
PATHWAYS TO ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN ADOLESCENCE AND YOUNG ADULTHOOD*

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Summary. Considering the importance of active citizenship, the goal of the present research was to identify meaningful predictors of intentions to participate in politics in adolescence (Study 1) and young adulthood (Study 2). Based on the assumptions of the civic voluntarism model, three main predictors were examined: Resources (educational level), experiences in social networks (club membership, important others' attitudes toward political behaviors, political discussions), and individual characteristics (attitudes toward political behaviors, internal political efficacy). Despite the differences in age, both studies identified a strikingly similar pattern of results: Especially experiences in social networks predicted changes in young people's intentions to participate in politics. These effects, however, were mediated by the examined individual characteristics. While the effect of political discussions was largely mediated by the young people's sense of internal political efficacy, the effect of important others' attitudes was mediated by their own attitudes toward political behaviors.

Key words: political participation, adolescence, young adulthood, civic voluntarism model, internal political efficacy

The call for young people's active involvement in the public domain is anything but new and has often been repeated by politicians, researchers, and teachers over the last decades. An integral part of active citizenship is political participation. Generally, research distinguishes between conventional and unconventional forms of political participation. While the former includes traditional means of involvement (i.e., joining political parties, supporting a political candidate), the latter comprises activities that go beyond the scope of traditional governmental and party politics (i.e., taking part in demonstrations, volunteering for charity; cf. Barnes et al., 1979). The most prominent and frequent form of voicing one's political opinion is

*This research was supported by the German Research Foundation (DFG, FOR 481, No 213/9-4) by financial aid given to the second author.

voting in elections. Other conventional activities were found to be less common and were increasingly replaced by unconventional activities. These changes could be especially observed among young people throughout the last decades (Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Youniss et al., 2002; Syvertsen et al., 2011). Adolescence and young adulthood are critical and formative periods for political development, since young people's political understanding, their sense of identity, and their experiences with the political domain develop significantly at that time (cf. impressionable years hypothesis; Sears, Levy, 2003). Given these manifold changes on the one hand and the public call for young people's political participation on the other hand, a better understanding of factors contributing to active citizenship during these periods in life is of particular importance.

One prominent theoretical approach that allows for a thorough investigation of factors underlying political participation was introduced by the civic voluntarism model (CVM; Verba, Schlozman, Brady, 1995). According to the model three main predictors explain political behaviors: Resources, the access to social networks, and individual characteristics. Hence, in response to the question of what keeps young people from becoming politically engaged, Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) answered: "because they can't; because they don't want to; or because nobody asked" (p. 269).

Concerning resources, research confirmed that people with higher material (e.g., income) as well as educational achievements are more likely to participate in politics – not only in adulthood (Verba, Schlozman, Burns, 2005; Gallego, 2007), but also in adolescence (Smith, 1999; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). Other socio-structural variables, such as age and gender, have also been considered as resources predicting participation. However, the empirical evidence is rather mixed. That is, while some studies found age- and gender-specific patterns, others found no such differences. Generally, the effects of age and gender were found to be less consistent than the effects of income and education and seem to be dependent on the examined forms of political participation (for age, see Watts, 1999; for gender see, Kuhn, 2010).

The second factor CVM identifies as predictor of political behaviors are experiences and interactions in different social contexts (i.e., social networks). Among these, the family and peer group are of particular relevance. This was supported by a number of empirical studies in the field of political socialization. Correspondingly, political discussions with important others, their approval of political behaviors, as well as the existence of social role models have shown to further young people's political participation (cf. Fletcher, Elder, Mekos, 2000; Oswald, Schmid, 2006; Zaff, Malanchuk, Eccles, 2008). Other important social contexts in adolescence and young adulthood are extracurricular activities and youth organizations. Consequently, young people are more likely to become politically active, when they are involved in organizational networks (Youniss, Yates, 1997; Smith, 1999; McFarland, Thomas, 2006; Schmidt, Shumow, Kackar, 2007). In order to account for a broad spectrum of social influences, we examined both experiences in primary social networks (i.e., family, peer group) and organizational networks (i.e., club memberships).

Finally, research has identified a variety of attributes and skills affecting young people's political participation, such as their political knowledge, interest, or values. They are summarized in CVM's third factor – individual characteristics. Accounting for all possible and diverse individual factors in this study, however, was not feasible. In order to have a parsimonious, yet potentially strong set of predictors, we selected our indicators of individual characteristics by referring to the assumptions of expectancy-value theory (e.g., Atkinson, 1957; Eccles, Wigfield, Schiefele, 1998). According to the theory, two factors explain a person's decision to show a certain behavior: First, the subjective value the person places on the behavior and, second, the belief how well he or she will do on the activity (i.e., expectancy of success; Wigfield, Eccles, 2000). In applying these considerations to political behaviors, we accounted for young people's approval of political activities (i.e., attitudes toward political behaviors) as an indicator of values and their sense of internal political efficacy (i.e., perceived competencies to participate effectively in politics; cf. Niemi, Craig, Mattei, 1991) as an indicator of expectancies. Both variables have shown to be meaningful predictors of political participation in adolescence and young adulthood (for attitudes, see Jülich, 1996; Pancer et al., 2007; for internal political efficacy, see Vecchione, Caprara, 2009; Eckstein, Noack, Gniewosz, 2013).

Although the effects of resources, experiences in social networks, and individual characteristics are mutually related, most studies based on the CVM have examined its three main predictors either as independent units or in additive designs. Thus, even though previous research has shown that the CVM is a valid framework to predict political participation (e.g., Verba, Schlozman, Brady, 1995; Barkan, 2004; Gabriel, 2004; McIntosh, 2006), little is known about the underlying (developmental) processes. Following contextual models of human development, resources and experiences in social networks might be considered to be rather distal factors, meaning that they do not affect political behaviors directly, but indirectly through their influence on the proximal determinants, such as individual characteristics. For example, growing up in a well-off and politically active family environment, having opportunities to take responsibilities in a youth organization, or seeing that friends are politically engaged might heighten young people's political awareness, such as the approval of political activities or confidence in their own political abilities. Eventually, this should result in a higher readiness to participate in politics.

Current Study

Based on the above-summarized assumptions and findings, the goal of the present research was to test theory-based predictors of intentions to participate in politics in adolescence (Study 1) and young adulthood (Study 2). These two age groups were intentionally chosen, since both have shown to be critical periods for political development. Furthermore, we aimed at qualifying the interplay between predictors of political participation as suggested by the CVM. More precisely, we hypothesized that the effects of resources (i.e., educational level) and experiences in social networks (i.e., club membership, important others' attitudes toward polit-

ical behaviors, political discussions) on young people's intentions to participate in politics were mediated by individual characteristics (i.e., young people's attitudes toward political behaviors, internal political efficacy beliefs). Finally, apart from education, age and gender might also be considered as resources predicting young people's readiness to participate in politics. However, given the rather inconsistent pattern of empirical evidence, we took an exploratory approach. That is, we included age and gender as covariates in our research, thereby controlling for its influences.

Study 1

Method

Sample. The empirical data of Study 1 were taken from a more comprehensive project on adolescents' political development. Data were collected in 36 public high schools in the federal state of Thüringen in Germany¹. Participating schools were randomly selected and were, thus, equally located in urban and rural areas. Overall, 704 adolescent high school students from three different age cohorts (Cohort 1: 6th grade, $n = 293$; Cohort 2: 8th grade, $n = 288$; Cohort 3: 10th grade, $n = 123$) were surveyed twice with a one-year time lag in between (Time 1: summer/ fall 2004, Time 2: summer/ fall 2005). The first time point was primarily included in the analyses to control for the stability of adolescents' intentions to participate in politics (i.e., premeasure). Yet, changes in the outcome variable were predicted by variables from the second measurement point. Therefore, the sample characteristics considering age and gender summarized below correspond to the latter time point. Overall, adolescents' average age was 15.35 years ($SD = 1.20$, age range: 13-19 years) and girls and boys were approximately equally distributed ($n_{\text{girls}} = 379$, 53.8%; $n_{\text{boys}} = 325$, 46.2%). Students in the sample attended two different school types: A higher, college-bound school track ($n = 481$, 68.3%) and a lower, more practically oriented track ($n = 223$, 31.7%).

Measures. Adolescents' intentions to participate in politics were assessed by six items (i.e., "I would ... join a political party, participate in an environmental group, work for a student council, vote in elections, demonstrate, donate money"; $\alpha = .60$; Noack, Gniewosz, 2008). Hence, in Study 1, a rather broad measure of intentions to participate in politics was applied which combined conventional and unconventional forms of participation. Given the scope of activities taken into account, further exploratory factor analyses were carried out in order to examine whether the scale's diversity might be reflected in different dimensions of intentions to participate in politics. Principal component analysis (oblimin rotation) yielded a one-factorial solution. Factor loadings ranged between .43 (intention to

¹Most schools in the federal state of Thuringia in Germany are public and therefore free of tuition fees. Since all participating schools were randomly selected, they can be considered as fairly representative for the state of Thuringia concerning school equipment, teachers' professional experience, and characteristics of the student body.

vote in elections) and .69 (intention to join a political party). Since excluding single items with low loadings led to a further decline in Cronbach's alpha, we decided to include this rather broad indicator of intentions to participate in politics that combined conventional and unconventional activities.

The three main predictors of the CVM were operationalized as follows: First, school track (0 = *lower track*, 1 = *higher track*) and parents' educational level (1 = *no degree*, 2 = *9th grade*, 3 = *10th grade*, 4 = *high school diploma*, 5 = *university degree*) were considered as indicators of educational resources. Second, the amount of political discussions with important others (4-item-scale; e.g., "Do you discuss national politics with your parents/peers"; $\alpha = .80$), important others' attitudes toward political behaviors (4-item scale; e.g., "My parents think we should take the chance to participate in politics"; Fischer, Kohr, 2002; $\alpha = .73$), and club membership (0 = *not a member*, 1 = *member*) were chosen as indicators of experiences in social networks. Club membership included different forms of organizational involvement, such as participation in fire brigades, the Red Cross, church clubs, and charity clubs. And third, individual characteristics were assessed by internal political efficacy (4-item scale; e.g., "I consider myself as qualified to participate in politics"; Krampen, 1991; $\alpha = .78$) and attitudes toward political behaviors (4-item-scale; e.g., "We should take the chance to participate in politics"; Fischer, Kohr, 2002; $\alpha = .68$). If not stated differently, response options ranged from 1 = *I do not agree at all* to 4 = *I totally agree*. Finally, age and gender (0 = *male*, 1 = *female*) served as control variables.

Procedure. The main analyses were conducted by means of latent structural equation modeling (SEM) using *Mplus 6* (Muthén, Muthén, 1998-2010). Besides the advantage to account for measurement errors (Byrne, 2006), the application of SEM allows investigating more complex relationships between several independent and dependent variables. To reduce model complexity, item parcels were constructed for each scale. All latent variables were measured by two parcels. Items were assigned to parcels according to their factor loadings so that each parcel had a similar relation to the latent construct (cf. Little et al., 2002).

Two models were specified to test our assumptions: In a first step, young people's intentions to participate in politics were predicted by educational resources and experiences in social networks (Model 1). In a second step, individual characteristics were added to the analyses (Model 2). To test for mediation, we examined the significance of the indirect effects of resources and experiences in social networks on young people's intentions to participate in politics via individual characteristics. Moreover, we used bootstrapping to determine the confidence intervals of the indirect effects. In doing so, new data sets are generated, each containing an estimate of the indirect effect ($N_{\text{samples}} = 1000$; cf. Efron, Tibshirani, 1993). A significant indirect effect exists, if zero is not included in the 95% confidence interval.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-order Correlations of Study 1 Variables ($N = 704$)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Intentions to part. in politics – premeasure	–										
2. Intentions to participate in politics	.56***	–									
3. Internal political efficacy	.43***	.53***	–								
4. Attitudes toward political behaviors	.34***	.54***	.26***	–							
5. Political discussions	.50***	.48***	.69***	.23***	–						
6. Important others' attitudes	.19**	.34***	.02	.74***	.09	–					
7. Club membership	.18**	.16**	-.01	.01	.03	.01	–				
8. School track	.13*	.19**	-.01	.05	.06	.01	.01	–			
9. Parental education	.14**	.13*	.11*	.03	.17**	.07	-.04	.33***	–		
10. Age	.04	.07	.04	.14**	.26***	.03	-.07	.16**	.16**	–	
11. Gender	.16**	.10*	-.27***	.04	-.16**	.11*	.06	.10*	.10*	-.01	–
Mean	2.37	2.41	2.36	2.92	2.60	2.81	0.39	0.68	3.09	15.34	0.54
<i>SD</i>	0.51	0.55	0.69	0.62	0.72	0.58	0.49	0.46	1.07	1.22	0.50
Range	1-4	1-4	1-4	1-4	1-4	1-4	0-1	0-1	1-5	10-19	0-1

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

Results

The means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations of all variables are shown in table 1. As the correlational relationships indicate, all predictors were significantly positively related to adolescents' intentions to participate in politics.

In a first step, adolescents' intentions to participate in politics were predicted by their behavioral intentions from the previous measurement point (premeasure), school track, parental education (i.e., educational resources), club membership, political discussions with others, as well as important others' attitudes toward political behaviors (i.e., experiences in social networks). Moreover, the effects of the two covariates – age and gender – were taken into account. Correlations among the predicting variables were freely estimated (Model 1.1). The model showed a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(33, N = 704) = 58.44, p = .004, CFI = .976, TLI = .951, RMSEA = .033,$ and $SRMR = .026$. Controlled for adolescents' intentions to participate in politics at the previous measurement point ($\beta = .34, SE = .11, p = .003$), political discussions with others ($\beta = .30, SE = .10, p = .003$) and important others' attitudes toward political behaviors ($\beta = .25, SE = .06, p < .001$) explained changes in adolescents' intentions to participate in politics. Club membership had no significant effect ($\beta = .08, SE = .05, p = .093$). From the considered indicators of educational resources, school track had a significant effect ($\beta = .14, SE = .05, p = .003$), while the effect of parental education was not significant ($\beta = .01, SE = .05, p = .879$). The effects of the two covariates – age and gender – were also not significant ($\beta_{age} = -.02, SE = .05, p = .716; \beta_{gender} = .07, SE = .05, p = .211$). Overall, the examined predictors explained 46.0% of the variance in adolescents' intentions to participate in politics.

In a second step, only those indicators of educational resources and experiences in social networks that had a significant effect on adolescents' behavioral intentions were considered (i.e., school track, political discussions, important others' attitudes). Moreover, adolescents' attitudes toward political behaviors and their internal political efficacy beliefs were included as mediating variables (Model 1.2, see figure 1 for a graphical depiction). The model fit the data well, $\chi^2(45, N = 704) = 88.22, p = .000, CFI = 0.985, TLI = 0.972, RMSEA = .039,$ and $SRMR = .025$. When accounting for adolescents' attitudes toward political behaviors ($\beta = .33, SE = .08, p < .001$) and internal political efficacy ($\beta = .31, SE = .09, p = .001$), the effects of important others' attitudes ($\beta = .03, SE = .07, p = .683$) and political discussion with others ($\beta = .03, SE = .10, p = .810$) were no longer significant. Tests of indirect effects showed that the latter were mediated by the examined individual characteristics. While the effect of important others' attitudes on intentions to participate in politics was mediated by students' own attitudes toward political behaviors ($\beta = .24, SE = .06, p < .001; 95\%CI [0.10, 0.31]; 89.89\%$ of total effect), the effect of political discussions was largely mediated by adolescents' sense of internal political efficacy ($\beta = .22, SE = .07, p = .001; 95\%CI [0.08, 0.28]; 67.74\%$ of total effect). Furthermore, the effect of political discussions was also partially mediated by students' attitudes toward political behaviors ($\beta = .07, SE = .02, p = .001, 95\%CI [0.02, 0.09]; 22.58\%$ of total effect). The effect of school track, however, was not mediated by the examined individual characteristics. More precisely, while school track predicted young peo-

ple's intentions to participate in politics ($\beta = .15$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$), the indirect effects via attitudes toward political behaviors ($\beta = .01$, $SE = .01$, $p = .240$; 95%CI [-0.01, 0.03]) and internal political efficacy beliefs were not significant ($\beta = -.01$, $SE = .01$, $p = .382$; 95%CI [-0.04, 0.01]). Overall, the predictors explained a substantial amount of variance in adolescents' intentions to participate in politics, as the R^2 -value of .54 indicates².

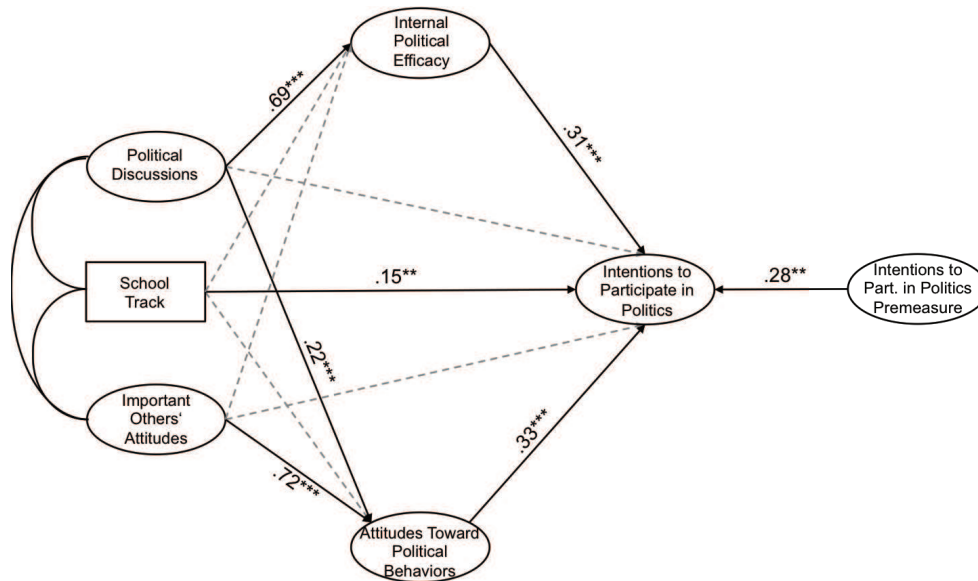


Figure 1. Graphical depiction of Model 1.2: Standardized coefficients for the structural equation model predicting changes in intentions to participate in politics from resources and experiences in social networks and mediated by individual characteristics (Study 1, $N = 704$)

Note. Non-significant paths are dashed. Latent variables are shown with ovals
 $* p < .05$; $** p < .01$; $*** p < .001$

Discussion

Based on the assumptions of the civic voluntarism model, the present research examined the effects of educational resources, experiences in social networks, and individual characteristics on adolescents' intentions to participate in politics. We considered educational resources and experiences in social networks to be rather distal variables, the effects of which were mediated by individual factors. In line

² In a subsequent analysis we examined whether our findings were moderated by adolescents' age or gender. We found no indication that the examined relationships of Model 1.2 differed among girls and boys or among younger and older participants, $\Delta\chi^2(20) \leq 29.18$, $p \geq .085$.

with our expectations, the results of our final model revealed that the effects of political discussions and important others' attitudes toward political behaviors were significantly mediated by the examined individual factors. As our findings indicate there might be two different pathways to active citizenship: While the effect of political discussions was largely mediated by adolescents' internal political efficacy beliefs, the effect of important others' attitudes toward political behaviors was completely mediated by adolescents' own attitudes. The effect of school track, in contrast, was not mediated by the examined individual characteristics.

When interpreting these findings, some methodological aspects of this study need to be addressed. A first aspect concerns the assessment of adolescents' intentions to participate in politics, which was based on a rather broad measure. Besides its methodological drawbacks (low reliability of the scale and therefore a more conservative bias of the results; cf. Reis, Judd, 2000), it would be interesting to examine whether these findings could be confirmed in a separate examination of conventional and unconventional forms of participation. Moreover, this study focused on parental attitudes only as an indicator of important others' attitudes toward political behaviors. Yet as adolescents get older, peers become more and more a reference group from which they seek advice and approval (Syvertsen, Flanagan, 2006). A joint examination of parents' and peers' attitudes toward political behaviors could therefore provide a more comprehensive picture of social influences (cf. Jugert et al., 2013). Finally, so far these conclusions are based on a single study. Yet, the question arises to what extent the findings might be a characteristic of the examined age group or forms of political participation. In order to address some of these questions in more detail, we conducted a second study that focused on young adults and conventional political behaviors.

Study 2

Method

Sample. Data from Study 2 were derived from a longitudinal survey on political orientations in young adulthood. Students from a medium-sized university located in the federal state of Thüringen in Germany³ were surveyed over a period of two measurement points, divided by a six-month time lag (Time 1: spring 2009, Time 2: fall 2009). As in Study 1, data from the previous time point were primarily included to control for the stability of young people's intentions to participate in politics (i.e., premeasure). The study comprised 433 students. More female ($n = 293$,

³In terms of demographic characteristics, such as students' age or socio-economic background, the student body of this university is comparable to other German universities. Most German universities are public and therefore require no or only a small amount of tuition fees, which reduces selection effects due to students' socio-economic background. For some subjects, such as psychology or medicine, however, there is a restricted admission, which varies between universities. Criteria of selection are mostly students' *Abitur* grades (high school diploma). Within this study, we tried to include students from different subjects in order to reflect a broad student body, thereby reducing possible selection effects.

67.7%) than male ($n = 140$, 32.3%) participants took part in the survey and students' mean age was 21.79 years ($SD = 2.52$, age range: 17-33 years). More than half of the students ($n = 242$, 56.7%) were in their third semester. The overall number of completed semesters ranged between one and twelve ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 2.10$). Participants came from different fields of studies, such as economics, humanities, natural science, and social science, in order to reflect a broad student body.

Measures. In contrast to Study 1, this study concentrated on the examination of conventional political behavioral intentions only (4-item-scale; e.g., "I would ... work for a political party, visit political debates, support a political candidate, contact politicians"; $\alpha = .77$). Parental education, as indicator of educational resources, was operationalized as in Study 1. Since the participants were exclusively university students and consequently shared a similar educational background (i.e., successful completion of the higher school track), no further indicator of educational resources was included in the analyses. Indicators of experiences in social networks were the amount of political discussions with others (4-item-scale; e.g., "I often discuss political issues with ... my parents, siblings, friends, romantic partner"; $\alpha = .79$), important others' attitudes toward political behaviors (4-item-scale; e.g., "Most people who are important to me think that it is important to participate in politics"; Ajzen, 2002; $\alpha = .79$), and club membership (0 = *not a member*, 1 = *member*). Similar to Study 1, club membership included a broad array of organizational memberships (e.g., charity clubs, student networks). Finally, individual characteristics were assessed by the same measures used in Study 1 (i.e., internal political efficacy, $\alpha = .88$; attitudes toward political behaviors, $\alpha = .73$). Age and gender (0 = *male*, 1 = *female*) served as covariates. If not stated otherwise, response options ranged from 1 = *I do not agree at all* to 6 = *I totally agree*.

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-order Correlations of Study 2 Variables ($N = 433$)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Intentions to part. in politics – premeasure	–									
2. Intentions to participate in politics	.70***	–								
3. Internal political efficacy	.63***	.73***	–							
4. Attitudes toward political behaviors	.50***	.64***	.42***	–						
5. Political discussions	.52***	.65***	.69***	.38***	–					
6. Important others' attitudes	.41***	.52***	.44***	.74***	.52***	–				
7. Club membership	.26***	.16**	.18***	.19***	.20***	.17**	–			
8. Parental education	-.03	-.02	.06	-.02	-.01	.07	.04	–		
9. Age	.09	.12*	-.05	-.06	.02	-.11*	.02	-.07	–	
10. Gender	-.22***	-.23***	-.44***	-.12*	-.26***	-.06	-.07	-.07	-.03	–
Mean	2.71	3.29	3.58	4.17	3.47	3.54	0.28	4.01	21.79	0.67
SD	1.12	1.07	1.16	0.84	1.16	1.04	0.45	.88	2.54	0.47
Range	1-6	1-6	1-6	1-6	1-6	1-6	1-6	2-5	17-33	0-1

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

Results

As in Study 1, latent structural equation modeling was applied. Again, we used item parceling to reduce the number of parameters to be estimated. The intercorrelations, means, and standard deviations of all variables are summarized in table 2.

In a first step young adults' intentions to participate in politics were predicted by parental education, club membership, political discussions with others, and important others' attitudes toward political behaviors while controlling for the effects of behavioral intentions at the previous measurement point (i.e., premeasure) as well as the covariates age and gender. All predictors were allowed to covary (Model 2.1). The model fit the data well, $\chi^2(29, N = 433) = 47.61, p = .016, CFI = .987, TLI = .973, RMSEA = .038,$ and $SRMR = .026$. Controlled for young adults' behavioral intentions at the previous time point ($\beta = .48, SE = .06, p < .001$), both important others' attitudes (std. estimate = .18, $SE = .06, p = .004$) and political discussions with others ($\beta = .29, SE = .08, p < .001$) predicted changes in young adults' intentions to participate in politics. Yet, neither parental education ($\beta = .01, SE = .04, p = .791$) nor club membership ($\beta = -.06, SE = .04, p = .124$) had an additional effect. Also, the effects of the covariates – age and gender – were not significant ($\beta_{age} = .06, SE = .04, p = .121; \beta_{gender} = -.04, SE = .05, p = .339$). The predictors explained 62.3% of the variance in young adult's intentions to participate in politics.

In a second step, we examined whether the effects of experiences in social networks that had significantly explained students' intentions to participate in politics were mediated by their internal political efficacy and own attitudes toward political behaviors (Model 2.2, see figure 2 for a graphical depiction). Again, this model fit the data well, $\chi^2(39, N = 433) = 64.51, p = .006, CFI = 0.989, TLI = 0.982, RMSEA = .039,$ and $SRMR = .031$. Both individual characteristics significantly predicted changes in students' intentions to participate in politics ($\beta_{attitudes} = .32, SE = .07, p < .001; \beta_{efficacy} = .30, SE = .08, p < .001$). While important others' attitudes were no longer a significant predictor of young adults' political behavioral intentions ($\beta = -.03, SE = .06, p = .667$), the effect of political discussions with others was diminished, yet still significant ($\beta = .21, SE = .09, p = .017$). As in Study 1, we tested for the significance of indirect effects. The results showed that the effect of important others' attitudes was mediated by students' own attitudes toward political behaviors ($\beta = .20, SE = .05, p < .001; 95\%CI [0.10, 0.29]; 83.33\%$ of total effect). The effect of political discussions with others, in turn, was partially mediated by students' sense of internal political efficacy ($\beta = .26, SE = .07, p = .001; 95\%CI [0.11, 0.41]; 63.41\%$ of total effect). With a R^2 -estimation of .72, the predictors explained a substantial amount of variance in young adults' intentions to participate in politics⁴.

⁴ In a subsequent analysis we examined whether these findings were moderated by young adults' age or gender. We found no indication that the examined relationships of Model 2.2 differed among female and male or among younger and older participants, $\Delta\chi^2(14) \leq 11.61, p \geq .637$.

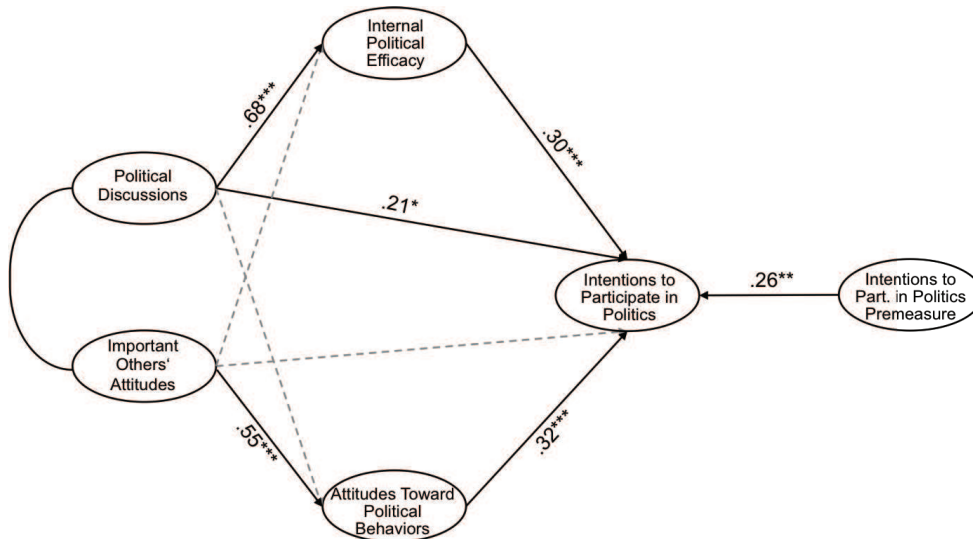


Figure 2. Graphical depiction of Model 2.2: Standardized coefficients for the structural equation model predicting changes in intentions to participate in politics from resources and experiences in social networks and mediated by individual characteristics (Study 2, $N = 433$)

Note. Non-significant paths are dashed

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

Discussion

Despite differences in age and forms of political participation, the analyses of Study 2 revealed a strikingly similar pattern of results to that of our first study. Again, the examined indicators of experiences in social networks were found to explain changes in young people's intentions to participate in politics. While the effect of important others' attitudes on young adults' behavioral intentions was completely mediated by their own attitudes toward political behaviors, the effect of political discussions was partially mediated by their internal political efficacy beliefs. In contrast to Study 1, however, political discussions with others also directly explained young adults' intentions to participate in politics. One possible explanation for this finding might lie in the different forms of political activities that were examined. That is, unlike in Study 1, only students' intentions to participate in conventional politics were assessed. It can be assumed that processes underlying political behavioral intentions differ slightly depending on the types of activities taken into account. Moreover, so far we only focused on two specific individual characteristics. Yet, other variables, such as young people's political knowledge and interest, have also shown to be related to political discussions with others and levels of political participation (Torney-Purta et al., 2001; cf. Richardson, 2003). In order to address this issue in more detail, future studies should take a more thorough

look at further individual characteristics as well as its relation to different types of political activities.

Similar to Study 1, neither parental education, which was included as an indicator of resources, nor club membership explained changes in young adults' intentions to participate in politics. While the former might be a characteristic of our sample (university students only and therefore less variance in parents' educational background), the non-significant effect of club membership might be related to the way of assessing this variable. Given its similarities to Study 1, we will address both findings in more detail in the general discussion.

General Discussion

The adolescent and young adulthood years provide a broad spectrum of developmental changes, experiences, and challenges that shape young people's political views and behaviors. These developments, however, do not automatically lead to active citizenship, which is, after all, an essential part of a vital democracy. It was therefore the goal of the present research to gain a more elaborate understanding of processes underlying young people's intentions to participate in politics. By qualifying the interplay between different sets of predictors of political behaviors as suggested by the civic voluntarism model, we could show that the effects of political discussions and important others' attitudes were largely mediated by individual characteristics. More precisely, our findings indicate that there are different pathways to active citizenship: Engaging successfully in political discussions seems to affect young people's intentions to participate in politics by enhancing their perceived political capabilities (i.e., internal political efficacy). This finding fits the existing literature underlining the importance of a constructive and supportive climate of discussion in which young people are encouraged to express their own opinions and therewith have the chance to collect experiences with fundamental democratic principles – such as negotiating and compromising (Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Hess, 2002; e.g., Campbell, 2008). According to Richardson (2003), these interactions are one example of vicarious experiences for they “allow [...] the participants to learn more about political participation without necessitating actual involvement” (p. 29). Initiating discussions of current societal or political issues – be it in the classroom or within the family or peer context – might therefore present one promising approach to stimulate young people's political awareness and confidence (cf. Hahn, 1996; McDevitt, Chaffee, 2000).

The perception of important others' attitudes toward political behaviors, in turn, affected young people's own attitudes. Eventually, this positive evaluation of political behaviors made young people more willing to take action themselves. As this finding further underlines, young people's political development is bound to their social environment. That is, on their way to active citizenship they seek approval from close persons, adapt their actions and attitudes to existing role models, and are affected by prevailing social values and norms. Increasing the visibility of political activities or providing opportunities to get in contact with politically engaged peers could therefore represent another possible pathway to further young

people's readiness to take an active role in the public sphere. We found this pattern in our sample of adolescent high school students as well as in our sample of young adult university students. The availability of two datasets with comparable designs did not only allow us to consider a broader age range but also to examine different forms of political participation, lending additional value to our study. Yet, our measures of political discussions, important others' attitudes, and intentions to participate in politics differed in Study 1 and 2. To draw more sustained conclusions, further research using identical instruments across studies is needed.

Contrary to our expectations, club membership – which was included as another indicator of experiences in social networks – had no additional effect on young people's intentions to participate in politics in both studies. The zero-order correlations between club membership and intentions to participate in politics were also small (see table 1 and 2) and associations became non-significant when all predictors were taken into account in the model estimation. One possible explanation for this finding might be the way of assessing club memberships. So far we only assessed whether young people were members or not. Yet, since membership can take many different forms and shapes, future studies should include a broader indicator of membership that also considers time spent in a club, the kind of club, or the quality of experiences (cf. mastery experiences; Bandura, 1997).

Besides the effects of young people's experiences in social networks, the examined indicators of educational resources either had a direct effect (cf. school track, Study 1) or were not related to young people's intentions to participate in politics (cf. parental education, Study 1 and 2). Regarding the latter finding, it could be hypothesized that the effects of educational resources and experiences in social networks are not independent from each other. That is, the availability of educational resources might facilitate access to social networks, which, in turn, affects individual characteristics and eventually young people's intentions to participate in politics. Empirically, however, we found no evidence for this assumption given the predominantly non-significant zero-order correlations between educational resources and experiences in social networks (see table 1 and 2). Moreover, when interpreting this finding one should take into account that we only included educational level as an indicator of resources. In addition to intellectual aspects, however, the latter might also comprise material aspects, such as income or occupational status. The availability of books and newspapers at home represents another resource underlying political behaviors (Verba, Schlozman, Brady, 1995). Therefore, a broader index of resources would be desirable in future studies in order to add to this study.

Some limitations of the present research should be noted. Both studies were carried out among high school as well as university students from the federal state of Thüringen in former East Germany. This might raise the question of representativeness – especially against the backdrop of recent German history (for an overview of the consequences of German unification, see Silbereisen, 2005). In order to make more sustained statements about the generalizability of our findings, further research should comprise participants from different regional and national contexts. Moreover, based on the study's design, we cannot rule out that the examined

mediation processes operate in the opposite direction. That is, internal political efficacy might lead to higher levels of political discussions with important others. Likewise, young people who consider political activism as important might project their attitudes onto their friends or parents and may therefore perceive the latter's attitudes as more positive. Longitudinal mediation analyses are therefore needed in future studies to investigate the relation between resources, social networks, individual characteristics and young people's intentions to participate in politics. In order to examine changes in the outcome variable, we controlled for young people's intentions to participate in politics at the previous measurement point. Therefore, this kind of modeling still provided more information than traditional cross-sectional designs. Finally, we considered young people's behavioral intentions so far. Even though intentions have shown to predict political behaviors (e.g., Eckstein, Noack, Gniewosz, 2013), it is important to additionally include the amount of actual political activities. After all, it is people's real actions that make a difference and not only their readiness to do so.

In sum, by comparing two different age groups the present research provided some valuable findings concerning the prediction of young people's intentions to participate in politics. Overall, the civic voluntarism model has shown to be a helpful framework in order to examine meaningful predictors. Moreover, our study indicated that there are different pathways to active citizenship: While political discussions affected young people's intentions to participate in politics largely via their sense of internal political efficacy, the effect of important others' attitudes was mediated by young people's own attitudes toward political behaviors. Given the often-criticized lack of political involvement, especially among young people, a better understanding of the processes underlying intentions to participate in politics is of particular importance, as it might provide some answers to the frequently raised question of what keeps young people from becoming politically engaged.

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