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Mauno Koivisto Lecture 2010: Political dropouts and the effects of participatory innovations

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Introduction

My recent work (Milner 2002; 2010) is concerned with what I term civic literacy, i.e. the knowledge and skills required to make sense of the political world. Levels of civic literacy, i.e. the proportion of the population with such skills and knowledge, are low and declining, and there are significant differences between high and low civic literacy countries. The high civic literacy countries are especially those in Scandinavia and Northern Europe that engage in policies I term non-material redistribution, in such areas as adult education, communications, libraries, civic education, etc. I find a close relationship between material and non-material redistribution (see Figure 1, which shows that countries that redistribute income have lower disparities in levels of literacy).

These differences, it appears, prevail among the Internet generation, i.e. those 18–30, the first to grow up with the Internet, and among whom civic literacy is low. Citizens lacking the minimum level of knowledge needed to make sense of the political world are termed political dropouts. Among young people, they are better termed potential political dropouts. Such dropouts are concentrated among those with relatively low levels of education. What distinguishes the high civic literacy countries is that they are much better at reducing this. Figure 2 shows that compared to the population as a whole, citizens as poorly educated citizens in countries in Scandinavia and northern Europe are more politically knowledgeable than elsewhere.

In this article, based on my latest book (Milner, 2010) I focus on innovations that reduce the proportion of political dropouts, looking to the high civic-literacy countries for inspiration. I conclude that, unless appropriate innovations are introduced in civic education and in complementary political institutional reforms, the likely consequence of the Internet Generation's low level of political attentiveness will be a continuing decline in civic literacy. If we wish to boost the informed political participation of young citizens, the core challenge lying before us is that of identifying policies that could prevent young people from becoming political dropouts by facilitating their developing the habits of political attentiveness. We should not be misled by dubious survey data and glowing depictions of "engaged citizenship" or cause-oriented repertoires to minimize the phenomenon and underestimate the challenge. We need to rely instead on indicators which place political knowledge – which can be tested - and attentiveness front and center.

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Figure 1. Inequality in the distribution of literacy (9th to 1st decile)

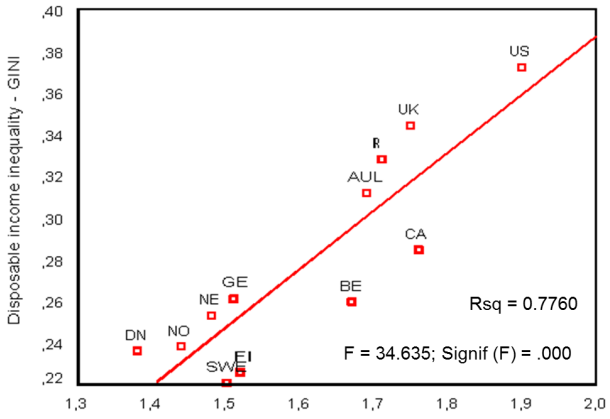


Figure 2. Gini indices scattered against (the F-value of) the effect of education on (CSES) political knowledge (Grönlund & Milner, 2006)

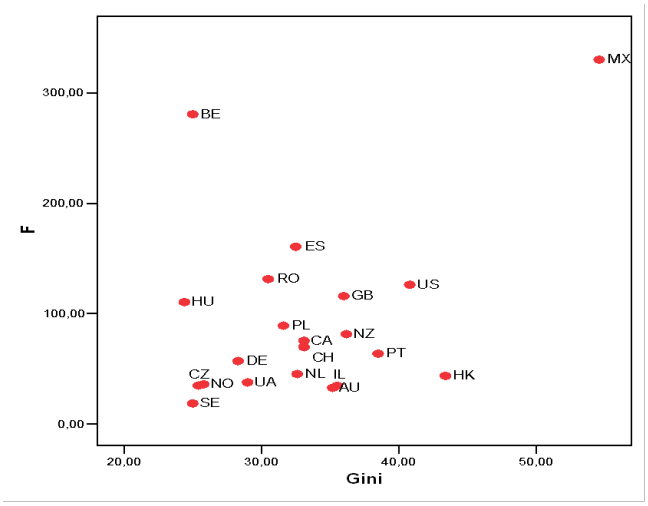


Table 1
Reported turnout in European national elections [ESS round 1]

	Born since 1980	***All***
Sweden	81	87
Denmark	79	94
Netherlands	75	86
Germany	73	85
Austria	75	89
Italy	76	89
Hungary	69	81
Greece	60	90
Finland	55	82
Belgium	54	85
Norway	50	84
Ireland	42	76
Portugal	41	72
UK	41	72
Spain	27	78
Switzerland	18	69

Table 2
Turnout in US federal elections: 1960–2008

Year	***Turnout of voting-age population (%)***	***Turnout of 18–24 year-olds (%) (reported)***
2008	56.8*	48.5****
2004	55.3	41.9**
2000	51.3	32.3
1996	49.1	32.4
1992	55.1	42.8
1988	50.1	36.2
1984	53.1	40.8
1980	52.6	39.9
1976	53.6	42.2
1972	55.2	49.6
1968	60.8	50.4***

**Source 2008 election results: http://elections.gmu.edu/Turnout_2008G.html.*

***Source: US Census Bureau, current population surveys (CPS) 1968 to 2004*

****Prior to 1972, data are for those 21–24 years of age, except for those aged 18 to 24 in Georgia and Kentucky, 20 to 24 in Hawaii, and 19 to 24 in Alaska.*

*****CIRCLE The youth vote in 2008. Based on the current population survey data.*

Democratic innovations that address – or at least do not ignore – the potential political dropouts

Political participation and political knowledge of the internet generation

While those who vote may engage in other forms of political engagement, the evidence is clear that, despite the frequent claim to the contrary, few of those who do not vote participate otherwise. An analysis of the results of a survey of 14-year olds in the 24-nation IEA study found "no overall shift in post-materialist societies from voting to more active, issue-specific forms of participation. Rather... except in the USA, teenagers in the most post-materialist countries, such as the Nordic countries, predict [for themselves] the least diversified range of activism" (Amnå et al., 2004, 35). Generalizing from cross-national data, Gidengil et al. (2004, 142) conclude that "the affluent and the highly educated are the most likely to sign petitions, join in boycotts, and attend lawful demonstrations, just as they are more likely to vote, to become members of political parties, and to join interest groups."

Hence declining turnout reflects declining political participation. Table 1 compares reported voting among young voters to that of the population as a whole in European countries. The generational difference is only in part a matter of life cycles, as is well illustrated in Figure 3 derived by Wass (2008) from the unusually detailed generational data on turnout in Finland. The important exception to the story of decline is the United States, which saw a reversal in the presidential elections of 2004 and 2008, in which, as displayed in Table 2, youth voting rose. However, to judge by the 2010 midterms, this tendency has come to an end. CIRCLE estimates that the 2010 youth (18–29) turnout rate was 20.9 %. Using the same method and the same adjusted tallies from past midterm elections, youth turnout was 23.5 % in 2006, 20.9 % in 2002, 23.6 % in 1998, and 23.9 % in 1994[1].

Turning to political knowledge, there are indications of a parallel overall decline (though it is much harder to identify knowledge level changes over time, since the difficulty of an indicator can vary). The data from the IEA student survey, despite its limitations[2], are telling in this regard. In 2009, 140 000 grade 8 students took part in 38 countries surveyed. Fifteen of these took part in a previous IEA study of civic education in 1999. As we can see in Table 3, in seven there has been a significant decline in civic content knowledge since 1999; only in (Slovenia) has there been a significant increase.

Data shows that in the United States political knowledge is low, and there is a significant difference between the youngest group and everyone else. The data in response to one question is especially unsettling, showing an inability of young Americans to identify the party that is more conservative (60 %) – a term used habitually to characterize the

[1] In predominantly Democratic ("blue") states, youth turnout was 18.8 %. In predominantly Republican ("red") states, turnout was 22.6 %. In competitive ("purple") states, turnout was 23.6 %. In states targeted by several non-partisan youth voting groups, youth turnout was 21.4 %. In the states least targeted by those groups, the turnout was 20.5 %.

[2] To gain approval of the national representatives, one assumes, questions were eliminated that might appear to place a given country at a disadvantage, i.e., the factual questions. What remained in the end were items measuring the students' familiarity with democratic concepts and skills in interpreting political communication. Rather than testing factual knowledge, the questionnaire tested vocabulary, logic, and appreciation for democratic principles.

Figure 3. Turnout by generation in Finland from 1987 to 2003 (Wass, 2008)

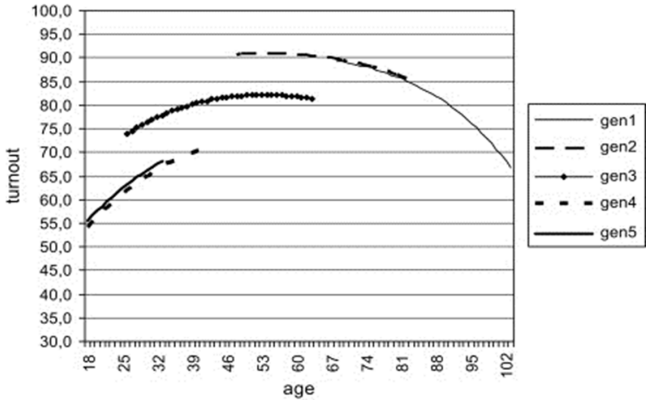


Table 3
Changes in civic content knowledge between 1999 and 2009 (ICCES)

Country	***Mean Scale Score 2009***	***Mean Scale Score 1999***	***Differences between 1999 and 2009***
Finland	109	108	1
Slovenia	104	102	3
Chile	89	89	0
Estonia	95	94	1
Lithuania	94	94	0
Italy	100	101	-1
Switzerland	94	95	-2
Latvia	91	92	-1
Colombia	85	89	-4
Norway	97	103	-5
Greece	102	109	-7
Poland	103	112	-9
Slovak Rep.	97	107	-10
Czech Rep.	93	103	-10
Bulgaria	88	99	-11
Sweden	98	97	0
England	90	96	-6

Republican Party. These results parallel that of the National Geographic-Roper Global Geographic Literacy Survey, (see Table 4) which assessed the knowledge of political geography of 3,250 young adults in 2002[3]. Out of 56 total questions asked across the ten countries surveyed, the average young American answered 23 questions correctly (just above last-place Mexican youth), with young persons in Canada (27) and Great Britain (28) faring almost as poorly. Sweden (40) and Germany (38) led, followed by Italy (38), France (34) and Japan (31).

Table 4
National geographic-roper global geographic literacy survey 2002 (age:18–24), overall quiz performance

Country	***Number***
Sweden	40
Germany	38
Italy	38
France	34
Japan	31
Great Britain	28
Canada	27
U.S.	23
Mexico	21

Average number of correct answers (of 56)

The effect of changing information media

How are we to explain these cross national and generational differences? The most important factor, we should note at the outset, is family background, one that we do not examine per se, since this is a given impervious to policy choices. Young people who have grown up in homes where political and social issues were discussed, which correlates strongly with parental education, are far more likely to be politically knowledgeable and involved. McIntosh et al. (2007; see also J. E. Kahne & Sporte, 2008) found that growing up in such a family has a much stronger effect than even parents' income and occupation on adolescents' 'civic outcomes'. In a comparative study of three stable democracies and four Eastern European transitional ones, Flanagan et al. (1998) found a strong and robust relationship between family values and the public interest concerns of 12–18 year olds.

A second factor, media use, is amenable to policy choices. In my earlier work, I showed a clear relationship between newspaper reading levels – and the media related policies that lay behind them - and civic literacy, something we can see by looking at the ranking of countries in Table 5. A similar ranking prevails in terms of Internet access (Table 6). The Internet's arrival signals a simultaneous, integrated transformation of the nature of the content (text, pictures, video, sound, and graphics - combined, in much higher resolution). Its effect can be compared to that of television, but only after the arrival of the remote control and cable and satellite transmission. Prior (2007) found no link between the political knowledge of respondents without access to cable or Internet and their degree of preference for entertainment, but "for those with access to cable television. . . moving from low to high entertainment preference corresponds to a 20 % drop in political knowledge." Henceforth viewers, with minimal effort, could avoid political news. The result was a deeper political knowledge gap between those following news and

[3] Two examples: "The Taliban and al Qaeda movements were both based in which country?" "Which two countries have had a longstanding conflict over the region of Kashmir?"

Table 5
Age structure of self-reported daily newspaper readership (2000)

Country	***Reach (Youth)***	***Age***	***Reach (Adults)***
Norway	81	13–19	86
Sweden	77	15–24	88
Denmark	76.6	16–24	79.7
Finland	72	15–24	87
Austria	69.5	14–29	75.2
Switzerland	68.1	16–24	74.8
Netherlands	58	15–24	71.4
Germany	53.6	14–19	76.2
Belgium	50.7	15–24	47.4
Canada	44.9	18–24	54.1
Spain	41.7	16–24	39.7
Italy	40.2	18–24	39.3
United States	40	18–24	54
France	36.3	14–19	45.3
UK	35.7	15–24	32.8

Table 6
Percentage with home Internet access, 2008 (Eurostat)

Country	***%***	***Country***	***%***
Iceland	88	Slovenia	59
Netherlands	86	Estonia	58
Norway	84	Slovakia	58
Sweden	84	Latvia	53
Denmark	82	Lithuania	51
Luxembourg	80	Spain	51
Germany	75	Hungary	48
Finland	72	Poland	48
United Kingdom	71	Italy	47
Austria	69	Czech Republic	46
Belgium	64	Portugal	46
Ireland	63	Greece	31
France	62	Romania	30
		Bulgaria	25

those avoiding it, a gap that could only grow with the Internet[4].

In the US, the biggest single-decade drop in reported regular newspaper reading was not in TV's heyday, but in the decade that the Internet emerged, the 1990s, when it dropped from about 50 to 40 %. During the presidential primary season in 2008, 40 % of American adults stated that they looked for political information on the Internet, up 9 points from 2004; by campaign's end, the Internet had displaced newspapers as second source—after television—for national and international news. Among young people, the Internet had pulled equal with television (Smith et al., 2009).

It is too early to attempt to establish the overall effect of the Internet on political participation. We do know that Internet use exacerbates the tendency that arrived with the multi-chanelled TV universe, in which content is internally selected, ordered and, potentially, created[5]. As a result, power shifts from institutions to networks and from bordered territories to cyberspace, transcending geographical and hierarchical restrictions. Faster information gathering enhances political engagement for the digitally sophisticated but widens the digital divide between them and others.[6] But the social media may narrow that divide. Smith et al. (2009) raise this possibility in a recent study, noting that a potential exception to the Internet's widening the class-based gap in political participation may lie in social networking, since 78 % of those under twenty-five are found to engage in such activities. Nevertheless, the authors warn, "Many forms of political engagement on these venues do not fall squarely under the rubric of a definition of political participation.... A social *networking site like Facebook is more a forum for political talk than for organized political effort... 'Friending' a candidate is not the same as working in a campaign.... Among those who are politically engaged on social networking* sites, 44 % are students... The educational component of their eventual SES will, by definition, rise .... Thus, we consider it premature to conclude... that interactive forms of online political participation hold the key to unlocking the association between political participation and socio-economic status. "

Indeed it is premature. I contend that the possibility of on-

[4] For most of the 126 students in an Ohio University intro US politics course, mean age 19 (Miller 2010) the Internet is primary news source. Each has a cellular phone; all but 5 an active Facebook account (average use one hour a day, half the time spent on the Internet). While 79 % could name no Supreme Court justice, 77 % could identify 3 American Idol judges, and 68 % could identify no news anchors (Brian Williams, Katie Couric, and Charlie Gibson).

[5] Even newspapers are affected. "I can no longer file a story in our computer system without filling out a box, a small gray square that may well determine the future of serious journalism. The box is supposed to contain words and phrases that will help me reel you in. Search has become a journalistic obsession on the Web, and with good reason. Most people don't read publications online, patiently turning from national news to Metro to Style to the sports section. They hunt for subjects, and people, in which they're interested. Our mission – and we have no choice but to accept it – is to grab some of that traffic that could otherwise end up at hundreds of other places, even blogs riffing off the reporting that your own publication has done. If you appease the Google gods with the right keywords, you are blessed with more readers. So carried to a hypothetical extreme, an ideal headline would be, 'Sarah Palin rips non-Muslim Obama over mosque while Lady Gaga remains silent.'" Howard Kurtz, "Appeasing the Google Gods" Washington Post, Sept 7, 2010.

[6] Using administrative data on North Carolina students, Vigdor and Ladd (2010) corroborate earlier findings of broad racial and socioeconomic gaps in home computer access and use. The introduction of home computer technology is associated with modest but statistically significant and persistent negative impacts on student math and reading test scores. Moreover, providing universal access to home computers and high-speed internet access would likely broaden, rather than narrow, math and reading achievement gaps.

line communication "unlocking" the association between political participation and socio-economic status, if anywhere, lies in initiatives targeting potential political dropouts. This is the subject of the next section of this paper.

Innovations in enhancing youth political participation

The civic education gap

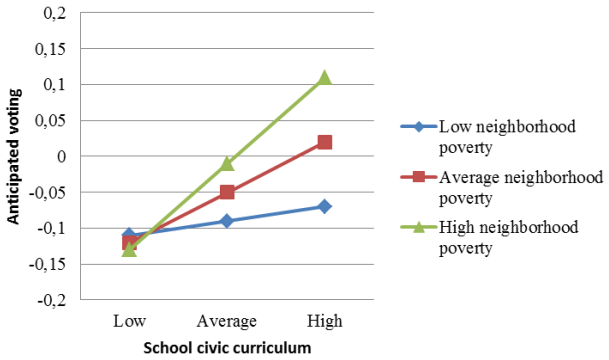
Unlocking the potential of Internet based communications to reduce the number of political dropouts, I argue, is primarily a question of effectively applying such communication techniques. There is no comprehensive comparative analysis of the effects of civic education on political participation, but we do know from numerous specific cases that civic education can, when done well, raise levels of political knowledge. To the extent that such programs target, or at least do not miss, the potential political dropouts, they can also be expected to raise levels of political participation.

The irony is that civic education is provided least where it can have the most benefit especially in the low- civic literacy countries. A recent study of US high school civic education opportunities (J. Kahne & Middaugh, 2008) found that a student's race and academic track, as well as a school's average socioeconomic status (SES) determines the availability of the school-based civic learning opportunities that promote voting and broader forms of civic engagement. In a more comprehensive study, Wilkenfeld (2009) identified a "civic engagement gap" among American adolescents. The most disadvantaged are male, black, American Indian, immigrant, and low-SES youth.

Wilkenfeld controlled for inequalities in civic experiences in school and the overall school environment, finding that the civic engagement gaps between racial minority, low SES and higher SES white students was significantly reduced. In neighborhoods with high poverty levels, confidence in future political participation was positively associated with students' civic knowledge. The fuller the school's civic curriculum, the higher the overall confidence in political participation, a relationship especially pronounced in high-poverty neighborhoods (See Figure 4). These studies suggest that in the United States at least, appropriately targeted civic education can narrow the SES-based political attentiveness, knowledge and participation gap between different groups of students.

What about high civic literacy countries? A recent Finnish study based on data from the 1999 IEA Civic Education Study of 15-year-olds found that Finnish pupils who have taken civic education at school have more civic knowledge and skills, are more involved in politics and more confident about voting in the future than pupils who have not attended such education courses. The author concludes that "civic education makes it possible to reduce polarization as the role of school can become particularly important for those pupils whose family is politically passive" (Nurmi, 2011). On the other hand, where it is offered seems to make less difference in high civic literacy countries. Ekman and Zetterberg (2010)

Figure 4. Anticipated voting according to school civic curriculum in different types of neighborhoods.



found that different school contexts had little effect on the political knowledge or anticipated political participation of 14 year-old Swedish high school students. What mattered beyond the education level of the students' own parents was the average educational level of the parents in a given school.

From the above I conclude that especially in societies where there are wide gaps due to weak efforts at material and non-material redistribution – the US being the classical example – the crucial factor is the targeting of civic education at potential political dropouts. But targeting is also a matter of content, or course design - which brings us back to high-civic literacy countries, with their relatively high level of youth voting and political knowledge. What can we learn from the experiences of these countries if we seek to make it possible for the majority of citizens to effectively make inputs into policy decisions, both as voters, and through more direct forms of participation? What policy interventions are likely to promote political attentiveness among (the potential political dropouts in) the Internet Generation? Clearly the primary terrain for such intervention is the school, and the primary means of such intervention is civic education. After surveying what we know from the literature (Milner, 2010), I conclude that for civic education to be effective it must:

1. be certain to include if not directly target potential political dropouts

2. apply innovative techniques that correspond to the students own forms of communication and expectations. This entails use of:

-A. simulations, that permit hands-on rather than passive learning, and

-B. use of sophisticated Internet technology allowing for two-way rather than top-down communications

In the next section I look at a few promising examples of these techniques in several European countries, singling out Norway. I do not directly discuss the wider content of civic education, a subject well beyond the scope of this paper, but I do, in the Appendix, provide a short summary of the curriculum in Norway, which can serve as some kind of benchmark, and which the reader should consult as a backdrop to the innovations described below. In part because youth turnout lev-

Table 7
Is Skolval good for raising awareness and interest in politics?

	All	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Swedish-born*	*Foreign-born*
Yes	73.7	78.9	68.5	72.7	85.0
No	26.3	21.1	31.5	27.3	15.0

els were declining, Norwegian civic education was reformed with the objective of giving "an insight into the political system in Norway and in the international community and make the individual aware that politics is a matter of conflict and collaboration." This was part of a comprehensive reform of the system education in Norway, with the entire curriculum rethought, learning goals articulated for all courses at all levels, and new textbooks prepared.

Simulations

Simulations are used in many countries and in many ways. In the US, the Dirksen Congressional Centre provides classroom materials for several types of Congressional simulations.[7] These fit into the wider category of parliamentary simulations. As a rule, parliamentary simulations, however sophisticated, do not meet our first criterion, namely including as targets potential political dropouts. Typically, parliamentary simulations address the already politically interested. The same can be true of the electoral simulations carried out in the schools in many democratic countries, but if carried out effectively with access to appropriate human and financial resources, this need not be the case. A study *for the* National board of Youth Affairs, (*Sverigesungdomstyrelsen*) of *Skolval 2006*, Sweden's nationally coordinated school elections, found that 70 % of eligible young people in the academic stream and 60 % of the vocational programs took part. Table 7 shows a very positive response to the simulation, especially among the foreign born, a particular target of the effort.

An important aspect of election simulations effectively reaching potential political dropouts is their being integrated into the civic education program. Here Norway stands out. The Norwegian Skolevalg has been running mock elections since 1989 for parliamentary and local elections. It also carries out a survey of students, with a similar survey among a representative population sample, before the election. Approximately 70 % of all high-school students participate in *Skolevalg*, and 30 % in the election survey, (which allows for longitudinal comparison of age differences in attitudes). Overall results are reported online, while school results are distributed to the schools, so students can compare their choices with those of their peers.

Both the mock and real elections are well integrated into Norwegian civic education. Students study political parties and their programs, visit them, make projects where they present party platforms in class, and role play as representatives of political parties. The courses are structured so the section on elections and parties can coincide with the campaigns (facilitated by a system of immoveable fixed election dates). This is complemented by the textbooks, which stress forms of political participation, from membership in the parties or interest groups to street marches and demonstrations. In his content analysis, Borhaug (2011) finds that the textbooks convey "three quite different ideas of what makes political participation worthwhile: "As an individual, you may affect policy outcomes to suit your preferences; All citizens has an obligation and general interest in upholding democracy, this implies some participation; It is possible to be young and politically engaged and active, this is an available identity.... At a general level these ideas are found in all the textbooks and there are no distinguishable alternative profiles among the textbooks. It is likely that the textbooks resemble each other because they are influenced by the same Norwegian political culture in general, curricular context and didactical tradition in particular" (Borhaug, 2011).

Also integrated into the Norwegian civic education process is, from the point of view of this paper, the most interesting example of effective use and targeting of simulation, the *Minitinget*. (There is a similar such simulation for the Swedish *Riksdag* in Stockholm called the *Democracy Workshop*). The *Minitinget*, opened in September 2005, is located next to the Storting (Parliament) in Oslo.[8] Each of about 25 students in a typical civic education class is assigned the role of an individual legislator and party, and placed on a committee mandated to deal with one of two issues. Once assigned their committee, the students go to their parties' caucus rooms, where they work out a position on the issue. They are guided in their deliberations by instructions on a computer screen in the booth, with access to relevant newspaper articles and excerpts from TV and radio coverage. Deliberations are interrupted by calls and computer screen messages from lobbyists, constituents, and party leaders. They even answer questions posed by real journalists in a mock press conference. They then go to committee rooms where they carve out compromises to try to win majority support. The bills then come to the plenary in a mock session of Parliament, with speeches for and against each measure, and a vote is taken. Finally, the students vote again, this time based on their own views, and discuss how these evolved during the simulation. The three-hour Minitinget session is typically combined with a visit to the *Storting*.

From my observations, this innovation fits the criteria outlined above. The simulations are not targeted at the already politically aware but at all, including potential political dropouts. The civics teacher I spoke to observed that its hands-on nature seems to be especially appreciated by less articulate boys, who are passive in their relationship to the more traditional aspects of civic education. With three civics classes visiting daily during the school year, most 15–16 year old Norwegians are able to participate in the Minitinget once

[7] http://www.congresslink.org/print_lp_contents.htm

[8] Relevant information (in Norwegian) can be found at: http://www.tinget.no/no/Toppmeny/Minitinget/Praktisk-Informasjon/

Table 8
Voting turnout in Norway

Local elections year	***1995***		***1999***		***2003***		***2007***	
National election Year		***1997***		***2001***		***2005***		***2009***
18-21	*43*	*59*	*33*	*54*	*37*	*55*	*33*	*57*
All	63	78	60	76	59	77	61	76

Source: Institutt for samfunnsforskning and Statistisk sentralbyrå.

during their two years of civic education at the upper secondary level (see Appendix 1).

It is difficult, of course, to link civic education to quantitative indicators of political participation, beyond those of attitudinal surveys. In a study I carried out using data from Elections Canada (see Milner, 2010), I could find no positive effect whatsoever on turnout in subsequent elections due to the introduction of traditional, compulsory civic education in Ontario. But Ontario - education in Canada is run by the provinces - serves as a useful contrast with Norway. In the former, the (half-semester) course was introduced hastily, imposing an additional burden on the students and schools who were given no additional resources – nor was there any provision for training civics teachers. No wonder among the first year university students I recently queried, the great majority reacted negatively to their experience in the course three years earlier.

The contrast with Norway could not be clearer. The various elements of the course are integrated, from the training of civics teachers, to the curriculum and the textbooks, right up to the *Skolevalg*, which was revamped by the education department in cooperation with the highly respected Norwegian Social Science data Center (NSD) in 2005 as part of an effort to improve civic education and encourage youth political participation. Unlike in Ontario, where the turnout of the relevant group of young people actually declined, there is some indication that in Norway the educational reform may have had a positive effect. Table 8 captures turnout data in recent Norwegian elections. As we can see, declining youth turnout went hand in hand with declining overall turnout until the most recent national election in 2009, the first in which students affected by the educational reform were eligible to vote. In 2009, youth turnout rose, yet that of other age groups declined. Given that the numbers are relatively small, it is too early to do anything more than speculate that the efforts to address young people has paid off. Given the low youth turnout in local elections in 2007, the results of the local elections to take place this year (2011) could prove revealing in this regard.

The Netherlands is another country where innovations in this area have flourished, in particular due to the work of the IPP: *the Instituut voor Publiek en Politiek* (Dutch Centre for Political Participation), an independent, non-partisan body. Since 1994 the IPP has organized election simulations for secondary school students in the two days before the day of the election. Linked to these are diverse educational projects targeted at youth participation, including *Wegwijs op het Gemeentehuis* in which young people fill the role of a member of the municipal council for a day, and *De Haagse Tribune*, which offers secondary school students the chance to spend a day becoming familiar with how their parliamentary democracy functions.

The IPP's functions are not limited to young people: a substantial part of its revenues are drawn from commissions from provincial and municipal and other government agencies, as well as NGOs, to design and implement projects for enhancing citizen participation in decision-making. Of particular interest here are the activities tied to providing information that fosters political participation. WWW.brusselstemt.nl is a website on which the IPP follows the voting behaviour of members of the European Parliament. *StemmenTracker* looks at the actual voting behaviour of political parties in Parliament; *ReferendumWijzer* examines the advantages and disadvantages of the various options in a referendum; *ProgramVergelijking* gives a concise overview of the position of the various political parties on issues such as health care, the economy, and education; and *Stemexamen*: tests election knowledge.

The latter two are integrated into the *StemWijzer*: the Dutch Voter Advice Application (VAA). In the months leading up to an election, visitors to the site are asked to give their opinions on about 30 propositions to which representatives of the parties have already responded. The site calculates which party program most closely corresponds to their answers, and provides further information about the positions held by the political parties. A recent survey (Ruusuvirta & Rosema, 2009) found that 75 % of Dutch citizens 18–24 used VAAs in the 2006 election. If these figures are accurate, then it suggests that use of the *StemWijzer* is not limited to those already planning to participate in the election, but in fact reaches some potential political dropouts. The same cannot yet be said generally about the VAAs now being used in a number of European countries. (A list, no doubt incomplete, is found in Table 9.)

Nevertheless, this may be changing as more VAAs target young people. One such case is the *Wahlomat* in Germany which, in the 2009 Federal election, was used by more than 15 % of Germans. The *Wahlomat* is operated by the BPB (*Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*), the federal agency responsible for civic education materials. Understandably, thus, young voters are a priority of the *Wahlomat*. *Wahlomat* information is incorporated into the civic education materials, and a simple form of the *Wahlomat* is addressed to young people. In the 2009 election, in cooperation with local edu-

Table 9
A Partial List of European VAAs.

Country	***VAA***
Austria	Politkabine
Bulgaria	Glasovoditel
Belgium	Kieskompas
Czech Republic	Kohovolit CZ
France	MonVoteAMoi
Germany	Wahl-O-Mat
Hungary	Választási Iránytű
Ireland	Vote Match IE
Italy	Cabine Electorale
Netherlands	StemWijzer
Poland	Latarnik Wyborczy
Romania	Testeaza-ti votul!
Slovakia	Kohovolit SK
Switzerland	Smartvote
United Kingdom	Vote Match UK
	Vote Match Europe

cational authorities, the BPB organized public question-and-answer assemblies in a score of upper-secondary schools in two states, Saarland and Rhineland-Palatinate. A simulation was created in which politicians' responses to the *Wahlomat* on a big screen served as a basis for political discussion of the issues.

A more comprehensive case of a VAA focusing on young people is provided by the Swiss VAA, Smartvote. Unlike the *Wahlomat* in Germany, *Smartvote* operates independently of government, which gives it more room to manoeuvre, and provide more pointed information to the user. There is some reason to believe that its use has contributed to the rise in electoral turnout generally and, especially, among young people. Turnout rose from 42.2 % in 1995 to 48.3 for the former in 2007, and from 21 to 35 % for the latter. Fivaz and Nadig (2010) cite data from the Swiss Electoral Studies, showing that while 18–24 year olds made up 8 % of all voters, they made up 21 % of Smartvote users. Their own survey found 15 % of them to be "decisively" motivated to vote by using Smartvote, higher than the average for all age groups.

Two applications of *Smartvote* specifically address young people. The first is *Parteienkompass*, an adapted version of *Smartvote*'s issue matching system that operates outside of elections, and includes questions on political values, with questions presented in a language adapted to the needs of students and users with a relatively low level of political knowledge and interest. It also features a database providing comprehensive information about Switzerland's main political parties. There are complementary materials for students and teachers, allowing them to download documents covering the issue-matching system as well as information about the electoral system and the political parties derived from the database. The project was carried out in cooperation with a textbook publisher, *hep*, which also provides information about *Parteienkompas* in its newsletter, which is sent to almost every school in Switzerland. Hep also organizes training programs and workshops for civic education teachers, illustrating how to integrate *Parteienkompas* into civic education classes. In addition, in an effort to reach young citizens who have left school, *Smartvote* made available a shorter and more simply worded VAA known as *Myvote*, and joined forces with *20 Minuten*, Switzerland's most widely read free daily newspaper, which runs the most popular Swiss online community information platform targeted at those under 35.

Conclusion

There are other promising innovations that could be included here; but the above serve the purposes of this paper. As stated at the outset, if we are concerned with increasing citizen input into democratic decision making, we need to be concerned that citizens have the knowledge and skills to effectively make such inputs. To boost the informed political participation of the citizens of the future, we need to focus on measures to prevent young people from becoming political dropouts, drawing lessons especially from the high civic literacy countries. While the examples set out in the above section present only an incomplete picture, they do provide some guidelines as to the kind of innovations we should be seeking.

We have stressed an approach to civic education that targets the potential political dropouts using simulations that effectively apply the communications technology of the Internet generation. We have noted also the possibilities in the appropriate application of Voting Advice Applications to the civic education classroom and beyond. In concluding, we need to take note of a relevant dimension the exploration of which is beyond the scope of this paper. It is that of political institutions. Two salient aspects can be mentioned here. It is no coincidence that the countries here highlighted use proportional electoral systems with fixed election dates. VAAs are more meaningful in PR systems in which parties have fewer incentives to blur policy divergences than under majoritarian systems. Secondly, fixed election dates, such as Norway's system of alternating, every second September, national and local elections, facilitate incorporating election simulations and other election related activities into civic education programs.

The principle is a simple one: the institutional arrangements must invite the expression of relevant positions on current issues in the political arena in a manner predictable and understandable to the ordinary citizen. This is a principle that could beneficially be applied to all innovations seeking to enhance democratic participation.

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Appendix*: Civic education in Norway.*

Teaching hours: Primary (Years 1 to 7): 385.Lower secondary (Years 8 to 10): 256. Upper Secondary (Vg 1 and 2): 84 hours each.

Subject areas:

Primary/lower secondary: sociology, geography and history.

Upper secondary: the individual and society, working and business life, politics and democracy, culture, and international relations.

International relations: cooperation, terrorism, conflicts, conflict resolution, globalization, distribution of resources and sustainable development, and Norway's role on the international stage.

Individual and society: socialization, personal finances, forms of cohabitation, criminality, influences upon youth.

Working and business life: companies, trade unions, wage setting, unemployment, and career choices.

Culture: role of religion, indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, anti-racism.

Politics and democracy, objectives: The pupil completing the courses shall be able to: elaborate on how one can participate in and influence the political system and discuss what can threaten to democracy discuss the relationship among government, law and human rights elaborate on the type of government, the main political bodies, and the place of indigenous peoples and minorities identify basic differences between the parties and argue from different political viewpoints elaborate on key features of Norwegian economic policy explain the basis of the welfare state and the challenges it faces.