DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 076 440 SO 002 125

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TITLE Schools and the Learning of Dissent Norms: A Study of West German Youths.
INSTITUTION American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Sep 71
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, September, 1971

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Activism; Affective Behavior; Cultural Factors; *Dissent; Environmental Influences; Grade 9; Grade 10; Grade 13; *Political Attitudes; Political Science; *Political Socialization; *School Role; Socialization; *Social Studies; Statistical Surveys; Student Attitudes; Tables (Data)
IDENTIFIERS American Political Science Association; *West Germany

ABSTRACT

This paper illustrates three different, but interrelated approaches to investigating the role of formal schooling in the political learning process from survey data. The assumption is made that the formation of students' political beliefs are affected by factors which are both internal and external to the school setting. Data from which illustrations in this paper are derived were collected in two of the West German states from a sample of pre-university students across the entire range of pre-collegiate educational institutions, both general and vocational. Measurements of dissent toleration are used to illustrate various approaches to identifying the role of school-related factors in the formation of such political attitudes. The study includes data on attitudinal correlates of enrollment in different types of schools, on the relationship between the frequency with which controversial issues are discussed in class and the level of dissent toleration, and on student activism as a socializing influence. (Author/SHM)

SCHOOLS AND THE LEARNING OF DISSENT NORMS: A STUDY OF WEST GERMAN YOUTHS

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Prepared for delivery at the 1971 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Conrad Hilton Hotel Chicago, Illinois - September 7-11

This paper illustrates three different, but interrelated approaches to investigating the role of formal schooling in the political learning process from survey data. In presenting these different approaches, the paper addresses itself to the ongoing discussion of one of the more thorny methodological problems encountered in political socialization research: to go beyond describing the distribution and nature of certain kinds of political or politically relevant attitudes across major demographic sub-groups in childhood or adolescence, and to proceed to inquiring into the actual learning process from which such attitudes result. In this kind of inquiry, the researcher faces a substantially new set of analytical problems over and beyond the methodological scope characteristic of some of the earlier work on political socialization; identifying the role of formal schooling (as distinct from other contributions) in the political learning process is representative of the kind of task involved, and has recently become the subject of some rather imaginative and methodologically sophisticated explorations (e.g. Langton, Ehman, Merelman).

It has been a common and, to some extent, persuasive argument that questions such as the one about the role of schooling in the formation of political attitudes can only be validly answered through research designs of an experimental or quasi-experimental nature. While the methodological reasoning in favor of this position is impressive, concern with the fundamental artificiality of experimental settings, and with the resulting limitations in the nature of the findings, still leads us to further explore the explanatory potential of survey designs in the hope of retaining the "natural" validity of such data without unduly jeopardizing the "methodological" validity of the findings derived from them.

In general terms, the approaches presented in this paper proceed on the assumption that the formation of students' political beliefs are affected by both factors internal and factors external to the school setting. In other words: in trying to account for the variance in political beliefs among students, it is expected (1) that a certain portion of this variance will be explained by the instructional and extra-instructional activities of the school; (2) that a further portion of the variance will be accounted for by factors outside the school environment (family, media, the social stratification system, etc.); and (3) that the amount of explained

variance will be further increased by taking into consideration the combined effect of factors internal and factors external to the school environment; this effect may result from the mutual reinforcement of these two sets of factors (as in the case where societal expectations with regard to certain types of schooling are reinforced or confirmed through the actual instructional practice in the school), or from other, more complicated forms of interaction (as in the case where social reality is at considerable variance with the tenor and spirit of school instruction).

The data from which the illustrations in this paper are derived were collected by the author in two of the 10 West German states in the fall of 1969. The sample for the study consisted of 6,200 pre-university students across the entire range of pre-collegiate educational institutions, both general and vocational. With the classroom as the sampling unit, the sample was stratified by type of school and by grade (grades 9, 10, and 13, representing the terminal year for each of the three major cycles of the German pre-university educational system), and schools and classrooms were selected at random within each of these two strata. While the major data source are the responses to a questionnaire administered to the students in their classrooms by a member of the project staff, extensive contextual data on each classroom, school, and community were collected independently through interviews with school personnel and from documentary and statistical sources.

The major explanatory interest of the study as a whole is with a set of attitudinal and normative orientations towards various types, levels, and intensities of intra-system dissent and conflict. In conceptualizing the dependent variable structure, the design of the study and of its data collection instruments has been guided by the work of Dahrendorf, Sherif, McClosky, Rokeach, and others, and has to some extent been determined by what was perceived as a need for developing a more conflict-oriented notion of the linkage between political learning and the political system.

The various attitude measures designed for the survey have yielded a complexly interrelated set of attitudinal indices, including scales on

the legitimacy of certain types of conflictual behavior, attitudes towards freedom of speech and expression in a range of specified "borderline" situations, orientations towards the acceptability of dissent in both rather abstract and situationally defined terms, and attitudes towards certain types of "deviancy" (including deviations from generally accepted norms of sexual and marital behavior). For the purpose of this paper, only one of these measurements is being used. This is a composite measure of "dissent toleration" arrived at through a combination of a substantive specification of dissent and a simplified "social distance" scale. Briefly, the development of this particular measure proceeded as follows:

First, three positions were chosen that were considered to represent -- in the German context -- beliefs dissenting from more or less generally accepted norms: (1) the position of somebody who is "against religion and church"; (2) the position of somebody who "clearly advocates abolishing democracy in the Federal Republic (of Germany)"; and (3) the position of somebody who "demands the full recognition of the DDR (East Germany)".

In choosing these three issues, an attempt was made to include topics of dissent that were as diverse and unconnected with each other as possible; it was felt that the validity of our measure as a generic indicator of dissent toleration would be enhanced if, given the substantive independence of the three topics, the responses were found to follow essentially the same patterns in each case -- which, as our further analysis has shown is indeed the case.

Secondly, for each of the three positions thus defined, a set of four "acceptance levels" was designed, each presumably located at a different "social distance" from the respondent. Thus the respondent was asked whether a person holding such a position (anti-religious, anti-democratic, pro-DDR recognition) should (a) be allowed to have one of his books published; (b) be allowed to speak on (public) television; (c) be allowed to be a teacher at a school; and (d) be acceptable as a friend of his (the respondent's). After it was found that each of these three scales corresponded to a perfect Guttman format,

respondents were divided into high, medium, and low "tolerators" depending on how far they were prepared to go in accepting the holder of each of the three projected dissenting positions. Furthermore, it was found that the three indices thus derived correlated sufficiently highly with one another to justify their being consolidated into one composite index of dissent toleration. As further evidence of the fact that this index does indeed measure a generic disposition towards dissent (rather than a particular attitude about the substantive topic over which dissent is specified as occurring), the pattern of association between these measures and other, more abstractly and generically formulated attitudinal indices was shown to be sufficiently consistent and systematic.

In the following sections of this paper, we will use this measure of dissent toleration as a dependent variable to illustrate various approaches to identifying the role of school-related factors in the formation of such attitudes. As a first step, we will proceed from a rather aggregate level of anlysis in describing and analyzing the variation on our dependent measure across different types of schools. As a second step, we will turn to the investigation of a factor which can be conceived as being indicative of classroom or school "climate". Our third approach will proceed on the assumption that dispositions towards certain types of behavior within the political context of the school predict to some extent the strength of more generalized attitudes towards the wider social and political system.

Attitudinal Correlates of Enrollment in Different Types of Schools

On the most general level of analysis which is represented by Table 1, we find a rather striking relationship between level of dissent toleration and the type or cycle of school in which the student is enrolled. In the German educational system, three major cycles or tracks of further schooling are open to the student after completing the first four years of elementary school. In primary school (Hauptschule). schooling is continued for another five years, with graduation usually leading into lower or middle level industrial or clerical employment. The middle school (Realschule) provides six years of schooling beyond elementary school and is geared to a comparatively elevated level of employment in private industry, public service, and the like. The most prestigious track is provided in various forms of secondary education which normally lead, after nine years, to the Abitur which guarantees automatic admission into the university.

Given the strikingly different pattern of attitudes for students in these three different cycles, some further probing into the exact nature of this relationship, and into the possibility of this relationship being an artifact of some intervening factors, is clearly required. As a first correction, the different age-grade distribution in the three sub-samples needs to be taken into account, and Table 2 provides the pattern that emerges when grade is controlled for. Although the initial difference between the three types of school is somewhat reduced, it still remains rather significant.

The same analytical procedure can now be applied to two further lines of exploration which proceed on the common (and to a considerable degree correct) assumption that both the "channeling" of students into one of these three different tracks and their political learning process is strongly affected by both parental status and by the students' residential (rural or urban) background. Consequently, indicators of these two factors are introduced as control variables on the assumption that they might explain, by reducing the initially observed differences, a substantial degree of the attitudinal variation across schools.

Table 1: Dissent Toleration by Type of School

	Type of School		
Dissent Toleration	Secondary School	Middle School	Primary School
High	52.0	36.7	19.9
Medium	25.0	33.4	30.5
Low	23.0	29.9	49.6
N (=100%)	2325	1043	919

Table 2: Dissent Toleration by Type of School by Grade

	Type of School								
	Secondary School			Middle School			Primary School		
Grade:	9	10	13	9	10	13	9	10	13
Dissent Toleration									
High	38.0	52.6	73.7	29.8	45.2	-	20.0	-	-
Medium	29.3	27.3	14.5	35.0	31.3	-	30.3	-	-
Low	32.7	20.2	11.9	35.2	23.5	-	49.7	-	-
N (=100%)	899	862	539	568	473	-	916	-	-

Tables 3 and 4 provide the results of this analysis for some sub-groups of our sample. For the purposes of our analysis, and on the basis of previous research on social stratification in Germany, father's education was considered a sufficiently reliable indicator of parental status. Table 3 contrasts the distribution of dissent toleration across grades and types of school for students whose father had had primary education only, and for those whose father had graduated from secondary school. While the pattern for these two groups is different in some important respects, the most significant finding from an examination of Table 3 is that the introduction of father's education as a control variable tends to reduce slightly the differences between students in secondary and middle schools at the 9th grade level, but does hardly affect the difference between students in these two school types and the primary school students. It seems, therefore, that even holding such an allegedly powerful variable as parental status constant still leaves a substantial amount of variance unaccounted for. It is this unexplained portion of the difference between different types of schools which invites further and closer inquiry into the school's role in the political learning process over and beyond the effects of selection and stratification.

There is, of course, no question but that parental status is indeed associated with different levels of dissent toleration, as the different distribution patterns in the two sub-sections of Table 3 clearly indicate. An inspection of the absolute marginals for each sub-section also confirms the strong effect which parental educational background has on the decision (which is, since it occurs at age 10 of the student, entirely the parents' decision) to channel their children into one of the three main tracks of the educational system.

The introduction of the second intervening variable, that of the residential background of the student, yields very similar results. In Table 4, we have contrasted students who have attended elementary school (the first four years of schooling) in a village or town of under 5,000 inhabitants with those whose early schooling experience was in a city of between 50,000 and 250,000 inhabitants. Again, the overall effect of this variable on the overall level of dissent toleration is strikingly clear, although it is much less clear just what the presumably very

Table 3: Dissent Toleration by Type of School by Grade, for selected levels of father's education

3.1 Father with Primary School Education

	Type of School								
	Secondary School			Middle School			Primary School		
Grade:	9	10	13	9	10	13	9	10	13
Dissent Toleration									
High	34.2	55.2	74.9	28.5	47.1	-	19.8	-	-
Medium	28.8	23.9	14.1	36.6	31.5	-	30.1	-	-
Low	37.0	20.9	11.0	34.9	21.5	-	50.1	-	-
N (=100%)	392	368	191	393	340	-	743	-	-

3.2 Father with Secondary School Education

	Type of School								
	Secondary School			Middle School			Primary School		
Grade:	9	10	13	9	10	13	9	10	13
Dissent Toleration									
High	41.1	54.5	78.9	42.9	48.1	-	22.2	-	-
Medium	24.0	26.0	11.1	19.0	33.3	-	33.0	-	-
Low	34.9	19.5	10.0	38.1	18.5	-	44.4	-	-
N (=100%)	129	123	90	42	27	-	18	-	-

Table 4: Dissent Toleration by Type of School by Grade, for selected sizes of home town[1/]

4.1 Home Town under 5,000

	Type of School								
	Secondary School			Middle School			Primary School		
Grade:	9	10	13	9	10	13	9	10	13
Dissent Toleration									
High	32.7	49.0	71.2	24.0	36.7	-	16.7	-	-
Medium	31.5	27.0	17.3	36.4	32.6	-	28.7	-	-
Low	35.8	24.0	11.5	39.7	30.7	-	54.6	-	-
N (=100%)	422	392	208	242	215	-	449	-	-

[1/] i.e., town in which respondent attended first four years of elementary school

4.2 Home Town 50,000 - 250,000

	Type of School								
	Secondary School			Middle School			Primary School		
Grade:	9	10	13	9	10	13	9	10	13
Dissent Toleration									
High	58.3	65.4	73.2	26.7	60.9	-	22.1	-	-
Medium	26.2	23.1	9.9	36.0	26.6	-	30.8	-	-
Low	15.5	11.5	16.9	37.2	12.5	-	47.1	-	-
N (=100%)	84	78	71	86	64	-	172	-	-

complex nature of the socialization effect of small town versus big city environment is. One important exception to this pattern should be noted, however: In the terminal grade (grade 13) of secondary school, the difference between students with rather rural backgrounds and those with urban backgrounds virtually disappears, possibly indicating that the formative experience of attending secondary school (whatever, again, the nature of that experience is) is at last capable of overcoming the effects of the initial early socialization experience.

With regard to the difference between types of schools, however, the introduction of the residential background variable does again not appear to reduce the initial difference in any significant and systematic way. In fact, for students from urban backgrounds, the between-school differences even show an increase over the initial pattern as reported in Table 2. At this point, any explanation for this must be purely speculative, but it may be worth pursuing the possibility that more prestigious types of schooling would tend to disproportionately reinforce the more "liberal" or "open-minded" attitudinal disposition which is associated with growing up in an urban environment.

What this initial and, admittedly, still fairly crude analysis has shown is that a significant and consistent relationship between the type of school in which a student is enrolled and his attitude towards dissent remains even when such presumably powerful background factors as parental status and urban versus rural residence are controlled for. There is, in other words, a significant area for further inquiry: If students at the same grade level and with the same family and residence background differ substantially with regard to their political attitudes depending on which type of school they are enrolled in, a further exploration of what in the nature of these different schooling experiences could conceivably account for such differences is clearly indicated.

The School as an Experiential Setting

In going beyond the kind of aggregate analysis represented in the preceding section of this paper, some recent research in political socialization has moved into the exploration of what is referred to as "school climate" as an important factor in the political learning process. "School climate" is conceived as representing a variety of intra-school or intra-classroom conditions which form a unique and identifiable setting within which a specific type of social and political learning occurs. In adopting this perspective, we propose to illustrate that such climates can indeed be found to exist within a specified set of criteria, and can be studied with regard to their association with differential learning outcomes.

As an indicator of classroom climate, we chose to use the frequency with which particularly salient controversial issues were discussed in the classroom. Our interviews and observations showed that, among a range of controversial issues, the topic of student unrest and protest was considered a particularly salient one, and was the subject of at least some discussion throughout the larger part of our school sample. Thus, for the purposes of this analysis, we have used the frequency with which this particular issue was discussed as an indicator of the "open-ness" or "close-ness" of the classroom climate as well as of the degree of controversy likely to accompany such discussions. It seemed particularly appropriate to explore this factor with regard to our overall interest in explaining or accounting for attitudes towards dissent and conflict; one of our assumptions had been that a particularly important influence on the formation of toleration would be the amount and intensity of actual experiences in situations which were characterized by a certain degree of disagreement and controversy.

Table 5 shows that the relationship between the frequency with which controversial issues are discussed in class and the level of dissent toleration does indeed seem to be significant. As that frequency increases, so does the probability of students in that classroom demonstrating higher scores on our dependent toleration measures. Similar results, it should be noted, were obtained when experiences of disagreement

Table 5: Dissent Toleration by Frequency of Discussing Controversial Issues in Class

	Frequency of discussing student protest in class		
	Often	Sometimes	Never
Dissent Toleration			
High	54.9	42.5	37.6
Medium	25.0	27.7	30.9
Low	20.1	29.9	31.5
N (=100%)	721	2636	1658

and controversy in social situations outside the classroom were substituted for the variable used in this analysis.

It seemed important, however, to inquire further into the nature of this relationship by looking at the association between our two variables within grade levels and within school types, in order to see whether this pattern holds regardless of any particular setting. Table 6 presents the results of this analysis when the type of school is held constant and when grade level is controlled for. It is obvious that the school climate variable loses most of its predictive power with regard to dissent toleration for most sub-groups; especially in grades 10 and 13, the frequency with which controversial issues are discussed in the classroom is virtually unrelated to the probability of scoring high on our toleration measure. Thus, if we accept the evidence in Table 5 that overall a relationship between classroom climate and dissent toleration exists, then the data in Table 6 lead us to assume that certain other characteristics of grade level and of type of school (such as -- to use an oversimplified example -- grade-specific or school-specific attributes of teachers) mediate this initial relationship in such a way that those characteristics override the contribution which our ingredient of classroom climate had seemed to make towards the formation of tolerant attitudes. It should be noted, however, that our intial assumption is not completely rejected: Table 6 indicates that the significance of classroom climate as a socializing influence varies with grade level: in the 9th grade, there still is a significant relationship between our two variables, while this relationship becomes ambiguous in grade 10, and almost completely disappears in grade 13. What this would seem to indicate is that certain characteristics of school settings (such as the amount of controversy experienced in them) is of greater significance at some age-grade levels than at others, and perhaps even that, while certain kinds of experiences are provided uniquely or predominantly by the school at an earlier grade level, they are substituted by similar, and perhaps more formative, experiences in out-of-school settings for students in higher grades.

Table 6: Dissent Toleration by Frequency of Discussing Controversial Issues in Class, By Grade

(For students in public secondary schools only; N = 1662)

	Frequency of discussing student protest in class								
	Often			Sometimes			Never		
Grade:	9	10	13	9	10	13	9	10	13
Dissent Toleration									
High	59.4	50.7	76.2	39.9	56.6	74.9	38.4	49.4	73.2
Medium	15.6	28.8	11.5	26.5	26.9	12.3	32.0	30.0	8.9
Low	25.0	20.5	12.3	33.6	16.5	12.8	29.6	20.6	17.9
N (=100%)	32	73	130	253	309	187	375	247	56

Student Activism as a Socializing Influence

We are on even more tenuous ground in our third approach, in which the student's political learning process is conceived as a function of his "civic" dispositions towards the school as a political sub-system. Our contention is that the ways in which the student sees his political role within his school predict his normative outlook on the political system as a whole, and on his role in it. We are anxious not to describe this as a necessarily causal relationship; it is quite conceivable that such generalized orientations toward the wider political system precede and determine the student's perception of his in-school civic role. On the other hand, since we are primarily interested in trying to account for differences in attitudes towards the political system at large, we consider it more instructive to find out just how much of that difference is explained by a definitely school-related orientation on the part of the student. In any event, the relationship between those two kinds of attitudinal characteristics (if such a relationship is found to exist) should provide further insights into the attitudinal makeup of students found to differ on our dependent variable of dissent toleration.

The analysis presented in Table 7 considers willingness to participate in a students' strike as an orientation essentially related to the student's civic role within his school; it is assumed to indicate an orientation towards responding to situations of conflict between students and the governing authority of their schools. Table 7 indicates that a significant relationship between that orientation and the level of dissent toleration does indeed exist: the student who is more strongly committed to a conflictual mode of responding to his school environment is also more likely to accept dissent as an unavoidable and perhaps desirable fact of social and political life in the wider political system. Again, however, the age-grade factor requires our attention: while the relationship remains significant on each grade level, the 13th graders who are unwilling to become involved in a students' strike do still have a higher probability of scoring high on our toleration measure than do their more strike-willing peers in the 9th and 10th grade.

Table 7: Dissent Toleration by Willingness to Participate in Students' Strike, By Grade

(For students in public secondary schools only; N = 1674)

	Willingness to participate in students' strike					
	Yes			No		
Grade:	9	10	13	9	10	13
Dissent Toleration						
High	47.8	55.7	79.2	32.1	47.8	61.8
Medium	23.6	27.0	9.5	34.9	31.2	18.0
Low	28.7	17.2	11.3	33.0	21.0	20.2
N (=100%)	356	429	283	312	205	89

We are thus again confronted with the puzzling problem encountered in the first section of this paper: both background and experiential factors (which need by no means be independent of each other) account for an appreciable portion of the variance on our attitudinal measure, but we are still left with a significant residue of variance which appears to be affected by either the type of school or the grade level, or both. It will therefore be necessary to continue probing into the kinds of learning contexts which these different school types and grade levels provide in order to arrive, most probably step by little step, at a more refined comprehension of how the political learning process is affected through the exposure to specific educational conditions.