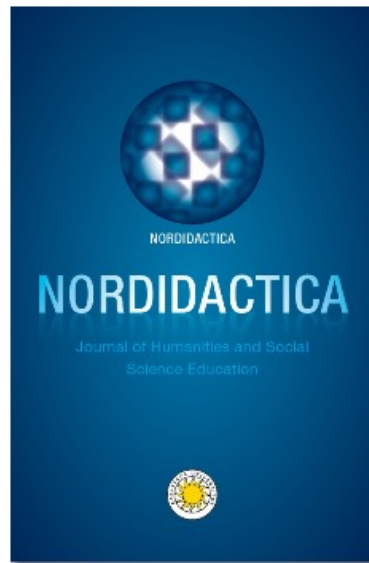# Party choice and family influence in the age of late modernity

Niels Nørgaard Kristensen & Trond Solhaug

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Party choice and family influence in the age of late modernity – Students`reflections as first-time voters in a Norwegian parliamentary election

Niels Nørgaard Kristensen, Ålborg University Denmark

Trond Solhaug, Norwegian University of Science and Technology NTNU, Norway,

Abstract: This paper analyses how young first-time voters reflect their sources of influence on when considering a choice of party as they approached the 2013 parliamentary elections in Norway. Party identification has traditionally been regarded as resulting from social (class) identity, occupation or professional belonging and family influence. This view led to the much tested hypothesis of transfer of political orientations from one generation to another (Jennings & Niemi, 1974). Later, scholars like Giddens (1991) and Beck (1986) argued that social and political orientations are first and foremost characterized by reflexivity. Based on this we hypothesize that young people's choice of party is characterized by a search for their political selves. Analysing interviews of 28 students, we found considerable support for both hypotheses where the majority voiced a strong family influence. Both groups also emphasise their independence and need for self-reflections on their choices. What characterises most of these young voter's process of finding a political party is self-reflection on influence from either family upbringing and/or influence from peers, media or school. We therefore propose that the hypotheses should be regarded as complementary rather than rival.

About the authors: Niels Nørgaard Kristensen is assistant professor of political sociology at Dept. of Political Science, Aalborg University Fibigerstræde 1, 9220 Aalborg Ø, Denmark. Email: nnk@dps.aau.dk

Trond Solhaug is Professor in social science teaching and pedagogy at Institute for Teacher Education (ILU) Norwegian University for Science and Technology, NTNU, Jonsvannsvg 82, 7491 Trondheim Norway. Email Trond.solhaug@ntnu.no

Introduction and research focus

Citizens' right to vote is at the heart of democracy, and finding a party to vote for has, since the Michigan school (Belknap & Campbell, 1952), been regarded as being influenced by the process of identification with collectives (Holmberg, 2008). The development of party identification has historically been seen as being highly influenced by social structures mediated by family, friends, school and other sources (Holmberg, 2008). Though the influence of social structures and party identification has declined in recent decades, it may still be important (Holmberg, 2008). In particular, young first-time voters are in the process of developing their political selves and identities, and finding a party to vote for is a central part of political identity formation.

Since the early 1950s, the political process of party choice (and identification) has become more complex, particularly in multiparty systems. First, fission processes in multiparty systems, such as Scandinavia's, as well as new political cleavages have resulted in an increase in the number of parties and, thus, have provided a wider range of political options. Second, the 'catch-all' orientation among parties has blurred the distinctions between them. Third, new party alignments have arisen, like the Red-Green coalition in Norway, which indicates the persistence of the left/right scale, although it has become more flexible and blurry. Fourth, class voting is on the decline (Knutsen, 2006, 2008), which has reduced social class belonging as a central guide to voting. Furthermore, social and political processes such as urbanisation, secularisation and globalisation, including the spread and use of information technology, have implied pluralisation as well as new alliances and distinctions between people (Castells, 2009). All of these changes increase the complexities regarding voters' decision-making, which point to the growing need for voter information and reflection. In most countries, schools have a special role to play in voter education. Moreover, as the paper discusses, the growing political complexity also presents a challenge to schools.

In recent decades, late modernity has led to differentiation in society as well as numerous possible life courses. Growing wealth and education give young people more options, and the development of a popular culture encourages young people to reflect upon questions such as 'who am I?' and 'who do I wish to be' (Giddens, 1991; Krange & Øia, 2005)? While in early research partisan identity was seen as a consequence of social identity, perspectives from the theory of individual life projects suggest that young people are questioning their early socialisation, not least as they approach the age of the first-time voter (Abendschön, 2013). This might complicate young people's decision-making processes even further. Consequently, our interest here is to explore how first-time voters reason and act in terms of their party choice in the face of such growing complexity.

A further sign of late modernity is the profusion of voting advice applications (hereafter VAAs), which have become very popular heuristics for a significant number of voters. These VAAs instigate questions from party platforms that voters are supposed to respond to. Based on voters' responses to a number of questions, the applications suggest a party choice to the voter. Thus, VAAs may become important guides in an increasingly blurry political landscape characterised by strategic communication

intended to attract voters (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Coleman & Blumler, 2008). We argue that the influence of social structures versus self-reflection and individual life projects is a major contemporary debate in political socialisation, which is also strongly reflected in our interview data. Our research questions are:

How did young students, as first-time voters, reflect on their sources of political voting decision-making in the 2013 parliamentary election in Norway? What implications do the findings have for political education in school?

Our data comes from interviews with 30 first-time voters who told us about their process of arriving at a party choice. The individual descriptions explicitly or implicitly indicated a process of fitting a party onto the political self or one of political identity development. We therefore advance two assumptions for our analysis, the first of which represents the 'habitus hypothesis' based on the work of Bourdieu. We hypothesise that party choice is rooted in perceived family discussions and upbringing. Contrary to this, we subsequently present the 'reflexivity hypothesis' based on various sociologists such as Giddens and Beck, which argues that party choice is first and foremost a result of young voters' reflection on their political selves and identity.

Previous research

The first field of research of interest to this study is political socialisation, which builds on a long tradition of researchers (e.g. Hyman, 1959; Greenstein, 1965; Easton & Dennis, 1969). This research saw political socialisation as a means to provide support to the political system. It was seen as a process of introduction into the political culture (Almond & Verba, 1963). It focused on knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and values in the political system, which were transmitted to individuals in order to provide systemic support. Classic works on the transmission process between family and politics include Jennings and Niemi (1974, 1975). These authors reveal substantial transmissions between generations, particularly where the parental generation is interested and shows a degree of emotions. Jennings, Stoker and Bowers (2009) have extended their analysis from earlier findings on longitudinal data, essentially confirming earlier findings. Children from politicised families that are also stable over time are more likely to adopt family political orientations. Much of the early research on political socialisation sees the individual as a passive recipient of external influences. Later studies placed greater emphasis on adolescents' cognitive development through their civic practices (Torney-Purta, 1992; Torney-Purta, Lehman, Osvald, & Schultz, 2001; Niemi & Hepburn, 1995; Biesta, 2011). These studies emphasise the process of political learning as a series of interactions in different arenas, for example, with those who are regarded as significant others by the individual, such as family, peers, media, school, organisations, etc. A relatively recent and comprehensive work is Sherrod, Torney-Purta and Flanagan (2010), a volume which focuses on civic engagement and covers new theoretical and empirical approaches to civic practices. Flanagan has convincingly argued that young people are active learners and are constructors of their experiences (Flanagan, 2013). These young people often seem to demonstrate great loyalty towards the political values of the family before gradually taking in their own political experiences and personal

values (Solhaug & Kristensen, 2014). Family influence is also strongly emphasised by Jennings, Stoker and Bowers (2009, 782): 'Early acquisition of parental characteristics influences the subsequent nature of adult political development'. In a comprehensive research project reported by Amnå, Ekstrøm and Stättin (2016), they corroborate the findings from Jennings, Stoker and Bowers (2009) that family contribution to politics seems to be dependent on the politicisation of families. Focusing on young people's dialogues, they also found (in large samples) that peer dialogue was more important than family dialogues. The present study contributes to the recent scientific research agenda by revealing the forms of contribution to young people's political attitudes and party preferences from family and other sources.

The second research tradition examined in our study is voting research. A classic theory is the Michigan Model – a theory of voter choice based primarily on sociological and political party identification factors. It was originally proposed by political scientists in the 1950s at the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center, and the model most famously appeared in *The American Voter* (Campbell et al., 1960). Its aim was to explain voting behaviour in terms of a voter's psychological attachment to a political party. According to this model, party attachment is generally stable and is formulated by outside social influences, including parents, family members and others in one's sociological environment (Holmberg, 2008). The Michigan Model is a variant and development of the hypothesis of social class voting. This line of theory argues that belonging to a social class (see Bordieu on habitus below) is the key determinant of voting behaviour. Historically, political parties grew out of political positions in class societies and institutionalised one of the most important cleavages in industrial society (Rokkan, 1987). However, voters are often argued to be generally much less wedged to party allegiances than in earlier days, and the last fifty years have steadily displayed a decline in party identification. Many writers have pointed out that 'class voting' has declined in post-industrial societies, though class orientations and loyalties persist (Knutsen, 2008). In the 1970s and 1980s, massive changes occurred in most western countries, which meant that social class was no longer the main determinant of voting behaviour. This development has induced a shift in the idea of the voter as part of a social group, with choices that are highly constrained by socio-demographic circumstances, to the idea of the voter as a rationally calculating and self-interested individual. This transformation is often summarised as a paradigm shift: from the 'dependent' voter to the rational or 'judgemental' voter (Scammell, 2014, p. 127). This has led to class de-alignment and the breakdown of the long-term association of a social class with support for a particular party. Voters have taken on a more individualistic orientation, increasingly becoming 'swing' voters who float from party to party in various elections. Consequently, a stronger exploratory micro-focus is needed to understand voter behaviour.

In recent decades, late modernity has led to increasing differentiation in society. Several theorists in the vein of Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens have argued for increased reflexivity in society, in institutions as well as in individuals, which implies that individuals are unable to rely on tradition in the creation of their self-identity. In late modern society, the self is solely a reflexive project for which the individual is

responsible (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). According to Thomas Ziehe (1989), cultural emancipation and modernity have caused people to become much more emancipated from objectively predetermined structures, in particular, from the symbolic foundation of tradition. The consequence of this is primarily an upgrading of the meaning of subjectivity.

However, the possible influence of social groups on first-time voters' decisions should not be ignored, and neither should the social environment. Bourdieu (1986) offers a dispositional theory of social practice through the concept of habitus. The idea here is that human individuals incorporate the objective social structures in which they are socialised in the shape of mental or cognitive structures. Therefore, increased reflexivity does not just lead us to reflect arbitrarily. Reflections are shaped by our habitus as well as by praxis, and we should consider the role of family and social environment in our analysis of the reflections of our informants on party choice and political identity.

Theory: Political socialisation and two rival hypotheses of party choice

In our approach to the study of young people's process of choosing a party, we take a political learning perspective and see young people as active constructors of their knowledge and political landscape. In line with this perspective, Flanagan (2013) has argued for treating politics and socialisation as a domain of experience and knowledge, as opposed to political socialisation accounts where young people are more or less passive recipients of influence from older generations. She maintains that adolescents' worldly ideals are constructed and internalised from their actions with others. Individual political theories are built on the basis of memberships in groups and institutions like peer groups, schools and community-based institutions—spaces where young people enact what it means to be part of a group (Flanagan, 2013). However, we argue that family experiences are a very important reservoir from which young people choose to adopt knowledge, habits, values and emotions, including ideas about voting and politics. In what follows, we combine Bourdieu's theoretical concept of 'habitus' and Giddens' concept of 'reflexive modernity' as an analytical framework for analysing students' descriptions of their process of choosing a political party. We argue that the concept of 'habitus' allows for both structuralist and individualist perspectives, which are needed in order to reveal the breadth of students' cognitive processes regarding party choice. Combining the theories of habitus and reflexive modernity is also consistent with the political learning perspective described above.

Bourdieu: Voter 'habitus' and party choice

Bourdieu understands all praxis as social. In *Distinction* (1984), he displays a comprehensive analysis of taste and illuminates how particular objective living conditions generate particular ways of perceiving, judging and acting in the world and, thus, how various tastes function as markers of 'class'.

> *Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 6)*

The same underlying and structuring logic applied here will, according to Bourdieu, function in all fields, and the same mechanisms of classifications and distinctions can be expected to be valid in politics. Thus, political opinions (related to certain political issues) also work as an expression of lifestyle and political identity – and they have a social function as markers of class. For analyses of social differences in political opinions, this link between objective structures and an actor's mental structures and praxis is the fundamental strength of Bourdieu's concept of class. In Bourdieu's perspective, it is relevant to study the relationship between objective and structural circumstances. However, this linkage cannot be properly understood without the mediating structure of 'habitus'. Together, the various intentions and resources of individuals form a dispositional structure ('habitus'), which is manifested in attitudes towards the political – in political participation and in social and political identity. According to Bourdieu, habitus is closely linked to the individual's objective position in the social space, as it is formed by the opportunities and constraints that this position reveals. Habitus therefore designates an acquired disposition and acts as:

> *Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53)*

Bourdieu's overall point is that all socialisation works as an embodiment of social structures, which the individual carries around. When Bourdieu talks of incorporation or embodiment, he tries to stress that this impact is not intentional, but rather, it functions as a sort of 'mechanism' that is imprinted in the body. A simple illustration of an acquired pattern of action which the body – once learned – is able to perform without the use of reflection is riding a bike, or the ways in which people speak in accented form or perform a specific dialect. Many people do this throughout their lives without many changes. On the contrary, habitus is not programmed or genetically encoded, nor is it built to work forever. Habitus is lasting, but it is not definite and unchangeable. It can be redirected by later changes in life – like moving to another region or part of the world. It is a disposition – or a system of dispositions, understood as tendencies to do certain things in specific ways – rather than a certain type of coercion. Habitus always works in a social setting, and according to this type of setting, habitus may vary, which constrains an accurate prediction of it. Habitus and the given social spaces delimit the conditions for an individual's positioning. Habitus and the possessions of cultural capital, which it designates, are extremely important for individuals and their ability to position themselves. Through upbringing, socialisation and education, families try to reproduce or recreate their cultural capital within coming

generations. The lifestyle, or the cultural capital, is then passed on from generation to generation.

Thus, the concept of habitus can be seen as a theory of action that contrasts other rival theories of action. On one hand, there is the subjectivist idea that human actions are the result of intentional and rational decisions, and on the other hand, there is the objectivist idea that human actions are mechanically determined by objective structures. The first notion resembles the rational agent of economic theory making informed choices in a free market. In this notion, there is an idea of a voluntarist actor freed from all constraints and acting intentionally and determinedly. At the micro-level, it borrows basic understandings from economic theory (e.g. Downs, 1957; Schumpeter, 1950). All action, in this theory, is instrumentalist and is based on calculations of returns. Actions based on habitus may also be intentional, but they may also be unintentional. Moreover, the theory of habitus departs from structural determinism, whereby actions, thinking and attitudes are prescribed in modes and relations of production (like in structural Marxist philosophy), in the structures of the brain (structural ethnology) or in the structures of the psyche (psychoanalysis), and action is determined by circumstances 'outside' of the individual. Contrary to other theories, Bourdieu offers a dispositional theory of habitus whereby human individuals incorporate objective social structures, under which they are socialised, in the shape of mental or cognitive structures. Specifically, these can be seen as cognitive dispositions that lead individuals to think, act and understand the social world in certain ways. Such cognitive dispositions, however, always work in relation to situations with particular objective structures, which Bourdieu calls fields. The idea of habitus allows for greater individual variation, albeit within certain frames, which subsequently have to be established. The concept of habitus represents Bourdieu's attempt at building a middle ground between the determinism of structuralism and the existentialism of voluntarism. It establishes the link between an agents' social position and his/her praxis (positioning). In modern society, the two main sources of habitus are the socialisation of family and of the system of education unleashing differential forms of habitus. The incorporation of social structures goes on through the insensible influence from these positions within the structure, that is, as an imprinting experience of distinctions. As a lasting, acquired and socially differentiated system of dispositions, the concept of habitus can be used to explain why people act as they do.

> *Habitus is the embodiment of the social structures and encompasses cognitive, motivational, and bodily structures. Of special relevance to the study of political opinions, this includes, e.g., cognitive capacity, a tendency to search for and comprehend new information, attitudes (in a bodily sense) expressed during political discussion, the language spoken and so on. (Slothuus, 2005, p. 80)*

What unifies Bourdieu and theorists like Giddens is their common rejection of both structural determinism, as well as profound voluntarist explanations, and the sharing of a common goal of reaching beyond objectivism and subjectivism. What separate them are their explanations of action: Bourdieu offers a theory on social praxis and helps to explain patterns of action – he basically suggests a 'homology' between social and

mental patterns. To put it succinctly, we condensate these elements of Bourdieu's theoretical thinking as *the habitus hypothesis*.

Giddens: Late modernity and party choice

Giddens' approach to analyses of modernisation is based on his theory of structuration (Giddens, 1984), whose background is situated in theories and analyses of modernisation (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994). Giddens offers a theory of social praxis, which helps to explain the processes of emancipation and self-actualisation of modern society. His sociology emphasises that late modernity is characterised by information seeking and reflexivity (Giddens, 1998). The ways in which people reason about politics, pursue their interests and reach decisions, in other words, involve information processing by individuals. This prescribes the reflexive, self-expressive individual as a basic characteristic of late modernity, which is essential to the emergence of what Giddens calls 'lifestyle politics' (Giddens, 1991). Theorists of late modernity (Giddens, Beck, & Lash, 1994) emphasise that individuals create their own biography without being bound by traditions. Consequently, they are 'freed' and are able to establish their self-identity through lifestyles and choice-making. The processes of self-identity and reflexivity may be illustrated like this: identities are activated when they serve the purpose or background for the judgments of situations. Humans formulate issues, get responses and reflect in an ongoing process that involves feedback on how they see themselves (Stets & Burke, 2006, p. 130). According to Giddens, information seeking and processing are vital parts of modern agency, and the mass media provides basic tools for participation in democratic public life. Modern social life, though, assumes that new information is always reflected upon in a constant surveillance of social practice (Giddens, 1991).

Processes of self-identity and reflexivity come into play and develop gradually throughout individuals' lives. Identity, for example, is no longer experienced only as something taken over from the social base, where life as a whole is mapped out in the personal biographies determined during childhood. Consequently, identity constitutes sources and resources of meaning for individuals, and it is made and constructed by social actors through processes of individualisation (Giddens, 1991). Identities can be ascribed to and originate from predominant institutions, but they only become identities if and when individuals internalise them and use them for the construction of meaning. This implies that political identity is no longer experienced only as adopted from a group or the immediate social environment. Rather, life as a whole is mapped out in personal biographies, and identities are to a large extent constructed by the individual.

In the work of Ziehe (1989), cultural emancipation produces a peculiar double-sided tendency: people become much more emancipated from objectively predetermined structures and, in particular, emancipated from the symbolic foundation of tradition. Never before have so many people had so much time, so many material opportunities, so much psychological attention, so much societal symbolism and so many images to bring forth happiness in mind and speech in relation to their own suffering, relations with other people and the need for communication. However, with this upgrading of the

meanings of reality and the simultaneous downgrading of the guidance of tradition, people also become more exposed and more vulnerable. To sum up, we name this general line of thinking *the reflexivity hypothesis*.

Methodology

Data collection procedure

The data for this study were collected by preservice teacher students (hereafter interviewers) specialising in teaching social/political science in their final (master's) year of the teacher education programme at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. The first-time voters were selected from interviewer's schools for teacher practice located in a city and countryside in Norway. The interviews were carried out in these schools. The interviewers attended a seminar, which introduced them to ethical considerations like the needs for a standard information letter to all students and parents, students' voluntary participation and guaranteed anonymity regarding all information. For the specific theoretical field of approaches to political socialisation, the methodological considerations called for an open-ended interview procedure by the researchers (Gibbs, 2002). Since interviews are most often '… the joint production of accounts or versions of experiences, emotions, identities, knowledge, opinions, truth' (Rapley, 2004, p.16), we pointed out some critical measures in the seminar to allow for the students' most spontaneous voices in order to minimise the influence from interviewers. We strongly emphasised that interviewers should avoid leading questions but instead search for the young students' most spontaneous responses to the challenge: 'can you elaborate how you came up with a party to vote for?' We also emphasised a listening attitude and dialogue with open-ended follow-up questions on the intended research focus. Questions on neutrality and subjectivity were thoroughly considered during the discussion regarding interviews. The interviewers were given general selection criteria in order to maximise difference and, more specifically, to ensure a mixture of gender, political interests, ethnic Norwegians and immigrants, different schools and school classes and also to avoid interdependence among the respondents. The respondents were then selected from 6 different schools and 16 different classes that were equally distributed between the schools. The selected respondents are indicated in the table below.

In the selection of 28 young voters, there are 13 males, 15 females, 6 immigrants, 5 who were not interested in politics and 10 somewhat interested, 2 non-voters, and 1 'blank voter' (Y-B); four of them did not use the VAAs. Such a variety of students strengthens our analysis and research.

TABLE 1

Codes, Gen = gender (M = male; F = female), Age, Imm = Immigrant (Y = Yes; N = No), P-Int = Political interest (Y = yes; N = No; some), Voted (Y = Yes; N = No), VAAs = participated in VAAs (Y = yes; N = No)

Code	AG1	AG2	AG3	AG4	AG5	BH1	BH2	BH3	BH4	BH5	CB1	CB2	CB3	CB4
Gen	F	M	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	M	F	F	M	M
Age	17	18	18	18	18	17	17	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
Imm	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
P-Int	Y	Y	N	Y	some	Y	Y	Y	Y	some	some	some	some	Y
Voted	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
VAAs	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y

Code	DA1	DA2	DA3	DA4	EK1	EK2	EK3	EK4	FS1	FS2	FS3	FS4	FS5	FS6
Gen	F	M	F	F	F	F	F	M	M	F	F	M	F	F
Age	19	21	20	20	18	17	17	18	18	18	18	17	18	18
Imm	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
P-Int	some	Y	N	some	N	Y	N	N	Y	some	some	some	some	Y
Voted	Y	Y-B	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
VAAs	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y

Together with the researchers, the interviewers transcribed their interviews and presented the results in a second seminar. This last seminar was part of the interview validation and discussion of interpretations with the researchers, which was aimed at supporting research interpretations and reducing problems of bias (Tjora, 2009). By inviting students to collect data, we also allowed for a greater variety of conversations between younger people, thereby hopefully reducing researcher bias. We argue that finding similarities across such a variety of dialogues strengthens our conclusions. However, we acknowledge that as researchers, we were not able to get the lively impressions from a conversation, with follow-up opportunities, and that this made us more dependent on the transcripts and text.

Analytical procedures

All the interviews were read, and we selected those parts that elaborated on sources of political influence and party choice. These parts were reread, translated, and a preliminary explorative analysis was conducted. Based on the preliminary reading and empirical analysis, we chose the contradictory hypothesis (habitus vs. modernist reflexive) perspective of the paper. We grouped our respondents' statements according to how they voiced the influence from a particular family/social background versus showing greater independent reflectivity. Other group differences like boys and girls,

immigrants and majority population and interested and non-interested in politics were considered, but we could not identify group-specific answers with an acceptable level of certainty. In search of an interpretation of the commonalities among students, we went back and forth from theory to our respondents' reflections. In this process, we arrived at a theoretical basis of Bourdieu's habitus and Beck/Giddens' reflexive modernity as fruitful approaches to develop our interpretations and further analyses of data. In this analysis, we explored the differences between the two main groups and then asked what these groups of students had in common in terms of their reflections. In the following empirical analysis, we display excerpts from these two groups, which were carefully selected to show the variety and similarities of viewpoints and attitudes among the students.

Results

In what follows, we present excerpts from students in two main groups. We focus on how students voice their family experiences as the most important source of habitus formation.

The habitus hypothesis

The first students were quite clear and normative: 'I do believe that one should vote like their parents. …I did vote like mine…and I did emphasise what could bring Norway forward in my choice'. The student went on to reveal some of the family dynamics:

> *AG1: Actually, my parents said that I should vote independently, but you are raised in a certain culture, so I voted for the Red party [one of the 3 red parties] like them because we all believe that this party is best for the country…as pointed out, family is most important, but I have also discussed a lot of politics with my friends. Friends may have a strong influence, as almost everyone in the class voted for one x [chose not to identify party choice] party.*

Few students would perhaps express so clearly that they should vote (as a moral act?) like their parents. The family's 'taste for the political *red*' classifies as being 'raised in a culture' that encompasses the embodied experience of being red versus parties of other political colours. Despite such a politically reddish culture, parents encourage their children to exercise their independence and autonomy in finding their political way. Such parental attitudes were supported by other students like FS2:

> *FS2: At the beginning [of the voting process], I did not get to know my parents' party choice…they wanted me to find a party of my own. …at home, I always have to find out anything on my own, but of course, I experience their views from their comments, who they support and who they dislike.*

> *Interviewer: Is family neutral?*

> *FS2: No, they aren't. Indirectly, they tell you which party they vote for, and actually, I am most likely influenced by them. I don't really know if this party is the right one, but I may find that out later.*

The student emphasised how parents transmit their views by revealing their personal attitudes, which children learn to read early on. Despite parents' insistence on their child's self-determination, the feeling of what 'mom and dad' think is good or bad seems to become strong guidelines (heuristics) in political reasoning. Several students recounted similar stories of support for autonomy and political independence along with strong indirect influence from childhood:

> *HB3: I am certainly not influenced by my friends, on the contrary. ...My family has influenced me, maybe not directly, but they raised me! Though voting is a secret thing in our family, I know their viewpoints. The media also has some influence...but they could not change my mind.*

> *EK1: ...I remember being with mom voting as a child, but it wasn't like I remembered it, but voting was ok. ...Actually, I think my mom and dad as well as my boyfriend have influenced me most...*

> *EK2: Well...it [voting decision] is to a large extent about influence from parents. I think childhood and adolescence are very important, at least in my case. I am most certainly influenced by my parents.*

The students were strikingly conscious about their family experiences becoming embodied experiences – 'they raised me'… Without using the word taste, we argue that they told stories of how taste is transmitted and embodied in them. Family discussions and non-verbal acts serve as models, and voters are behaviour transmission mechanisms. Modelling is most likely important, Bandura argues, but it is difficult to reveal students' memories and tell its exact influence (Bandura, 1997). Despite a clear influence from childhood, a variety of heuristics comes into play:

> *AG2: I have been active in the labour youth organisation for years, and therefore, I should vote labour, of course. My parents vote the socialist left party, so my choice is socialist, albeit more moderate. I am not overly influenced by friends, but I am an immigrant, and immigrants usually vote red.*

> *DA4: I don't have enough knowledge, and my opinions are influenced from my childhood. I always felt it was safe to choose what my family considered to be good for them, who they voted for and why. But at the same time, things that are important to me and what I am really concerned about have also influenced my choice.*

Both of these students emphasised family influence, but social identity and a feeling of what is safe seemed to influence their choice and work as heuristics in their process of finding a party. However, the students also showed independence, and party choice was far from being blindly adopted, as shown by this student:

> *AG4: Yes, there is a connection between family experience and voting. I didn't vote like mama, but she raised me to be what I am so… We are fairly equal. But I voted for a pretty similar party because I have my own reflections.*

> *HB2. To put it this way, I know I don't like the blue parties, so I tend to disagree just from hearing them in the election campaign. I have also become more certain about my choice…Who has influenced you? I am influenced by*

> *my father, by what he has been saying; if we go for a walk and observe something related to politics, we talk fairly openly about it...*

Once again, these students were strikingly clear about family influence and pointed to the students' 'habitus' of embodied experiences over time. In some cases, the role of family became a 'joint political relationship', like this father-son relation. The family may also be the arena of direct political socialisation, like the following student descriptions:

> *HB5: My whole family votes for the Labour Party. Frankly, I didn't have a clue of what to vote for. Therefore, dad explained the policies of the different parties and particularly about FRP (Progressive Party) which I didn't know and didn't like...*

> *EK3: It [voting] was exciting... I was a bit nervous in the box...arriving at a decision... [EK3 continues to explain that she was uncertain and confused, and then her mom replied: "Thou shall vote!!"]. So we sat down to explore the different party policies and tried to find out which party was my best choice. She asked (and showed respect) for my opinions and what party would be the best choice for me. I think that my parents and the media influence me the most.*

> *FS5: My parents and where I grew up... it is very similar...Lots of people where I come from voted for the same party as I...Regarding whether my family is neutral: well, I listen to what they say, their thoughts, opinions and who they are going to vote for.*

Habitus or the embodied political and non-political experience of growing up in a family is a dispositional theory which means that party choice is not determined. All of the students' embodied experiences of discussions, attitudes, modelling and support for independent decisions and autonomy shape their cognitive structures. Families are very important mediators of such social and cognitive structures and transmit these intentionally or unintentionally to their children. Reading the last three excerpts on the students' reports on family influence reveal that family upbringing categorically supports students' dispositions, even though parents encourage independent decision-making.

To summarise, the above excerpts leave little doubt that family upbringing also condenses political experiences that are embodied in the majority of the students. However, family influence takes a variety of forms in students' political socialisation, particularly in their voting decisions. First, the many forms of taste are strongly transmitted in the family through conversations, discussions, modelling or other non-verbal signals and shape students political habitus. This in turn structures students' perceptions of how they act upon the world. The fact that most of our students voted in a similar manner as one or both parents might be a sign of a transmitted structure. Second, parents' voting and attitudes seem, in particular, to transmit through students' perceptions of good and bad, which are often accompanied by positive and negative feelings. Other guidelines included social identity or the obligation to vote. Trust, support for autonomy, self-reflection and students' independent decision-making regarding voting choice seem to characterise parents' attitudes. Third, the political

influence of the family takes many forms, such as heuristics, 'educational' forms and/or non-verbal signals. Modelling takes place in families all the time, such as father-son political discussions, or the child observing her mother at the ballot box. Fourth, families seem to encourage and trust their children in the support for autonomy and reflections over party choice. There is little sign of parents telling their children who to vote for. Consequently, there is considerable support for the hypothesis of a working habitus and, in particular, family influence among our students. Having said this, we believe that family influence accompanies support for students' autonomy and independent decision-making. Although 'influence' is the common concept in the transmission of political attitudes between parents and children, the 'adoption' of political views emphasising students as active subjects rather than passive recipients might be a better notion. We shall return to this in the discussion.

The late modernity and reflexivity hypothesis

In this section, we present quite a few students who voiced that their family background was of little influence to them and that they should more accurately be characterised by their independent reflexivity in the choice of political party. However, some students were indeed characterised by 'leaving home', as they approach the task of finding a party. The respondent AG3 explained:

> *AG3: There were election news on all channels, and they tried to make us vote. During the election campaign, I changed party many times. It was so confusing, and I changed my mind all the time….but in the end, certain issues were decisive for my choice, including tests on the net regarding voting advice applications (VAAs) and reading articles... But family is also important, …they raised me into who I am, and we are very much alike. So family surely influences voting for many. But I voted differently for a small party because I had my own opinion. My family supported me.*

Once again, habitus and the embodied family structures are very important. Despite this voiced influence, the student finally breaks with it, thereby showing independent reflexivity on personal opinions. This student describes himself as uncertain, but in the end, he voted for a certain party, which resulted from peer influence. He also displayed the dilemma between family upbringing and the feeling of becoming independent. Particularly, taken-for-granted loyalties may be questioned when faced with voting realities.

> *BH1: I have always liked the Labour Party and always liked their values and the likes. And then I became uncertain and wanted to look for alternatives, and I took at least 10 VAAs. But, since it's only data, what is most important to me are different issues, and the choice between two parties [outcome of VAA tests] became a dilemma…I have not discussed much with mom and dad, but I don't think they have influenced me.*

The student continued by explaining that she went around the 'election market' in town to talk and explore issues and ended up with a choice between labour and the right wing, which have traditionally been opposed to each other. Exploring new alternatives also makes choices more difficult, as the information may not be reliable or may be

insufficient. Thus, political 'taste' may change as students mature, but the story reveals a search for making a well-informed choice grounded in herself, and to leave as little as possible to voting by chance. Such a cognitive rational approach also characterises most of our students.

Some students have very specific stories about their voting decision processes, such as the following two.

> *BH4: How was I influenced? I saw an NRK TV programme, and there was a foreigner who talked to politicians on issues and their opinions about them. My decision was very much based on information from these programmes. The programme helped me a lot. I voted differently from my family, and I am not overly influenced by them.*

> *CB3: How was the process of finding a party to vote for? ...A school debate initiated my interest. There were lots of discussions with family and friends. I learned a lot from these and reading party pages and making up my mind ... I also used the VVAs, and there was some influence from friends.*

These students seemed to be more detached from references to their habitus and more situated in modern reflectivity and what 'tastes' politically acceptable. Their reasoning is characterised by greater emphasis on independent reflexive choices, but independence and making an informed choice are apparent among them.

> *CB1: After inquiring into the parties, I soon found out which of them I agreed with. I then continued to research it to be sure about my choice.*

> *CB2: I decided on my choice [Insists on being completely self-determined in making her choice].*

> *DA1: As I said before, I like the Labour Party. I have read papers and watched TV and decided that Labour was the best party.*

We argue that 'taste' matters for party choice and that '…agree with…' and …'like'… are all expressions of taste. These students do not voice the influence of a habitus, although such influence may certainly still be there. However, their reflectivity is in the foreground. Two issues are striking here: first, the informed rationality approach to the election as well as the insistence on independence, particularly from family influence. This is particularly the case for CB2, who might have tried to avoid an immigrant stigma (authors' interpretation). A special case of making an informed choice is represented in the next quote.

> *DA2: I casted a blank vote in protest. I considered voting for the 'Pirate Party', but they did not come up with a proper programme before the election. I then considered two other parties but ended up voting 'blank' or no party. …I disagree with all parties on some issues, and I found it impossible to keep my disagreements at an acceptable level, so I decided to vote blank.*

The process of 'fitting a party onto the self' might be difficult as the parties try to 'catch all'. Once again, it can be said that the guy 'tasted them all but avoided swallowing'. This rational process of 'fitting a party onto the self' is also characterised by the following three respondents, although they also seem to compromise more on their choices than the 'blank' voter.

> *DA3: Simply the party that I agree with on most issues. Both before the campaign, and after, I took the VAA. …Friends and media had some influence on my choice.*

> *FS3: In my choice…I considered which party was best for me. My parents voted differently, so I am uncertain of their influence – maybe the media; I watched debates and these made me find parties that I liked.*

> *FS4: I arrived at a decision by considering what Norway needed the most, school, roads, etc. Some information came from 'flyers' and my own [reflection], less from family background.*

The process of reflectivity may also reveal different strategies such as 'agreed most with', 'like' and the 'intellectual perspective that Norway needed', but these are all signs of reflexivity.

Voting is also a symbol of an initiation rite into the electorate of responsible citizens, which in itself might be exciting for some, as in the excerpt below.

> *FS6: Experience of voting? Oh…very exciting, I can see…that my…that my vote counts …how Norway should be!! But I was very uncertain.*

To summarise, independence and reflexivity were most apparent among many of our students, as most of them downplayed the role of family influence on their choice of party. Some students emphasised the transition from childhood to growing independence; some declared their complete independence; and some referred to the absence of family political discussion and direct influence. Issues, media, role models, debates and occasional events generated reflexive practices and might have been decisive in the final choice. They all told stories representing a serious rational approach and attempt to fit a party onto their political selves, but more students voiced their insecurity about their choice. These observations lend support for the reflexivity hypothesis.

Discussion

All our respondents were inspired by their experiences and acquaintances in the voting process, in particular, their upbringing in their families as well as their self-reflections and peer discussions. Interestingly, many of them were also able to point out the precise 'trigger point' that initiated their political interest, like a certain political event, an inspiring school teacher, influence from friends or discussions in the family.

Both of our theoretical assumptions (habitus vs. reflectivity hypotheses) were clearly supported in the data, and the respondents by and large were neatly grouped into two overall categories. The first of these consisted of students who voiced strong influence, some loyalty and political taste grounded in their family background and family values. The young people here often seemed to lean on a certain model consisting of the political orientation of their parents. In the first stages of their political life, they often seemed to demonstrate great loyalty towards the political values of the family before gradually taking in their own political experiences and personal values (Solhaug & Kristensen, 2014). Having said this, the students also employed a reflexive approach to

voting, regardless of their views on political socialisation in their families. In other words, there was also support for their need for autonomy in terms of parents' attitudes as well as in the students' comments and reflectivity. *The fact that the students both emphasised their embodied family experiences and voiced their own reflectivity and their families' support for it is perhaps the main finding in the study.*

The second group downplayed family influence and took on a more autonomous and reflexive approach to the voting process, emphasising peers, media and school as sources of influence. Some students had very specific stories of their reflections on the voting decision process. These responses clearly support the reflexivity hypothesis.

Theoretically, we have argued that taste classifies and that the students' family experiences seemed to develop a political taste for their orientations. Party choice is one of these 'landmarks' in the political landscape that is reflected in family experiences. We also argue that late modernity has led to differentiation, causing student voters to become more emancipated from objectively predetermined structures and, in particular, emancipated from the symbolic foundations of tradition. Not least, individual life projects have generated a need for reflexive processes among young people. Family influence as well as student autonomy, reflection and independence were strikingly apparent in our first group. This process of 'fitting a party onto the self' significantly distinguishes the narrowing down of the instrumental and goal-oriented rational decision-making process. For these respondents, continuously seeking validation of their planned party choice seemed highly important. This process reflects the common doctrine of representative democracy that voters should make an informed choice of a party or candidate on the basis of announced political programmes (Whiteley, 2012). It also denotes a state of hyper-reflexivity, which we believe is quite common to many modern voters. These findings and our analysis of the two hypotheses lead us to the conclusion that the hypotheses should be seen as overlapping and complementary rather than rival and antithetical. This is, we believe, a profound new insight derived from this study. The voting process of adolescents is *neither* related to tradition and socialisation *nor* to reflexivity and rationality. Rather, it is a complex synthetizing of accounts of both camps of theories of human and political action. Reflection is not explicitly 'modern', but simply characterises human activity, not least in the process of becoming someone leaving home and voting for parties. This is also apparent in a final finding in the study that *many of the respondents seemed to be voting on the basis of pure idealism characterised by information seeking, combined with a political taste for viewpoints.* They typically reason about what is the best situation for the country or the environment; they want more information or cannot find any party to vote for. Above all, the students' stories are characterised by making informed choices, and some students voiced uncertainty about their choices. There were no signs from the students that the perceived political complexity led to randomly picking a political party or other forms of 'irrationality'.

Conclusions

First, we conclude that the hypothesised influence from family background gained strong support from the majority of respondents. Despite that many students emphasised family influence, they also noted that their families encouraged them to make an independent choice. Most of the students also reflected thoroughly on their choices, and no one actually reported that he/she unreflectively adopted a family voting habit. A second conclusion is therefore that family political influence is characterised by reflectivity, an influence from late modernity.

Third, a group of respondents seemed to downplay the role of family influence on party choice. Rather, they either emphasised other sources of influence or saw themselves as totally independent in their choice of party. Their process is characterised by thorough information seeking and reflectivity, particularly over which party 'fits', and how they see themselves and their political identity (Kristensen & Solhaug, 2017). A fourth and final conclusion is that the habitus and reflexivity hypotheses should be regarded as complementary rather than rival.

Implications for voter education

First, students may regard school as an apolitical arena, and therefore teachers have to prove their respect for most political views within ethical frameworks of conversation and laws of freedom of expression in order to gain students' trust and foster engagement in class.

A general implication from the students' reflectivity is that school should strongly support discussion from experiences and support autonomy in teaching approaches. Students' 'out of school' experiences may often feed discussions that are seen as important to the class and also situate school and political education in the local, national and global communities. Building on students' experiences, political education may come closer to their real life and support the purpose of reflectivity, which all students seem to desire. Real life experiences (Flanagan, 2013) seem to be very important to wrestle with in school in order to be connected to society, family, peer groups or other significant experiences. Theoretically, we argue along with Klafki that support for political autonomy should characterise political education (Klafki, 2001). The human need for autonomy and self-determination is further emphasised by Deci and Ryan (2000; Ryan & Deci, 2003). Educational support for autonomy builds on teachers' trust and support for their students' capabilities to handle challenges and that they are capable of finding their political way in the complex political landscape. We argue that school has a political potential to offer real life experiences of particularly controversial issues (Hess, 2009) of presumed importance to students. School may also offer support for students' reflexive processes and the need to find their own way toward a political self that fits (Kristensen & Solhaug, 2017).

A political self may consist of how a person relates to the broad field of politics. It could be voting, sympathies/antipathies, participation, solidarity or critical issues of various kinds. A political self is often important in managing relations of any political

kind. Consequently, political education in school should focus less on the facts of the formal political system and more on students' experiences, reflexivity and finding of their political selves.

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