



University of Roehampton, London

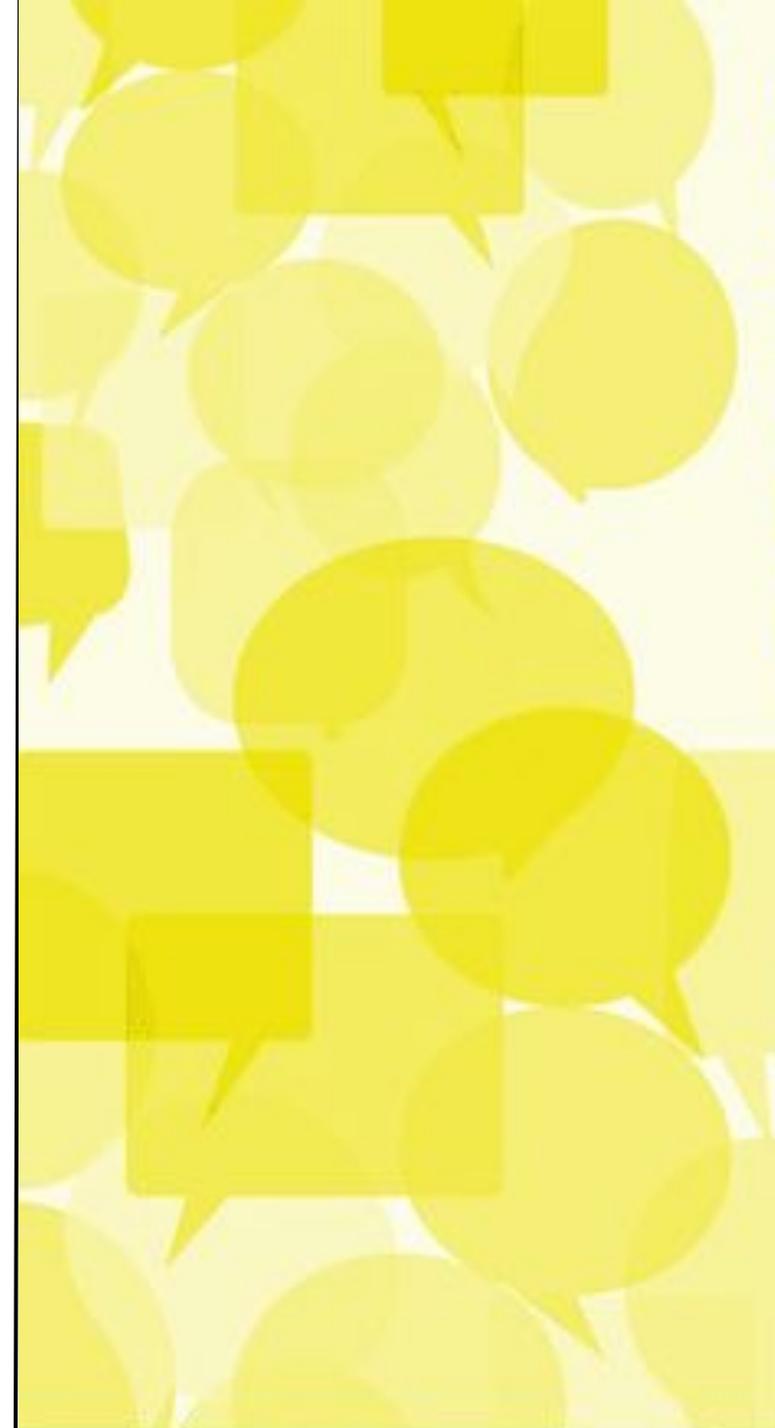
Seventh Annual Conference on Citizenship Education

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A democracy with many faces:

“What are the views of vocational education students on democratic issues, and how do these views change as issues become more complex?”



Discussing democratic issues: Examples

“I think everyone should be able to be who they want to be. I think everyone should be respectful. Everyone is fine the way they are.”

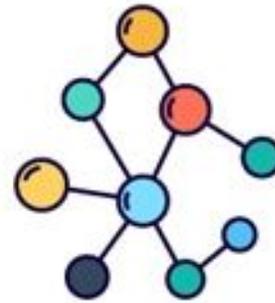


“There are immigrants who try very hard to integrate. However, there are also immigrants like the Polish who are just disrespectful (...) and act as if they are in their own country. I don’t think politics should account for that kind of people. They are guests, even though they stay in this country, they are still guests.”

Adolescents' democratic attitudes



'the democratic attitudes of adolescents' is an increasingly **discussed topic** in public and political discourse



making **considerations** between conflicting democratic values



concern about the support for democracy among **students** from vocational educational tracks



little is known about the ways in which adolescents deal with **democratic issues**



methods

3

democratic issues



- **Decision-making in school:**

...should their school be closed during Eid al-Fitr (festival that marks the end of Ramadan)?

- **Having discussions in the classroom:**

...should students that make offensive comments about classmates be removed from the classroom?

- **Political representation:**

...should uninformed citizens vote during elections?

3

sets of conflicting democratic values



majority
vote



minority
rights

freedom of
speech



equality

conditional political
representation



equal political
representation



increasingly complex conditions



types of elections:

Second Chamber; provincial councils, municipal councils; referendum

kind of arguments:

quality of arguments; number of arguments

levels of decision-making:

school; national

groups of people:

students; elders; immigrants

groups of students:

transgender; homosexual

bystanders:

classmates; other students; big group; small group

characteristics of voters:

uninformed; other opinion; self-interest

20

interviews



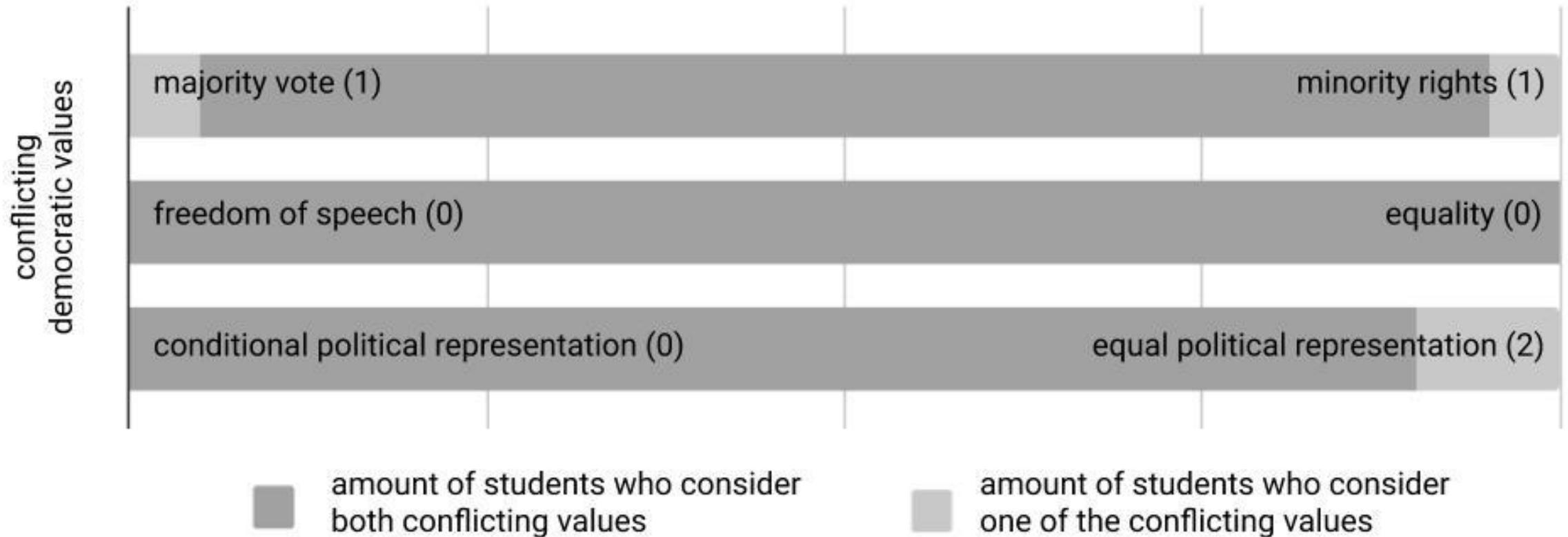
- 20 tertiary vocational education students (mbo)
- aged 16-19
- vocational study learning track (BOL)
- levels 2-4
- first or second year
- two main fields: commerce/business, healthcare
- 6 schools
- 6 cities in the Netherlands



results

Students' views on democratic issues (1/3)

The extent to which students consider (conflicting) democratic values



Discussing democratic issues: Examples

Quotes that illustrate how students consider multiple democratic values

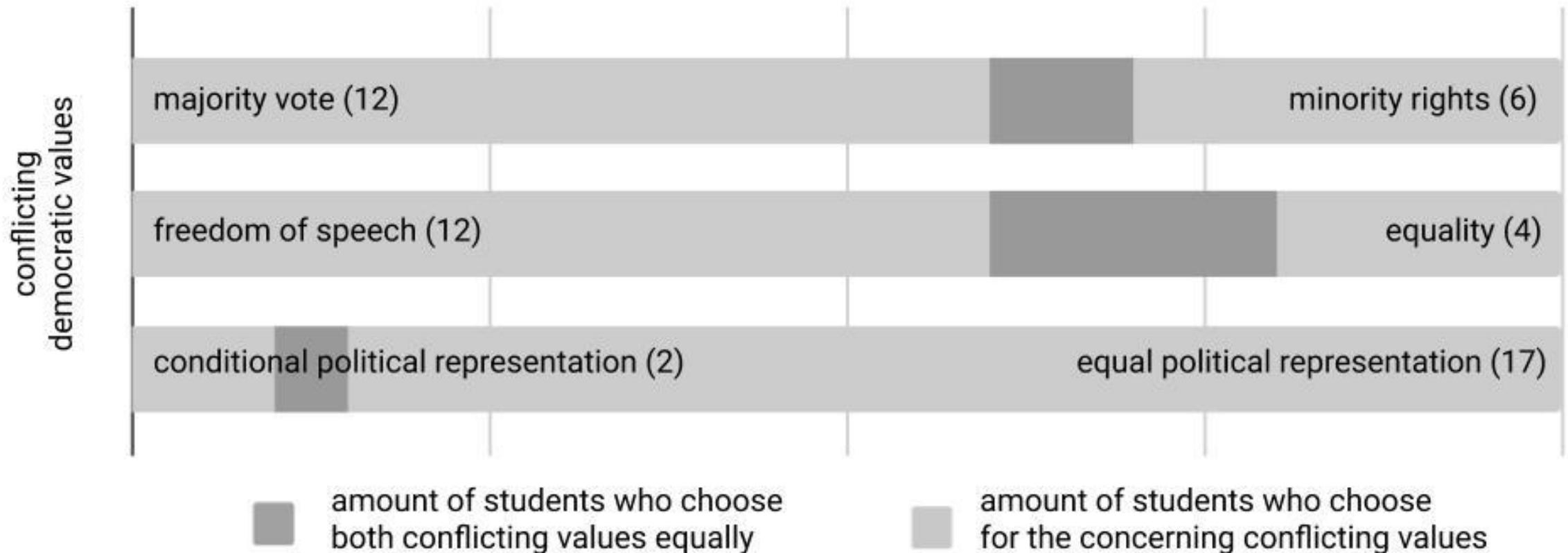
“I do not think that a person should vote if they have not thought about who they should vote for. However, when you consider the past, I feel like everybody has earned their right to vote. So... I don't know.”

“She can express her opinion, but she makes it very personal. That's why it isn't really an opinion anymore, because it is focused on one person. So people are allowed to express their opinion in general, but not personally towards someone.”

“I think that the majority's interests should be respected in a democracy, but that the minority should also be heard. In this case that means that during the end of Ramadan only the Muslims should have a day off and not the entire school. That would be best.”

Students' views on democratic issues (2/3)

The choices students eventually make between conflicting democratic values



Discussing democratic issues: Examples

Should the school be closed during Eid al-Fitr (festival that marks the end of Ramadan)?



14 students say **yes**

“Yes, because it is important to learn that there is a group of people who think Islamic holidays are important. It is important for these people to be seen and heard by society.”

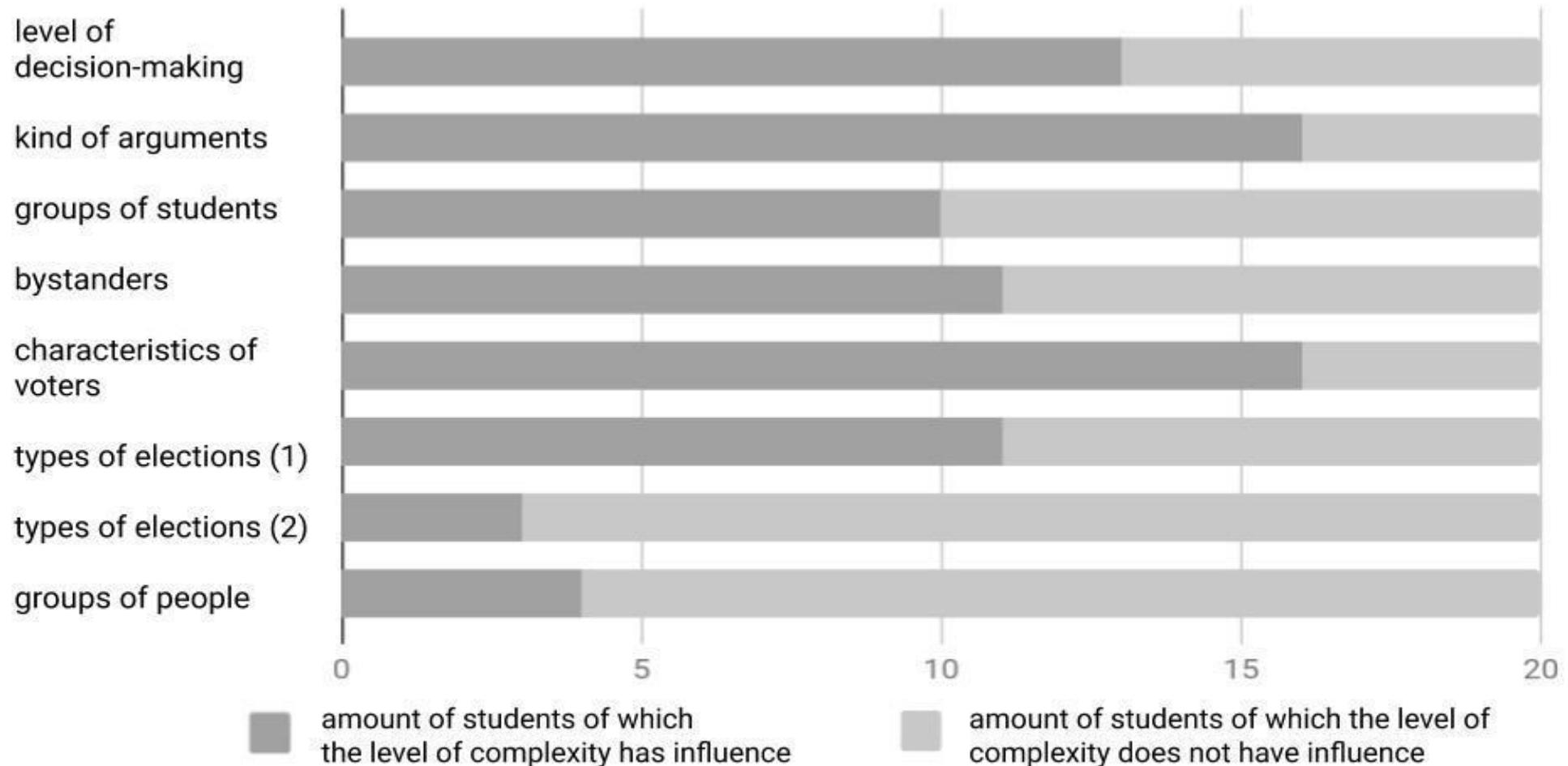


6 students say **no**

“I personally think, this is the Netherlands, we initially don't have a culture like that, only from the people that come to us from different countries. These people that come here should accept that we don't have that culture.”

Students' views on democratic issues (3/3)

The extent to which students' views on democratic issues change in relation to different levels of complexity



Discussing democratic issues: Examples

- 1) During decision-making processes, should your school listen to what the largest or the smallest group wants?
- 2) What if the smaller group has arguments that are well-founded, and the largest group has arguments that are poorly founded?



2 students:
majority in all
cases



1 student:
minority in all
cases



1 student:
both groups in all
cases



1 student:
minority with
arguments that are
based on facts >
majority with
arguments that are
based on lies



16 students:
minority with
well-founded
arguments >
majority with
poorly founded
arguments



4 students:
minority with
largest amount of
arguments >
majority with
smallest amount of
arguments



conclusion



While most students consider both conflicting democratic values, some students mainly focus on one of these values.



After students make implicit considerations between conflicting democratic values, they make explicit choices between these values.



As students were presented with democratic issues that were made increasingly complex as the interview went on, both students' considerations and choices changed.

and...

Students mentioned that they experience little or no room at school to discuss democratic and political issues, and all of them would like to have more opportunities to voice their opinion.

Questions & Discussion



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