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Section 35: La socialisation politique des enfants: pour un réexamen empirique et transdisciplinaire

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The Interdependence of Political Knowledge and Democratic Values. Empirical Results of a Three-Wave Panel Study among Primary School Children in Germany

1. Introduction: Children and Politics

“And it is reasonably clear that good citizens are made, not born. The question is how, by whom, to what end?” (Galston 2001, 217) Which mechanisms turn a non-political child into a so called “good citizen” represents the substance driving political socialization research. This research is undergoing a vibrant revival in recent years due to trends who are supposed to challenge democratic political systems like the decline of conventional forms of participation (Knutson 1974; Galston 2001; Milner 2002; Finkel/Ernst 2005; Galston 2007; Hooghe/Dassonneville 2011; Attar-Schwartz/Ben-Arieh 2012). The ideal citizen is expected to be equipped with several characteristics to be able to fulfill democratic responsibilities like - for instance- voting. Two basic aspects of this democratic citizenship are *support for democratic values* and *political knowledge*. The acquisition of and support for democratic values as basis of political behavior is supposed to be an indispensable resource of a stable democratic system (Easton 1967, 276; Easton/Dennis 1967; Prothro/Grigg 1960; Thomassen 2007, 419) because

“(democracy) is much more than a technique of government. It is a technique that reflects certain values – notably those of individual liberty and equality. Unless the bulk of the society is committed to a high valuation of these ideals it can hardly be expected that institutions predicated upon them will work successfully or long endure.” (Griffith et al. 1956, 131)

Besides democratic values, research underlines equally the importance of political knowledge as “*keystone to other civic requisites*” (Almond/Verba 1963, 45; Delli Carpini/Keeter 1996, 5; Zaller 1992; Niemi/Junn 1998; Sherrod et al. 2002, 264). Knowing the “*the rules of the game, (...) the substance of politics and people and parties*” is claimed to be crucial for the stability of a healthy democracy (Delli Carpini/Keeter 1996, 14).

Those two individual characteristics are supposed to contribute fundamentally to the stability of democratic political systems. Furthermore, research suggests that the cognitive and the normative aspect of political socialization are linked “somehow”, but actually is not very clear about the exact mechanisms. Literature describes the nature of this relationship in various but very unspecific ways, and is predominantly divided concerning the causal direction between political knowledge and democratic values. On the one hand, political knowledge is seen as being a necessary precondition for the development of democratic values (Hooghe/Dassonneville 2011, 322; Green et al. 2011; Michaud et al. 2009). According to William A. Galston, “(civic) knowledge promotes support for democratic values. For example, the more knowledge citizens have of political principles and institutions, the more likely they are to support core democratic principles, (...)” (ibid. 2001, 224)

On the other hand, values are usually meant to be “(...)internalized guides in the production of behavior” (McKinney 1980, 204). Hence, it is equally plausible to assume that individuals need to be convinced of the validity of democratic values in order to act in line with them. Thus, individuals who “believe” in the idea of democratic citizenship are more likely to feel obliged being informed about politics, alternatives, or possibilities to participate.

If we consider support for democratic values and political knowledge not only as being related “somehow”, but claim that they develop and change “more or less in tandem” (Jones 1980, 203), then the question is not only how the mutual influence between political knowledge and democratic values can be described but also when they start being interrelated.

Most probably, this interdependent developmental process of political knowledge and democratic values begins not only with entering youth or adulthood but much earlier in life. Already primary school children perceive diverse aspects of politics – like for instance their parents being unemployed or they see TV-news about famine in poor countries. The child becomes increasingly aware of the political sphere, becomes “somewhat politicized and proves increasingly able to identify government as different from the private sector of life.” (Easton/Dennis 1969, 128) Furthermore, children are “are affected by politics just as much as everyone else.” (Olsson 2008, 58) Therefore, the question of how political knowledge and democratic values develop in early childhood is one important aspect of the political socialization research (Greenstein 1965; Hess/Torney 1967; Easton/Dennis 1967; Sapiro 2004, 13; Attar-Schwartz/Ben-Arieh 2012, 704).

To answer those questions of development and interdependence of political knowledge and democratic values within young children, the empirical investigation of this paper relies on a unique dataset gathered for the “Learning to Live Democracy” project in Mannheim (Germany). It consists of a standardized three wave panel study of more than 700 pupils aged 6 to 10. The panel structure of the data allows following the dynamic relationship of political knowledge and democratic values over several years. However, before starting the empirical analysis, this paper provides a theoretical elaboration of the possible connections between the normative and cognitive development within the political socialization process.

2. Theoretical Framework: The Relationship of Political Knowledge and Democratic Values

The aim of this paper is to explain the relationship between political knowledge and democratic values. It can be assumed that political knowledge affects support for democratic values and equally it can be assumed that it is just the other way around, so that democratic values affect the acquisition of political knowledge (see figure 1). Furthermore, it is likely that both directions of influence are observable at the same time with different magnitude in the effect strength. As a result, three basic theoretical models can be derived which will be described in the following section.

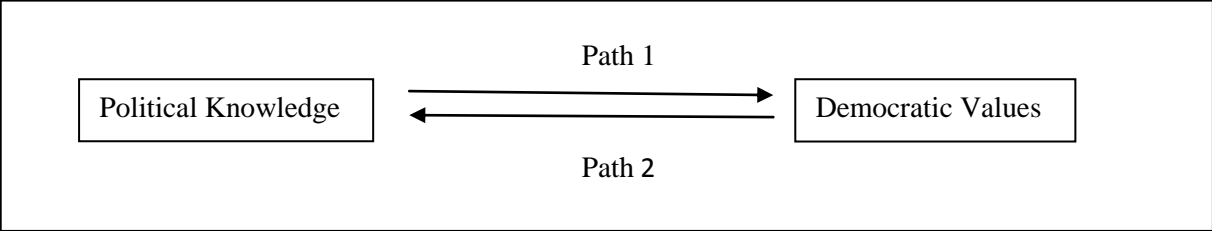


Figure 1: causal directions of influence between political knowledge and democratic values

2.1 The Influence of Political Knowledge on Democratic Values

Model 1 assumes that political knowledge defined as “*the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory*” (Delli Carpini/Keeter 1996, 10) is fundamental for the development of democratic values (Delli Carpini/Keeter 1993; Delli Carpini/Keeter 1996; Fishkin 1996, 134; Dalton 2000, 919; Galston 2001; Hochschild 2001, 319; Tilley/Wlezien 2008; Green et al. 2011). However, how could knowledge of political facts shape values of young citizens? Why should it be decisive “*(for) our judgments of what should be*” to know “*what is*” (Williams 1979, 16)? The first answer to this question is a very simple one: you can only support what you know. Only through information of the political sphere young citizens can judge political decisions, behaviors or abstract values guiding this behavior. A greater familiarity with political topics can lead to knowledge about existing - but also about alternative ways of behavior and underlying values. For this reason, political knowledge can lead to stronger or weaker support for democratic values, depending on how convincing the acquired knowledge is for the individual young citizen.

Further arguments for the supposition that political knowledge precedes support for democratic values can be found in studies about the relationship between formal education and support for democratic values. Bobo and Licari (1989) -for instance- argue that education promotes cognitive sophistication, which may, in turn, strengthen the ability to draw connections between general values and specific applications in everyday behavior. This is also the reason why educated people are supposed to be better able to identify the long term benefit of democratic principles and are more likely to accept short term drawbacks (Nie et al. 1996, 6; Green et al. 2011, 463). Nie and colleagues (1996) designate this cognitive proficiency as “*democratic enlightenment*”, signifying an understanding of and commitment to the rules of the “*democratic game*” (ibid. , 6). This democratic enlightenment should even be stronger when citizens are not just generally educated, but *politically* educated. This means that young citizens with political knowledge are more likely to be democratically enlightened than young citizens without information about the performance of democratic values and its behavioral consequences. Enlightenment, driven by political knowledge makes individuals realize that they share their destiny with others in the political community. Therefore, children with a relatively high level of political knowledge are more likely to accept rules, norms, principles, and values that facilitate life in such a society (ibid. , 11). Being equipped with all the necessary information makes them to understand the benefits of democratic values (Brewer 2003, 174). For these reasons, we can formulate the following expectation:

1A: The higher the level of political knowledge, the stronger becomes the children’s support for democratic values.

However, it is questionable whether the knowledge of political facts leads to stronger support for democratic values in every case. Knowledge can equally result in critique or disappointment. Children being attentive toward the political life simultaneously perceive the negative aspects of daily political behavior. Therefore they would develop a stronger sense of mistrust and probably turn away from the established political system and its actors. With regard to political interest Rosenberg (1954) argues that “*many people are not motivated because of the absence of a shining example by others (including the most respectable).*” (ibid. , 365) Similarly, regarding the support democratic values, perceiving, for instance, that politicians do not abide by the rules, one’s own sense of duty would probably decrease. For this reason, the following expectation can be formulated:

1B: The higher the level of political knowledge of children, the weaker becomes the children’s support for democratic values.

To conclude, the presumed direction of influence from political knowledge to democratic values implies that democratic values can be chosen actively. This conscious selection can be doubted. Are primary school pupils able to draw complex connections from basic political knowledge to abstract democratic values? Can the process of the internalization of values really be described as an active choice? Or are values something that is assimilated unconsciously from the very beginning when individuals perceive that they don't live alone. If this is the case, then values can equally serve as basis for the acquisition of political knowledge.

2.2 The Influence of Democratic Values on Political Knowledge

Model 2 considers that support for democratic values affects the development of political knowledge. Values as such will be defined as *“a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection of available modes, means and ends of action”* (Kluckhohn 1967, cited in van Deth/Scarborough 1995, 27) Furthermore, they *“are used in the assessment of behavior along the dimensions of good/bad, appropriate/inappropriate, and right/wrong. They deal with “what ought to be”, rather than simply with “what is.”* (McKinney 1980, 204) In attaching the notion “democratic”, we refer to values which guide behavior in democratic political systems and are needed to preserve system stability (Abendschön 2010). This idea can be traced back to David Easton's systemtheoretical work. For him, the stability of a democratic system depends strongly on the amount of the citizens' support for the regime. However, since the system consists of several subsystems, it is difficult *“to speak meaningfully of support for a system as a whole”* (vgl. Easton 1965, 172). This is the reason why Easton differentiates three different objects of support. These are the political community, authorities and the regime. The latter *“as sets of constraints on political interaction in all systems may be broken down into three components: values (goals and principles), norms, and structure of authority.”* (ibid., 193) Therefore, values play an important role in the guidance of day- to day policy and help to prevent violating feelings of the political community. Easton refers not only to written ideologies or norms but likewise to informal or customary rules and expectations. Claiming that *“(every) regime consists, in part, of a broadly defined underlying set of political values and principles, articulated or implicit, which impose constraints on the purposes for which the energies and resources of the system may be committed”* (ibid., 194) he talks primarily about political practices of the authorities. We will extend this view on political practices of everyday and every citizen. Hence, democratic values are constraints on the purposes for which the energies and resources of *an individual* may be committed. They represent individual convictions about good or bad behavior in a democratic society and cover different dimensions like norms of citizenship or attitudes towards citizens' equality.

Being crucial for individual behavior in democracies (vgl. Rokeach 1979, 48), democratic values should equally be considered to be relevant for the acquisition of political knowledge. If children support democratic values containing ideas about good citizenship in a democratic society, these convictions, should lead to a behavior appropriate in democratic societies. This includes gathering information about politics because knowledge is seen as being important in order to fulfill ones role as good citizen. *“(There) is a unique influence on political learning that sometimes provides motivation (...): a citizen's sense that paying attention to politics is an obligation or duty. Many citizens see politics as distasteful or intrinsically uninteresting but nevertheless pay attention because they believe they should.”* (Delli Carpini/Keeter 1996, 184 f.) Therefore, we can expect the following:

2A: The higher the support for democratic values, the higher becomes the level of political knowledge.

For the inverse direction of influence, political knowledge is supposed to affect the support for democratic values positively *or* negatively. However, since democratic values cover characteristics of a “good citizen” knowing what his rights and duties are, it is not likely that the support for this kind of values would affect the acquisition of political knowledge of children negatively. Citizens supporting democratic values are willing “*to move beyond one’s individual self-interest and to be committed to the well-being of some larger group of which one is a member*” (Sherrod et al. 2002, 265).

2.3 Reciprocal Influence between Democratic Values and Political Knowledge

As we have seen, both directions of influence between political knowledge and democratic values are equally plausible. This is the reason why a theoretical elaboration of the relationship between political knowledge and democratic values has to take into account a third possibility, which presumes that the influence between political knowledge and democratic values is of reciprocal nature. Consequently, the question is not if model 1 or model 2 is the approved one, but which effect is stronger. Furthermore, we are interested in a period of development in which children continuously change their attitudes, behavior and cognitive abilities why it is very likely that the strength of the effects do not remain the same over the whole time of primary school.

At the beginning of primary school, the children’s level of political knowledge is most likely very basic. Furthermore, their cognitive abilities are not yet fully developed which makes it even more difficult for the children to draw connections between political facts and democratic values. On the other side, democratic values develop already early and unconsciously and are very likely to influence the acquisition of political knowledge. Therefore, we expect that at the beginning of their school career, the effects of democratic values on political knowledge are stronger than the other way around. However, later in their development - at the end of primary school - children have acquired a bigger amount of political knowledge and developed further their cognitive abilities. This is the reason why it is more likely that the effect turns around so that political knowledge gains a stronger influence on support for democratic values.

For this reason the following can be expected:

3A: The older the children, the stronger becomes the influence of political knowledge on support for democratic values.

3B: The younger the children, the stronger becomes the influence of support for democratic values on the acquisition of political knowledge.

3. Empirical Investigation: Political Knowledge and Democratic Values among Primary School Children in Mannheim

The aim of this paper is to investigate the dynamic relationship between political knowledge and democratic values over time. Longitudinal studies are particularly useful in such cases given that only panel data provide the opportunity to study dynamic relationships or to make causal inferences. Furthermore, since it is likely that the effects between political knowledge and democratic values will impinge in the long run, we need information about a longer period of time - ideally about several years. Hence, the panel study should, at least, incorporate three waves in order to be able to assess the mutual process of development of cognitive and normative orientations. Three waves are the minimum to observe the potential change of causal influence at different stages in the children’s political socialization (see expectation 3A and 3B).

3.1 Data: Surveying young Children

The data of the following empirical investigation is drawn from the German study “Learning to live democracy”¹(LLD) (van Deth et al. 2007; Abendschön 2010; van Deth et al. 2011; Vollmar 2012). The first methodological challenge was the development of a standardized questionnaire suitable for children who have not yet developed literacy skills. For this purpose, qualitative interviews with children as well as interviews with teachers and psychologists were conducted in a pilot phase of the project (Berton/Schäfer 2005; Rathke 2007). The resulting pictographic questionnaire for children covers about 100 items dealing with political knowledge, images of “good citizenship”, desirable social behavior, conceptions of democracy, political communication, gender roles and attitudes toward political issues and authorities. Additionally, a manual for the interviewers specified the exact wording of the questions which were to be read to the children in class. The girls and boys were interviewed directly after their school career starts in the first grade. To be able to trace individual development as well as the dynamic of the political socialization process, they were questioned again after one year of schooling and short before they had to leave primary school at the end of the fourth class. At the beginning of the first school year 736 valid questionnaires could be included in the empirical analysis. 725 children participated in the second, 765 in the third wave. A total of 431 children participated in all three waves. On the basis of this large and representative sample this paper will present some first empirical tests of the theoretical models.

3.2 Operationalization and first Descriptive Results

The first step consists of finding a way to empirically detect political knowledge and democratic values. A measure of political knowledge should reveal the children’s level of factual knowledge about institutions and processes in democratic systems, about major domestic and international issues and about promises and performances of people and parties (Delli Carpini/Keeter 1996, 14). These aspects are covered within three LLD-items *perception of politicians*, *perception of laws* and *perception of democracy*. Figure 2 displays the levels of the children’s perception of those objects in the first, second and third wave. Already at the moment of school enrollment, the children show a relatively high level of political knowledge. Politicians and laws are known in the first wave by almost half of the respondents. The slightly more difficult, abstract object “democracy” is known by at least one third of the girls and boys. While from the first to the second wave, the knowledge level slightly grows for all three items, the step from the second to the third wave is in fact remarkable: roughly 90 percent of the children are familiar with politicians and laws and next to 70 percent already heard about democracy before leaving primary school, which is twice the number of school beginners.

¹ The project was conducted at the Mannheim Centre for European Social Research and financed by the German Science Foundation. For more information on the study see: http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/projekte/pro_zeig_d.php?Recno=31

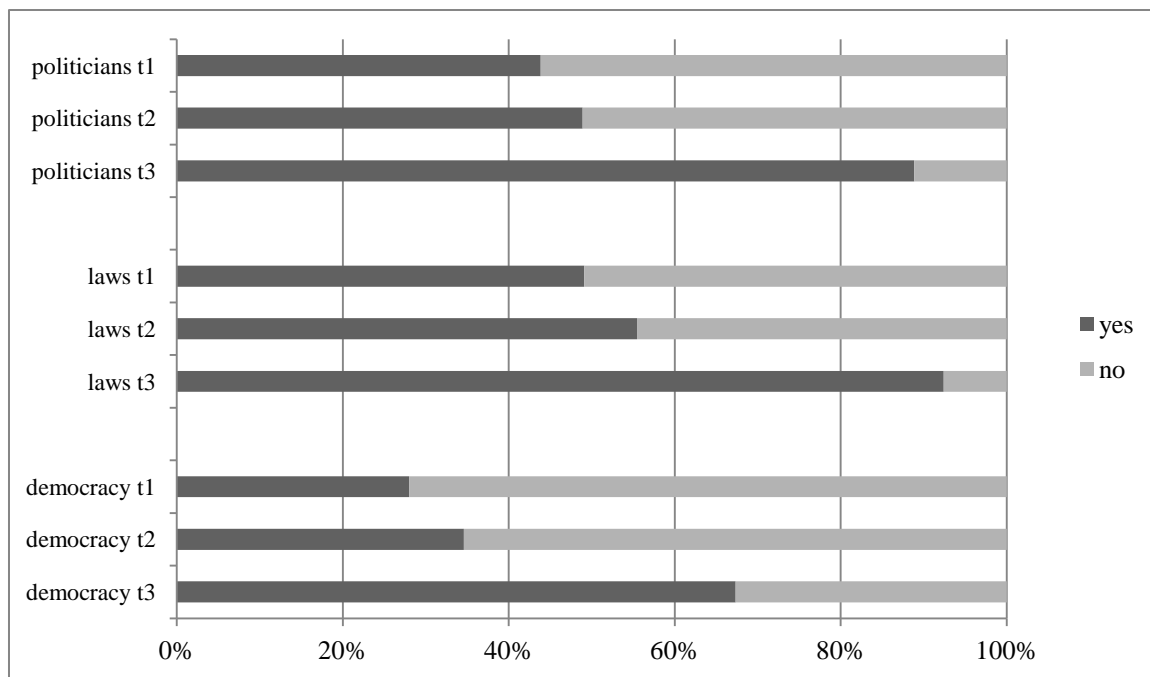


Figure 2: Children's perception of political objects (in percent)

A principal component analysis confirms that the three items form one dimension which represents knowledge of three important aspects of the political sphere: actors, regulations and regime. The additive index which is build ranges from 0 to 1, while 0 indicate an absolute lack of political knowledge whereby 1 represents the highest possible level. As can be seen in table 2, political knowledge increases considerably. Roughly two third of the children are reaching the highest level in the third wave.

Table 1 : Distribution of Political Knowledge (in Percent)

Scale	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
0	35,51	28,45	2,09
0,33	24,90	25,41	9,02
0,5	1,36	1,24	0,26
0,67	20,82	22,65	26,27
1	17,41	22,24	62,35
N	735	724	765

To measure democratic values as individual convictions about good or bad behavior in a democratic society, we use three items representing the children's support for a duty-based image of citizenship (van Deth 2008, 2; Conover et al. 1991). The children were asked if they would reward *helpfulness*, *hard work* and *law abiding behavior*. Their answers (see figure 3) support the assertion that already at the age of six, school children have rough ideas about desired behavior in societies. About 80 percent of the children in the first grade would reward all three forms of behavior. While the support for *helpfulness* grows during the four years of schooling, the aspiration to reward *hard work* declines about 20 percent points. The support for *law abiding behavior*, however, is stable over the three waves.

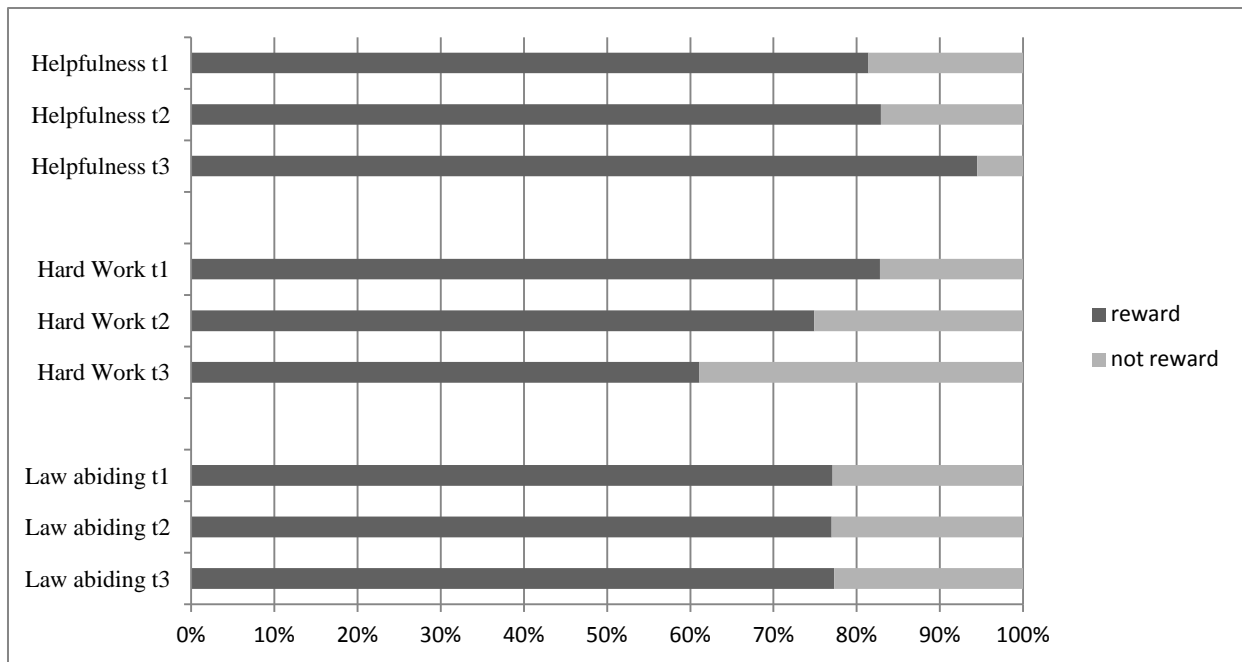


Figure 3: Children's support for democratic values (in percent)

As a principal component analysis reveals that these three items constitute one component in all three waves, an additive index can be constructed ranging from 0 to 1. This enables measuring different levels of support of democratic values in the three waves. As can be seen in table 2, the development of the support for democratic values is not that straightforward as it is for political knowledge. Whereas about 61 percent of the respondents reach the highest score of one in the first only about 52 percent do so in the third wave.

Table 2 : Distribution of Support for Norms of Citizenship (in Percent)

Scale	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
0	4,95	4,84	3,01
0,33	10,44	12,31	12,96
0,5	0,41	0,55	0,13
0,67	22,53	25,31	31,54
1	61,68	56,98	52,36
N	728	723	764

As we have seen, the level of political knowledge increases considerably during primary school while the development of support for values is more diversified. At first sight, a common development of political knowledge and democratic values is not observable. Therefore, in the next section, we will overcome the descriptive analysis to establish more complex investigations.

3.3 The Empirical Relationship between Political Knowledge and Democratic Values across Time

According to the theoretical expectations, we should find considerable associations between political knowledge and the children's support for democratic values across the waves. This relationship can be thought in three different manifestations: firstly, political knowledge being an antecedent of democratic values. Secondly, support for democratic values being

determinant for political knowledge and finally in terms of reciprocal effects. Particularly, we expect the effect of political knowledge on democratic values being weaker at the beginning of primary school and gaining more influence during time. For democratic values, we expect the reverse development. As we are interested in the long-term process, we test firstly whether the levels of political knowledge at time point t1 and t2 affect following levels of support for democratic values (t2 and t3). Secondly, it will be analyzed whether preceding levels of support for democratic values (t1 and t2) affect upcoming levels of political knowledge (t2 and t3).

Furthermore, additional factors usually affecting the political socialization process will be included in the empirical analysis. These are gender, socioeconomic status², migration background³ and political interest⁴. Political interest as “(...) *a sense of curiosity about political matters*” (Gabriel/van Deth 1995, 395) is very likely to influence as much the normative as the cognitive dimension in a reinforcing manner (positively and negatively). Furthermore, low socioeconomic status and migration background are - according to preceding work on political socialization -expected affecting negatively political knowledge and support for democratic values (Greenstein 1965; Berger/Luckmann 1966; Hess/Torney 1967; Easton/Dennis 1969). The anticipated effects of gender on political knowledge and democratic values are more ambiguous. On the one hand, empirical findings show that women are generally less informed about politics than man, why we expect a positive influence on the level of political knowledge of the boys (Almond/Verba 1963; Frazer/Macdonald 2003; Mondak/Anderson 2004). However, women are - due to gender specific socialization influences – supposed to be morally more competent than their male counterparts. For this reason, it is likely that being a girl influences the support for norms of citizenship positively (Damon 1988, 118; Nunner-Winkler 2001).

In order to assess the impacts of the above mentioned factors regression analyses are performed. To analyze the effects on political knowledge, preceding scores of democratic value support were included in the regression model. The same, the scores of preceding levels of political knowledge were included to measure their influence on support for democratic values. Table 3 represents the results of the multivariate regression analyses.

Apparently, there is no significant effect of preceding levels of political knowledge on support for democratic values. Being informed about politics does not seem to influence the children's acquisition and support for democratic values. This is equally the case at the beginning as at the end of primary school. Therefore, the expectations 1A, 1B and 3A have to be rejected. Obviously, it is not decisive “(for) *our judgments of what should be*” to know “*what is*” (Williams 1979, 16)? However, the support for democratic values is affected positively by political interest.⁵ Young citizens who care about politics are more likely to support democratic values, no matter if they know exactly what is going on.

² Next to the German citizens, the Turks are by far the largest ethnic group in the city selected. Children with other foreign nationalities are grouped together in a third category.

³ The socioeconomic status is constructed on the basis of socioeconomic characteristics of the neighborhood (unemployment rate, rate of people receiving social benefits, rate of migrants).

⁴ As the children in the first two waves have not been questioned about their subjective political interest, we needed “(...) *an indicator in which what people say reflects how they behave, and the behavior is indicative of their interest in politics.*” (Gabriel/van Deth 1995, 396) The indicator used in electoral research with adults is usually the frequency of discussions about politics. Equally, the children were asked about their frequencies of discussing social and political themes with parents, teachers, or other children. We could build an additive index ranging from 0 to 3.

⁵ It has also been tested whether political interest of the preceding waves affects democratic values of following waves, which is not the case.

Turning to the reverse direction of influence, the results of the regression analyses show that the acquisition of political knowledge is not affected by preceding levels of support for democratic values either. Again, this is the case equally at the beginning and at the end of primary school as both the bottom and the upper part of the table show. Hence, the expectations 2A and 3B have to be rejected as well. Support for democratic values seems not to be an important predictor for the development of political knowledge. Democratic values do not serve as motivation to gather information about politics. Political interest – by contrast – is affecting the level of political knowledge positively.⁶ Furthermore, the results show that being female, having a migration background and a lower socioeconomic status affects the level of political knowledge negatively which confirms previous findings of political socialization research.⁷

Table 3: Cross-lagged effects between political knowledge and democratic values (OLS- regressions; β -coefficients)

		Democratic Values t2	Political Knowledge t2
Democratic Values t1			-.018
Political Knowledge t1		-.036	
Political Interest t2	middle	-.085	-.141*
	low	-.091*	-.078
	no	-.109*	-.177**
Gender	female	.025	-.104**
Ethnic Background	turkish	-.086	-.351***
	others	-.024	-.158**
Socioeconomic Status	middle	-.027	-.142***
	low	.055	-.121*
Variance Explained (%)		1.15	14.99
N		428	423
		Democratic Values t3	Political Knowledge t3
Democratic Values t1			.017
Political Knowledge t1		-.019	
Democratic Values t2			.040
Political Knowledge t2		-.000	
Political Interest t3	middle	-.061	-.014
	low	-.115**	-.080*
	no	.005	-.033
Gender	female	.034	-.022
Ethnic Background	turkish	.019	-.165***
	others	.037	-.038
Socioeconomic Status	middle	.023	-.012
	low	.031	-.088**
Variance Explained (%)		1.00	9.87
N		420	415

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

Comments: Reference categories: German background, high ses, male, high political interest; Variance Explained = adjusted R-squared

⁶ Again, it is the actual level (and not the preceding levels) of political interest which influences positively the level of political knowledge.

⁷ Introducing autocorrelation effects does not change the results significantly.

4. Discussion

Concerns about decreasing levels of political participation and similar trends within the younger generation challenging democratic political systems have revived political socialization research's interest to assess the process of induction of the young into a political culture. Hence, numerous questions emerge concerning how “good citizens” showing strong support for democratic values and high levels of political knowledge develop. This paper contributes to the clarification of this question by assessing the long-term relationship between political knowledge and democratic values within young children.

Political knowledge and democratic values have been expected to be connected significantly. The effect of democratic values on political knowledge should be stronger at the beginning of the process than the other way around. Later in the children's development the reverse effect is more likely to be more substantial. The results of the first steps of the empirical analysis indicate no relationship between the cognitive and the normative orientations of the primary school children. No cross-lagged effects could be found within the regression analysis. It has to be noted that the dataset already provided the basis for several insightful but separate analyses of democratic values and political knowledge (Abendschön 2010; van Deth et al. 2011; Vollmar 2012). So, the measurement instruments previously proofed being trustworthy. Therefore, what else can explain that we did not find significant effects between the two variables?

Firstly, the empirical analysis is right at the beginning. The data we are using provides much more possibilities to assess the dynamic relationship between political knowledge and democratic values, what will be done within the next steps. Secondly, the first results indicate that political interest has to be taken into account within further examinations. By definition, political interested are involved much more in politics than not interested citizens. Pupils with a relatively high level of political interest would be more attentive towards the political sphere. Therefore, it is very likely that political interest has a strong effect on political knowledge as well as on democratic values (Westle 2006, 209; Gabriel/van Deth 1995, 399). This effect can be thought in various ways: as intervening, additive or preceding factor of political knowledge and democratic values (see figure 4). By consequence, future research should extend the theory by introducing political interest as further important factor. These models would provide a much more complex and complete insight into early inauguration into the political sphere.

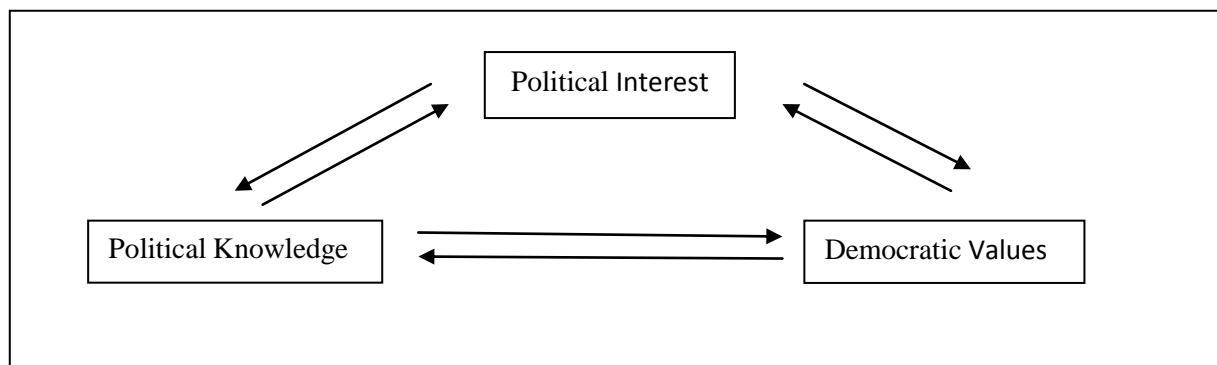


Figure 4: causal directions of influence between political knowledge, democratic values and political interest

Finally, next to considering political interest as third important predictor, we have to keep in mind that reciprocal effects will be observable probably only later in life when young citizens developed their cognitive skills much further (Deary et al. 2008). Therefore it would be highly desirable to pursue respondents from early childhood until they enter into adult life. This would allow assessing effects between political knowledge, democratic values and quite probably political interest over a longer period of time. So, it is quite probable that effects between normative and cognitive orientations will be observable much later in life while at the beginning of the process they do not develop “*in tandem*” but relatively separately (Jones 1980, 203). This can have important consequences for civic education in primary school. If democratic values cannot be taught directly through political information, there have to be found other ways of providing “democratic insights”- like direct experiences in order to support the development of democratic values. However, the consequence should not be that factual political knowledge has not to be taught anymore. It is still required for citizens to take political decisions in a responsible way.

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