*

Chapter	Research topic	Data	Analysis
2	To what extent are qualification and civic outcomes related at the school level, and to what extent are outcomes in both domains explained by schools' student composition and tracking?	Student data of the Dutch ICCS 2016 sample, aggregated to the school level; school data from the Dutch Inspectorate of Education, 2016; Statistics Netherlands Microdata, 2016.	Multivariate Multiple Regression (MMR) analyses on six qualification and civic outcomes.
3	What is the role of schools' supply of democratic activities and students' participation in these activities for students' democratic outcomes, and to what extent do these activities mitigate or reinforce potential inequalities in students' democratic outcomes?	Student and principal data from fifteen European countries in the ICCS 2016 sample.	Multilevel path analyses at the student and school level with country fixed effects.
4	To what extent are students' and schools' average experiences of openness in classroom discussions stratified by students' educational attainment or socioeconomic status, and to what extent can such differences be explained by school factors?	Student, teacher and principal data from the Dutch sample of ICCS 2016.	Multilevel linear regression analyses and path analyses at the student and school level.
5	To what extent are civic learning experiences of students in school stratified by educational attainment and socioeconomic status, and to what extent does curricular standardization moderate this relation, across more and less centralized education systems?	Student, teacher and principal data from fourteen European countries in the ICCS 2016 sample; policy data (OECD, 2016a; Eurydice, 2017).	Multilevel linear regression analyses at the student and school level, with school level random effects and country fixed effects.





# Chapter 2

## **Are schools' qualification and civic outcomes related? The role of schools' student composition and tracking**

This chapter is based on Mennes, H. I., Van de Werfhorst, H. G., Dijkstra, A. B., & Munniksmma, A. (2022). Are schools' qualification and civic outcomes related? The role of schools' student composition and tracking. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, doi: 10.1177/17461979221084109

### **Abstract**

In preparing generations for the future, schools fulfill a qualification and a civic task: providing youngsters knowledge and skills for the labor market, and equipping them to navigate democracy and society. Little research has considered how schools combine these tasks, particularly in relation to schools' student composition in terms of socioeconomic (dis)advantages across vocational and academic tracks, the focus of this study. By means of a unique, combined dataset, qualification and civic outcome indicators of 101 Dutch secondary schools were examined. Results showed that schools' qualification and civic outcomes were more positively related in academic than in vocational tracks, possibly informed by schools' student composition: the role of student composition was stronger in academic than vocational tracks for both qualification and civic outcomes. This is discussed in relation to schools' role in mitigating versus reproducing societal inequalities.

Keywords: qualification, citizenship, educational tasks, student composition, tracking

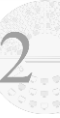
## Introduction

In preparing generations for the future, schools fulfill multiple educational tasks. Schools have a qualification task, which concerns teaching youngsters skills that prepare for further education or the labor market. Fulfilment of this task can refer to students' successful transfer to the next grade, for example, or to students' scores on central exams that are necessary for degree obtainment. Additionally, schools' civic task refers to their role in providing youngsters with opportunities to become equipped for participation in democracy and society in general (Van de Werfhorst, 2014). This can concern students' knowledge of democracy, or their intentions and sense of efficacy for democratic participation. Moreover, schools can form an emancipatory vehicle for equal opportunities and for optimizing selection relative to youngsters' preferences and talents (Van de Werfhorst, 2014).

Schools' fulfilment of their qualification and civic task can foster individuals' and societies' prospects. Qualification relates to individuals' economic security and prosperity (Krueger & Lindahl, 2001), while civic outcomes concern individuals' democratic representation and political efficacy later in life (Bovens & Wille, 2010; Jennings & Niemi, 2015). Moreover, at a societal level, schools' fulfilment of both tasks respectively matters for economic growth and national welfare (e.g., Owens, 2004; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2004) and democratic stability and legitimacy (e.g., Papaioannou & Siourounis, 2008). While a great body of research addresses what schools can do to fulfill the qualification task well (e.g., Hattie, 2008; Marzano, 2003) and while research on fulfilment of schools' civic task is gradually increasing (Campbell, 2019; Isac et al., 2014), there is less attention for the fact that schools have to combine these two tasks (Van de Werfhorst, 2014).

This calls for attention. It leaves unaddressed whether schools face a potential trade-off between both tasks in terms of the teaching resources they can allocate to each. If these two tasks are hard to combine, i.e. are negatively related, fulfilment of one corresponds with less teaching resources left for the other, affecting students' learning opportunities in either of both domains. Moreover, learning in schools can be stratified by students' background, both for qualification education and civic education (e.g., Hoskins et al., 2017; Sirin, 2005). When both tasks combine well for schools, i.e. are positively related, students' qualification prospects may correspond with the quality of their preparation to navigate democracy, and as such, schools may reproduce not only economic/occupational but also political hierarchies. Only by researching schools' fulfilment of both tasks at once, can such scenarios be examined.

This underscores the need for insight in the relation between schools' fulfilment of both tasks, that is whether both relate in a positive or negative direction. It could be expected that schools' fulfilment of their qualification task corresponds positively with their fulfilment of the civic task, possibly because both domains are not as strongly demarcated, and schools' investments in students' learning experiences in one domain may strengthen or spill over to the other domain (Biesta, 2010). If schools invest in students' literacy, for example, this may benefit students'



civic outcomes too, as some argue that civic processes contain a strong linguistic component (Eidhof et al., 2017). The few studies on the relation between schools' qualification and civic outcomes show mixed findings, even when including outcomes related to but different from qualification or civic outcomes: most suggest a positive relation (e.g., Dronkers & Warnaar, 1999; Eidhof et al., 2017), yet other studies suggest a negative relation that resonates more with a trade-off relation between both tasks (e.g., Hofman et al., 1999; Pollock & Winton, 2012), and others find no relation between both types of outcomes (e.g., Gray, 2004; Van der Wal & Waslander, 2008). Given these findings, we expect the relation to be positive, yet the inconsistencies motivate further research on the relation between schools' qualification and civic outcomes.

To do this well, we also reflect on factors that inform schools' qualification and civic outcomes and thus potentially shape the relation between both. Two such factors stand out. First, schools' fulfilment of both tasks is likely entangled with the relative socioeconomic (dis)advantage of schools' student compositions (Pacheco & Plutzer, 2008; Perry & McConney, 2010). Second, schools' provision of education in both domains differs between vocational and academic tracks (e.g., Brunello & Checchi, 2007; Nieuwelink et al., 2019), especially in strongly tracked educational systems. Drawing from theory on tracking in each separate domain, a broader understanding can be achieved of the role of tracking for schools' fulfilment of both tasks: whether the differences in education between tracks allow for an easier combining of both tasks in academic versus vocational tracks or vice versa. In addition, by considering both the role of schools' student composition and tracking, we can assess whether the role of student composition for qualification and civic outcomes differs between tracks. As these relations are positioned at the school level, we focus our research on this level. In sum, our research questions are (1) to what extent are qualification and civic outcomes related at the school level, and (2) to what extent are outcomes in both domains explained by schools' student composition and tracking?

This study focuses on the Netherlands. The Dutch educational system is highly stratified and characterized by early tracking (OECD, 2016b), meaning that students are assigned to different educational tracks already at 11–12 years of age. Students receive advice regarding a track orientation by the end of primary school, informed by standardized test assessments and teachers' observations. Students enter a (preliminary) track orientation in the first year of secondary education. Some schools offer only one track orientation, while others offer multiple tracks, yet less often within the same classroom. As such, the education students receive is tied to the track they pursue, already during lower secondary education. In the Netherlands, a relation has been found between the relative (dis)advantage in schools' student compositions and educational tracks (Van de Werfhorst et al., 2015). Moreover, the Dutch government has further formalized schools' civic task within its stratified, tracked educational system. This formal establishment of schools' civic task resonates with trends across Europe (Eurydice, 2012, 2017). This makes the

Netherlands exemplary for examining the relation between both domains, and to examine the role of two factors for these domains: schools' student composition and tracking.

### **The role of schools' student composition**

Schools' student composition refers to ways in which students bring the (in)direct effects of parental economic, social, or cultural capital to school, which relates to their learning outcomes. Regarding qualification, students' parental resources can affect their achievements, and this likely translates into a positive relation between schools' student composition and schools' qualification outcomes once aggregated. A well-established link has been found between students' scholastic outcomes and their socioeconomic background (Sirin, 2005; White, 1982) like parental education (Tieben & Wolbers, 2010). Moreover, researchers have identified peer effects, showing that schools' socioeconomic student composition positively impacts the average level of achievement in schools, while controlling for individual socioeconomic resources (Perry & McConney, 2010; Van Ewijk & Slegers, 2010).

Parental capital can play a similar role in the civic domain. Students' socioeconomic status has been linked to resources that are relevant for democratic forms of citizenship (Brady et al., 1995; Pacheco & Plutzer, 2008). Parents foster children's civic knowledge, engagement, or efficacy through political socialization (Jennings et al., 2009). Previous research identified relations between parental education and students' political knowledge (McIntosh et al., 2007) or voting intentions (Munniksmas et al., 2017). Hence it can be expected that an advantaged student composition informs schools' (aggregated) outcomes, both in the qualification and the civic domain.

### **The role of tracking**

In addition to schools' student composition, tracking potentially shapes the relation between schools' qualification and civic outcomes. Tracking means that schools are organized into different educational tracks: students are generally placed in one track type, leading to a particular form of qualification that could be broadly categorized as either vocational or academic. For schools' qualification and civic outcomes, tracking is relevant to consider as differences between tracks have previously been found. For qualification outcomes, it is known that achievement inequality between tracks is greater in highly stratified educational systems (Pfeffer, 2008; Schütz et al., 2008; Van de Werfhorst & Mijs, 2010). Regarding the civic domain, previous research has shown that students in academic tracks (vs their vocational peers) score higher on democratic knowledge (Maslowski et al., 2010; Munniksmas et al., 2017), report more democratic behavior (Netjes et al., 2011), and express stronger intentions to participate in democracy (Kranendonk et al., 2019).

Differences between tracks in terms of qualification and civic outcomes could be attributed to the kind of qualification and civic education that is provided in each track. Vocational secondary education generally leads to different qualifications



than academic secondary education in terms of the kind of higher education students can pursue, also in the Netherlands (Brockmann et al., 2008). Moreover, in some countries, teaching resources may be greater in academic than vocational schools (Brunello & Checchi, 2007), and teachers in academic tracks may on average have higher expectations, which can affect students' qualification outcomes (Stevens & Vermeersch, 2010). For civic outcomes, studies suggest that the experienced frequency and kind of civic education differs between academic and vocational tracks (Leenders et al., 2008; Nieuwelink et al., 2019; Ten Dam & Volman, 2003).

Additionally, differences between tracks in qualification and civic outcomes could be attributed to relatively disadvantaged student compositions in vocational versus academic tracks (a selection effect). Social background is an important determinant for students' placement in tracks (Brunello & Checchi, 2007). In the Netherlands, for example, research shows that advantaged student compositions are overrepresented in academic (compared to vocational) tracks (Van de Werfhorst et al., 2015). Relating this selection-effect to schools' qualification and civic outcomes, it is likely that schools' student composition explains the positive difference between vocational and academic tracks in both qualification and civic outcomes of schools.

This relation between student composition and tracking can be further examined, by considering whether they interact. Several studies have examined whether the role of students' background advantage was stronger or weaker across tracks. Regarding qualification, for example, Brunello and Checchi (2007) found that the role of family background was smaller in vocational as opposed to academic tracks. They attributed this to more effective curricula in terms of preparation for future training in vocational tracks. Regarding civic outcomes, research by Nieuwelink et al. (2019) suggests that learning opportunities on democratic citizenship were more commonly experienced in academic than vocational education. Also, studies show that some civic learning opportunities may enforce the role of family background, as privileged students may be more likely to engage in youth councils or other democratic activities (Matthews, 2001). If civic learning opportunities are more likely offered in academic than vocational education, and if participation in these opportunities is informed by family background, then the impact of student composition on civic outcomes may be greater in academic versus vocational tracks.

The aforementioned studies provided insight in the role of student composition and tracking in schools' qualification and civic outcomes and the relation between both. As student composition was found to be positively related to both qualification and civic outcomes of schools, this may correspond to a positive relation between schools' qualification and civic outcomes. Moreover, if this role of student composition is greater in academic compared to vocational tracks, the relation between qualification and civic outcomes of schools may also be more positive in academic than vocational tracks: the potentially confounding role of student composition, positively associated with both qualification and civic outcomes

of schools, will then be greater in academic tracks. Together, this has resulted in the following hypotheses:

- H1* Schools' qualification and civic outcomes are positively related at the school level.
- H2* Schools' qualification and civic outcomes are more positively related in academic than vocational tracks.
- H3* Student composition advantage is positively related with schools' qualification and civic outcomes.
- H4* Student composition advantage explains the positive difference between vocational and academic tracks in schools' qualification and civic outcomes (selection effect).
- H5* The relation between student composition advantage and schools' qualification and civic outcomes is stronger in academic compared to vocational tracks.

## Methods

### Data

School-level data from multiple sources was combined. Firstly, civic outcomes were measured using the Dutch sample of the 2016 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study, abbreviated ICCS (Munniksmas et al., 2017; Schulz et al., 2018a). This survey measures youngsters' knowledge, attitudes and skills regarding a variety of civic and political issues (Schulz et al., 2018a). The sample in each participating country was determined using two-staged clustering, where schools were selected based on a proportional to size probability, after which a classroom of students was randomly selected within each school (Schulz et al., 2018a). For the Netherlands, data was gathered between February and April 2016, which resulted in a representative sample of 2812 students in the second year of secondary education (equivalent to eighth grade, average age = 14), from 123 classrooms in 123 Dutch secondary schools (Munniksmas et al., 2017). In this study, all individual data was aggregated to the level of tracks within schools, based on an average of 24 students per classroom ( $SD = 5$ ). Following Köhler et al. (2018), school-level weighting was applied to correct for sampling deviations.

Secondly, qualification outcomes were measured through 2016 data of the Dutch Inspectorate of Education (IoE), which contains multiple performance indicators for Dutch secondary schools (Dutch Inspectorate of Education, 2017). The IoE data contains indicators of all Dutch schools regarding students' success, distinguishing between tracks. Third, data from Statistics Netherlands (SN, the Dutch national statistical office, 2020) was added to assess schools' student composition in terms of socioeconomic (dis)advantages. Students who were enrolled in the 2015–2016 year in either a vocational or academic track of the participating ICCS schools were included and information on their background was aggregated to the level of track within schools. The three datasets were combined via two-step, anonymous



linking. Not all of the initial 123 ICCS schools could be matched to both IoE and SN data, hence the final dataset contains a total of 101 schools, of which 53 represent vocational education and 48 academic education.

## Variables

### *Dependent variables*

*Qualification outcomes.* Three indicators for qualification performance were used from the Dutch Inspectorate of Education, concerning the school year 2015–2016. For each school, the percentage of students who successfully transferred to the next grade was included, both for schools' lower and upper secondary education grades. These percentages depend on students' achievements on core subjects like languages and mathematics. Thirdly, schools' average central exam grade (for each track) was included. In the final year of Dutch secondary education, students in every track take separate nationally standardized exams which allows for comparison between schools, within tracks. These three indicators are among the key indicators of school quality for the Dutch Inspectorate of Education. Following an exploratory factor analysis, there was minimal support for one dimension of qualification school performance based on these three indicators, nor were the indicators strongly related (for all three combinations,  $r \leq 0.23$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This signals that the three indicators represent different aspects of qualification outcomes, and were hence included separately.

*Civic outcomes.* Schools' civic outcomes were measured based on three indicators for democratic citizenship, all from ICCS 2016. Following previous conceptualizations of citizenship (Munniksma et al., 2017; Schulz et al., 2018a), the selected indicators focus on knowledge regarding democracy and citizenship, (intended) democratic behavior, and reflection (on self-efficacy). Firstly, regarding civic knowledge, students were asked 87 adjudicated multiple-choice questions regarding democracy and civil society. Following item response theory, students' answers on these questions resulted in five estimate scores that indicated students' civic knowledge (Köhler et al., 2018), of which an average was used in the current study ( $\alpha = .98$ ). After aggregation to the school level, a higher score indicates a higher average civic knowledge score among schools' students.

Secondly, intended democratic participation was measured by three questions. Students were asked whether, as an adult, (s)he thinks (s)he will vote in both local and national elections, and whether s(he) will get information about candidates before voting in an election. For each of these three activities, students chose between 'I would certainly not do this', 'I would probably not do this', 'I would probably do this', and 'I would certainly do this'. Item response theory with weighted likelihood estimates resulted in one scale (Köhler et al., 2018), with a high reliability in the Dutch sample,  $\alpha = .83$  (Munniksma et al., 2017). After aggregation to the school level, a higher score indicates stronger average intentions for democratic participation among schools' students.



Thirdly, regarding civic self-efficacy, students were asked to indicate how well they thought they would do on several activities, like 'organize a group of students in order to achieve changes at school', or 'stand as a candidate in a school election'. Students answered by choosing between 'not at all', 'not very well', 'fairly well', and 'very well'. Item response theory with weighted likelihood estimates resulted in one scale (Köhler et al., 2018), also with a high reliability in the Dutch sample,  $\alpha = .84$  (Munniksma et al., 2017). After aggregation to the school level, a higher score indicates a stronger average sense of civic efficacy among the schools' students.

### *Independent variables*

*Student composition: average parental education.* Schools' average parental education was calculated using data from Statistics Netherlands. For each student, the highest educational attainment level of both parents was selected. In case of missing data for one parent, the educational attainment level of the other parent was used. Statistics Netherlands provides 18 categories to capture all levels of the Dutch educational system, ranging from no primary education (recoded as 1) to doctorate's degree (recoded as 18). For each school, the average (highest) parental education level was calculated, where a higher value indicates a higher average education level. Initially, schools' student composition in terms of average household income was also included (using data from Statistics Netherlands, measured via households categorizations as percentile groups in terms of their disposable income). However, given multicollinearity concerns relative to average parental education ( $VIF > 9$ ), household income was excluded from the analyses.

*Student composition: household social benefits support.* Schools' average household social benefits support was measured using data from Statistics Netherlands. This was included as the negative effects of, for example, parental job loss on students' achievements are not entirely captured by factors like household income (e.g., Stevens & Schaller, 2011). For each household, social benefits dependency has been expressed as a percentage of the full household income. For each school, this resulted in an average percentage of household social benefits support, where a higher value indicates a higher average support in the school's student composition.

*Student composition: proportion of students with a migration background.* Schools' proportion of students with a migration background was included as a control variable, using data from Statistics Netherlands. We include migration background as previous research has shown that it can impact students' qualification outcomes while controlling for socioeconomic factors (Heath & Brinbaum, 2014), and that it has been linked to differences in political knowledge (Abendschön & Tausendpfund, 2017), civic attitudes and intentions, for example regarding voting intentions (Munniksma et al., 2017), or societal interest (Geboers et al., 2015). Given these findings, we include the proportion of students with a migration background as a control variable, to assess the role of the other student composition variables well.



Following SN's guidelines, a student who is born abroad, or born in the Netherlands with at least one parent who has been born abroad, is considered to have a migration background. For each school, this resulted in a proportion of students with a migration background, where a higher value indicates a greater proportion.

*Tracks.* Schools were categorized as either vocational or academic, in line with the track that students in the ICCS 2016 sample pursued. In the Dutch education system, secondary schools offer education in one or more tracks. Students start in a track in the first year of secondary education, and often classrooms are formed on the basis of tracks, particularly in later years of secondary education. Therefore, as the ICCS 2016 sample in each school concerned one classroom, the track in each school was often homogenous. Vocational track types were coded 0 versus academic track types coded 1. ICCS classrooms with mixed tracks (i.e. students who pursue vocational or academic education in the same classroom) were excluded from the study, due to the low number ( $n = 4$ ). Descriptive statistics of all variables are included in Appendix 2.1.

## Analysis

In order to test the hypotheses, two steps of analysis were conducted. The relations between the qualification and civic indicators were analyzed through Pearson's bivariate correlations. Secondly, to examine the role of student composition and tracking, Multivariate Multiple Regression (MMR) analyses were conducted with the three qualification and three civic indicators as dependent variables, using Stata 16. The primary reasons to opt for MMR instead of six separate multiple regression analyses is to control for correlated residuals of the dependent variables, to reduce the risk of an inflated alpha-level given multiple analyses, and to assess the relative contribution of multiple independent variables on all dependent variables (Dattalo, 2013). The suitability of MMR was tested via Pillai's trace which supported the use of a MMR analysis. Given concerns regarding some statistical assumptions, robust standard errors were used in the MMR, via Kolev's SUREGR module (2021). Checking the role of three outlier cases by excluding them from the MMR results, conclusions regarding the hypotheses remained the same. All independent continuous variables in the MMR analyses were z-standardized. In order to ensure the generalizability of the ICCS classrooms' variables to all students in that schools' similar track, correlations between ICCS and SN variables on comparable student composition factors were checked. Results showed strong, positive correlations between ICCS and SN variables (relevant bivariate correlations, at least  $\geq .69$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and generalizability was hence supported.

## Results

Bivariate correlations between schools' qualification and civic outcomes were conducted to test Hypothesis 1, concerning the expected positive relation between schools' qualification and civic outcomes (also reported in Appendix 2.2). Considering all schools, some qualification and civic indicators are significantly

Table 2.1. *Bivariate Pearson correlation matrix between qualification and civic outcomes of schools with vocational versus academic tracks*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Successful transfer early grades		-0.02	-0.04	-0.00	-0.04	0.05
2. Successful transfer later grades	0.30*		0.50***	-0.05	0.15	0.36*
3. Central exam grade	0.04	0.19		0.43**	0.46***	0.47***
4. Civic efficacy	-0.18	-0.07	0.05		0.70***	0.47***
5. Intended democratic participation	-0.02	-0.19	0.22	0.20		0.84***
6. Civic knowledge	0.09	-0.12	0.32*	-0.29*	0.60***	

Source: ICCS (2016), IoE (2017), SN (2020). Data are weighted.

Correlations below the diagonal concern vocational tracks ( $n = 53$ ), above the diagonal concern academic tracks ( $n = 48$ ). \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

related, yet both in positive and negative directions. Schools' average percentage of successful transfers in early grades is negatively related to schools' average intended democratic participation ( $r = -.20$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and schools' average percentage of successful transfers in later grades is negatively related to their average intended democratic participation ( $r = -.32$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and their average civic knowledge score ( $r = -.32$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In contrast, schools' average central exam grade is positively related to average civic efficacy ( $r = .21$ ,  $p < .05$ ), intended democratic participation ( $r = .36$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and civic knowledge ( $r = .35$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This leaves Hypothesis 1 partly supported: depending on the indicators, schools' qualification and civic outcomes are both negatively and positively related.

Table 2.1 shows the bivariate correlations between qualification and civic outcomes for vocational and academic tracks, to test Hypothesis 2; that the relations between schools' qualification and civic outcomes are on average more positive in academic compared to vocational tracks. In vocational tracks, only average central exam grade is positively related to average civic knowledge. In contrast, in academic tracks, the average percentage of successful transfers in later grades is positively related to average civic knowledge, and average central exam grade is positively related to average civic efficacy, intended democratic participation and civic knowledge. When distinguishing between tracks, all significant relations between schools' qualification and civic outcomes are positive, and more so in academic than vocational tracks. This supports Hypothesis 2. Subsequently, the difference in the correlations when considering all schools versus either vocational or academic tracks motivates to examine the role of student composition and tracking.

Table 2.2 displays the MMR results. To test Hypothesis 3, that student composition advantage positively associates with schools' qualification and civic outcomes, Model 1 contains the main effects of all student composition factors. The coefficients of determination display great variety among the six outcome variables: inclusion of the indicators in Model 1 explains little to moderate parts of the variance in schools' qualification outcomes, yet moderate to much of the variance in schools'



Table 2.2. *Multivariate multiple regression models predicting qualification and civic outcomes of schools*

	Successful transfer early grades					Successful transfer later grades					Central exam grade				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Parental education	-0.71*** (0.14)	-0.43** (0.15)	-0.51*** (0.15)	-0.47*** (0.14)	-0.46*** (0.14)	-0.56* (0.22)	-0.26 (0.38)	-0.93* (0.42)	-0.35 (0.39)	-0.29 (0.38)	0.35* (0.17)	0.57*** (0.21)	-0.09 (0.18)	0.44* (0.19)	0.54* (0.21)
Household social benefits support	-0.96*** (0.23)	-0.94*** (0.23)	-0.97*** (0.21)	-0.96*** (0.22)	-1.02*** (0.22)	-0.44 (0.29)	-0.42 (0.33)	-0.67* (0.30)	-0.46 (0.33)	-0.50 (0.34)	-0.17 (0.21)	-0.15 (0.22)	-0.39* (0.20)	-0.21 (0.20)	-0.21 (0.22)
Proportion migration background	0.09 (0.18)	0.17 (0.16)	0.18 (0.15)	0.21 (0.15)	0.30* (0.15)	0.10 (0.19)	0.18 (0.16)	0.28 (0.15)	0.27 (0.18)	0.31 (0.18)	0.23 (0.15)	0.29* (0.15)	0.38** (0.13)	0.42** (0.15)	0.39* (0.15)
Track (reference = vocational)	-0.68*** (0.20)	-0.69*** (0.20)	-0.69*** (0.19)	-0.70*** (0.19)	-0.69*** (0.19)	-0.71 (0.36)	-0.78** (0.27)	-0.76* (0.34)	-0.72* (0.35)	-0.72* (0.35)	-0.52* (0.23)	-0.52* (0.23)	-0.59** (0.20)	-0.60** (0.21)	-0.54* (0.22)
Track * parental education			0.13 (0.20)				1.08*** (0.32)						1.06*** (0.18)		
Track * social benefits support				-0.15 (0.20)					-0.32* (0.14)					-0.50*** (0.11)	
Track * proportion migration background					-0.19 (0.15)					-0.18 (0.10)					-0.16 (0.11)
Constant	-0.00 (0.09)	0.29*** (0.08)	0.25** (0.09)	0.27*** (0.08)	0.30*** (0.08)	0.02 (0.09)	0.33 (0.21)	0.02 (0.22)	0.29 (0.21)	0.33 (0.20)	-0.10 (0.09)	0.13 (0.14)	-0.18 (0.12)	0.08 (0.14)	0.13 (0.14)
R <sup>2</sup>	.30	.34	.34	.34	.34	.15	.23	.41	.25	.24	.17	.20	.35	.25	.21

Continuation of Table 2.2

	Civic efficacy					Intended democratic participation					Civic knowledge				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Parental education	0.15 (0.16)	0.40 <sup>*</sup> (0.19)	-0.14 (0.32)	0.21 (0.21)	0.33 (0.18)	0.73 <sup>***</sup> (0.09)	0.49 <sup>***</sup> (0.12)	0.24 (0.21)	0.38 <sup>**</sup> (0.13)	0.45 <sup>***</sup> (0.12)	0.82 <sup>***</sup> (0.11)	0.39 <sup>***</sup> (0.08)	0.33 <sup>***</sup> (0.10)	0.34 <sup>***</sup> (0.08)	0.38 <sup>***</sup> (0.08)
Household social benefits support	-0.18 (0.24)	-0.16 (0.22)	-0.36 (0.27)	-0.25 (0.24)	-0.37 (0.25)	-0.14 (0.12)	-0.16 (0.13)	-0.25 (0.15)	-0.21 (0.13)	-0.27 <sup>*</sup> (0.13)	-0.06 (0.15)	-0.09 (0.11)	-0.11 (0.10)	-0.11 (0.10)	-0.13 (0.11)
Proportion migration background	0.54 <sup>**</sup> (0.19)	0.61 <sup>***</sup> (0.16)	0.69 <sup>***</sup> (0.16)	0.81 <sup>***</sup> (0.16)	0.95 <sup>***</sup> (0.18)	0.30 <sup>***</sup> (0.08)	0.23 <sup>**</sup> (0.09)	0.27 <sup>**</sup> (0.08)	0.35 <sup>***</sup> (0.09)	0.41 <sup>***</sup> (0.11)	0.18 (0.10)	0.06 (0.07)	0.07 (0.07)	0.11 (0.07)	0.14 (0.09)
Track (reference = vocational)		-0.60 <sup>**</sup> (0.22)	-0.66 <sup>**</sup> (0.23)	-0.71 <sup>***</sup> (0.20)	-0.64 <sup>**</sup> (0.20)	0.56 <sup>***</sup> (0.15)	0.54 <sup>***</sup> (0.16)	0.54 <sup>***</sup> (0.16)	0.50 <sup>***</sup> (0.15)	0.54 <sup>***</sup> (0.15)	1.01 <sup>***</sup> (0.11)	1.01 <sup>***</sup> (0.11)	1.01 <sup>***</sup> (0.10)	0.99 <sup>***</sup> (0.10)	1.01 <sup>***</sup> (0.10)
Track * parental education			0.89 <sup>***</sup> (0.24)				0.40 <sup>*</sup> (0.17)					0.11 (0.09)			
Track * household social benefits support				-0.75 <sup>***</sup> (0.14)					-0.44 <sup>***</sup> (0.08)					-0.20 <sup>***</sup> (0.06)	
Track * proportion migration background					-0.51 <sup>***</sup> (0.10)					-0.27 <sup>***</sup> (0.07)					-0.11 <sup>*</sup> (0.05)
Constant	-0.04 (0.09)	0.22 (0.12)	-0.04 (0.17)	0.14 (0.13)	0.23 <sup>*</sup> (0.12)	-0.01 (0.06)	-0.26 <sup>**</sup> (0.08)	-0.37 <sup>**</sup> (0.12)	-0.30 <sup>***</sup> (0.09)	-0.25 <sup>**</sup> (0.09)	-0.05 (0.06)	-0.49 <sup>***</sup> (0.07)	-0.52 <sup>***</sup> (0.06)	-0.51 <sup>***</sup> (0.06)	-0.48 <sup>***</sup> (0.06)
R <sup>2</sup>	.22	.26	.35	.36	.34	.58	.63	.65	.67	.66	.64	.78	.78	.79	.78

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ,  $n = 101$  in all models. All continuous variables (including outcome variables) were z-standardized. Source: ICSS 2016, IoE 2017, SN 2020. Data are weighted.



civic outcomes. Hence, schools' civic outcomes are somewhat better explained by student composition than schools' qualification outcomes, yet for all outcomes student composition plays a role.

Regarding schools' qualification outcomes, parental education and (household) social benefits support yield significant results in Model 1. Unexpectedly, a student composition with a relatively high average parental education predicts lower percentages of successful transfer in both early and later grades. This is not in line with Hypothesis 3. However, expectedly, a student composition with a relatively high average parental education predicts a higher central exam grade. Also as expected, schools with a relatively high percentage of students from households that receive social benefits are more likely to have a lower percentage of students who successfully transfer in early grades. This supports Hypothesis 3. Turning to schools' civic outcomes, highest parental education yielded positive outcomes in intended democratic participation and civic knowledge; schools where parental education is relatively high, are more likely to have stronger average intended democratic participation and higher average civic knowledge outcomes. Household social benefits support yielded no significant results for schools' civic outcomes. In Model 1, we also controlled for the proportion of students with a migration background, and in schools with a higher proportion of students with a migration background, the average reported civic efficacy and participation was higher (*et ceteris paribus*). Together, Hypothesis 3 is partly supported by these results: a relatively advantaged student composition in terms of socioeconomic indicators is positively related to primarily schools' civic outcomes, and inconsistently to qualification outcomes.

In Model 2, the distinction between vocational and academic tracks is added to test Hypothesis 4, that the impact of student composition advantage explains the positive difference between vocational and academic tracks in both qualification and civic outcomes of schools. Adding tracks to the model leads to an increase of 3%–14% points of explained variance in each outcome, which suggests that differences between vocational and academic tracks cannot be fully attributed to a selection effect in terms of student composition. A closer examination of tracks' main effects confirms this. With the exception of Model 2 for successful transfer to later grades, for all qualification indicators, outcomes are higher in vocational than in academic tracks when keeping (interactions with) student composition factors constant. For the percentage of successful transfers in early grades, the coefficient for average parental education diminishes. Considering later grades, the role of parental education shrinks and becomes insignificant. This suggests that in academic tracks, parents are on average higher educated. At the same time, for central exam grade, the role of parental background has become stronger: keeping track constant, schools whose students on average have higher educated parents tend to have higher average central exam grades, yet higher average parental education is more common in academic than vocational tracks, which is likely why the role of parental education was less strong in Model 1. We controlled here for the proportion of students with a migration background, which positively predicts central exam grades in Model 2:

schools with a higher proportion of students with a migration background are more likely to have a higher average exam grade (other things being equal). This means that within vocational or within academic tracks, schools with a higher average proportion of students with a migration background have higher central exam grades, holding constant on other socioeconomic composition variables.

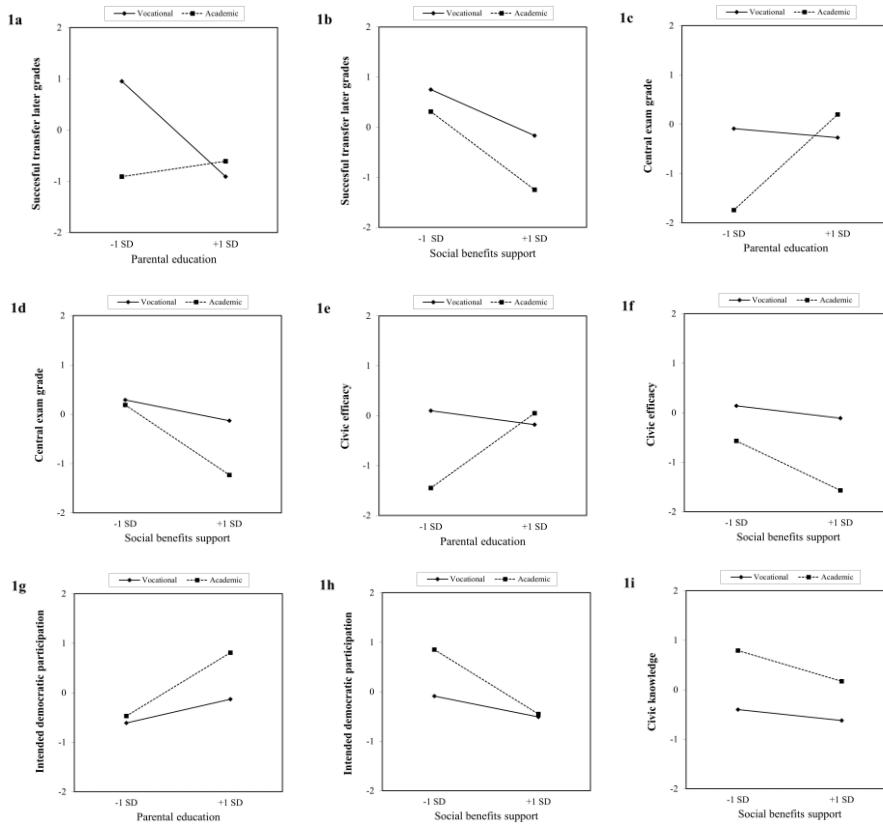
Turning to the results of Model 2 for civic outcomes, civic efficacy is on average stronger in vocational tracks, whereas intended democratic participation and civic knowledge are on average lower in vocational compared to academic tracks (while keeping the other variables constant). For civic efficacy, parental education yields a positive result in Model 2 as opposed to Model 1, and controlling for schools' proportion of students with a migration background, this similarly increases in Model 2. Thus, when keeping track constant, average parental education of schools' student composition positively relates to schools' average civic efficacy, and the role of the proportion of students with a migration background is somewhat stronger for civic efficacy when we consider it within either vocational or academic tracks. For intended democratic participation, the predictive value of parental education and migration background decreases when taking tracks into account. For civic knowledge, the role of parental education decreases. This suggests that student compositions with a relatively high average parental education level are overrepresented in academic schools, where intended democratic participation and civic knowledge are higher than in vocational schools.

The findings of Model 2 compared to Model 1 partly support the selection effect as proposed in Hypothesis 4. Many of the significant effects as found in Model 1 change once track is controlled for, which suggests that student composition differs across tracks. At the same time, the inclusion of track yielded significant results for each of the six outcomes while controlling for (interactions with) all student composition factors, which suggests that the difference between vocational and academic track entails more than a mere selection effect in terms of schools' student composition.

The next step is to test Hypothesis 5, stating that the relation between student composition and schools' qualification and civic outcomes is stronger in academic than vocational tracks. Models 3–5 contain the interaction effects between track and each student composition factor. For qualification outcomes, four interaction effects were found, illustrated in Figure 1a to 1d. For schools' percentage of successful transfers in later grades, the negative role of parental education was stronger in vocational tracks and positive in academic tracks (1a), and the negative role of social benefits support was stronger in academic than vocational tracks (1b). For schools' central exam grade, the overall positive role of parental education was negative in vocational tracks, yet positive in academic tracks (1c), and the negative role of social benefits support was stronger in academic than vocational tracks (1d).

For civic outcomes, eight interaction effects were found (see Figure 2.1e–1i). For civic efficacy, the role of parental educational was stronger and only positive for academic tracks compared to vocational tracks (1e) and the positive role of

Figure 2.1a-1i. *Estimated interaction effects for schools' student composition factors and track on schools' qualification and civic outcome indicators*



Source: ICSS (2016), IoE (2017), SN (2020). Data are weighted. Estimates are taken from Models 3 (1a, 1c, 1d, 1g), 4 (1b, 1e, 1h), and 5 (1f, 1i) of the multivariate multiple regression analysis ( $n = 101$ ) as reported in Table 2.2. 'Social benefits support' is interpreted as a form of student composition disadvantage, and should hence be read in the opposite direction of the other graphs. All continuous variables (including outcome variables) were z-standardized.

independence of social benefits support (1f) was stronger in academic compared to vocational tracks. We controlled for the role of migration background in schools' civic efficacy, which was stronger in vocational tracks. For intended democratic participation, the positive role of parental education (1g) and independence of social benefits support (1h) was greater in academic than in vocational tracks (as a control, the role of migration background was greater in vocational than academic tracks). For civic knowledge, the positive role of independence of social benefits support was greater in academic than in vocational tracks (1i) (and including migration background as a control shows that its role was slightly stronger in vocational than academic tracks). Considering the visualizations in Figure 1a to 1i, eight of the nine depicted interaction effects display that the role of student composition is stronger in



academic compared to vocational tracks. Moreover, six of the nine interaction effects suggest that the difference between vocational and academic tracks is smaller in schools with more socioeconomically advantaged student compositions. Based on this, overall, the patterns support Hypothesis 5.

### Conclusion and discussion

This study examined the relation between schools' qualification and civic outcomes and to what extent schools' student composition and tracking shape these outcomes. Three qualification indicators (percentage of successful transfers in lower and upper secondary grades and average central exam grade) and three civic indicators (civic efficacy, intended democratic participation, and civic knowledge) were considered in 101 Dutch secondary schools with different student composition factors across vocational and academic tracks. Results showed both negative and positive relations between qualification and civic indicators, which motivated further examination of student composition and tracking. Student composition accounted for a significant part of the variance in all six indicators, indicating that schools with relatively advantaged student compositions were more likely to have higher average central exam grades, reported civic self-efficacy, participation, and knowledge. When controlling for (interaction with) student composition, a difference between vocational and academic schools was found for all outcomes: Unexpectedly, academic (compared to vocational) tracks showed on average lower qualification outcomes, and lower civic efficacy yet higher intended democratic participation and civic knowledge. This could be due to the fact that the qualification indicators were standardized for each track, as opposed to outcome measurements like PISA or TIMSS, where students are scored on the same test. The findings suggest that differences between tracks could partly but not fully be attributed to differences in schools' student composition, and that tracking also informs a difference in schools' qualification and civic outcomes beyond student composition, which could correspond with findings on track differences in terms of educational provision (e.g., Brunello & Checchi, 2007; Ten Dam & Volman, 2003). Moreover, the relation between schools' student composition and qualification and civic outcomes of schools was stronger in academic than vocational tracks, which resonates with our discussion of previous research (Brunello & Checchi, 2007; Matthews, 2001; Nieuwelink et al., 2019).

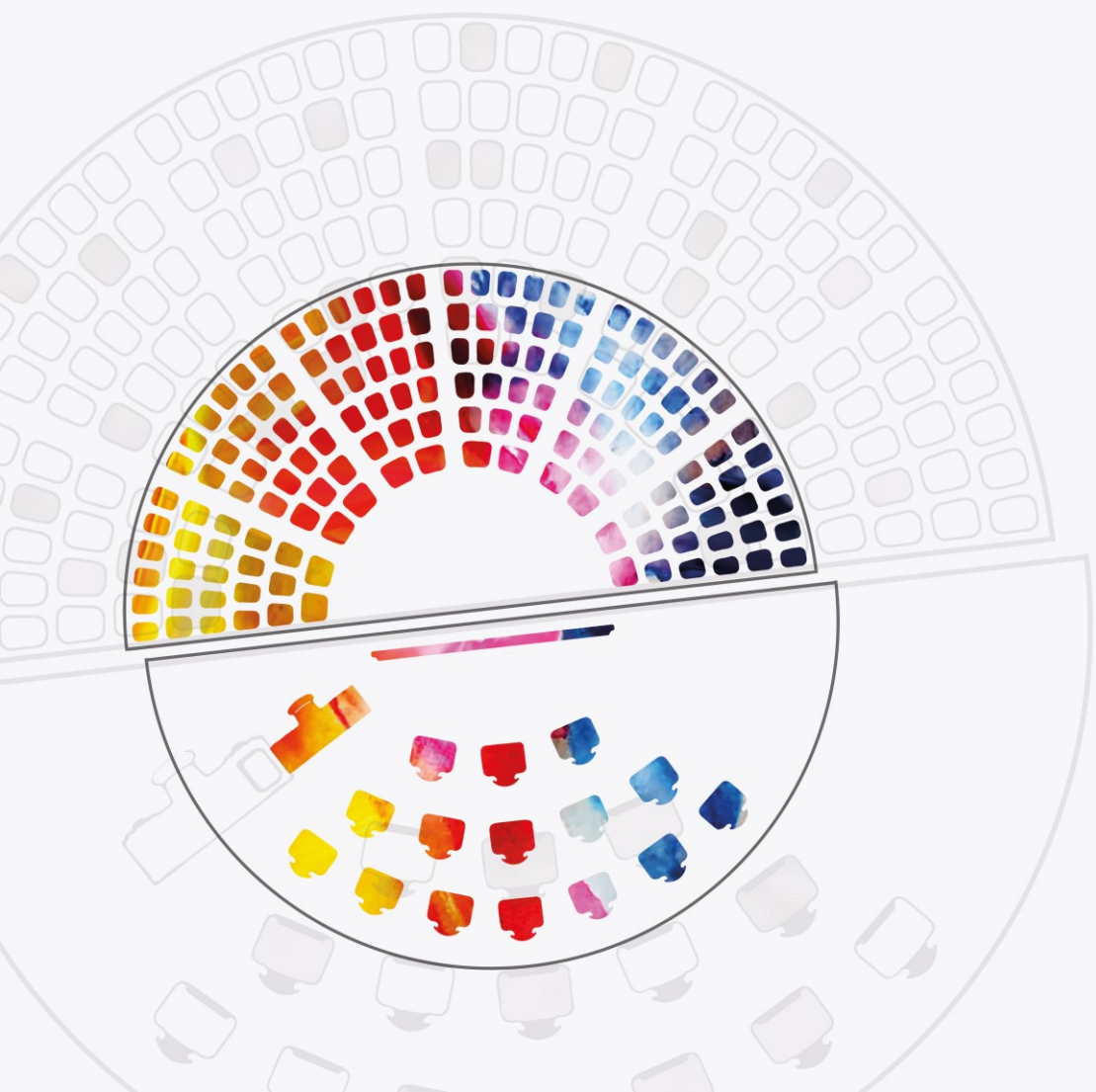
Evaluating these findings, several limitations require mention. The relation between schools' qualification and civic outcomes was only examined at the school and not student level, due to linking restrictions. The possibility exists that the strength and direction of the relation between civic and qualification outcomes differ between student and school level, due to different—possibly interacting—mechanisms at both levels (Snijders & Bosker, 2011). Our school level insights motivate further research to untangle these mechanisms thoroughly.

A second limitation concerns the fact that this study only indirectly examined whether student composition and tracking shaped *the relation* between

schools' qualification and civic outcomes; the extent to which both factors explained variety in schools' qualification and civic outcomes was used to infer how this confounds the relation between these outcomes. The stronger relations between qualification and civic outcomes in academic (versus vocational) tracks can hence not certainly be attributed to schools' student composition, although the findings of our multivariate multiple regression analysis do suggest this. In aiming to expand research on schools' fulfilment of multiple educational tasks, further methodological sophistication would contribute to the ability to capture why some domains relate, as opposed to predicting the outcomes of both domains.

Taking these limitations into account, the current study has contributed in several ways. Firstly, by uniquely combining three representative datasets with information on schools' qualification and civic outcomes, these findings add to the scarce body of research on the relation between schools' fulfilment of different educational tasks. Secondly, the current study examined to what extent this relation could be shaped by the relative socioeconomic advantages of schools' student compositions across tracks, which was supported by the findings. This means that the insights of this study have implications for another vital function of education, namely the provision of equality of opportunity. The current findings show that in the Netherlands, schools' qualification and civic outcomes are more positively related in academic than in vocational tracks and that schools' student compositions likely play a role in this. The difference between vocational and academic tracks is greater depending on schools' socioeconomic student compositions, demonstrating that the role of parental resources remains important. This is particularly evident in the civic domain, in spite of the desirability of smaller differences between tracks given the principle of equal citizenship that is so central to democratic notions of justice (Dahl, 2007; Miller, 1999). In light of the role of both parental resources and tracking, and the increasing attention to schools' civic task across European countries (Eurydice, 2012, 2017), schools' role in reproducing or mitigating educational hierarchies across tracks may be expanding also explicitly toward the civic domain. Practically, this warrants educational policymakers to remain aware that schools' fulfilment of each educational task across tracks should not be considered in a vacuum: the combination of fulfilment of different tasks gives insight in the accumulation of learning inequalities that are otherwise discussed separately, leaving the gravity of their accumulation unaddressed. This also calls for a closer examination of this combination: educational inequalities are present in the Netherlands, and further research can contribute to untangling what shapes whether schools and tracks provide qualification and citizenship equally well, and equally for all.





# Chapter 3

## **Inequalities in democratic outcomes among young citizens: the role of access to and participation in democratic activities in school in 15 countries**

This chapter is based on Mennes, H. I., Munnikma, A., Dijkstra, A. B., & Van de Werfhorst, H. G. (2022). Inequalities in democratic outcomes among young citizens:

The role of access to and participation in democratic activities in school in 15 countries. *Acta Politica*, accepted for publication. doi: 10.1057/s41269-022-00276-1

### **Abstract**

Across countries, social inequalities exist in citizens' democratic engagement. One potential channel through which these gaps are formed concerns schools, yet little research has yet considered the relation between schools' supply of democratic education and social inequalities in students' democratic outcomes. This study examines whether schools' supply of democratic activities moderates the relation between students' social background and their intended political participation, civic knowledge and civic self-efficacy. Based on multilevel path analyses using ICCS 2016 data from 15 European countries, results confirm social inequalities in students' democratic outcomes, and a positive indirect role for schools' supply of democratic activities, via students' participation in them. Schools' supply does not depend on their social student composition, nor do we find strong support for a moderating role of supply for the relation between students' social background and their democratic outcomes. Students with advantaged social backgrounds report higher participation in democratic activities as offered by schools, and the social stratification of some democratic outcomes is stronger among students who participate more in democratic school activities. This suggests that equal supply of democratic activities by schools is unequal in its reach, which we discuss in relation to the accessibility of activities for students.

Keywords: social inequalities, intended political participation, civic knowledge, civic self-efficacy, democratic school activities, International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS)

## Introduction

Engaged and informed citizens form the backbone of healthy democracy and civil society in general (Almond & Verba, 1963; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). At the same time, social inequalities persist in citizens' engagement with democracy (Gallego, 2014). In many countries, divisions exist between citizens with lower versus higher education or socioeconomic status (SES) in terms of propensity to vote (Gallego, 2010), knowledge of democratic matters (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Fraile, 2013), as well as broader political participation (Gallego, 2007). These gaps are reason for concern in light of the legitimacy of choices made by democratic institutions (Dryzek, 2001; Parkinson, 2003), the risk of disproportionate influence on these choices (Verba, 1996), let alone the intrinsic importance of equality as a foundational democratic principle (Dahl, 2007).

Looking at the drivers of these gaps, socioeconomic factors can account for different political socialization experiences at home and corresponding democratic outcomes (Beck & Jennings, 1982; Verba et al., 2005). Yet schools can also play a role, as educational experiences carry the potential to shape democratic involvement (Campbell, 2019; Geboers et al., 2013). Civic outcomes tend to solidify towards adulthood (Hooghe et al., 2015; Russo & Stattin, 2017). Therefore, adolescence is a crucial period for democratic development, covering the typical school-going age span when students interact on a daily basis. Consequently, schools can serve as a mini polity (Flanagan, 2020), where democratic experiences in school can imprint students' future democratic engagement. One way of enabling such experiences in school is by providing democratic activities, like student elections, student councils, voting activities, or debating events (Keating & Janmaat, 2016; Saha & Print, 2010). Schools' supply of such democratic activities offers students the opportunity to practice citizenship (De Winter, 2018; Lawy & Biesta, 2006), which also prepares for and familiarizes with democracy at a societal level.

While research is available on schools' supply of democratic activities (e.g., Keating & Janmaat, 2016; Mager & Nowak, 2012; Print et al., 2002; Saha & Print, 2010), less is known regarding its potentially differential functioning; whether the role of schools' supply of democratic activities differs for students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The studies that did explicitly investigate this, mostly focus on students' perceptions, leaving supply as reported by schools out of sight (Deimel et al., 2020; Hoskins et al., 2017; Sampermans et al., 2021). This while governments increasingly recommend (or even mandate) schools to supply civic education in general, and democratic activities in particular (Eurydice, 2012, 2017). It underscores the significance of including not only students' experiences in democratic activities but also schools' perspectives on providing them. In sum, while schools are deemed a relevant institution in the preparation of citizens, their supply of democratic activities is often studied in terms of average experiences for all student groups. This leaves their potentially differential role understudied: whether students from different socioeconomic backgrounds participate equally in and benefit equally from schools' reported supply.



The aim of this study is to gain more insight in the role of schools' supply of democratic activities, students' participation in these activities, and whether both mitigate or reinforce potential inequalities in students' democratic outcomes. We start by examining schools' role in students' average outcomes, testing schools' function as a mini polity: the extent to which schools' supply of democratic activities (as reported by schools' principals) and students' average democratic outcomes are mediated by students' average participation in these activities (as reported by students). Secondly, as the main focus of this article, we examine to what extent both schools' supply of and students' participation in democratic activities mitigate or reinforce potential social inequalities in students' democratic outcomes.

### **Democratic outcomes of students**

Future democratic institutions will be navigated, maintained and shaped by today's youth. Therefore, scholars reflected on democratic outcomes that can be beneficial to people's engagement with democracy, and to healthy democratic functioning. The following three democratic outcomes concern whether (young) citizens have intentions, knowledge and skills that can assist them in exercising their citizenship and in participating in democracy. Firstly, we consider (intended) political participation. This is a traditional democratic outcome and concerns (a.o.) voting in elections, or in the case of underaged citizens, their intentions to vote once legally allowed. Political participation, like voting, is one way through which citizens exert influence on decisions in democracy (Brady, 1999). Moreover, for democracy at large, a sufficiently high electoral participation rate by citizens from all social backgrounds contributes to citizens' representation, which matters in light of the legitimacy of political decisions (Parkinson, 2003).

Secondly, civic or democratic knowledge matters. This refers to knowledge of principles or processes central to democratic functioning and governance, and can help citizens in recognizing the potential and challenges of democracy. It provides information on the routes and rules of political influence, and makes the link between public policies and interest groups more insightful (Galston, 2001). Additionally, civic or democratic knowledge can help to make reasoned judgements regarding civic matters (Galston, 2001), for example in elections (Torney-Purta, 2002). Thirdly, political efficacy is often studied as a democratic outcome (e.g., Maurissen, 2020; Pasek et al., 2008). Democratic or political efficacy refers to citizens' sense of agency and belief in their ability to meaningfully exercise their citizenship; based on their own capabilities (i.e., internal efficacy) as well as democracy's responsiveness to their actions (i.e., external efficacy). Drawing from research on overall self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), efficacy can condition individuals' motivation to act – after all, if one believes that actions can make a difference, it makes more sense to undertake them, for example through political lobbying, expressing one's opinion, or protesting for a just cause. In sum, while these three democratic outcomes often relate, they entail different aspects of citizenship. Hence, all three can be argued valuable; for



individuals, as these outcomes can facilitate to exercise one's citizenship as one sees fit, as well as for democracy, for the sake of its resilient functioning.

### **Schools' role in democratic outcomes**

The role of schools in the development of democratic outcomes like knowledge, self-efficacy and intended participation has become more formal in many countries, often captured under 'civic education' or 'citizenship education' (Eurydice, 2012, 2017; Schulz et al., 2018a, p. 3). One traditional strand of theory proposes the school to be a *mini polity* (Flanagan, 2020), or a *miniature community* (Dewey, 1899): a practice ground for citizenship that provides students democratic experiences (De Winter, 2018; Lawy & Biesta, 2006), which also equips for macro polities. Schools can reify such a place by providing students activities in which they learn not only 'about' but also 'through citizenship' (Kerr, 2000, p. 210; Keating & Janmaat, 2016, p. 410), for example via student elections, student councils, voting activities, debating events or participation in decision-making practices at school (Keating & Janmaat, 2016; Mager & Nowak, 2012; Saha & Print, 2010). Schools that offer such activities may stimulate students' civic knowledge, as these activities illustrate what democratic processes, principles and tensions entail; first hand experiences with democratic processes like voting may help solidify what students know about these processes and about the democratic rules that structure them. Moreover, these activities may foster students' civic self-efficacy, as students become more familiar with their ability to take part in democratic processes: schools' supply of these activities to students may signal to them that democratic processes are not only about, but also for them. Potentially, democratic activities in school also stimulate students' intentions towards democratic participation later in life, as positive experiences in terms of expressing their voice in school (e.g., in voting activities), may translate to using their voice in society too. In a more general sense, schools' supply of democratic activities to their students may also proxy a broader emphasis on civic engagement in the school, which stimulates students to learn about democracy and engage with it. From that perspective, it is not only the activity itself, but also the school's emphasis that it represents, that may nurture students' democratic outcomes.

Scholars empirically examined the relation between students' participation in democratic activities (as offered by schools) and students' democratic outcomes. Previous studies show that participation in democratic activities in schools relates positively to students' expected political participation (Maurissen, 2020), their civic knowledge (Mager & Nowak, 2012; Torney-Purta, 2001), democratic skills (Mager & Nowak, 2012) and political engagement (Keating & Janmaat, 2016). Other scholars note that students' reported participation in democratic activities can be a matter of access (Hoskins et al., 2017), which highlights the role of schools' supply. For schools' supply of democratic activities to be related to students' democratic outcomes, students have to actually participate in these activities: if a school offers opportunities to take part in democratic processes, students can gain more democratic



experiences, which can spill-over to their more general democratic outcomes. We thus expect that:

*H1* Students' average participation in democratic activities in school mediates a positive relation between schools' supply of democratic activities and students' average democratic outcomes.

### **Schools' role in social inequalities**

Given social gaps in democratic outcomes, the follow-up question concerns to what extent schools' supply of democratic activities moderates social inequalities in democratic outcomes. Even among students in early adolescence – before differences in years of education arise – disparities are found in students' democratic outcomes, depending on their SES (e.g., Dassonneville et al., 2012). Students with a higher SES score higher on civic knowledge (Schulz et al., 2018a; Witschge & Van de Werfhorst, 2016), report stronger expectations of electoral participation in some countries (Schulz et al., 2018a), and report more interest in social and political issues (Witschge & Van de Werfhorst, 2016), which resonates with broader cross-national patterns that show a gap between more and less advantaged adult citizens in several democratic outcomes (e.g., Fraile, 2013; Gallego, 2007, 2014).

What accounts for this link between students' socioeconomic status and their democratic outcomes? We consider the role of students' political socialization, either at home or in school (Jennings, 2009; Niemi & Sobieszek, 1977). Students' SES can serve as a proxy for their home environment, where students' from more privileged SES homes may experience different political socialization by their parents than students from less privileged SES homes. Research identified that talking about political and social issues is more prevalent among parents with a higher educational attainment (Lauglo, 2011), and that political discussion at home can play a positive role in, for example, students' political interest (Dostie-Goulet, 2009), or for other civic outcomes (McIntosh et al., 2007). If students with more privileged SES backgrounds are more likely to converse with their parents about political or civic issues, this may add to students' sense of comfort regarding democratic processes, and potentially signal to them that they have a role in these processes. Consequently, this may stimulate students' propensity to become engaged in democratic processes in the school context; they may feel more invited to participate in democratic activities in school. If, on average, students with a more privileged SES experience more political socialization at home, this may spillover to their propensity to participate in democratic activities in schools. Research by Quintelier (2013b) suggests that students' participation in deliberative voluntary associations (like school councils) is partly a matter of self-selection, attracting particular students more than others. Other scholars identified that youth councils are not always representative in terms of students' social or educational background (Augsberger et al., 2018; Wyness, 2009). These findings could be applied to the school context, resulting in the expectation that:

- H2* Students with a higher socioeconomic status are more likely to participate in democratic activities in school.

Turning to the role of schools, research reports that schools' supply of civic education can play a compensatory role for socioeconomic status. A compensatory effect of schooling means that students with a disadvantaged background gain more from what schools offer than their advantaged peers in terms of their democratic outcomes. Multiple studies assessed this, and while findings are mixed, a recent review by Campbell (2019) seems to favor the likelihood of a compensatory role. Several studies identified a compensation effect on students' democratic outcomes; for formal and informal forms of civic education (Neundorf et al., 2016) an open classroom climate (Campbell, 2008), the instructional methods teachers adopt in their civic classes (Gainous & Martens, 2012), teachers' awareness-raising (Wanders et al., 2021), and central, high-stakes civic examination (Campbell & Niemi, 2016). Following these observations, it could be argued that students with a less privileged SES gain more from schools' supply of democratic activities in terms of their democratic outcomes, compared to their peers with a more privileged SES. In terms of expectations, this can mean (one of) two scenarios. First, students with a lower SES may gain more from participating in school activities in terms of their democratic outcomes. Secondly, schools with greater supply of activities may mean less selectivity, so that students' average participation in democratic activities in school is less determined by social background. In sum, we expect that:

- H3* The relation between students' socioeconomic status and their democratic outcomes is weaker when participation in democratic activities in school is higher.
- H4* The relation between students' average socioeconomic status and their average participation in democratic activities is weaker in schools where supply of democratic activities is higher.

## Methods

### Data

The 2016 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study contains data from secondary schools across 24 countries, measuring a variety of students' civic outcomes and civic educational practices of schools (Schulz et al., 2018b). Stratified sampling was used with two-staged clustering, where schools were selected based on a probability proportionate to size (Schulz et al., 2018b, p. 245). Within each school, one (or more) classroom(s) of students was then randomly selected (Schulz et al., 2018b, p. 50). In the present study, we limited our scope to European countries: we relied on the European Commission's summary of governmental guidelines regarding schools' supply of democratic activities (Eurydice, 2012). In order to be able to cross-check schools' average reported supply within countries with national guidelines, we excluded non-European countries from our analyses. This resulted in 1618 schools



nested in 15 countries<sup>1</sup>. A total of 36165 students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade were included, with 48.75% boys and 51.25% girls. Additionally, schools' principals participated in the ICCS study, resulting in a total of 1618 school principals in the present study.

## **Variables**

### ***Dependent variables***

*Intended political participation* was measured by asking students whether they expected to take part in a number of activities in society as an adult. This concerned to 'vote in local elections', to 'vote in national elections' and to 'get information about candidates before voting in an election'. For each item, students could choose between 'I would certainly not do this', 'I would probably not do this', 'I would probably do this' and 'I would certainly do this'. Using item response theory (IRT) scaling with weighted likelihood estimates, the ICCS scale was constructed where a higher score indicates stronger intended political participation (Köhler et al., 2018). The resulting variable showed a high average reliability across the 24 participating countries ( $\alpha = .83$ , as reported in Schulz et al., 2018b, p. 181).

*Civic knowledge* was measured through 87 mostly multiple-choice questions regarding democracy and civil society (Schulz et al., 2018a). These items concern knowledge of basic features of democracy, as well as in-depth understanding of democratic institutions, systems, and principles – all deemed relevant for participation in these institutions, and critical reflection on their functioning. Following item response theory, students' answers on these questions resulted in five estimate scores that indicate students' knowledge score (Köhler et al., 2018), of which an average was used in the current study ( $\alpha = .98$ ). A higher score indicates more civic knowledge.

To measure *civic self-efficacy*, students were asked to indicate how well they thought they would do on four activities, namely 'discuss a newspaper article about a conflict between countries', 'argue your point of view about a controversial political or social issue', 'follow a television debate about a controversial issue' and 'write a letter or email to a newspaper giving your view on a current issue'. Students could answer by choosing between 'not at all', 'not very well', 'fairly well', and 'very well'. The four items were combined in one average variable where a higher score indicates stronger civic self-efficacy. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  score for the four items combined was .77, confirming sufficient reliability.

### ***Mediator variable***

Students' *participation in democratic activities in school* was measured by asking students about two activities: whether at school, they had ever voted 'for a class representative or in school parliament', and whether at school they had become 'a candidate for class representative or school parliament'. Students were encouraged to consider all schools since the first year of primary school. For both activities, students chose between 'no, I have never done this', 'yes I have done this but more than a year ago', or 'yes, I have done this within the last twelve months'.

Both items were separately included in the analyses (i.e., not combined as one variable) because of their differing opportunity structure: previous research suggests that selective activities like youth councils attract students differentially as a function of social or educational background (Augsberger et al., 2018; Wyness, 2009). Therefore, we considered both an inclusive activity (all students can vote) and in additional analyses, a more selective activity (it is unlikely that all students become candidate). To isolate the supply of the current school from previous schools they were enrolled in, participation was recoded so that a score of 0 indicates no previous participation, or more than a year ago, and 1 if a student had participated within the last twelve months.

### ***Independent variables***

Schools' *supply of democratic activities* was measured via principals' perceptions. Each principal was asked about the same democratic activities as were students, namely, 'how many [8<sup>th</sup> grade] students at this school elect their class representatives' and 'vote in student council, school parliament or elections'. For both items, principals chose between 'none or hardly any', 'some of them', 'most of them' or 'all or nearly all of them'. Answers to both items were combined as an average score. A higher score indicates that on average democratic activities are provided to more students in the school.

Students' *socioeconomic status* was measured by including the ICCS composite variable for SES (Schulz et al., 2018b, p. 151). It is based on an index of students' reported highest parental education, highest parental occupational status, and their estimation of the number of books at home. This index was constructed using principal component factor scores, and resulted in an acceptable average reliability score of  $\alpha = .64$  (Schulz et al., 2018b, p.152). A higher score indicates a more privileged socioeconomic status of the student.

Several control variables were included. Educational attainment is known to associate with democratic outcomes (e.g., Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Gallego, 2007). In addition, some scholars argue that students' perceptions of socioeconomic factors like their parents' income is error-prone (Campbell, 2008; Maurissen et al., 2020), hence students' *expected educational attainment* has been used as a(n additional) proxy for students' socioeconomic background (Campbell, 2008; Maurissen et al., 2020; Quintelier & Hooghe, 2013). Students were asked what the highest level of education is that they expect to complete. Students' answers were country specific and hence recoded to match the four categories based on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED): level 2 or below (primary education), level 3 (secondary education), level 4 or 5 (tertiary vocational education), or level 6, 7 or 8 (tertiary academic education). We recoded this (following Schulz et al., 2018a) so that tertiary academic education was coded 1 and tertiary vocational education (level 4 or 5) or no tertiary education (level 2 or 3) were coded 0.

Students' *gender* was also included, as gender is known to account for differences in several democratic outcomes, like political knowledge (e.g., Pereira et



al., 2015) or forms of political engagement (Hooghe & Stolle, 2004). It is coded with 'male' as 0, and 'female' as 1. *Migration background* was included too, given corresponding findings on differences in civic knowledge (Schulz et al., 2018a). Students who were born abroad or of whom at least one parent was born abroad were considered to have a migrant background. No migration background was coded as 0, a migration background as 1.

Lastly, students' *willingness to participate in democratic activities in school* was included, to control for the possibility that students did not participate, yet nevertheless wanted to. Students were asked, if they were given the chance, how likely it would be that they would participate in voting in a school election for class representatives or school parliament, or become a candidate for class representative or school parliament. Students could answer with 'not at all likely', 'not very likely', 'quite likely', and 'very likely'. Both items were included as separate variables (similarly as for students' reported participation in these activities), and a higher score indicates a stronger willingness to participate.

## Analyses

The hypothesized model was tested through multilevel path analyses, conducted at the student and school level, using Mplus 8.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012). This choice of analysis allowed for the relatively unique combination of testing mediating relations while taking the hierarchical structure of data into account (Preacher et al., 2010; Preacher et al., 2011). Given the nested structure of the data – students in schools, in countries – multilevel analysis allows to account for level-specific interdependence of residuals (Snijders & Bosker, 2011). For all variables (except for schools' supply of democratic activities) analyses were run at the individual level (that is, within schools), as well as at the between level (i.e., across schools). Inherent to path analysis with multilevel data, variation in dependent outcomes generally has a within and/or a between component, where variables can vary both within and between groups (e.g., Christ et al., 2017; Heck & Thomas, 2015). In order to properly capture both sources of variation, analyses were run at both the within (i.e., student) level and between (i.e., school) level. Thus, the within part of the model predicts individual level outcomes by individual level independent variables and the between part of the model predicts school level outcomes (averages) by school level independent variables. The Mplus software enables us to tease the two levels of variation apart.

Given that our hypothesized model contains a mediation where the independent variable is located at the school level (schools' supply of democratic activities is constant *within* schools), variation in this variable cannot relate to individual differences within a school. Therefore, the mediation can only be tested through a between-level model (see Preacher et al., 2010). Initially, we tested H4 via a cross-level interaction, including a random slope for the relation between students' socioeconomic status and their participation in democratic activities in school (in line

Table 3.1. *Descriptive statistics*

	Mean	SD	Range	n
Intended democratic participation	-0.01	1.00	-2.84 – 1.15	36102
Civic knowledge	0.09	0.99	-3.93 – 3.31	36165
Civic self-efficacy	0.01	1.00	-2.65 – 2.06	35650
Participation in inclusive democratic activity (voting)	0.55	0.50	0 – 1	36165
Participation in selective democratic activity (candidacy)	0.22	0.41	0 – 1	36165
Socioeconomic status	-0.06	1.00	-3.75 – 2.41	36165
Expected educational attainment (academic)*	0.45	0.50	0 – 1	36165
Willingness to participate in inclusive activity*	0.03	1.00	-2.44 – 0.91	36165
Willingness to participate in selective activity*	0.03	1.01	-1.41 – 1.62	36165
Gender (female)*	0.50	0.50	0 – 1	36165
Migration background (yes)*	0.23	0.42	0 – 1	36165
Supply of democratic opportunities	-0.18	1.27	-4.41 – 0.59	1618

Source: ICCS 2016.  $n(\text{student})_{\text{total}} = 36165$ ,  $n(\text{school}) = 1618$ ,  $n(\text{country}) = 15$ . Asterix indicates control variables. All non-binary variables were standardized. Data was weighted at student and school level.

with Preacher et al., 2016). However, as the random slope yielded no significant result, we excluded it in line with Hox et al. (2018, p. 13), and tested the moderator role of schools' supply of democratic activities at the between level. As the mediator is a binary variable, it should be analyzed as a probit or logistic model, using Mplus' WLSMV estimator. At the same time, given some concerns regarding assumptions underlying the model, we preferred robust standard errors, which was not possible with Mplus' WLSMV estimator. In light of previous research on the comparison between both kind of models (Gomila, 2021; Hellevik, 2009), we ran the model both as probit and as linear (using Mplus' MLR estimator), where the latter provides robust standard errors. Results were mostly similar, and we report all relevant differences. As the linear model with robust standard errors yielded fewer significant results, we opted to focus on these.

In light of caveats regarding the non-random and small number of included countries (see Möhring, 2012), country fixed effects were included for the three democratic student outcomes, for students' participation in democratic activities in school, as well as for schools' supply of democratic activities. This means we can still account for the portion of variance in our outcomes that is located at the country level (and school and student level), without running a three-level model (Möhring, 2012). Moreover, as including country fixed effects allows us to identify the variance that is unique to each country, we can check for possible country differences in terms of compulsory voting (Birch, 2018) or policy regarding citizenship education (Eurydice, 2012). Data was weighted to control for sampling deviations at the student and school level (in line with Köhler et al., 2018), and all variables were standardized (except for binary variables). Descriptive statistics of all variables are reported in Table 3.1.



## Results

In order to test the hierarchical structure of the data, we first ran an empty model, including only country fixed effects. The intraclass correlations (ICCs) confirm a nested structure: the school level (as opposed to student level) accounts for 17 percent of variance in intended political participation, 38 percent of variance in civic knowledge, six percent in civic self-efficacy, and 30 percent in participation in democratic activities in school. Combined with the fairly large average cluster size (Muthén & Satorra, 1995), this underscores the significance of analyses sensitive to the multilevel structure of this data. Figure 3.1 shows the results of the multilevel path analysis for all three democratic outcomes. The model has been visualized apart for each democratic outcome, yet was analysed as one model predicting all three outcomes simultaneously. We highlight several relations here, as they assist in interpreting the main results. Students' expected educational attainment, their gender, their migration background and their willingness to participate in democratic activities were included as control variables. At the between level, country fixed effects were included (reference = Denmark). Students' expected educational attainment mirrored students' SES in terms of significant results; all significant relations between SES and all three democratic outcomes, were in the same direction for students' expected educational attainment in relation to ditto variables. At the within level, students' willingness to participate in an inclusive democratic activity (i.e. voting) related positively to all three democratic outcomes, and to their actual participation in this activity. For students' willingness to participate in a selective democratic activity (i.e. standing candidate), relations were similar, except for a significant negative relation with civic knowledge. In schools where students were on average more willing to participate in inclusive democratic activities, average participation was also higher. Girls scored higher on civic knowledge (within) and students without a migration background expressed stronger intentions regarding political participation and scored higher on civic knowledge (within). School with a greater proportion of girls and more students without a migration background showed higher average civic knowledge, and for schools with more students without a migration background, average intentions regarding political participation were stronger. In addition, country fixed effects were included to control for country-level variance, showing each country's score relative to the reference country (Denmark). When discussing the main results, all aforementioned variables are controlled for.

Turning to the hypotheses, H1 concerns the expected positive relation between schools' supply of democratic activities and students' average democratic outcomes, as mediated by students' average participation in an inclusive democratic activity like voting. At the school level, as shown in Figure 3.1A, a significant positive path was found between schools' supply of democratic activities and students' average intended political participation via their participation in a voting activity (indirect effect = 0.02,  $p < .01$ , total effect = -0.00,  $p = 0.90$ ). Similarly, Figure 3.1B displays a significant positive path between schools' supply of democratic activities and students' average civic knowledge via their participation in a voting activity



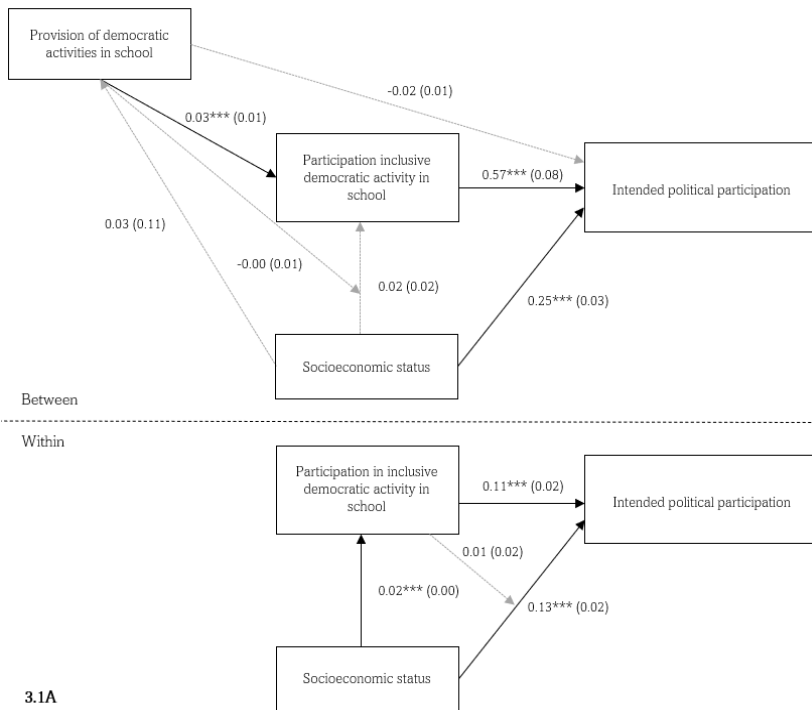
(indirect effect = 0.01,  $p < .01$ , total effect = 0.03,  $p < .05$ ). As Figure 3.1C shows, no indirect path was found for students' average civic self-efficacy (indirect effect = 0.00,  $p = .13$ , total effect = 0.01,  $p = .67$ ), nor did we find a direct relation between schools' supply of democratic activities and students' average democratic outcomes across schools in this model. Put differently, schools' supply of democratic activities does not relate directly to students' democratic outcomes, but students' average participation in an inclusive democratic activity like voting may mediate this relation for civic knowledge and for students' average intended political participation (although no total effect was found for the latter). For civic self-efficacy, no mediation was found. In the probit model, positive indirect effects were found for all three outcomes (for intended political participation, indirect effect = 0.04,  $p < .001$ , for civic knowledge, indirect effect = 0.04,  $p < .001$ , for civic self-efficacy, indirect effect = 0.01,  $p < .05$ ). The relations between schools' supply and each democratic outcome were negative and significant in the probit model, leading to a significant total negative effect for only intended political participation (total effect = -0.02,  $p < .01$ ). Given the positive indirect effects in both analyses, however, we conclude that the results show positive (partial) mediation for the relation between schools' supply of democratic activities and (most of) their students' average democratic outcomes. Therefore, H1 is partly supported.

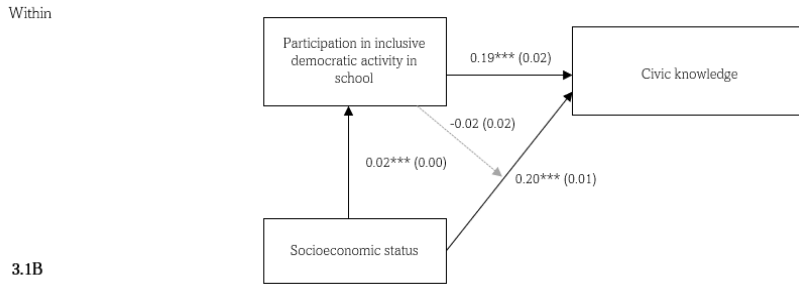
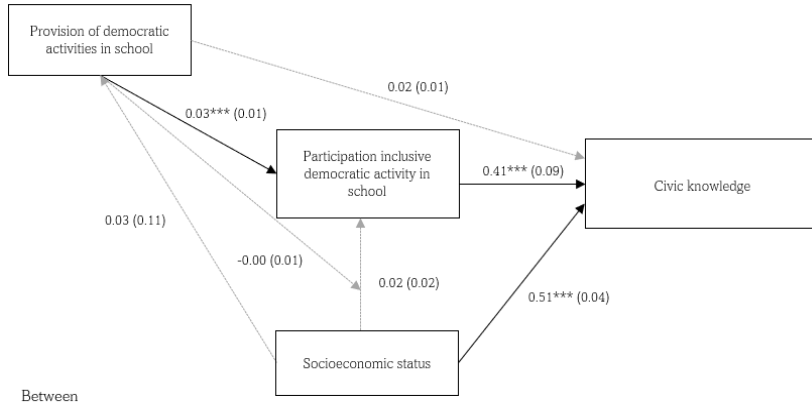
Next, we examine the role of students' socioeconomic status to test H2, concerning the expected positive relation between students' socioeconomic status and their propensity to take part in democratic activities in school. In order to capture this main effect, we ran a simplified version of the model as illustrated in Figure 3.1, excluding all moderators. A significant path was found for students' socioeconomic status and their participation in democratic activities at the within level; students with a higher SES were more likely to take part in democratic activities in school than their peers with a lower SES ( $b = 0.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This confirms H2.

A potentially compensatory role of schools was tested for H3 and H4. At both the within and between level, students' (average) SES related positively with each democratic outcome; at the within level, one standard deviation increase in one's SES corresponds with an increase of 0.13 of a standard deviation in intended political participation, 0.20 of a standard deviation in civic knowledge and a smaller 0.08 of a standard deviation in civic self-efficacy. At the between level, one standard deviation increase in schools' average SES relates to an increase of 0.25 of a standard deviation in intended political participation, 0.51 of a standard deviation in civic knowledge and 0.11 of a standard deviation in civic self-efficacy. At both levels, the increase of one standard deviation in SES is roughly equally or more important for almost all democratic outcomes than participating in an inclusive democratic activity in school (versus not).

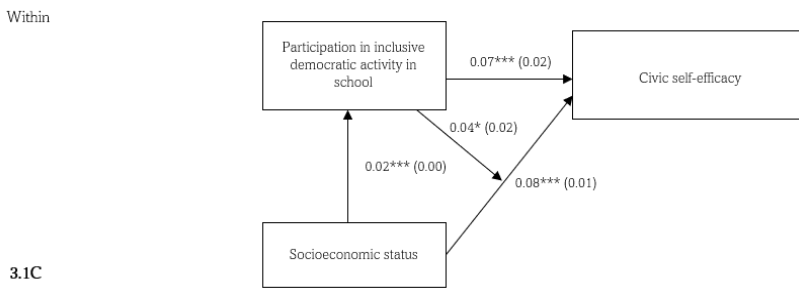
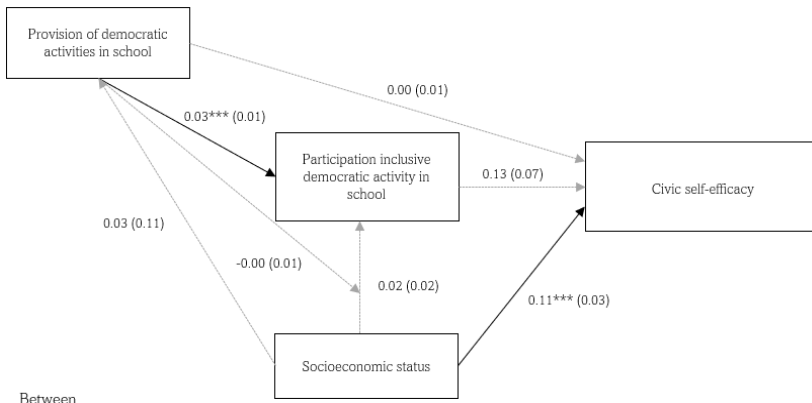
Figure 3.1. *Multilevel path model explaining intended political participation (3.1A), civic knowledge (3.1B) and civic self-efficacy (3.1C) via students' participation in an inclusive democratic activity in school*

Note. Source: ICCS 2016.  $n(\text{student}) = 36165$ ,  $n(\text{school}) = 1618$ ,  $n(\text{country}) = 15$ . Dashed line indicates non-significant result,  $*** = p < .001$ ,  $** = p < .01$ ,  $* = p < .05$ . RMSEA  $< .05$ , CFI  $> .95$ , AIC = 308338, BIC = 309613. Data are weighted at school and student level, all non-binary variables are z-standardized. Country fixed effects, students' expected educational attainment, gender, migration background and students' willingness to participate in democratic activities in school were included as control variables. These variables, as well as robust standard errors are reported in Appendix 3.1. For intended political participation, ICC = .17, for civic knowledge, ICC = .42, for civic self-efficacy, ICC = .06, for participation in inclusive democratic activities, ICC = .22.





3.1B

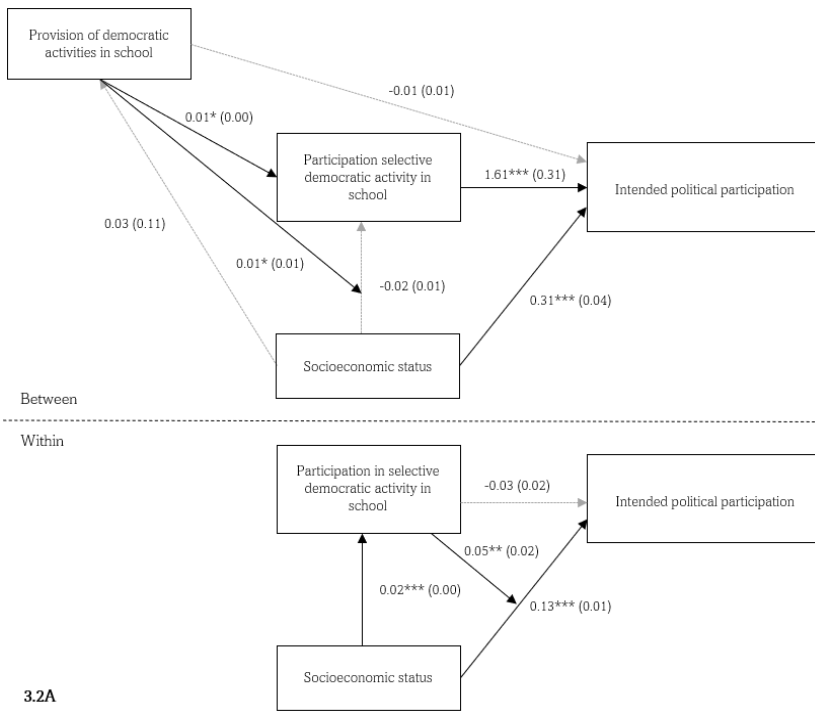


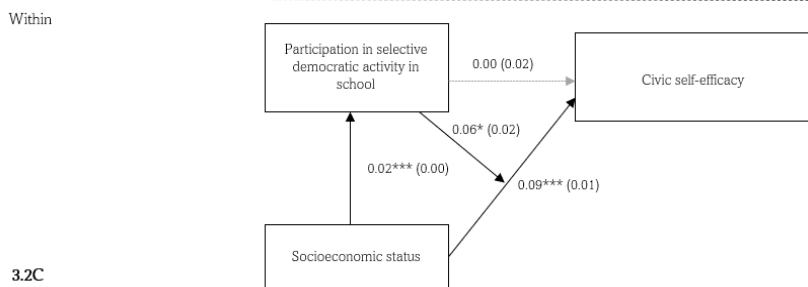
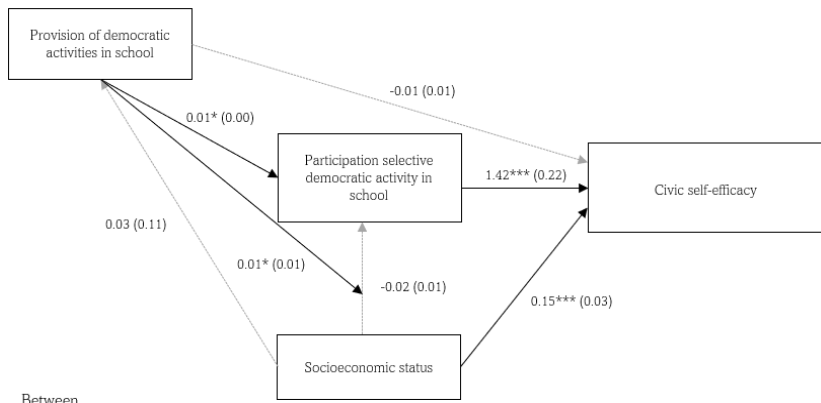
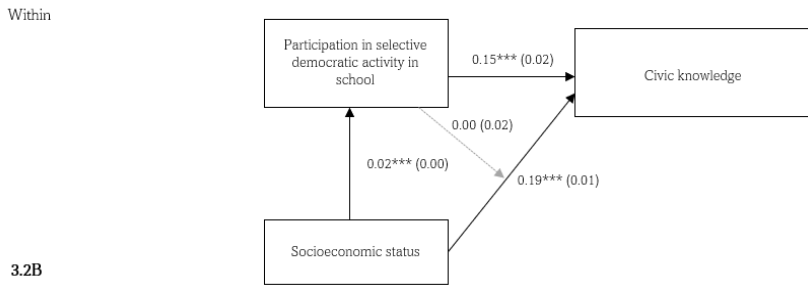
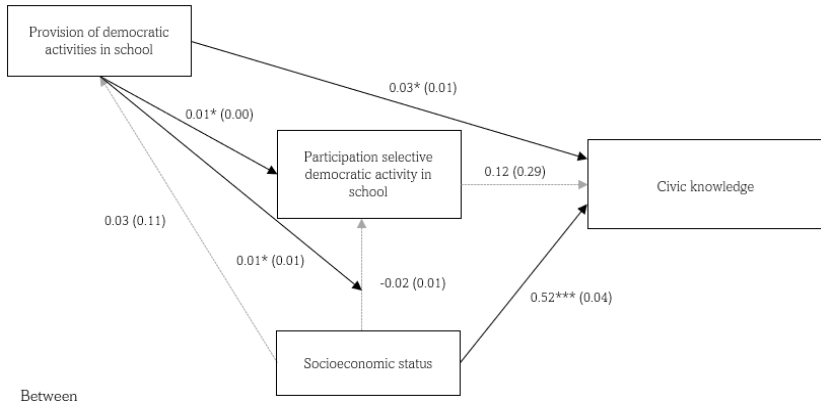
3.1C



Figure 3.2. *Multilevel path model explaining intended political participation (3.2A), civic knowledge (3.2B) and civic self-efficacy (3.2C) via students' participation in a selective democratic activity in school*

Note. Source: ICCS 2016. N(student) = 36165, n(school) = 1618, n(country) = 15. Dashed line indicates non-significant result, \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \* =  $p < .05$ . RMSEA < .05, CFI > .95, AIC = 295129, BIC = 296403. Data are weighted at school and student level, all non-binary variables are z-standardized. Country fixed effects, students' expected educational attainment, gender, migration background and students' willingness to participate in democratic activities in school were included as control variables. These variables, as well as robust standard errors are reported in Appendix 3.2. For intended political participation, ICC = .17, for civic knowledge, ICC = .42, for civic self-efficacy, ICC = .06, for participation in selective democratic activities, ICC = .07.





H3 concerns the negatively moderating role of students' participation in democratic activities for the relation between students' SES and their democratic outcomes. We tested this with an interaction at the within level. Only for students' civic self-efficacy, we found a significant moderation; the positive role of students' SES is stronger for students' civic self-efficacy among students who participated in a democratic activity in school ( $b = 0.04, p < .05$ ). In the probit model results, we found a similar positive moderation effect for civic self-efficacy ( $b = 0.03, p < .01$ ), and also found a weak negative moderation effect for civic knowledge ( $b = -0.02, p < .05$ ), suggesting that students' SES is less strongly related to civic knowledge among students who participated in an inclusive activity. While this last result is in line with H3, the remaining findings are opposite to the expected compensatory role, hence H3 is rejected.

H4 concerns the role of schools' supply of democratic activities for the relation between schools' average SES and their students' average participation in inclusive democratic activities. No significant path was found, hence the link between students' average SES and their average participation in democratic activities is not weaker in schools that on average offer democratic activities to more students (as opposed to schools with less equal supply). In the probit model, a negative moderator role was found for schools' supply ( $b = -0.08, p < .001$ ), meaning that the (insignificant) role of SES ( $b = 0.05, p = .14$ ) was slightly less important for students' average participation in an inclusive democratic activity in schools where supply was more equally available. Overall, we do not consider this sufficient support for a compensatory role of schools' supply. This means that H4 is rejected. We accounted for the possibility that schools' average SES would relate to their supply of democratic activities, but no significant path was found between both. This means that schools' supply of democratic activities does not depend on the average socioeconomic composition of their students.

### ***Additional Analyses***

In order to test H3 and H4 well, regarding the compensatory role that schools may fulfil, we further differentiate the kind of democratic activity schools offer. In the aforementioned, we considered an inclusive democratic activity that all students could take part in. Alternatively, democratic activities as offered by schools can also be more selective in nature, meaning that not all students can participate in these activities, even if the school offers them to all students, like becoming a candidate for a student representative role. Here, all students may be offered the opportunity to take part in the activity, yet in practice only a select group of students can actually take part in the activity. To assess the role of the selectivity of the activity, we ran the exact same model again, but replaced the mediator: instead of students' participation in inclusive democratic activities like voting, we included students' participation in more selective democratic activities like becoming a candidate (to be voted for). Results of this alternative model are illustrated in Figure 3.2 and summarized in Appendix 3.2. In light of lower AIC and BIC scores for the

Table 3.2. *Hypotheses and respective conclusions drawn from the results*

Hypotheses	Conclusion
<b>H1</b> Students' average participation in democratic activities in school mediates a positive relation between schools' supply of democratic activities and students' average democratic outcomes.	Partly supported
<b>H2</b> Students with a higher socioeconomic status are more likely to participate in democratic activities in school.	Supported
<b>H3</b> The relation between students' socioeconomic status and their democratic outcomes is weaker when participation in democratic activities in school is higher.	Rejected
<b>H4</b> The relation between students' average socioeconomic status and their average participation in democratic activities is weaker in schools where supply of democratic activities is higher.	Rejected

*Note.* Results concern the multilevel path analyses as reported in detail in Appendix 3.1 and 3.2.

alternative model compared to the initial model, the former fits the data better. We only highlight the results in relation to H3 and H4, regarding schools' potentially compensatory role. Again, SES plays a positive role for all three democratic outcomes at both the within and between level. It stands out that the positive relation between students' SES and their intentions regarding political participation and their civic self-efficacy is stronger among students that took part in a selective activity (also found in the probit model). Students' participation in selective activities thus corresponds with a stronger link between their SES and their intended political participation and civic self-efficacy, whereas for inclusive activities, this pattern was only found for civic self-efficacy. Considering the compensatory role of schools' supply of democratic activities, we found a very weak though positive effect on the (insignificant) relation between schools' average student SES and average participation in a selective democratic activity ( $b = 0.01, p < .05$ ), yet not in the probit model. Put differently, the results show little support for the idea that among schools where supply of democratic activities is available for more students, that the role of SES is smaller for students' average participation in a selective activity like standing candidate. In sum, H3 and H4 are also rejected when considering participation in a more selective democratic activity. As an overview, we summarize the hypotheses and respective conclusions in Table 3.2.

### Conclusion and discussion

Across countries, cleavages exist between citizens from lower and higher socioeconomic backgrounds in their democratic outcomes. As schools are often attributed a formal role to stimulate (future) citizens' democratic outcomes, we focused on schools' differential role in the existence of these gaps. Specifically, we examined to what extent schools' supply of activities to practice democratic processes mitigates or enforces the relation between students' socioeconomic status



and their intended political participation, civic knowledge and their civic self-efficacy. Based on multilevel path analyses using ICCS 2016 data from 15 European countries, results both confirm the presence of social inequalities in students' democratic outcomes, as well as a role for schools' supply of democratic activities via students' participation in them.

Our results replicate previous findings that across countries, socioeconomic inequalities in democratic outcomes are present already in adolescence (Schulz et al., 2018a): students with more privileged socioeconomic backgrounds report stronger intentions for political participation, score higher on civic knowledge and are more likely to report civic self-efficacy than peers with less privileged socioeconomic backgrounds. This resonates with previous research that identified comparable gaps already in adolescence (e.g., Dassonneville et al., 2012; Witschge & Van de Werfhorst, 2016).

Next, we tested the classic theoretical notion of the school as a mini polity (Flanagan, 2020): schools' supply of democratic activities can offer students relevant experiences in democratic processes, which in turn spills over to familiarity and involvement with democracy in general. Results support this mediating relation for average intentions regarding political participation and average civic knowledge, although moderately. Second, we considered how this mechanism relates to the socioeconomic inequalities in students' democratic outcomes. Students' with a more privileged socioeconomic status were more likely to take part in an inclusive democratic activity like voting in school. This echoes scholars who highlighted the possibility that some democratic activities may reach and represent young people disproportionately (e.g., on youth councils, Matthews & Limb, 2003). In addition, opposite to our expectations, we found some support for an accelerating role of schools; among students who participated in an inclusive democratic activity in school, SES was more important for their civic self-efficacy, compared to students who had not participated. When considering participation in a more selective democratic activity (like standing candidate), such an accelerating role was also found for intended political participation. In addition, we examined whether a relation between schools' average socioeconomic student background and students' average participation in democratic activities was weaker if schools' supply of such activities was more equally available. Results showed little robust support for such a compensatory role of supply. In sum, we'd say that the overall findings are more in support of a (weakly) accelerating role than a compensatory role of schools. We checked whether schools' supply of democratic activities depended on their students' socioeconomic composition, yet the data did not show such a relationship.

Before turning to possible implications, several limitations stand out. First, as we wanted to consider democratic activities that both principals and students reported about (regarding schools' supply and students' participation respectively), we focused on voting activities in the school context, however, this is a relatively narrow coverage of the activities schools could supply for students to get acquainted with democratic processes. Moreover, we could only examine whether students had



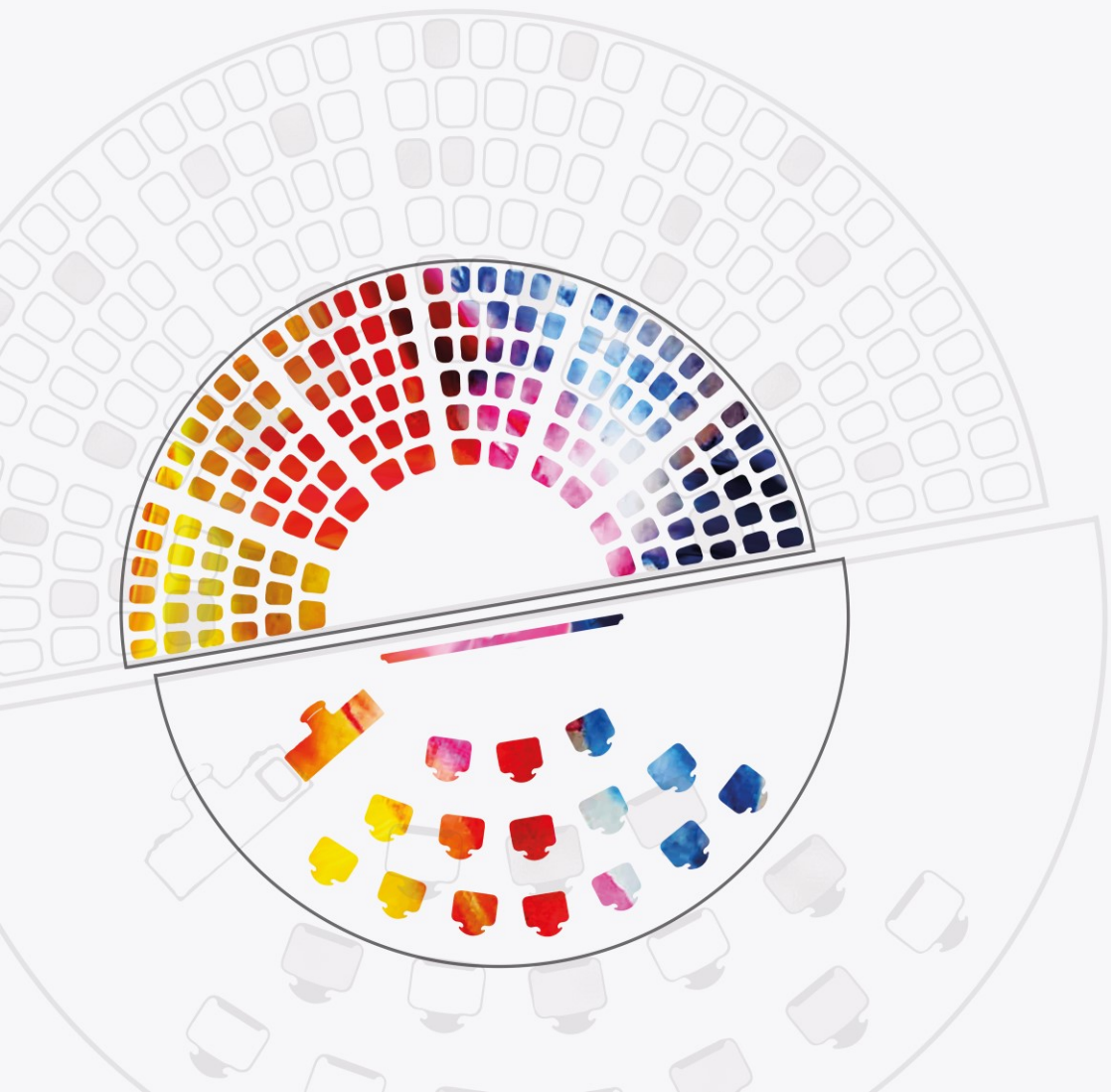
participated in these activities *at least once* over the last year. This means that we could not distinguish between students who had participated in democratic activities only once in the last year, or, for example, almost weekly. Neither could we control for the duration or pedagogical significance of (students' participation in) these activities. Given our theoretical framework, however, we'd expect that greater frequency or quality of students' participation in democratic activities would more likely strengthen than diminish the patterns we identified in the present study. Future research can examine this, thus we recommend to consider a broader variety of democratic activities that differ in selectivity, accessibility, frequency and didactic quality. Thirdly, it may go without saying that our data lacked the longitudinal structure to properly assess a potentially compensatory role of schools' supply, hence the results on the moderating role of schools as presented in this study remain suggestive at most. Lastly, the results show slightly different patterns for each of the three democratic outcomes, for example regarding the mediating role of students' participation in democratic activities (present for their intended democratic participation and their civic knowledge, but not for their civic self-efficacy). This suggests that different mechanisms may be relevant for each of the three outcomes. We did not empirically examine different mechanisms in the present study, yet underscore its relevance for future research.

While taking these limitations into account, the results in the study show interesting patterns. Schools' supply of democratic activities may be relatively equal across students in many schools, yet the extent to which students access this supply depends on their social background: equal supply, but not supply for equality. Students with a higher SES are more likely to participate in provided democratic activities at school. These findings resonate with previous studies that considered students' participation in civic learning opportunities in school, identifying similar gaps (by social background, Hoskins et al., 2017; by track, Sampermans et al., 2021), yet add the insight that these inequalities persist even regardless of how equal schools' supply is for students. Moreover, social background appears more important for an outcome like students' civic self-efficacy if students report to have participated in a school activity like voting or standing candidate. Future research could focus on the role of accessibility and inclusiveness of schools' supply; while some students may be more interested to participate than others, the inclusivity of schools' supply may tackle that students are interested in participating yet hesitate or experience constraints to do so, due to social circumstances. Additionally, future research could further examine the role of national policies on schools' civic educational supply (Eurydice, 2012, 2017), as these might affect social inequalities in students' access to and participation in democratic activities. The present study shows that even if schools provide opportunities for all students to practice democratic processes, students' participation in these activities is stratified by social background. This highlights the importance of schools' supply of democratic activities, as the nature and reach of this supply may matter for schools' role in reproducing or tackling social inequalities in young citizens' democratic outcomes.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The included countries are Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden, Belgium (Flemish) and the North-Rhine Westphalia region of Germany.





# Chapter 4

## The role of selection versus school factors for different open classroom climate experiences in the Netherlands

This chapter is based on Mennes, H. I., Munniksma, A., Van de Werfhorst, H. G., & Dijkstra, A. B. (2022). The role of selection versus school factors for different open classroom climate experiences in the Netherlands. *Submitted*.

### **Abstract**

While discussion is central to democratic functioning, young people report different experiences in terms of openness of discussion at school. Little research yet examined what accounts for these differential experiences, specifically regarding the role of the school context. This study considers the role of selection versus school factors: students' personal background characteristics versus school characteristics like school type, resources and climate. Using student, teacher and principal data of the Dutch 2016 cycle of the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), results show that differences in students' perceptions of classroom discussion openness as a function of their expected educational attainment disappear once controlling for students' interest in political issues and discussion about these outside school, which indicates selection effects. However, considering school factors, we find that students in schools offering an academic track are more likely to experience an open classroom climate, which may be partly explained by schools' sense of social belonging among students and staff. These findings suggest that the constitution of an open discussion climate partly relies on selection, yet that school factors also play a role.

Keywords: open classroom climate, inequalities, selection, tracking, school factors, International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) 2016

## Introduction

In many countries, schools are considered a key actor in the political socialization of young people. This has resulted in a young yet expanding research tradition on schools' realization of this process. One way is via practicing democratic discussion, characterized by an open classroom climate: the extent to which the classroom is "a learning environment that is focused on open discussion about political and social issues" (Persson, 2015, p. 587). A classroom climate that is open allows for democratic forms of discussion and gives students room to express their voice as well as to hear others' opinions. Studies indicate that an open classroom climate for discussion relates positively to a variety of students' civic and social outcomes: political engagement (Campbell, 2008), political or institutional trust (Barber et al., 2015; Dassonneville et al., 2012), ethnic tolerance (Gniewosz & Noack, 2008), political efficacy (Blankenship, 1990), critical consciousness (Godfrey & Grayman, 2014), positive peer relations (Munniksma et al., 2022) as well as civic and democratic knowledge (Alivernini & Manganelli, 2011; Gainous & Martens, 2012; Isac et al., 2014; Knowles & McCafferty-Wright, 2015; Martens & Gainous, 2013; Persson, 2015). Moreover, research suggests that an open classroom climate might fulfil a compensatory role in terms of inequalities in political engagement (Campbell, 2008). At the same time, however, scholars highlight that students' perceptions of an open classroom climate are stratified by educational attainment or socioeconomic background, meaning that students in academic tracks are more likely to experience an open classroom climate than peers in vocational tracks (Munniksma et al., 2017), similarly for students from socioeconomically advantaged backgrounds versus disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g., Hoskins et al., 2017; Hoskins et al., 2021).

These findings sparked interest in factors that affect an open classroom climate, and in particular students' differential experiences of such a climate. Studies primarily focused on the role of classroom diversity or classroom socioeconomic composition (Claes et al., 2017; Deimel et al., 2020), ideological classroom composition (Knowles, 2020) or teaching practices in the classroom (Hu & Huang, 2019; Schuitema et al., 2018). While these factors reveal a lot about dynamics within the classroom, the relevance of the wider school context has been scarcely considered. This while classroom composition in terms of students' background often corresponds with the wider composition of the school (e.g., Vogels et al., 2021), and teaching practices inside the classroom may be informed by the track types that schools offer (Nieuwelink et al., 2019; Ten Dam & Volman, 2003), or wider school factors, like school resources and climate, for example. Put differently, what happens in classrooms is embedded in the school context and may thus be informed by school level factors. Few studies, however, focus on the relevance of school factors for (differential) experiences of open classroom climates (for exceptions, see Hu & Huang, 2019, Kuang et al., 2018; Maurissen et al., 2018; Reichert et al., 2018).

As such, the aim of the current paper is to examine 1) to what extent students' and schools' average experiences of openness in classroom discussions are differentiated by educational attainment or socioeconomic status, and 2) to what

extent such disparities can be explained by school characteristics. In order to examine the role of school characteristics well, we have to control for alternative explanations, like selection effects. Selection effects can account for a greater likelihood of openness in classroom climates, due to the sorting of students who associate with the kind of discussion that characterizes open classroom climates. For example, students who are interested in discussions about political topics may experience their classroom climate as more open, and may be more likely to pursue an academic oriented education, or to have a more privileged socioeconomic background. This could account for differences in open classroom climate between tracks, for example (Munniksma et al., 2017), or between socioeconomic backgrounds (Hoskins et al., 2021). Alternatively, school factors can play a role: schools that offer academic tracks or that have a more privileged socioeconomic student composition may have different resources or a different school climate that facilitates the realization of an open climate in classroom discussions. In the present study, we focus on the latter line of reasoning, yet we control for the possibility of selection effects. At the student level, we consider the role of students' expected educational attainment, their socioeconomic status and their political interest and interactions outside school. At the school level, we examine the role of tracking and socioeconomic student composition. In addition, we focus on the role of school resources and school climate. Given that teachers play an important role in the realization of an open classroom climate (Kelly, 1986; Siegel-Stechler, 2021), we consider the average amount of training that teachers have had regarding classroom discussions. In addition, the broader social climate in the school can create a positive social embedding (Goddard, 2003; Ripski & Gregory, 2009) that facilitates open discussions within classrooms. We test the relative role of each of these factors using student, teacher and principal data of the Dutch 2016 cycle of the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS). In the Netherlands, students are placed in educational tracks that prepare for different educational orientations around age 12, which is relatively early compared to other OECD countries (OECD, 2016b; Woessmann, 2009). Some studies suggest that supply of civic education differs across educational tracks (Nieuwelink et al., 2019; Sampermans et al., 2021; Ten Dam & Volman, 2003), also specifically when considering open classroom climate for discussion (Munniksma et al., 2017). This makes the Netherlands an interesting case to focus on: on the one hand, disparities in open classroom climate between tracks may indicate selection effects of students (i.e., different educational aspirations of students), but on the other hand, it could hint to differences in the educational practices that schools provide to students. The Dutch sample of the ICCS 2016 study (Munniksma et al., 2017) allows to examine the latter while controlling for potential selection effects.

#### **A divided open classroom climate: selection or access?**

In the context of civic education, the value of an open classroom climate for discussion is often highlighted. This climate refers to a learning environment that



enables students to dialogue freely and to have discussion on political and social issues (Persson, 2015, p. 587). Hoskins and colleagues characterize an open classroom climate by the prevalence of several experiences for students; whether students feel enabled to bring up topics in discussion, feel encouraged to form their own opinion and to express it, feel enabled to not only agree but also disagree with teachers, and whether teachers respect the opinion of students (Hoskins et al., 2017). Together, such perceptions feed into a classroom environment that provides a fertile ground for dialogue and discussion. The realization of an open classroom climate knows two central actors: first, classmates, as fellow participants in discussions, and second teachers, who have a more leading role in enabling discussion and dialogue in the classroom. The concept of 'climate' that is tied to these discussions suggests that all students in the classroom experience the same. However, scholars who rely on students' self-reported perceptions of open classroom climate often identify differences between individual students within the same classroom (Claes et al., 2017; Reichert et al., 2018). As a result, an open classroom climate is often examined as an aggregate average experience of all students in the same classroom. Alternatively, one could argue that a classroom climate can only be considered open if all students experience it as such: only if all members of the classroom feel it is a constructive and respectful place for discussion, is it truly open. In sum, perceptions of an open classroom climate can differ between students and classrooms, hence the concept is studied both as an individual perception as well as a classroom characteristic or civic educational practice that can be offered to students.

Previous research indicates that disparities exist in students' experiences of an open classroom climate, meaning that they are unequally distributed among students depending on their educational track or social background (Hoskins et al., 2017; Hoskins et al., 2021; Munniksma et al., 2017). This can refer to differences between classrooms, but also within the same classroom; students can experience discussions differently, as a function of their expected educational attainment. (Schulz et al., 2018a), their parental educational level (Claes et al., 2017) or their socioeconomic status (Knowles, 2020). Such differences can be explained in multiple ways. On the one hand, it could indicate that students' expected educational attainment or their socioeconomic background represent particular interests or experiences that color one's evaluation of how open a classroom is. For example, students who are interested in political discussion may be more likely to pursue an academically oriented education, and at the same time appreciate discussion about political topics in the classroom. Analyses by Schulz et al. (2018a) indeed show that students' perceptions of an open classroom climate are predicted by students' interest in civic issues, as well as by expected educational attainment. Additionally, students who have more frequent discussions with parents or friends may be more likely to evaluate discussions in the classroom as open. Quite some studies indicate such patterns, for example based on the 2009 data of the ICCS study. Focusing on four Scandinavian countries, Reichert et al. (2018) found that discussion outside school relates positively to student profiles that tend to experience classroom

discussions as open. Based on the European sample of ICCS 2009, Maurissen et al. (2018) identified a positive role for discussion with family and friends for students' perceptions of open classroom climate. Examining the same sample of countries, Claes and colleagues (2017) also witness this link between discussion with family and friends and open classroom climate, and their results suggests that these discussions are more likely when parental educational level is higher. In that sense, an open classroom climate may be (partly) a matter of selection: students who find discussion interesting and engage in discussion with family or friends may be more likely to pursue an academically oriented education or come from a more privileged background, *and* may be more likely to evaluate their classroom climate for discussion as open.

Additionally, some scholars approach an open classroom climate as a matter of access, where students who pursue particular educational programs or go to more privileged schools may be more likely to be exposed to an open classroom climate than peers in schools with other educational programs or a less advantaged student population. From that angle, open classroom climate is not solely the product of the selection of students, but can also be informed by school factors. For example, Munniksmas et al. (2017) identified differences between tracks in the Netherlands, where students in academic tracks were more likely to report an open classroom climate than peers in vocational tracks. In addition, research suggests that students who go to a school with more advantaged students are more likely to experience their classroom climate as open than students who go to a school with less advantaged students (Hoskins and Janmaat, 2019; Hoskins et al., 2021). Put differently, it could be that students' experiences of an open classroom climate partly depend on the school one goes to, regardless of one's own expected educational attainment or social background. That underscores the potential role of schools, and the question what this role entails.

### **The role of school resources: teacher training**

If differential experiences of an open classroom climate partly depend on the school one goes to, this brings up the question what school factors account for this difference. Within the scope of this study, we consider two factors. First, the role of teachers. Research on open classroom climate underscores teachers as central actors: they facilitate discussions in the classroom by deciding about topics, by distributing time and attention between students and different views, and by making sure that all students feel treated fairly and just in the process (Kelly, 1986). This is not without challenges (Stray & Sætra, 2016), as is demonstrated by a dispersed and sometimes low level of confidence among teachers to realize civic educational practices in their classrooms (Schulz et al., 2018a). Teaching civic education may involve particular didactic skills and teaching methods, like classroom discussions on political and social issues. This can be a daunting task for teachers, considering that students differ in their propensity to speak out in the classroom, the taboo on particular topics, and the time limit of a classroom hour that teachers face, to name

some obstacles (Avery et al., 2013). Indeed, studies show that teachers express to feel unready to facilitate classroom discussions, for example on controversial topics (Gindi & Erlich, 2018; Oulton et al., 2004). This introduces the second factor, concerning the potential role of teacher training regarding discussions in the classroom.

Teacher training refers to the formal learning or preparation teachers received that equips them to realize educational practices, for example in the domain of civic education. This can concern pre-service training that precedes teaching experiences and is part of one's teaching education program, or in-service training when teachers already work at school. In both categories of training, civic educational practices like classroom discussion can be taught. Research suggests that teachers find classroom discussion on social or political topics valuable, yet that they also hesitate to facilitate this (Byford et al., 2009). Teacher education programs may provide tools and opportunities to teachers to practice (and develop) skills to facilitate discussions (Pace, 2019). While little research is available on the relation between teacher training and teachers' realization of an open classroom climate, research in general shows that participation in teacher education programs associates with a higher sense of preparedness among teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002) and that teachers' sense of preparedness to teach civic education relates to their students' average perception of an open classroom climate (Hu & Huang, 2019). Translating this to the context of an open classroom climate, we expect that when teachers have enjoyed more training regarding classroom discussion, either through pre-service, in-service or both, this adds to their skills and their teaching practices, specifically regarding classroom discussions. Consequently, students may experience a more open classroom climate for discussion.

Some research examined the relation between schools' educational tracks or socioeconomic student composition and their teacher training or teaching expertise. In some countries, schools that offer academic (as opposed to vocational) tracks have more teaching resources (Brunello & Checchi, 2007), which may also result in more training opportunities for teachers. In general, studies suggest that schools with a more advantaged student composition have more resources (Perry, 2013), that it is easier for these schools to hire teachers or to invest in teacher expertise, or that these schools are less likely to risk investment loss due to staff turnover (Belfi et al., 2015). Translating this to the context of civic education, schools offering academically oriented tracks or schools with a more privileged socioeconomic student composition may on average have more training among teachers regarding discussions in the classroom. As such, we also explore whether the expected positive relation between educational attainment and socioeconomic status with average perceptions of an open classroom climate could be mediated by the average training of schools' teachers.

**The role of school climate: social belonging**

Second, besides the role of school resources like teacher training, schools' climate may also play a role for the openness of discussion in its classrooms. An open classroom climate and its exchange of views regarding social or political issues involves potential conflict. It can confront students with opinions of others that are different than their own (Maurissen et al., 2018), which demonstrates the notion that it is okay to disagree with one another (Avery et al., 2013), and that contestation can provide insight in different interests, thereby contributing to a better understanding of an issue (Campbell, 2008). While tolerance to, or even appreciation of, such conflict may be part of an open classroom climate, Avery and colleagues point out that students can feel reluctant, or insecure to disagree with others (Avery et al., 2013). Adolescence is a time during which peer approval weighs relatively heavily (Newman & Newman, 1976) and expression of a dissenting view may be easier in a more socially comfortable atmosphere. Against this background, a sense of social belonging can provide students the comfort to 'appreciate' conflicting views in discussions. This introduces the potential role of school social belonging.

School social belonging refers to positive relations between students and teachers and a sense of community in the school among its members. If schools are generally characterized by great social belonging, this may form a solid basis for discussions that take place in the school's classrooms. In general, a positive social school climate or school-based social capital links to engagement among students and better learning experiences (Goddard, 2003; Ripski & Gregory, 2009) and social and cognitive learning environments (Kutsyuruba et al., 2015). Positive relations between teachers and students in school also relate to civic outcomes like students' societal involvement (Wanders et al., 2020). For an open classroom climate in particular, scholars found that positive social relations in the school between students and teachers related to a more open classroom climate (Kuang et al., 2018; Maurissen et al., 2018).

Research also provides insight in the role of school social belonging for the stratification of open classroom climates by educational attainment or socioeconomic background. A review by Perry (2013) considers the ways in which the average socioeconomic status (SES) within schools relates to school characteristics that influence the learning environment of students, showing that relations between students and teachers are more supportive in schools with a student composition that is socioeconomically more privileged. Belfi and colleagues provide several explanations for this relation, like different backgrounds of teachers versus students, which makes trust and social connection less easy, or lower social acceptability of students' attachment to school by peers among lower SES schools (Belfi et al., 2015). Taking these findings together, schools' social belonging could (partly) explain why schools' socioeconomic student composition relates to a higher average open classroom climate at the school level; school social belonging is expected to be more likely in schools with an advantaged student composition, and

can inform the social basis for discussions that follow in the classroom. In sum, based on previous research, we arrive at the following hypotheses:

- H1* Educational attainment relates positively to students' perceived open classroom climate.
- H2* Socioeconomic status relates positively to students' perceived open classroom climate.
- H3a* Schools' average teacher training relates positively to students' perceived open classroom climate.
- H3b* Schools' average teacher training mediates the positive relation between schools' tracks or socioeconomic student composition and their average open classroom climate.
- H4a* Schools' social belonging relates positively to students' perceived open classroom climate.
- H4b* Schools' social belonging mediates the positive relation between schools' tracks or socioeconomic student composition and their average open classroom climate.

## Methods

### Data

We use data from the Dutch 2016 wave of the International Civic & Citizenship Education Study (ICCS). This study has been conducted in 24 countries worldwide, and is administered by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). Key strengths of the ICCS are its high quality, its national representativity and its facilitation of international comparison regarding pupils' civic outcomes and schools' civic educational practices. All data has been collected in the first six months of 2016, which resulted in a sample of more than 94000 pupils in about 3800 schools, distributed across the 24 countries (Schulz et al., 2018a). In each school, one (or sometimes more) classroom(s) of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students was randomly selected (Schulz et al., 2018b), and as such, the classroom and school level are (statistically) equal in the ICCS data. In addition, around 3800 school principals and 37000 teachers participated across the 24 countries. In the present study, we focus on the Dutch wave of ICCS 2016 (Munniksma et al., 2017). This resulted in a sample of 1854 students in 87 schools (45 with vocational tracks, 42 with academic tracks). Given endogeneity considerations (Antonakis et al., 2014), we also include data from each school's principal and on average 12 teachers per school.

### Variables

#### *Dependent variable*

Students' *perceptions of an open classroom climate for discussion* were measured by asking students about the frequency of several aspects of an open classroom climate happening, following other studies (Hoskins et al., 2021; Maurissen et al., 2018; Munniksma et al., 2017). Students were asked 'when discussing political

or social issues during regular lessons, how often do the following things happen?'. The following situations were presented to students: 'teachers encourage students to make up their own minds', 'teachers encourage students to express their opinions', 'students bring up current political events for discussion in class', 'students express opinions in class even when their opinions are different from most of the other students', 'teachers encourage students to discuss the issues with people having different opinions', and 'teachers present several sides of the issues when explaining them in class'. For each situation, students could indicate frequency by choosing between 'never', 'rarely', 'sometimes' or 'often'. Answers to these six items were previously combined into one scale via item response theory with weighted likelihood estimates (Köhler et al., 2018), with a reliable Cronbach's  $\alpha$  score of .76 in the Dutch sample (Munniksma et al., 2017, p. 187). A higher score indicates a stronger perception of openness regarding the classroom climate for discussion. While an open classroom climate is often presented as a characteristic of the classroom, previous research stresses that students in the same classroom can differ in how open they perceive their classroom climate to be (Claes et al., 2017; Reichert et al., 2018). Therefore, we consider students' perceptions of an open classroom climate both at the individual (within) level and the classroom/school (between) level.

### *Independent variables*

**Student level variables.** Students' *expected educational attainment* was based on the question what the highest level of education is that students expect to complete. Answers were specified for the national context and hence recoded to the four categories of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED): level 2 or below (primary education), level 3 (secondary education), level 4 or 5 (tertiary vocational education), or level 6, 7 or 8 (tertiary academic education). We recoded this into three binary options that indicate students' expected educational attainment; no tertiary education (no/yes), tertiary vocational education (no/yes) or tertiary academic education (no/yes).

In addition, students' *socioeconomic status* was measured based on an index of students' highest parental education, highest parental occupational status, and their estimation of the number of books at home as described by Köhler and colleagues (2018). This index was constructed using principal component factor scores, and resulted in an acceptable reliability score of  $\alpha = .61$  among the Dutch ICCS sample (Schulz et al., 2018b, p. 152). A higher score indicates a higher socioeconomic status.

As indicators of *selection*, three student variables were included. Students were asked how often they were involved in a number of activities (outside school), among which was 'talking with your parent(s) about political or social issues' or 'about what is happening in other countries' and 'talking with friends about political or social issues' or 'about what is happening in other countries'. For all four activities, students could choose between 'never or hardly ever', 'monthly (at least once a

month)', 'weekly (at least once a week)', or 'daily or almost daily'. All four activities were recoded so that two options remained; 'never or hardly ever' (coded 0) versus 'at least monthly' (coded 1). Both items on discussion with parents were combined in an average score, and the same was done for items on discussion with friends. Thirdly, students' personal interest in political and social issues was controlled for. They were asked how interested they are in political and social issues, where they could answer 'not interested at all', 'not very interested', 'quite interested', or 'very interested'. A higher score on this variable thus indicates stronger interest.

At the student level, two *control variables* were included: students' gender and migration background. Gender was self-reported by students, and 'male' was coded as 0, and 'female' as 1. In addition, students who were born abroad or of whom at least one parent was born abroad were considered to have a migration background. Students without a migration background were coded as 0 and students with a migration background as 1.

**School level variables.** To measure *tracks*, schools were categorized as either vocational or academic, in line with the track that students in the Dutch ICCS 2016 sample pursued. In the Dutch education system, secondary schools offer education in one or more tracks. Students start in a track in the first year of secondary education, and often classrooms are formed on the basis of tracks, particularly in later years of secondary education. Therefore, as the ICCS 2016 sample in each school concerned one classroom, the track in each school was often homogenous. Vocational track types were coded 0 and academic track types (including general academic education) were coded 1. ICCS classrooms with mixed tracks (i.e. students who pursue vocational, general or academic education in the same classroom) were excluded from the study, due to the low number ( $n = 4$ ).

Schools' *socioeconomic student composition* was measured through the combination of two items. Each participating school's principal was asked to approximate what percentage of students in the school came from economically affluent homes and what percentage came from economically disadvantaged homes. For both backgrounds, the principal chose between 0-10 percent, 11-25 percent, 26-50 percent, or more than 50 percent. We recoded both variables into four dummy variables. The first category is 'relatively disadvantaged', when the principal estimated the percentage of students with affluent backgrounds as below 10 percent and the percentage of students with disadvantaged backgrounds as at least 26 percent, or when students with affluent backgrounds accounted for 25 percent of the student population at most, combined with more than half of the student population with a disadvantaged background. In the reversed case, we categorized this as 'relatively affluent'. If both the proportions of students with disadvantaged and affluent backgrounds were estimated as at least 26 percent of the entire student population, then the composition was categorized as 'socioeconomically diverse'. The remaining combinations of principals' answers to both items indicated a more 'moderate socioeconomic' student composition (e.g., when both affluent and

Table 4.1. *Descriptive statistics*

	Mean	SD	Range	n
<i>Student level</i>				
Open classroom climate	47.58	8.53	16.67 – 78.16	1854
Expected education: no tertiary education <sup>1</sup>	0.13	0.34	0 – 1	1854
Expected education: academic oriented education <sup>1</sup>	0.31	0.46	0 – 1	1854
Socioeconomic status	-0.02	0.98	-3.27 – 2.07	1854
Gender (female)	0.52	0.5	0 – 1	1854
Migration background (yes)	0.19	0.39	0 – 1	1854
Discussion with parents	-0.01	0.98	-1.74 – 1.07	1854
Discussion with friends	0.02	1.01	-1.04 – 1.53	1854
Interest in political topics	0.01	0.98	-1.35 – 2.98	1854
<i>School level</i>				
Socioeconomic school composition				
Disadvantaged (yes) <sup>2</sup>	0.14	0.35	0 – 1	87
Affluent (yes) <sup>2</sup>	0.39	0.49	0 – 1	87
Diverse (yes) <sup>2</sup>	0.19	0.39	0 – 1	87
Track (general/academic)	0.43	0.49	0 – 1	87
Average teacher training	0.13	1.01	-2.66 – 2.13	87
School social belonging	0.11	1.09	-2.23 – 2.39	87

Source: ICCS 2016. All non-binary variables were z-standardized. <sup>1</sup>Reference category is vocational oriented education, <sup>2</sup>reference category is a moderate socioeconomic student composition. Data was weighted at the student and school level.

disadvantaged students formed up to 25 percent of the student population). This was selected as the reference category.

*Average teacher training* was included, as teachers were asked whether they had attended any teacher training courses addressing classroom discussion. Teacher chose between ‘no’, ‘yes, during pre-service training’, ‘yes, during in-service training, or ‘yes, during both pre- and in-service training’. We recoded so that 0 indicates no training, 1 either pre-service or in-service training, and 2 if training in both pre- and in-service was followed. For each school, teachers’ scores on this variable were then aggregated to the school level, so that a higher score indicates a higher average attendance of the school’s teachers in pre- and/or in-service training regarding classroom discussions.

*School social belonging* of students and staff was measured via perceptions of teachers and principals. The complete list of items for this concept is reported in Appendix 4.1. Teachers were asked how many students in their school ‘have a good relationship with the school teachers and staff’, and ‘how many students in school show they feel part of the school community’. Teachers chose between ‘none or hardly any’, ‘some of them’, ‘most of them’ or ‘all or nearly all’. In addition, principals were asked to what extent the following statements describe the current situation at



their school, namely that 'teachers feel part of the school community', that 'teachers have a positive attitude towards the school' and 'students feel part of the school community'. Principals chose between 'not at all', 'to a small extent', 'to a moderate extent' or 'to a large extent'. Exploratory factor analysis showed support for one composite variable (with factor loadings ranging between 0.29 and 0.43) and a moderate yet acceptable Cronbach's  $\alpha$  score of .63 (after standardization). Given the different answering scales of the selected items, we constructed the composite variable via factor scores using the regression method (Thomson, 1951). A higher value indicates greater social belonging in school as (on average) perceived by the school's teachers and principal. Descriptive statistics are summarized in Table 4.1.

### Analyses

The hypotheses were tested through multilevel linear regression analysis at the student and school level, using Stata 16, and multilevel path analyses at both levels, using Mplus version 8.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012). We chose the latter for its ability to test mediation while taking the hierarchy of the data into account (Preacher et al., 2010, 2011). We started the multilevel linear regression analysis with an empty model (Model 0, Table 4.2), to check the data structure. The intraclass correlation confirmed a nested structure: the school level (as opposed to student level) accounts for around eight percent of variance in the open classroom climate measure. While this means that the variance between schools is limited and that the majority of variance is positioned at the student level, it still indicates hierarchy in the data, which underscores the relevance of using a research design that is sensitive to this nested structure.

Besides multilevel linear regression analysis, we employ a multilevel path model. For path analysis with multilevel data, variation in dependent outcomes is generally distinguished between a within and/or a between component, where variables can vary both within and between groups (Christ et al., 2017; Heck & Thomas, 2015). We are primarily interested in the relations at the between (i.e., school) level, and are aware that the within (i.e., student) level is also an important source of variation in open classroom climate perceptions. The Mplus software enables us to tease the two levels of variation in open classroom climate apart. Thus, the within part of the model predicts individual level outcomes by individual level independent variables and the between part of the model predicts school level outcomes (averages) by school level independent variables. Data were weighted to control for sampling deviations at the student and school level (Köhler et al., 2018) and all non-binary variables were standardized. We checked for multicollinearity among the included independent variables, which was not a cause of concerns (based on VIF scores that were all below 2).

### Results

In order to test Hypothesis 1, 2, 3a and 4a, regarding the role of selection and school factors for students' perceptions of an open classroom climate, we start

with multilevel linear regression modelling, as summarized in Table 4.2. Model 1 contains all student level background variables, displaying that students who expect to attain an academic oriented educational attainment tend to experience their classroom climate as more open compared to students who anticipate a vocational oriented educational attainment. No difference in open classroom climate was found for students who do not expect a tertiary education compared to students who expect a vocational education. We consider the difference between vocational and academic attainment as support for H1, that educational attainment relates positively to perceptions of open classroom climate. Opposite to our expectations, students' socioeconomic status yields no significant relation to their perceptions of openness of their classroom climate. This means that H2 is rejected. In addition to educational attainment and SES, two control variables were included. Students who categorize themselves as girls (versus boys) on average perceive a more open classroom climate, but migration background makes no difference in terms of students' open classroom climate perceptions.

In order to properly assess the contribution of school factors (H3a and H4a), we first assess the role of selection factors, like discussion with parents and friends, as well as students' personal interests in political and social issues. These three variables were added in Model 2. Results show that all three yield a positive significant result; students with high interest in political and social issues and discuss them outside of school tend to experience classroom discussions as more open. At the same time, the role of students' expected educational attainment disappears in Model 2. This suggests that the educational difference in open classroom climate at the individual level is actually explained by students' interest and discussion outside school; it appears that students who expect to attain an academic educational attainment are more interested in social and political issues or discuss these more often with family and friends than peers who expect to attain a vocational educational attainment. These results support the notion of selection processes; that differences in perceptions of open classroom climate as a function of students' educational attainment are confounded by students' interests in (discussions about) social and political topics outside school. However, educational attainment and socioeconomic background can also play a role in the openness of classroom climate for discussion at the school level. Therefore, in Model 3 to 5, we include the track that the school offers and the socioeconomic student composition of the school, in addition to students' individual expected educational attainment and their socioeconomic status. Results show that students in academic tracks are more likely to experience an open classroom climate for discussion than peers in vocational tracks. In addition, going to a school with a student composition that is socioeconomically disadvantaged (compared to a more moderate socioeconomic student composition) means that one is less likely to perceive discussions in the classroom as open. This role of socioeconomic student composition is only present if track is not controlled for, suggesting overlap between both. In sum, the extent to which students perceive their classroom discussions as open also partly depends on

Table 4.2. Multilevel linear regression modelling of students' perceptions of an open classroom climate

	Model 0	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
<i>Student level</i>								
Expected educational attainment (no tertiary education) <sup>1</sup>	-0.65 (0.83)		-0.27 (0.76)	0.31 (0.80)	-0.21 (0.77)	0.31 (0.81)	0.27 (0.81)	0.24 (0.80)
Expected educational attainment (academic oriented education) <sup>1</sup>	1.44** (0.52)		0.76 (0.51)	0.40 (0.48)	0.75 (0.50)	0.41 (0.48)	0.44 (0.49)	0.44 (0.49)
Socioeconomic status	0.36 (0.24)		-0.03 (0.23)	-0.16 (0.23)	-0.11 (0.23)	-0.22 (0.23)	-0.22 (0.23)	-0.25 (0.23)
Gender (female)	1.74*** (0.40)		1.37*** (0.37)	1.49*** (0.38)	1.57*** (0.38)	1.49*** (0.38)	1.50*** (0.38)	1.51*** (0.38)
Migration background (yes)	0.52 (0.68)		0.09 (0.65)	0.10 (0.67)	0.32 (0.63)	0.30 (0.64)	0.37 (0.64)	0.34 (0.64)
Discussion with parents			1.03*** (0.27)	1.00*** (0.28)	1.01*** (0.28)	0.98*** (0.28)	0.99*** (0.28)	0.97*** (0.27)
Discussion with friends			0.93*** (0.19)	0.93*** (0.19)	0.93*** (0.19)	0.93*** (0.19)	0.94*** (0.19)	0.93*** (0.19)
Interest in political issues			1.03***	1.02***	1.05***	1.04***	1.04***	1.02***
<i>School level</i>								
Track (academic)			(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)
			1.98** (0.62)	1.98** (0.62)		1.84** (0.61)	1.88** (0.58)	1.44* (0.57)
Disadvantaged socioeconomic school composition <sup>2</sup>					-1.85* (0.80)	-1.48 (0.90)	-1.39 (0.87)	-0.90 (0.75)
Affluent socioeconomic school composition <sup>1</sup>					0.45 (0.72)	0.44 (0.64)	0.42 (0.64)	0.19 (0.61)
Diverse socioeconomic school composition <sup>1</sup>					0.08 (0.83)	0.41 (0.82)	0.32 (0.80)	0.28 (0.80)
Average teacher training in classroom discussions							0.35 (0.20)	0.33 (0.19)
School social belonging								0.68* (0.27)
Constant	47.68*** (0.36)	46.39*** (0.48)	46.68*** (0.43)	45.77*** (0.50)	46.70*** (0.53)	45.76*** (0.63)	45.71*** (0.62)	45.91*** (0.58)
Intraclass correlation	.08	.06	.05	.04	.04	.04	.04	.03

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Source: ICSS 2016.  $n(\text{student}) = 1854$ ,  $n(\text{school}) = 87$ . <sup>1</sup> Reference category is vocational oriented education. <sup>2</sup> Reference category is socioeconomically moderate student composition. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .



the school one goes to, even when controlling for individual characteristics. We take this as support to proceed with an examination of school factors.

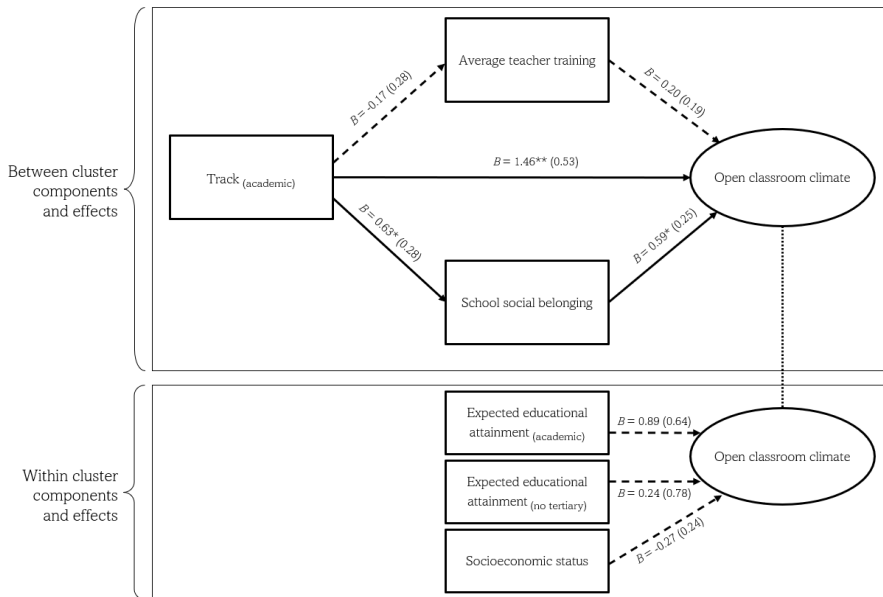
In Model 6 and 7, we add the role of average teacher training and school social belonging, to test H3a and H4a on their respective positive relation with open classroom climate. The training that teachers on average have had regarding classroom discussions yields no significant results, in neither Model 6 nor 7. Put differently, we find no support that teachers' average training in classroom discussions associates with students' perceptions of how open classroom discussions are in our sample. As a result, we reject H3a. In line with our expectations, school social belonging relates positively with perceptions of an open classroom climate; students who go to a school where the social belonging among staff and students rated as more positive, are more likely to perceive an open classroom climate. This supports H4a. In addition, in Model 7, the coefficient for track (academic versus vocational) shrinks and diminishes in terms of significance. Following Baron and Kenny's (1986) causal steps approach to test for mediation, this forms an initial indicator that the relation between tracks or socioeconomic student composition and classroom climate for discussion may be mediated via schools' social belonging.

This brings us to H3b and H4b, regarding the mediating role of both average teacher training (H3b) and school social belonging (H4b). We tested this via multilevel path analysis, as illustrated in Figure 4.1. Control variables are not displayed, yet included and reported in Table 4.3. The model fit is good, based on an insignificant Chi-square test ( $\chi^2 = 9.84$ ;  $df = 6$ ;  $p = .13$ ), a RMSEA score of .02 and a CFI score of .97, which is well within the margins of model fit guidelines for comparable path models (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Echoing the results of Model 7 of the multilevel linear regression analyses for students' individual open classroom climate perceptions (Table 4.2), the multilevel path analysis shows that only track and social school belonging yield significant results at the between level: in schools that offer an academic track and where school social belonging is considered more positive, the average openness of classroom discussions is also higher. In addition, track relates positively to school social belonging ( $b = 0.63$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Schools' socioeconomic student composition was unrelated to their average open classroom climate, and including it as a mediation led to a decline in model fit. Regarding socioeconomic student composition, therefore, H3b and H4b are rejected.

Using Mplus' maximum likelihood ratio (MLR) estimator, we found no support for a significant indirect path from track to open classroom climate via average teacher training ( $b = -0.03$ ,  $p = .56$ ) nor via social school belonging ( $b = 0.37$ ,  $p = .15$ ). Given the significant paths from track to open classroom climate via school social belonging, the absence of a significant indirect effect may signal non-normality of the product, for which Bayesian estimation is a better alternative. Bayesian estimation cannot be run with sampling weights. Therefore, we ran the MLR model without sampling weights, and compared this with Bayesian estimation, results of which are reported in Table 4.3. Results with Bayesian estimation are also illustrated in Figure 4.2. For both, the direct path from track to open classroom climate turned

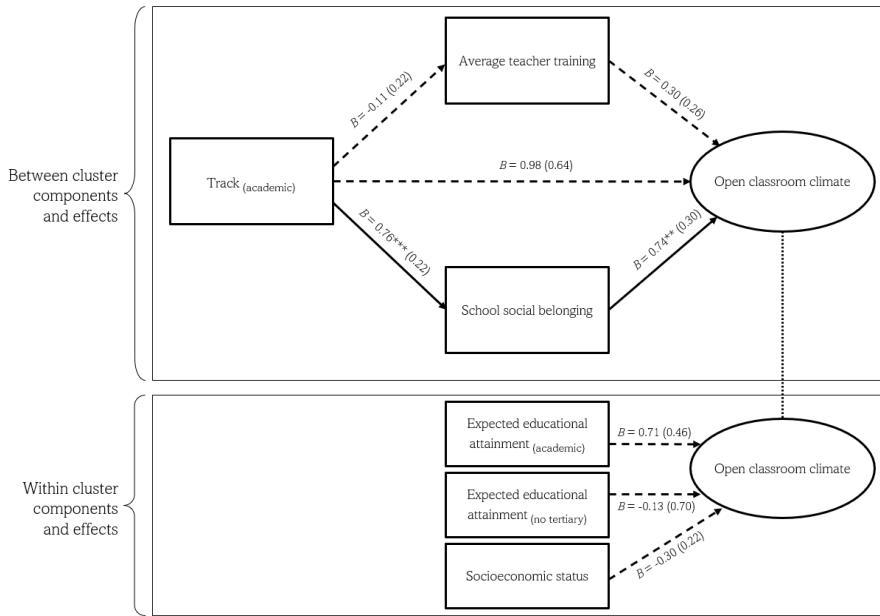
out insignificant, yet an indirect effect is found for track and open classroom climate, via school social belonging (indirect effect = 0.53,  $p < .01$ , total effect = 1.54,  $p < .01$ ). For average teacher training, no significant paths were found, direct nor indirect, hence H3b is rejected. For school social belonging, the results show some support for a mediating role in the relation between schools' track and schools' average open classroom climate (thus via school social belonging), although the representativity of the sample is not guaranteed. For track, H4b is thus partially supported.

Figure 4.1. *Multilevel path model for students' perceptions of open classroom climate with maximum likelihood ratio estimation*



Notes. Source: ICCS 2016. Figure 4.1 visualizes the direct and indirect paths for track (academic versus vocational), average teacher training and school social belonging for schools' average open classroom climate, while controlling for the role of students' individual expected educational attainment and socioeconomic status at the within level. a.o.. MLR estimation is used, with robust standard errors in parentheses.  $n(\text{student}) = 1854$ ,  $n(\text{school}) = 87$ .  $*** = p < .001$ ,  $** = p < .01$ ,  $* = p < .05$ . Data was weighted, all non-binary variables were standardized.

Figure 4.2. *Multilevel path model for students' perceptions of open classroom climate with Bayesian estimation*



*Notes.* Source: ICCS 2016. Figure 4.2 visualizes the direct and indirect paths for track (academic versus vocational), average teacher training and school social belonging to schools' average open classroom climate, while controlling for the role of students' individual expected educational attainment and socioeconomic status at the within level, a.o.. Bayesian estimation is used, standard errors in parentheses.  $n(\text{student}) = 1854$ ,  $n(\text{school}) = 87$ .

\*\*\* =  $p < .001$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \* =  $p < .05$ . Data was not weighted, all non-binary variables were standardized.

Table 4.3. *Multilevel path models of students' perceptions of an open classroom climate*

	Weighted MLR estimation	Unweighted MLR estimation	Unweighted Bayesian estimation
<b>Within level</b>			
<b>Open classroom climate</b>			
Expected education: no tertiary education <sup>1</sup>	0.24 (0.78)	-0.17 (0.80)	-0.14 (0.70)
Expected education: academic oriented education <sup>1</sup>	0.89 (0.64)	0.68 (0.54)	0.71 (0.46)
Socioeconomic status	-0.27 (0.24)	-0.31 (0.22)	-0.30 (0.22)
Gender (female)	1.37** (0.40)	1.72*** (0.36)	1.74*** (0.38)
Migration background (yes)	-0.41 (0.66)	0.02 (0.60)	0.03 (0.52)
Discussion with parents	0.87*** (0.25)	0.91*** (0.24)	0.90*** (0.24)
Discussion with friends	0.72** (0.22)	0.94*** (0.19)	0.94*** (0.22)
Interest in political issues	1.03*** (0.23)	0.91*** (0.21)	0.90*** (0.22)
<b>Between level</b>			
<b>Open classroom climate</b>			
Track (academic)	1.46** (0.53)	0.98 (0.53)	0.98 (0.64)
Disadvantaged socioeconomic school composition <sup>2</sup>	-0.89 (0.72)	-0.67 (0.78)	-0.64 (0.83)
Affluent socioeconomic school composition <sup>2</sup>	0.43 (0.56)	0.22 (0.58)	0.24 (0.66)
Diverse socioeconomic school composition <sup>2</sup>	-0.07 (0.79)	0.16 (0.74)	0.18 (0.76)
Average teacher training in classroom discussions	0.20 (0.19)	0.30 (0.18)	0.30 (0.26)
School social belonging	0.59* (0.25)	0.75** (0.24)	0.74** (0.30)
<b>Average teacher training in classroom discussions</b>			
Track (academic)	-0.17 (0.28)	-0.11 (0.22)	-0.11 (0.22)
<b>School social belonging</b>			
Track (academic)	0.63* (0.28)	0.76*** (0.21)	0.76*** (0.22)
Intercept, open classroom climate	1.50*** (0.83)	46.06*** (0.55)	46.01*** (0.63)
<b>Indirect effects</b>			
Track, via average teacher training	-0.03 (0.06)	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.02 (0.09)
Track, via school social belonging	0.37 (0.26)	0.57* (0.23)	0.53** (0.28)
<b>Total effects</b>			
Track, via average teacher training	1.42** (0.54)	0.95 (0.54)	0.95 (0.64)
Track, via school social belonging	1.83** (0.55)	1.55** (0.55)	1.54** (0.65)
RMSEA/CFI	.02 / .97	.02 / .98	-

Source: ICCS 2016.  $n(\text{student}) = 1854$ ,  $n(\text{school}) = 87$ . (Robust) standard errors in parentheses. <sup>1</sup> Reference category is vocational oriented education. <sup>2</sup> Reference category is a socioeconomically moderate student composition.  
 \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .



### Conclusion and discussion

Open discussions are inherently important for democratic functioning. As such, students' preparation for democracy within schools often involves discussion in the classroom. An open classroom climate, where students can freely and constructively exchange views regarding social or political issues is considered a key element of this preparation. At the same time, students differ in their experiences of how open their classroom discussions are. Little research has thus far examined what accounts for these differential experiences. In the present paper, we investigated differences in students' perceptions of an open classroom climate, as a function of educational attainment and socioeconomic background. In order to explain these differences, we examined the potential relevance of several school factors that may foster the likelihood of an open classroom climate: track, socioeconomic student composition, average teacher training, and school social belonging.

Results show that the perceived openness of classroom discussions indeed differs across students. In our Dutch sample, students who expect to attain an academic versus vocational education are more likely to experience their classroom climate as open. Opposite to our expectations, students' perceptions of open classroom climate did not differ as a function of their socioeconomic background. In that sense, these results show different patterns than findings from other countries (e.g., Hoskins et al., 2017; Hoskins et al., 2021). Results also showed that, when controlling for students' interest in political and social topics and their discussion about these topics outside school, expected educational attainment did no longer differentiate the perceived openness of classroom discussions. Put differently, it appears that students who expect to attain an academic education are on average also more interested in (discussion about) political topics, and evaluate their classroom discussions as more open. While controlling for these selection effects, however, students in academic tracks perceived more open classroom discussions than peers in vocational tracks. This means that students' experiences of an open classroom climate for discussion partly depend on the school they go to.

We considered two possible explanations for this difference at the school level, namely school resources and school climate respectively: teachers' average training in guiding classroom discussions and a sense of social belonging among staff and students in school. We found that average teacher training did not relate to open classroom climate, which is opposite to what we expected based on previous studies (Hu & Huang, 2019; Schuitema et al., 2018; Siegel-Stechler, 2021). Yet, results showed that students who go to schools with a stronger sense of social belonging among students and staff (as reported by principals and teachers) were more likely to perceive an open classroom climate. Moreover, the difference between educational tracks was smaller once school social belonging was taken into account. The results suggest that school social belonging is slightly more likely in schools that offer academic (versus vocational) tracks, and that it thus (partially) explains why track accounts for different average perceptions of openness in classroom discussions: in our sample, schools that offer academic tracks report somewhat stronger social



belonging among staff and students, which relates positively to average openness in classroom discussions. We found no support for a mediating role of average teacher training in the relation between schools' tracks, nor did we find a relation between schools' socioeconomic student composition and their average perceptions of open classroom climate in the school. In the Netherlands, the track that schools offer often corresponds with schools' student composition in terms of socioeconomic resources (Vogels et al., 2021), which could mean that socioeconomic student composition largely overlapped with track in the sample in this study.

The results of this study have several limitations that deserve to be highlighted. First, we relied on principals' and teachers' perceptions of school factors, which means that students' perceptions of these school factors are not included. In testing mediating relations, we propose particular mechanisms that connect characteristics of the school to students' perceptions of classroom climate (based on previous research, like Hu & Huang, 2019; Maurissen et al., 2018). In the present paper, these proposed mechanisms could only be partially tested. Given that students' own perceptions of social belonging were not included in the analyses, for example, we cannot be certain that a sense of social belonging is indeed experienced by students, and that it spills over to the openness of classroom discussions, as an explanation for the relation. At the same time, excluding students' perceptions was a deliberate choice, as it can decrease the endogeneity risk of common source bias (Antonakis et al., 2014, p. 105). Another limitation was that, due to a relatively small sample size, the power of the mediation analyses was of concern (MacKinnon, 2008). A larger representative sample would allow to check whether this affects the patterns as identified in this study. In sum, future research could contribute to a more detailed understanding of the mechanism that underlies the patterns in this paper, specifically regarding the relation between tracks, school social belonging and perceptions of open classroom climate.

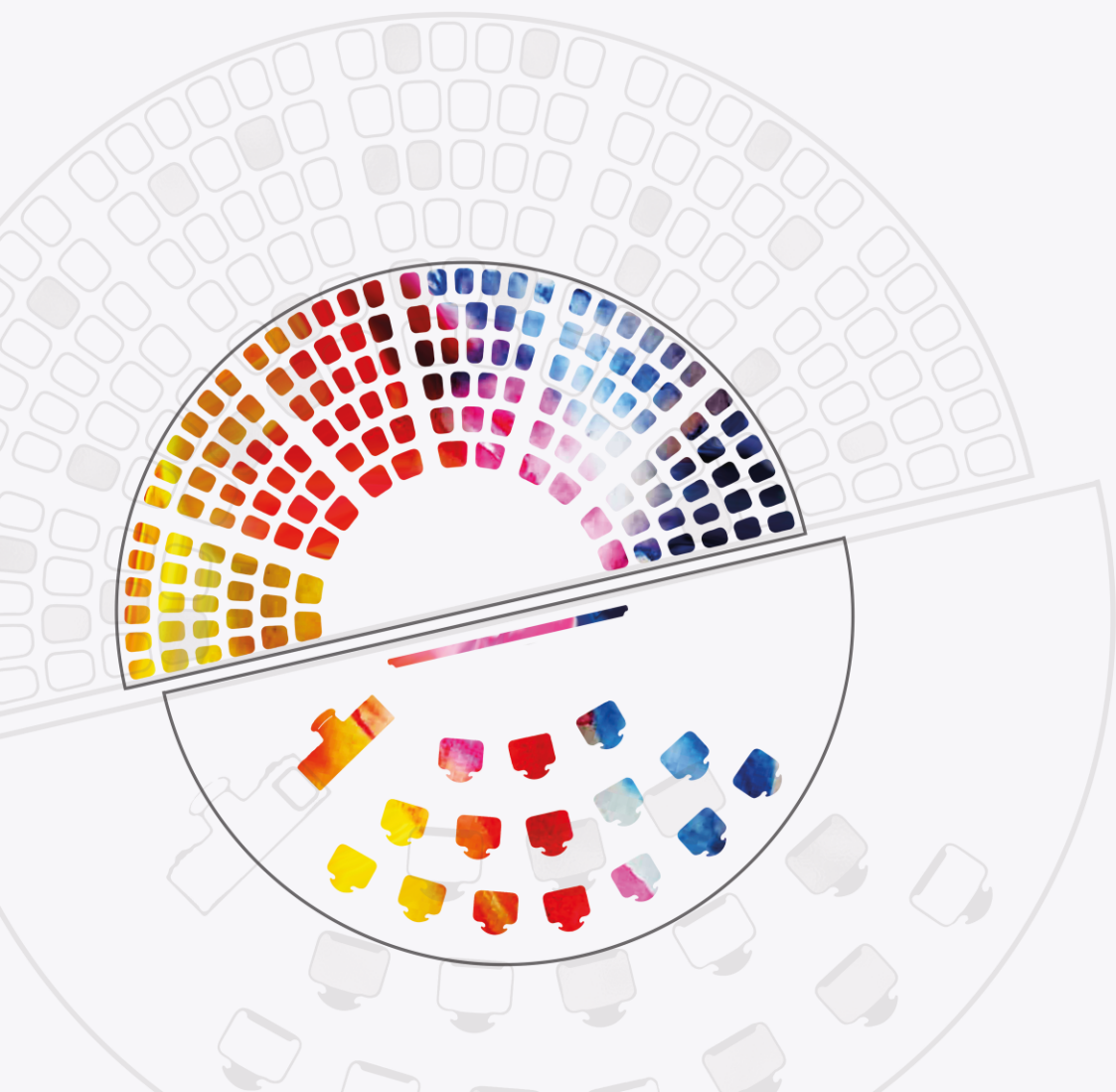
Another limitation that stands out concerns the fact that we could only examine one classroom in each school, which means that we did not statistically distinguish between classroom and school level. Previous research on open classroom climate often focused on the classroom (e.g., Claes et al., 2017; Deimel et al., 2020; Knowles, 2020). We expanded this by assessing the role of the *context* of the classroom too. Future research could examine both classroom and school factors simultaneously, to weigh the relative significance of both for the realization of an open classroom climate: while our findings suggest that the school context can form an important factor in the openness of classrooms' discussion climate, its relevance may be bleak compared to classroom factors. This study did not provide insight in the relative importance of both.

While taking these limitations into account, the present study contributed to existing insights in multiple ways. First, we add to the strand of research that examines students' differential experiences of an open classroom climate (echoing Hoskins et al., 2017; Hoskins et al., 2021). As an open classroom climate is one important way in which schools reify civic learning opportunities for students

(Hoskins & Janmaat, 2019), this is a relevant consideration. Second, in addition to students' own experiences, we included contextual perspectives; teachers and principals, who are central actors in the realization of either an open classroom climate or its school context, for example via their training and teaching expertise, or via the social climate of the school. Inclusion of alternative perspectives is not only important for statistical reasons (Antonakis et al., 2014), but it also helps to separate students' experiences from the actors shaping those experiences (e.g., teachers' and principals' views). By only relying on students' perspectives, these central actors are left unconsidered, which is an important contribution of this study.

Previous research called for more consideration of the wider school context for open classroom climate perceptions (Claes et al., 2017; Maurissen et al., 2018). The present study aimed to target this, showing that schools' tracks associate with the likelihood that students experience an open classroom climate. In addition, school social belonging relates positively to perceptions of openness. It thus appears that school level factors contextualize the realization of an open classroom climate; while democratic dialogue may take place inside the classroom, it can be informed by and embedded in what happens outside of the classroom. Untangling further how factors at the school level may facilitate the openness of classroom climates can assist educational practitioners in their realization of discussion in the classroom, and may show that the efforts of the teacher alone do not reflect the full story. While students' perceptions of how open discussions are depend for the greatest part on their individual characteristics, like how interested they are in politics and discussion about it, this study additionally showed that school factors like track type or school climate also play a role. In expanding research to all relevant actors and the context of the school at large, we may gain a broader understanding of schools' likelihood of realizing an open classroom climate, and specifically, in what ways schools can contribute to equal access for students to an open climate for discussion in classrooms; participating in open and democratic discussions starts with having a seat at the table.





# Chapter 5

## The role of curricular standardization in stratified civic learning of students in 14 European countries

This chapter is based on Mennes, H. I., Munnikma, A., Dijkstra, A. B., & Van de Werfhorst, H. G. (2022). The role of curricular standardization in stratified civic learning of students in 14 European countries. *Submitted*.

### **Abstract**

Across Europe, governments invest in central curricula for civic education. Yet across schools, social inequalities exist in students' civic learning experiences in school. In this paper we examine these inequalities and contextualize them by countries' institutional and policy characteristics. We focus on educational standardization, referring to a standard of educational quality for all students, which studies link to smaller disparities in learning in school. Using ICCS 2016 data from 1634 schools in 14 countries, results show some support that schools' use of civic curricular sources, like standardized materials from official educational authorities, associate with smaller inequalities in students' civic learning, but only among countries where educational policy is relatively centralized. We discuss this in relation to schools' compensatory role and emphasize the relevance of institutional characteristics for civic education.

Keywords: civic learning, curricular standardization, inequalities, stratification, International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) 2016

## Introduction

In many European countries, schools are formally granted the task to contribute to young people's civic learning and knowledge. This trend is accompanied by growing research interest in effective civic educational practices that schools can employ to fulfil this task (for reviews, see Campbell, 2019; Donbavand & Hoskins, 2021; Fitzgerald et al., 2021; Geboers et al., 2013). Meanwhile, students differ in the civic learning opportunities they report to have had in school, and in their test scores regarding civic knowledge. These differences occur along the lines of students' expected educational attainment and their socioeconomic status respectively (Schulz et al., 2018a). Such disparities in learning can reflect a difference in the education students receive: students' opportunities to learn about civic topics depend on the civic curricular content actually offered to them in school. A relation between students' expected educational attainment (e.g., vocational versus academic education) and students' civic learning in school, or between students' socioeconomic background with their civic learning in school may therefore indicate that students receive differential opportunities to learn (a line of reasoning that echoes other scholars, see for example Schmidt et al., 2015; Schütz et al., 2008, who focus on social background). Disparities in civic educational learning experiences matter, as schools form one channel through which citizens can acquire skills and knowledge that facilitate their engagement with democracy. This engagement is known to differ across citizens in European democracies, as illustrated by inequalities in citizens' democratic knowledge (Fraile, 2013), their political engagement (Van de Werfhorst, 2017) and political participation (Gallego, 2007). Inequalities like these do not benefit democratic functioning, in terms of the proportionate representation of citizens and the legitimacy of democratic decisions (Dryzek, 2001; Parkinson, 2003; Verba, 1996). Unequal opportunities for students to learn about civic topics in school may indicate that schools reproduce such societal inequalities. This motivates further research on factors that shape the equitability of schools' supply of civic learning.

An important aspect of schools' supply of civic learning concerns their civic curriculum, constructed either by schools themselves, or by higher level educational authorities, like the national government. Broadly defined, curriculum refers to "what teaching and instruction is to be offered" (Kelly, 2009, p. 7), and for which purposes and objectives. Purposes – or learning goals - concern the reasons behind attention for certain topics and content, which are then transferred to students via teaching and instruction (Walker, 2003). For civic education, well-structured, organized curricula have repeatedly been found to associate positively with several of students' civic (learning) outcomes, like civic knowledge (for a review, see Campbell, 2019; Geboers et al., 2013). The governance context of curricula deserves particular attention here, as curricula are often subject to standardization: governments can construct standards of teaching that entail the same level of quality for all students (Allmendinger, 1989). Standardization can also apply to curricula, meaning that some central regulation takes place regarding a curriculum, for example in terms of the topics it should cover or the educational standards it should meet, as issued by a

higher educational authority where control is located, like the national government (Bray, 1999). Put differently, depending on the level of educational standardization in a country, schools may have central curricular sources at their disposal. As standardization implies that the quality or provision of education is equal across students, research links it with smaller differences between students or schools; for example, fewer inequalities in educational achievements (e.g., Van de Werfhorst & Mijs, 2010), and smaller disparities in civic outcomes like ethnic tolerance (Janmaat & Mons, 2011) or forms of civic engagement (Witschge & Van de Werfhorst, 2016). However, standardization can apply to different aspects of education (e.g., curriculum design, assessment, staffing) and relatively little is known regarding the extent to which standardization of civic curricula relates to stratified civic learning in school.

In sum, the aim of the current study is to examine (1) to what extent the civic learning students experience in school is stratified by students' expected educational attainment and their socioeconomic status, and (2) to what extent curricular standardization tempers or strengthens the stratification of civic learning in school. We examine several aspects of standardization. First, we consider schools' use of standardized civic curriculum sources, as provided by the government or a central educational institution. However, whether governments provide such standardized curricula is no guarantee that schools adopt them; a standard civic curriculum may be available, but not mandatory for schools to adopt (Maroy, 2008). Therefore, we take into account whether schools experience autonomy in terms of curriculum construction. Moreover, we control for the unique country context in terms of central educational governance: standardization may only temper learning inequalities if a central (government) authority promotes or recommends particular forms of civic education, like a standard curriculum. We focus on European countries, as the European Union invests coordinated efforts in the educational governance of member states' civic education. For the EU, civic education is considered "a priority at the European level" as it can promote shared values (Eurydice, 2017, p. 11). Despite this shared priority across member states, education systems differ significantly across European countries, partly in terms of standardization (Bol & Van de Werfhorst, 2016). Supranational efforts to stimulate civic education (i.e., at the European level) therefore motivate more research on the role of intranational governance structures (i.e., countries' level of educational standardization). Within the EU, this resulted in policy documents and analyses of civic curricula across European education systems (e.g., Council of the EU, 2001; Eurydice, 2012, 2017). We add to and build on these analyses to gain a more detailed understanding of curricular standardization for civic learning.

### **Stratified civic learning in school**

We consider two stratification factors that differentiate the civic learning that students report, potentially corresponding with what schools offer: students' expected educational attainment and students' socioeconomic status. Regarding expected educational attainment, students differ in the education they want and are



enabled to pursue, often broadly categorized as either vocational specialization or general/academic specialization. These educational routes are often captured as different levels, where a higher level generally corresponds with more years of education. Some research shows that the educational attainment students expect to pursue relates positively to the civic education they experience in school, like an open classroom climate for discussion, their learning about civic topics at school (Schulz et al., 2018a) or simulation of civic processes in school (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). Similar patterns are found for students' socioeconomic status. Research shows that a more advantaged socioeconomic background associates with more civic learning in school, for example concerning political activities in school, or open classroom climate experiences (Hoskins et al., 2017; Hoskins et al., 2021). Put differently, it appears that students' experiences of learning about civic topics depends on the educational attainment they expect to pursue, and on their socioeconomic background. Based on this, we expect that:

- H1a* Students' expected educational attainment associates positively with their civic learning in school.
- H1b* Students' socioeconomic status associates positively with their civic learning in school.

### **Curricular standardization**

We focus on the role of schools and educational governance in reifying these civic learning experiences. What schools offer in terms of civic educational practices can be summarized as their civic curriculum. In general, curricula prescribe the ways in which schools realize learning for their students: they inform the instruction of students and the transfer of knowledge and skills. This also applies to civic learning, where a civic curriculum is one route via which students receive learning opportunities to gain knowledge about democratic matters and institutions. In general, curricula set out which topics are taught to students for which reasons (Walker, 2003) and research targeted what factors make curricula effective (e.g., Hattie, 2008). For civic learning, research on the role of curricula is more scant, yet several studies available identified that an organized, formal civic curriculum relates positively to democratic outcomes like political engagement (Pontes et al., 2019), civic engagement (Whiteley, 2014) or endorsement of democratic behaviors (Geboers et al., 2013). As high quality curricula aim to foster students' learning processes, civic curricula may likewise benefit students' civic learning experiences in school.

To guarantee such a level of quality for all students, curricula are often subject to educational policy through regional or national standardization. With greater curricular standardization, curricula have to meet (country)wide "quality of education" standards (Allmendinger, 1989, p. 233), which affects the organization and formality of curricula. This means that decisions about a curriculum at a more central level of educational governance will affect more students. In general, countries differ

in terms of educational standardization, which can apply to a variety of topics like assessment and examination, school budgets, teacher training or curricula (Bol & Van de Werfhorst, 2013; Woessmann, 2003), often broadly categorized as standardization of input (like curricula) or output (like examination) (Rowan, 1990). Research on the relation between curricular standardization and students' learning in school shows mixed results. On the one hand, countries have moved away from standardized educational practices because of concerns regarding misrecognition of educational professionalism within schools (Klein 1991; Walbert et al., 2000). Schools, and in particular teachers, are closely engaged in the primary learning process of their students and gain important insight in the learning needs of their student population (Hattie, 2012). An imposed, standardized curriculum may clash with such professional autonomy, as it restricts the freedom of schools and teachers to teach what they judge to be most important as educational professionals (Biesta, 2015).

On the other hand, standardization may stimulate the quality of curricula, as the construction of a standardized curriculum often involves many stakeholders and deliberative processes before a national standard of quality is developed and accepted (Klein, 1991). Studies indicate that several forms of educational standardization associate with students' performance in school (Bol & Van de Werfhorst, 2013). Bol and Van de Werfhorst (2013) found that standardized exams relate positively to student performance, while standardized curricula relate negatively to student performance. Woessmann (2003), in contrast, identified that central decisions on curricula for mathematics relate to better student performance, but primarily when combined with standardization of output, like central examination. Applying these findings to civic education, the level of standardization of output (as covered by aforementioned studies, see also Rowan, 1990) can result in likewise patterns for the civic educational domain. For example, Campbell and Niemi (2016) linked central high stakes civic exams to higher gains in political knowledge among students. For curricula in particular, as a form of standardization of input (Rowan, 1990), central guidelines or sources may be in development in many countries, although not yet very elaborate (Eurydice 2012, 2017), specifically in comparison to literacy and numeracy curricula. In that light, standardized civic curricular sources may support schools in their development of civic educational supply, and correspondingly stimulate students' civic learning:

*H2* Schools' use of standardized civic curricula sources relates positively to students' civic learning in school.

### **Curricular standardization and stratification of civic learning**

Against the background of differential civic learning in school across students, the question remains to what extent civic curricular standardization moderates inequalities in civic learning in school. Previous research identified that students' access to civic educational practices differs by social background, both in

quantity and quality (Hoskins et al., 2017, 2021; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008; Schulz et al., 2018a). Curricular standardization may play a role in these inequalities, because “in a standardized system it does not matter very much where children go to school, they receive much the same education” (Horn, 2009, p. 346). In general, the education that schools supply to students can strengthen or diminish differences between students in their civic (learning) outcomes, meaning that civic educational supply contributes overall more to advantaged students’ learning than to disadvantaged students (e.g., Hoskins, et al., 2017; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008), or vice versa, that differences between students are smaller because of schools’ supply (e.g., Campbell, 2008, 2019; Neundorf et al., 2016; Wanders et al., 2021). Curricular standardization can mean that teachers draw from the same curricular sources, meaning that more students are offered the same curricular topics, regardless of their educational attainment or their socioeconomic status. Witschge and Van de Werfhorst (2016) indeed found that differences between schools in terms of inequalities in students’ civic knowledge was smaller if the civic educational content was more centralized and thus standardized. This would mean that it is less likely that students differ in the civic learning they report, as they are (roughly) all supplied with the same curricular content. Therefore, we expect that:

- H3a* The relation between students’ expected educational attainment and their reported civic learning is weaker in schools where standardized civic curricula sources are used.
- H3b* The relation between students’ socioeconomic status and their reported civic learning is weaker in schools where standardized civic curricula sources are used.

Whether teachers use curricular sources for all students is inextricably linked with the relative autonomy teachers have to select their own teaching materials. An important aspect of curricular standardization is therefore to what extent curricular sources are centrally recommended to or even imposed on teachers, for example through national regulation. In general, educational centralization associates with smaller social inequalities in students’ learning experiences or educational achievements (e.g., Causa & Chapuis, 2009; Oppedisano & Turati, 2015). For the civic educational domain, research indicates that more centrally governed education systems likely leave less decision room for schools, corresponding with smaller differences in civic outcomes among students (Janmaat & Mons, 2011), and Campbell and Niemi (2016) found that central high stakes civic exams relate to smaller inequalities in students’ political knowledge. Witschge and Van de Werfhorst (2016) found that countries with more centralized civic curricular content show larger social inequalities in civic knowledge, but they also found that countries with more central assessment guidelines in the civic educational domain have smaller inequalities in students’ interest in social and political issues and participation in the community. While these findings are mixed, they highlight that it

is important to take the country context into account when considering educational standardization, as schools' use of standardized materials or guidelines can be steered by central authorities. Put differently, if civic curricular content is standardized and centrally promoted by an educational authority, this may leave less room for differences between students in the civic educational content they are offered. As such, social differences between students in terms of their civic learning in school may be smaller. We therefore expect that:

- H4a* The relation between students' expected educational attainment and their reported civic learning is weaker in countries where education is more centrally governed.
- H4b* The relation between students' socioeconomic status and their reported civic learning is weaker in countries where education is more centrally governed.

## Methods

### Data

The 2016 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study measures students' civic outcomes and aspects of schools' civic curricula across 24 countries (Schulz et al., 2018a). Its representativity is a key strength: in each country; schools were randomly sampled in proportion to size, after which one 8<sup>th</sup> grade class was randomly selected (Schulz et al., 2018a). We use a selection of 14 European countries, as we rely on insights from the Eurydice 2017 report on the state of national civic curricula frameworks, which is only available for the European countries in the ICCS 2016 sample. This resulted in 1634 schools in total. In these schools, 36712 students participated (49.6% male, 50.4% female), with an average age of 14.4 years ( $SD = 0.6$ ). In addition, in each school, an average of four civics teachers participated as well as each school's principal (Schulz et al., 2018a).

### Variables

#### *Dependent variable*

Students' *reported civic learning in school* was measured via seven items (see Köhler et al., 2018, p. 109). Students were asked whether they had learnt about a variety of topics at school, like 'how citizens can vote in local or national elections', 'how citizen rights are protected in their country', 'how to contribute to solving problems in their local community', 'how laws are introduced and changed in their country', or 'political issues and events in other countries'. Students could choose between 'not at all', 'to a small extent', 'to a moderate extent' and 'to a large extent'. The seven items were combined in one item response theory scale (with weighted likelihood estimates) which had a minimum reliability score of Cronbach's  $\alpha = .75$  for the countries selected in this study (Schulz et al., 2018b, p. 160). A higher score on the scale indicates more civic learning in school as reported by the student.

### *Independent variables*

**Stratification factors.** Two stratification factors were included. Students' expected educational attainment is included as an indication of the educational route students anticipate. Students were asked what the highest level of education is that they expect to complete. Answers were specified for the national context and then recoded to four categories of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED): level 2 or below (primary education), level 3 (secondary education), level 4 or 5 (tertiary vocational education), or level 6, 7 or 8 (tertiary academic education). Following previous research (Schulz et al., 2018a), we combined levels 2 to 5 into one category, capturing non-tertiary education and vocationally oriented education (coded 0), and level 6 to 8 represent an academic oriented education (coded 1). As a second stratification factor, students' socioeconomic status was measured based on an index of students' highest parental education, highest parental occupational status, and their estimation of the number of books at home as described by Köhler and colleagues (2018). This index was constructed using principal component factor scores, and resulted in an acceptable minimum reliability score of  $\alpha = .60$  among the countries selected in this study (Schulz et al., 2018b, p. 152). A higher score indicates a higher socioeconomic status.

**Standardization.** Schools' average use of a standardized civic curriculum was measured by means of teachers' answers on two items, following Witschge and Van de Werfhorst (2016). Teachers were asked 'in planning lessons related to civic and citizenship education for your grade 8 students, to what extent do you draw on' [...], after which multiple sources were mentioned, among which were the following two: 'official curricula, curricular guidelines or frameworks' and 'teaching material directly published by the Ministry of Education or by the local education authority'. Teachers could answer with 'not at all', 'to a small extent', 'to a moderate extent' or 'to a large extent'. An average score was calculated based on teachers' answers regarding both sources, meaning that a higher score indicates that the teacher relied more on these sources. For each school, the average score was taken from all teachers' answers, hence a higher score means a higher average use of a standardized civic curriculum in the school.

In addition, we included a composite variable to assess teachers' average use of alternative civic curricular sources; the possibility exists that it is not necessarily teachers' use of standardized sources that matters for students' learning, but their use of any civic curricular sources. Besides the two standardized sources, teachers were also asked about six other sources (see Köhler et al., 2018, p. 95), like 'media (e.g., newspapers, magazines, television, etc.)', 'original sources (e.g., constitutions and human rights declarations)', 'web-based sources of information (e.g. wikis, newspapers on line) and social media', and 'teaching/learning materials published by commercial companies'. The reliability of these six sources combined was not high ( $\alpha = .60$ ), yet deemed sufficient to be combined in an average score, where a higher score indicates higher average use of (alternative) civic curricular sources in the school.

One aspect of curricular standardization is the extent to which curricula are centrally imposed or recommended to schools: schools may be more likely to use standardized sources if a central educational authority prescribes them. Therefore, we also consider the role of educational centralization (or its antipole, school autonomy) as one aspect of standardization (echoing Witschge & Van de Werfhorst, 2016). We accounted for the role of centralization in several ways.

At the school level, we controlled for principals' perceptions of school autonomy regarding civic education. It is possible that teachers opt for official curriculum sources, yet that local and national governments do not impose such teaching materials: when schools experience high school autonomy, the use of these materials is then a free choice and not the result of imposed standardization. Principals' perceptions of school autonomy 'related to civic and citizenship education' was asked about, regarding 'curriculum planning' and 'choice of textbooks and teaching materials'. In considering both topics, principals could choose between 'no autonomy', 'little autonomy', 'quite a lot of autonomy' and 'full autonomy'. We included the average answer for both topics as an indication of whether schools' use of a standardized civic curriculum was experienced as an imposed or free choice. We checked the distribution of perceived school autonomy in each country, as one might expect that it does not vary much within countries. Countries' standard deviations for the 1 to 4 answering categories ranged from 0.27 (Sweden) to 0.91 (Malta), demonstrating variance across principals' perceptions of school autonomy within the same country. A higher score on this item means that the principal experiences more autonomy with regard to their civic curriculum (both regarding its planning and the choice of textbooks and teaching materials).

In addition, at the national level, each country's level of educational centralization was measured by four items from the ICCS' 2016 National Context Survey, which was completed by each country's team of researchers responsible for the national subsample. Each team was asked 'to what extent [...] individual lower secondary schools have responsibility for decisions about' matters like 'allocating resources', 'curriculum planning', 'pedagogy or approaches to teaching', and 'student assessment'<sup>1</sup>. Answer categories ranged from greater to smaller responsibility, with broadly three options; schools may decide on their own, schools may decide yet within borders or guidelines as mandated and encouraged by authorities, or schools must follow guidelines as assigned by regional or central authorities. Factor analyses showed solid support for a composite variable (eigenvalue = 1.68, factor loadings ranging from .58 to .75), corresponding with a strong reliability score ( $\alpha = .74$ ). A higher score indicates more educational centralization. On the basis of this score, countries were divided in two groups, based on their below or above average score on this variable. This resulted in one group of seven countries that were relatively educationally decentralized (i.e., Flemish Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Latvia and the Netherlands), and one group of seven relatively centralized countries (i.e., Bulgaria, Slovenia, Norway, Lithuania, Croatia, Sweden and Malta).

Table 5.1. *Country descriptive statistics of students' civic learning and indicators of (aspects of) educational centralization*

Country	Civic learning			General educational centralization	Civic curricular standardization	General curricular standardization
	<i>n</i>	ICCS 2016 Mean	ICCS 2016 <i>SD</i>	ICCS 2016 Mean	Eurydice 2017 Mean	PISA 2015 Mean
<i>Centralized</i>				<i>0.9</i>	<i>2.6</i>	<i>2.2</i>
Bulgaria	1658	48.1	9.2	2	3	2.6
Croatia	3709	49.9	9.6	2.5	3	2.7
Lithuania	3348	46.4	8.8	2.3	2	1.5
Malta	3302	48.4	9.4	2.3	2	2.7
Norway	5101	47.9	9.2	2	2	1.7
Slovenia	2536	51.7	8.8	2.5	3	2.2
Sweden	1960	53.1	9.3	2	3	1.7
<i>Decentralized</i>				<i>-1.0</i>	<i>1.9</i>	<i>1.5</i>
Denmark	1707	49.2	7.8	1.8	2	1.5
Estonia	408	47.3	7.8	1.8	2	1.3
Finland	2789	45.5	8.5	1.3	2	1.5
Italy	2897	51.9	8.2	1.5	1	1.6
Latvia	2623	46.6	8.4	1.3	2	1.9
Netherlands	2159	44.2	9.9	1.5	2	1.1
Belgium (Flemish)	2534	46.1	8.4	1.5	2	1.7

Source: ICCS 2016, Eurydice 2017, PISA, 2015 (OECD, 2016a).  $n(\text{student}) = 36712$ ,  $n(\text{school}) = 1634$ ,  $n(\text{country}) = 14$ .

This is one way to conceptualize this division. To examine whether different conceptualizations render the same results, we included two alternative measures of curricular standardization at the national level. First, Eurydice's analysis of the extensiveness of each country's national civic curriculum framework (2017, p. 46). The Eurydice report (2017, p. 46) contains an analysis of European countries' civic education, specifically regarding the extensiveness of European countries' national civic curriculum. Countries were coded 1 if only 'general aims' were formulated in terms of their national civic curriculum. If 'specific objectives' or 'learning outcomes' were also specified, countries were coded 2. If countries' curriculum contained general aims, specific objectives and learning outcomes, it was coded 3. In that way, a higher score indicates a more extensive national civic curriculum. Second, we drew from OECD's analysis of PISA 2015 principal data on the distribution of responsibility for curricula (2016a, p. 116). For each country, they summarized the distribution of responsibility for the curriculum across four actors within the education system; teachers and principals (coded 1), school boards (coded 2), local/regional authorities (coded 3) or national authorities (coded 4). Principals had distributed the responsibility across these actors (which summed up to 100 percent), which resulted in aggregated average percentages for each actor at the country level. For each country, we multiplied each actor by the respective average percentage and

summed these scores, to get a (weighted) indicator of the level of centralization regarding curricula. A higher score thus indicates more responsibility at a higher level in the national education system regarding curricula. All three variables are summarized per country in Table 5.1. The three variables measure (curricular) standardization or centralization differently, and demonstrate some overlap. While the average score for each measure is higher in the ‘centralized’ versus ‘decentralized’ groups, the comparison also shows that countries would be differently categorized, were we to rely on another indicator of (curricular) standardization. However, we chose for the ICCS 2016 National Context Survey variable, as this variable is most detailed and temporally closest to the ICCS 2016 data, while keeping this caveat in mind. We use this ICCS 2016 variable regarding national educational centralization in two ways: first, to distinguish two subsamples of country contexts (relatively centralized and decentralized), and second, for both subsamples, we also include it in a cross-level interaction, described in more detail under *Analysis*.

**Control variables.** Several control variables were included. Students’ gender was included, as gender is known to account for differences in outcomes which are relevant in the civic educational domain, like political knowledge (Pereira et al., 2015) or political engagement (Hooghe & Stolle, 2004). It is coded ‘male’ as 0, and ‘female’ as 1. Migration background was included too, given similar findings on differences in civic outcomes (Schulz et al., 2018a). Students who were born abroad or of whom at least one parent was born abroad were considered to have a migration background. Students without a migration background were coded as 0 and students with a migration background as 1.

We also included a classroom compositional variable. The role of peers increases during adolescence for a variety of civic outcomes (e.g., Koskimaa & Rapeli, 2015; Wanders et al., 2021), and some studies suggest that supply of civic learning can depend on the track that students pursue, at the benefit of academic compared to vocational education (Nieuwelink et al., 2019, Sampermans et al., 2021). In some of the countries included in the sample, like the Netherlands or Belgium, students are already differentiated around age 12 (Woessman, 2009). This means that in some classrooms in the sample, students may be relatively homogeneous in terms of the educational attainment they expect to pursue (corresponding with their track). Therefore, we control for classrooms’ composition in terms of the anticipated educational attainment of its students (partly as a proxy for track). A classroom average was calculated on the basis of students’ expected educational attainment, where a higher score thus indicates a greater proportion of students in the classroom to anticipate an academic tertiary education, versus a vocational tertiary education or non-tertiary education. Descriptive statistics of all variables are reported in Table 5.2.

## Analysis

The hypotheses were tested through multilevel linear regression analyses with school level random effects and country fixed effects, using Stata, v16.0.



Table 5.2. *Descriptive statistics*

Variable	Mean	SD	Range
<i>Dependent</i>			
Civic learning in school	48.31	9.25	14.34 – 79.01
<i>Individual level</i>			
Expected educational attainment level	0.01	1.00	-2.40 – 0.9
Socioeconomic status	0.01	1.00	-3.75 – 2.4
Gender (female)	0.50	0.50	0 – 1
Migration background	0.21	0.41	0 – 1
<i>School level</i>			
Classroom proportion expected educational attainment*	0.02	0.97	-2.27 – 2.37
School average standardized civic curriculum use	0.01	1.00	-3.87 – 1.83
School average alternative civic curriculum use	0.00	1.00	-5.19 – 3.48
School autonomy regarding civic curriculum	-0.01	1.01	-3.76 – 3.45
<i>Country level</i>			
National educational centralization	0.07	1.10	-1.60 – 1.61
Civic curricular standardization, Eurydice	0.01	1.04	-2.22 – 1.52
General curricular standardization, PISA	0.13	1.01	-1.43 – 1.86

Source: ICCS 2016.  $n(\text{student}) = 36712$ ,  $n(\text{school}) = 1634$ ,  $n(\text{country}) = 14$ . Following Fox (2015) all non-dichotomous independent variables are standardized.

Students' perceptions of civic learning is the dependent variable. Assuming a nested data structure – students in schools, in countries – multilevel analysis is suitable to account for interdependence of residuals at each of the included levels (Snijders & Bosker, 2011). The selection of countries in ICCS 2016 is non-random and relatively low in number (< 25), which makes a two level (country) fixed effects approach more suitable than a three level analysis (Möhring, 2012). In order to take the country context into account, we performed the analyses on two sub-samples: (1) seven relatively centralized countries and (2) seven relatively decentralized countries in terms of education (based on a below and above average score on educational centralization, see Table 5.1). As we include country fixed effects, we do not include other country level variables. However, we can assess the role of countries' level of educational centralization by including it as a cross-level interaction with both student level stratification factors (as described by Möhring, 2012). With this method we basically estimate a non-linearity in the association between student stratification factors and the dependent variable. By doing this, we can control for the contextual role of countries' centrally imposed educational policy on the stratification of civic learning in school. Given the small number of countries in these analyses, we should be careful in interpreting these non-linearities, and as an additional check, we also ran the models on all countries together (see Appendix 5.1). The hypotheses include several cross-level interactions (e.g., for schools' average use of a standardized

curriculum and students' expected educational attainment as well as students' socioeconomic status) hence random slopes were included for all lower level variables in these interactions (Heisig & Schaeffer, 2019). Student and school level weights were used to control for sampling deviations (in line with Köhler et al., 2018) and all non-dichotomous independent variables were standardized. Low VIF scores (all < 2) indicate that multicollinearity was not problematic for the included independent variables. Because of some concerns regarding heteroscedasticity, we use robust standard errors.

## Results

### Data structure

In order to check the appropriateness of a multilevel analysis, we examine the data structure in both groups of countries: we inspect the intraclass correlations of Model 0 and 1 (only containing the school level random intercept and country fixed effects). In the group of centralized countries, the variance at the school level is 12 percent in Model 0 and seven percent in Model 1. In the group of decentralized countries, the school level accounts for 22 percent of variance in Model 0 and 12 percent in Model 1. The drop in ICC we witness for both groups of countries indicates that incorporating the country context accounts for quite a portion of variance between schools in our sample. Focusing on Model 1, the percentages show that the majority of variance in students' civic learning is located at the individual level, yet we take the school ICCs as support for an analysis that is sensitive to the nested structure of the data. Comparing the ICCs between both samples, the higher school level variance among the decentralized versus centralized countries demonstrates that countries with relatively decentralized educational governance likely allow for more differences between schools than countries with more centralized educational governance.

### Regression results

The results of the multilevel linear regression analyses are summarized in Table 5.3a for centralized countries, and in Table 5.3b for decentralized countries. For both groups of countries, bivariate correlations between all included variables are reported in Appendix 5.2a and Appendix 5.2b. We use Model 2 to 5 to test the hypotheses. The stratification variables and student level control variables are included in Model 2, to test H1a and H1b. Schools' use of standardized civic curricular sources is added in Model 3, to test H2. Model 4 contains the cross-level interactions between both student level stratification factors and schools' standardized curriculum use (H3a and H3b), as well as centralization of educational governance (H4a and H4b). As a check, Model 5 is similar to Model 4, but we replaced school's use of standardized curricular sources for alternative curricular sources as a moderator. Models 1 to 5 contain country fixed effects, and Models 2 to 5 include random slopes for both student level stratification factors, in light of the included cross-level interactions. In addition, Models 2 to Model 5 contain several

control variables. Among centralized countries, male students report significantly more civic learning than female students, and students with a migration background report significantly more civic learning than students without a migration background, throughout Model 2 to 5. These patterns are not found in the subsample of decentralized countries.

Turning to the hypotheses, Hypothesis 1a and 1b concern the positive relations between students' expected educational attainment and their civic learning (H1a) and between students' socioeconomic status and their civic learning (H1b). In both groups of countries, students' expected educational attainment positively relates to their civic learning: students who expect to attain an academic oriented education are more likely to report civic learning in school than students who expect to attain a vocational oriented education or no tertiary education. These results remain consistent from Model 2 to Model 5. Regarding H1b, Table 5.3a shows that in centralized countries, students' socioeconomic status relates positively with their civic learning, consistently from Model 2 to 5. Among decentralized countries, the relation between students' socioeconomic status and their civic learning is also positive in Model 2 to Model 5, although less strongly significant. It stands out that in both groups of countries, the role of students' expected educational attainment is more important than their socioeconomic status, yet both factors relate positively to the civic learning experiences students report to have had in school. In Model 2 to 5, we also controlled for the classroom composition in terms of educational attainment. In neither group of countries did this yield a significant result. Whether students experience civic learning in school thus depends on students' personal characteristics, and is unrelated to the educational composition of their classroom. In sum, the results support both H1a and H1b.

Having examined the stratification of students' civic learning, we now turn to the role of the school and country context for this stratification. Hypothesis 2 concerns the positive relation between students' civic learning and schools' use of standard civic curriculum sources. Schools' average use of a standardized civic curricular sources is unrelated to more civic learning as experienced by students, except for Model 4, among centralized countries; when taking into account the conditional relation with students' expected educational attainment and with their socioeconomic status, schools' average use of standardized civic curricular sources shows a positive relation with students' civic learning. From Model 2 to 5, we controlled for schools' average use of alternative civic curricular sources, as well as for school autonomy. Neither resulted in any significant relations with students' civic learning. In sum, on the basis of these results, H2 is rejected.

Hypothesis 3a and 3b concern the negatively moderating role of schools' average use of standard civic curriculum sources for the positive relation between students' expected educational attainment and their civic learning (H3a), and for the positive relation between students' socioeconomic status and their civic learning (H3b). We test these via cross-level interactions, added in Model 4. Among centralized countries, we witness a negative interaction between schools' use of

standard civic curricular sources and students' expected educational attainment: in schools where teachers on average use more standardized civic curricular sources in their teaching, students' civic learning experiences depend less on their expected educational attainment. For socioeconomic status, no such moderating relation was found. Among decentralized countries, schools' use of standard civic curriculum sources did not moderate the stratification of civic learning by expected educational attainment nor socioeconomic status.

The possibility exists that it is not necessarily the use of *standardized* civic curricular sources that moderates inequalities in civic learning, but just the use of *any* civic curricular sources. To test this, in Model 5, we include the same cross-level interactions as in Model 4, but with schools' average use of alternative civic curricular sources. Here, we see similar patterns as in Model 4. Among centralized countries, schools' use of alternative civic curricular sources shows a negative interaction with students' expected educational attainment. This means that if teachers on average use many (alternative) civic curricular sources for their teaching, their students' civic learning experiences depend less on their expected educational attainment. For socioeconomic status, no such moderating relation was found. Put differently, it appears that what matters most is not *which* sources are used, but *whether* sources are used. At the same time, based on comparison of both standardized coefficients, the moderating role of schools' use of standardized civic curricular sources appears slightly stronger than schools' use of alternative civic curricular sources. Moreover, when taking into account the moderating role of schools' use of alternative civic curricular sources, its main effect did not become significant, like was the case for standardized civic curricular sources. Among decentralized countries, none of these patterns were found significant. Taking these results together, we find some support for H3a, yet only among centralized countries, and H3b is rejected.

In addition to school factors, we aim to take the country context into account, by considering whether the relation between civic learning and expected educational attainment (H4a) or socioeconomic status (H4b) differs as a function of countries' level of educational centralization. To test this, Models 4 and 5 include these cross-level interactions. Among centralized countries, students' expected educational attainment is less important for their civic learning if educational centralization is stronger, although the moderation is only weakly significant. The same pattern is found for students' socioeconomic status. Among the group of decentralized countries, on the other hand, the role of students' educational attainment was a stronger determinant of students' civic learning in countries where educational centralization is stronger. This means that, within the group of relatively decentralized countries, students' civic learning experiences in school are more strongly related to their expected educational attainment if the educational governance of their country is more centralized. In sum, the patterns among relatively centralized countries are in line with both H4a and H4b, yet combined with the findings among decentralized countries, both hypotheses are rejected.

Table 5.3a. *Explaining civic learning in centralized European countries*

	Model 0	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Student expected educational attainment (academic)		1.39*** (0.20)	1.39*** (0.20)	1.33*** (0.19)	1.29*** (0.19)	
Student socioeconomic status		0.35*** (0.09)	0.35*** (0.09)	0.32*** (0.09)	0.33*** (0.09)	
Student gender (female)		-0.55* (0.25)	-0.56* (0.25)	-0.56* (0.25)	-0.57* (0.25)	
Student migration background (yes)		0.80** (0.28)	0.81** (0.28)	0.79** (0.28)	0.81** (0.28)	
Classroom average expected educational attainment		-0.21 (0.16)	-0.22 (0.16)	-0.22 (0.16)	-0.23 (0.16)	
School use of standardized civic curricular sources			0.25 (0.16)	0.51** (0.18)	0.25 (0.16)	
School use of alternative civic curricular sources			0.04 (0.16)	0.02 (0.16)	0.25 (0.19)	
School perceived autonomy			-0.02 (0.18)	-0.01 (0.18)	-0.01 (0.18)	
Student edu * standardized civic curricular sources				-0.43* (0.17)		
Student SES * standardized civic curricular sources				0.14 (0.10)		
Student edu * alternative civic curricular sources						-0.36* (0.17)
Student SES * alternative civic curricular sources						0.16 (0.11)
Student edu * national centralization					-0.39* (0.17)	-0.49** (0.17)
Student SES * national centralization					-0.17* (0.09)	-0.13 (0.09)
Country fixed effects	excluded	included	included	included	included	included
Constant	49.77*** (0.17)	47.85*** (0.24)	47.16*** (0.29)	47.23*** (0.32)	47.13*** (0.32)	47.09*** (0.33)
Random variance						
Expected educational attainment			2.62 (1.06)	2.61 (1.06)	2.41 (0.99)	2.44 (1.4)
Socioeconomic status			0.55 (0.26)	0.55 (0.26)	0.50 (0.27)	0.52 (0.27)
Constant	10.07 (0.70)	5.43 (0.59)	6.11 (0.81)	5.91 (0.78)	5.74 (0.72)	5.72 (0.73)
School ICC	.12	.07	.07	.07	.07	.07

Source: ICCS 2016. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$  All non-dichotomous independent variables were standardized. Data was weighted at student and school level.  $n(\text{student}) = 21614$ ,  $n(\text{school}) = 859$ ,  $n(\text{country}) = 7$ . Robust standard errors in parentheses. Reference country is Norway.



Table 5.3b. *Explaining civic learning in decentralized European countries*

	Model 0	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Student expected educational attainment (academic)			1.56*** (0.24)	1.56*** (0.24)	1.67*** (0.28)	1.74*** (0.26)
Student socioeconomic status			0.27* (0.12)	0.28* (0.12)	0.29* (0.14)	0.31* (0.13)
Student gender (female)			0.08 (0.23)	0.08 (0.23)	0.09 (0.23)	0.09 (0.23)
Student migration background (yes)			0.48 (0.27)	0.47 (0.28)	0.47 (0.28)	0.47 (0.28)
Classroom average expected educational attainment			0.37 (0.21)	0.37 (0.21)	0.37 (0.21)	0.38 (0.21)
School use of standardized civic curricular sources				0.58 (0.36)	0.64 (0.38)	0.58 (0.37)
School use of alternative civic curricular sources				-0.02 (0.29)	-0.02 (0.29)	0.02 (0.34)
School perceived autonomy				0.06 (0.27)	0.06 (0.26)	0.06 (0.26)
Student edu * standardized civic curricular sources					-0.17 (0.31)	
Student SES * standardized civic curricular sources					-0.05 (0.13)	
Student edu * alternative civic curricular sources						-0.12 (0.36)
Student SES * alternative civic curricular sources						0.03 (0.13)
Student edu * national centralization					0.76** (0.24)	0.81*** (0.23)
Student SES * national centralization					0.12 (0.12)	0.14 (0.11)
Country fixed effects	excluded	included	included	included	included	included
Constant	49.43*** (0.28)	51.70*** (0.35)	51.07*** (0.39)	51.26*** (0.40)	51.24*** (0.40)	51.23*** (0.40)
Random variance						
Expected educational attainment			3.27 (1.11)	3.27 (1.11)	3.24 (1.12)	3.26 (1.11)
Socioeconomic status			0.71 (0.29)	0.70 (0.29)	0.69 (0.29)	0.71 (0.29)
Constant	17.95 (1.63)	9.17 (1.06)	8.72 (1.17)	8.38 (1.12)	8.37 (1.12)	8.36 (1.12)
School ICC	.22	.12	.12	.12	.12	.12

Source: ICCS 2016. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . All non-dichotomous independent variables were standardized. Data was weighted at student and school level.  $n(\text{student}) = 15156$ ,  $n(\text{school}) = 777$ ,  $n(\text{country}) = 7$ . Robust standard errors in parentheses. Reference country is Italy.

As a robustness check, we also ran Model 0 to 5 on the sample of all fourteen countries together, and added two additional models: in Model 6 and 7 respectively, we replaced the ICCS composite variable on national educational centralization for the Eurydice (2017) score of civic curricular standardization (Model 6) and the 2015 PISA score of general curricular standardization (OECD, 2016a). Results are summarized in Appendix 5.1. Not surprisingly, the weakly significant results among centralized countries disappeared when combined with the decentralized countries, and the opposite role of educational centralization among both subsamples was not visible among all countries combined. Neither did we identify a significant role for either the Eurydice (2017) or PISA (OECD, 2016a) score of curricular standardization. Only in Model 4 and 7 was schools' use of standardized civic curricular sources positively related to students' civic learning ( $b = 0.6, p < .05$ ).

### Conclusion and discussion

Across European countries, we witness inequalities in students' civic learning (Schulz et al., 2018a), and recent attention goes out to a standardized civic curriculum that entails a standard of civic teaching for all students. Little is yet known about its role for equal learning experiences regarding civic topics. The impact of a standardized civic curriculum is likely contextualized by countries' educational centralization, which research links to smaller social disparities in students' civic outcomes (Janmaat & Mons, 2011; Witschge & Van de Werfhorst 2016). This paper drew from these insights to shed light on the role of curricular standardization for stratification of students' civic learning in school.

Results show that students who expect to attain an academic educational attainment (versus other attainments) and who have a more privileged socioeconomic background report more civic learning experiences in school. This replicates Schulz and colleagues' (2018a) findings and confirms our expectation that students' experiences of civic learning in school are stratified. Turning to the role of schools, we examined teachers' average use of standardized civic curricular sources, but found little support for a robust role of this use for students' civic learning in school. Opposite to our expectations, we only found teachers' use of these sources to relate to students' civic learning when taking a difference between expected educational attainment into account. Results showed that the role of students' expected educational attainment was less important for the civic learning experiences if they went to school where teachers on average use more standardized civic curricular sources, yet only among our sample of centralized (as opposed to decentralized) countries. This means that in a subgroup of centralized countries, how much a student has learnt in school about civic topics is less determined by their expected educational attainment if the school tends to use standardized civic curricula sources (compared to schools that do not). At the same time, a similar pattern was found when considering teachers' average use of alternative sources, suggesting that it is not so much *which* sources teachers' employ, but primarily *whether* they use sources. Overall, the findings are not robust enough to conclude that

curriculum standardization plays a tempering role in terms of civic learning inequalities, yet the results motivate further research in that direction.

We also contextualized students' civic learning by taking into account their countries' level of educational centralization. Among the group of seven relatively centralized countries, we found that the role of both students' expected educational attainment and their socioeconomic background was less important for their civic learning if that country was more centralized in terms of educational governance. These patterns were in line with previous findings regarding the role of centralization (e.g., Janmaat & Mons, 2011; Witschge & Van de Werfhorst, 2016). Among the group of seven relatively decentralized countries, however, the role of students' expected educational attainment was more important for students' civic learning if that country was more centralized in terms of educational policy. This latter pattern is opposite to what we expected, and may be due to other country level factors that we did not account for, like political or cultural traditions (Janmaat et al., 2013), or other education system characteristics like tracking (Bol & Van de Werfhorst, 2016; Horn, 2009). In addition, while the results overall suggest that inequalities in civic learning are smaller among relatively centralized countries, the relations were not strong, and the non-random and low number of countries considered in this study urge caution in drawing conclusions about cross-national patterns.

This highlights an important limitation of the study: the number of countries was small and non-random, thereby limiting the reliability and generalizability of findings regarding educational centralization. We chose to include countries' degree of educational centralization as we believe it is important to contextualize schools' use of standardized civic curricular sources. Governmental standard setting in terms of civic curricula can mean that teachers do not only have standardized civic curricula at their disposal, but are also more likely to use them. This may result in smaller differences across students in terms of the civic topics they learn about in school. In contrast, the impact of such curricular standards may be less profound if not centrally imposed. Across European countries, the civic educational domain has relatively recently been formalized in many European countries, corresponding with quite some diversity in educational standards or central guidelines across national contexts (Eurydice, 2012, 2017). To remain sensitive to this context and to offer a nuanced view of the role of standardization for civic curricula, we included the consideration of centralization, yet with aforementioned caveats in mind.

Another limitation concerns the level of detail concerning standard curricula sources. The way in which we conceptualized standardization of civic curricula did not allow to check whether differentiation within a standardized curriculum exists, for example, in response to students' educational aspirations or tracks. This means that a standardized curriculum may not teach the same to all students in the same way; standardization in education can refer more to standards in the *quality* of education, rather than standards in education per se (Allmendinger, 1989, p. 233). For the present study, this means that the tempering role of (standardized) civic curricula for stratified civic learning cannot with certainty be



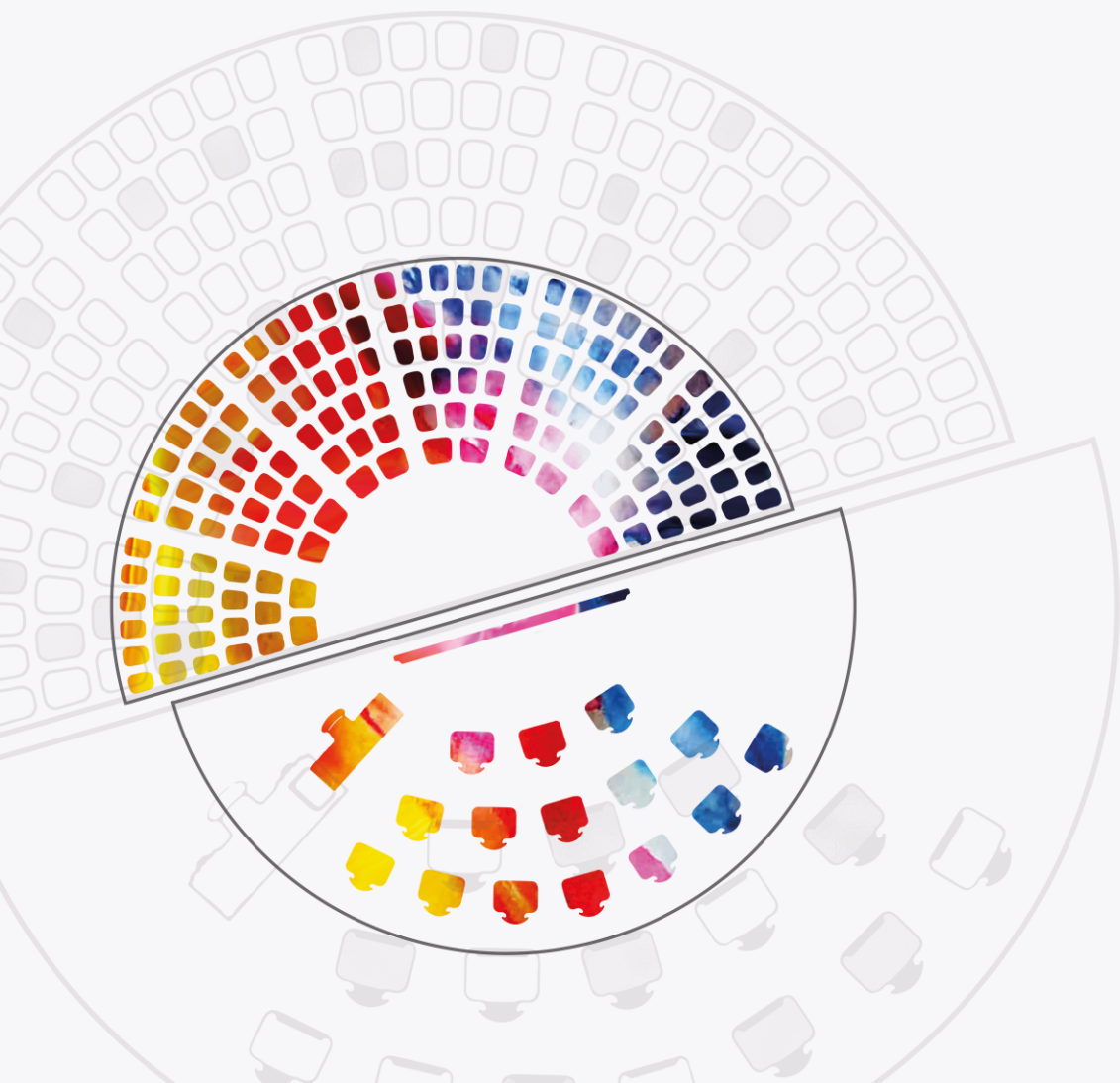
attributed to the similarity in curricular content that students were offered; whether it is a completely homogeneous civic educational provision for all students, or whether it is the standard of quality of this provision that plays a significant role. Future research could deepen our understanding of curricular standardization by capturing in more detail what these 'standards' entail.

In sum, the present study contributed to the understanding of curricular standardization in relation to students' stratified civic learning, which has been scarcely researched yet. Educational inequalities exist in students' civic learning, which underscores the relevance of insight in the equity of what schools provide through their civic curricula. Moreover, the findings suggest that inequalities in students' civic learning may be smaller in schools that use more (standardized) civic curricular sources, potentially contextualized by countries' level of educational centralization. The findings of this study thus emphasize the relevance of more research on institutional and governance characteristics for civic learning inequalities.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Inclusion of a fifth item on 'recruiting and appointing teaching staff' indicated poor fit based on explorative factor analysis (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .59$  if item was included), hence we excluded this item for the final composite variable.





# Chapter 6

General discussion and conclusion

## General discussion and conclusion

In many European countries, among which the Netherlands, we witness a persistent gap in educational opportunities between students from more and less privileged backgrounds, and between students' with better or worse prospects across their life domains (Dutch Inspectorate of Education, 2022; OECD, 2021). Meanwhile, many countries in Europe invest in their schools' civic task (Eurydice, 2012, 2017); to foster young citizens' equipment to navigate and sustain democracy. In the Netherlands, for example, judicial reform now mandates schools to contribute to students' knowledge of and respect for democratic rule of law and democratic core values (WVO, 2021). While the body of research on educational inequalities is steadily growing, the civic educational domain is still underexposed: little is yet known about how schools' realization of their civic task relates to educational inequalities in terms of civic educational learning opportunities for students and their civic outcomes. At the same time, this is a highly relevant consideration. Across democracies, research shows gaps between citizens with different educational and social backgrounds in their political participation (Gallego, 2007, 2010, 2014), their knowledge of democracy (Fraile, 2013), political trust (Goubin & Hooghe, 2020; Schoon & Cheng, 2011) and specifically satisfaction with democracy and confidence in political institutions (Van der Meer & Hakhverdian, 2016). While equality is a core democratic principle (Dahl, 2020), scholars highlight how it is also constantly challenged within democratic systems, for example in terms of proportional representation of citizens in decision making processes (Dryzek, 2001; Parkinson, 2003; Verba, 1996). As a result, democratic processes and inequalities therein between groups of citizens require care. Schools can function as one channel via which young citizens acquire skills or knowledge that enable them to navigate democracy, and to sustain its future functioning. This could also target democratic inequalities: schools are often posited as emancipatory vehicles, meaning that inequalities in starting positions in life that are considered unjust can be challenged through education. At the same time, schools can also (unintentionally) reproduce or even enlarge already existing inequalities; students with privileged starting positions may maintain such positions during but potentially also because of their education.

Despite the relevance of the role of schools in relation to democratic inequalities, relatively little is known about the factors that shape whether and how schools reify equitable civic learning opportunities for students, and how these opportunities relate to students' learning processes and their civic outcomes. In this dissertation, I therefore examined to what extent inequalities in civic educational learning opportunities exist and relate to the context in which these learning opportunities (and their outcomes) take place. Context is defined broadly here, and refers to multiple kinds of factors. First, it concerns the different educational tasks that schools have to fulfil, besides teaching citizenship. Schools also prepare students for qualification and for the labor market, for example. This means that civic education is often realized in an educational context that has been (partially)

designed for the purpose of optimal academic or scholastic learning. This poses the question to what extent different educational tasks for schools can be combined, and what this means for inequalities in (learning) outcomes in citizenship compared to qualification.

Second, context refers to schools' civic educational supply: what they offer students in terms of civic educational practices. Based on previous research, two practices are quite well established; democratic activities in school, like voting or student elections, and classroom discussions on social or political topics. What educational practices schools supply to students shape students' learning opportunities; the extent to which students can use what schools supply to them in such a way that their personal or social circumstances do not hinder them (drawing from O'Neill, 1976; Westen, 1985; Rawls, 1971 in Marrero & Rodríguez, 2012; Sen, 1992 in Beckley, 2002).

Lastly, what happens in schools is also largely contextualized by countries' educational systems: the extent to which schools' supply is differentiated between educational orientations (i.e., tracks), and previous research shows disparities in students' civic outcomes as a function of their track (Hoskins & Janmaat, 2016; Janmaat et al., 2014; Witschge et al., 2019; Witschge & Van de Werfhorst, 2020). Another aspect of educational systems concerns standardization; the extent to which the quality of civic education is centrally governed and standardized for all students. Some studies suggest that inequalities in students' civic outcomes are more likely in countries with greater educational centralization (e.g., Janmaat & Mons, 2011; Witschge & Van de Werfhorst, 2016). Put differently, the civic learning opportunities that students experience may be formed by the context in which they are reified; students' personal and social circumstances, schools' supply of civic education alongside other educational tasks, and educational system characteristics that create the conditions under which schools offer civic education.

In the preceding chapters of this dissertation, I examined these different forms of context. In this final chapter, I summarize the main findings of the dissertation in order to answer the central research question. I also position the contribution of these findings in the research field of educational inequalities and civic education. I then reflect on the limitations of my research, with related suggestions for future studies. I conclude by laying out what my findings imply for educational practice and policy in the civic domain.

### **Summary of main findings**

Education fulfils multiple tasks or functions (Balantine et al., 2021; Biesta, 2010; Durkheim, 1956; Fend, 1974; Peschar & Wesselingh, 1995; Van de Werfhorst, 2014; Witschge, 2022), among which is the civic task to prepare young citizens for democracy. Little research has considered how schools combine different educational tasks. Therefore, in *Chapter 2*, I contextualized schools' civic task relative to another vital function of education; to prepare students for the labor market. I paid particular attention to social circumstances, via schools' student composition in

terms of socioeconomic resources, and by considering the role of tracking (i.e., vocational versus academic school types). In the study, I compared multiple school outcomes. As an indication of schools' qualification task, I looked at the percentage of students who transfer successfully in lower secondary education, in upper secondary education, and the average central exam grade of students. For the civic domain of schooling, I considered the school average score of civic knowledge, civic self-efficacy and intended democratic participation (i.e., voting intentions). A total of 101 Dutch secondary schools were examined, combining data from the Dutch sample of the International Civic & Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), from the Dutch Inspectorate of Education (IoE) and Statistics Netherlands (SN). Results showed mixed patterns, yet schools' qualification outcomes (primarily average central exam grade) and civic outcomes were more often positively related in academic than in vocational tracks, possibly informed by schools' student composition: the role of student composition was stronger in academic than vocational tracks for both qualification and civic outcomes. At the school level, forms of socioeconomic advantage relate to both a greater likelihood of beneficial qualification outcomes, as well as to democratic outcomes that may be beneficial for students' position and representation in democracy. The chapter underscores that schools' outcomes in relation to both educational tasks across tracks should not be considered in isolation. Considering learning inequalities in both domains together, allows to grasp the implications of their combination. The fact that schools' student composition plays an important role in schools' average civic outcomes also motivates to look more closely at schools' supply of educational practices in the civic domain. On the basis of the study in Chapter 2, little can be said about *what* schools provide to students, and how this may affect students' civic outcomes.

In the following chapters, I therefore consider schools' supply of civic educational practices. In *Chapter 3*, I focused on schools' supply of democratic activities to students, that aim to enable learning not only 'about' but also 'through citizenship' (Kerr, 2000, p. 210; Keating and Janmaat 2016, p. 410). Schools are often proposed as *miniature communities* (Dewey, 1899) or *mini polities* (Flanagan, 2020), where democracy can be practiced (Lawy & Biesta, 2006). Taking part in democratic activities in school may present democratic processes as something that is specifically meant for students, arguably boosting their knowledge about these processes, and their self-esteem and intentions to take part in democracy later in life. Using ICCS 2016 data from 15 European countries, results showed that schools' supply of democratic activities relates positively to students' intended political participation and civic knowledge via their participation in such activities in school. At the same time, the study shows that students from a more privileged socioeconomic background are more likely to take part in these activities in schools. Whether schools' supply was more equally available for all their students did not tackle this relation; also if a school provided democratic activities to more students, socioeconomic background steered whether students reported participation. Moreover, some of the study's findings suggest that the role of students'



socioeconomic background was more important for a democratic outcome like civic self-efficacy among students who had participated in democratic activities in school. This was true for activities that are relatively selective by nature, like standing candidate in a school election, but we also found this pattern for activities that could be done by all students, like voting in the school or classroom context. This suggests that schools may thus reproduce existing inequalities in democratic outcomes among students, even if the supply is similar for all students, and when the activity appears relatively accessible.

Another way in which schools realize supply of civic education is via safe and open discussion in school, often considered a vital aspect of deliberative democracy. Therefore, I examined potential differences in students' experiences of an open classroom climate for discussion in *Chapter 4*, with particular attention for the role of the school context. An open classroom climate concerns "a learning environment that is focused on open discussion about political and social issues" (Persson, 2015, p. 587). Research relates an open classroom climate for discussion to a variety of civic outcomes (e.g., Dassonneville et al., 2012; Martens & Gainous, 2013; Munniksma et al., 2022; Persson, 2015). At the same time, studies suggest that students' experiences of an open classroom climate depend on their educational track or social background (Hoskins et al., 2017; Hoskins et al., 2021; Munniksma et al., 2017). Following these insights, in the study in Chapter 4, I examined to what extent differences exist in how open students perceive discussions in their classroom, and whether the school context plays a role for such differences, for example via the school types that schools offer (e.g., academic or vocational tracks), but also through teaching resources (i.e., how much training teachers have had regarding classroom discussion), and the broader social school climate (i.e., do students and teachers experience a sense of social belonging in the school). I used principal, teacher and student data from the Dutch cycle of ICCS 2016. Results showed that students in academic tracks are more likely to experience an open classroom climate for discussion than peers in vocational tracks. This is even the case when controlling for students' personal educational aspirations. The results show that students who expect to pursue an academic versus vocational educational attainment tend to be more interested in political topics or discuss these more often outside school. This also seems to color their rating of how open discussions in the classroom are. However, even when controlling for such selection effects, students' perceptions of classroom climate openness differ between tracks. School social belonging seems to partially explain this difference: in schools where teachers and students experience a stronger sense of belonging to the school, ratings of an open classroom climate are higher, and it appears that this is somewhat more often the case in schools offering academic than vocational tracks. Put differently, the findings show that selection effects may color students' perceptions of how open their classroom discussions are, but that the school also plays a role, via the track it offers, and the social climate in which classroom discussions are embedded.

Democratic activities and classroom discussions are two ways in which schools reify their civic educational supply. In the final empirical chapter, I zoom out again, by considering the role of the broader educational infrastructure that contextualizes schools' supply of civic education, often captured as their 'civic curriculum'. Besides tracking (as examined in Chapters 2 and 4), educational systems also differ in the level of standardization (Bol & Van de Werfhorst, 2016; Horn, 2009). Educational standardization refers to the fact that governments can construct standards of teaching that entail the same level of quality for all students (Allmendinger, 1989). Such standards, if centrally imposed on schools, can greatly affect whether and what schools supply to students. In the context of civic education, the role of standardization (or more specifically centralization) has been scarcely researched, but available research suggest that educational centralization corresponds with smaller disparities in students' civic outcomes (Campbell & Niemi, 2016; Janmaat & Mons, 2011; Witschge & Van de Werfhorst, 2016). In *Chapter 5*, I built on these previous insights and investigated the role of standardization of schools' civic curricula for inequalities in students' civic learning in school. I used ICCS 2016 data from students in 1634 schools across 14 countries, and distinguished between countries where educational policy is determined at a relatively central level of governance (like the national ministry of education or another educational authority), and countries where school autonomy is relatively high (meaning that schools have much room to determine their own civic curriculum). Results showed that students who expect to attain an academic oriented education reported that they had learnt about more democratic topics in their school than peers who expect to attain a vocational education or no tertiary education. In addition, a more privileged socioeconomic background also predicted students' learning in school about multiple democratic topics. Among relatively more centralized countries, I found that disparities in students' civic learning in school as a function of their educational expectations were smaller if teachers in that school employed more civic curricular sources for their teaching. Whether these sources were standardized (i.e., issued by central educational institutions) or unstandardized (i.e., alternative teaching materials) did not matter much. These patterns were not visible among countries where educational governance was relatively decentralized, like the Netherlands. Based on fourteen countries, it is not possible to draw robust conclusions regarding the role of country level policy and governance. Alternative factors may explain the cross-country differences in patterns (e.g., political or cultural traditions (Janmaat et al., 2013), or tracking (Bol & Van de Werfhorst, 2016), and the analyses in the chapter did not account for their role. However, the findings of this study do underscore the potential relevance of considering the educational governance context that embeds schools' civic educational supply. The fact that across groups of countries, inequalities differ, as does the role of schools in these inequalities, indicates that the country context matters. This highlights the relevance of examining whether educational systems and policies leave room for differences between schools, and

whether this shapes the variety in civic learning opportunities in schools that reach students.

In sum, each study examined to what extent inequalities exist between students in their civic learning and related civic outcomes, and what role a variety of factors play in these inequalities. This brings me back to the central research question of this dissertation: *To what extent are there inequalities in civic educational learning opportunities, and how are these inequalities related to the context in which these learning opportunities take place?* Across the four studies, results showed both equalities and inequalities in the civic educational domain, in the Netherlands, as well as across European countries. For example, in the study in Chapter 3, no relation was found between schools' average socioeconomic student background and the average participation of students in democratic learning activities in school, and in Chapter 4, students' perceptions of openness in classroom discussion did not differ as a function of their social background. Put differently, based on these results, students' personal or social circumstances are not always a determinant of the civic educational opportunities they receive or use in schools. At the same time, these equalities do not extend to the entire civic educational domain; across the four studies, results showed different forms of inequalities in students' civic learning opportunities in school, by students' social background, or as a function of their expected educational prospects. For example, students with a more privileged socioeconomic background or students who expect to attain an academic education (versus vocational, or non-tertiary) have more likely participated in democratic activities in school and have learnt more about democratic topics in school. Also, students who pursue an academic track are more likely to experience open discussion in their classroom than students in vocational tracks.

The studies show that these inequalities are contextualized by several factors, at the school and country level. At the school level, schools' civic educational supply matters, for example in terms of the availability and accessibility of democratic activities for students, or in the curricular sources included in teaching. In addition, I identified a role for schools' social climate, i.e., a sense of belonging among students and staff, which may spillover into classrooms and affect openness of classroom discussions. I also contextualized schools' civic task by examining it in conjunction with their role to prepare students for the labor market, or more general, for educational qualification. Here, tracking appeared a relevant factor, as the relation between schools' citizenship and qualification outcomes appeared stronger in academic than vocational schools, and tracking relates to a civic educational practice like open classroom climate. Besides the school level, the country context is a relevant consideration for civic educational learning opportunities, as educational standardization and centralization of educational policies may shape students' civic learning opportunities in schools.

In other words, the ways in which inequalities in the civic educational domain manifest, and the significance of these inequalities is contextualized by the other educational tasks that schools fulfil, by characteristics of schools' supply of

civic education, by characteristics of the educational system like educational tracking and standardization, and thus also the broader educational governance context. On the basis of these insights, I arrive at three main conclusions.

**1) Educational learning opportunities in the civic domain are unequally distributed, corresponding with inequalities in other educational domains**

In Chapter 1, I discussed the significance of equality for the civic educational domain, compared to more traditional educational domains like qualification. For democracy, and democratic governance, it is important that “in arriving at decisions, the government must give equal consideration to the goods and interests of every person bound by those decisions” (Dahl, 2020, p. 65), and that every citizen affected by a political decision should have the opportunity to exert influence on that decision, equally as other citizens (Dworkin, 1987). This underscores the relevance of equal learning opportunities in the civic educational domain; as all students are equal as citizens, inequalities in terms of the preparation students receive to navigate and benefit from democracy, may be at odds with the democratic principle of equality. The significance that is attributed to equality can differ across life domains (Miller, 1999): when considering qualification, or the labor market, for example, some argue that merit justifies differences between people (Miller, 1999). Within democracy, such a justification is considered less straightforward (Miller, 1999). At the same time, educational institutions prepare for these different life domains at once. This underscores the relevance of insight in schools’ role in inequalities in civic learning opportunities, also alongside other educational domains.

The findings in this dissertation demonstrate that students’ experiences in civic educational practices depend on students’ socioeconomic background and their expected educational attainment, which signals that civic learning opportunities are not equally distributed across students. As found in Chapter 3 and 5, students’ socioeconomic background plays a role for students’ civic educational learning experiences. In addition, I identified a role for students’ expected educational attainment in Chapter 3, 4 and 5. The focus on the Netherlands in Chapter 2 and 4 allowed me to investigate the role of tracking, distinguishing between vocational and academic tracks. The differences between tracks we found in Chapter 2 (regarding schools’ average civic outcomes) and Chapter 4 (regarding openness of classroom discussions) seem to suggest that students’ position in the schooling system in terms of their expected educational qualification associates with civic learning opportunities and civic outcomes.

My conclusion on the basis of these findings is twofold: first, the social inequalities we witness in the civic educational domain can echo patterns in other educational domains, like qualification (Jehangir et al., 2015; Lafontaine et al., 2015; Martins & Veiga, 2010; Sirin, 2005). For scholastic or academic outcomes, socioeconomic resources may benefit students’ chances for educational success in school. This dissertation shows signs that such socioeconomic resources also matter

for civic learning opportunities. Second, and relatedly, this could signal that inequalities across educational domains overlap; pursuing an academic track orientation can offer economic benefits later in life, yet it may also imply more civic learning opportunities, strengthening political prospects. Warren (2002) problematizes such spill-over relations between inequalities, pointing at the role of *convertability of resources*; “some kinds of inequalities are inherent in the divisions of labor that come with complex, differentiated societies: some become better than others at surgery, airline security, negotiating political conflicts, making music, or any number of other pursuits. As long as these inequalities are the result of choice rather than fate, they benefit individuals (because lives can be chosen and unique potentialities can be realized) as well as society (since we all benefit from the excellence of others). Their danger to participatory equality is not that such inequalities exist but that preeminence in one domain can often convert into preeminence in other domains” (p. 697-698). In other words, education can be a currency through which not only economic prospects can be obtained, but potentially political prospects too (Schakel & Van der Pas, 2021, p. 420). If one agrees with Warren’s line of reasoning, that it is not inequality per se that is problematic, but the potential relation between inequalities across life domains, then the potential correspondence of educational inequalities regarding qualification and citizenship warrants attention.

## **2) In conceptualizing inequality of opportunity in the civic domain, it is important to distinguish between supply, actual opportunity and outcomes**

My second conclusion concerns the distinction between schools’ supply of civic education, students’ experiences with this supply and students’ civic outcomes, which I elaborated on in Chapter 1. A focus on mere civic outcomes makes it difficult to grasp how schools contribute to these outcomes, as it not always clear whether and which aspects of civic education account for students’ civic learning experiences. The patterns found in Chapter 2, for example, were difficult to attribute explicitly to schools’ civic educational efforts, as these were not controlled for. By focusing more specifically on what schools supply, the contribution of schools is highlighted more clearly, for example because the accessibility of supply can be examined across different groups of students, as I did in Chapter 3. The findings in this dissertation highlight the significance of distinguishing between schools’ supply of civic educational practices and students’ use of and gains from this supply; whether schools provide civic educational practices does not necessarily mean that students’ experience what is offered as an opportunity, and not all students benefit in the same way from what is supplied. For example, in Chapter 3, relatively equal supply (in terms of democratic activities in school) for students was unequally used by student with different socioeconomic backgrounds. In a different way, in Chapter 4, findings showed that students’ experiences in a civic educational practice like an open classroom climate can differ as a function of the educational tracks that schools supply, but students’ personal characteristics, like interest in discussion about social

and political topics outside of schools, matter too. Also, in Chapter 5, schools' supply of teaching via particular civic curricular sources (as used by teachers in their civic education) related to differential civic learning experiences among students as a function of their expected educational attainment.

In different ways, these studies show the significance of distinguishing between schools' supply, students' educational experiences and what this means for their civic outcomes. This is particularly relevant in relation to the meaning of equality of opportunity in the civic educational domain. As discussed in Chapter 1, equality of opportunity can refer to equal resources or barriers to obtain particular outcomes, or it concerns how real the opportunities are that flow from resources, which also requires consideration of personal or social circumstances (O'Neill, 1976; Rawls, 1971 in Marrero & Rodríguez, 2012; Sen, 1992 in Beckley, 2002; Westen, 1985). For civic education, the focus could thus lie on equal civic educational supply to all students, or on how real the opportunities are that flow from this supply. This means that one examines how realistic the chance is that students (can) use what is supplied to them, in such a way that it assists them to reach their desired educational goals. On the basis of the findings of the previous chapters, I conclude that for the civic educational domain, equality of supply is not necessarily the same as equality of opportunity. In order to understand how civic educational inequalities manifest, it is therefore important to distinguish between schools' supply, students' experiences with this supply, and their gains from it in terms of civic outcomes.

### **3) Educational governance matters for the manifestation and combatting of civic educational inequalities**

My third conclusion concerns the governance of civic educational inequalities, as the role of institutional and policy characteristics appear to be meaningful for students' educational learning opportunities in the civic domain. I highlighted in Chapter 1 that insights regarding the role of institutional and policy characteristics are not abundant for inequalities in the civic educational domain (Dijkstra & De la Motte, 2014). In general, educational policymakers have a powerful yet demarcated set of tools that they can employ to realize a combination of educational goals; besides citizenship, schools prepare for employment, and aim to sort students optimally in line with their preferences, whilst also promoting equality of opportunity (Van de Werfhorst & Mijs, 2010; Van de Werfhorst, 2014). The tools that governments have to reach these goals partly depend on governments' educational responsibility and control (centralization versus school autonomy) and the structure of their education system (e.g., differentiated in terms of school types). For the civic educational domain, research focused primarily on the classroom and school context and less on the institutional and policy tradition in which these are embedded (for exceptions, see Campbell & Niemi, 2016; Dijkstra et al., 2021; Janmaat & Mons, 2011; Janmaat et al., 2013; Witschge & Van de Werfhorst, 2016; Witschge, 2022). The findings in this dissertation provide direction to ways in which this national context matters for schools' realization of civic education. For example,

educational tracking in terms of early selection in different tracks corresponds with gaps in civic learning and with civic outcomes (as found in Chapter 2 and 4). As tracks stand for differential supply of education, it may be additionally challenging for schools and educational policymakers to stimulate an integrated supply of civic educational learning opportunities in the Netherlands (Dijkstra et al., 2021). This ties in with broader findings that tracking can correspond with greater inequalities in learning (outcomes) for students (Van de Werfhorst & Mijs, 2010). In addition, as suggested by the findings in Chapter 5, schools' use of civic curricular sources, like materials issued by ministries of education or other central educational institutions, correspond with smaller educational gaps in students' learning experiences in school, yet this pattern was only found among countries with a relatively centralized educational policy tradition. While the robustness of these country-level findings warrant careful interpretation, the cross-country differences as identified in Chapter 5 signal that the national context matters for civic learning opportunities in school, and Chapter 2 and 4 show that educational tracking matters for students' civic outcomes as well as for civic learning opportunities in school.

On the basis of this, I conclude that educational governance is a meaningful consideration within the civic educational domain: it matters not only for students' civic outcomes (as previous research showed, Janmaat & Mons, 2011; Witschge & Van de Werfhorst, 2016; Witschge, 2022), but it also appears to shape whether and how civic educational learning opportunities are offered to students.

### **Limitations and recommendations for future research**

While each study in this dissertation has particular limitations (as discussed in each respective chapter), a number of overarching limitations stand out. I discuss these here, as they help to gauge the scientific contribution of this dissertation, and because they inform potential routes for future research. The first limitation concerns the lack of causal inferences that can be made upon the findings in the preceding chapters. The empirical analyses on which aforementioned findings are based, tell little about the effectiveness of the civic educational practices, the educational system or governance characteristics that were studied. Given the cross-sectional nature of the analyzed data, conclusions were drawn about relations only, not about the causality of these relations. For example, based on the findings in this dissertation, it cannot be said whether democratic activities in school actually booster democratic outcomes (as studied in Chapter 3), nor whether a strong sense of social belonging among students and staff makes classroom discussions more open (as examined in Chapter 4), nor whether schools' use of standardized civic curricula materials diminishes learning gaps between students from different educational orientations (as was the focus of Chapter 5). The patterns as identified in these chapters do not exclude the possibility of such causal mechanisms, but form in no way enough foundation to support causal claims. The contribution of this dissertation lies in the light it sheds on the contextualization of inequalities in the civic educational domain, and the implications this has in terms of educational governance

and democratic functioning. The identification of relevant contextual factors can inform future research that is better designed to investigate causal mechanisms and particularly the endurance of civic educational practices' effectiveness, for example through panel/longitudinal data, or a (semi-)experimental research design with randomized controlled trials (Campbell, 2019).

Another limitation concerns the small and select type of civic educational practices that were studied: Chapters 3, 4 and 5 focus on different forms of inequalities, each in relation to one civic educational practice that is well established, yet not exhaustive. While these combinations of particular forms of inequality and specific educational practices was founded on previous research insights (e.g., Campbell, 2019; Fitzgerald et al., 2021; Geboers et al., 2013), the studied combinations are not exhaustive. Put differently, the risk of selectivity in terms of these combinations warrants to say that the picture this dissertation draws of inequalities in the civic educational domain is informed by the existing scientific insights, yet not complete in terms of its coverage. A future route for research may be to provide a meta-analytical overview of the ways in which educational inequalities persist, develop or diminish in the civic educational domain, just as has been done for other educational domains (Gross et al., 2021; Gross & Hadjar, 2021; Sirin, 2005; Van de Werfhorst & Mijs, 2010; Zapfe & Gross, 2021).

Third, in this dissertation, I focused on the political axe of citizenship, targeting the ways in which civic education may contribute to students' position in the political hierarchy of their society. Yet the civic task of schools goes beyond this political axe, also covering the social, economic or civil dimensions that citizenship can entail (e.g., Marshall, 1950; Schulz et al., 2016, 2018a). Moreover, students also introduce new forms of citizenship behaviors and outcomes that are being discovered by researchers (Amnå et al., 2009), yet are still left out of view in this dissertation. This means that the students in this dissertation who displayed little intention to participate in elections once eligible, may have other ways, for example via social media, to exert their citizenship in a way they deem fit (Sloam, 2014). Moreover, research demonstrates that adolescents' expressions of political and civic engagement may not be strong nor explicit (De Groot et al., 2014), but that they are often more nuanced than could be captured by the survey measures included in this study (e.g., Vaessen et al., 2022). Future research could investigate in which ways inequalities in educational learning opportunities manifest for other axes of citizenship, and enrich our scientific understanding of the diverse and many ways in which adolescents express and use their citizenship.

### **Implications**

I conclude this chapter by reflecting on what these findings could mean for educational practitioners and policymakers. First and foremost, this dissertation contributes with insights in how inequalities can manifest in the civic educational domain, in particular in relation to other educational inequalities that currently receive more attention. Inequalities can exist in multiple ways; not only in students'

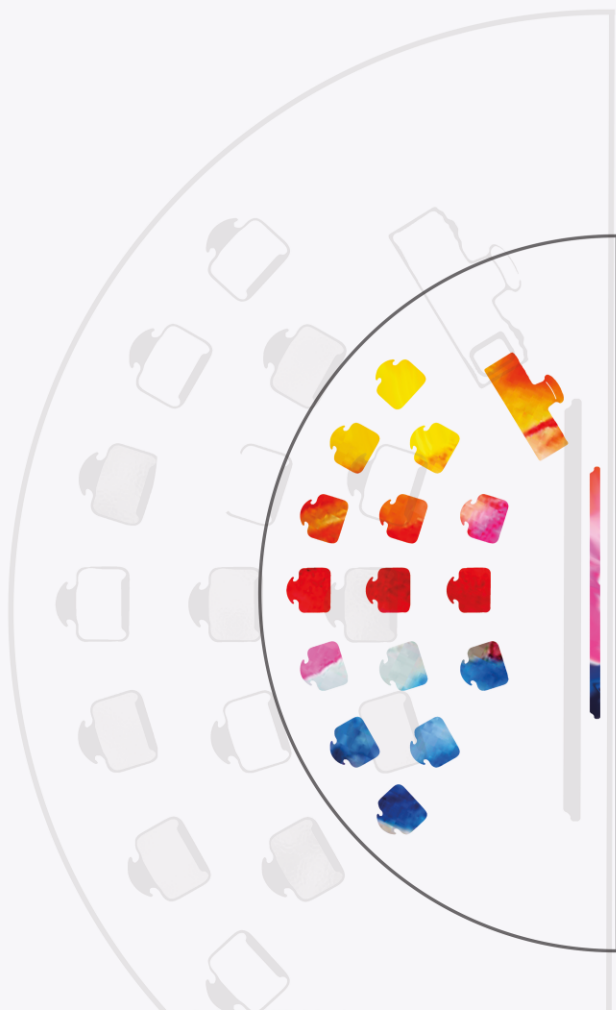
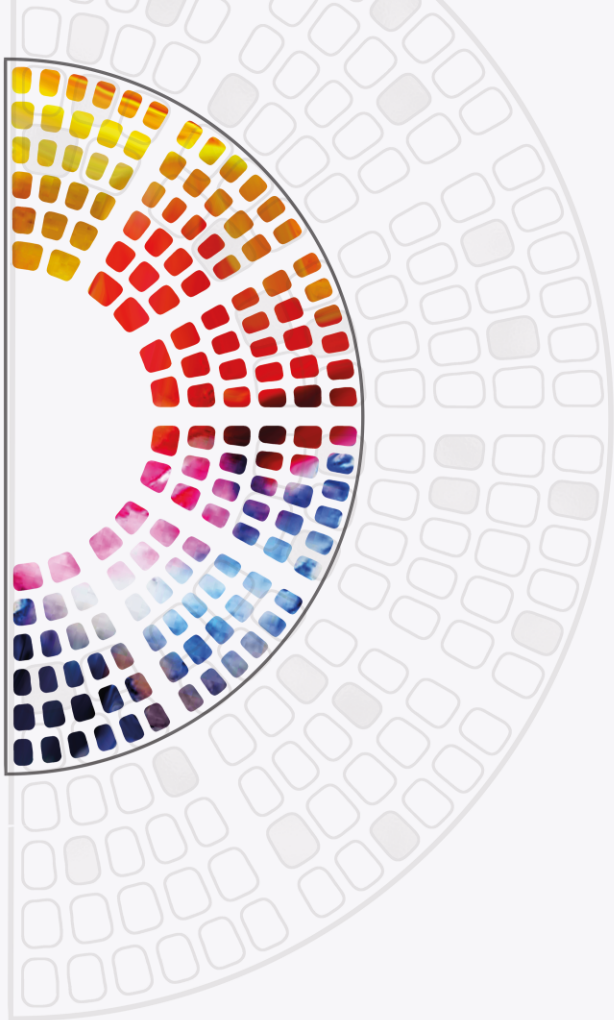


civic outcomes, but also in students' opportunities to learn in school about democracy, and in the extent to which these opportunities translate into better equipment to navigate democracy. For educational practice, the relevance of each of these ways may differ for different actors. Teachers play a vital role in which civic educational practices are offered to students and how these affect students' learning processes, potentially differentially. In the Netherlands, following the recent elaboration of schools' statutory civic task (WVO, 2021, Article 2.2), schools and teachers may be engaged in constructing their provision of civic education that meets the requirements as stipulated in this task. In doing so, one consideration could be what equal learning opportunities entail within the civic educational domain, and whether schools' supply of civic education succeeds in realizing these. Educational practitioners who engage also in policymaking, may additionally consider the distribution of civic educational supply across students, schools and school types, and alongside fulfilment of other educational tasks, like labor market preparation. For all actors, the results in this dissertation may make the complexity of realizing equitable civic education more insightful. Educators face multiple educational tasks, and they provide education to a student population that is rich in diversity. The insights in this dissertation show that equal supply of civic education does not necessarily mean that supply is also inclusive, in the sense that all students benefit equally from it. In that regard, the findings of this dissertation could be seen as an acknowledgement that equal civic learning opportunities are a worthwhile educational aim, but that pursuing them is also not without challenges, given the different ways in which inequalities manifest.

Second, and relatedly, the insights in this dissertation may provide reason to invest in a broader understanding of the role of governance choices and dilemmas for schools' civic task. Schools' realization of civic education is shaped by countries' educational systems and policy contexts, and governments have a set of tools they can employ to steer schools' supply of civic education. However, the effectiveness of many of the instruments that governments have at their disposal to steer schools' civic task (see Dijkstra & De la Motte, 2014) have not been empirically examined yet, specifically the interaction between educational practice and policies within existing educational systems. This means that educational policy regarding schools' civic task has limited empirical guidance to rely on. Moreover, whether and how governments invest in equitable civic education is partly also a normative question. Much of the public debate regarding civic education has focused on *which* goals civic education should promote (e.g., Eidhof et al., 2016; Van Goethem et al., 2022) – but less discussion has thus far targeted *how* these goals should be reached, and what means are permissible to that end. This latter topic is an empirical question in terms of effectiveness, but also a normative one, where different ideological standpoints may result in different positions. What is effective versus what is desirable or permissible are both relevant questions from a governance perspective, and insight in the former can assist in weighing the latter. The findings in this dissertation may inform this debate, and assist efforts towards a better empirical understanding of whether and

how equitable civic education is realized: alongside other educational tasks, amidst varying educational systems, and, of central importance, for students who are both rich in diversity, and whose interests form the future of democracy.





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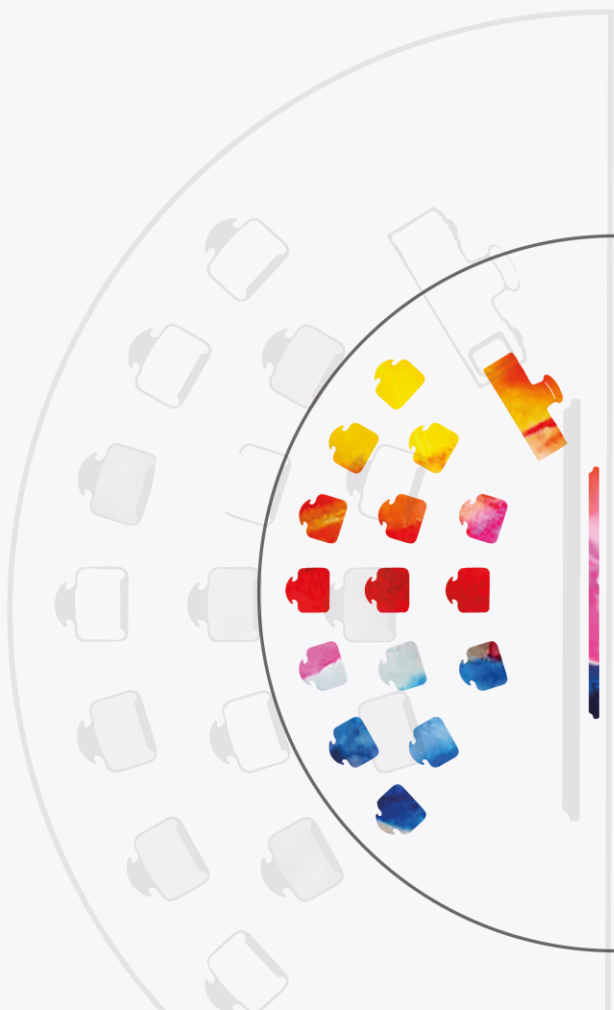
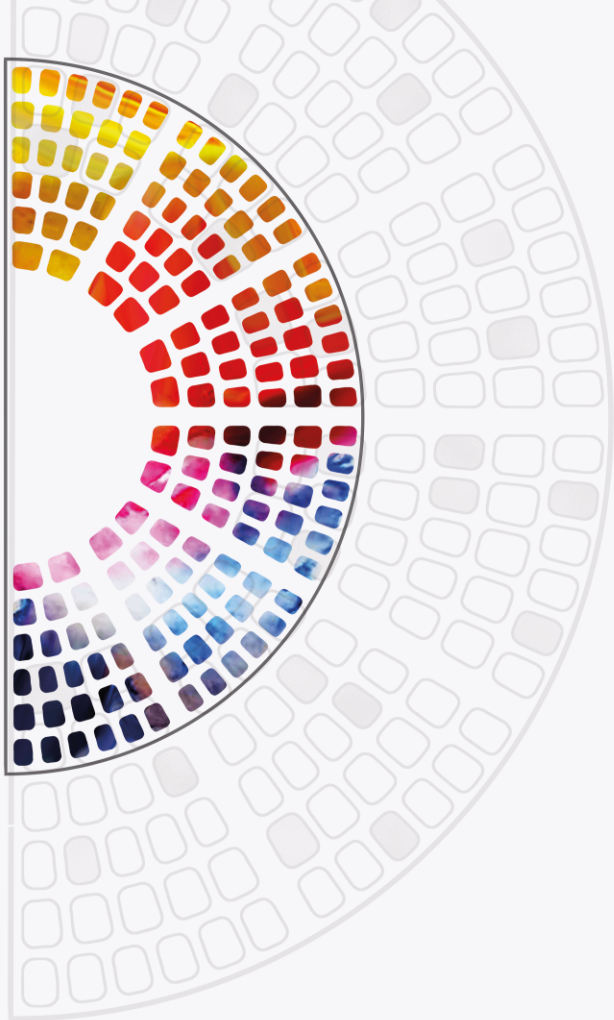
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# Appendices

Appendix 2.1. *Descriptive statistics*

	All schools ( <i>n</i> = 101)		Vocational tracks ( <i>n</i> = 53)		Academic tracks ( <i>n</i> = 48)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Successful transfer early grades	97.74	2.60	98.29	2.07	96.95	3.08
Successful transfer later grades	90.39	4.85	92.13	4.54	87.90	4.18
Central exam grade	6.46	0.16	6.44	0.14	6.49	0.19
Civic efficacy	48.11	2.69	48.08	2.92	48.14	2.36
Intended democratic participation	46.60	4.07	44.28	2.71	49.94	3.30
Civic knowledge	514.48	72.73	464.99	41.44	585.45	42.66
Parental education	11.34	1.95	10.27	1.43	12.86	1.56
Household social benefits support	3.89	3.37	4.71	3.59	2.72	2.65
Proportion migration background	0.18	0.19	0.18	0.19	0.18	0.19

Source: ICCS (2016), IoE (2017), SN (2020). Data are weighted.

Appendix 2.2. *Bivariate Pearson correlation matrix between qualification and civic outcomes of schools*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Successful transfer early grades	1					
2. Successful transfer later grades	0.23*	1				
3. Central exam grade	-0.05	0.22*	1			
4. Civic efficacy	-0.09	-0.06	0.21*	1		
5. Intended democratic participation	-0.20*	-0.32**	0.36***	0.30**	1	
6. Civic knowledge	-0.17	-0.32**	0.35***	0.00	0.86***	1

Source: ICCS (2016), IoE (2017), SN (2020). Data are weighted.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .  $n = 101$ .



Appendix 3.1. *Multilevel path model explaining intended political participation, civic knowledge and civic self-efficacy via students' participation in an inclusive democratic activity in school*

	Political participation	Civic knowledge	Civic self-efficacy
<i>Within level</i>			
Participation in inclusive democratic activity	0.11*** (0.02)	0.19*** (0.02)	0.07*** (0.02)
Socioeconomic status (SES)	0.13*** (0.02)	0.20*** (0.01)	0.08*** (0.01)
Expected educational attainment (academic)	0.20*** (0.02)	0.37*** (0.02)	0.20*** (0.02)
Gender (female)	0.03 (0.02)	0.19*** (0.01)	0.01 (0.02)
Migration background (yes)	-0.15*** (0.02)	-0.18*** (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
SES * participation in inclusive d.a.	0.00 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.04* (0.02)
Willingness to participate in inclusive d.a.	0.30*** (0.01)	0.13*** (0.01)	0.16*** (0.01)
Willingness to participate in selective d.a.	0.05*** (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)	0.21*** (0.01)
<i>Between level</i>			
Participation in inclusive democratic activity	0.57*** (0.08)	0.41*** (0.09)	0.13 (0.07)
Socioeconomic status	0.25*** (0.03)	0.51*** (0.04)	0.12*** (0.03)
Expected educational attainment (academic)	0.19* (0.08)	0.56*** (0.10)	0.20** (0.07)
Gender (female)	0.14 (0.10)	0.27* (0.12)	0.05 (0.07)
Migration background (yes)	-0.27*** (0.08)	-0.47*** (0.09)	0.12 (0.06)
Supply of democratic activities	-0.02 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Bulgaria	-0.29*** (0.06)	-1.36*** (0.07)	-0.08 (0.06)
Croatia	-0.27*** (0.04)	-0.79*** (0.05)	0.16*** (0.04)
Estonia	-0.46*** (0.05)	-0.41*** (0.05)	-0.34*** (0.05)
Finland	-0.23*** (0.04)	-0.21* (0.06)	-0.38*** (0.03)
Italy	0.41*** (0.05)	-0.59*** (0.10)	0.09 (0.12)
Latvia	-0.16* (0.05)	-1.00*** (0.07)	-0.27*** (0.05)
Lithuania	-0.12* (0.05)	-0.94*** (0.05)	-0.12** (0.04)
Malta	-0.32*** (0.04)	-1.02*** (0.05)	-0.17*** (0.04)
Netherlands	-0.54*** (0.06)	-0.60*** (0.07)	-0.29*** (0.05)
Norway	0.04 (0.05)	-0.40*** (0.05)	-0.23*** (0.04)
Slovenia	-0.33*** (0.04)	-0.63*** (0.04)	-0.19*** (0.03)
Sweden	0.08 (0.04)	-0.12* (0.06)	0.03 (0.04)
Belgium (Flemish)	-0.42*** (0.05)	-0.59*** (0.06)	-0.23*** (0.06)
Germany (North Rhine, Westphalia)	-0.59 (0.07)	-0.65*** (0.08)	-0.24*** (0.05)

## Continuation of Appendix 3.1

	Participation inclusive d.a.	School supply
<i>Within: student level</i>		
Socioeconomic status (SES)	0.02*** (0.00)	-
Expected educational attainment (academic)	0.06*** (0.01)	-
Gender (female)	0.00 (0.01)	-
Migration background (yes)	-0.01 (0.01)	-
Willingness to participate in inclusive d.a.	0.09*** (0.01)	-
Willingness to participate in selective d.a.	0.04*** (0.00)	-
<i>Between: school level</i>		
Socioeconomic status (SES)	0.02 (0.02)	0.03 (0.11)
Expected educational attainment (academic)	0.09 (0.05)	-0.23 (0.34)
Gender (female)	0.07 (0.05)	0.26 (0.34)
Migration background (yes)	-0.06 (0.04)	0.41 (0.26)
Supply	0.03*** (0.01)	-
Supply * SES	-0.00 (0.01)	-
Willingness to participate in inclusive d.a.	0.28*** (0.03)	-
Willingness to participate in selective d.a.	0.04 (0.04)	-
Bulgaria	-0.13*** (0.04)	-1.33*** (0.28)
Croatia	0.13*** (0.03)	0.22* (0.10)
Estonia	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.73*** (0.21)
Finland	-0.04 (0.04)	0.14 (0.10)
Italy	-0.26* (0.10)	-2.31*** (0.51)
Latvia	-0.07* (0.04)	-0.43* (0.16)
Lithuania	0.04 (0.03)	-0.63*** (0.17)
Malta	0.00 (0.03)	-0.16 (0.17)
Netherlands	0.02 (0.04)	-1.63*** (0.24)
Norway	0.13*** (0.02)	0.18 (0.11)
Slovenia	0.20*** (0.02)	-0.25* (0.10)
Sweden	0.01 (0.03)	-0.10 (0.14)
Belgium (Flemish)	0.00 (0.04)	-1.01** (0.31)
Germany (North Rhine, Westphalia)	0.14*** (0.03)	-0.26 (0.14)

Source: ICCS 2016.  $n(\text{student}) = 36165$ ,  $n(\text{school}) = 1618$ ,  $n(\text{country}) = 15$ . Reference country = Denmark. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \* =  $p < .05$ . Estimator = MLR. Data was weighted.



Appendix 3.2. *Multilevel path model explaining intended political participation, civic knowledge and civic self-efficacy via students' participation in an selective democratic activity in school*

	Political participation	Civic knowledge	Civic self-efficacy
<i>Within level</i>			
Participation in selective democratic activity	-0.03 (0.02)	0.15*** (0.2)	0.00 (0.02)
Socioeconomic status (SES)	0.13*** (0.01)	0.19*** (0.1)	0.09*** (0.01)
Expected educational attainment (academic)	0.21*** (0.02)	0.37*** (0.02)	0.20*** (0.02)
Gender (female)	0.03 (0.02)	0.19*** (0.01)	0.01 (0.02)
Migration background (yes)	-0.15*** (0.02)	-0.19*** (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
SES * participation in selective d.a.	0.05** (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	0.06* (0.02)
Willingness to participate in inclusive d.a.	0.31*** (0.01)	0.14*** (0.01)	0.17*** (0.01)
Willingness to participate in selective d.a.	0.06*** (0.01)	-0.08*** (0.01)	0.22*** (0.01)
<i>Between level</i>			
Participation in selective democratic activity	1.61*** (0.31)	0.12 (0.29)	1.42*** (0.22)
Socioeconomic status	0.31*** (0.04)	0.52*** (0.04)	0.15*** (0.03)
Expected educational attainment (academic)	0.26** (0.09)	0.62*** (0.10)	0.20** (0.07)
Gender (female)	0.17 (0.11)	0.33* (0.13)	0.02 (0.07)
Migration background (yes)	-0.29** (0.09)	-0.51*** (0.09)	0.14* (0.07)
Supply of democratic activities	-0.01 (0.01)	0.03* (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Bulgaria	-0.42*** (0.07)	-1.42*** (0.07)	-0.14* (0.06)
Croatia	-0.39*** (0.07)	-0.71*** (0.07)	-0.03 (0.05)
Estonia	-0.43*** (0.06)	-0.41*** (0.05)	-0.32*** (0.05)
Finland	-0.21*** (0.04)	-0.22*** (0.05)	-0.35*** (0.05)
Italy	0.41*** (0.08)	-0.62*** (0.12)	0.12 (0.13)
Latvia	-0.21*** (0.05)	-1.03*** (0.07)	-0.28*** (0.05)
Lithuania	-0.24*** (0.06)	-0.92*** (0.07)	-0.26*** (0.05)
Malta	-0.35*** (0.05)	-1.00*** (0.05)	-0.23*** (0.05)
Netherlands	-0.48*** (0.06)	-0.62*** (0.08)	-0.20*** (0.05)
Norway	0.06 (0.06)	-0.31*** (0.06)	-0.30*** (0.04)
Slovenia	-0.52*** (0.07)	-0.58*** (0.07)	-0.43*** (0.05)
Sweden	0.10* (0.05)	-0.12* (0.06)	0.05 (0.04)
Belgium (Flemish)	-0.43*** (0.06)	-0.64*** (0.06)	-0.19** (0.06)
Germany (North Rhine, Westphalia)	-0.70*** (0.07)	-0.61*** (0.08)	-0.39*** (0.06)

## Continuation of Appendix 3.2.

	Participation selective d.a.	School supply
<i>Within: student level</i>		
Socioeconomic status (SES)	0.02*** (0.00)	-
Expected educational attainment (academic)	0.04*** (0.01)	-
Gender (female)	-0.01 (0.01)	-
Migration background (yes)	0.00 (0.01)	-
Willingness to participate in inclusive d.a.	0.02*** (0.00)	-
Willingness to participate in selective d.a.	0.17*** (0.00)	-
<i>Between: school level</i>		
Socioeconomic status (SES)	-0.02 (0.01)	0.03 (0.11)
Expected educational attainment (academic)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.23 (0.34)
Gender (female)	-0.00 (0.02)	0.26 (0.34)
Migration background (yes)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.41 (0.26)
Supply	0.01* (0.00)	-
Supply * SES	0.01* (0.01)	-
Willingness to participate in inclusive d.a.	0.08*** (0.02)	-
Willingness to participate in selective d.a.	0.14*** (0.03)	-
Bulgaria	-0.01 (0.02)	-1.33*** (0.28)
Croatia	0.09*** (0.02)	0.22* (0.10)
Estonia	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.73*** (0.21)
Finland	-0.01 (0.02)	0.14 (0.10)
Italy	-0.09 (0.04)	-2.31*** (0.51)
Latvia	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.43* (0.16)
Lithuania	0.03 (0.02)	-0.63*** (0.17)
Malta	-0.03 (0.01)	-0.16 (0.17)
Netherlands	-0.01 (0.02)	-1.63*** (0.24)
Norway	0.00 (0.01)	0.18 (0.11)
Slovenia	0.16*** (0.02)	-0.25* (0.10)
Sweden	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.10 (0.14)
Belgium (Flemish)	0.01 (0.02)	-1.07** (0.31)
Germany (North Rhine, Westphalia)	0.09*** (0.02)	-0.26 (0.14)

Source: ICCS 2016.  $n(\text{student}) = 36165$ ,  $n(\text{school}) = 1618$ ,  $n(\text{country}) = 15$ . Reference country = Denmark. Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ , \*\* =  $p < .01$ , \* =  $p < .05$ . Estimator = MLR. Data was weighted.



#### Appendix 4.1. *Items measuring school social belonging*

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##### **Teachers**

In your opinion, how many students in this school ...

- have a good relationship with the school teachers and staff?
- show they feel part of the school community?

Answering options: none or hardly any, some of them, most of them, all or nearly all  
(Source: Köhler et al., 2018, p. 90)

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##### **Principals**

In your opinion, to what extent do the following statements describe the current situation at this school?

- Teachers have a positive attitude towards the school.
- Teachers feel part of the school community.
- Students feel part of the school community.

Answering options: not at all, to a small extent, to a moderate extent, to a large extent  
(Source: Köhler et al., 2018, p. 74).

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Appendix 5.1. *Explaining civic learning in 14 European countries*

	Model 0	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Student expected educational attainment (academic)			1.51*** (0.18)	1.51*** (0.18)	1.33*** (0.16)	1.39*** (0.15)	1.19*** (0.16)	1.36*** (0.17)
Student socioeconomic status			0.29** (0.10)	0.30** (0.10)	0.29*** (0.08)	0.30*** (0.08)	0.30*** (0.08)	0.28** (0.09)
Student gender (female)			-0.08 (0.18)	-0.08 (0.18)	-0.07 (0.19)	-0.08 (0.18)	-0.07 (0.19)	-0.07 (0.19)
Student migration background (yes)			0.54* (0.22)	0.54* (0.22)	0.54* (0.22)	0.54* (0.22)	0.55* (0.22)	0.54* (0.22)
Classroom average expected educational attainment			0.21 (0.16)	0.21 (0.16)	0.22 (0.16)	0.22 (0.16)	0.24 (0.16)	0.23 (0.16)
School use of standardized civic curricular sources				0.48 (0.27)	0.60* (0.28)	0.48 (0.27)	0.55 (0.28)	0.62* (0.28)
School use of alternative civic curricular sources				-0.02 (0.22)	-0.02 (0.22)	0.05 (0.26)	-0.02 (0.21)	-0.02 (0.22)
School perceived autonomy				0.05 (0.22)	0.04 (0.22)	0.05 (0.22)	0.05 (0.22)	0.04 (0.22)
Student edu * standardized civic curricular sources					-0.31 (0.22)		-0.19 (0.21)	-0.35 (0.22)
Student SES * standardized civic curricular sources					-0.00 (0.09)		-0.01 (0.09)	0.02 (0.09)
Student edu * alternative civic curricular sources						-0.20 (0.27)		
Student SES * alternative civic curricular sources						0.06 (0.11)		
Student edu * national centralization					-0.02 (0.17)	-0.23 (0.16)		
Student SES * national centralization					-0.02 (0.08)	-0.01 (0.08)		
Student edu * Eurydice civic standardization							-0.23 (0.14)	
Student SES * Eurydice civic curricular standardization							0.00 (0.07)	
Student edu * PISA general curricular standardization								0.12 (0.22)
Student SES * PISA general curricular standardization								-0.10 (0.11)
Country fixed effects included	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Constant	49.53*** (0.20)	47.83*** (0.25)	46.95*** (0.27)	46.89*** (0.28)	46.97*** (0.28)	46.99*** (0.27)	47.00*** (0.28)	46.97*** (0.28)
<b>Random variance</b>								
<b>School level</b>								
Expected educational attainment			1.47 (0.26)	1.48 (0.26)	1.48 (0.26)	1.48 (0.26)	1.42 (0.26)	1.48 (0.26)
Socioeconomic status			1.32 (0.26)	1.32 (0.26)	1.31 (0.26)	1.31 (0.26)	1.31 (0.26)	1.31 (0.26)
Constant	16.02 (1.21)	8.41 (0.77)	8.37 (0.79)	8.13 (0.77)	8.13 (0.77)	8.13 (0.77)	8.07 (0.77)	8.13 (0.77)
School ICC	.19	.11	.12	.11	.11	.11	.11	.11

Source: ICCS 2016, Eurydice 2017, PISA, 2015 (OECD, 2016a). \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$  All non-dichotomous independent variables were standardized. Data was weighted at student and school level. Robust standard errors in parentheses.  $n(\text{student}) = 36712$ ,  $n(\text{school}) = 1634$ ,  $n(\text{country}) = 14$ . Reference country is Norway.



Appendix 5.2a. *Bivariate correlations among the subsample of centralized countries*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
(1) Civic learning opportunities									
(2) Expected educational attainment level	0.04***								
(3) Socioeconomic status	0.02***	0.36***							
(4) Gender (female)	-0.02*	0.15***	0.01						
(5) Migration background	0.03***	0.01	-0.05***	0.00					
(6) Classroom average expected educational attainment level	-0.04***	0.37***	0.27***	0.04***	0.00				
(7) Classroom average socioeconomic status	0.01	0.01	-0.03***	0.01	-0.05***	0.02**			
(8) School average standardized civic curriculum use	0.01	0.01*	0.02*	0.00	0.03***	0.04***	0.24***		
(9) School perceptions of autonomy	0.01	0.09***	0.07***	-0.01	-0.01	0.25***	-0.14***	-0.03***	
(10) Country's educational centralization	0.05***	-0.12***	0.01	0.01	0.02*	-0.32***	0.05***	-0.28***	-0.20***

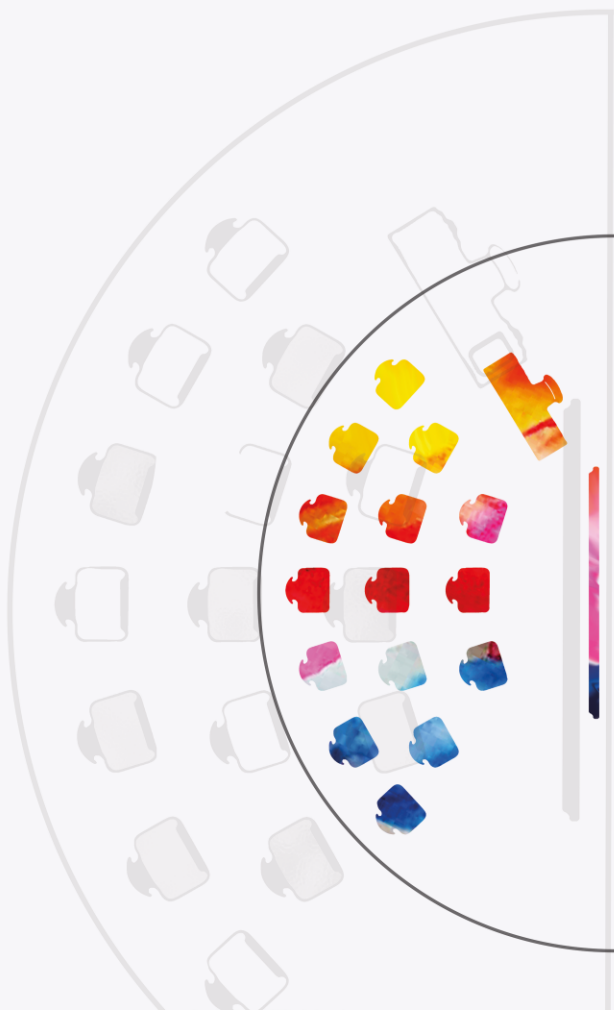
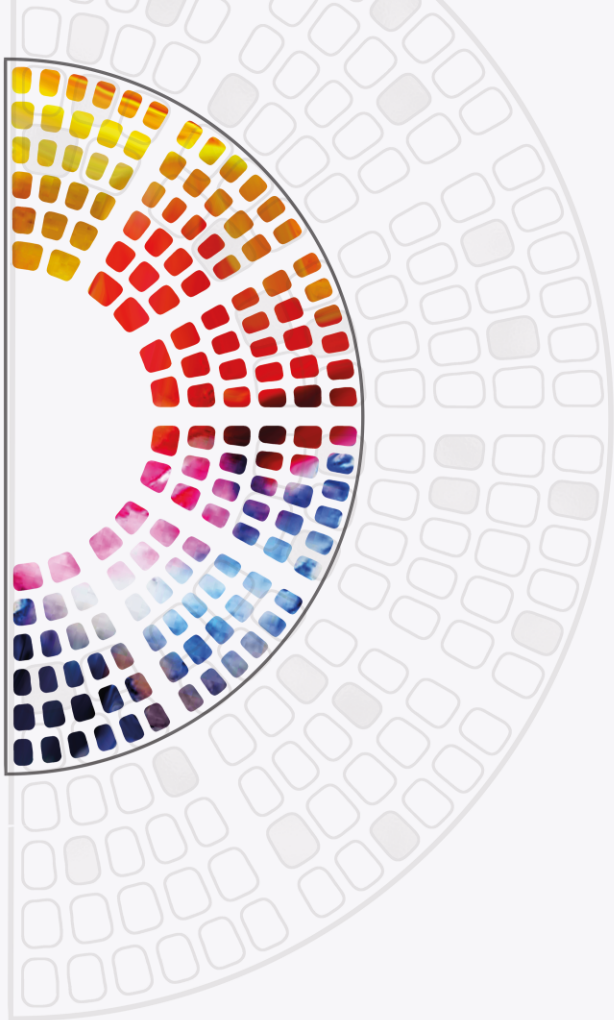
Source: ICCS 2016.  $n(\text{student}) = 21614$ ,  $n(\text{school}) = 859$ ,  $n(\text{country}) = 7$ . \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . Data is unweighted.

Appendix 5.2b. *Bivariate correlations among the subsample of decentralized countries*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
(1) Civic learning opportunities									
(2) Expected educational attainment level	0.04***								
(3) Socioeconomic status	0.04***	0.32***							
(4) Gender (female)	-0.02*	0.07***	-0.01						
(5) Migration background	0.03***	0.01	-0.09***	0.01					
(6) Classroom average expected educational attainment level	-0.03***	0.47***	0.29**	0.02*	-0.01				
(7) Classroom average socioeconomic status	0.01	-0.01	-0.04***	0.01	0.04***	-0.02*			
(8) School average standardized civic curriculum use	0.04***	-0.02	-0.01	-0.01	-0.02	-0.04***	0.37***		
(9) School perceptions of autonomy	0.06***	-0.10***	-0.02*	-0.00	-0.05***	-0.21***	-0.15***	0.08***	
(10) Country's educational centralization	0.11***	-0.06***	-0.00	0.00	0.06***	-0.13***	-0.21***	0.04***	0.03**

Source: ICCS 2016.  $r(\text{student}) = 15156$ ,  $r(\text{school}) = 777$ ,  $r(\text{country}) = 7$ . \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . Data is unweighted.





# Summary

### **Inequalities in education for democracy**

In many countries, among which the Netherlands, schools have to fulfill a civic task via which they prepare young citizens to navigate and sustain democracy. Little research has yet examined to what extent this preparation differs across students. In general, inequalities in educational opportunities are persistent, and research increasingly covers the ways in which these inequalities manifest. Less often, however, lies the focus on inequalities in the civic educational domain. In this dissertation, I examined to what extent inequalities in civic educational learning opportunities exist, and how these inequalities relate to the context in which these learning opportunities (and their outcomes) take place. Context here entails the different ways in which schools reify their supply of civic education besides their other educational tasks. In addition, context concerns the role of educational system characteristics that embed this supply, for example, the level of educational tracking and educational standardization. Moreover, governments' educational policies and responsibilities contextualize whether and how inequalities in the civic educational domain manifest. In order to empirically investigate the research question at hand, I used the 2016 data of the International Civic & Citizenship Education Study (ICCS). I combined students', teachers' and principals' perspectives included in ICCS, focusing on the Dutch and broader European sample of ICCS, and enriched this with census and policy data.

In order to research how inequalities in civic educational learning opportunities relate to their context, the starting point is reflection on the meaning and relevance of these inequalities within education and democracy. Therefore, in Chapter 1, I discuss the concept of citizenship, and the reasons why governments turn to schools to teach civic education. In general, empirical support for schools' impact on young citizens' civic outcomes is limited, but compared to other institutions, schools' reach of young generations is very wide. Moreover, adolescence is a vital period for the development of individuals' civic outcomes. Therefore, in many countries, governments grant schools a formal task to prepare young citizens for democracy. At the same time, it is not unlikely that this preparation differs between students and between schools. In general, research has shown that schools can reproduce, increase or diminish existing inequalities between young citizens, for example in terms of qualifications for the labor market, but potentially for civic outcomes too, like students' knowledge of democracy, their intentions regarding participating in democracy, or their sense of self-efficacy to do so. Schools can play an (un)intentional role in students' equipment to navigate democracy; educational experiences may boost students' knowledge, intentions or self-efficacy regarding democracy, yet potentially more for some students than others. This means that schools can play a role in inequalities in students' preparation for democracy, besides a potential role in inequalities regarding students' preparation for the labor market. As equality is considered a core principle within democracy, such inequalities warrant attention. I thus reflect on what factors contextualize inequalities in civic

educational learning opportunities; schools' supply of civic education, educational system characteristics, and governmental educational responsibilities. This reflection forms the foundation for the empirical chapters.

First, I examined the premise that schools' role in inequalities in the civic domain may mirror inequalities in other educational tasks, focused on students' qualifications and their labor market position. Only by considering schools' role in the inequalities in both domains at once, is it possible to consider whether inequalities may accumulate. Therefore, in Chapter 2, I studied schools' civic task relative to another vital task of education, namely to prepare students for the labor market. Little research has considered how schools combine these tasks, particularly in relation to schools' student composition in terms of socioeconomic (dis)advantages across vocational and academic tracks, which was the focus of this chapter. I researched six qualification and civic outcome indicators of 101 Dutch secondary schools, using 2016 data from the Dutch sample of the International Civic & Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), from the Dutch Inspectorate of Education and Statistics Netherlands. Schools' qualification and civic outcomes were more positively related in academic than in vocational tracks, possibly informed by schools' socioeconomic student composition: the role of student composition was stronger in academic than vocational tracks for both qualification and civic outcomes. The chapter shows that schools' fulfilment of each educational task across tracks should not be considered in a vacuum: if socioeconomic student composition plays a role in both schools' qualification and civic outcomes, educational inequalities in one domain may overlap with the other domain.

Given that the first study only focused on outcomes, it provides no insight in whether and how schools invest in these outcomes, and to what extent schools' supply is equitable. Therefore, in the second study (Chapter 3), I distinguished between the role of schools' supply of civic education, students' participation in this supply, and its relation with three democratic outcomes of students: intended political participation, civic knowledge and civic self-efficacy. I used the ICCS 2016 student and principal data of 15 European countries, and found that schools' supply of democratic activities relates positively to some democratic outcomes of students via their participation in these activities. At the same time, socioeconomic inequalities were present in all three democratic outcomes as well as in students' participation in democratic activities in school. This was regardless of whether the principal reported that the supply of democratic activities was equally accessible for most, if not all students. Moreover, the results gave some indication that students' socioeconomic background was more relevant for a democratic outcome like civic self-efficacy, among students that had participated in democratic activities in school. For more selective democratic activities (like standing candidate) results also showed this pattern for students' intended political participation. These findings demonstrate that schools' supply of civic educational activities may be equal for all students, but not necessarily supply *for equality*: supply that appears available for all students does not necessarily result in equal gains for all students in terms of democratic outcomes.



This resonates with the line of reasoning that equal opportunities in the civic educational domain may thus entail more than equal supply, if one takes into account whether students use and benefit from what is offered.

Schools' supply of democratic learning activities is only one way in which schools reify their civic education. That is why in the third study (Chapter 4), I focused on another civic educational practice that is widely discussed; an open classroom climate for discussion. This refers to a climate in classrooms where students can discuss social and political topics freely and openly. Research has shown that students' perceptions of how openness in classroom discussions differs as a function of their educational attainment as well as their social background. In this study, I examined what accounts for these gaps, and I explored two explanatory routes. On the one hand, students' evaluation of their classroom discussions may be informed by personal differences, for example, in terms of their interest in politics and discussions about it. This may overlap with their expected educational attainment or their social background. On the other hand, differential perceptions of how open classroom discussions are can also signal differences in terms of the educational context: that the openness of discussions in classroom depends on the school that one attends, regardless of personal characteristics. I focused specifically on the potential relevance of the tracks that schools offer (e.g., academic or vocational), but also available teaching resources in the school (i.e., how much training teachers have had regarding classroom discussion), and the broader school climate (i.e., whether students and teachers experience a sense of social belonging in the school). I used student, teacher and principal data from the Dutch cycle of ICCS 2016, and results showed that students in academic tracks are more likely to experience an open classroom for discussion than peers in vocational tracks. This is even the case when controlling for personal characteristics of students. The results suggest that students who expect to pursue an academic (versus vocational) educational attainment tend to be more interested in political topics and discuss these more often outside school with friends and family. These students also perceive their classroom discussions as more open. However, even when controlling for these personal factors, open classroom climates differ between tracks. School social belonging seems to partially explain this difference. In schools where teachers and students experience a stronger sense of belonging to the school, ratings of an open classroom climate are higher, and it appears that this is somewhat more often the case in schools offering academic than vocational education. Put differently, the findings show that selection effects may color students' perceptions of how open their classroom discussions are, but that the school also plays a role, via the track it offers, and the social school climate that contextualizes classroom discussions.

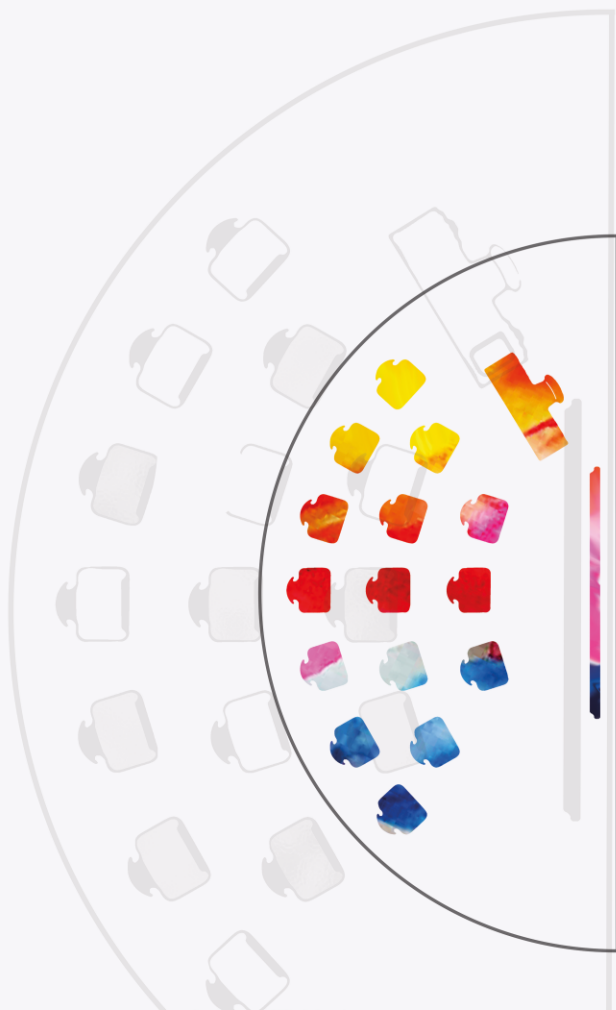
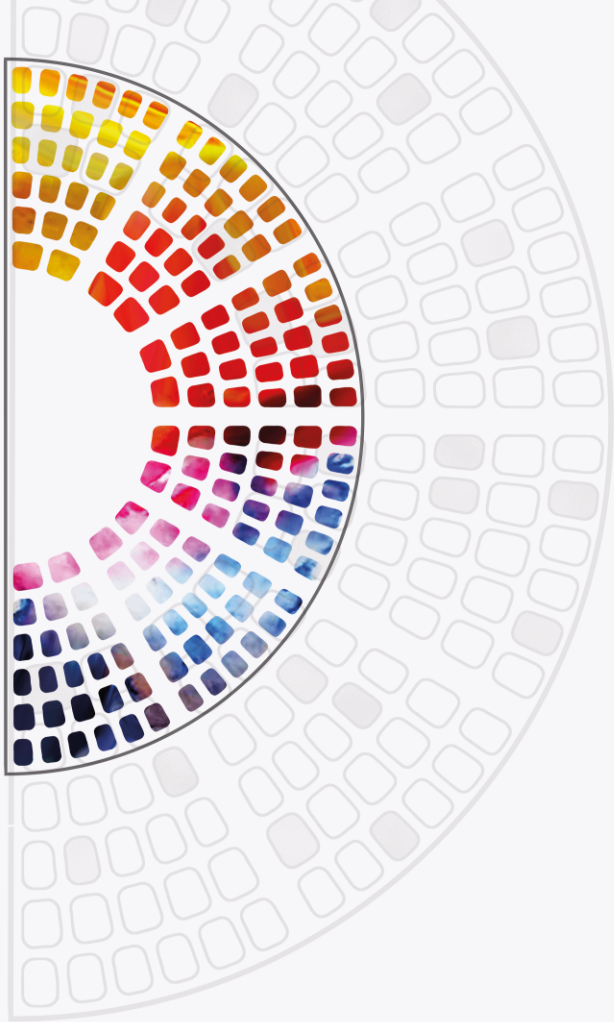
In the fourth study (Chapter 5), I took on a broader view, by investigating the role of educational standardization and policy centralization regarding civic education. Governments have a select set of tools at hand to influence schools' civic education, partly determined by the level of standardization of the country's education system; the extent to which standard setting takes place regarding the



quality of education that is offered to students. These standards can apply to multiple aspects of education, determined at a central level of governance. In light of inequalities in students' civic learning experiences in school, I focused on standardization of civic curricula, in more and less centralized education systems. I included countries within the European Union, using student, teacher and principal data from ICCS 2016. The findings in this study suggest that schools' use of civic curricular sources, including sources issued by central educational authorities, correspond with smaller inequalities in students' civic learning, yet only among countries with relatively centralized educational policies. The study displays the relevance of considering aspects of educational governance, as these may shape to what extent civic educational supply supports students' civic learning equally.

The findings of these studies together display a picture of inequalities in civic learning opportunities that students perceive and receive, depending on where students come from (i.e. their socioeconomic background) and where they expect to go (i.e. their educational attainment). I summarized and discussed my findings regarding these inequalities in Chapter 6. Unequal civic learning opportunities exist both within and between schools, and the studies demonstrate a role for the kind of learning opportunities supplied and the kind of tracks students follow. In addition, the findings underscore the relevance of educational governance, for example through educational standardization. I discuss these findings in light of broader debates about the educational functions that schools combine, the various ways in which inequalities can manifest in education, and the role of (in)equality between citizens for democratic governance. This dissertation thereby highlights that inequality of opportunity is a relevant consideration for civic education, and that it is important to research whether and how schools play a role in reifying civic learning opportunities, to assist young individuals to navigate and sustain democracy in a way that does justice to their equal positions as citizens.





# Samenvatting

## Ongelijkheden in democratie onderwijs

In veel landen, waaronder Nederland, vervullen scholen een rol om jonge burgers voor te bereiden op de democratie. Daarmee wordt beoogd dat scholen bijdragen aan de mate waarin jonge burgers hun weg vinden in de democratie en deze onderhouden en waarborgen. Hoewel er toenemend inzicht is in de manieren waarop scholen deze burgerschapstaak kunnen vervullen, is er nog weinig onderzoek gedaan naar de mate van kansengelijkheid in burgerschapsonderwijs: in hoeverre leerlingen gelijke toegang en gelijk profijt hebben van het burgerschapsonderwijs dat scholen aanbieden. In het algemeen geldt dat kansen(on)gelijkheid in het onderwijs hardnekkig is, en onderzoeken maken in toenemende mate inzichtelijk via welke wegen ongelijkheden in het onderwijs zich manifesteren. Minder vaak ligt de focus echter op ongelijkheden in onderwijs dat voorbereidt op de democratie, ook wel burgerschapsonderwijs genoemd. In dit proefschrift heb ik onderzocht in hoeverre ongelijkheden in leeransen binnen burgerschapsonderwijs bestaan, en hoe deze zich verhouden tot de context waarin deze leeransen (en gerelateerde uitkomsten) plaatsvinden. Context verwijst hier naar de verschillende manieren waarop scholen hun aanbod van burgerschapsonderwijs realiseren naast andere centrale onderwijstaken. Daarnaast gaat het bij context om de rol van kenmerken van het onderwijssysteem, waarin dit aanbod verankerd is, zoals de mate van differentiatie (naar schooltypen) en standaardisatie van het onderwijs. Bovendien contextualiseren het onderwijsbeleid en de verantwoordelijkheden van de overheid of en hoe ongelijkheden zich manifesteren op het gebied van burgerschapsonderwijs. Om de onderzoeksvraag empirisch te onderzoeken, heb ik data van de 2016 International Civic & Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) gebruikt. Ik heb de perspectieven van leerlingen, docenten en schoolleiders binnen de ICCS gecombineerd, met een focus op de Nederlandse en bredere Europese steekproef van het ICCS, en ik heb deze aangevuld met census- en beleidsbronnen.

Om te onderzoeken hoe ongelijkheden in leeransen binnen het burgerschapsonderwijs zich verhouden tot hun context, is het van belang eerst te reflecteren op de betekenis en relevantie van deze ongelijkheden binnen onderwijs en binnen de democratie. Daarom bespreek ik in Hoofdstuk 1 het concept burgerschap en de redenen waarom overheden zich tot scholen wenden om over burgerschap en democratie te onderwijzen. Over het algemeen is de empirische ondersteuning voor de invloed van scholen op de burgerschapsuitkomsten onder jonge burgers beperkt, maar in vergelijking met andere instituties hebben scholen een zeer omvattend bereik van jonge generaties. Bovendien is de adolescentie een cruciale periode voor de ontwikkeling van burgerschapsuitkomsten van individuen. Daarom kennen overheden in veel landen een formele taak toe aan scholen om jonge burgers voor te bereiden op de democratie. Tegelijkertijd is het niet onwaarschijnlijk dat deze voorbereiding verschilt tussen leerlingen en tussen scholen. Eerder onderzoek heeft laten zien dat scholen bestaande ongelijkheden tussen jonge burgers kunnen reproduceren, vergroten of verkleinen, bijvoorbeeld in termen van

kwalificaties voor de arbeidsmarkt, maar mogelijk ook voor burgerschapsuitkomsten, zoals jonge burgers hun kennis over de democratie, hun voornemens om er deel aan te nemen, en zelfvertrouwen wat betreft hun vermogen om deel te nemen aan de democratie. Dit betekent dat scholen een (on)opzettelijke rol kunnen spelen in de uitrusting van leerlingen om door de democratie te navigeren; onderwijservaringen kunnen de kennis, de intenties of het zelfvertrouwen van leerlingen wat betreft de democratie stimuleren, maar mogelijk meer voor sommige leerlingen dan voor andere. Dit betekent dat scholen een rol kunnen spelen bij ongelijkheden in de voorbereiding van leerlingen op deelname aan de democratie, naast een mogelijke rol bij ongelijkheden in de voorbereiding van leerlingen op de arbeidsmarkt. Aangezien gelijkheid wordt beschouwd als een kernprincipe binnen de democratie, vragen dergelijke ongelijkheden om aandacht. Ik heb daarom verkend welke factoren ongelijkheden in leerkansen binnen het burgerschapsonderwijs contextualiseren, hetgeen resulteerde in de volgende drie factoren: aanbod van burgerschapsonderwijs door scholen, kenmerken van het onderwijssysteem en beleidsinstrumenten vanuit de overheid. Deze verkenning vormt de basis die aan de empirische hoofdstukken ten grondslag ligt.

Ten eerste heb ik de premisse onderzocht dat de rol van scholen bij ongelijkheden in het burgerschapsdomein een weerspiegeling kan zijn van ongelijkheden in andere onderwijstaken die gericht zijn op kwalificaties van leerlingen en op hun arbeidsmarktpositie. Alleen door de rol van scholen in de ongelijkheden in beide domeinen tegelijk te beschouwen, kan worden gewogen in hoeverre er sprake is van potentiële accumulatie van ongelijkheden. Daarom heb ik in Hoofdstuk 2 de burgerschapstaak van scholen bestudeerd ten opzichte van een andere essentiële taak van het onderwijs, namelijk om leerlingen voor te bereiden op de arbeidsmarkt. Er is weinig onderzoek gedaan naar de manier waarop scholen deze taken combineren. Dit geldt met name in relatie tot de samenstelling van de leerlingenpopulatie wat betreft sociaaleconomische achtergronden in beroeps- en academische georiënteerde schooltypen (respectievelijk vmbo en havo/vwo), hetgeen de focus van dit hoofdstuk was. Ik heb zes indicatoren van kwalificatie- en burgerschapsuitkomsten van 101 Nederlandse middelbare scholen onderzocht, met behulp van 2016 data van de Nederlandse steekproef van de ICCS, van de Nederlandse Inspectie van het Onderwijs (Ivho) en van het Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (CBS). De kwalificatie- en burgerschapsuitkomsten van scholen waren positiever gerelateerd in academische (havo/vwo) dan in beroepsgeoriënteerde (vmbo) schooltypen, mogelijk ingegeven door de sociaaleconomische leerlingenpopulatie van de scholen: de rol van de leerlingenpopulatie was sterker in havo/vwo schooltypen dan in vmbo schooltypen, voor zowel kwalificatie- als burgerschapsuitkomsten. Het hoofdstuk geeft reden om de vervulling door scholen van elke onderwijstaak in verschillende schooltypen niet in een vacuüm te beschouwen: als de sociaaleconomische samenstelling van leerlingen een rol speelt in zowel de kwalificatie van de school als de burgerschapsresultaten, kunnen onderwijsongelijkheden in het ene domein overlappen met het andere domein.



De eerste studie was alleen gericht op uitkomsten, en geeft daarmee geen inzicht in hoe scholen investeren in deze uitkomsten, dan wel in hoeverre het aanbod van scholen gelijk verdeeld is. Daarom heb ik in de tweede studie (Hoofdstuk 3) onderscheid gemaakt tussen de rol van het aanbod van burgerschapsonderwijs van scholen, de deelname van leerlingen aan dit aanbod en de relatie met drie democratische uitkomsten van leerlingen. Ik heb hiervoor data geanalyseerd van leerlingen en schoolleiders van de ICCS 2016 uit 15 Europese landen. Resultaten lieten zien dat het aanbod van democratische activiteiten op scholen een positief verband heeft met de democratische uitkomsten van leerlingen, via de deelname van leerlingen aan deze activiteiten. Tegelijkertijd waren sociaaleconomische ongelijkheden aanwezig in zowel de democratische uitkomsten van leerlingen als hun deelname aan deze activiteiten in de school. Dit was ongeacht of de schoolleider aangaf dat het aanbod van democratische activiteiten voor de meeste, zo niet alle leerlingen even toegankelijk was. Bovendien gaven de resultaten enige indicatie dat de sociaaleconomische achtergrond van leerlingen relevanter is voor hun democratische uitkomsten wanneer ze meer deelnemen aan democratische activiteiten op school. Anders gezegd, onder leerlingen die deelnamen aan democratische activiteiten op school, was sociaaleconomische status een belangrijker voorspeller van hun democratische uitkomsten dan voor leerlingen die niet hadden deelgenomen aan democratische activiteiten. Deze bevindingen tonen dat het aanbod van democratische activiteiten op school gelijk kan zijn voor alle leerlingen, maar dat het niet noodzakelijkerwijs aanbod met kansgelijkheid is: aanbod dat beschikbaar lijkt voor alle leerlingen, betekent niet per se gelijke leerkansen voor leerlingen wat betreft hun democratische uitkomsten. Dit sluit aan bij de redenering dat voor kansgelijkheid binnen burgerschapsonderwijs wellicht meer nodig is dan een gelijk onderwijsaanbod.

Het aanbod van democratische leeractiviteiten door scholen is slechts één manier waarop scholen hun burgerschapsonderwijs realiseren. Daarom heb ik me in de derde studie (Hoofdstuk 4) gefocust op een andere onderwijsvorm die voor burgerschapsonderwijs vaak wordt genoemd; een open klasklimaat voor discussie. Dit verwijst naar een klimaat in de klas waar leerlingen op een constructieve en vrije manier over sociale en politieke onderwerpen kunnen discussiëren. Onderzoek heeft laten zien dat de perceptie van leerlingen over hoe open discussies in de klas zijn, verschilt als functie van het schooltype dat ze volgen, en af kan hangen van hun sociale achtergrond. In deze studie heb ik nader onderzocht wat deze verschillen verklaart, en heb ik daarvoor twee verklarende routes verkend. Enerzijds kunnen de percepties van leerlingen over discussies in de klas worden bepaald door persoonlijke verschillen, bijvoorbeeld wat betreft hun interesse in politiek en in discussies hierover. Dat kan overlappen met hun verwachte onderwijsrichting of hun sociale achtergrond. Anderzijds kunnen verschillende percepties van hoe open discussies in de klas zijn ook wijzen op verschillen in termen van de onderwijscontext: dat de openheid van discussies in de klas afhangt van de school waar men naartoe gaat, ongeacht persoonlijke kenmerken. Ik heb me specifiek gericht

op de potentiële relevantie van het schooltype dat scholen aanbieden (bijvoorbeeld academisch of beroepsonderwijs, d.w.z. havo/vwo versus vmbo), maar ook op de potentiële relevantie van beschikbare leermiddelen voor docenten in de school (d.w.z. hoeveel training leraren hebben gehad met betrekking tot klassikale discussies), en van het bredere schoolklimaat (d.w.z. of leerlingen en docenten een gevoel van sociale verbondenheid in de school ervaren). Ik gebruikte data van leerlingen, docenten en schoolleiders uit de Nederlandse steekproef van het ICCS 2016, en de resultaten lieten zien dat leerlingen in havo/vwo schooltypen het klimaat voor discussies in de klas als opener ervaren dan leeftijdsgenoten in vmbo schooltypen. Dit is zelfs het geval wanneer gecontroleerd wordt voor verschillen in individuele kenmerken. De resultaten laten zien dat leerlingen die verwachten dat ze een vervolgopleiding op een hogeschool of universiteit zullen doen meer geïnteresseerd zijn in politieke onderwerpen en deze vaker buiten school bespreken met vrienden en familie, dan leerlingen die verwachten een beroepsgeoriënteerde vervolgopleiding te doen, of geen vervolgopleiding verwachten. Leerlingen die een academisch georiënteerde vervolgopleiding verwachten te volgen, ervaren discussies in de klas ook als meer open. Echter, zelfs wanneer voor deze individuele factoren is gecontroleerd, ervaren leerlingen in havo of vwo hun klasklimaat bij discussies als meer open dan leerlingen in het vmbo. Een gevoel van sociale cohesie op school lijkt dit verschil gedeeltelijk te verklaren. Op scholen waar docenten en leerlingen een sterker gevoel van verbondenheid met de school ervaren, wordt het klasklimaat als meer open ervaren, en de resultaten suggereren dat dit iets vaker het geval is bij scholen die havo/vwo dan vmbo aanbieden. Anders gezegd, de bevindingen laten zien dat selectie-effecten kunnen kleuren hoe open leerlingen hun discussies in de klas ervaren, maar dat de school ook een rol speelt: via het schooltype dat wordt aangeboden, en het bredere sociale schoolklimaat waarbinnen deze discussies plaatsvinden.

In de vierde studie (Hoofdstuk 5) heb ik meer uitgezoomd door de rol van onderwijsstandaardisatie en beleidscentralisatie met betrekking tot de vormgeving van burgerschapsonderwijs te onderzoeken. Overheden hebben een select aantal instrumenten tot hun beschikking om het burgerschapsonderwijs van scholen te sturen, waarvan standaardisatie er een is; de mate waarin alle leerlingen een standaard burgerschapscurriculum wordt aangeboden. Daarbij is het ook van belang in hoeverre overheden scholen zo'n curriculum niet alleen centraal aanbieden, maar ook centraal kunnen opleggen. Daarom heb ik zowel curriculaire standaardisatie (aanbieden) als beleidscentralisatie (opleggen) onderzocht. Ik heb landen binnen de Europese Unie meegenomen, met behulp van gegevens van leerlingen, docenten en schoolleiders van de ICCS 2016. De bevindingen in dit hoofdstuk suggereren dat standaardisatie van burgerschapscurricula overeenkomt met kleinere ongelijkheden in het burgerschapsonderwijs van leerlingen, maar alleen onder landen met een relatief gecentraliseerd onderwijsbeleid. De studie laat zien dat het belangrijk is om rekening te houden met de bestuurlijke context, omdat deze een rol lijkt te spelen in

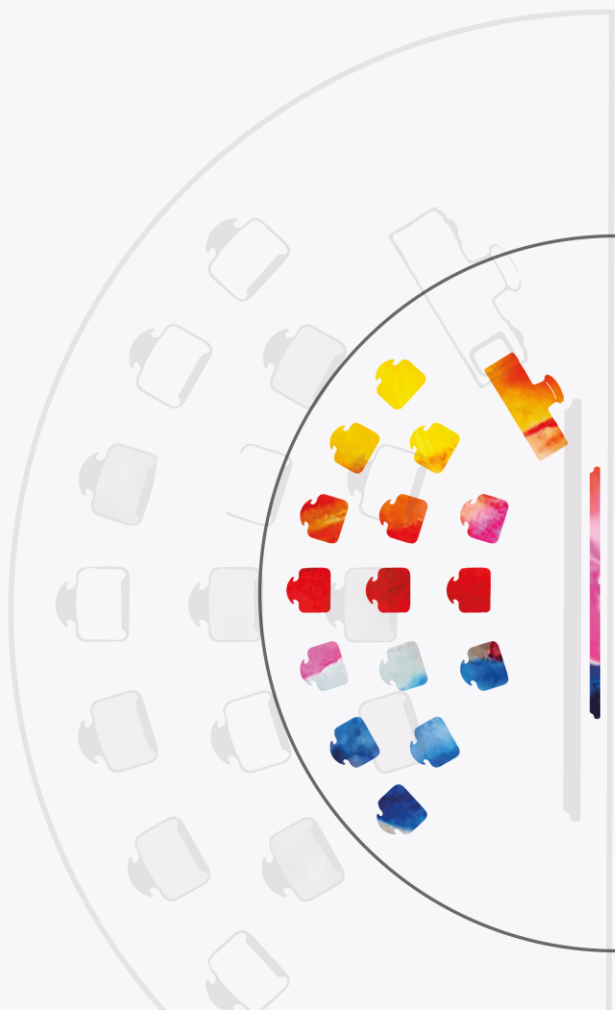
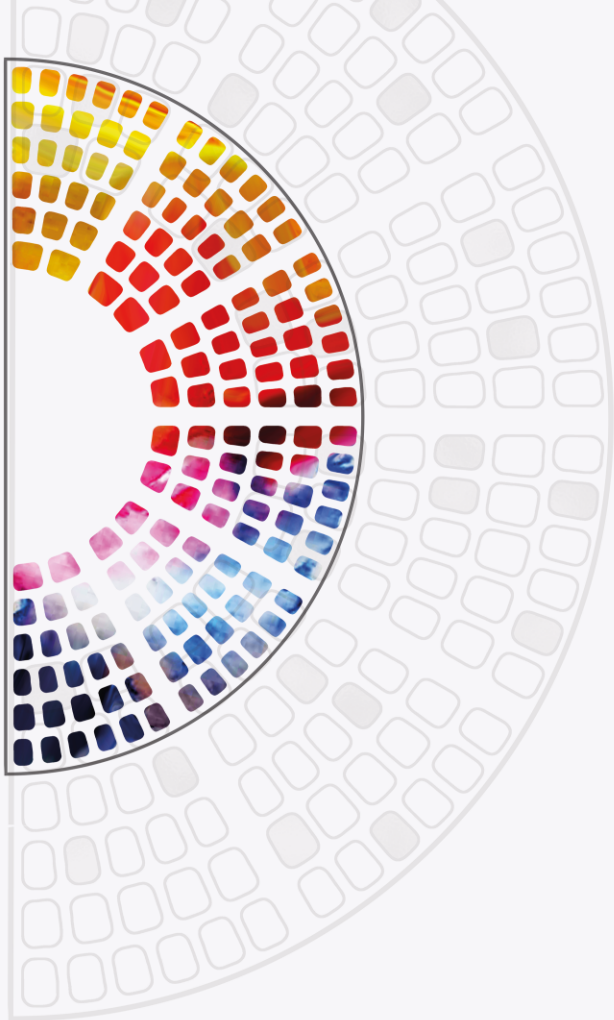


de mate waarin het aanbod van burgerschapsonderwijs de leerervaringen van leerlingen ondersteunt, met name voor minder bevoorrechte leerlingen.

De bevindingen van deze onderzoeken samen laten een beeld zien van ongelijkheden in de kansen die leerlingen aangeboden krijgen wat betreft burgerschapsonderwijs, afhankelijk van waar leerlingen vandaan komen (d.w.z. hun sociaaleconomische achtergrond) en in welke richting ze verwachten te gaan (d.w.z. hun onderwijsoriëntatie). Ik vat mijn bevindingen wat betreft deze ongelijkheden samen en bespreek deze als volgt in Hoofdstuk 6. Er bestaan zowel binnen als tussen scholen ongelijke kansen in het burgerschapsonderwijs, en de studies tonen een rol aan voor het soort leerkansen dat wordt aangeboden en het type onderwijs dat leerlingen volgen. Daarnaast onderstrepen de bevindingen de relevantie van onderwijsbestuur, bijvoorbeeld via onderwijsstandaardisatie of beleidscentralisatie. Ik bespreek deze bevindingen in het licht van bredere debatten over de onderwijsfuncties die scholen combineren, de verschillende manieren waarop ongelijkheden zich in het onderwijs kunnen manifesteren, en de rol van (on)gelijkheid tussen burgers voor democratisch bestuur. Dit proefschrift benadrukt daarmee dat ongelijkheid van kansen ook een relevante overweging is voor burgerschapsonderwijs, en dat het belangrijk is om in ogenschouw te nemen of en hoe scholen een rol spelen bij het realiseren van leerkansen binnen burgerschapsonderwijs. Deze kansen kunnen leerlingen ondersteunen om door de democratie te navigeren op een manier die recht doet aan hun gelijke positie als burgers.







# Contribution of the authors

## Chapter 2

Based on Mennes, H. I., Van de Werfhorst, H. G., Dijkstra, A. B., & Munniksma, A. (2022). Are schools' qualification and civic outcomes related? The role of schools' student composition and tracking. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, DOI: 10.1177/17461979221084109

Hester Mennes: conceptualization, data curation, methodology, formal analysis, writing, revision and editing.

Herman van de Werfhorst: conceptualization, methodology, data curation, formal analysis, supervision.

Anne Bert Dijkstra: conceptualization, methodology, data curation, revision, supervision.

Anke Munniksma: methodology, data collection, revision, supervision.

## Chapter 3

Based on Mennes, H. I., Munniksma, A., Dijkstra, A. B., & Van de Werfhorst, H. G. (2022). Inequalities in democratic outcomes among young citizens: The role of access to and participation in democratic activities in school in 15 countries. *Acta Politica, accepted for publication*, DOI: 10.1057/s41269-022-00276-1

Hester Mennes: conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, methodology, writing, revision and editing.

Anke Munniksma: conceptualization, methodology, data collection, writing, revision, supervision.

Anne Bert Dijkstra: conceptualization, methodology, revision, supervision.

Herman van de Werfhorst: conceptualization, methodology, revision, supervision.

## Chapter 4

*Submitted.*

Hester Mennes: conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, writing, revision and editing.

Anke Munniksma: conceptualization, methodology, data collection, formal analysis, writing, revision, supervision.

Herman van de Werfhorst: conceptualization, methodology, revision, supervision.

Anne Bert Dijkstra: conceptualization, methodology, data preparation, revision, supervision.

## Chapter 5

*Submitted.*

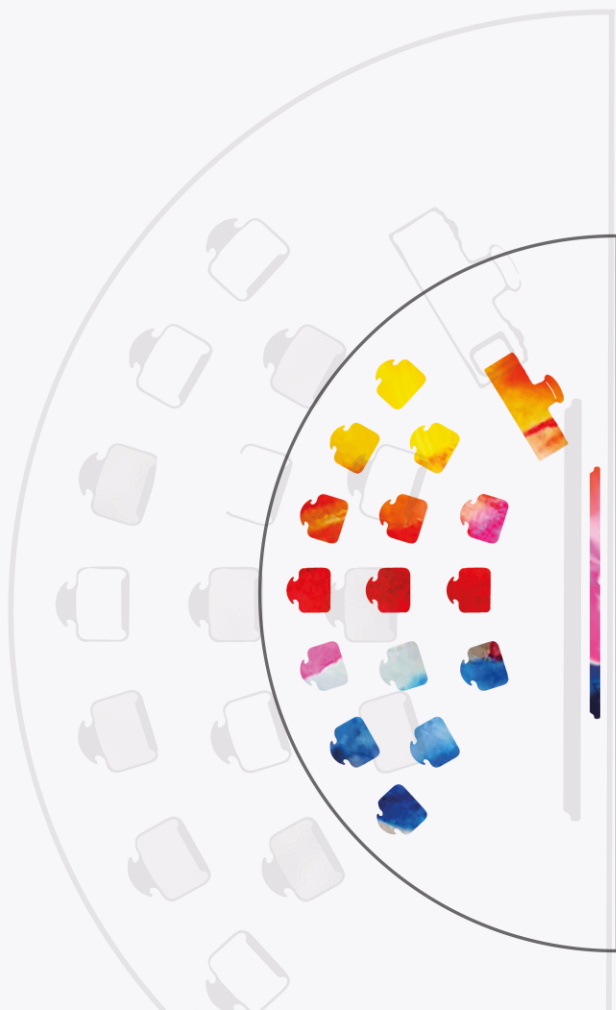
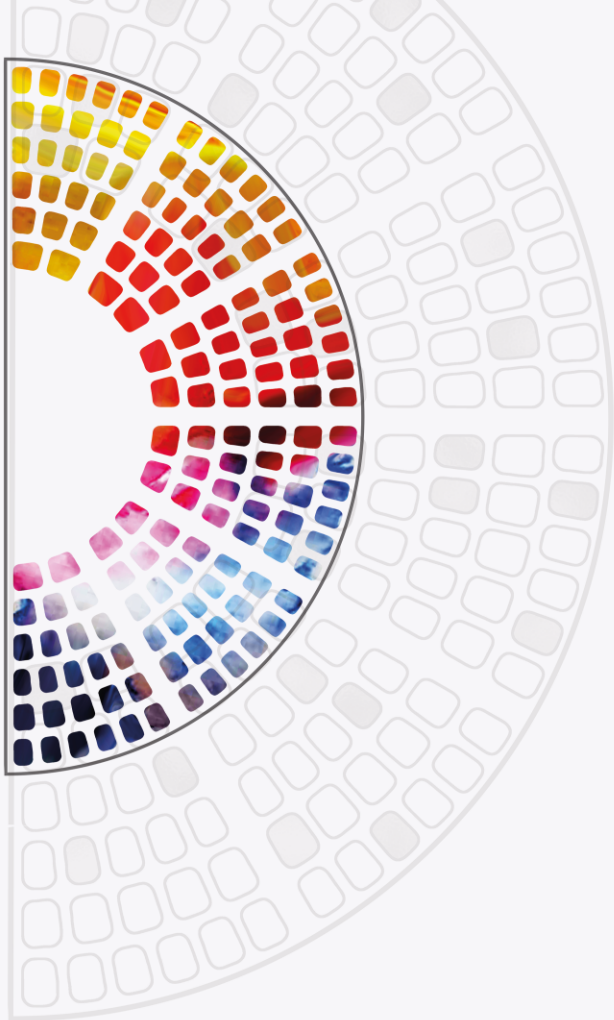
Hester Mennes: conceptualization, data curation, methodology, formal analysis, writing, revision and editing.

Anke Munniksmā: conceptualization, methodology, data collection, writing, revision, supervision.

Anne Bert Dijkstra: conceptualization, methodology, revision, supervision.

Herman van de Werfhorst: conceptualization, methodology, revision, supervision.





# Publications and presentations

**2019**

- Paper presented at the *Amsterdam Centre for Inequality Studies seminar series* on Citizenship and Education, February 19, 2019: "From distant problems to close solutions: Determinants of global issue concern among youngsters in 22 countries".
- Paper presented at the *2019 Annual conference from the Society for the Study of Social Problems* 2019, August 9, 2019: "From distant problems to close solutions: Determinants of global issue concern among youngsters in 22 countries".
- Paper presented at the *2019 Seventh annual conference on Citizenship Education* at University of Roehampton, September 26, 2019: "Cumulated (dis)advantage? Determinants of civic versus qualification performance of Dutch secondary schools".

**2020**

- Paper presented at the *PoliticoGenetmaal 2020 Digital conference*, October 15, 2020: "Inequalities in democratic student outcomes and participation in democratic activities in secondary education".

**2021**

- Paper presented at the *2021 Virtual Inequality Brownbag series* from The Center for Inequality Dynamics (CID), on March 1, 2021: "Schools' role in democratic outcomes of youngsters: Governance for civic education".
- Paper presented at the *2021 Dag van de Sociologie* [ Day of Sociology], June 10, 2021: "Inequalities in students' civic learning opportunities in schools across Europe: The role of curriculum standardization".
- Paper presented at the *2021 Onderwijs Research Dagen* [Education Research Days], July 7, 2021; "Ongelijkheden in leerkanen: De rol van curriculumstandaardisatie voor democratie onderwijs" [Inequalities in learning opportunities: the role of curriculum standardization in democracy education].
- Paper presented at the *2021 European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) General Conference*, August 30, 2021; "The role of school autonomy for students' democratic experiences in schools in fifteen European countries".

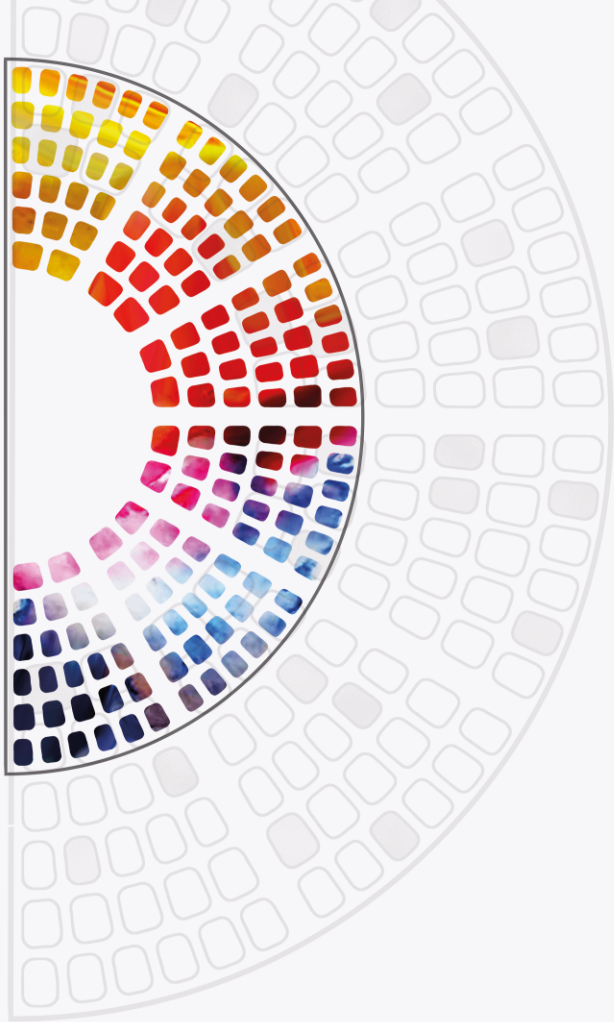


**2022**

Paper published, Mennes, H. I., Van de Werfhorst, H. G., Dijkstra, A. B., & Munniksmma, A. (2022). Are schools' qualification and civic outcomes related? The role of schools' student composition and tracking. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 1-22, DOI: 10.1177/17461979221084109.

Paper accepted for publication, Mennes, H. I., Munniksmma, A., Dijkstra, A. B., & Van de Werfhorst, H. G. (2022). Inequalities in democratic outcomes among young citizens: The role of access to and participation in democratic activities in school in 15 countries. *Acta Politica*, DOI: 10.1057/s41269-022-00276-1.





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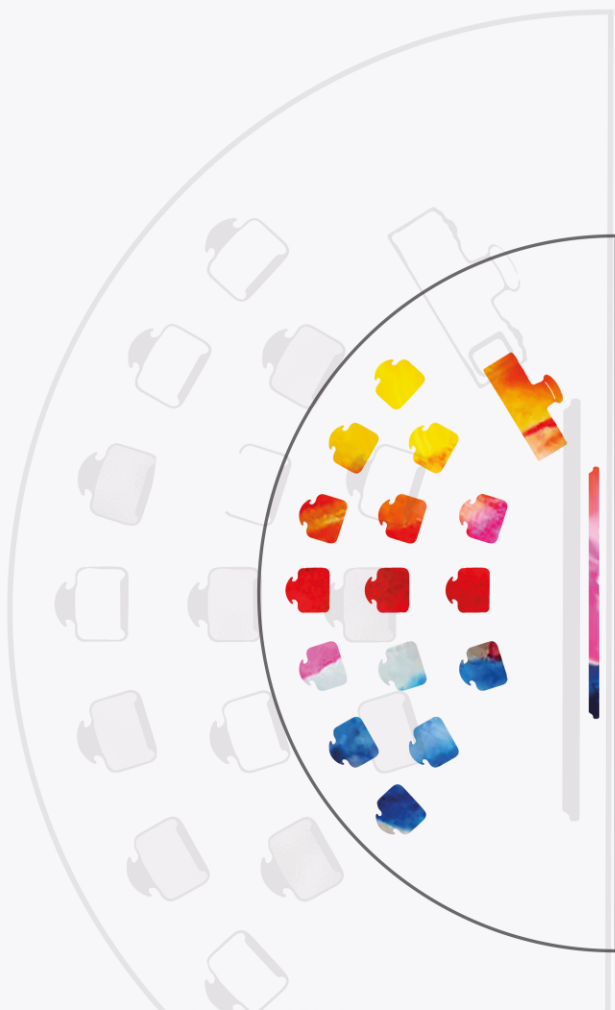
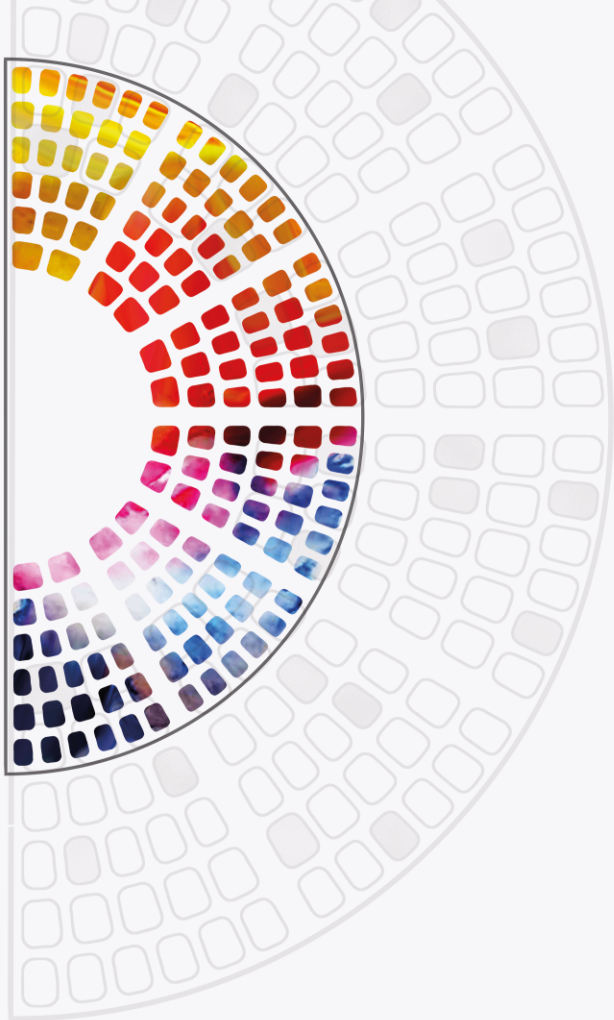
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