Party choice and family influence in the age of modernity:
Students´ reflections on sources of political influence on their party choice as first time voters in a Norwegian election.

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Abstract

This paper focuses on how young, first-time voters reflect on the sources of influence on their party choice, as they approach recent (2013) parliamentary election in Norway for the first time. Party identification has traditionally been seen as a result of family influence on social (class) identity or professional belonging. This is well documented by the Michigan school of political research in the sixties (Converse, 1960; Holmberg, 2008). This view has led to the much tested hypothesis of transfer of political orientations from one generation to another (Jennings & Niemi 1974). Later, modernists like Giddens (1991) or Beck (1986) argue that social and political orientations are first and foremost characterized by reflexivity. This imply that young people’s social and political orientations are a result of their reflections of self, and their identity, and perceptions of whom they wish to constitute their self as. In this process, their upbringing and cultural background are less predominant, which lead to the hypothesis that; young people’s choice of party as first time voters is first and foremost a result of their self-reflections and search for their political self. A selection of 30 first-time voters in upper secondary school was interviewed about their party choice. In the analytical procedures we read and coded the interviews on self-reported family influence and self-reported reflexivity. We found that young voters reflect considerably over their choice, but the influence of family environment was surprisingly strong. A majority of the voters reported that their upbringing has had strong influence on their orientations, particularly where parents showed great political interest. In the analysis of voters’ reasoning, all of the voters somehow acted rationally using available information from a variety of sources for reflective purposes. Particularly, these first-time voters
reflected on party choice and their political self, but the family influence was most often voiced as basis for their reflections. This way the hypothesised family influence is supported more strongly than the modernity hypothesis. We suggest that political education should take account of this and allow for reflexivity in the formation of the students’ political self.

*Keywords*: Political identity, first-time voters, Voter Advice Applications, participation, social studies, voter education.
Introduction and Research Focus

Citizens’ right to vote is at the heart of democracy. Finding a party to vote for has, since the Michigan school (Belknap & Campbell, 1952), been regarded as influenced by the process of identification with collectives (Holmberg, 2008). Though party identification has declined somewhat 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. Finding a party to vote for is a central part of political identity formation, and voter education is a major issue in schools’ political education, which is also a focus point for this paper.

The political process of party choice (and identification) has over the years 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 growth in the number of parties and thus have provided a wide range of political options. Second, the ‘catch all’ orientation among parties has blurred the distinction between them. Third, new party alignments arise, like the Red-Green coalition in Norway, which confirm that the left/right scale still exists, but has become more flexible and blurry. Fourth, class voting is declining (Knutsen, 2006; 2008), which has reduced social class belonging as a guide to voting. Furthermore, social and political processes such as urbanisation, secularisation and globalisation, including the spread and use of information technology, has implied pluralisation as well as new alliances and distinctions between people (Castells, 2009). All of these changes increase the complexities in voters’ decisions, which point to the growing need for voter information where school in most countries have a special role to play.

Historically, the development of party identification was seen as an outcome of (political) socialisation through family, friends, school and other sources (Holmberg, 2008). In recent decades, modernity has led to differentiation in society and numerous possible life courses. Growing wealth gives 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 precisely as they reach the age of the first-time voter (Beck, 1992). 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 concerning their party choice in the face of such growing complexity.

A further sign of modernity is the profusion of voting advice applications (hereafter named VAAs), which have become very popular heuristics for a significant number of voters. These VAAs present questions from party platforms that voters are supposed to respond to. Based on voters’ responses to a number of questions, these applications suggest a party choice to the voter. Thus, VAAs may become important guides in an increasingly blurry political landscape characterised by the strategic communication favoured to attract voters (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Coleman & Blumler, 2008).

In our approach to this study, we used open-ended individual interviews to ask students in school, who also were first-time voters, how they reflect on their sources of influence on their choice to vote for a particular political party. In our view, the individual descriptions of this process explicitly or implicitly indicated a process of fitting a party to the political self or a process of political identity development.
How did young students as first-time voters reflect on their sources of political voting decision in the 2013 parliamentary election in Norway? What implications do the findings have for political education in schools?

In our response to this question we used interviews from 30 first time voters who told us about their processes of arriving at a party choice.

We hypothesise that family background and “coming from” a particular social group has had a major influence on student’s party choice. Alternatively, modernity has caused young people to reflect on their (political) self freely, and therefore party choice is first and foremost a result of the construction of a political self and identity. In the following, we offer sections on the theory of identity formation, previous research, methodology and empirical results/discussion and implications for political education.

Previous research
The relevant body of literature for this study is vast and we cannot cover it all. But, we can, however, point to some major theoretical traditions, schools and discussions. The first one of these covers adolescents’ political socialization as well as more specific cognitive approaches to elections and party choice. From these large research fields, we would like to mention Sherrod, Torney-Purta, & Flanagan (2010), a volume which in a comprehensive way covers new theoretical as well as empirical approaches to civic engagement. Research on voting and political awareness has been approached from a number of angles. The theories of political socialization build on a long tradition dating from the classic work of Hyman (1959), Greenstein (1965), and Easton and Dennis (1969) among others, who saw political socialization as a means to provide support to the political system. Political socialization was here seen as a process of induction into the political culture (Almond & Verba 1963) and as a process through which knowledge about the system as well as beliefs, attitudes, and values was transmitted to individuals. This tradition of political socialization research generally 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) (Niemi & Hepburn 1995) (Biesta 2011), consequently seeing 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, organizations, etc. In line with the political learning perspective, Flanagan convincingly argued for treating politics and socialization as a domain of experience and knowledge, as opposed to political socialization accounts in which children become citizens largely through a transmission process passed down from older to younger generations. She maintained that adolescents’ ideals of the world are constructed and internalized from their actions with others and that individual political theories are built up through 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).

The Michigan Model is 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). It aimed 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, S. (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 is the key determinant in voting behaviour. Historically, political parties grew out of political positions in class societies and thereby institutionalized one of the most important cleavages in industrial society (Rokkan 1987). However, voters are often argued to be in general much lesser wedged to party allegiances than in earlier days, and the last fifty years have steadily displayed a decline of party identification. Many writers have pointed out that “class voting” has declined in post-industrial society, though class orientations and loyalties still exist (Knutsen 2008). In the 1970s and the 1980s there were massive changes in most western countries, which meant that social class was no longer the main determinant of voting behaviour. This 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.

This development has induced a shift of the idea of the voter as part of a social group, with choices highly constrained by socio-demographic circumstances, to the idea of the voter as a rationally calculating and self-interested individual. This transformation is often summarized as a paradigm shift: from the "dependent" voter to the rational or "judgemental" voter (Scammell 2014: 127).

In recent decades, modernity has led to 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 not able to rely on traditions 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 has caused people to become much more emancipated from objectively predetermined structures, and in particular emancipated from symbolic foundation of tradition. The consequence of this is primarily an upgrading of the meaning of subjectivity.

However, the possible influence from social groups on first-time voters’ decisions should not be ignored, and the social environment can never be ignored. Bourdieu (1986) offers a dispositional theory of social practice, carried out in the concept of habitus. The idea here is that human individuals incorporate the objective social structures in which they are socialized 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 and by praxis, and we should take into consideration the role of family and social environment in our analysis of the reflections of our informants in relation to party choice and political identity.

**Theory: Party choice based on the perspectives of Bourdieu & Giddens: Two rival hypotheses.**

In the following we pursue this argument, and we offer a basic set of contrasting accounts of the phenomenon of political reasoning and identification. The first one of these represents the “habitus hypothesis” based on the work of P. Bourdieu. As the opposition to the habitus hypothesis we
subsequently present the “reflexivity hypothesis” based on various sociologists such as A. Giddens and U. Beck.

**Bourdieu: Voters’ “habitus” and party choice.**

Bourdieu understands all praxis socially. 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 hence 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, 1984:6).

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. Hence, also political opinions (related to certain political issues) work as an expression of lifestyle and political identity - and they have a social function as markers of class. To the analysis of social differences in political opinions exactly 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”. The various intensions and resources of individuals together are forming a dispositional structure (“habitus”) showing of 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 which this position provides. Habitus therefore designates an acquired disposition and it 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, 1990a: 53).

Bourdieu’s overall point is, that all socialisation works as an embodiment of social structures, which the individual carry around. When Bourdieu talks of incorporation or embodiment he tries to stress, that this impact is not intentional, but rather functions as a sort of “mechanism”, which 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 accented or perform a specific dialect. Many people do this through their whole life without many changes. On the other hand habitus is not programmed or genetically encoded and 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 manners, rather than a certain type of coercion. Habitus always works in a social setting, and according to this type of setting, habitus may vary hence constraining its accurate predictability. 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, socialization and education families try to reproduce or recreate their cultural capital within coming generations. The lifestyle, or the cultural capital, is passed on from generation to generation.

So, basically, the concept of habitus can be seen as a theory of action contrasting other rival theories of action. On the one side the subjectivist idea that human actions are the result of intentional and rational decisions, and on the other side 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 on 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 the basic understandings from economic theory (e.g. Downs 1957, Schumpeter 1950). Action, in this theory is instrumentalist and is based on calculations of returns. In opposition to this stand actions based on habitus, which are not necessarily intentional. On the other hand they are not either pre-determined as in structural determinism, which is another oppositional theory of action. In this line of thinking attitudes are prescribed in modes and relations of production (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. Against these conceptions Bourdieu offers a dispositional theory of practice, carried out in the concept of habitus. The idea here is that human individuals incorporate the 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 the individual to think, act and understand in certain ways. Such cognitive dispositions, however, always work in relation to situations with particular objective structures, which Bourdieu name as fields. The idea of habitus allows for greater individual variation, albeit still within certain frames, which subsequently have to be established. The concept of habitus represents Bourdieu’s attempt at building a third way between the determinism of structuralism and the existentialism of voluntarism and it establishes the link between agents’ social position and his/hers praxis (positioning). In modern society the two main sources of habitus are the socialization of family and of the system of education unleashing differential forms of habitus. The incorporation of social structures go on through the insensible influence from these positions in 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 2005:80).

What unifies Bourdieu and theorists like Giddens is their common rejection of both structural deterministic 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 shortly, we condensate these elements of Bourdieu’s theoretical thinking as the habitus hypothesis.
Giddens: Late modernity and party choice
Giddens´ approach to analyses of modernization is based on his theory of structuration (Giddens 1984). The theoretical background is situated in theories and analyses of modernization (Beck 1994, Giddens 1991, Beck, Giddens & Lash 1994). Giddens offers a theory of social praxis which helps to explain the processes of emancipation and self-actualization of modern society. The sociology of Giddens emphasizes that modernity is characterized by information seeking and reflexivity (Giddens, 1997). The ways people reason about politics, pursue their interests, and reach decisions in other words involve individuals´ information processing. This prescribes the reflexive, self-expressive individual as a basic characteristic of late modernity and essential to the emergence of what Giddens calls “lifestyle politics” (Giddens 1991). Theorists of late modernity (Giddens, Beck & Lash, 1994) emphasize how individuals create their own biography, without being hold up by traditions. Consequently, they are “freed” and able to establish their self-identity through 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 judgments of situations. Humans formulate issues, get responses and reflect in an ongoing process which involves feedback on how they see themselves (Stets & Burke, 2006:130). According to Giddens, information seeking and processing are vital parts of modern agency and that mass media provide 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. For example identity 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 they are made and constructed by social actors through processes of individualization (Giddens 1991). Identities can be ascribed to and originate from predominant institutions, but they only become identities, if and when individuals internalize 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, cultural emancipation produces a peculiar double-sided tendency: People become much more emancipated from objectively predetermined structures, and in particular emancipated from 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 images to bring forth happiness in mind and speech concerning one’s own suffering, relations to other people, and the needs for communication. On the other hand by this upgrading of the meanings of reality people also become more exposed and more vulnerable.

To sum it up we name this general line of thinking the reflexivity hypothesis.

Methodology

Data collection procedure
The data for this study were collected by students (hereafter interviewers) specialising in social/political science in their final (master) year of the teacher education programme at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. The first time voters were selected at schools and
the interviews were carried out in these schools. The interviewers were introduced to the specific theoretical field of approaches to political socialisation and specific methodological considerations. A main target in the interviews was how the first time voters arrived at their choice at the ballot box. Among the methodological considerations was the conscious development of dialogue and follow-up questions on the intended research focus. Also, questions of neutrality and subjectivity were thoroughly considered and the interview discussion was ‘... the joint production of accounts or versions of experiences, emotions, identities, knowledge, opinions, truth, etc.’ (Rapley, 2004 p.16). Furthermore, an interview guide was developed and discussed by the researchers. 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 to avoid interdependence among respondents. Respondents were then selected from 6 different schools and 16 different classes 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 non-interested in politics and 10 somewhat interested, two non-voters, and one ‘blank voter’ (Y-B); four did not use the VAAs. Such a variety of students strengthens our analysis and our 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)

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The teacher education students transcribed their interviews and presented their results in a second seminar together with the researchers. This last seminar was part of the interview validation and discussion of interpretation with the researchers (Tjora, 2009).

By inviting students to collect data, we also allowed for a greater variety of conversations between more young people and hopefully less researcher bias. We argue that finding similarities across such a great variety of dialogues strengthens our conclusions. However, we acknowledge that, as researchers, we were not able to get the lively impression from a conversation, with opportunities to follow up, and this makes us more dependent on transcripts and text.
Analytical procedures
All the interviews were read and the parts that elaborated on sources of political influence were selected. These parts were reread, translated and a preliminary explorative analysis was done. Based on the preliminary reading and empirical analysis we chose the contradictory hypothesis perspective of the paper. We grouped our respondent’s statements according to how they voiced influence from family/social background and reflexivity. These two groups are therefore grounded in empirical results. In search for and interpretation of what students had in common we went back and forth from theory to our respondents´ reflections. In this process we arrived at a theory basis of Bourdieu’s Habitus and Beck/Giddens´ reflective modernity as fruitful concepts to develop our interpretation and further analyses of data. In this analysis we explored the differences within the two main groups and we asked, what these groups of students have in common in their reflections. In the following empirical analysis we display excerpts in two groups, which are carefully selected to show the variety of viewpoints and attitudes among these students.

Results
In the following we display excerpts from students in two main groups and we start with those who particularly emphasise family background as a source of political party orientation.

Family background
The following empirical analysis is the student’s most spontaneous responses to the challenge from the interviewer “can you elaborate how you came up with a party to vote for?”

The first students were quite clear and normative: “I do believe that one should vote like the parents did. …I did vote like mine…and I did emphasise what could bring Norway forward in my choice.” The student goes on by revealing some of the family dynamics:

“Actually, my parents said that I should vote independently, but you are raised in a certain culture so I voted Red party (meaning one of the available 3 red parties: authors) like them, because we all believe that this party is best for the country…as pointed out family is most important, but I have discussed politics very much with my friends. Friends may have strong influence like, almost all in class voted for one x (choose to be anonymous) party.” (AG1)

Few students would perhaps express so clearly that the child should vote like their parents (and many would disagree), but at the same time the parents seem to emphasis the students´ independence and autonomy in finding a political way. Such parental attitudes are supported by other students like FS2;

In 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? “No they aren’t. Indirectly they tell 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”. (FS2).

It (voting) was exiting.. “I was a bit nervous in the box. …arriving at a choice”.. Authors: the student continues to explain that she was uncertain and confused when mom replied «Thou shall vote!!». “So, we sat down explore what about the different party policies and tried to find
out which party was my best choice. She asked (and respected) for my opinions and what party would be the best choice for me? I think parents and media influence me most” (EK3).

Parents seem to encourage reflexivity and independence in choice of a party which is important. None of our students reported that they were “told at home what to vote for”. But students told these stories of support for autonomy and independence, but also revealed the strong indirect influence from childhood, discussions at home, establishing “goodies and badies” and so on. The more indirect influence is apparent.

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. Media also has some influence…but they could not change my mind”.

The latter two students reveal quite clearly that it’s difficult to have “parental secrets”. Family viewpoints are conveyed in so many ways if not early then later during adolescence. Voting also recall memories from childhood “early political socialization” like this student:

EK1: No, it (voting) was something new. 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...

Such memories, though unrelated to content of politics, recall the parent as the “model” in political behaviour. Such modelling, as voiced by the student, is most likely important, but it’s difficult to tell the exact influence of it. It is part of “habitus” and the totality of family experiences. The family and childhood influence is also supported by this student; “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 from my parents.”

Some students on the other hand voice influence and reflexivity and independence:

AG2...I am active in labour youth organisation since years and therefore I should vote labour of course. My parents vote the socialist left party so my chose is socialist but more moderate. I am not influenced much 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 as good for them and who they voted for and why. But at the same time things that are important to me and what I am really concerned about has influenced my choice also.

The influence from parents is explicit, but also the social identity of being an immigrant comes into play in the process of finding a party. However, the student chose a different (though similar) political party than his parents which reflects independence. Despite parental influence, party choice is far from being adopted blindly. In different ways “our” students describe that the choice is rooted in their background but other sources provide “food for reflection”. Like this student;

AG4) Later, 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. ...
But family means a lot in elections for many young people. Also, there are often lots of close friends who vote for the same party.

HB2. To put it this way, I know I don’t like the blue parties, so I tend to disagree only by hearing them in the election campaign. Then I 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 direct on it...

In some cases the role of family becomes a “joint political relationship”, like this father son relation. The family may also be the arena of direct political socialization, like these two students descriptions.

HB5; My whole family votes for Labor 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 knew and didn’t like...Actually I was quite open and made up my mind in the last minute at the ballot box considering my future and the issue of privatisation.

EK3. How was voting? It (voting) was exciting.. I was a bit nervous in the box. ..Arriving at a choice..Author; the student continues to explain that she was uncertain and confused when mam replied “Thou shall vote, so we sat down explore what about the different party policies and tried to find out which party was my best choice. She asked (and respected) my opinions and what party would be the best choice for me? I think parents and media influence me most.”

In the latter two students descriptions family is a source of information on the one hand and respect for the young voter personal reflections and decision on the other. Although it’s not explicit, reflexivity do accompany family influence particularly through other sources like media or friends.

FS5 “My parents and where I grew up, it is very similar...Lots of people from where I come from voted for the same party as I...Family neutral? Well, I listen to what they say, their thoughts, opinions and what they are going to vote for.

The students HB5 and FSS both comment upon the family and or social environment vote for the same party. The story of growing up in this social/political environment be less apparent these days, but it still exists and is apparently something which plays a significant role in some students’ political orientations.

To summarize, the above excerpts leave no doubt that family plays a significant but rather differential role in student’s political socialization, particularly in their voting decisions. First of all students do emphasise the importance of childhood in family, their upbringing and all aspects of growing up in their homely environment (habitus). Second, our students emphasise their self-reflection and support for their independent decisions of voting choice. Except for one instance of the “duty” to vote, the choice of party is left to the students as an independent choice. Third, the political influence of family takes many forms. Some influence comes from voices of “goodies and baddies” and may take the form of heuristics in the adolescent political orientation. In other cases they are more direct like discussions or information oriented. Some students are remarkably clear about the family influence which may reflect loyalty to parents?! Consequently, there is considerable support for the hypothesis of considerable family influence among our students. Having said this, we believe that family influence accompany support for students’ autonomy and independent decision.
We have no examples of family putting explicit political pressure on students’ choice, however such pressure might still be felt without being voiced or felt without being voiced or voiced without being felt.

**Modernity/reflexivity**

In this section we present quite a few students who seem to be less influenced by their family background but are more characterized by their independent reflexivity on choice of a political party. However, some students are definitely characterized by “leaving home” as they approach the task of finding a party. The respondent AG3 explained:

«There were election-news in all channels and they tried to make us vote”. “During 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. Also tests on the net (VVA) and reading articles.. But also family is important, …they raised you to who I am, and we are very much alike. So family sure influence voting for many, but I voted differently for a small party because I had my own opinion. My family supported me.”

Leaving home and become political is to some students a balance between family influence which always is there, in this case as support for the student’s personal and independent decision, and independent reflexivity on personal opinions. He describes himself as uncertain, but in the end he voted for a party resulting of influence from friends.

Also this student displays the dilemma between family upbringing and feeling of becoming independent. Particularly loyalties taken for granted may be questioned facing voting realities.

**BH1.** I have always liked the Labour party and always liked their values and the like. And then I become uncertain and wanted to look for alternatives, and I took at least 10 VAAs. But, since its 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.

So, the student continues by explaining that explores how she went around the “election market” in town to talk and explore issues and ends up in a choice between labour and right wing which traditionally have been opposed each other. Exploring new alternatives also makes choices more difficult as the information may not be reliable or felt insufficient. But many students tell stories of their search for making a well informed choice grounded in themselves, and that they make informed choices and leave as little as possible to voting by chance.

Some students have very particular stories of their voting decisions processes, like these next two.

**HB4: How I was influenced. I saw a NRK TV program and foreigner (Leo Aikic) talked to politicians on issues and their opinion about them. My decision was fairly much based on information from these programs. The program helped me a lot. I voted differently from my family and am not much 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 this and reading**
party pages and make up my mind. ..Voting Advice Applications (VVA) and influence from friends.

The students in this group are all characterized by greater emphasis on independent reflective choice, but independence and informed choice is more apparent among some.

CB1 I soon found out that after inquiring into the parties which of them I agreed with. Then I continued to research it to feel sure about my choice.

CB2 “I decided on my choice” Insists to be completely self-determined in her choice.”

DA1: As said before, I like the Labour party. I have read papers and seen TV and decided that Labour is the best party. I vote totally independently of family (insisting), as if the question of influence portrays an immigrant stigma.

Two issues are striking; first the informed rationality and serious approach to election and their insisting independence particularly from family influence. A special case of making an informed choice is represented by this next guy.

DA2 I casted a blank vote in protest. I considered voting for the “Pirate party”, but they did not come up with proper program before the election. Then I 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 and decided to vote blank.

The process of “fitting a party to self” might be difficult as the parties have opinions that might fit and might not. This rational process of fitting party process is also characterized by these 3 respondents, but they also seem to compromise more in their choices than the one who voted blank.

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 media, I watched debates and these made me find parties I liked.

FS4 “I arrived at decision by considering what Norway needed most, school, roads etc. Some information cam from “flyers” and my own (reflection) less family background.”

The informed rationality takes different forms. Some emphasise their agreement, some points out the needs for their country, some uses debates as their basis for decision, but it’s all signs of reflexivity.

Voting is also a symbol of initiation rite into the electorate of responsible citizens which in itself might be exciting to some like this one.

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

To summarize: Independence and reflexivity is most apparent among many of our students which all downplay the role of family influence on their party choice. Some students emphasise the transition
from child to independence, some students do point out their total independence and some refer to absence of family political talk and active influence. They tell stories of serious rational approach and attempts to fit party to their political self. These facts lend support for the reflective hypothesis.

**Discussion**

The present paper approaches adolescents’ sources of political influence and their ambivalence in making political choices, by focusing on how they reason as first-time voters. In our study, we try to identify the sources of influence on voting reflections, because these are all part of the complex decisions that students have to make. Although students’ practices are important in their stories, our analysis takes a rather exploratory and cognitive approach. We assume that what they tell us at least indicates some of the most important aspects of their cognitive reflections on voting, and especially their own individual role, as well as the ways in which political values or heuristics are “handed over” through political socialization and thereby work to facilitate the voting process.

Many of the respondents are being inspired by their surroundings and acquaintances in the voting process. Interestingly, many of them are also rather precisely able to finger out a ‘trigger point’, which has initiated their political interest, like an certain political event, an inspiring school teacher, influence from friends, or discussions in the family. Often political values can be tied to specific everyday experiences and close surroundings, and generally various sources like family, media and friends play a variable role in the political development and orientations of these adolescents. Young people here often seem to lean on a certain model consisting of the political orientation of their parents. In the first stages of their political life they often seem to show a great loyalty towards the political values of the family before gradually taking in more and more of their own political experiences and personal values (Solhaug & Kristensen 2014).

Theoretically, we have argued that modernity has led to differentiation and has caused people to become much more emancipated from objectively predetermined structures, and in particular emancipated from symbolic foundations of tradition. Political identification is changing and the focus of studying political identity and participation ought to be redirected accordingly, as politics is increasingly understood as occurring outside formal political institutions. We have, on the other hand, also argued that habitus and family influences are very strong predictors of political orientations. Both our hypotheses are clearly revealed in the data, and the respondents by and large are neatly grouped into two overall categories. The first of these consist of students who apparently point to the need to commit to family background and family values when it comes to political party preference and decision making. The second group takes on a much more autonomous and reflexive approach to the voting process. Some students have very particular stories of their reflections in the voting decision processes. Some are very clear about stating their family as the main or singular source of influence behind their voting decision – and even almost at the same time apologizing their lack of independency. In the other opposite extreme position we find the modern “reflexivists” like the guy stating that he found out (who to vote for) after inquiring into the parties which of them he agreed with”. But even after this point he continues to research until he feels absolutely sure about his choice. This process of “fitting a party to self” significantly distinguishes the narrowing down or the instrumental and goal-oriented rational decisions making. It seems very important to these respondents to continuously seek validation of their planned party choice. This process not only likely 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 being complementary, rather than being rival.

A final finding in the study is the fact that many of the respondents seem to be voting on the basis of idealism. Typically, they reason what is the best situation for the country or for the environment. Still, they find the voting situation rather complex and their apparent idealism is most often not linked to political ideologies, which is showing off in the fact that this complexity sometimes leads to ‘irrationality’, in the sense that they without any hesitation are able to jump from considering voting for a political party in the one end of the political spectrum to a party in the other end of the spectrum. The reason for this could be that when facing complexity in the political campaign some adolescents manages the political decision-making situation by choosing a strategy of combining (value) rationality with simplification and reduction of information. The credibility of the politicians then becomes a decisive factor. Some look for explicit values to sympathize with, while others see only in and political marketing all over the place.

**Conclusion**

We conclude that the hypothesised family background gets strong support from a majority of our respondents. Despite that many students emphasise family influence, they also point out their families encouraged them to make an independent choice. Most of the students also reflected thoroughly on their choice and no one actually reported to plainly adopt a family voting habit without reflections. So, when we conclude that our hypothesis gets support, the reality of choice might be very different from the adoption of political orientation in the fifties when the theoretical work on political socialization was in its infancy. The independence and reflectivity may also be seen as an influence from modernity.

A large minority seem to downplay the role of family influence in making a party choice. Rather, they either emphasise other sources of influence or they consider themselves as totally independent in their choice of a party. Their process is characterized by thorough information seeking and reflectivity, particularly over which party “fits” how they see themselves and their identity. This is clearly a sign of influence from late modernity.
Literature


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