The Power of a Democratic Education

How Education Cultivates Democratic Values and Behaviors

QAC Summer 2012 Apprenticeship

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INTRODUCTION

Does education in a democracy change people's political values and behavior? If so, how?

To answer the question, this study explores the relationship between democratic education and the consequent development of democratic attitudes and behaviors within individuals and societies.

To test a validity of learning experience in democracy as an important factor for political socialization, this study compares three models that account for different democratic components:
- years of democratic education, years of democratic experience, and a level of institutional democracy.

Main goal of the study:
- To substantiate John Dewey's claim that "learning by doing"—education that leads to certain behaviors and notions—bolster democratic values and practices.

Data used:
- World Values Survey, a comprehensive survey of individual values and attitudes which is conducted throughout five waves from 1981-2008 and includes about 250,000 respondents from 97 countries.

Methodology: Hierarchical Linear Modeling (individuals nested within country-waves)

"Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself"

VARIABLES

Dependent Variables

- Democratic Values
  - Perception of governmental responsibility
    - Scale from 1 ("the people should take more responsibility") to 10 ("the government should take more responsibility")
  - Democratic Behaviors
    - Signing a petition
      - Scale: 1 (have signed a petition) / 2 (might sign) / 3 (would never sign)

Independent variables
- DemEdu (Years of Education in Democracy) / CtyDemEdu (country-level mean)
- DemExp (Years of Living in Democracy) / CtyDemExp (country-level mean)
- Democracy Level (Aggregate level of democracy)
- Control variables: Income / Education level / Town Size / Age / Sex / Social Capital (both in individual and country levels)

CONCLUSION

- Individuals with more democratic education tend to embrace more democratic values and actions than their counterparts with lower levels of democratic education.
- Model 1 with democratic education variables better illustrates the individual-level variation in democratic values and behaviors than model 2 and model 3 do.
- In addition to a correlation with citizen sovereignty and willingness to sign petitions, democratic education turned out to encourage rational and secular values, more active civic engagement, and peaceful demonstrations.
- Surprisingly, democratic experience and democratic institutions are not able to explain democratic values, and in many cases have a negative relationship with democratic behavior. This is likely due to a variation within mature democracies, but more research is necessary.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

- What are the factors that affect a variation of democratic actions and choices within a well-established democratic country?
- How can we develop a model of democratic education that can be applied to non-democratic societies?

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my faculty sponsor Prof. Mary Alice Haddad for allowing me this great research opportunity. I also appreciate Manolis Kaparakis for energizing the class every morning with great workshops and for giving me helpful advice in and out of classes. This summer with QAC program was amazing.

REFERENCES