Civic Education and Youth Voter Turnout: 
The Federated States of Germany during Elections
For the European Parliament

by

Allison Torline

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Introduction

The direct election of members of the European Parliament was established in 1979, and was intended to help assuage the complaint that a democratic deficit exists within the European Union. Elections are vital to representative democracy for they serve as the mechanism with which to implement popular sovereignty. However, voter participation has remained relatively low in comparison with national parliaments, and has continued to decrease since the first election. For example, in 1979, the average rate of voter participation within the entire European Union was at 61.99%, but this number dropped to 43% by 2009 (Europarl).¹


The poor turnout becomes even more drastic if one concentrates specifically on the youth population. According to the post European Election 2004 survey, more than two-thirds of voters between 18 and 24 did not go to the polls. They participated at a rate of

¹ It should be noted that during this time, the number of EU Member States increased from nine countries—Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, the UK, Denmark and Ireland to the 27 countries currently holding EU membership. This is a variable this paper does not examine, but one that could have had an effect on the data.
33% while the overall European average was 46% (Flash Eurobarometer 162:10). In the 2009 results, the rate of participation of voters aged 18 – 24 decreased to 29% (Flash Eurobarometer 320 :14). This is particularly disturbing because these citizens are the future adult voters of Europe and should be developing a commitment and sense of importance towards voting now, so they can continue the practice throughout their lives and pass it on to the next generation of citizens. Youth participation gives young adults an opportunity to exercise political influence on their governments, increases the likelihood that their distinct interests are being represented, and adds to the overall turnout during elections. Thus, more youth involvement would lead to more legitimacy and strengthen democracy within the EU.

There have been many theories of why young European voters are not showing up at the polls during elections for the European Parliament. However, this research posits that it is a matter of civic education. This study begins with a thorough discussion of the European Union’s democratic deficit concerns along with an investigation of why and how European citizens choose to participate in EP elections. It then moves on to demonstrating that youth participation is important for democracy and that the European Union recognizes it. I then pose the question: how can youth voter turnout be increased?

After extensively studying the connection between civic education and turnout in previous academic works, I hypothesize that having Europe-specific civic education in schools would lead to increased turnout by youth voters during European elections. I then conduct a unique case study of Germany’s16 federated states (Bundesländer) to see how variation in political and civic education correlates with youth political participation. In addition, this paper investigates whether low youth turnout percentages symbolize
indifference from youth populations towards EU politics, or if the youth engage themselves in other ways.

After concluding that European civic education does play a role in increasing German youth turnout during EP elections and that German youth are particularly apt to participate in politics through non-traditional methods, this paper offers suggestions for extending this hypothesis beyond the German case study to other EU member states.

**Background**

As the largest supranational body in the world, the European Union can be praised for uniting countries that had been at war for centuries. Today, armed conflict within the EU has been made nearly impossible. However, as the EU’s power has increased, so has the number of criticisms made against it. One of the most prominent concerns voiced since the EU’s inception is whether or not a democratic deficit exists.

Political scientists have consistently worried that due to the centralization of governmental procedures in such a multinational context, individual citizens are too far removed from decision making procedures, and the quality of democracy suffers. The European Court of Justice is small and unusually powerful compared to national European courts, the European Commission is viewed as a remote technocracy, and the Council of Ministers is composed of political elites who often deliberate in secret (Moravcsik, 2003).

Follesdal & Hix (2006) argue there is no single meaning of the ‘democratic deficit’. Definitions are as varied as the nationality, intellectual positions and preferred solutions of the scholars or commentators who write on the subject. “At the domestic level in Europe, the central structure of representative government in all EU Member States is that the government is accountable to the voters via the parliament. European parliaments
may have few formal powers of legislative amendment, but the executive is held to account by the parliament which can hire and fire the cabinet, and by the Parliament’s scrutiny of the behavior of government ministers (2006:534).” They say policy-making in the EU is dominated by executive actors, national ministers in the Council, and government appointees in the Commission, which is problematic because their actions are beyond the control of national parliaments.

They also argue that there are not “European elections” meaning national elections are not about the personalities and parties at the European level or the direction of the EU policy agenda. National elections are fought on domestic rather than European issues, and parties collude to keep the issue of Europe off the domestic agenda. “The absence of a ‘European’ element in national and European elections means that EU citizens’ preferences on issues on the EU policy agenda at best have only an indirect influence on EU policy outcomes. In comparison, if the EU were a system with a genuine electoral contest to determine the make-up of ‘government’ at the European level, the outcome of this election would have a direct influence on what EU ‘leaders’ do, and whether they can continue to do these things or are forced to change the direction of policy (2006:536).”

Another reason is that European integration produces ‘policy drift’ from voters’ ideal policy preferences. They feel the EU adopts policies that are not supported by a majority of citizens in many or even most Member States. Governments are able to undertake policies at the European level that they cannot pursue at the domestic level, where they are constrained by parliaments, courts and corporatist interest group structures. Concentrated interests such as business interests and multinational firms have a greater incentive to organize at the European level. These features skew EU policy outcomes
more towards the interests of the owners of capital than is the case for policy compromises at the domestic level in Europe (2006:537).

Reif and Schmitt (1980) analyzed the results of the first EP election in 1979 and concluded that the composition of the European Parliament did not reflect the “real” balance of political forces in the then European Community because the national political systems decided most matters. Thus, European Parliament elections were deemed simultaneous national second-order elections. The authors then made suggestions for how to assess what influences voters during these elections.

They write that one of the most important consequences of a second-order election is that there tends to be less at stake, which results in lower levels of participation and higher percentages of invalidly marked ballots due to fewer voters considering the elections as sufficiently important. It also results in heightened opportunities for small and new political parties, and because popularity of political parties controlling national governments waxes shortly after an election and soon wanes thereafter, the national governing party has a comparative disadvantage to the opposition.

Reif and Schmitt (1980) also discuss that dimensions of the election will have an effect on the results, such as the specific issues the national governments are facing and how they are translated to the European level. Institutional dimensions such as whether or not compulsory voting exists, regionalization/personalization of PR, and whether or not European elections are held the same day as national elections also play a role. They also write that campaign efforts of parties and candidates are more important during second-order elections than during first-order elections. Generally more attention is given by the public (media and voters) to the latter. “In second-order election campaigns, those
campaigning must compete with other political issues and events in a situation in which voters are already less prepared to accept “campaign news” as important and relevant.”

Finally, the authors say one must take structural and cultural change dimension into account. They argue that since political parties are very often based on socio-economic or cultural groups, change in these patterns changes the pattern of party support in the electorate, if parties do not adapt themselves to the new circumstances.

Van der Eijk and Franklin (1996) used Reif and Schmitt’s suggestions to examine the 1989 and the 1994 Europe-wide elections with the aid of large-scale surveys which placed European citizens within their institutional, political, economic, and social contexts. The researchers examined the elections of 1989, country by country, with the objective to determine to what extent the elections were domestic rather than European events. They then used the 1994 elections results to test if their theories were true. This lead to insights into how and why Europeans vote the way they do that were consistent with Reif and Schmitt’s predictions.

The most important implications for second-order elections theory regarding political parties is that there is a non-uniformity of effects due to dependency on contextual factors; for example, the presence of concurrent national elections and the time difference between national and European elections are crucial influences on the magnitude and even the directional effects of strength and ideological extremity (1996:303).

The researchers also chose to investigate whether European voters could be motivated to adapt to a more European party system with more European choices. They
conjectured that if voters go to polls purely out of loyalty, habit or duty, then inducing them to adapt their electoral behavior to changes in the institutional framework of the European Union will be unlikely, but if voters appeared to be trying to affect the course of political events, then reforms aimed at increasing political significance of European elections would be more practical.

Using individual-level data from a 1994 Eurobarometer survey, Carrubba and Timpone (2005) found that voters who are most concerned about environmental issues and who feel that the European Parliament is an important institution are most likely to switch their vote to a green party in a European election. This lead them to conclude that “At least some of the electorate is demonstrating a tendency to cast votes because of how the EP may influence policy outcomes in the future” (2005:277). In addition, using data from the 1999 European Election Study, Marsh (2003) shows that voters who think that the pace of integration is too fast are more likely to defect from government parties.

This is significant to my research in that it shows that attitudes and knowledge about the European Union can affect voter behavior. European specific civic education could be a means toward increasing voter knowledge about EU institutions and policies and encourage the development of personal opinions toward Europe, which could, perhaps, improve voter turnout.

The Youth

Now that the voting behaviors of the general population of Europe during EP elections have been discussed, this paper will now focus on the youth population specifically. The connection between youth voluntary and civic participation and the
participation that occurs during adulthood is well documented. Verba et al. (1995) explored factors that predicted adult engagement in politics and associations within their communities. After completing their analysis, they found the two strongest predictors of adult involvement were membership in high school clubs and interest groups and participation in high school government. Beck and Jennings (1982) reconfirmed the importance of high school involvement on adult participation, and emphasized the role of civic orientation in converting pre-adult experiences to later participation. Youniss and Yates (1997) reviewed studies that reported a link between youth involvement in organized activities and civic behaviors fifteen or more years later in adulthood. Their data uniformly showed that those who participated in government or community service projects during high school were more likely to vote and join community associations as adults than those who did not. Additional examples of this trend can also be found in Smith (1999) and McFarland (2006).

It is clear that the European Union recognizes the connection between youth and adult political engagement and perceptions of the democratic deficit. Back in November 2001, the European Commission released the White Paper “A New Impetus for European Youth.” Within this document, four main goals were stated: improving the availability and quality of information available to youth, reinforcing frameworks for youth participation, increasing activity in voluntary activities and maintaining a better understanding of the youth (Europa). To coincide with these aims, the Youth in Action program was created by the European Commission in 2006. With a budget of €885 million, the program strives to “strengthen young people’s active citizenship, develop their solidarity and promote European cooperation on youth policy.” Funding goes to non-profit projects for young
people, groups of young people and persons and organizations active in youth work (Ec.europa). In 2008, the European Parliament created the European Charlemagne Youth Prize. “The Prize is awarded to projects which promote European and international understanding, foster the development of a shared sense of European identity and integration and offer practical examples of Europeans living together as one community.” (Europarl)

With the passing of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009, the promotion of increased participation by young people in democratic life in Europe was added to the objectives; along with the development of the European dimension in education. (Treaty of Lisbon). In addition, children and young people should benefit from EU objectives in other fields, such as education and training, health, or in relation to the rights of children and young people, which should also indirectly promote civic engagement (European Commission). The Europe Direct initiative provides local information centers in all EU member states that act as informational resources to citizens within their own communities and in their native languages. The experts working there address university students and secondary schools, thus, promoting the spread of information and youth participation.

But are these measures satisfactory? Do they truly address the problems that keep the youth from participating? This leads to the question: what factors influence youth electoral participation? Oppenhuis (1995) and other studies have examined socio-demographic characteristics and the likelihood of voting at great length. For example, it is widely assumed that the higher one’s social economic status, the more one is inclined to participate in politics. Upper and middle class voters are more likely to turnout than those in the working class. Income is another aspect of this. In a country which is not well
developed economically, it is likely that people are more concerned with supplying their needs and not with getting involved in politics. *Membership in a political organization* is a strong mobilizing factor in voting because members are exposed to the activists’ efforts to make them cast their vote favorably to the organization. *Religious* voters are more likely to turn out than others, because elections represent an “opportunity to express support for a party that represents their religion” and “frequent churchgoers have a stronger sense of civic duty” (Oppenhuis 1995:23).

Political orientations also play a role. Starting with *political interest*, it is widely assumed that “voters who are (highly) interested in politics are much more likely to participate in politics, including electoral participation, than voters who have no interest at all (Oppenhuis 1995:28)” A sense of civic duty is another influential factor. *Political efficacy*, feeling that individual political action does or can have an impact upon the political process, is also import.

There have been many theories of why European voters are showing up at the polls less frequently than for national elections, such as the circumstances of when and how elections occur or level of EU skepticism. According to Steinbrecher (2007:273), “Europe-specific attitudes comprise several kinds of attitudes, like satisfaction with democracy at the European level, the assessment of the European institutions, opinions towards the integration process and the European Union membership of one’s own country”. Moreover, the literature suggests knowledge about and interest in European politics, the perceived salience of European issues, the approval of the European Community and the perceived importance of the EP are to be included in the field of EU-specific political orientations.
Analysts of the democratic deficit have traditionally argued that the European Parliament is too weak. Although reforms of the EU treaties since the mid-1980s dramatically increased powers of the European Parliament, it was still a concern that the Council held more decision making power than the Parliament. It has been argued that this was the reason voters remained apathetic. But as an article in the German magazine, *Der Spiegel*, points out, the Treaty of Lisbon beefed up Parliamentary influence with greater budgetary power, joint decision-making responsibility on almost all EU laws, and the right to appoint the bloc's top diplomat. The EP now has say over EU decisions on an ever-increasing range of issues, including trade, financial services, climate change, energy security, transportation, consumer protection and immigration. Yet, turnout barely increased in 2009. The article questions whether this is the fault of the media for not paying enough regular attention to EU issues and decisions, but they also wonder if national governments are to blame for failing to adequately educate the electorate (Dowling, 2009).

My research will focus on the latter question. What is the effect of civic education in schools on youth political participation during European Parliamentary elections? For the purposes of this research, political participation will include voter turnout, as well as engagement in terms of social capital (Putnam, 2000).

**Literature Review**

While the importance of encouraging youth citizens to participate seems clear, just how to go about doing that has been the issue of much debate. In *Revisiting Youth Political Participation*, several theories are discussed that range from a need for youth empowerment, the structure of political institutions, or a lack of opportunity for the youth
to participate (Forbrig, 2005). However, because of its function of increasing civic knowledge, civic education is consistently and highly correlated with youth participation.

Capaccio and Herczy de Mino (1999) say education can persuade youth to value the right to vote and instill in them a sense of civic duty and norms. It can make youth more aware of their potential voting powers as a group, which is a manner to influence politics and force politicians and parties to pay attention to their specific needs. They argue that state schools provide the best forum and opportunity to shape political education of the next generation, because school-based programs have several advantages: citizenship education can be easily incorporated into a social studies curriculum, students are required to attend school and are thereby captive audience members, electoral authorities can visit classrooms and vise versa, and schools can be venues for mock elections, writing competitions, project grants and awards. Schools can also persuade youth to value the right to vote and can instill in them a sense of civic duty and norms.

Galston (2004) outlines the effect of civic knowledge gained through education on important civic attributes- 1. It promotes support for democratic values, 2. The more knowledge people have, the more likely they are to participate in civic and political affairs, 3. It helps citizens to understand their interests as individuals and as members of groups, and 4. Increased knowledge leads to less generalized mistrust and fear of government.

Galston’s conclusions are supported by Niemi and Junn (1998) in their book, Civic Education: What makes Students Learn. The authors examined National Assessment of Education Progress data on civic achievement to take account of the influences of schools and homes on American high school students’ knowledge of foundational aspects of the
American political system, including principles of democracy and structures and processes of government. Contrary to previous scholarly belief, they found that school and curriculum matter to increasing political knowledge. The amount of coursework and how recently it occurred, the variety of substantive topics covered in government and civics classes, and the extent to which teachers incorporate discussions of current events have a significant influence on youth. These educational effects persist even after accounting for powerful predictors of civic knowledge.

The work of Finkel (2003) and McAllister (1998) supports these findings. Finkel conducted his study in three different countries, and discovered that individuals who were exposed to civic education were significantly more active in local politics than were individuals in the control group, and by margins wider than those found anywhere else in their study. McAllister noted that education produced higher levels of political knowledge that made a person a ‘better democratic citizen.’

Perhaps the most convincing connection between citizenship education and adolescent political engagement comes from Torney-Purta (2002). She argues, “schools achieve the best results in fostering civic engagement when they rigorously teach civic content and skills, ensure an open classroom climate for discussing issues, emphasize the importance of the electoral process, and encourage a participative school culture.”

She maintains that through ideal civic education in a democracy, students acquire meaningful knowledge about the political and economic system. They will be able to recognize the strengths and challenges of democracy and the attributes of good citizenship, they will also be comfortable participating in respectful discussions.
concerning important and possibly controversial issues, and they will be aware of civil society organizations.

This knowledge will then lead to skills in interpreting political communication and to favorable dispositions towards actual involvement in conventional citizenship behavior, especially voting on the basis of candidates’ issue positions. She claims proper civic education is a means towards equal levels of civic preparation across social groups, such as those divided by race, gender or socioeconomic status.

Torney-Purta bases this on the conclusions of the IEA Civic Education Study in which 90,000 14-year-olds in 28 countries were tested over a period of 8 years on knowledge of civic content and skills and were surveyed about concepts of citizenship, attitudes toward governmental and civic institutions, and political actions. Thus, she concludes: “Three elements of schools are important in civic education: the formal curriculum, the culture of the classroom, and the culture of the school. The IEA Civic Education Study’s results suggest that schools can be effective in preparing students for engagement in civil society by teaching civic content and skills, ensuring an open classroom climate for the discussion of issues, emphasizing the importance of voting and elections, and supporting effective participation opportunities such as school councils (Torney-Purta).”

The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) was founded in 1959 with the goal of comparatively studying educational policies and practices in various countries and educational systems around the world. In 1994, the IEA approved the two-phased Civic Education Study. Phase 1 consisted of extensive documentary evidence and expert interviews describing the circumstances, content, and
process of civic education in 24 countries (Torney-Purta, et al. 1999: Foreword). The IEA Civic Education Study placed importance on the formal curriculum, the culture of the classroom, and the culture of the school. Each country involved was asked to answer 18 framing questions through systematic data collection, expert commentary and secondary sources. Countries were then asked to respond to three international framing domains with details concerning official curriculum coverage, pertinent examination questions, typical class activities and assignments, extracurricular and out-of-school activities, and use of media. (Torney-Purta et al. 1999:25)

Händle, Oesterreich & Trommer (1999) conducted a survey of expert opinion on concepts of civic education in Germany for the study. They began by detailing the educational context of civic education. They first brought up the point that Germany has a complex, traditionally tripartite school system. At the age of 10, students are separated into Hauptschule, Realschule, Gymnasium, and the less frequent Gesamtschule. This complexity is further compounded by the fact that the 16 federal states have autonomy in cultural affairs. Despite efforts to make the education system more uniform, state-by-state differences still exist in the list of subjects, in the number of required instruction hours per week, and what is to be learned. They claim such differences are particularly pronounced in the subject of civic education (1999:260).

In order to explore civic education in Germany, Händle, Oesterreich & Trommer (1999) focused their findings on the Secondary Level 1 which consists of the previously mentioned tripartite options for secondary education. They reviewed literature and gathered detailed reports from three different fields: economic relations, history, and political education. They also surveyed the opinions of around 100 experts (teachers,
students, school administrations, university and research, and associations) on what should be the goals of civic education and how well these goals are being realized in German schools.

The experts felt principles of democracy, forms of society, rights of citizenship, obligations and responsibilities of citizens, national identity, international relations, market economy and globalization, and more themes should be emphasized in civic education. However, they concluded for most topics that the necessary goals were not being realized. The selective school system, which is influenced by students’ social status, also has an effect on how social learning takes place. In Gymnasium, the high school which prepares students to attend universities, civic education takes place largely through established subjects. Additional opportunities include extracurricular free-work groups, project days, project weeks and school events, however, these are optional and typically only a small number of students participate. Hauptschule are usually attended by students from less privileged backgrounds, and schools are especially concerned with improving the school environment and life opportunities for these individuals. These schools tend to adopt practice-oriented learning and could benefit from hands-on projects, case studies and role-plays (1999:277).

In summation, the researchers found there is a gap between ambitious civic education goals and their realization at the secondary level with a particularly large discrepancy on the goal of students obtaining political or civic awareness. The majority of experts felt students in school do obtain a grasp of fundamental principles and democratic rights, but fail to achieve in areas of social responsibility and engagement, which they regarded as highly important goals. The experts believed increased time allocation toward
civic education, longer school days, and more engaging student activities would lessen this gap (1999:280).

It has been over ten years since the IEA Civic Education Study presented their results, and while Händle, Oesterreich & Trommer (1999) did an excellent job of depicting the context of civic education in Germany through academic literature and expert opinion, they did not analyze school curricula in-depth as other countries for the study did. They also made little to no references as to how schools provide civic education concerning the European Union and how to engage as citizens at the European level. It is goal of this paper to address these gaps.

**Research Design**

I hypothesize that having Europe specific civic education in schools will lead to increased turnout by youth voters during European elections. In order to perform my research, I will be conducting a case study of Germany. I will look at the 16 federated states of Germany to see how variation in political and civic education correlates with youth political participation.

Data concerning German voter turnout during national and European elections are made readily available by the German Bureau of Statistics and the Federal Returning Officer (Bundeswahlleiter). This information can be sorted according to age, gender and federal state across election years.

I expect to see variation in civic education levels across the various German states, because education is determined at the state level as opposed to the national level. Each state has a central office (Landeszentrale) for political education. From these offices, I hope to gain information in regards to civic education courses in German curricula, trips to
the European Parliament, visits from EU representatives, etc., which I would then use to operationalize European civic education in schools.

From preliminary research of data, I expect to see higher youth turnout in federal states that are geographically closest to the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France. I feel this relationship stems from having greater access to the EP. Because of their location, I would assume that students in these states can more readily take trips to Strasbourg or have representatives visit their classrooms. Perhaps, this would even lead to more courses concerning EU politics and institutions.

Model

The Europäische Akademie Berlin was asked by the European Commission in December 2006 to study how Europe was being taught in German schools. In March 2007, they published their report: Die Europäische Dimension in den Lehrplänen der deutschen Bundesländer (The European Dimension in the Curricula of the German States). As a starting point, the researchers examined the report dating from August 6, 1978 by the Kultusministerkonferenz (KMK)\(^2\), an assembly of ministers for education from each Bundesland. This report detailed specific knowledge students should be obtaining about Europe. This included Europe’s geographic variety, its political and social structure, the historical powers of Europe and the development of European rights, nations and freedom, the many languages and cultural wealth, the history of European thought and integration since 1945, the different interests within Europe, the intentions and practices of European institutions, and its economic, ecological, social and political problems (18). The KMK asserted that incorporating Europe into all subjects is possible, but that social

studies courses that emphasize politics, history, economics and rights will be the most meaningful (19).

The researchers from the Europäische Akademie Berlin set up their study by examining curricula from all sixteen German states. Because of Germany’s complicated school structure, they would have had to examine 1,600 different curricula if they were going to look at every one. As this would have been impossible within the given time frame, the researchers chose to look at multiple curricular examples from the various school types in every Bundesland. They then supplemented this by visiting schools and conducting interviews with school administrators, teachers and students. They looked at social studies curricula with the most depth due to its logical association with civic education, but also looked at German and English curricula as well. The researchers gathered vast amounts of detailed information about the state of European civic education including the roles of teachers, textbooks, extracurricular opportunities and more. They then gave each Bundesland a “grade” on a scale from 1 (highest) to 6 (lowest) for how well they were meeting the KMK’s goals and incorporating the topic of Europe into each of the discussed subjects.

This paper will be using these grades to quantify the degree of European civic education in German schools. Unfortunately, this means the rich qualitative data from the study will not be conveyed, but it is much more practical to only use the grades. I will be comparing how youth voter turnout in each Bundesland during elections for the European Parliament matches the grade it was given. However, to make correlations simpler, I will reverse the grading scale so that 6 is the highest and 1 is the lowest so that a higher grade would equate to higher turnout percentages. Youth, for the purposes of this study, is
defined as voters between the ages of 18 and 25. Also, because the researchers conducted their report in 2006, it makes the most sense to use voter turnout data from the years closest to that time. Thus, I will only be looking at voter turnout from the 2004 and the 2009 EP elections.3

Data

Below is a table detailing the youth voter turnout during the 2004 and 2009 elections for the European Parliament and the grades given for each subject according to Bundesland.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bundesland</th>
<th>18-21</th>
<th>21-25</th>
<th>18-21</th>
<th>21-25</th>
<th>Social Studies</th>
<th>German</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baden-Württemberg</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayern</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandenburg</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bremen</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamburg</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hessen</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mecklenburg-Vorpommern</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Niedersachsen</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nordrhein-Westfalen</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rheinland-Pfalz</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saarland</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>50.2</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sachsen</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sachsen-Anhalt</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schleswig-Holstein</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thüringen</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>5</td>
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3 These statistics are made available by the German Bundeswahlleiter. „Wahlbeteiligung der Männer und Frauen nach Altersgruppen bei den Europawahlen 1979 – 2009“
I analyzed this data using SPSS, a computer software designed for statistical analysis, and created the table of correlations on the next page. These correlations are useful because they will show any trends between turnout and grades and evaluate whether the trends are significant. A full regression analysis isn’t applicable because there is too few data, and data on alternative explanations such as socioeconomic status, for example, was not included.

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<td><strong>Pearson Correlation</strong></td>
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<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
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<td>2004:18-21</td>
<td>.923**</td>
<td>.960**</td>
<td>.945**</td>
<td>.564*</td>
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<td>-.356</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009:18-21</td>
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<td>.868**</td>
<td>.976**</td>
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<td>.908**</td>
<td>.472</td>
<td>.401</td>
<td>-.458</td>
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**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Results**

As noted by the above table, voter turnout was very positively and significantly correlated with each age group and year, but this paper is not concerned with that. What is more important is the relationship between voter turnout and the assigned grades. One will notice that there is positive correlation between voter turnout and social studies and German curricula, but that there is actually a negative correlation between turnout and
English curricula—meaning a lower grade equated to higher turnout. However, only the correlation between Social Studies and voter turnout from 2004 is statistically significant. The 18-21 year-olds had significance at the .023 level and the 21-25 year-olds had even more significance at the .006 level.

The graphs on the next two pages demonstrate this positive and significant correlation and show where each state falls. The reference lines mark the average grades and turnout percentage. States in the upper-right corner had above-average turnout and received a grade above the average of four.
Discussion

The results are very encouraging; keeping in mind that the grades given were a quantified form of what was essentially qualitative data, that the researchers were not able to examine and give grades based on all 1,600 curricula in the German educational system, and that the data comes from a very particular point in time. The negative correlation between the grades in English and turnout is puzzling, and the positive but not statistically significant correlation between turnout and the German grades and 2009 turnout and the Social Studies grades is bittersweet. However, this does not overshadow the fact that there is demonstrated positive and significant correlation between indicators of European civic education in schools and German youth voter turnout during European Parliamentary elections, even if it is only for the year 2004. This still partially confirms my hypothesis that civic education within a European context will increase youth voter turnout during EP elections.

One will also notice from the scatter plots that the same five states (Baden-Württemberg, Berlin, Rheinland-Pfalz, Saarland, and Thüringen) received the highest grades in Social Studies curricula and had the highest percentages of youth voter turnout in 2004. I would venture to say this is in part due to their geographical proximity to EU institutions. Aside from Berlin and Thüringen, these states are the closest to Strasbourg, where the European Parliament is situated. It is highly probable that students in these states are more familiar with the European institutions. It is reasonable to assume that students in these states have easier access to the Parliament, because representatives could more easily visit schools or students could even pay a visit to the Parliament itself.
Unfortunately though, this sort of data is not made readily available, as I had hoped it would be by the Centers for Political Education (Landeszentralen) in the various German states.

However, to investigate the relationship between geographic location and civic education further, I chose to compare the average turnout rates across Bundesländer for the 2009 European parliamentary election as well as for the 2009 national parliamentary election. If the same five states mentioned above (Baden-Württemberg, Berlin, Rheinland-Pfalz, Saarland, and Thüringen) consistently have the highest turnout rates, this would add an extra confound to my theory that civic education leads to higher turnout, as the high turnout rates in those states could be a product of having a culture of high electoral participation in those regions. But if the states with the highest turnout percentages vary from the five previously mentioned, this would lend more credit to my hypothesis.
Graph 3 demonstrates that four of the five states (Thüringen, Rheinland-Pfalz, Baden-Württemberg, and Saarland) again clearly maintained the highest participation percentages during the 2009 election for the European Parliament. The states with the best turnout during the 2009 national parliamentary election are much less defined than for the European elections, because there are multiple states with nearly equal turnout. However, the states with the highest levels were Schleswig-Holstein, Hessen, Niedersachsen, Saarland, and Baden-Württemberg. So while there was some overlap, the highest turnout was not consistently linked to specific Bundesländer. This suggests that the voter turnout results are not due to a regional culture of participation, and gives support to my civic education hypothesis.
Engaging Europe

It has already been established that the youth are voting less than the rest of the population, and are turning out less for EP elections. But it is important not to focus exclusively on voter turnout percentages. In order to obtain a full understanding of political participation, a discussion should also be made in terms of social capital. Putnam (2000) emphasizes "that social networks have value. Just as a screwdriver (physical capital) or a university education (human capital) can increase productivity (both individual and collective), so do social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups" He argues that participating in group or community activities of any kind improves political participation.

Do the disappointing turnout percentages symbolize indifference from youth populations towards EU politics, or do the youth simply feel disconnected from the voting process and engage themselves in other ways? In order to answer these questions, this paper will now examine how the youth engage themselves at the European level. To do this, there must first be a definition and description of political engagement. When this paper refers to political engagement/participation, it means a voluntary action in an attempt to exert influence on political decision-making processes. In a report issued by Jugend für Europa (Youth for Europe), the German agent for the EU “Youth in Action” program, Gaiser and de Rijke (2011) break political participation down into three categories: traditional organizations, informal groups and temporary/situational actions. According to them, traditional organizations are functionally designed for specific interests. Memberships are usually long-term and associated with strong loyalties. Examples are political parties, professional organizations and unions, as well as personal
affiliations such as sports clubs or youth groups. Informal groups are more loosely structured but highly institutionalized, and often include political movements such as those supporting the environment and human rights. Temporary/situational actions utilize unconventional or conventional methods and tend to be more spontaneous. They require physical action at specific times. Examples of this type of behavior are voting, demonstrating and striking (Gaiser & de Rijke).

The difficulty of studying youth activity concerning the European Union is a matter of accessibility. Typically, young citizens wanting to get involved are going to find it easiest to act within their own communities. They can volunteer in local organizations, participate in club sports, or assist during fundraisers, but these activities are relatively focused on the national level. So how can the German youth engage themselves supranationally? It seems they would have to step away from traditional forms of engagement, and rely more on informal groups and temporary/situational actions. Getting involved in these has been made fairly simple, due to how easily assessable information and communication technology is today. These opportunities encourage new forms of participation like blogging, email chains, online communities, flashmobs, newsgroups and more (Gaiser & de Rijke). These types of activities lend themselves much more readily to a European context, because they have virtually no boundaries. Information can travel almost instantly to anywhere in the world without the participant leaving his or her home.

The EUYOUPart study on political participation of young people in Europe utilized results from the European Social Survey (ESS) of 2004 to distinguish empirical data on how the youth in specific countries participate politically. For their purposes, EUYOUPart only took the youth eligible to vote in the 2004 election of the European
Parliament into consideration. This paper will focus on their findings concerning young Germans.

As expected, the German youth participated in conventional activities at fairly low rates with the two most infrequently occurring forms being participation in a political party or action group occurring at 3.9% and donating money to a political organization or group, also at 3.9%. The highest form was working in another organization or association at 17%, followed by wearing a campaign badge/sticker at 9.3%, and contacting a politician or government official at 9.2%.

However, participation rates were much higher for temporary/situational actions. 29.1% of Germans had signed a petition, 20.1% had participated in a lawful demonstration, 23.5% had been part of a boycott, and 33.6% had made a politically motivated purchase (EUYOUPart 72-73).

Unfortunately, this information did not include data about online forms of political engagement, but new research focusing on the political engagement of young Americans does. The Youth and Participatory Politics (YPP) network has created a groundbreaking longitudinal survey which examined three types of youth behavior: politically driven online participation, online exposure to diverse perspectives, and interest-driven online participation. Part of the research’s focus was on how often students used blogs or social networking sites to share or discuss perspectives on social or political issues, used the internet to get information about social or political issues, and used email to communicate with others who are working on a political or social issue.

The results indicate three major findings: (1) Spending time in online communities appears to promote engagement with society. Youth engagement in interest-driven online
communities was associated with increased volunteer and charity work and in increased work with others on community issues. (2) Contrary to popular belief, it is rare for individuals only to be exposed to political perspectives with which they agree. However, 34% of youth said they didn’t encounter any perspectives at all, meaning they are disengaged from political and civic debates and discussions. (3) Youth exposed to digital media literacy education are more likely to encounter diverse perspectives and are more likely to engage in civic and political issues.

While this study was limited to California, more than 2,500 young adults were surveyed with more than 400 of those being followed for several years. YPP is now conducting U.S.-wide surveys and launching in-depth qualitative studies of the relationship between digital media, youth and political engagement. It is highly probable that the new study will achieve similar results to those found in the California study (DML).

It seems as though European researchers could also benefit from using this sort of study. There are multiple resources for an EU focused study. Surveyors could poll the youth about whether they visit any of the websites of EU institutions, read any of the blogs or follow the EU on social networks. Does the youth interact in online communities and does this action correlate with increased civic engagement or voter participation? Would Europe and the U.S. have similar results?

Judging from the EUYOUPart findings alone, it does not appear that young Germans are apathetic about European politics. They are participating even if they are not voting. A possible explanation for this could be that they feel their votes matter less in an
institution as large as the European Parliament, and that participating in other ways is more effective than casting a ballot.

**Conclusions**

There were many limitations to this project. For one thing, there are no strict quantitative standards for European civic education in German schools, so I found the most in-depth study on the topic that I could and utilized the ratings that were given in that report. This study focused solely on Germany, and yet, it is still impossible to draw absolute conclusions. For example, one can see from Table 1 in this paper, that in both 2004 and 2009, 18-21 year-olds had a higher rate of turnout than the 21-25 year-olds. Is this because it is more likely to be the younger group’s first time participating in an election and they possess extra enthusiasm for voting, or is it because this group has more recently been exposed to European civic education and are more engaged with European topics on a daily basis?

It cannot be assumed that the results found in Germany would be the same across the European Union. To witness the truest representation of the connection between youth voter turnout and civic education, there would need to be much more uniformity in the evaluation of curricular standards. In order to fully understand European civic education’s effect on youth turnout during European Parliamentary elections, there would need to be consistent grading over multiple years for all EU Member States. If the European Commission has also asked other EU countries to conduct studies of the level of “Europe education” in their school curricula just as it asked the Europäische Akademie Berlin to do for Germany, then these collective findings could possibly be used as a first step toward creating a standard for European civic education in schools for all EU members.
There is also room to further study if civic education is leading young adults to become more engaged with Europe. The EUYOUPart data indicates that the youth are participating, just not in traditional forms. If civic education could adapt to their preferred methods and the newest technologies, perhaps it would also make voting during EP elections more enticing.

This paper cannot answer all the many questions it put forward, but it could serve as an impetus for further discussion. In this paper, the significant correlation between European civic education and youth voter turnout has been demonstrated in the case of Germany, however limited this may be. With further specifications and a wider lens, it is my belief that continued research would prove that having European civic education in schools would indeed increase youth voter turnout during elections for the European Parliament.
References


Treaty of Lisbon. Article 165.

