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Skilled Voices? Reflections on Political Participation and Education in Austria

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Skilled Voices? Reflections on Political Participation and Education in Austria

By Florian Walter and Sieglinde Rosenberger

(Education Working Paper No. 11)

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ABSTRACT

This study, part of OECD/CERI's project on Measuring the Social Outcomes of Learning, investigates the relationship between educational attainment and political participation in Austria. First, a model based on various theoretical considerations is introduced. This incorporates direct educational effects as well as indirect effects that occur through material resources, social capital, civic orientations and values. Using a multivariate analytical approach the model is applied to the 2002 European Social Survey. Three forms of political participation are distinguished, namely voting, elite-directed and elite-challenging activities. Educational attainment is found to have significant effects on all three types but the strongest impact is on elite-challenging activities. The latter includes forms of political action such as signing petitions and buying or boycotting certain products which are increasingly accepted as a legitimate way to express one's political preferences. Most of the effects of education arise through intermediate variables, including social capital (especially affiliation with non-political organisations), civic orientations (political interest as well as internal and external efficacy) and individual (postmaterialist) values. The effect of education on elite-directed activity operated primarily through organisational affiliation, as well as internal and external efficacy. In contrast, the effect of education on elite-challenging activity seems to be fostered via social environments that combine high levels of political interest, interpersonal trust, postmaterialist values and a certain degree of scepticism against political institutions. The paper concludes with suggestions for policy and research.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce rapport, publié dans le cadre du projet « Mesurer les retombées sociales de l'éducation », étudie la relation entre niveau d'instruction et participation politique en Autriche. Dans un premier temps, il présente un modèle basé sur diverses considérations théoriques. Cela comprend à la fois les effets éducatifs directs et indirects qui se produisent en fonction des ressources matérielles, du capital social, des orientations civiques et des valeurs. A partir d'une approche analytique à plusieurs variables, le modèle est appliqué à l'Enquête Sociale Européenne de 2002. On distingue trois formes de participation politique, à savoir le vote, les activités conduites par l'élite et celles contestant l'élite. On s'aperçoit que le niveau d'instruction a des effets significatifs sur ces trois formes de participation, et plus particulièrement sur les activités contestant l'élite. Ces dernières incluent des actions politiques telles que la signature de pétitions, l'achat ou le boycott de certains produits, actions qui sont de plus en plus considérées comme une façon légitime d'exprimer ses préférences politiques. La plupart des effets de l'éducation se produisent au moyen de variables intermédiaires, notamment le capital social (et plus particulièrement l'affiliation à des organisations apolitiques), les orientations civiques (l'intérêt politique tout comme l'efficacité interne ou externe) et les valeurs (post-matérialistes) individuelles. L'éducation exerce un impact sur les activités conduites par l'élite principalement via l'affiliation à des organisations, et via l'efficacité interne et externe. Quant aux effets de l'éducation sur les activités contestant l'élite, ils s'exercent par le biais de l'environnement social qui inclut à la foi un niveau élevé d'intérêt politique, la confiance interpersonnelle, des valeurs post-matérialistes et un certain degré de scepticisme vis-à-vis des institutions politiques. En conclusion, ce rapport fait des recommandations en matière de politique et de recherche.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction 7
2. Dimensions of political participation 10
What is political participation? 10
Forms of political participation 10
3. How does education affect political activity? 11
Cognitive mobilization 11
Material resources 12
Civic orientations 13
Social capital 13
Value orientations 14
4. Education and political participation – The Austrian case 14
Participation in Austria – historical development and international comparison 15
Do the educated participate more? 18
Why do the educated participate more? 20
5. ICTs, political participation, and education 29
6. Conclusions 30
From education to participation 30
Policy implications 32
References 34
Appendix 41

SKILLED VOICES?
REFLECTIONS ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND EDUCATION IN AUSTRIA

Education's impact on civic engagement has been one of the main strands of the activity on Measuring the Social Outcomes of Learning (SOL), carried out by the OECD's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI). This activity aims to:

- develop a framework that can be used to analyse the links between education and social outcomes;
- foster the gathering and application of evidence on SOL;
- improve the knowledge base about the full extent of benefits that accrue to individuals and society;
- contribute to more well-integrated policies across education and other policy domains by making explicit the interactions between economic and social outcomes.

Two overall reports have been published from the first phase of SOL: *Understanding the Social Outcomes of Learning* (OECD, 2007); a companion volume available free as a web publication at *www.oecd.org/edu/socialoutcomes/symposium*.

This paper, by Florian Walter and Sieglinde Rosenberge of the University of Vienna, delves in depth into the effect of education on civic engagement in Austria. Civic engagement covers a number of different dimensions, both behavioural (eg voting, or participation in a political party) and attitudinal (eg trust in political institutions). The issue is a topical one in most OECD countries, which show similar patterns of declining formal participation and disaffection from the traditional democratic system. The authors make a key distinction between elite-directed participation – for example, through political parties controlled by their leaders – and elite-challenging participation such as demonstrations or public protests. Placed in a broad theoretical context, they draw on extensive empirical data. They give particular emphasis to the issue of inequality as a key influence on the shape of civic engagement, pointing to the risk of a vicious circle, with people at the low end of the democratic pile withdrawing from democratic processes and therefore seeing their interests poorly represented in the debate. Education may even be reinforcing this process. The authors also have interesting comments on the gender aspects of participation in the broader context of Austrian culture. They conclude by urging a higher level of civic education; but more broadly that levels of trust in political institutions need to be strengthened.

This report will be followed by others which address the key SOL question – what are the links between education and social outcomes – from specific national angles. It is published concurrently with a similar report from Norway (EDU Working Paper No. 12).

1. Introduction

For several decades, the social sciences have been primarily discussing the outcomes of education and life-long learning with respect to their economic benefits under the term "human capital" (cf. Schultz 1961, Becker 1975, Romer 1989, Blundell *et al.* 1999). Within this context, the OECD has conducted and initiated comprehensive analyses relating to the determinants of human capital as well as pursued opportunities to measure its effects (OECD 1998, 2001, 2005, 2006). But additional education not only affects the economically relevant characteristics and macroeconomic growth in a positive way, it also has implications for matters of social cohesion and social life as a whole.

The connection between political activity and social status is one of the most frequent observations within scientific research on political participation. The argument goes like this: people from upper socioeconomic strata (with more educational attainment, higher incomes, and better occupations) are more likely to be engaged and to participate in politics than the socially and economically disadvantaged.[1]

Research efforts have also shown that there is one socioeconomic factor, which is able to explain even more than the others, namely **education**. In a famous quote, Philip Converse considers education to be the "universal solvent" for the puzzle of political participation (Converse 1972: 324). A voter turnout study by Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980: 102) highlights the "transcendent importance of education", a finding reconfirmed about a decade later by *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America* (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995: 433) also observe "the dominant role of education" in explaining political participation in their 1995 publication *Voice and Equality*. Thus we can confidently assert that the correlation between education and political activity is common sense within political participation research.

In the late 1970s, the issue of political activism also gained prominence in Austrian social sciences: Ernst Gehmacher and Karl Blecha from the *Institut für Empirische Sozialforschung (IFES)* were materially involved in surveying empirical data for Verba and Nie's comparative *Participation and Political Equality* study conducted in 1978; Leopold Rosenmayr was part of the Austrian research team of Barnes and Kaase's *Political Action* study dating back to 1979. The results of these studies were published in two books – Leopold Rosenmayer's *Politische Beteiligung und Wertewandel in Österreich* (1980) and Roland Deiser and Norbert Winkler's *Das politische Handeln der Österreicher* (1982). Soon after these publications, political participation research in Austria was neglected, and no comprehensive study was published during the past 20 years. While the subject of electoral participation and voting behaviour is fairly well covered by the publications of Plasser and Ulram (1988, 1992, 1995, 1999) and Plasser, Ulram and Seeber (2000, 2003) on local and national elections, or the recent articles of Picker and Zeglovits (2005a, 2005b) and Filzmaier and Hajek (2005a, 2005b) on the European Parliamentary elections, the development of other forms of political participation remains comparatively unexplored (as exceptions see Plasser and Ulram 2002; Ulram 2000). Although the issue of education is mentioned in some of these publications, it is not the focus of any of them.

This paper attempts to fill the resulting research gap by providing an analysis of political activity in Austria and its interrelations with education. The following research questions will be addressed:

- Does formal education affect the extent and form of political participation at the individual level in Austria?

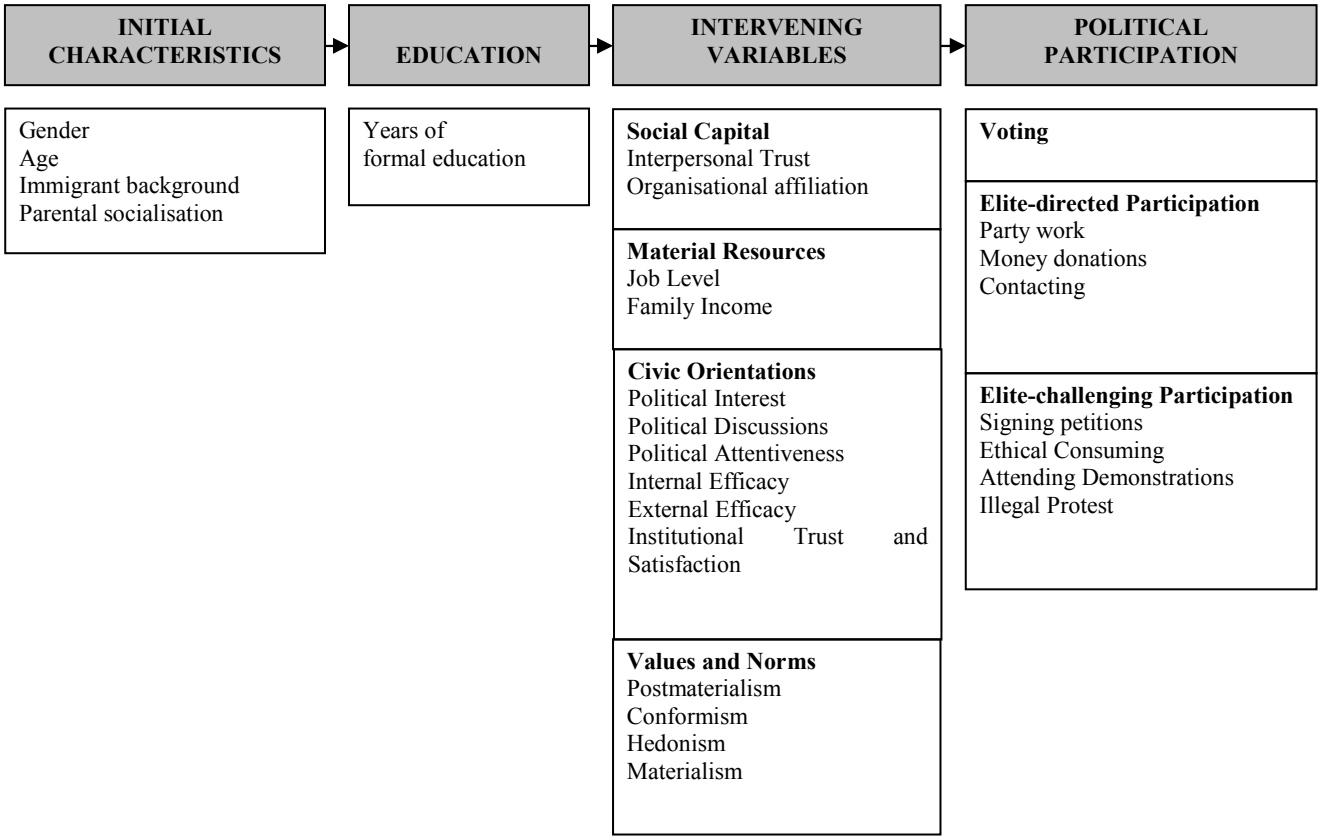
[1] During the last 45 years numerous studies on political participation have been published. For some important examples see Almond/Verba 1963, Verba/Nie 1972, Milbrath/Goel 1977, Verba/Nie/Kim 1978, Barnes, *et al.* 1979, Wolfinger/Rosenstone 1980, Rosenstone/Hansen 1993, Putnam 1994, 1995, 2000, Brady/Verba/Schlozman 1995, Verba/Schlozman/Brady 1995, Nie/Junn/Stehlik-Barry 1996, Lijphart 1997, Dalton 2000, Norris 2002.

- How can we explain these effects?
- What can policy-makers do facing this correlation between education and political participation?
- In which way are new Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) related to the issue of education and political activity?

Figure 1 includes our 3-step model visualizing the effects of education on the degree of political activity. It includes factors ***(initial characteristics)*** affecting one's individual level of education, such as socialisation factors (education of parents), age,[2] gender, and immigrant background. These factors are also believed to have an impact on intervening variables and the degree and form of political activity itself. ***Education*** has a direct impact on political involvement through cognitive mobilization. Additionally there are effects of education on ***intervening variables*** like material resources, social capital, civic orientations and value orientations and the acceptance of norms. According to our theoretical assumptions, these factors are imagined to have a direct impact on ***political participation***.

[2] In the empirical analysis we included both age and age-squared as independent variables to control for both linear and curvilinear age effects.

Figure 1. Linking education to political participation



Before we can dedicate ourselves to the analysis of the complex relationship of education and political participation, we will initially give a broad definition of the term "political participation" (Section 2 of this paper). Section 3 describes the mechanisms which are to be found in the interrelations between education and political activity on a theoretical level. We present the current state of research on the question, *how* education might have an impact on the level of political activity. After discussing the theoretical basics we turn to the empirical analysis, for which we use representative survey data for Austria, taken from the European Social Survey (ESS) of 2002 as well as the European Values Survey (EVS) from 1990 and 1999. The empirical part of this paper in Section 4 includes a descriptive analysis of the development of political participation in Austria and the role of different forms of activity compared to other Western European Countries. Additionally we will conduct a step-by-step analysis of the interrelation of education and political participation by describing the stages in which initial characteristics affect educational attainment (Step 1), initial characteristics and education affect intervening variables (Step 2), and initial characteristics, education, and intervening variables affect participation (Step 3). In Section 5 we will introduce the potential role of new Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs), their impact on the issue of political participation, and the special role of education vis-à-vis the potentialities. In Section 6 we summarize the main findings of our analysis and link them to some general effects on society. We also give some recommendations for policy makers on the basis of our own and previous research.

2. Dimensions of political participation

What is political participation?

In an early classification, Verba and Nie (1972) describe political participation as "those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take" (p. 2). Similarly, Barnes, *et al.* (1979) characterize political action as "all voluntary activities by individual citizens intended to influence either directly or indirectly political choices at various levels of the political system" (p. 42).

Most of the seminal studies in participation research include aspects that lead them to similar application-oriented definitions of political activity. We understand political participation as individual and intentional activity, aimed at the articulation of interests. It intends to either directly influence collectively binding decisions or indirectly control the selection of representatives making these decisions. While the second dimension of activity is restricted to the act of voting, the first one includes different acts of decision making itself as well as expressing one's opinion about presumptive and effective decisions made by others. Finally we want to note that our concern is with political activity.

Forms of political participation

Political participation research is rooted in psephology and emerged from the early works of the American political scientists Paul Lazarsfeld, Angus Campbell and Philip Converse (Campbell *et al.* 1960; Campbell, Gerald and Miller 1954; Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet 1969). Yet already in the 1960s Lester Milbrath (1965) observed some kind of "unidimensionality" in studies on political participation because of its exclusive focus on activities related to elections and party politics. During the 1970s, this sort of research included a series of taxonomic categorization attempts.[3] Thus Barnes *et al.* (1979) identified the mentioned traditional or *conventional* forms of political participation, but also analyzed so called *unconventional* participatory acts, which differ by their degree of social acceptance (i.e. legitimacy). A separation between *legal* and *illegal* forms on the basis of lawfulness is also possible (Opp 1992).

For the purposes of our analysis we deem a distinction between ***elite-directed*** and ***elite-challenging*** participation the most fruitful. Inglehart (1977) captures this distinction as follows:

> "Elite-directed political participation is largely a matter of elites mobilizing mass support through established organizations such as political parties, labour unions, religious institutions, and so on. The newer 'elite-challenging' style of politics gives the public an increasingly important role in making specific decisions, not just a choice between two or more sets of decision-makers." (p. 3)

This classification has the advantage that it already implies long-term changes within the structures of participatory behaviour and is therefore adaptable for both cross-sectional and longitudinal research design. Additionally, it provides a differentiation between the affirmative, hierarchically structured, and representative elite-directed, and the confrontational, egalitarian, and self-determined elite-challenging forms of political activity.

The differentiation between elite-directed and elite-challenging participation is not only theoretically fit but also empirically founded. Using principal components analysis, ESS 2002 survey data for Austria confirms that elite-directed participation measured by the items *worked in a political party or action group, donated money to political organisation or group* and *contacted politician and/or government official* is significantly different from elite-challenging participation measured by items *signed petition, ethical consuming, attended lawful demonstration* and *participated in illegal protest activities* (see

[3] For a detailed overview of classifications carried out by various researchers during the past decades see Kaase 1992.

Table 1). We can also see that illegal protest reaches a clearly lower value than the others, which points to the significance of legality as an additional category for classification. Nevertheless, as participation in illegal protest activities is the only item of that kind, it remains in the category of elite-challenging participation.

Table 1. Forms of political participation in Austria, 2002 (factor loadings; Varimax-rotation)

	ELITE-DIRECTED PARTICIPATION	ELITE-CHALLENGING PARTICIPATION
Voted last national election	-	-
Worked in political party or action group	.78	-
Donated money to political organisation or group	.57	-
Contacted politician and/or government official	.78	-
Signed petition	-	.67
Ethical Consuming	-	.68
Attended lawful demonstration	-	.70
Participated in illegal protest activities	-	.37
Eigenvalue	**2.08**	**1.24**
Explained variance (%)	**26.00**	**15.46**

Source: ESS 2002

Moreover, we can see from Table 1 that voting has little in common with other forms of political participation. Through the principle of "one person, one vote" it is not only the most egalitarian mode of political activity (Eilfort 1994, 41), but also provides the least information about the participant's specific interests and policy preferences (information-poor activity). This is why Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995, 24) state: "[O]n every dimension along which we consider participatory acts, voting is *sui generis*".

3. How does education affect political activity?

Within our review of the most recent literature on the topic of political participation and education, five distinctions arise: cognitive mobilization, material resources, civic orientations, social capital, and value orientations. We organize the following discussion by these distinctions.

Cognitive mobilization

The term "cognitive mobilization" describes the direct effects of education on political participation. Cognitively mobilized citizens are equipped with the main skills, resources and abilities necessary to process complex political information, to understand the rules and idiosyncrasies of the political system and to recognize their own political interests and preferences (Barnes *et al.*1979: 112; Nie, Junn and

Stehlik-Barry 1996: 41; Whiteley 2005: 9). During the past 50 years these political skills have expanded significantly (Dalton 2000: 920). At the same time the accumulation of political information and experiences in schools and universities makes it easier for people with a higher degree of formal education to clear the participatory hurdles of handing in or signing petitions for referenda and the like. They are more likely to have the knowledge required for the exertion of influence on political decisions (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993: 74). In any case this direct cognitive path must be considered as an "absolute" effect – more education leads to more participation – referring to the typology introduced by Nie, Junn and Stehlik-Barry (1996) and elaborated further by Campbell (2006).

When political behaviour is intended to be explained by cognitive mobilization, this explanation is positioned in the area of rational choice theory (Downs 1957, Olson 1973). It claims, that acquired knowledge, skills and competences reduce the costs of the participatory act and thereby boost the probability of becoming politically active (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980: 36; Dee 2004; 1699; Hillygus 2005: 27).

Material resources

Education is closely connected to other variables expressing socioeconomic status (SES). Through direct effects on both family income and job position education provides a primary explanation for the social position of individuals, which can be regarded as a "relative" effect referring to the sorting model of education. This relative effect means that a person might be more likely to participate in politics, when her educational level is higher than that of the people surrounding her. Campbell (2006: 40) – following the argument of Nie, Junn and Stehlik-Barry (1996) – treats the relative effect as an aspect of social status which is also expressed by material resources.

So how can we interpret these effects with respect to the will to participate? As people with higher levels of formal education are presumed to have higher earnings, they can also make higher donations to political parties, organisations and candidates. Additionally, it is easier for the financially well off to devote their free time to activities lacking monetary rewards – i.e. to engage in voluntary organisations and groups. Moreover people with higher incomes and job levels have the opportunity to develop the kind of abilities (*civic skills*) that foster political participation on the job. Because these people are better equipped with the civic skills necessary for political activity, they are also more likely to be recruited by those already active (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993: 164f.).

Another pattern providing some explanatory power is presented by Whiteley by the terms "equity fairness" and "relative deprivation" (Whiteley 2005, 13). He assumes that individuals, who perceive themselves as being treated unfair by the system (i.e. the political system as well as the economy), build up a gap between their *expectations* of the political system and their *evaluations* of their treatment by political authorities, which they conceive as relative deprivation. This diffuse feeling can be expressed through protest behaviour, but it can also lead to alienation and retirement from political life. In the latter sense it comes close to what is attributed as "Politikverdrossenheit" within German-speaking political science (cf. Arzheimer 2002, Maier 2000). Whiteley considers education to play a role in this process because it may be able to reduce the feelings of relative deprivation through its impact on income and job position. Nevertheless he adds that the expectation to be treated adequately by the system will increase with rising educational attainment. Obviously the approach linking the interrelations between education and political activity to matters of fairness and relative deprivation cannot provide a satisfactory explanation, because it deems both a positive and negative correlation of these factors possible. Theoretically, lower education can just as much as higher education lead to more or less feeling of deprivation and thus to more or less political activity.

Civic orientations

We use the term "civic orientations" to embrace those characteristics we identify as essential for active citizenship and which help us explain why people are not just *able to* participate in politics, but why they also *want to* do so. These orientations are: *interest in politics, discussions about political events, attentiveness to politics in the media, trust in one's own political competence, feelings of responsivity on part of political authorities*, and *trust in* as well as *satisfaction with democratic institutions and authorities*.

These psychological characteristics are estimated to be closely connected to resources and education (Whiteley 2005: 11). The cognitive skills for political participation acquired through education are stimulated by affective attitudes, which thereby initiate the wish to become politically active (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995, Nie, Junn and Stehlik-Barry 1996). Moreover these attitudes lead to more participation: being interested in politics and following news coverage on political events strengthens cognitive skills and with it the perception of political competence (internal efficacy). Feelings of responsiveness (external efficacy) and institutional trust refer to the wealth of experience concerning one's relationship to the political system. Nevertheless we must not ignore how attitudes expressing the will to participate in politics are considerably shaped by cognitive and material resources of the individual (Whiteley 2005: 11).

Social capital

Social capital appears in different manifestations – the most prevalent measures of social capital are social relationships and interpersonal trust (OECD 2001; Gehmacher, Kroismayr and Neumüller 2006). ***Social relationships*** can be differentiated by their degree of formalization. *Informal* relationships predominantly exist within the family, circle of friends or work and living environment (colleagues, neighbours), while *formal* relationships become manifest within associational activities, churches, and other non-political organisations[4]. Social relationships depict the structural level of social capital (Gabriel *et al.* 2002: 26). The importance of ***interpersonal trust*** as a relevant gauge for social capital was especially accentuated by the works of Robert Putnam (1994, 2000). The concept of social capital assumes that people seek solutions to common problems by interacting among more or less formalized social networks. These interactions are positively affected by mutual interpersonal trust, and similarly the degree of trust is enhanced by the positive experience of collective problem solving (Whiteley 2005).

Education and social capital are characterized by a high degree of interdependency (Desjardins and Schuller 2006). Education can be regarded both as a resource fostering the development of social capital and as a result originating from the prior existence of social capital. The interrelations between the two factors differ depending on the form of appearance. Analytically, we have to distinguish between the connection of education and social relationships and the connection of education and interpersonal trust.

In most cases, social relationships are shaped largely homogenously – people who share the same socioeconomic status interact more frequently than people with different social backgrounds. Both informal and formal relationships are entered more frequently by the better educated for matters of social reproduction (Verba and Nie 1972, Milbrath and Goel 1977, Lake and Huckfeldt 1998). Additionally, organisations and associations are more interested in recruiting members holding resources like higher education and especially higher incomes (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995, Gabriel *et al.* 2002). Education is also relevant for the quality of relationships and thereby has effects on the probability for the individual to gain important network positions that expose her to political authorities. Wollebaek and Selle

4 We are well aware of the fact that many seemingly non-political organisations frequently comment on or become active in political matters. In this paper an organisation is defined as non-political, if its primary goal is not to exert influence on the political agenda.

(2002) disbelieve this consideration and state that the size of networks has much greater effects on the development of social capital than their quality.

The emergence of interpersonal trust is also influenced by education. Following Whiteley (2005: 15) education leads to more trust because persons interacting with other higher educated people are more "trustworthy". By contrast, Gabriel *et al.* (2002) treat education as a status variable and see interpersonal trust as a "resource of the successful" – as "luxury that only the better off can afford" (p. 101; translated by authors). In this view, trust in others is seen as a risk factor which is easier to calculate for the wealthy than for the economically disadvantaged.

But it is also possible to imagine a negative effect of social engagement on political action. Activities in non-political organisations induce costs because they demand using the scarce resource of free time. This time can be afforded for social OR political engagement. This means that activity in non-political organisations does not lead to an increase but rather a decrease of political participation (Deth 2001).

Value orientations

The importance of the effect of values on political attitudes and the level of political activity as well as the macro-correlation between generally increasing education levels and a widespread alteration of values was first demonstrated by Ronald Inglehart (1977, 1990). Modern industrial societies have experienced a significant change from materialistic to postmaterialistic values since the 1970s. Inglehart describes a value change which he mainly accounts for by referring to the rising education levels and the improvement of wealth in western world (Inglehart 1990: 66-103).

This educational effect is also observable at the individual level. Firstly, it refers to school at an instance of socialization. The curricula put more emphasis on communicating postmaterialistic values. From a certain grade students interact in a more postmaterialistic environment and are therefore more likely to lean towards postmaterialism (cf. Gabriel *et al.* 2002: 103). Secondly, the theory of value change also treats education as a status variable. Due to the experience of social security during young people's childhood and adolescence, which is expressed by their parents' prosperity and offers them the opportunity of higher educational attainment ("formative security"), material possessions are considered to be less important and especially self-determination is regarded as a central value (Inglehart 1990: 165f).

The will to self-determination is a vital feature of postmaterialistic value orientation and leads to a stronger desire for political participation. Higher income levels as an effect of more formal education reinforce the feelings of "formative security" and make political activity easier by granting a higher extent of psychic energy (Inglehart 1990, 310). However it is important to note that the more extensive political activity of postmaterialists should be theoretically restricted to elite-challenging forms of participation. As a result of the desire to determine their own political fate and the non-consideration of this wish by the institutions and political authorities of the representative system, they oppose the engagement within parties and unions and prefer different kinds of protest behaviour to express their preferences (Barnes *et al.* 1979: 345).

4. Education and political participation – The Austrian case

Having explicated the theoretical pathways though which education might have an impact on political participation, we now want to enter the empirical analysis by having a look at the situation in Austria.

The relevant questions are threefold: First, we need to look at the *development of different forms of participation* in Austria and *compare the activity levels to those in other Western European countries* in order to learn more about the significance of different participatory acts. By doing so, we also get an impression of the specific participatory culture in Austria. How has turnout in elections, party and union

membership, party identification, and partisanship changed over time? Was there a parallel or reverse development concerning the participation in petitions, demonstrations or strikes? Are there differences between Western European countries in terms of the acceptance and usage of diverse forms of activity?

In a second step we will, as a start, *describe the bivariate relationship between education and participation*. Can we identify a connection between education and political activity? Which forms of activity depend more on education, which less? At which level of educational attainment does its effect emerge?

Finally, we also discuss the educational effects on political participation while *considering other impact factors* at the same time. Therefore we control for intermediary variables and conduct a stepwise analysis as described in Table 6-12. This allows us to make conclusions not only about the fact *that* education affects political activity but also *how* this effect can be explained. Are the better educated more active because they understand politics better? Or is it because they are also more engaged in non-political institutions? Do value orientations play a role in explaining participation? And what about political interest or feelings of individual competence and institutional responsiveness?[5]

Participation in Austria – historical development and international comparison

Austria has been facing a decrease in voter turnout and elite-directed activities during the past 30 to 50 years (see Table 2). This finding is true for all electoral levels, especially so called "second order elections" (Reif and Schmitt 1980) such as regional and presidential elections, where the decrease is more than 20 percentage points. The growing number of non-voters in European parliamentary elections must also be regarded as striking: in only three elections within the 8 years between 1996 and 2004, turnout dropped from 67.7 to 42.4% (25.3 percentage points). But also in the area of "first order elections", like national parliamentary elections we can observe a significant decline in turnout rates.

[5] Within this last part of our analysis we decided to draw on regression analysis. Although regression is able to provide valuable insights into potential relationships if merged with meaningful theory, we have to be aware of the fact that causality cannot be established that way. If we describe "effects" and "impacts" in the following, this refers to the likely directions of correlation on the basis of our theoretical assumptions, not to causality in the strict statistical sense. Any results of our analysis thus have to be interpreted on this understanding.

Table 2. Development of political participation in Austria, 1950s – 2000s[a]

Avg Turnout (%)	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	**Net Shift**
Regional Parliament	93.4	90.3	88.5	85.9	80.7	72.4	-21.0
National Parliament	95.3	93.8	92.3	91.6	83.6	81.4	-13.9
European Parliament	-	-	-	-	58.6	42.4	-16.2
Presidential	97	95.8	94.7	89.5	79.9	71.6	-25.4
Membership rates (%)							
Party Members[b]	-	-	29	28	24	18	-12
Union Density[c]	-	-	60	54	45	40	-20
Percentage of people who report...							
being a member of a political party[d]	29	28	23	23	15	15	-14
identifying with a particular party[d]	73	75	64	61	48	54	-19
having signed a petition[e]	-	-	34	48	46	55	+21
taken part in a demonstration[e]	-	-	6	10	10	16	+10
taken part in a consumer boycott[e]	-	-	2	-	5	9	+7
taken part in an unofficial strike[e]	-	-	1	-	1	2	+1
occupied buildings[e]	-	-	0	0	1	1	+1

Sources:
[a] Federal Ministry of the Interior
[b] Proportion of Party members relative to electorate; Source: Mair and van Biezen (2001, 15), own calculations
[c] Proportion of Union members relative to employed population; Source: Karlhofer 1997, 399, Eurostat Labor Force Survey 1999
[d] Plasser and Ulram 2002, 88; average values per decade
[e] Political Action Survey 1974, Ulram 1990, 156, European Values Surveys 1990 and 1999; values in column "2000s" collected in 1999

Especially during the 1980s, many voters decided not to make use of their right to vote. During the same period of time we also observe a decline in elite-directed participation. The observed drop in party members is accompanied by a weakening of ties measured by party identification, which fosters the assumption that growing indifference or aversion to formal membership in parties or other hierarchical organisations is paralleled by a decrease in active engagement.

A diametrically opposed development can be examined in the area of elite-challenging participation.[6] Signing petitions and taking part in demonstrations are no longer interpreted as "unconventional" forms of political participation, as they had been classified by Barnes *et al.* (1979). They have been assessed as "normal" ways of expressing one's political opinion. In 1999, every second respondent declared that she had already signed a petition, and more than one sixth said that they had taken part in lawful demonstrations, and finally one out of ten stated that he/she had boycotted products for political reasons. Only illegal protest such as unofficial strikes and the occupation of buildings are still rejected by a vast majority of people.

To sum up: While participation in elections and elite-directed activity clearly shows a downward trend, surveys indicate significant growth in the area of elite-challenging participation. As we do not know which groups of people use which forms of activity we have to be careful in the interpretation of our findings. Elite-directed and elite-challenging participation could be used by different groups to express their particular opinions and preferences, or some groups could use both elite-directed and elite-challenging channels which means that some people would completely drop out of the participatory process. Considering these results we come to the assumption, that there is **less a decline** of participation but rather **a shift among different forms** of political activity. This does not imply that parties and elections cease being the most important feature of contemporary liberal democracies, but that (some groups of) people increasingly seek different paths than the traditional voting and party work to express their political views.

Table 3 compares participation levels in Austria with those of other Western European countries. The high turnout rates and the huge proportion of party members relative to the electorate (M/E ratio) needs to be highlighted. As measured by the average turnout levels at national parliamentary elections since the 1950s, Austria (90.2%) comes in second behind Belgium (92.4%), and even in front of Luxembourg (89.7%), who both have compulsory voting. Concerning union density, Austria is located in the intermediate ranks. Besides the traditionally highly unionized Scandinavian countries, Belgium, Italy, and Ireland also lie ahead of Austria. Yet, compared to Spain and especially France the proportion of union members relative to the employed population is still very high in Austria. During the past 20 years, the M/E ratio in Austria has declined significantly (10.9 percentage points). At 17.7%, this ratio is almost twice as high as in Finland, which shows the second highest M/E ratio in Western Europe. Low membership rates can be found in the United Kingdom and France.

Survey data reinforces the case. On both voter turnout and elite-directed activity, Austria ranks among the top European countries. A different observation is true for elite-challenging participation: Austria is to be found in the lowest region of the medium third of all countries, only the Southern European countries Spain, Portugal, Greece, and Italy as well as Ireland and the Netherlands show lower levels of activity.

[6] When we interpret the findings it is important to be aware of the fact that most of the used data on voting and elite-directed participation stems from official statistics, while the data for elite-challenging activity is derived from surveys. These answers to survey questions or statements tell us less about virtual activity than about the (change of) appreciation of these forms of participation.

Table 3. Political participation in Western Europe

Country	Average Turnout[a] (1950s – 2000s)	Union Density, mid 1990s	M/E Ratio[b]. late 1990s	Elite-directed Activity[c]	Elite-challenging Activity[c]
Austria	90.2	41.2	17.66	26.7	47.3
Belgium	92.4	51.9	6.55	25.8	47.6
Denmark	85.6	80.1	5.14	24.4	58.6
Germany	85.0	28.9	2.93	20.0	56.6
Finland	75.1	79.3	9.65	29.0	54.3
France	72.3	9.1	1.57	21.1	53.5
Greece	79.5	24.3	6.77	16.1	15.4
United Kingdom	73.5	32.9	1.92	23.8	57.1
Ireland	71.3	48.9	3.14	28.6	41.2
Italy	89.2	44.1	4.05	13.6	24.9
Luxembourg	89.7	-	-	28.8	54.6
Netherlands	85.5	25.6	2.51	20.4	39.1
Norway	79.9	57.7	7.31	32.8	58.5
Portugal	73.6	25.6	3.99	15.3	14.0
Sweden	85.0	91.1	5.54	21.9	70.9
Switzerland	53.8	22.5	6.38	30.7	63.6
Spain	73.9	18.6	3.42	16.6	33.1

Sources*:*
[a] Average turnout in national parliamentary elections by decade; http://www.idea.int
[b] M/E Ratio: Proportion of party members relative to electorate, World Labour Report 1997-1998; Mair and van Biezen 2001, 15
[c]-Reported participation in at least one activity; ESS 2002

On the basis of the available data, we can state that in Austria, hierarchical and institutionalized participation is traditionally more widespread than protest behaviour. This has to be seen as a major characteristic of the Austrian political culture, where political parties have played a comparatively strong role in both politics and society.

Do the educated participate more?

We now want to illustrate the connection between education and political participation. Education is measured by *years of full time education*, which has the advantage of ratio data and grants the opportunity to be used in multiple regression analysis. We also measure education by the *highest level of education completed*, which provides ordinal scale data for cross-tabulation and the interpretation of thresholds.

The relationship between the highest level of education completed and level of activity is illustrated for different forms of participation by Table 4. An additional educational degree has a positive effect on almost all kinds of participatory acts. Only party work and illegal protest behaviour do not reflect this assumption, because respectively the highest and the lowest levels of education do not match the general pattern. Besides this, we can identify a coherent picture concerning the effect of educational level on becoming politically active.

Table 4. Political participation and education in Austria

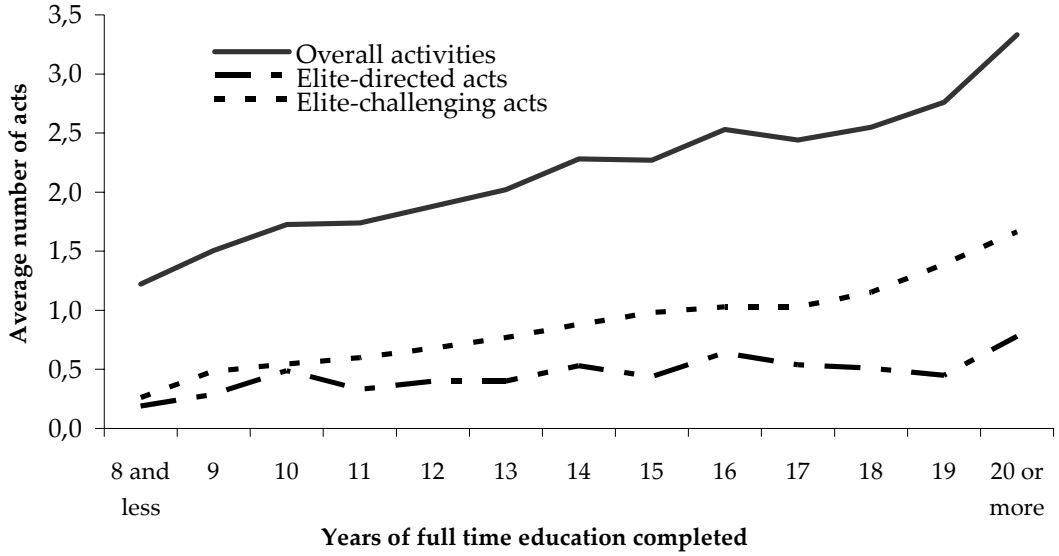
	Overall Sample	Highest level of education completed				
		no qualification	Compulsory	Intermediate	High school	University
VOTING						
Voted last national election	88.4	65.1	84.1	89.3	89.7	96.1
ELITE-DIRECTED PARTICIPATION (EDP)						
Worked in political party or action group	10.3	3.2	7.8	10.2	13.4	11.5
Donated money to political organisation or group	11.4	4.6	8.0	8.8	15.1	20.6
Contacted politician or government official	18.5	4.5	10.9	19.6	20.9	30.6
ELITE-CHALLENGING PARTICIPATION (ECP)						
Signed petition	27.3	7.1	19.7	24.9	33.3	44.0
Ethical Consuming	34.6	9.6	21.8	32.7	42.1	59.1
Attended lawful demonstration	9.6	5.5	4.1	8.1	12.9	20.7
Participated in illegal protest activities	1.3	2.3	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.7
n		42	648	772	515	273

Source: ESS 2002

If we look at the years of full time education and number of different participatory acts, instead of the highest level of education and the single forms of activity, we come to a similar conclusion. Figure 2 also illustrates the expected effect. Furthermore it becomes clear that the correlation between education and political participation is much higher in elite-challenging than elite-directed participation.

While both start from a rather low average participation level of .26 and .19 acts by persons with 8 or less years of education, the curve for elite-challenging activity ascends much more steeply than the curve depicting elite-directed acts. People with 20 or more years of education on average report having taken part in 1.66 elite-challenging acts compared to only .78 elite-directed acts. Even if we consider the fact that we included only three elite-directed and four elite-challenging acts in our analysis, this difference remains remarkable. A moderate correlation ($r = .14$) between years of education and elite-directed participation is confronted by a solid correlation ($r = .31$) between years of education and elite-challenging activity. While party work, making donations, and contacting hardly correlate with education, signing petitions, ethical consuming, attending demonstrations, and participating in strikes are interrelated with educational attainment to a certain extent.

Figure 2. Political participation and education in Austria



Source: ESS 2002

If we include voter turnout into our examinations and take a more detailed look at its correlation with education, only the extreme ends of the distribution have a significant effect on electoral participation (see Table 4). The difference in turnout between people whose highest level of education is compulsory, intermediate or high school nearly disappears while people with no educational qualification participate very little in elections. The same applies – in an alleviated form – to persons with an academic degree, whose participation level is far higher than those of other educational strata. Thus the overall effect of education on electoral turnout is low and mainly focuses on the question whether people have had some educational attainment or not. Nevertheless concerning this crucial step the effect seems drastic.

Why do the educated participate more?

Education – who has, who has not?

Which initial characteristics facilitate higher educational attainment? Several studies identify parents' education[7] when the respondent was a teenager as well as gender, age, and ethnicity as major explaining variables (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995, 417). In this study we decided to replace ethnicity with the most frequently spoken language, as an indicator of immigrant background. Within Western European countries, immigrant background is deemed to be an important factor influencing educational attainment.

Age affects education in a curvilinear pattern. If we take a closer look at age effects, we find that, while the youth often have not yet finished their educational career and therefore hold less formal educational attainment, the average number of years of education rises steadily for middle-aged people

[7] To measure formative security we can use the variables *parent's occupation when respondent was 14* and *parent's education when respondent was 14*. We decided to use only one to avoid multicollinearity and chose *parent's education* due to its better data level and more frequent usage in social science studies.

until they are about 40 years old. On average, older generations also attained less formal education. This finding mainly points at cohort effects referring to the rising general education levels during the past 30 years.

Immigrant background seems to have an impact on educational attainment, even though it is not as strong as the age effect. People who do not primarily speak German at home are likely to experience less years of education than the German speaking population (mainly Turkish and ex-Yugoslavian). This finding can also be confirmed by official statistics (see Table 5) and is common in studies focusing on education and the topic of immigration in Austria (Herzog-Punzenberger 2005, 2006; Nairz-Wirth 2003). The effect might even be underestimated due to survey effects within the ESS sample, where among people with immigrant background, high school and university graduates are clearly overrepresented compared to the overall population.[8] Case studies using both quantitative and qualitative research methods could help to shed light on the educational inequalities suggested by our analysis.

Table 5. Highest level of education by Citizenship and Gender

	Country of Birth			Gender	
	Austria	Turkey	Former Yugoslavia	Male	Female
Compulsory school	33,5	80,7	60,1	27,0	43,6
Intermediate school	48,1	13,2	30,9	52,9	38,6
High school	10,8	4,1	5,8	11,6	10,3
Academic degree	7,6	1,9	3,2	8,5	7,5

Source: Statistik Austria 2005

If we look at socialisation variables (formative security) we recognize that parents' education is by far the firmest indicator for educational attainment. Social reproduction in the area of education seems to be a distinctive feature of Austrian society. Basically, our observations confirm the findings from more detailed analyses of educational inequality claiming that the attendance of a high school or university is a lot less likely for children from socially disadvantaged families (Bacher 2003, 2005). The education of parents has an outstanding effect on the individual's educational career.

Does education increase material resources or social capital?

In our analysis of the impact of initial characteristics and of education on intervening variables we first consider factors describing *material resources*. As Table 6 indicates, the effect of education on job level and household income is significant even after controlling for initial characteristics.

[8] Within the ESS the highest educational degree of nearly 30% of respondents born in Turkey and former Yugoslavia is compulsory school. The Austrian census of 2001 shows that this proportion in the population is 80.7% for born Turks and 60.8% for born Ex-Yugoslavians. For Austrians this bias is much smaller (29.7% ESS, 33.5% census).

Table 6. OLS regression of intervening variables on initial characteristics and education: Material Resources (β-coefficients)

	Job Level	Household Income
Gender (female)	-.02	-.08**
Age	.34**	.64**
Age squared	-.25*	-.74**
German at home	.04	.05
Parents' education	.07**	-.03
Education	.53**	.19**
Adjusted R^2	.31	.08
n	1777	1388

* significant at .05 level
** significant at .01 level
Source: ESS 2002

Age has a significant curvilinear effect on job level and income. This effect can be described as climbing up the job ladder during the life cycle, but then suddenly dropping off and therefore lower earnings (pensions) in old age due to retirement.

Survey data suggest that gender impacts on material resources are weaker than age effects. Although there is no significant effect of gender on job level, the effect on income is moderate but highly significant, which refers to the well-known fact that women earn less money for equal jobs (AK Frauenbericht 2006). Using household income as we do here does not reveal gender differences in income. We also cannot identify a significant impact of immigrant background on material resources. Within socialisation variables we want to specifically point at the impact of parents' education on job level. If the respondent's parents attained higher formal education, it is more likely for their children to get better jobs. All in all, formative security at home seems to influence individual careers.

When we turn to *social capital*, different factors become important and education loses much of its explanatory power. Concerning organisational affiliation, education still appears to be of major importance, but the people with higher formal education do not have a much higher degree of interpersonal trust. Organisational affiliation is affected strongly by age. It follows a curvilinear pattern which indicates that people join non-political organisations mainly during their 40s and 50s and are less active in their youth and especially when they become older. On the other hand, interpersonal trust does not seem to be correlated with age at first glance. If we take a closer look we find out that trust levels remain comparatively constant during the first decades of the life cycle before dropping considerably from the age of around 45. Both observations are likely to point at both a cohort (generation) and lifecycle (position within the life course) effect for age.

A positive effect is obvious for the language used – people who mainly speak German at home have a higher probability to be affiliated in non-political organisations than those who do not. Immigrant background acts as a barrier to participation in organised clubs and communities. Additionally, we can observe a small positive socialisation effect on social capital.

Table 7. OLS regression of intervening variables on initial characteristics and education: Social Capital (β-coefficients)

	Organisational Affiliation	Interpersonal Trust
Gender (female)	-.13**	-.01
Age	.85**	.10
Age squared	-.86**	-.15
German at home	.12**	.03
Parents' education	.09**	.05*
Education	.18**	.06*
Adjusted R^2	.11	.01
n	2162	2123

* significant at .05 level
** significant at .01 level
Source: ESS 2002

Are civic orientations and values related to education?

Concerning *civic orientations* the impression of the dominant explanatory role of education also remains constant. Especially political interest, discussions about political affairs, and internal efficacy are empirically interrelated with educational attainment. The correlation between education and attentiveness to news coverage of political affairs, feelings of responsiveness (external efficacy) as well as trust in and satisfaction with the political system is smaller but still highly significant. Besides the education factor, the constant impact of gender on the development of civic orientations is striking. All of the dependent variables measuring civic orientations are influenced by gender in a significant and negative way. Women report being less interested in politics, discuss less about political affairs and are more likely to think that they cannot change things through their engagement. As studies on the relationship of gender and civic orientations suggest, this disengagement of women mainly refers to a conventional notion of politics (Inglehart and Norris 2003).

Table 8. OLS regression of intervening variables on initial characteristics and education: Civic orientations (β-coefficients)

	Political Interest	Political Discussions	Political Attentiveness	Internal Efficacy	External Efficacy	Institutional trust and satisfaction
Gender (f)	-.15**	-.10**	-.06**	-.19**	-.07**	-.06**
Age	.44**	.35**	.41**	.40**	.06	-.08
Age squared	-.26**	-.29**	-.19*	-.34**	-.11	.11
German at home	.03	-.03	.01	.03	.04	-.05*
Parents' education	.11**	.07**	.06**	.12**	.02	.01
Education	.28**	.26**	.10**	.26**	.13**	.10**
Adjusted R^2	.15	.10	.06	.14	.03	.01
N	2144	2126	2141	2023	2111	2152

* significant at .05 level
**significant at .01 level - Source: ESS 2002

The relationship between age and civic orientations follows three different patterns. First, political interest and attentiveness rise constantly and almost linearly with growing age. Young people are hardly interested in a conventional notion of politics and do not follow news coverage in the media frequently.[9] Interest and attentiveness levels rise with age, a development that does not invert even for senior citizens. Second, frequency of political discussions and internal efficacy are very low among young as well as elderly people while the middle-aged discuss political affairs regularly and also feel capable of understanding politics. Finally, external efficacy as well as trust in, and satisfaction with, institutions are not significantly affected by age.

Immigrant background does not affect civic orientations – immigrants thus seem to be just as interested in, attentive to, satisfied with, and efficacious about politics as "native" Austrians. An interesting aspect is that parental socialisation appears to have an impact especially on the individual aspects of civic orientations. People with higher educated parents seem to develop some sense of interest in and attentiveness to politics, possibly because their parents were also interested in politics and discussed political affairs with their children at home.

For the analysis of the impact of education on individual *value orientations*, the European Social Survey provides a battery of 21 items by which the respondent can design a value type that fits his/her own personality best. An analysis (see Appendix) of these items leads to four factors that correspond to four basic value categories which we refer to as Postmaterialism, Conformism, Hedonism, and Materialism:

- ***Postmaterialists*** want to make their own decisions about life. The well-being of people in other parts of the world concerns them in almost the same manner as the well-being of their family, friends, and neighbours – everybody shall be treated equally and as equals. The protection of environment is of major importance to them, as is the contact with different cultures and the development of new ideas.
- ***Conformists*** strive for a secure and decent life which they lead in accordance with their traditions. Modesty is regarded as a central virtue. In terms of the maintenance of order, people should always do what they are told and not question the decisions of authorities.
- ***Hedonists*** want to have fun in their lives. They want to make new experiences and live for the moment. In order to reach this goal they are absolutely disposed to take the necessary risks.
- ***Materialists*** are mainly concerned with the pursuit of wealth. They want to earn as much money as possible and be rewarded for their attainment and skills. Non-material things are of no interest to them.

Examining the interrelation of value orientations and socio-demographic characteristics, the previous impression of education's dominant role in explaining intervening variables is put into perspective again. Although postmaterialistic and conformist attitudes are strongly affected by education, this effect is much lower when it comes to materialistic values and disappears completely for hedonism. Ronald Inglehart's assumption that the development of postmaterialistic values is promoted by "formative security", measured by parents' education when respondent was a teenager, is partly confirmed. But formative security also seems to push hedonistic values, while it has a negative impact on conformist values. Since postmaterialistic and hedonistic orientations do not ascribe importance to material things, Inglehart's assumption can be at least partly confirmed: formative security during adolescence reduces the affinity to financial merits as well as the need for a strong government and for the maintenance of traditions. Further effects on value orientations can be stated for age and gender. Our findings suggest that older people tend

[9] As recent studies show the conventional wisdom sketching a politically largely uninterested youth does not satisfactorily capture the facts. Rather than being generally disaffected young people are alienated by parties and politicians, not by politics in a broader sense. Nevertheless the ESS shows significantly less political interest and satisfaction of young people, a fact that might be connected with the ambiguous nature of the survey question used (see Appendix). For further reading on the topic of political interest of the youth in Austria see the papers of Picker/Westphal 2005 or Filzmaier 2007.

towards conformist while younger people tend towards hedonistic values. Postmaterialistic and materialistic values are not significantly affected by age. Women are overrepresented among postmaterialists and underrepresented among materialists. Money and appreciation seems to be less important for women than it is for men.

Table 9. OLS regression of intervening variables on initial characteristics and education: Value Orientations (β-coefficients)

	Postmaterialism	Conformism	Hedonism	Materialism
Gender (f)	.15**	.02	-.03	-.19**
Age	.17	.56**	-.85**	-.17
Age squared	-.19	-.22*	.48	.05
German at home	.11**	-.01	-.00	-.09**
Parents' education	.10**	-.15**	.11**	.02
Education	.19**	-.21**	.02	.08**
Adjusted R^2	.11	.27	.19	.07
N	2161	2161	2161	2161

* significant at .05 level
** significant at .01 level
Source: ESS 2002

Almost the same observation can be made for matters of language. People who speak German at home as their first language tend towards postmaterialism and are not as much attracted by money and influence, while people with immigrant background are more attracted by materialistic values. This seems appropriate if we consider the largely precarious financial situation of immigrants which places them on a different level of the hierarchy of needs and makes it necessary to care more about food and living in the first instance.

Who has voice?

Within the preceding sections we suggested that education is connected to political participation via intervening variables and therefore analyzed the effect of education on these variables controlling for sociodemographic (initial) characteristics. For the sake of completeness we should also describe the relationship between intervening factors and political activity. Before we consider the remaining effects of intervening variables while controlling for initial characteristics and education in a multivariate analysis, it seems useful to check the bivariate correlations between the single factors and the different forms of participation so as to evaluate our theoretical assumptions using empirical data.

As Table 10 indicates, the likelihood of becoming politically active is very much affected by the degree of organisational affiliation, political interest, frequency of political discussion, and internal efficacy. The strongest indicators for overall activity level (OAL) are those that show a strong and highly significant correlation with both elite-directed (EDP) and elite challenging participation (ECP). Integration into community life through organisational affiliation, political interest and discussion, and a certain degree of believing in one's own proficiency to understand politics, seem to be indispensable prerequisites for political action of any kind. By contrast, a feeling of responsiveness on the part of political elites shares much stronger correlations with elite-directed activity like party work, contacting politicians or government officials, and donations than with demonstrating, signing petitions, and ethical consuming.

The latter are yet more affected by social status (expressed by job level) and the will to self-determination (expressed by Postmaterialism).

Table 10. Correlations between intervening variables and different forms of participation (Pearsons r)

		Job Level	Family Income	Interpersonal trust	Organisational affiliation	Political interest	Political discussion	Political Attentiveness
OAL	r	0,24	0,16	0,10	0,43	0,40	0,32	0,15
	Sig.	**	**	**	**	**	**	**
EDP	r	0,12	0,15	0,05	0,32	0,33	0,26	0,14
	Sig.	**	**	*	**	**	**	**
ECP	r	0,22	0,10	0,11	0,34	0,25	0,21	0,05
	Sig.	**	**	**	**	**	**	*

		Internal Efficacy	External Efficacy	Institutional Trust and Satisfaction	Postmaterialism	Conformity	Hedonism	Materialism
OAL	r	0,36	0,21	0,04	0,29	-0,20	-0,02	-0,03
	Sig.	**	**	-	**	**	-	-
EDP	r	0,35	0,23	0,08	0,12	-0,08	-0,07	0,04
	Sig.	**	**	**	**	**	**	-
ECP	r	0,20	0,12	-0,03	0,33	-0,28	0,09	-0,05
	Sig.	**	**	-	**	**	**	*

In order to be able to interpret the relative effects of intervening factors on political activity we have to include them in a multivariate model. Therefore we finally want to focus on explaining political participation by initial characteristics, education, and intervening variables altogether.

In the first instance, it is interesting that education loses most of its own explanatory value in a more complex model. This does not mean that education is irrelevant for participation or that there is no direct cognitive effect, rather the impact of education on political activity is mainly channelled through intervening variables. For sociodemographic characteristics, we can identify some effect of age, indicating that older people are politically more active than youth, as well as a weak but significant effect of German as the first language spoken at home, indicating that immigrants participate less than Austrians. Thus, the mentioned lack of a direct effect of education may also be covered by language skills necessary to become politically active.

Especially organisational activities, a high degree of political interest, internal and external efficacy, and postmaterialistic values boost the level of political activity. A lower but significant effect can be observed for language, underpinning the notion that immigrants are less likely to become politically active than Austrians. Age also has an impact on the degree of political participation. As indicated in several prior studies, young and old people are less active than people in the middle age groups. Our model indicates that political activity is lowest among the youngest cohorts, peaks at an age of about 60 before dropping slightly for seniors but not as low as the youth.

Table 11. OLS regression of overall activity on initial characteristics, education and intervening variables

	Overall activity			
	B	Std. Error (B)	β	Sig.
Gender (female)	.05	.08	.02	
Age	.03	.02	.32	*
Age squared	-.00	.00	-.27	*
German at home	.49	.22	.06	*
Parents' education	.00	.02	.00	
Education	.01	.02	.01	
Job level	.08	.06	.04	
Household income	.03	.04	.02	
Organisational affiliation	.19	.02	.29	**
Interpersonal trust	.01	.01	.04	
Political interest	.23	.05	.14	**
Discussions about politics	.04	.03	.05	
Political attentiveness	.01	.02	.01	
Internal Efficacy	.09	.02	.16	**
External Efficacy	.07	.03	.09	**
Institutional trust and satisfaction	-.02	.01	-.12	**
Postmaterialism	.59	.21	.21	**
Conformism	.21	.19	.10	
Hedonism	.08	.12	.05	
Materialism	.23	.12	.12	
Constant	-1.79	.63		**
Adjusted R^2	.33			
N	1031			

* significant at .05 level
** significant at .01 level
Source: ESS 2002

Another highly significant effect in our model is surprising: the clear negative impact of institutional trust and satisfaction. As we do not assume that discontent and distrustful people engage in parties and participate in elections more frequently, this observation could mainly result from elite-challenging activity. The same is possibly true for the impact of postmaterialistic values. Thus we will have to take a separate look at the different forms of involvement: elite-directed and elite-challenging participation.

Table 12. OLS regression of elite-directed and elite-challenging participation on initial characteristics, education and intervening variables (β-coefficients)

	Elite-directed Participation	Elite-challenging Participation
Gender (female)	-.03	.02
Age	.22	-.09
Age squared	-.14	.03
German at home	.04	-.00
Parents' education	-.04	.04
Education	-.09*	.07*
Job level	.01	.05
Household income	.02	-.00
Organisational affiliation	.24**	.22**
Interpersonal trust	-.04	.08**
Political interest	.08*	.11**
Discussions about politics	.06	.01
Political attentiveness	.00	.01
Internal Efficacy	.24**	.04
External Efficacy	.11**	.05
Institutional trust and satisfaction	-.05	-.15**
Postmaterialism	.12	.24**
Conformism	.09	.07
Hedonism	.03	.07
Materialism	.13*	.07
Adjusted R^2	.23	.23
N	1031	1031

* significant at .05 level
** significant at .01 level
Source: ESS 2002

The first thing that we recognize are the many differences in factors with explanatory power – the common effects are the strong positive impact of organisational affiliation and the effect of political interest (though of different strengths) on both forms of activity. As already suggested during the analysis of overall participation, the degree of organisational affiliation contributes largely to political action. This might be explicable by the recruitment function of non-political organisations as well as their function as a "school of democracy", where the special skills helpful for political engagement can be acquired and trained. Organisational affiliation indicates social integration which also boosts political activity. Additionally, a certain amount of interest in politics seems to be a necessary prerequisite for all kinds of political activity.

While education has a positive effect on elite-challenging participation even after controlling for other variables, it turns into a negative effect if we consider elite-directed engagement. Again, this does not mean that there is a negative *overall* effect of education on elite-directed participation, since it is reduced mainly to its *direct* (cognitive) effect in this model.

Neither elite-directed nor elite-challenging engagement are influenced by age. As many other studies confirm, young people are less attracted by conventional forms of political activity, probably because they are not very interested in an institutionalised understanding of politics at all (BMSG 2003). Our analysis does not indicate an age effect on elite-challenging behaviour, although it seems likely that (especially highly educated) young people might dedicate themselves to low-cost protest activities like petition signing more frequently than the older generations. At universities there is usually a huge amount of petitions on various issues circulating among students. Additionally, there have been massive demonstrations in the late 1990s and early 2000s supported by students' associations to a large extent (protests against government's austerity measures, the introduction of tuition fees, and the centre-right wing government formed by the ÖVP and the FPÖ in February 2000). While we find some evidence for the assumption that young people attend demonstrations more frequently than the older cohorts, there is no indication for an age effect on petition signing. An estimate of 16.2% below the age of 30 report having attended a demonstration during the previous twelve months in 2002, but only 7.9% of people aged 30 and above. Concerning petitions, this relationship is 27 versus 27.4%. This observation is also confirmed if we further control for education: while there is a small difference in petition signing between highly educated youths and adults, this difference is high when it comes to demonstrations. Only every fifth person with an academic degree aged over 30 demonstrated in 2002, while it was every third person below 30.

The postmaterialistic value effect we observed for overall participation is exclusively reserved to elite-challenging activities while the materialistic value effect appears within elite-directed participation. This seems coherent because the postmaterialism scale[10] includes the wish for self-determination which probably cannot be satisfied within the barriers of a democracy strictly built on the idea of representation. Individual responsibility and initiative must mean confrontation with the representative system to a certain extent. But although elite-challenging participation is conflictual towards political authorities, it is also highly dependent on cooperation and collective action. Thus a certain degree of social capital is necessary to become engaged in petitions and demonstrations which depend on joint action. Our model underscores the impact of interpersonal trust as a promoter of elite-challenging activity.

All in all, our detailed analysis of elite-directed and elite-challenging forms of political participation provides insight about their different character as means to address one's personal interests to the political system. Nevertheless, comprehensive analyses and case studies must be used to complement this analysis with insights drawn from daily life.

5. ICTs, political participation, and education

Now we have been concerned with political activities that vary in their form and degree of acceptance among the population, but mainly use established paths of obtaining attention to one's concerns. In this section, we give a cursory outlook on further necessary research on the "Social Outcomes of Learning" by pointing at the opportunities for political activity that are granted by the New Internet and Communications Technologies (ICTs).

It seems obvious that the Internet possesses the potential to enhance political activity in all of its relevant dimensions: by providing *information* necessary for reasoned action in a cheaper and easier to use way and thereby removing barriers to the availability of information; by allowing for additional forms of

[10] All operationalizations and scales are listed and described in Appendix A.

communication – especially many-to-many communication between citizens – which can foster the legitimacy of political decisions through deliberative decision-making processes or facilitate the coordination of protest activities; by paving the way for new *decision-making* processes concerning both direct (e-referenda) and indirect (e-voting) democracy. Additionally, the Internet also entails some potential dangers to political participation that strongly relate to education. Policy makers have to be aware of two major constraints that affect not only the broadly neglected field of online participation but also the already existing e-government structures:

1. ***Understandability:*** Information does not mean knowledge. Of course every measure that aims at providing facts about or opportunities to discuss political processes be it from parties or other political institutions should be appreciated, but the sine qua non has to be that people must receive and be able to process information and have the skills to engage in deliberative procedures. As the capacity to turn information into knowledge and the availability of communicative skills is highly dependent on education, policy makers have to put effort into learning issues such as citizenship education.
2. ***Accessibility:*** The chance to gain access to the internet is unevenly distributed among the Austrian population. More than one third of Austrians do not have the opportunity to use even the existing supply of Internet politics (information as well as e-government structures). As long as the digital divide cannot be bridged and the knowledge gap remains open, thinking about new forms of online participation or e-voting technologies remains a secondary task. The immediate duty is to overcome social stratification and inequality structures of internet access itself.

Taking into account our considerations, we estimate the current techno-deterministic approach to Internet democracy to be insufficient. From the viewpoint of an improved democracy through equal (i.e. independent of education) online participation we surely have to ask "What is technologically possible to make voting easier through the Internet?". Nevertheless it is also and especially important to address the questions "How can we grant universal Internet access?" and "How can we guarantee that all people receive and understand political information?" – an issue that has scarcely been considered in Austrian studies so far.[11] We do not believe that e-participation will render traditional forms of activity unnecessary within the nearer future, so this argument might seem overstated to some scholars and politicians. Surely e-voting will not entirely replace the conventional paper-to-pencil vote but rather complement it in certain areas. However, the problem of unequal access to the political process already exists within traditional forms of participation and should be considered designing new opportunities through ICTs from the very beginning. If policy makers and developers do not keep it in mind, there is a risk of squandering the great potential inherent in the new technologies.

6. Conclusions

Within these concluding comments we now want to refer to the research questions and try to give some answers on the basis of the empirical analysis. Additionally we try to summarize some implications for policy makers by combining our results with those of other researchers in the domain of political participation.

From education to participation

"Does formal education affect the extent and form of political participation at the individual level in Austria? " The answer to this question has to be a definitive "Yes!", education seems to have a positive effect on all forms of political participation. No matter if we differentiate between people without qualification and those who finished compulsory school or between high school and university graduates, a higher degree of formal education is correlated with more political activity in all areas. Highly educated

[11] As exceptions see Aichholzer 2003, Aichholzer *et al.* 2006.

people are more likely to vote than people with less education and they engage in political parties, donate money, and contact politicians or government officials more frequently. Additionally, they tend to participate more in petitions and demonstrations and are more attracted by ethical consuming and illegal protests.

The assumption that the effect of education is variably strong concerning the diverse forms of participation is confirmed by the data. While turnout in elections is merely influenced by the formal level of education, this effect is obvious though still moderate concerning elite-directed participation. The engagement in elite-challenging activities is affected by educational attainment to the comparatively greatest extent.

How can the postulated effect of education on political activity be interpreted? We discussed this question within our theoretical considerations: the degree of cognitive mobilization, the amount of material resources and social capital, as well as civic and individual value orientations give information about how education affects the extent and quality of political participation. According to our statistical analyses, job level and income, political interest, the feeling of capability to understand politics and the frequency of discussions about political affairs, as well as postmaterialistic value orientations, appear to be particularly dependent on educational affiliation. Social capital is affected by education only in terms of social activities as a member or worker in non-political voluntary organisations.

The multivariate analysis of the impact of intervening variables on the level and form of participation mainly confirmed the impact of social capital, understood as engagement and membership in non-political organisations. This is the only highly significant and (in respect of intensity) relevant factor appearing in both elite-directed and elite-challenging activities. This finding is central to our analysis: political activity is dependent on education just as non-political activity is. It seems that the likelihood of becoming active and stand in for one's interests and beliefs as well as the probability to participate in social community life (through its organisations) have similar roots. Political activity is closely connected to factors of societal integration which is especially relevant when we speak of socially excluded groups. According to our multivariate analysis voting turnout is primarily affected by immigrant background (≠ Citizenship!) and – to a lesser extent – income and organisational affiliation. The most striking aspect of this finding is that even voting, the form of participation considered to be most equal, is dependent on income, social integration in the form of non-political engagement and immigrant background. This indicates that the so called universal suffrage may grant equal rights to vote but in fact is not sufficient to guarantee equal opportunity and equal turnout in terms of socioeconomic status, social integration, and ethnicity.

Elite-directed participation gets positive impacts from internal and external efficacy. To engage in parties, make donations, or contact politicians, it is necessary for the individual to believe in his/her capacity to understand politics and to trust that his/her activity will be responded to by political authorities. Young people rarely participate in elite-directed acts, probably because they are alienated by conventional politics. Elite-challenging activity becomes more likely if a person is politically interested but distrustful towards and unsatisfied with the political system and features postmaterialistic values. A strong will to self-determination paired with a feeling of disaffection of the political system fosters elite-challenging protest behaviour. Furthermore, a certain amount of trust in other people is important to engage in protest activities because collective action demands trustworthy fellows.

Besides the mentioned indirect effects, we can observe a small negative cognitive impact of education on elite-directed and a small positive effect on elite-challenging participation. This means that people are unlikely to engage in party politics when they think its cost is higher than its use – on a rational level they will prefer alternative ways of engagement instead.

Besides the internal effects causing higher educated people to participate in politics more frequently than people with less educational attainment, we were also interested in the *implications for policy-makers resulting from this connection*. To be able to give an estimation of these consequences we first have to concentrate on the findings concerning *educational inequality* (i.e. the access to education dependent on social status). This inequality is perceivable from our own as well as other comprehensive analyses on the basis of various data for Austria (Bacher 2003, 2005; Bacher and Paseka 2006; Fassmann 2002; Schlögl and Lachmayer 2004; Steiner 1998) and leads to an educational segregation as a result of cultural and social differences (gender, immigrant background, parents' social status).

In another step, the growing relevance of elite-challenging participation – which is affected by education to a greater extent than elite-directed acts – and the decline in turn out to the disadvantage of people with less educational attainment leads to an *underrepresentation of socially less privileged groups*. Whether this underrepresentation has negative effects on the political system as a whole depends on two major factors:

1. One has to ask whether small participation rates of people with little education and low socio-economic status (descriptive underrepresentation) lead to a non-consideration of the interests and preferences that are characteristic for these people (substantive underrepresentation), and this is reflected in the political agenda. Recent publications from the United States give support to this notion by suggesting that political authorities seem to hear the voice of the (economically) privileged much louder than the voice of the poor and that this fact also affects policy outputs (APSA 2004a, 2004b; Bartels 2004; Gilens 2005). Analogous studies for Austria could deliver interesting findings in this regard.

2. The emergence of negative effects depends on the extent to which the affected recognize their unequal consideration and lack of decisive power and how they react on it. "Political alienation" understood as a certain degree of scepticism against political authorities cannot rank as a problem in itself. On the contrary, reactions that assume threats to the political system through alienation should be regarded as exaggeration and mostly result from a lack of knowledge of the state of research on this issue. Nevertheless, such alienated scepticism hides the risk of producing attitudes that are open to anti-democratic diction if they are neglected permanently (cf. Arzheimer 2004). Further research is also needed in this area for the Austrian case.

Policy implications

How can policymakers face the issues discussed in this paper? As usual there is no simple and all-embracing solution. Nevertheless it seems reasonable and useful to face the educational bias of political participation on three different paths:

(1) Educational inequalities: In the first instance we see the necessity to reduce educational inequalities at all levels and to increase the educational attainment of groups distant or even resistant to schooling. As is claimed within seminal studies, these problems could best be addressed in a number of ways including an extension of vocational schools in rural areas (Fassmann 2002), the overcoming of the early differentiation in two modes of lower secondary education (AHS vs. Hauptschule; Schwarz, Spielauer and Städtner 2002), the implementation of all-day schools, the reduction of education costs (at the primary, secondary, and tertiary level) or even the introduction of remuneration for students (Bacher n.d.). In order to overcome gender differences in education, the issue of gender roles should be part of the curricula, affirmative action for girls and children with immigrant background should be implemented.

(2) Education and political participation: Another step of measures focuses on the link between education and political participation. Especially the involvement in elite-challenging activities is highly

dependent on educational attainment. We suggest confronting this problem in two ways: First, the placement of individual concerns on the political agenda could be eased by promoting direct democracy. In this sense not only the mode of initiation for petitions ("Volksbegehren") might be revised and simplified, but also participation in petitions could be made anonymous by providing the opportunity to vote "No". In the same way referenda could be opened for the wishes and initiatives of citizens and at the same time be supported by political and public institutions (Schaller 2002).

Second, an extension of civic education programs in schools and adult education could contribute to a reduction of cognitive barriers to political participation. Knowledge about the allocation of rights and duties among different institutions and information on how to become active and who to turn to if people want to express their interests, could reduce costs and lead to a boost of engagement within all social groups.

(3) A major part of the problem that participation depends on educational attainment, is located within elite-challenging activities. These activities often express feelings of protest against political authorities which is reinforced or even caused by a lack of trust in the traditional institutions of the representative system. Efforts made by politicians and parties thus must focus on the reduction of this loss of trust. This is important not only to be able to guarantee the legitimacy of their decisions in the future, but also to counter the effects of political inequality based on an educational bias in participation, of relative deprivation and further problems arising for the stability of democracy in this way.

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APPENDIX

Indicator operationalisation

Political Participation		
Voting	"Some people don't vote nowadays for one reason or another. Did you vote in the last national election in November 2002?"	0=no, 1=yes
Elite-directed activity	"There are different ways of trying to improve things in Austria or help prevent things from going wrong. During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following?" (a) Contacted a politician, government or local government official; (b) Worked in a political party or action group; (c) Donated money to a political organisation or group	0=no, 1=yes sum index (0-3 acts)
Elite-challenging activity	"There are different ways of trying to improve things in Austria or help prevent things from going wrong. During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following?" (a) Signed a petition; (b) Taken part in a lawful public demonstration; (c) Boycotted certain products AND/OR deliberately bought certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons (ethical consuming), (d) Participated in illegal protest activities	0=no, 1=yes sum index (0-4 acts)
Overall activity	sum index	0-8 acts

Education		
Highest degree of educational attainment	"What is the highest level of education you have achieved?"	scale 1-5
Years of full time education completed	"How many years of full-time education have you completed?"	4-25 years

Initial characteristics		
Gender	entered by Interviewer	0=male, 1=female
Age	"And in what year were you born?" → recoded: Age = 2002 – year of birth	15-94 years
Immigrant background	"What language or languages do you speak most often at home?" → recoded: German main language	0=no, 1=yes
Parent's education	"What is the highest level of education your father/mother achieved?"	scale 1-6

Material Resources		
Job Level	"What is/was the name or title of your main job?" → recoded ISC0 88 skill levels	scale 1-4
Household Income	"Using this card, if you add up the income from all sources, which letter describes your household's total net income? If you don't know the exact figure, please give an estimate."	scale 1-5

Social Capital		
Organisational Affiliation	"For each of the voluntary organisations I will now mention, please use this card to tell me whether any of these things apply to you now or in the last 12 months, and, if so, which." (a) A sports club or club for out-door activities?; (b) an organisation for cultural or hobby activities?; (c) an organisation for humanitarian aid, human rights, minorities, or immigrants?; (d) an organisation for environmental protection, peace or animal rights?; (e) a business, professional, or farmers' organisation?; (f) a consumer or automobile organisation?; (g) a religious or church organisation?; (h) an organisation for science, education, or teachers and parents?; (i) a social club, club for the young, the retired/elderly, women, or friendly societies? → recoded: member, participated, donated money, voluntary work (at least one positive answer)	0=no, 1=yes sum index (0-9 organisations)
Interpersonal Trust	"Using this card, generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?" "Using this card, do you think that most people would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance, or would they try to be fair?" "Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful or that they?"	0=most negative answer, 10=most positive answer sum index (0-30)

Civic Orientations		
Political Interest	"How interested would you say you are in politics?"	scale 0-3
Discussions about Politics	"Still using this card, how often would you say you discuss politics and current affairs?"	scale 1-7
Political Attentiveness	"On an average weekday, how much of your time watching television/listening to the radio/reading the newspapers is spent watching/listening to/reading about news or programmes about politics and current affairs?" → 3 questions	scale 0-7 sum index (0-21)
Internal Efficacy	"How often does politics seem so complicated that you can't really understand what is going on?" "Do you think that you could take an active role in a group involved with political issues?" "How difficult or easy do you find it to make your mind up about political issues?"	1=most negative answer, 5=most positive answer sum index (3-15)
External Efficacy	"Using this card, do you think that politicians in general care what people like you think?" "Would you say that politicians are just interested in getting people's votes rather than in people's opinions?"	1=most negative answer, 5=most positive answer sum index (2-10)
Institutional Trust and Satisfaction	"Using this card, please tell me on a score of 0-10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out." (a) Austria's parliament?; (b) the politicians? "Now thinking about the Austrian government, how satisfied are you with the way it is doing its job?" "And on the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Austria?"	0=most negative answer, 10=most positive answer sum index (0-40)

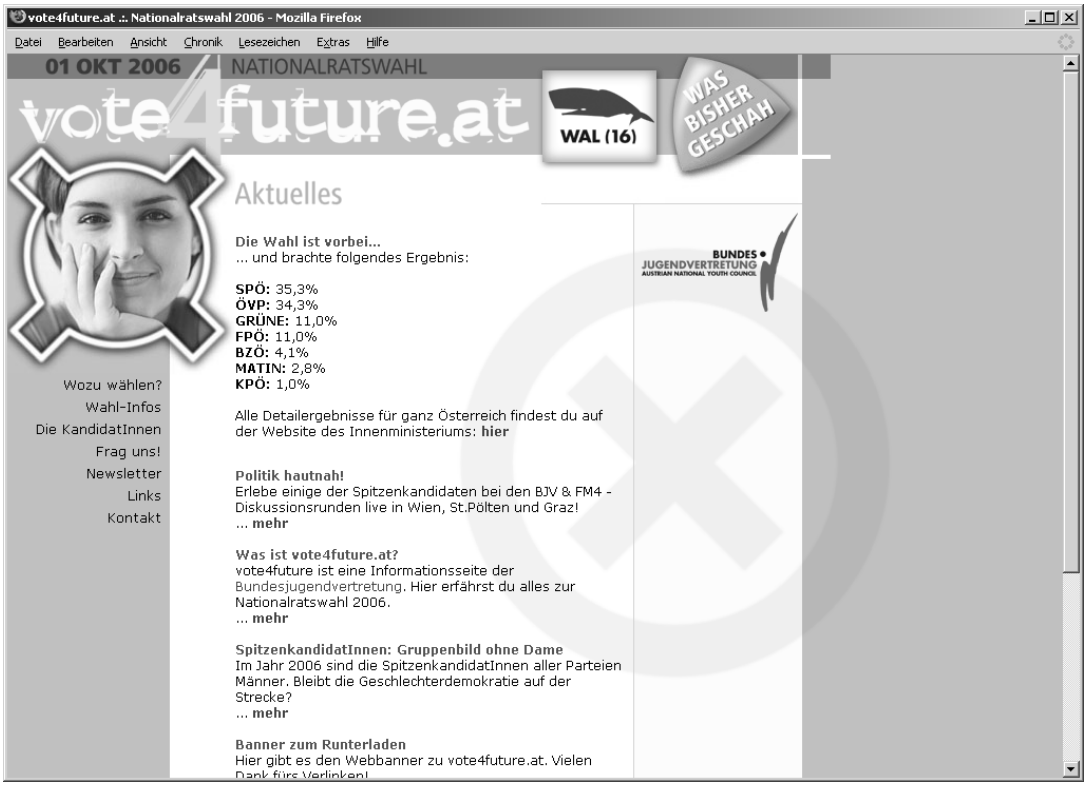
Value Orientations (based on main components analysis, see below)		
Postmaterialism	"Here we briefly describe some people. Please read each description tick the box on each line that shows how much each person is or is not like you." (a) Thinking up new ideas and being creative is important to her. She likes to do things in her own original way. (b) She thinks it is important that every person in the world should be treated equally. She believes everyone should have equal opportunities in life. (c) It is important to her to listen to people who are different from her. Even when she disagrees with them, she still wants to understand them. (d) It is important to her to make her own decisions about what she does. She likes to be free and not depend on others. (e) It's very important to her to help the people around her. She wants to care for their well-being. (f) It is important to her to be loyal to her friends. She wants to devote herself to people close to her. (g) She strongly believes that people should care for nature. Looking after the environment is important to her.	scale 1-6
Conformity	"Here we briefly describe some people. Please read each description tick the box on each line that shows how much each person is or is not like you." (a) It is important to her to live in secure surroundings. She avoids anything that might endanger her safety. (b) She believes that people should do what they're told. She thinks people should follow rules at all times, even when no-one is watching. (c) It is important to her to be humble and modest. She tries not to draw attention to herself. (d) It is important to her that the government ensures her safety against all threats. She wants the state to be strong so it can defend its citizens. (e) It is important to her always to behave properly. She wants to avoid doing anything people would say is wrong. (f) Tradition is important to her. She tries to follow the customs handed down by her religion or her family.	scale 1-6
Hedonism	"Here we briefly describe some people. Please read each description tick the box on each line that shows how much each person is or is not like you." (a) She likes surprises and is always looking for new things to do. She thinks it is important to do lots of different things in life. (b) Having a good time is important to her. She likes to "spoil" herself. (c) She looks for adventures and likes to take risks. She wants to have an exciting life. (d) She seeks every chance she can to have fun. It is important to her to do things that give her pleasure.	scale 1-6
Materialism	"Here we briefly describe some people. Please read each description tick the box on each line that shows how much each person is or is not like you." (a) It is important to her to be rich. She wants to have a lot of money and expensive things. (b) It's important to her to show her abilities. She wants people to admire what she does. (c) Being very successful is important to her. She hopes people will recognise her achievements. (d) It is important to her to get respect from others. She wants people to do what she says.	scale 1-6
all 4 value types	centred values computed for four value types following Shalom Schwartz (*Instructions for Computing Scores for the 10 Human Values and Using them in Analyses;* downloaded from http://ess.nsd.uib.no/files/2003/ESS1CodingHumanValueScale.doc)	centred human values scores based on means

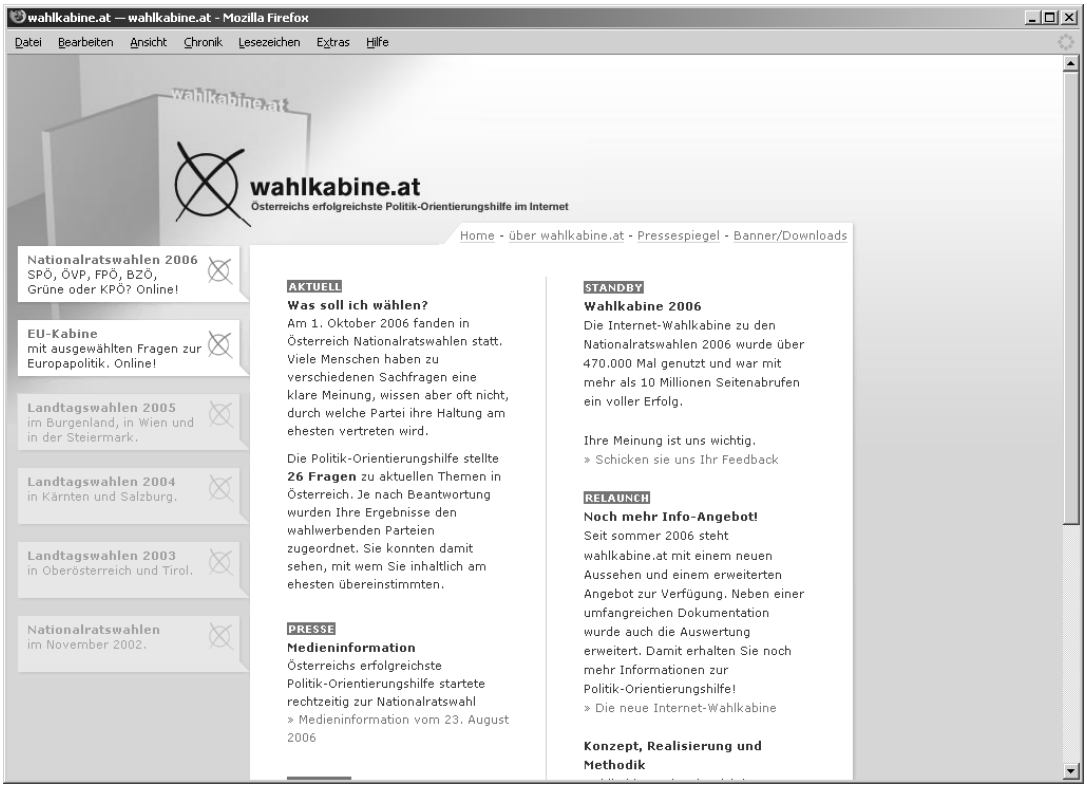
Main Components Analysis of value types

	VALUE TYPE			
	POSTMATERIALISM	CONFORMITY	HEDONISM	MATERIALISM
important to have new ideas and be creative	.46			
important that people are treated equally and have equal opportunities	.71			
important to understand different people	.72			
important to make own decisions and be free	.55			
important to help people and care for other's well-being	.66			
important to be loyal to friends	.71			
important to care for nature and environment	.70			
important to live in secure and safe surroundings		.62		
important to do what is told and follow rules		.67		
important to be humble and modest		.64		
important that government is strong and ensures safety		.69		
important to behave properly		.77		
important to follow traditions and customs		.62		
important to try new and different things in life			.66	
important to have a good time			.61	
important to seek adventures			.74	
important to seek fun and things that give pleasure			.82	
important to be rich, have money and expensive things				.54
important to show abilities and be admired				.75
important to be successful				.72
important to get respect from others				.72
Eigenvalue	**4.36**	**3.49**	**2.39**	**1.07**
Explained Variance (%)	**20.76**	**16.61**	**11.36**	**5.09**

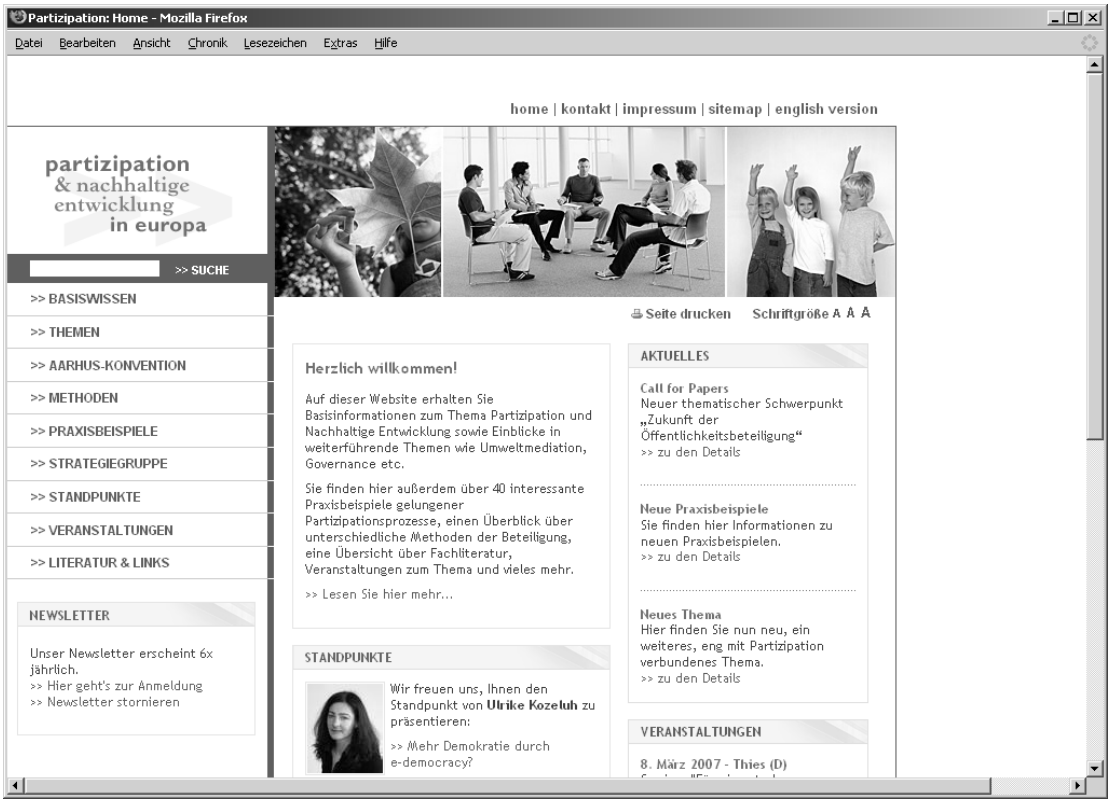
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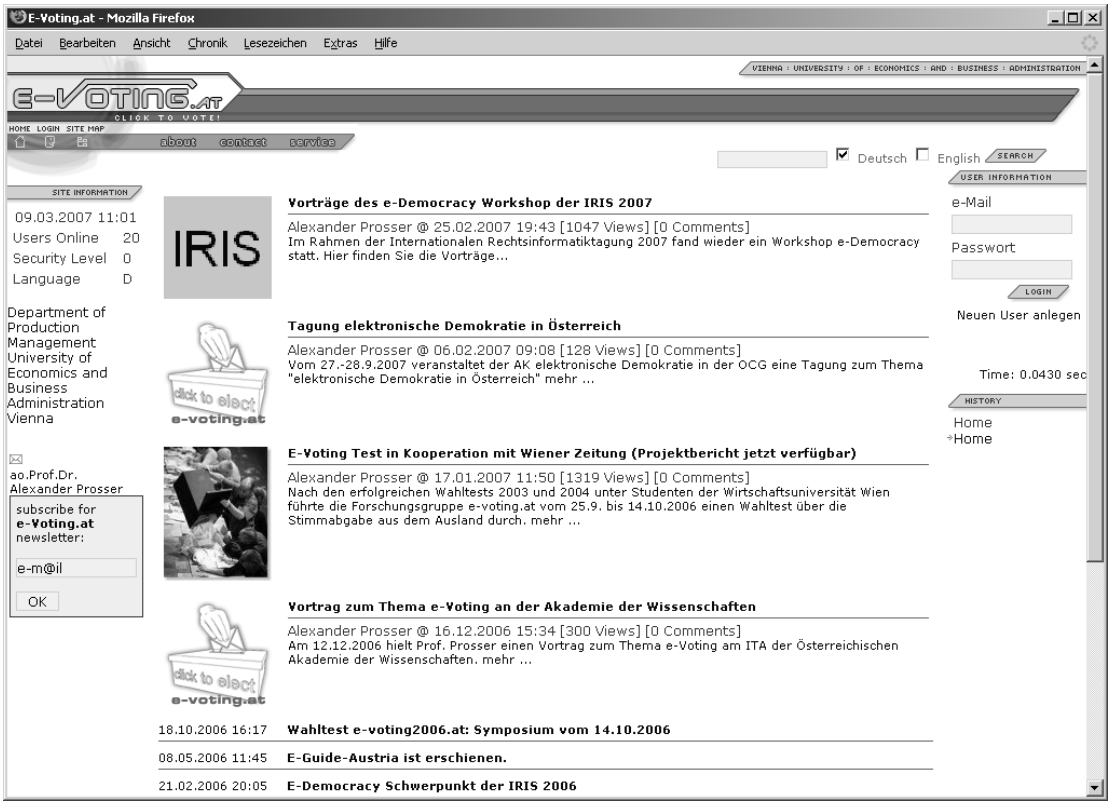
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