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Transition of Adolescent Political Action Orientations to Voting Behavior in Early Adulthood in View of a Social-Cognitive Action Theory Model of Personality

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The political activity and voting behavior of 136 young German adults in 1994 were predicted by their political action orientations measured 7 years before. Respondents belonging to cohorts born in 1971, 1972, and 1973 were surveyed in 1987, 1988, and 1994. The questionnaires measured variables relevant to the social-cognitive action theory model of personality: self-concept of political competence, beliefs about political locus of control, political knowledge, trust in politics, satisfaction with politics, and political activity in everyday life. The results are interpreted with respect to the correlative and absolute stability versus plasticity of the variables from 1987 to 1994, as well as the predictive value of the action theory personality variables for political activities and for voting behavior measured 7 years later. Longitudinal results indicate a high predictive value of self-concept of political competence and political knowledge for political activity and voting in early adulthood. Because only these two personality variables showed relatively high positional stability coefficients from adolescence to early adulthood, the discussion refers to the necessity of early developmental interventions to prevent extreme types of politically uninterested and passive adults. Therefore, the social-cognitive action theory personality model of political participation is extended to a social-cognitive action theory personality model of political socialization in the life span.

KEY WORDS: political participation, political socialization, self-concept, locus of control, trust, knowledge, voting, action theories, personality theory, longitudinal studies.

Political socialization—that is, political participation and its development in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood—is crucial for any democracy. Democracy depends on and can only develop through the political participation of its citizens, in either conventional or nonconventional political activities. However, “political ideas—like the consumption of cigarettes and hard liquor—do not suddenly begin with one’s eighteenth birthday” (Niemi, 1973, p. 117). Because the same is true

for political activities and action orientations, we must analyze their developments and correlates in the life span to obtain empirically founded hints at developmental risks (i.e., risks of development in the direction of low political interest, political nonparticipation, anomie, etc.) as well as empirically based indications for the promotion of political participation in general and in specific developmental phases.

Two to three decades ago, research on political socialization focused on childhood and early adolescence, the supposed relevant socialization agents for these age groups (e.g., parents, teachers, peers, and the impact of the mass media), the stability versus plasticity of political knowledge, political interests and attitudes, etc., and the relevance of early political learning for political participation and attitudes in later years. Cross-sectional and—at best—simple longitudinal designs (but no cross-sequential designs) as well as frequent selection of variables with weak theoretical backgrounds (mainly founded on plausibility considerations) predominated. Results referred, for example, to the learning of “attachment to the nation,” to “government and regard for law” in American elementary and secondary school students (Hess & Torney, 1970, p. 287), and to the (low) impact of peers on political knowledge and attitudes of junior high school students (Silbiger, 1977). In a review of this and other research, Sears (1983) concluded that the persistence of early political predispositions can be empirically differentiated into two categories of politically relevant person variables: those with rather low stability from childhood through adulthood, and those showing a higher degree of stability over time. Most political attitudes, political interests (see also Sears, 1997), and trust in politics are found in the first group; all these are more dependent on historical changes and political events rather than being age-dependent or stable over time. In contrast, empirical results point toward a relatively higher stability of identification with political parties, liberal-conservative orientation, individualism and equality, ethnic tolerance, political morality, and attitudes toward specific politicians (which can be a posteriori subsumed under a category of rather value-related and ideology-related concepts).

Another group of findings is based on research derived from the cognitive and moral developmental theories of Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. These results converge in the observation of negative horizontal shifts in the development of political knowledge (i.e., cognitions) and political moral judgments—for example, in children and young adolescents, the development of political cognitions and political moral judgments lags behind the stage of their “general” cognitive and/or moral development (see, e.g., Moore, Lare, & Wagner, 1985; Stevens, 1982; Torney-Purta, 1989). However, such results have only limited value for political socialization research because of their reliance on the pure description of relatively abstract developmental stage categories (i.e., of preoperational, concrete operational, formal, and relativistic political “world views”), with only weak hints at sociodemographic and/or socialization agent correlates of the stages reached in children’s and adolescents’ political thinking. Worse, political socialization

research in the Piagetian tradition focuses on the task of developmental description and neglects the tasks of explication and prediction of development in the context of political participation and socialization. For example, a high-stage level of formal political thinking and reasoning may be reached by an individual, but theory does not allow predictions of his or her extent or forms of political participation versus nonparticipation. Therefore, the impact of research in the Piagetian tradition on political socialization research remained rather low (fixed at the descriptive task), and there was a change in the research focus.

Sears (1987), in his review of political psychology, including research on political socialization, concluded: "Overall, the emphasis among researchers has probably shifted from childhood and early adolescence toward early adulthood as a possible formation period with lasting effects" (p. 241). However, it must still be assumed that there are some significant precursor variables of (young) adults' political participation in their political socialization in childhood or adolescence. Hints for these variables can be deduced from Sears' (1983) list of rather time-stable political person variables (see above) as well as from retrospective research showing that remembered political activism from middle to late adolescence is—together with currently measured variables of political identity and responsibility—a significant predictor of political participation in adults (see, e.g., Cole & Stewart, 1996). Aside from such empirically based hints for significant variables, there exist—beyond Piagetian theory—action theory and social-cognitive personality theory approaches for the identification of concepts with relevance for political participation and socialization research.

Action theory approaches (mainly in the tradition of expectancy-value theory and its differentiation to multiattribute utility theory) have proven to be especially fruitful in the domain of voting research (see, e.g., Downs, 1957; Himmelweit, Humphreys, Jaeger, & Katz, 1981). These earlier results have been complemented by findings on the predictive significance of (internal) locus of control beliefs (e.g., Majete, 1987), trust (e.g., Sabucedo & Cramer, 1991), and identified and introjected forms of political internalization (e.g., Koestner, Losier, Vallerand, & Carducci, 1996) for voting participation and voting decisions of adults. Because all of these personality variables are—structurally—more or less generalized expectancies, the link between action theory and social-cognitive personality theory approaches is Rotter's (1955, 1982) social learning theory of personality and its updatings (e.g., Bandura, 1986; Mischel, 1973, 1982). The common features of these theories include the expectancy-value framework (i.e., action theory) and the postulate of more or less generalized expectations (i.e., locus of control, trust, self-efficacy, construction competences, etc.) being personality traits with significance for the prediction of behavior and experience.

An explicit integration of action theory and social-cognitive personality theory approaches was presented with the action theory model of personality (Krampen, 1988). The descriptive and prognostic value of this theory for political participation was cross-sectionally confirmed in a sample of German young adults (Krampen,

1991a). In the present study, the design is extended to a longitudinal cohort analysis including the age span from 14 to 23 years. Thus, the transition of adolescents' political action orientations to political everyday life activities and voting behavior in early adulthood is under investigation in view of a social-cognitive action theory model of personality. The variables under study are summarized in Figure 1. These variables derive not only from social-cognitive personality theories (e.g., Bandura, 1986; Mischel, 1973, 1982; Rotter, 1955, 1982) and the action theory model of personality (Krampen, 1988, 1991a), but also from empirical political socialization research (summarized, e.g., by Niemi, 1973; Sears, 1983, 1987). These empirical results point toward the significance of the self-concept of one's own (political) competence (see, e.g., Carmines, 1991; Mengerling, 1992) and its domain-specific differentiation, especially in adolescence (see, e.g., Adams, 1985; Byrne & Shavelson, 1996); internal locus of control (see, e.g., Majete, 1987; Peterson & Maiden, 1992-93); political knowledge (see, e.g., Hyman, 1973; Lanoue, 1992; Prester, Rohrmann, & Schellhammer, 1987); and trust in politics (see, e.g., Marsh, 1977; Sabucedo & Cramer, 1991) for political participation as well as well-being of adolescents and adults. Satisfaction with politics and politicians was added in

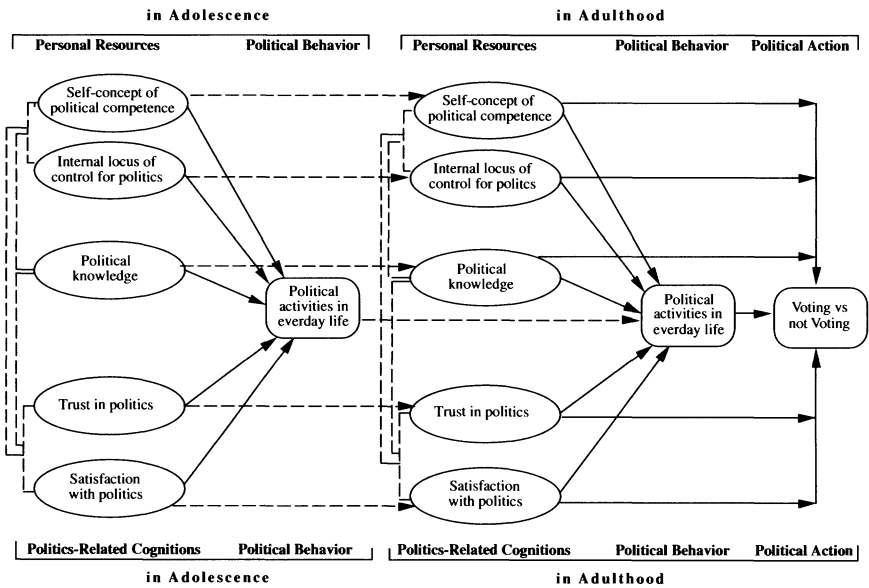


Figure 1. Social-cognitive model of political participation in the life span.

the present study because of its relevance for political participation research (see, e.g., Sears, 1983, 1987) and because it is an indicator of individuals' subjective perceptions of the current political life domain. These variables are grouped in Figure 1 on a dimension ranging from personal political resources (extreme: self-concept of political competence and internal locus of control for politics as indicators of political self-efficacy) to politics-related cognitions (extreme: trust in politics and satisfaction with politics). The dependent variables refer, in the first step (adolescence), to political activities in everyday life (e.g., talking about politics, reading political news, etc.) and, in the second step, to political activities in everyday life as well as voting participation (as a defined action category of political behavior).

With reference to the heuristic taxonomy of the social-cognitive action theory model of political participation (Figure 1), the questions under study refer to (a) the positional and absolute developmental stability versus plasticity of the political action orientations summarized in Figure 1 from adolescence to early adulthood, (b) the longitudinal prediction of political participation of young adults with reference to their political action orientations measured in adolescence, and (c) the differences in political action orientations between young adult voters and non-voters.

Method

Sample

In the first wave of data collection in 1987, the respondents were 162 German high school students who were recruited in schools and belonged to the birth cohorts 1971, 1972, and 1973 (83 females and 79 males; age range 14 to 16 years). In the second wave (1988), 151 adolescents from the first wave were reached (93.2%). Dropouts did not differ significantly in any variable measured in 1987. The third wave took place in 1994 after all of the original respondents had reached the official voting age and were formally authorized to participate in political elections at the European, federal, state, and community levels (and had the opportunity to vote in all of these types of election at least once). A total of 139 respondents were contacted by mail, and all of them participated in the third wave in 1994. The dropout rate, 14.2% for the first wave (1987) and 7.9% for the second wave (1988), proved to be independent of all variables collected at the first time of measurement. Because of missing data most statistical analyses reported refer to $n = 136$.

In 1994, these 139 former high school students were in college ($n = 52$), in vocational education ($n = 30$), working full-time ($n = 29$), in military service ($n = 12$), in civil service ($n = 12$), or were housewives with one or two children ($n = 4$). Most of the respondents were unmarried ($n = 117$), a small proportion were married ($n = 21$), and one was divorced. Thus, together with data on income and

living arrangements, the sample can be characterized as a socially integrated group of young German adults belonging to the middle class.

Measurement Instruments

All measurement instruments were research questionnaires constructed and evaluated empirically for their reliability as well as convergent and divergent validity in several pre-studies (see, e.g., Krampen, 1991a, 1991b). Three data collections were conducted through the postal system and consisted of identical questionnaires that included items measuring the following variables:

Self-concept of political competence (10 items). Sample item: "Nobody is perfect, I have no feeling for politics."

Internal locus of control for politics (8 items). Sample item: "I succeed frequently in convincing somebody of my political opinion."

Political knowledge (11 items). Sample item: "The Federal President of Germany is elected by the people" (correct answer: No, he or she is elected by federal and state representatives).

Trust in politics and politicians (6 items). Sample item: "I distrust most of our politicians."

Satisfaction with politics (3 items). Sample item: "Of course, some politicians and parties do some wrong, but, for the most part, our democratic system is okay."

Frequency of political activities in everyday life (the 12 items of the Frequency subscale of the Trierer Inventory on Political Participation). These items concerned such activities as "political talks" with various reference persons, "reading political news," and "consuming political news on television."

Political knowledge was assessed by Yes/No response items with only one correct answer. Frequencies of political activities in everyday life were rated on a 6-point scale (daily, several times a week, one or two times a week, several times monthly, rarely, never). Responses to all of the other items (agreement versus rejection) were measured on unipolar 6-point Likert-type scales. In agreement with the results of earlier studies (Krampen, 1991a, 1991b), coefficients of internal consistency (Cronbach's α) of all the scales were sufficient for group statistical analyses from all three times of measurement (Table I). As well, the convergent and divergent validity of the scales is confirmed by their intercorrelations (see below).

The questionnaire of the third data collection was extended by questions about current sociodemographic status variables (education, family status, living arrangement, income, and occupational or educational status) and about personal participation in all political elections at the European, federal, state, and community levels since reaching voting age.

Table I. Intercorrelations of Variables of Political Action Orientation in 1987 (above main diagonal) and 1994 (below main diagonal), With Internal Consistency and Cross-Lagged Correlation Statistics (Correlative Stability vs. Plasticity) for 1987, 1988, and 1994 ($N = 136$)

Variable	SCP	LOC	PKN	TRP	SPO	TIPP-F
Self-concept of political competence (SCP)	—	.43**	.37**	.09	.06	.54**
Internal locus of control for politics (LOC)	.46**	—	.11	.05	.17*	.31**
Political knowledge (PKN)	.39**	.20*	—	.00	.13	.36**
Trust in politics and politicians (TRP)	.12	.03	-.07	—	.50**	-.04
Satisfaction with politics (SPO)	-.08	.11	.14	.47**	—	-.02
Frequency of political activities in everyday life (TIPP-F)	.58**	.41**	.38**	-.12	-.16	—
Internal consistency (α)						
1987	.81	.50	.62	.64	.57	.75
1988	.85	.55	.66	.69	.54	.84
1994	.84	.69	.72	.72	.63	.81
Cross-lagged correlation (r)						
1987 → 1988	.81**	.53**	.76**	.29**	.31**	.79**
1987 → 1994	.62**	.32**	.61**	.13	.16	.59**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Analysis of the Data

Data analyses were performed on a development-descriptive level (i.e., analysis of developmental gradients and stability coefficients) as well as on a predictive level (i.e., multivariate statistical standard procedures of time-lagged multiple regression analysis and discriminant analysis).

Results

Development of Political Action Orientations From Adolescence to Early Adulthood

Table I shows time-synchronous intercorrelations of the variables for 1987 and 1994 (1988 intercorrelations are omitted because of their high similarity with those for 1987). The time-synchronous intercorrelations correspond to expectations and earlier results (e.g., Carmines, 1991; Lanoue, 1992; Marsh, 1977; Sears, 1987). The variables of self-concept of political competence and internal locus of control for politics are positively intercorrelated (together constituting a variable of political

everyday life from adolescence to early adulthood. Developmental plasticity is absolute for trust in politics and politicians and satisfaction with politics, whereas developmental stability is somewhat lower in locus of control for politics. Thus, these two politics-related cognitions proved to be very sensitive for time-related changes. This is in accordance with overviews of empirical results (e.g., Sears, 1983). However, the present sample displayed rather high positional stability of political self-concept, locus of control, and knowledge from adolescence to early adulthood.

Results of nonorthogonal analyses of variance (ANOVAs) involving the factors of birth cohort (1971, 1972, or 1973) and time of measurement (1987, 1988, or 1994) with repeated measurement on the second factor are summarized in Table II. An a priori computed multivariate ANOVA including the same factors and all six dependent variables gave no hints of significant interaction terms. This is demonstrated in the ANOVAs where different main effects were observed for the dependent variables (Table II). Self-concept of political competence proved to be not only positionally stable (see above) but also absolutely stable. There is neither a significant cohort effect nor a significant time effect. ANOVA results for internal locus of control for politics consistently point toward a decrease from adolescence to early adulthood (Table II); the same is true for political knowledge, but a significant increase is observed with age (operationalized by cohort as well as by time of measurement). For trust in politics and politicians as well as for satisfaction with politics, there are significant time effects (Table II) but no significant cohort effects. In combination with the above described results on the low positional stability of these variables of politics-related cognitions, these results point toward the historical and event (i.e., time) dependency of trust in politics and politicians and satisfaction with politics. Thus, both variables seem to be of low ontogenic significance in developmental psychology. In contrast, frequency of political activities in everyday life shows consistently significant increases for cohorts and times of measurement, with the largest cohort differences in adolescence (Table II).

Summarizing the cross-sequential findings on the positional and absolute stability versus plasticity of political action orientations from adolescence to early adulthood, the following developmental patterns can be differentiated: (a) Self-concept of political competence: high positional and high absolute stability. (b) Political knowledge and frequency of political activities: high positional and low absolute stability (i.e., generally increasing with age within the sample). (c) Internal locus of control for politics: medium positional stability and absolute decrease with time, but without consistent cohort differences. (d) Trust in politics and politicians and satisfaction with politics: low positional stability and absolute decrease with time (without consistent cohort effects).

Table II. Means and ANOVAs on Variables of Political Action Orientation, With Cohort and Time of Measurement as Factors (N = 136)

Variable	1987			1988			1994			ANOVA effect		
	Coh-1	Coh-2	Coh-3	Coh-1	Coh-2	Coh-3	Coh-1	Coh-2	Coh-3	Cohort (C)	Time (T)	T x C
Self-concept of political competence	36.8	36.1	37.1	37.9	36.3	37.0	37.4	37.0	36.9	1.21	1.87	1.54
Internal locus of control for politics	27.6	26.3	25.9	26.5	25.4	25.3	25.2	24.8	24.8	3.02*	10.16**	0.13
Political knowledge	6.5	7.1	7.8	7.3	8.1	8.4	9.3	9.2	9.2	4.63**	19.37**	0.45
Trust in politics and politicians	26.7	25.5	25.9	25.7	24.6	25.5	23.7	23.7	23.9	1.29	11.01**	0.98
Satisfaction with politics	15.7	15.8	15.6	15.0	14.9	15.4	13.7	13.8	14.2	0.88	12.03**	1.07
Frequency of political activities in everyday life	37.1	39.5	39.3	42.0	44.5	50.7	56.2	56.9	57.1	3.37**	14.03**	1.14

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Prediction of Political Activity by Social-Cognitive Personality Variables

Table III shows the results of multiple regression analyses for the prediction of the frequency of political activities in everyday life in early adulthood (1994) by social-cognitive personality variables assessed time-synchronously (1994) as well as 7 years before (1987). Multiple correlation coefficients as well as their population estimates (ρ) reach statistical significance in both analyses, but the coefficients drop in value from the time-synchronous (cross-sectional) to the cross-lagged prediction. However, the difference between the multiple correlation coefficients is not significant [$F(2, 127) = 2.77$]. Therefore, political activities in the everyday life of young adults can be predicted cross-sectionally as well as longitudinally by social-cognitive personality variables. Regression factor structure coefficients (which are preferred for interpretation because of their robustness in cases of small sample size in comparison to β weights) point toward the relatively high predictive power of self-concept of political competence, internal locus of control for politics, and political knowledge (Figure 3). It is exactly these three variables that survive in additionally computed stepwise regression analyses ($R = .41, p < .01$). Thus, trust in politics and politicians and satisfaction with politics are of low predictive power for political activity in early adulthood. The regression factor structure coefficients of cross-sectional and longitudinal multiple regression analyses are summarized in Figure 3 with reference to the social-cognitive model of political participation.

Differences in Social-Cognitive Personality Variables Between Voters and Nonvoters in Early Adulthood

At the third time of measurement (in 1994), 90 young adults reported that they had participated in at least one federal election and in at least one other election at

Table III. Time-Synchronous and Cross-Lagged Prediction of Frequency of Political Activities in 1994 From Political Action Orientations ($N = 136$)

Predictor variable	Time-synchronous prediction 1994 → 1994		Cross-lagged prediction 1987 → 1994	
	r_c	RSC	r_c	RSC
Self-concept of political competence	.58**	.77	.36**	.80
Internal locus of control for politics	.41**	.55	.24**	.53
Political knowledge	.38**	.51	.26**	.58
Trust in politics and politicians	-.12	-.16	-.03	-.07
Satisfaction with politics	-.16	-.21	.05	.11
Multiple correlation (ρ)	.75** (.73**)		.45** (.39**)	

Note. r_c = predictor-criterion correlation, RSC = regression structure coefficient.

** $p < .01$.

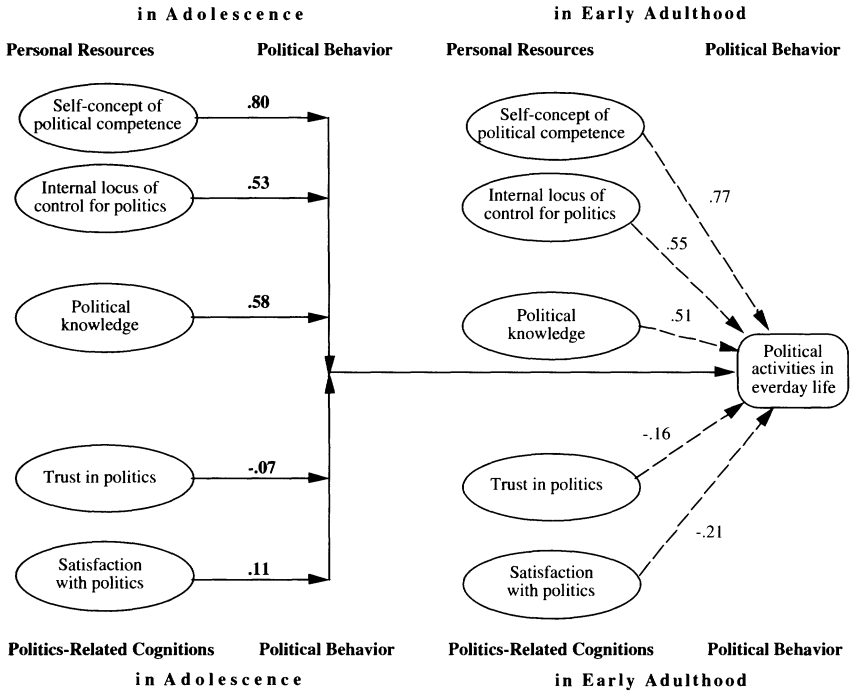


Figure 3. Regression factor structure coefficients of cross-sectional and longitudinal (boldface on continuous lines) prediction of political activities in everyday life of young adults ($N = 136$).

the European, state, or community level. The rest of the respondents ($n = 46$) reported that they had not exercised their right to vote in any public election. Thus, there was a 66% turnout in the present sample of young German adults, which is in astonishing accordance with the turnout of the 1994 federal election in Germany. “Voters” ($n = 90$) and “nonvoters” ($n = 46$) are compared in the following by multiple discriminant analysis including the social-cognitive personality variables assessed in adolescence as well as in early adulthood. (Because of small sample sizes, no results on differences between groups with different political party preferences and voting decisions are presented.)

The results of the time-synchronous (cross-sectional) multiple discriminant analysis are presented in Table IV. Statistical parameters are significant, and the percentage of cases correctly classified (88%) is high. Standardized canonical discriminant function coefficients point toward a high discriminating power of the variables of self-concept of political competence, frequency of political activities in everyday life, internal locus of control for politics, (low) trust in politics and politicians, and political knowledge. Only for satisfaction with politics is there no significant difference between voters and nonvoters in cross-sectional analysis.

Similar to the results of the multiple regression analyses presented above, the statistical parameters of the multiple discriminant analysis computed with longitudinal data drop in comparison to those computed with cross-sectional data. However, the results summarized in Table V show that they still reach statistical significance and a sufficient percentage of cases correctly classified (65%), considering the fact that there is a time lag of 7 years between the assessment of the social-cognitive personality variables in adolescence and voting versus nonvoting

Table IV. Discriminant Analysis of Voters Versus Nonvoters in 1994 Using Political Action Orientations Measured in 1994 as Discriminating Variables ($N = 136$)

Political action orientation (1994)	90 voters		46 nonvoters		$F(1, 134)$	DC
	M	SD	M	SD		
Self-concept of political competence	43.2	6.1	32.7	5.8	12.53**	.63
Internal locus of control for politics	27.7	3.2	22.8	3.5	7.66**	.48
Political knowledge	10.1	2.1	8.9	2.7	5.05*	.33
Trust in politics and politicians	21.5	4.7	26.5	5.2	6.23*	-.45
Satisfaction with politics	13.8	3.3	14.1	3.6	0.42	-.05
Frequency of political activities in everyday life	63.8	7.1	48.4	6.9	13.01**	.61
Canonical correlation (R_c)					.69**	
Wilks' λ					.52	
$F(7, 128)$					16.63**	
Cases correctly classified (%)					88.2	

Note. DC = standardized canonical discriminant function coefficient.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table V. Discriminant Analysis of Voters Versus Nonvoters in 1994 Using Political Action Orientations Measured in 1987 as Discriminating Variables ($N = 136$)

Political action orientation (1987)	90 voters		46 nonvoters		$F(1, 134)$	DC
	M	SD	M	SD		
Self-concept of political competence	39.2	7.3	34.6	6.9	8.93**	.55
Internal locus of control for politics	27.0	4.9	26.5	4.8	1.02	.18
Political knowledge	9.0	2.3	5.9	3.0	10.01**	.74
Trust in politics and politicians	25.8	5.8	26.2	5.6	0.87	-.10
Satisfaction with politics	15.8	3.5	15.7	3.4	0.21	-.11
Frequency of political activities in everyday life	44.6	8.2	32.8	7.9	9.77**	.66
Canonical correlation (R_c)					.42**	
Wilks' λ					.82	
$F(7, 128)$					3.92**	
Cases correctly classified (%)					65.4	

Note. DC = standardized canonical discriminant function coefficient.

** $p < .01$.

behavior in early adulthood. Of course, more interesting are some changes in the standardized canonical discriminant function coefficients (Table V and Figure 4): Results show that the variables of frequency of political activities in everyday life, self-concept of political competence, and political knowledge in adolescence are the most significant discriminators for voting versus nonvoting behavior of young adults. The other three variables measured in adolescence—internal locus of control for politics, trust in politics and politicians, and satisfaction with politics—do not discriminate between adult voters and nonvoters. Standardized canonical discriminant function coefficients of the cross-sectional and the time-lagged analyses are summarized in Figure 4 with reference to the social-cognitive model of political participation presented earlier.

Discussion

Results obtained in cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses prove empirically the heuristic value of a social-cognitive model of political participation in the life span, which is based on an action theory and social-cognitive personality

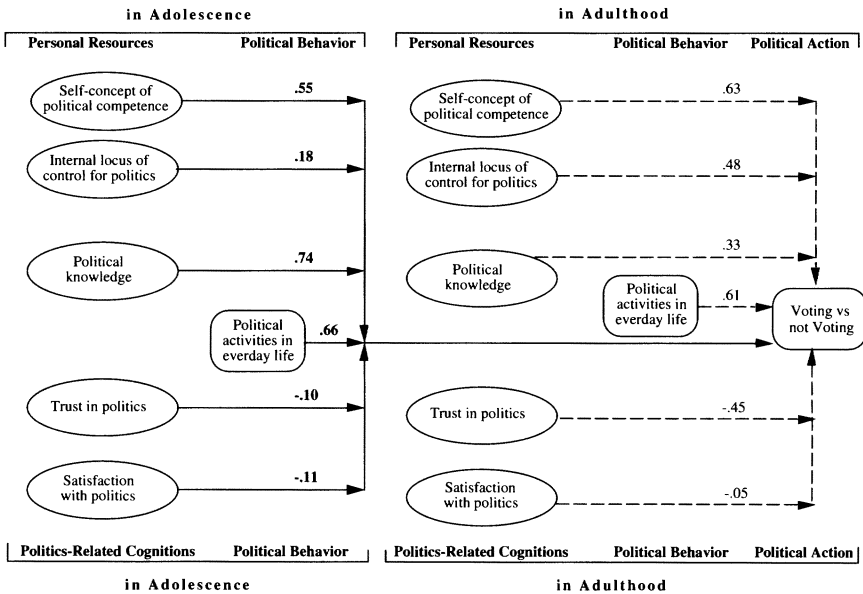


Figure 4. Standardized canonical discriminant function coefficients of cross-sectional and longitudinal (boldface on continuous lines) discrimination between adult voters and nonvoters ($N = 136$).

model. Derived from social learning theory of personality (Rotter, 1955, 1982), self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1986), and some other social-cognitive models (see, e.g., Mischel, 1973, 1982), the social-cognitive model of political participation in the life span includes a developmental psychology extension. More important, the selection of concepts and variables in political participation research could be done with reference to this heuristic model in a purposeful manner.

At the developmental-descriptive level, the application of the model to the transition of political participation from adolescence to early adulthood points toward four groups of political action orientations showing different developmental patterns over the course of the 7-year study period: (a) self-concept of political competence showed high positional and high absolute time stability; (b) political knowledge and frequency of political activities showed high positional stability but low absolute stability (i.e., both variables generally increased with age without larger changes in ranks within the sample); (c) internal locus of control for politics showed medium positional stability and absolute decrease over time without consistent cohort differences; and (d) trust in politics and politicians and satisfaction with politics showed low positional stability and absolute decrease over time without consistent cohort effects. Thus, the last three variables (internal locus of control for politics, trust in politics and politicians, and satisfaction with politics) are more time-related (e.g., political event-related) than age-related in their development (see, e.g., Sears, 1983). Political knowledge and political activities in everyday life are genuine developmental variables in the age span under study, and this age span appears not to be a sensitive period for self-concept of political competence. These results are of special significance because they are based not only on cross-sectional and longitudinal data, but on their combination in a cross-sequential design.

Longitudinal analyses indicate that political activity in the everyday life of young adults can be predicted by their political knowledge and self-concept of political competence as adolescents. In the discrimination of adult voters versus nonvoters, these two personal resources in the life domain of politics are completed by the frequency of political activities in adolescence. Only for these three variables were relatively high positional stability coefficients observed in the 7-year interval within the sample, and together the results hint at the danger that interindividual differences in significant political action orientations may already have been developed in a relatively stable manner during adolescence. These interindividual differences in political knowledge, self-concept of political competence, and political activity may increase with age. Thus, they may lead to the extreme types of "chronic know-nothing" and "know it all" described 50 years ago for the political knowledge of adults in the United States by Hyman and Sheatsley (1947). The present findings strengthen the hypothesis that the switches for such types may be triggered in (early) adolescence, may be reset later only with difficulty, and (besides political knowledge) may also include self-perceptions of political competence and

political activity; however, in the present study this is documented empirically only until early adulthood.

With respect to political socialization and education in a democracy with the educational objective of politically responsible, mature, and reflexive citizens, these results imply that age-adequate stimulation and information are necessary to prevent the vicious circle of little or no political activity in everyday life, avoidance of political information and talks, low political knowledge, and a low self-concept of political competence. In this vicious circle, low personal resources for politics and political nonparticipation inflate each other and may produce the extreme types described by Hyman and Sheatsley (1947). This circle must be prevented or interrupted by developmental contexts that make clear the personal significance of political topics as well as making possible individual learning processes and developments in the political domain of concrete everyday life. The above findings point toward the necessity of starting early, at least in adolescence, perhaps even in childhood. Such interventions should not be restricted to traditional school and college education, because students' involvement is often low (e.g., because they are already in the vicious circle resulting in politics being only "number 20 or so of the personal hit parade") and because some results have shown that the impact of adult reference persons decreases in adolescence in favor of peers (see, e.g., Jennings & Niemi, 1974; Krampen, 1991b). It is assumed that programs that follow the example of programs for the promotion of systematic self-monitoring in everyday life and self-reflexion of everyday life behavior (e.g., with reference to health behavior and health attitudes; see Krampen, 1996) are more effective. Furthermore, these programs are based not only on models of behavior modification but on action theory and social-cognitive approaches in personality theory. Thus, they conform well to the social-cognitive model of political participation in the life span and therefore support the results presented here.

Finally, it should be noted that most of the results obtained in the present longitudinal, cross-sequential study are in good accordance with other findings from cross-sectional and retrospective studies on bivariate intercorrelations of locus of control, or self-concept and political participation, or voting (see, e.g., Cole & Stewart, 1996; Majete, 1987; Mengerig, 1992; Sabucedo & Cramer, 1991). Of course, the present sample size is rather small, and the sample includes socially integrated young German adults from the middle class with higher education. Nonetheless, the quality of the sample is proven by the fact that turnout as well as voting decisions are in good accordance with the results of the 1994 federal elections in Germany (differences: $\pm 2.3\%$). The dropout rate after 7 years was rather low (14.2%), and—with reference to data assessed at the first time of measurement—dropout was not systematically related to the political action orientations under study. However, the possibility that dropout may be systematically related to the development of the variables within the 7 years under study cannot be excluded.

Conclusions for Research: A Social-Cognitive Model of Political Participation and Political Socialization in the Life Span

Two necessities for the extension of the social-cognitive model of political participation in the life span are noted because of their implications for further research. First, the model presented above (Figure 1) must be extended by the social antecedents of political action orientations, political behavior, and political action that can have significance in the life span. With reference to literature overviews (see, e.g., Knutson, 1973; Sears, 1987), Figure 5 includes a listing of such social antecedents, varying on a dimension of higher personal contact (i.e., informal and formal political education in the family, in schools and colleges, on the job, as well as within peer groups) to lower personal contact (i.e., political information by the mass media as well as perceptions of and experiences with national and international politics and politicians). It is hypothesized that social antecedents with higher personal contact have greater impacts on personal political resources, and that social antecedents with lower personal contact have greater impacts on politics-related cognitions (Figure 5). Of course, it must be assumed that the relative importance of these social antecedents varies within the life span and—perhaps—with the current political life situation as well as the political economic system. Furthermore, Figure 5 must be extended by a feedback loop from individual voting versus nonvoting to the social antecedents. This extension strengthens the hypothesis that political socialization must be conceptualized in a contextual developmental perspective in which “the focus of inquiry is the organism-environment transaction” (Lerner, 1985, p. 175). Lerner (1985) argued “that only the probabilistic epigenetic-contextual perspective is suited for studying the relation between the active, developing organism and its context” (p. 182). This argument and the focus on individuals as producers of their own development within given or actively selected developmental contexts have been neglected for the most part in empirical political socialization research until now. However, there are some hints at the significance of this aspect: With reference to political socialization in the family, Niemi (1973) wrote that “we cannot conclude that most children are following in the footsteps of their own parents, with little possibility of change. To a greater extent than has been realized, children are forming their own political views. Thus, when social and political events capture their interest, young people are sufficiently free of parental influence that rapid changes in their attitudes are possible” (p. 137). More recently, Koestner et al. (1996) differentiated empirically between two forms of political internalization in Canadian voters: Introjection was associated with relying on the influence of important others (i.e., social antecedents in Figure 5), whereas identification was associated with actively seeking information about current politics (i.e., an example for the active organism developing in a specific political context). Thus, we are in need of more empirical research on the dynamic interactions between individuals’ goal-directed, development-related activities and the social antecedents of political participation in political socialization research.

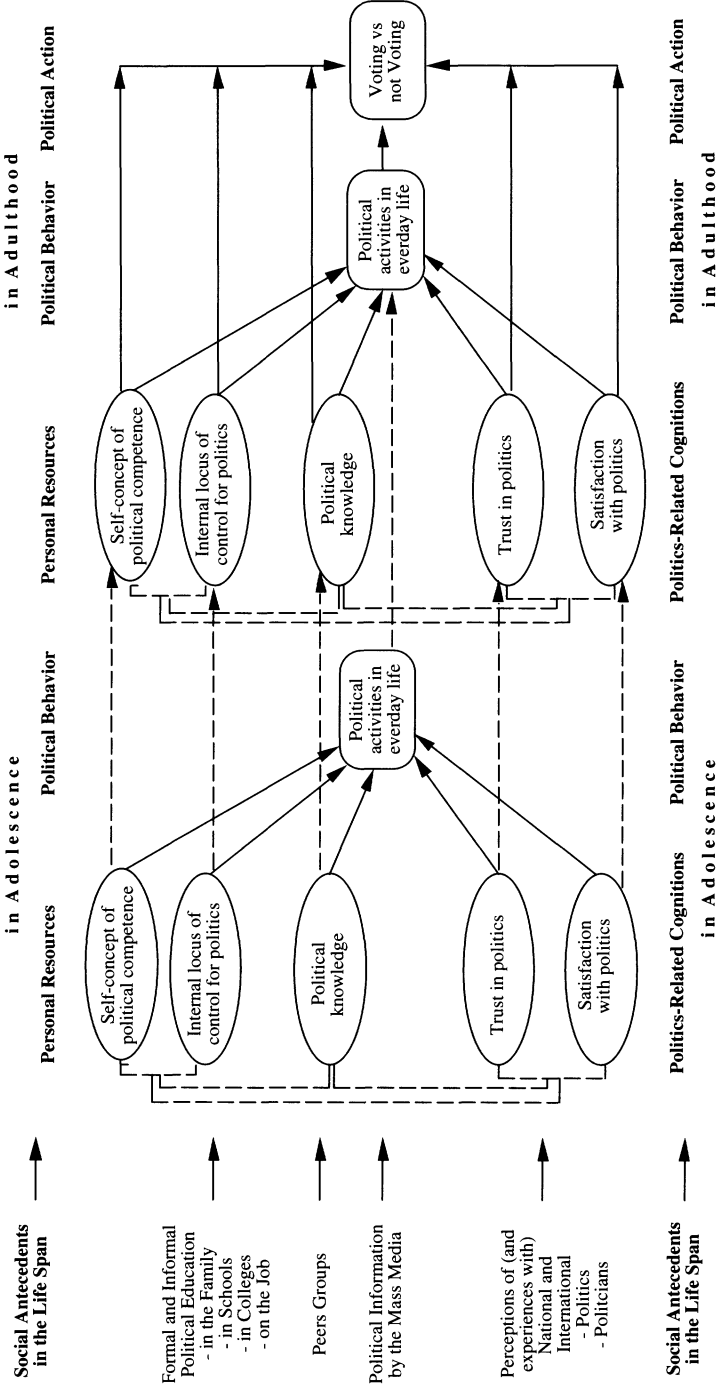


Figure 5. Extended social-cognitive model of political socialization and political participation in the life span.

Second, the social-cognitive model of political socialization and participation in the life span (Figure 5) must be extended by value-related and ideology-related concepts (i.e., normative categories). Such variables are not only of special significance in empirical analyses of decisions such as whether to vote for a specific political party; they are crucially important for democracy. Personality traits and attitudes such as identification with political parties, liberalism, individualism and equality, ethnic tolerance, and political morality can be subsumed under this category of rather value-related and ideology-related concepts that Sears (1983) saw as having a higher persistence relative to other early political predispositions (political interests, trust in politics, etc.). All of them are based on personal value decisions that are integrated in individual value systems, religiousness, and assumptions concerning human nature (see, e.g., de St. Aubin, 1996; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). Further, the results of Elmer, Renwick, and Malone (1983) have shown that such value-related political action orientations are related to the level of moral reasoning. The links between such normative politics-related concepts, which are based on personal value decisions, and the social-cognitive model of political socialization and participation in the life span are multifarious: Only the concepts of "subjective reinforcement values" of the social learning theory of personality (Rotter, 1955, 1982) and of "self-regulatory systems and plans" (Mischel, 1973, 1982), the evaluative valence component of all expectancy-value action theories, and the goal orientation of individuals producing their own development in personal (political) contexts should be mentioned. Therefore, the general action theory model of personality (see Krampen, 1988, 1991a) on which the social-cognitive model of political socialization and participation is based includes the concept of personal value orientations with reference to the subjective evaluations of outcomes and consequences of one's own (political) actions.

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