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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Explaining the gap: Why do Swedish-speaking minority youth have higher political self-efficacy than Finnish-speaking majority youth?

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Abstract

Although political self-efficacy is one of the most important determinants of political participation, little is known about the factors that boost its development or reduce structural differences between different social groups. This study tests three perspectives—socioeconomic background, social capital and supporting school environment—to explain why youth belonging to the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland have significantly higher political self-efficacy than those belonging to the Finnish-speaking majority, despite their minority status. Using the data of 5274 15–16-year-old students in a multilevel OLS design, this study indicates that a more open classroom climate in minority schools is an important predictor of the higher political self-efficacy of the minority youth. The results demonstrate the value of promoting classroom environments where students are encouraged to express their opinions and discuss political issues openly.

KEYWORDS

internal political efficacy, minority, open classroom climate, political self-efficacy, political socialization, youth

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INTRODUCTION

Political self-efficacy, or internal political efficacy, which refers to perceptions about how well one can understand and influence politics (Niemi et al., 1991, p. 1408), plays an important role in political participation for both adults (Finkel, 1985; Oser et al., 2022) and youth (Arens & Watermann, 2017; Hope, 2015). It is related to several other important citizenship characteristics, including perceptions about the system responsiveness (i.e., external political efficacy) (Levy, 2013; Sherrod, 2010, p. 527) and political interest (Levy, 2013). Moreover, political self-efficacy seems to be able to level differences in participation between more and less advantaged groups (Beaumont, 2011), fostering more equitable political engagement. In a functioning multicultural democracy, all social groups, including minorities, need to feel efficacious enough to participate in politics. For equal participation, it is crucial to explore how different minorities can be encouraged to participate. Some studies suggest that the development of political self-efficacy may partly differ between different minorities and between minorities and majorities and is influenced by factors like socioeconomic status (SES) and discrimination (Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Eckstein et al., 2015; Godfrey & Grayman, 2014). However, the literature is scarce and inconsistent and lacks studies on minority youth, especially those not disadvantaged in family SES or citizenship rights.

In this article, I intend to fill this void by studying non-disadvantaged minority youth, the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland. Studying them can potentially shed light on a wider variety of mechanisms affecting political self-efficacy than socioeconomic factors and discrimination. It is thus possible to gain insights that may also help to include other minority youth groups and young people generally into political decision-making. Consequently, this study contributes to the fields of political socialization, youth research and minority political engagement.

The Swedish-speaking Finns are a good example of a non-disadvantaged minority, because it has practically the same statutory rights to operate in its native language as the Finnish-speaking majority, an equal or even slightly higher SES (Henning-Lindblom & Liebkind, 2007), its own rich culture, a high sense of community and a political party speaking for Swedish-speaking people's rights. In practice, however, Swedish-speaking Finns, comprising 5.2% of the population and about 290,000 people, have limited possibilities to use their native language, poorer media supply and somewhat weaker learning results (Kyllönen, 2006; Ouakrim-Soivio & Kuusela, 2012). Furthermore, the minority is heterogeneous: many are bilingual and thus able to operate fully in Finnish when necessary, while others do not understand or feel confident to use Finnish (Lindell, 2020). As the data shows significant differences in political self-efficacy between the Finnish-speakers, the bilingual and the Swedish-speakers,[1] I set out to explore the power of three different approaches in explaining the political self-efficacy gap between the language groups. First, I test the effect of the socioeconomic background

(measured as a respondent's perception of their family's economic situation), which previous research considers one of the strongest and most universal factors behind political self-efficacy (Almond & Verba, 1963; Easton & Dennis, 1967; Manganelli et al., 2015). Second, I analyse the influence of social capital (generalized trust and associational engagement), which appears both to enhance political self-efficacy (Anderson, 2010) and to be stronger among the Swedish-speaking minority (Hyyppä & Mäki, 2001; Nyqvist et al., 2008). Third, I examine the impact of perceived political learning in civics class, an open classroom climate and school size, since the language groups study in separate schools where different school cultures may prevail. Moreover, education in one's mother tongue has been found to benefit youths' political self-efficacy (Jugert et al., 2018), and an open classroom climate is suggested to have a stronger impact on some minorities than majorities (Godfrey & Grayman, 2014).

The results of this study imply that the Swedish-speaking and bilingual youth in Swedish-speaking education have significantly higher political self-efficacy than the majority partly thanks to studying in a more open classroom climate. This underlines the importance of creating open classroom climates and studying how this is best done. However, SES and social capital appear as weak predictors as best. Given that discrimination and low SES have been used as explanations for lower political self-efficacy among more disadvantaged minorities (Einarsdóttir et al., 2018), this suggests that political socialization matters more than external conditions.

Socialization to political self-efficacy

Political socialization refers to the process through which people learn the relevant attitudes, information, values and behavioral patterns of their political system (Almond & Coleman, 1960, p. 27–29). According to social learning theory, people can learn by actions and their influences, or by observing other people's behavior and its consequences for them (Bandura, 1977, p. 12). Consequently, their environment influences their development. Even though people's attitudes and behaviors are somewhat malleable their whole life, a great deal of the socialization, including socialization of political efficacy (Almond & Coleman, 1960; Arens & Watermann, 2017; Easton & Dennis, 1967; Sohl & Arensmeier, 2015) happens during childhood and adolescence. This socialization process during adolescence has also been shown to affect youth (Arens & Watermann, 2017) and adult political behavior (Sherrod, 2010). In the political sphere, political self-efficacy is enhanced by skill-building political mastery experiences, models of political efficacy and involvement, social encouragement, supportive relationships and networks, as well as empowering and resilient political outlooks (Sherrod, 2010).

Youth are mainly socialized by four or five socialization agents: parents/family, peers, school and media, as well as leisure time communities (Quintelier, 2015). These agents operate not only individually but also in cooperation and interaction

with each other (Almond & Coleman, 1960; Quintelier, 2015). Furthermore, the young are active in their own development, being able to inspire their surroundings in reciprocal socializing relationships (McDevitt & Chaffee, 2002).

SES is one of the most robust predictors of political self-efficacy (e.g., Almond & Verba, 1963; Easton & Dennis, 1967; Manganelli et al., 2015), giving youth both resources and supporting political socialization to feel capable (Beaumont, 2011). SES is also shown to affect political self-efficacy both directly and indirectly in relatively egalitarian contexts such as Finland and Sweden, though less than in contexts where education is transmitted to a higher degree due to limited educational possibilities for low-SES youth (Gidengil et al., 2016; Sohl & Arensmeier, 2015).

SES seems mostly to have an impact by helping individuals to acquire civic resources important for political engagement, such as politically relevant knowledge, skills, orientations, experiences and social networks (Beck & Jennings, 1982; Gidengil et al., 2016). High-SES parents tend to offer their children more resources for the likes of gaining social capital (Beaumont, 2011; Beck & Jennings, 1982) and participating more politically and thus give an active example to their children (Beck & Jennings, 1982; Gidengil et al., 2016). In other words, high SES correlates heavily with supporting political socialization. Moreover, because people with ample resources have better prerequisites to influence politics, benefit calculations are also argued to explain political self-efficacy differences between socioeconomic groups. However, they cannot account for all the differences (Sherrod, 2010, p. 531). In sum, a higher SES can be assumed to be connected to a higher political self-efficacy.

Although social capital has been conceptualized in various ways (e.g., Bäck, 2011), it tends to be seen as a kind of interplay between trust and participation in social life. According to Robert Putnam (2000), social capital means relations between people, social networks, and norms of trust and mutuality. Social capital is expected to boost political self-efficacy by increasing feelings of connection and inclusion in communities (Anderson, 2010) and by strengthening skills, networks and self-confidence useful to participate and influence in politics (Levy, 2013, 2018; Quintelier, 2015). Often, participation in these networks creates self-reinforcing cycles, reflecting the active role youth have in their political socialization: youth gain social capital by participating (Levy, 2018; Putnam, 2000), which increases their eagerness to participate in the future (Levy, 2018).

Yet mere participation does not necessarily suffice; psychological engagement and a sense of community are needed, which, in turn, can increase both political self-efficacy and interpersonal trust (Anderson, 2010). As to youth, civic participation in extracurricular activities at school has a positive effect on civic orientations, such as political self-efficacy (Beck & Jennings, 1982). Friends in a contributing environment and participatory elements, promote active participation, and by participating, youth make gain social capital by making politically interested friends that further support their political

self-efficacy development (Levy, 2018). Furthermore, peer groups with strong political self-efficacy are suggested to boost each other's political self-efficacy (Koskimaa & Rapeli, 2015). Thus, social capital can create virtuous circles and conducive socialization environments, which boost political self-efficacy.

Overall, education has been suggested to influence political engagement in two ways: by increasing skills and attitudes relevant to participate (absolute education model), or by leading to a relatively higher social status that increases resources such as social networks (relative education model). According to a third option, education per se has no influence, but correlates with pre-adult socialization, such as family socio-economic status, the political socialization in the home environment and personal characteristics (pre-adult socialization model) (Persson, 2013).

School can potentially contribute to political self-efficacy development by giving direct and indirect experience of politically relevant skills. First, youth can learn a lot about politics at school, both factual knowledge and skills, and this political learning has been shown to have a positive impact on their political self-efficacy (Beaumont, 2011; Reichert, 2016). Second, engaged teachers who inform and inspire their pupils in political matters boost their pupils' political self-efficacy (Beaumont, 2011; Sohl & Arensmeier, 2015). Third, school can provide adolescents an introductory democratic context where they feel encouraged to discuss politics openly and diversity of opinions is respected (Manganelli et al., 2015). Furthermore, schools can expose students to political discourse and debate, which lies in the core of participatory democracy (Campbell, 2008). This kind of an open classroom climate has also been shown to enhance political self-efficacy (Campbell, 2008; Manganelli et al., 2015), especially compensating for those with low SES (Campbell, 2008). Fourth, being able to participate at school, such as making classroom rules, is associated with higher political self-efficacy (Levy, 2013). Finally, youth express higher political self-efficacy if they feel treated fairly by teachers and peers (Bandura, 1977; Sohl & Arensmeier, 2015).

Overall, both family background, social capital and school context are important facets in youth political self-efficacy. Theoretically, each of them can explain the higher political self-efficacy among the Swedish-speaking minority youth in Finland.

Political self-efficacy development among minorities

Little theory explains what belonging to a minority, as such, does to political engagement in general or political self-efficacy in particular. Overall, research about political self-efficacy of ethnic minorities is limited. Thus far most research has concerned US minorities and minorities in disadvantaged positions due to a lower level of education, economic inequality and/or discrimination.

Previous research suggests that ethnic minority youth and adults develop political self-efficacy roughly the same way as ethnic majorities, though different contexts seem to make a difference (Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Hope & Jagers, 2014). However, studies are scarce and results inconsistent between studies and ethnic groups. Some of the inconsistency may result from small sample sizes and different and sometimes problematic measures for political efficacy (e.g., voting intentions). Nevertheless, some results indicate that the political self-efficacy of different ethnic groups develops partly through different socialization processes. For instance, Blacks in the United States have on average higher political self-efficacy than their SES or level of political sophistication would predict, unlike most minorities, which is expected to result from supporting socialization (Sherrod, 2010). Yet, in the United States, political knowledge is associated with political self-efficacy of marginalized Latinx youth, but not that of marginalized Black youth, implying that political knowledge among Black people does not contribute to political self-efficacy (Diemer & Rapa, 2016). In Iceland, research has revealed substantial differences both between the majority and immigrant minorities, and between different immigrant minorities, although they probably stem at least partly from different educational levels and contacts with the majority population (Einarsdóttir et al., 2018). In a study in three European countries (Belgium, Germany and Turkey), no connection between socio-political engagement and political self-efficacy was found for immigrant youth, although the association was clear for majority youth (Eckstein et al., 2015).

Research on minority youth at school is scarce and US-centered. Langton and Jennings (1968) concluded that Black high school students, unlike their White peers, gained political self-efficacy when exposed to citizenship education, and the children of lower-educated parents benefited more than higher SES students. Likewise in the US, Godfrey and Grayman (2014) found that an open classroom climate particularly boosts minority students' political self-efficacy. In Germany, Turkish minority students benefited from bilingual education in Turkish and German, compared to peers only being educated in German (Jugert et al., 2018). Yet education may in some contexts have the reverse effect. Centellas and Rosenblatt (2018) show that differences in political efficacy increased during introductory political science courses in the USA, as Whites gained and Blacks lost political self-efficacy.

As to language minorities, research is scarce. According to a study from five different OECD countries (the USA, Canada, Germany, Austria and Israel), language minorities have lower political efficacy than majorities, and, unlike for the difference between immigrants and the majority, literacy skills do not explain the difference (Grotlüschen et al., 2021). Moreover, language and ethnolinguistic identity need to be considered when studying language minorities. While both unilingual and bilingual minority members can be expected to identify with the minority, the bilingual can be assumed to identify

and socialize with the majority to a higher degree (Henning-Lindblom & Liebkind, 2007), which could also affect their political socialization compared to unilingual people. Among Swedish-speaking Finnish adults, rural and predominantly Swedish-speaking contexts were found to enhance political self-efficacy (Karv et al., 2022); therefore, Swedish-speaking schools could be expected to benefit minority youth.

Swedish-speaking Finns as a minority

Finnish schools are relatively homogeneous according to PISA results (Kosunen et al., 2016; OECD, 2019), compulsory education carries no tuition fees, and the selective classes are principally open to everyone, although recent developments show some sociodemographic differentiation between and within lower secondary schools in urban areas (Kosunen et al., 2016). When comparing PISA results, all Finnish schools are still of relatively good quality (OECD, 2019). Almost all teachers are qualified, having completed an esteemed 5-year university degree (Opetushallitus, 2019: 1). The common education lasts 10 years in total—one pre-school year, 6 years in primary school and 3 years in lower secondary school—and is compulsory, guaranteeing almost universal attendance[2] (Lag om grundläggande utbildning, 1998/628, 9 §, 26 a §). Compared internationally, civics skills have a strong role in the curriculum and are considered important (Schulz et al., 2018). After completing the common education at the age of 15 or 16, young people choose between different academically or vocationally oriented upper secondary schools, and their compulsory education ends when they turn 18 (Läropliktslag, 2020/1214, 2 §).[3] In this study, the youth were surveyed during the last year of their common curriculum, when they were 15 or 16 years old.

Because of extensive language rights, the Finnish school system is almost completely separated between languages. Yet all the schools follow a common curriculum, which stresses, for example, children's rights to quality education, succeeding and being respected, equality, democracy, cultural diversity and active learning (Opetushallitus, 2014). Most pupils attend either Finnish-speaking (93.4% of the pupils) or Swedish-speaking (6.3% of the pupils) schools (Opetushallitus, 2019: 2). Teacher education is also separated into Swedish-speaking and Finnish-speaking programmes. The schools and teachers have broad autonomy to implement the curriculum (Schulz et al., 2018), which enables different teaching methods in Swedish- and Finnish-speaking schools. Additionally, Swedish-speaking comprehensive schools are on average almost 40% smaller than Finnish-speaking schools, which may contribute to tighter-knit communities and thus stronger social capital (Opetushallitus, 2019: 2). However, Swedish-speaking schools have somewhat weaker learning results, including in civic skills (Kyllönen, 2006; Ouakrim-Soivio & Kuusela, 2012).

The bilinguals belong to the language minority because of their other native language, and they are mostly associated with the Swedish-speakers. Most bilingual children are registered as Swedish-speaking, since the Finnish system only allows one official native language (Saarela, 2021, p. 44–45). They also tend to be closely attached to the Swedish-speaking community: most of them go to Swedish-speaking schools (Saarela, 2021, p. 52–53), have Swedish-speaking relatives and attend Swedish-speaking events and hobbies. Yet their socialization into the Swedish-speaking community can be weaker than that of the unilingual Swedish-speakers because they usually have one Finnish-speaking parent and Finnish-speaking relatives and can attend Finnish-speaking schools and hobbies without language barriers.

Family background (SES) is expected to slightly ameliorate the prerequisites of political self-efficacy for Swedish-speaking and bilingual minority youth. The Swedish-speaking have on average higher education than the Finnish-speakers (Opetushallitus, 2021). Moreover, the unemployment rate of the Swedish-speakers is only about a half of the unemployment rate of the Finnish-speakers (Statistics Finland, 2023).

Previous studies show that the Swedish-speaking Finns have more social capital than the Finnish-speakers, which is expected to strengthen their political self-efficacy (Hyyppä & Mäki, 2001; Nyqvist et al., 2008). Both civic (Nyqvist et al., 2008) and electoral participation (Official Statistics of Finland, 2019) are higher among the Swedish-speaking Finns, including bilinguals,[4] than among the Finnish-speakers, and the former association seems to apply to the youth as well (Myllyniemi, 2014, p. 55).

HYPOTHESES

As the previous section shows, the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland is not disadvantaged in contrast to most minorities. On average, Swedish-speaking Finns have higher SES and more social capital than the Finnish-speakers, which presumably enhances their political self-efficacy. Although little is known about differences between Swedish- and Finnish-speaking schools, the separated school system enables different school cultures. Consequently, Swedish-speaking schools may benefit from the high social capital and the tight-knit Swedish-speaking community, though their learning results may be weaker. Furthermore, Swedish-speaking schools are on average smaller than Finnish-speaking schools, which also may benefit minority students. Because higher SES, a more open classroom environment, political learning and higher social capital are associated with higher political self-efficacy, the following hypotheses are set:

H1. The more advantaged socioeconomic background among the minority contributes to the higher political self-efficacy among the Swedish-speaking and bilingual youth than among the Finnish-speaking youth.

H2. The higher social capital among the minority contributes to the higher political self-efficacy among the Swedish-speaking and bilingual youth than among the Finnish-speaking youth.

H3. The more advantageous school environment (open classroom environment, smaller school size) in minority schools contributes to the higher political self-efficacy among the Swedish-speaking and bilingual youth than among the Finnish-speaking youth.

DATA AND METHOD

Sample and procedure

The data of the study was collected in the spring 2021. The research strategy was adapted to the COVID-19 situation. Each research situation was conducted during a lesson and begun with a professionally produced video that introduced the study and explained how to participate, thus inviting responses, replacing the presence of a researcher and standardizing the research situation. After the video, students responded individually using electronic devices, either in class (94.2% of the weighted sample) or in remote learning settings (5.8% of the weighted sample). In remote learning settings, the whole class answered at the same time, while the teacher supervised the situation and advised the pupils when needed to secure equality between research situations. No significant differences emerged between data collected in class and data collected in remote learning arrangements.

The sample consists of 5274 young people in total, 4168 studying in Finnish-speaking schools and 1106 studying in Swedish-speaking schools. Of the sample, 21.3% reported speaking Swedish at home: 10.8% of the sample Swedish but not Finnish, and 8.9% of the sample both Swedish and Finnish. The sample was collected in 80 schools, 17 of which were Swedish-speaking, in 38 municipalities or local strategic partnerships.[5] Due to some schools' reluctance to participate, there were some geographic discrepancies. The strategic overrepresentation of the Swedish-speakers and the geographic discrepancies are addressed by applying geographical and linguistical weights (see Online Appendix A for further details).

The sample forms a strategic cluster sample. When choosing municipalities and schools to recruit, geographic diversity and representation, population density, language diversity, the average education level of the municipality, the schools' size and the schools' type were considered. Approximately one third of the contacted schools declined, mainly due to the extra burden placed by the COVID-19 pandemic or participation in other research activities. When a school declined, we aimed at recruiting another school with similar characteristics. Among most schools, all classes participated the study as

requested. Based on teachers' notes during the research settings, the individual-level response rate was about 80%. Although the sampling of the municipalities and schools was not random, the data can be considered a good mini-representation of the age group in Finland, since collecting the data during lessons enabled us to reach all pupils regardless of their background. Yet participation was voluntary, so we cannot exclude potential bias resulting from e.g., pupils less interested in politics not responding.

Quite a high proportion of the students at Finnish-speaking schools indicate speaking Swedish at home (63.1% of all the bilinguals in the weighted sample were studying in Finnish-speaking schools). Based on previous studies, few bilingual, let alone unilingually Swedish-speaking children attend Finnish-speaking schools, in which case they are likely mainly socialized as Finnish-speaking (Saarela, 2021, p. 52–53). To ensure that it is the socialization environment rather than the mere native language that is measured, the bilinguals and Swedish-speaking studying in Finnish-speaking schools are included as a separate group (unweighted $n = 144$).

Measures

Both test and control variables are included in the regression models to explain political self-efficacy. For school-related variables (apart from school size and school type), a factor analysis was run to avoid serious multicollinearity issues. Two factors were extracted and named political learning and open classroom environment, and their factor loadings were used in the final analyses. See full details of all the measures in Online Appendix B.

Dependent variable: Political self-efficacy

Political self-efficacy is measured using a six-item scale with Cronbach's alpha of 0.84. The questions, answered on a 5-point Likert scale and coded so that higher values imply higher political efficacy, are: (1) Sometimes politics seems so complicated that I do not quite understand what is going on; (2) I trust in my own abilities to participate in politics; (3) I understand the most important political issues in Finland; (4) I know more about politics than most people my age; (5) When political issues or problems are discussed, I usually have something to say; (6) I have political opinions that are worth hearing.

Test variables

Socioeconomic status

SES includes education levels, profession and economic situation, which all are highly correlated. The education level of the respondents themselves is the same

and cannot thus be used as a test variable. For youth, the family background is also assumed to have the most impact. In the questionnaire, both parents' education and profession, and the family's economic situation, are asked. The first two proved unreliable measures since the youth were unsure about the education of their parents and because many either did not know what their parents did for living or answered vaguely. Previous studies have also shown that children, particularly from low-SES families, do not know the educational level of their parents and tend to overestimate it (Engzell & Jonsson, 2015). Therefore, I use the family's economic status, measured as youth's self-assessment of the economic situation of their family, as a proxy for the SES of the respondents. Additionally, I control whether the family has had to *cut back on hobbies*.

Social capital

Social capital refers to both norms of trust and mutuality and social networks (Putnam, 2000). Therefore, researchers usually measure it with *Generalized trust* ("Would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?") and/or engagement in different social contexts, such as different associations. This study includes both aspects to encompass both aspects of social capital.

Associational engagement is controlled with a six-item scale that measures participation in different kinds of organizations, such as sports clubs, congregations and political youth organizations. Each item had three response alternatives for the frequency of taking part: never, have taken part but not very actively, or have taken part and engaged a lot. Because psychological engagement and a sense of community are needed for participation to enhance political self-efficacy (Anderson, 2010), only engaged participation was considered.

School size and school type

The school size, recoded in eight groups based on the number of students, is controlled because of the statistically smaller Swedish-speaking schools. Since school type influences school size, the study controlled whether the schools were comprehensive, that is, taught years 1–9 of the common education, or lower secondary, that is, taught years 7–9 (sometimes 6–9).

Political learning

The political learning factor is composed of eight items with Cronbach's alpha of 0.88. The questions, answered on a 5-point Likert scale and higher values implying higher competences, concerned perceptions of the quality of skills that

civics classes have offered to understand Finnish politics, international politics, the Finnish legal system, personal finances, one's own opportunities to have an influence in society, human rights and equality, one's own rights and duties as a citizen, and the media's role in society. All these themes are included in the curriculum (Opetushallitus, 2014).

Classroom environment

The classroom environment factor measures the perceived openness of the classroom environment and is composed of six items, answered on a 5-point Likert scale with higher values implying more openness. The items include students' opportunities to initiate discussion of political matters and disagree with their teachers and classmates, as well as perceptions of teachers' consideration of societal issues from diverse perspectives and encouraging opinion expression and discussion in heterogeneous groups (see Campbell, 2008). Cronbach's alpha of these items is 0.75.

Control variables

Since four or five socialization agents are named as the most important in youth political socialization (Quintelier, 2015), those outside the main test variables are included as control variables.

Parent discussion

Family or parents is considered an important political socialization agent for youth. For instance, family can give examples of participatory norms and politically efficacious attitudes (Almond & Verba, 1963; Levy, 2013) and can involve children in political discussions (Sherrod, 2010). Thus, political socialization from parents is controlled with a question about the frequency of political discussion with parents.

Peer discussion

Alongside family, peers form an important part of most youth's lives, and therefore, they are a significant socialization agent that must be controlled (Quintelier, 2015). Peers can develop each other's political skills through discussion (Quintelier, 2015), and politically self-efficacious friends support each other's political self-efficacy development by encouraging each other to discuss and take part (Koskimaa & Rapeli, 2015; Levy, 2018). Political socialization from peers was controlled with a question concerning the frequency of political discussion with peers.

Media exposure

The literature shows that news media exposure boosts political self-efficacy by increasing political discussion and political knowledge (Moeller et al., 2014; Pinkleton et al., 1998). Political efficacy, in turn, can add news media consumption, creating a virtuous circle (Moeller et al., 2014; Pinkleton et al., 1998). Media exposure was controlled with a question concerning the frequency of using media to find information about politics.

Analytical strategy

Because the data was collected in schools and classes, it has a hierarchical structure with individuals (level 1) nested within classes (level 2) nested within schools (level 3). Therefore, the data is analysed using multilevel linear regression models (in a structural equation modeling framework), where intercepts can vary by class and school, to minimize the risk of underestimating the standard errors of estimates. Multilevel regression models use random effects to account for the fact that respondents within a school or a class tend to be more alike than respondents between classes and schools, because the context influences the individual. This way, aggregate-level data, such as the school size, can be included.

The first regression model is empty, measuring only the share of the variation in political self-efficacy between school, classes and individuals. In the second model, language variables are tested. Thereafter, each group of test variables (SES, social capital and school) is added separately. Then, a model includes all test variables but no control variables, and finally, the last model also includes control variables. Thereafter, the final model is rerun repeatedly by including an interaction term of a language group and an independent variable (27 models).

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics

The average political self-efficacy of both the Swedish-speakers (2.92, *SD*: 0.82) and the bilinguals (2.96, *SD*: 0.83) in Swedish-speaking education is statistically significantly higher than the political self-efficacy of the Finnish-speakers (2.73, *SD*: 0.86), while the difference between the political self-efficacy of the Swedish-speakers and bilinguals in Finnish-speaking education (2.90, *SD*: 0.87) and the Finnish-speakers is not statistically significant, possibly explained by the smaller sample size. The difference between the bilinguals and the Swedish-speakers in Swedish-speaking education is not statistically significant, either.

Other descriptive statistics are presented in Online Appendix C. Correlations between the variables are presented in Online Appendix D.

Some descriptive differences occur between the language groups. The differences in SES are small, with the bilinguals in Swedish-speaking education and the Finnish-speakers having a slightly better SES than the other groups. The Finnish-speaking families and especially the Swedish-speakers in Finnish-speaking education had had to cut back on hobbies slightly more often than families with children in Swedish-speaking education. All minority groups are also clearly more engaged in associational life than the Finnish-speakers. Unexpectedly, all minority groups have lower generalized trust than the Finnish-speakers, while the minority respondents in Finnish-speaking education have the lowest, perhaps reflecting hardened attitudes against the Finnish-Swedish minority. Youth in Swedish-speaking education study in smaller schools than those studying in Finnish-speaking schools, partly explained by the overrepresentation of comprehensive schools among the Finnish-speaking schools. Both minority groups in Swedish-speaking education evaluate their classroom environment as being more open than the groups in Finnish-speaking education. Yet self-assessed political learning is practically the same for all language groups.

Differences in control variables are small. The minority groups seem to discuss politics slightly more often than the Finnish-speakers, both with their parents and with their peers. However, the Swedish-speakers in Swedish-speaking education seem to consume less media for political purposes than the other groups.

Multilevel models

To assess which variables may explain the higher political self-efficacy among minority youth (H1–H3), a multilevel analysis was performed (see Table 1 for all estimates). The analyses begin with an empty model (Model 1), in which no predictors are included, to monitor the reductions in the estimated variance components and intraclass coefficients in following models. According to the intraclass correlation coefficients in Model 1, about 96.3% of the variation in political self-efficacy is on the individual level. Differences between schools account about 1.2% of the total variation in political self-efficacy, and differences between classes an additional 2.6%, which probably reflects the egalitarian school system in Finland (Kosunen et al., 2016). Though minimal, the variation on both class and school levels is statistically significant, and thus, it is theoretically reasonable to include them because the data was collected in clusters—not including them leads to a risk for bias, while including them does not weaken the models substantially (Barr et al., 2013). In Models 2–7, these estimates fall by almost 80% (school level) and over 50% (class level). Thus, differences in test and control variables explain most differences between schools and classes.

TABLE 1 The impact of language group, SES, social capital and school environment on political self-efficacy.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Intercept	2.77*** (0.02)	2.75*** (0.02)	2.88*** (0.03)	2.61*** (0.05)	1.64*** (0.28)	1.67*** (0.28)	1.78*** (0.21)
Swedish-speaking (SW)		0.22* (0.11)	0.22* (0.11)	0.17 (0.11)	0.13 (0.11)	0.06 (0.11)	0.11 (0.09)
Bilingual (SW)		0.21*** (0.06)	0.21*** (0.06)	0.20*** (0.06)	0.16*** (0.04)	0.15*** (0.04)	0.16*** (0.04)
Swedish + bilingual (FI)		0.05 (0.10)	0.04 (0.10)	0.01 (0.10)	0.03 (0.10)	−0.03 (0.09)	−0.02 (0.07)
SES (ref. very good)							
quite good			−0.16*** (0.03)			−0.11*** (0.03)	−0.05 (0.03)
OK			−0.25*** (0.05)			−0.16*** (0.05)	−0.06 (0.04)
quite bad			−0.26** (0.09)			−0.12	−0.02 (0.09)
very bad			0.13 (0.16)			0.32* (0.15)	0.38* (0.17)
Cut back on hobbies (ref. no)			0.02 (0.04)			0.06 (0.04)	−0.01 (0.03)
Generalized trust				0.01 (0.01)		−0.01 (0.01)	−0.00 (0.01)
Associational engagement (ref. no active engagement)							
1 association				0.06 (0.04)		0.03 (0.04)	−0.02 (0.03)
≥2 associations				0.30*** (0.05)		0.23*** (0.05)	0.03 (0.03)
School size (school level)					0.03** (0.01)	0.03** (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
School type (ref. lower secondary) (school level)					−0.07 (0.04)	−0.07 (0.04)	−0.05 (0.04)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Political learning (class) (class level)					0.06 (0.37)	0.18 (0.32)	0.12 (0.28)
Political learning (own)					1.60*** (0.13)	1.54*** (0.14)	0.86*** (0.09)
Class env. (class) (class level)					1.77*** (0.25)	1.72*** (0.24)	0.57** (0.21)
Class env. (own)					0.68*** (0.12)	0.67*** (0.14)	0.08 (0.11)
Parent discussion (ref. more seldom)							
daily							0.66*** (0.06)
weekly							0.36*** (0.04)
monthly							0.22*** (0.04)
Peer discussion (ref. more seldom)							
daily							0.47*** (0.07)
weekly							0.23*** (0.03)
monthly							0.09* (0.04)
Media exposure (ref. more seldom)							
daily							0.78*** (0.06)
weekly							0.41*** (0.05)
monthly							0.20*** (0.04)
School variance ($N = 80$)	0.008* (0.004)	0.008 (0.004)	0.005 (0.004)	0.007 (0.004)	0.004 (0.003)	0.002 (0.003)	0.001 (0.002)

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Class variance ($N = 379$)	0.019*** (0.005)	0.019*** (0.005)	0.017** (0.005)	0.017** (0.005)	0.018** (0.006)	0.014** (0.005)	0.009* (0.004)
Individual variance ($N = 5274$)	0.699*** (0.016)	0.704*** (0.016)	0.694*** (0.011)	0.696*** (0.016)	0.656*** (0.011)	0.649*** (0.016)	0.433*** (0.011)
R^2 (individual)		−0.007	0.007	0.004	0.061	0.074	0.380
R^2 (class)		−0.011	0.068	0.083	0.066	0.240	0.509
R^2 (school)		0.096	0.391	0.120	0.577	0.807	0.837

Note: Multilevel OLS regression (standard errors in parentheses). The variables are operationalized on the individual level unlike otherwise mentioned in the table.
*Significant on 0.05-level, **significant on 0.01-level, ***significant on 0.001-level.

Abbreviation: SES, socioeconomic status.

Models 3–7 explain approximately 0.4%–38% of the variation between individuals, 7%–60% of the variation between classes, and 12%–84% of the variation between schools. While the model fit on the individual level in Model 7 is reasonable given that there is likely to be numerous unstudied factors influencing political self-efficacy, the high model fits on the aggregated levels indicate that important variables on group levels have not been omitted.[6] The negative R^2 scores in Model 2 derive from the fact that the language almost predominantly varies between schools, i.e., the variance is present in the baseline model (Model 1), and therefore, the variability is lower than the mathematical equation expects (see Hox, 2010, p. 69–78).

The results in Table 1 show that being bilingual or Swedish-speaking in Swedish-speaking education are significant predictors of political self-efficacy, although their estimates decrease when more variables are added into the models. Being Swedish-speaking in Swedish-speaking education even becomes insignificant when social capital or school context is controlled for (Models 4–7). Everything else being constant, the bilinguals in Swedish-speaking education have 0.16 units higher political self-efficacy than Finnish-speakers (Model 7), on a scale from 1 to 5. Without test and control variables, Swedish-speaking are expected to have 0.22 units and the bilinguals 0.21 units higher self-efficacy than Finnish-speaking (Model 2). In other words, the tested variables explain around a fourth of the higher political self-efficacy of the bilinguals in Swedish-speaking education, while making the estimates for the Swedish-speakers insignificant. Consequently, there are probably other explanatory variables than those controlled in these models.

H1 is not supported. The estimates and the significance levels for being Swedish-speaking or bilingual do not change when controlling SES, which means that SES is unrelated to the gap between the minority and the majority respondents, supported by the fact that SES differences between groups were small. Moreover, SES does not seem to be particularly well associated with political self-efficacy, when political socialization is controlled (Model 7), contrary to many previous studies (e.g., Easton & Dennis, 1967; Manganelli et al., 2015), which implies that SES has little effect that is not explained by socialization. This may yet be due to the subjective operationalization, which is why robustness checks with similar results were run.[7]

H2 receives little support (Models 4, 6, and 7). Active engagement in two or more associations is a significant predictor when political socialization is not controlled (Models 4 and 6), yet becoming insignificant in Model 7. Instead, generalized trust and engagement in one association are not associated with political self-efficacy. Associational engagement appears to explain some of the higher political self-efficacy of the Swedish-speaking, since their estimate becomes insignificant when controlling for social capital and they participate clearly more actively. Yet as associational engagement is insignificant when political socialization is controlled, this explanation is

marginal at best. The estimate for being bilingual only falls slightly when including the measures of social capital.

The analyses offer partial support to H3. When school variables are included (Models 5–7), the estimates for being Swedish-speaking or bilingual in Swedish-speaking education fall significantly, and the estimates for being Swedish-speaking become insignificant. This seems to be mostly related to a more open classroom environment in Swedish-speaking schools, because no differences appear in political learning and the school size is not associated with political self-efficacy. Political learning on the individual level is strongly related to political self-efficacy, but it cannot explain the differences between the language groups since its levels do not differ between them.[8]

One question is whether the different explanatory variables have different effects on political self-efficacy for different language groups. I tested this by rerunning Model 7 repeatedly with including an interaction term between a language group and a test variable. These models are not reported due to the lack of space. None of these interaction terms proved statistically significant, which suggests that the variables have similar relationships for the minority groups as for the majority.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In functioning multicultural democracies, not only different ethnic groups but also youth need to have high enough political self-efficacy to participate in politics, since political self-efficacy is an important prerequisite for political participation (Finkel, 1985; Hope, 2015). Yet little is known about political self-efficacy development among minorities and especially non-disadvantaged minority youth. In this study, I assess the impact of three perspectives—SES, social capital and school—on the higher political self-efficacy among Swedish-speaking minority youth in Finland by analysing a nationwide data ($N = 5474$) in a multilevel OLS design. The results show that an open classroom environment may explain some of the gap, while SES and social capital hypotheses are not supported.

While upholding previous results of the positive effects of an open classroom environment (Campbell, 2008; Manganelli et al., 2015) and political learning (Beaumont, 2011; Reichert, 2016) on political self-efficacy, the results supported the idea of the importance of the classroom environment for minorities (Godfrey & Grayman, 2014). For policymakers and teachers, this is good news: it seems that by encouraging youth to discuss politics openly, share their opinions and disagree, their trust in their own abilities to understand and influence politics increases. Moreover, minority-language schools in Finland seem to excel in that, although further research is needed to identify why and how such contributing environments are developed.

In contrast to previous research (Easton & Dennis, 1967; Manganelli et al., 2015), SES was only weakly associated with political self-efficacy. The surprising result stems probably from the fact that several variables correlating with higher SES, such as parent discussion, political learning and associational engagement, are controlled for. This also aligns with the results of Gidengil et al. (2016), who find that the impact of parents in Finland is mainly socially learned instead of directly transmitted, despite high-SES parents having more politically active children. Essentially, political socialization seems to be more important than SES, which is particularly interesting given that discrimination and low SES have been used as explanations for lower political self-efficacy among more disadvantaged minorities (Einarsdóttir et al., 2018). Yet it is possible that the result is explained by the operationalization of the SES variable, which is subjective due to the limitations of the data, although more objective operationalizations of parental education and profession do yield almost identical results.

Likewise, social capital was only weakly linked to political self-efficacy, in contrast with previous research (Beck & Jennings, 1982; Levy, 2013, 2018), and the gap between the language groups. This may reflect the inability of the measures to tell whether youth felt a necessary sense of community in their associations and environments (Anderson, 2010), or a correlation between social capital and other socialization. Furthermore, minority youth may be influenced by the higher social capital of their community, modeling their active and politically self-efficacious environment (Koskimaa & Rapeli, 2015; Levy, 2018). If so, the individual does not need to participate to enjoy positive effects. Therefore, research could be conducted about the effect of the aggregate level context—for example, the average activity of the community—which might explain the role of social capital in minority youth political socialization. Although the used measures are not connected to political self-efficacy when controlling for political socialization, some other measures for social capital, for example a sense of belonging to communities such as school, may additionally explain why classroom environments are more open in Swedish-speaking schools, highlighting the need for further research on the topic.

Importantly, the minority is heterogeneous (Liebkind et al., 2007; Lindell, 2020). While both the Swedish-speakers and the bilinguals in Swedish-speaking education had higher political self-efficacy than the Finnish-speakers, the estimates for the bilinguals were even higher. The bilinguals in Swedish-speaking education appear to get the best of both worlds: a more open classroom environment in minority language schools and fluent competence in the majority language to be able to effortlessly follow mass media and participate in hobbies regardless of the language. On the other hand, the same does not seem to apply for the bilinguals in Finnish-speaking education that do not differ from the majority, which highlights the importance of the school environment.

However, this study suffers from some limitations. First, the data is correlational, and even though it seems likely and logical that political self-efficacy is explained by, for example, open classroom climate, and not vice versa, a single survey wave cannot ascertain causal relationships. Second, the data relies on subjective measures, while observational data on classroom climate, or register data on SES, for instance, might yield different results.

Overall, this study suggests that a more open classroom environment in Swedish-speaking schools may explain some of the political self-efficacy gap between Swedish-speaking and bilingual minority youth and Finnish-speaking majority youth in Finland. In so doing, it points to the importance of creating an atmosphere where youth feel encouraged to share their opinions on political issues, discuss and disagree. It must nevertheless be borne in mind that a major part of the gap could not be explained. Hence, further research is needed to discover the mechanisms behind the high political self-efficacy of the Swedish-speaking minority youth.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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ENDNOTES

[1] For simplicity, the three groups are thus called this way, even though in each group, other home languages can occur alongside Finnish and/or Swedish.

[2] Home schooling is a possible but marginal option in Finland. Just a few hundred children and youth are home-schooled, which means fewer than 1 in 1000 minors.

[3] Previously, the compulsory education ended after having completed the lower secondary school, or going to school for 10 years, but after this age group the compulsory education lasts until turning 18.

[4] Exact statistics about the bilinguals do not exist because only one native language can be registered, but bilinguals are predominantly registered and categorized as Swedish-speaking.

[5] Several municipalities providing education together.

[6] Robustness checks were run using the percentage of registered Swedish-speaking in the municipality, as well as its interaction terms with the bilinguals and the Swedish-speakers. These were insignificant and did not change other results. Thus, the wider language context does not seem to matter for this age group.

[7] For robustness, the analyses were run replacing the chosen measures of SES with parents' educational level and with parents' professional group. These testes yielded almost identical results to the ones presented. However, because only youths' estimations were available, register data might give different results.

[8] A possible concern is whether political learning at school is too close to political self-efficacy to confound the analyses. Therefore, the analyses were rerun excluding political learning. These results, which do not change any of the main results, are presented in Online Appendix E.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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