making the future
yo**ung IN**

GENDER GAP IN CONFIDENCE TO GET INVOLVED IN POLITICS:

How to reduce it by making citizenship education inclusive

Written by

Bryony Hoskins, Roehampton University

Gema García-Albacete, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid

Agnès Hubert, Gender5 plus

cost
EUROPEAN COOPERATION
IN SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Funded by
the European Union

Executive Summary

The gender gap in confidence to understand and to get involved in politics develops in young people during their experience of lower secondary school education (between ages 11-16). The gap is being enhanced through young people's involvement in discussions in school classrooms where boys are benefiting, and girls are being discouraged. Schools and teachers need to be aware of this and be trained in more inclusive classroom teaching practices.

Key Messages and Recommendations

Challenge: Research shows that the 11-16 age period is when young people start forming their political attitudes and the same period is also when the gender gap in confidence to get involved in politics grows. According to recent findings, schools provide the milieu for reinforcing this gap through the experience of classroom discussions.

Recommendation 1: Raise awareness among teachers on the importance of classroom discussions as having the potential to increase confidence in engaging in politics.

Recommendation 2: Raise awareness among teachers that classroom discussions need to be managed to allow students from all social groups to participate.

Recommendation 3: Develop initial teacher training and continued professional development opportunities for teachers that will train them on inclusive methods for classroom discussions.

Recommendation 4: Monitor the level of inclusiveness of classroom discussions through school inspection and regular research

Recommendation 5: Develop research to identify constraints girls face in developing self-confidence in politics and design interventions that will be effective at reducing the gender gap on political confidence.

Solution: Building on the EU COST research we are launching a new EU Horizon funded project called 'Gender Empowerment through Politics in Classrooms' (G-EPIC) in Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Spain and the UK to build interventions to reduce the gender gap in confidence to get involved in politics.
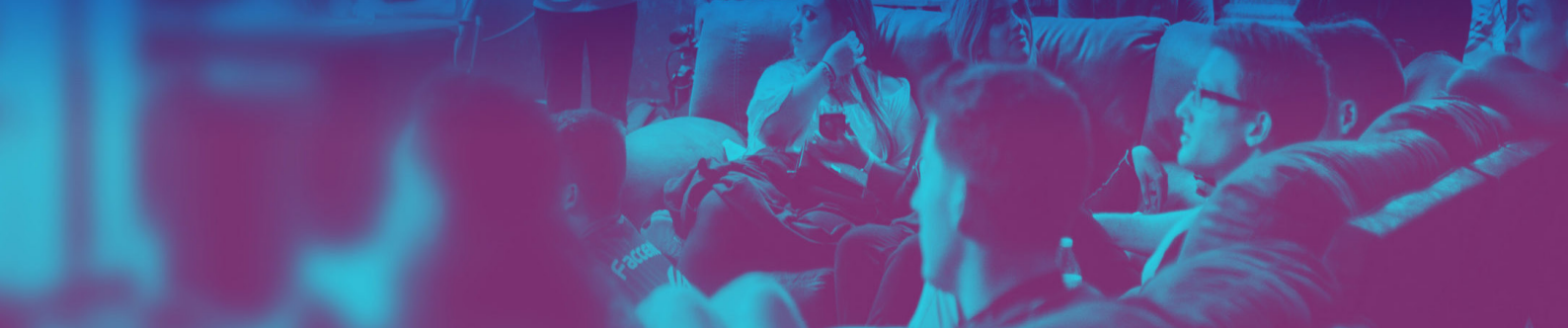
Gender[1] gap on confidence to get involved in politics

Decades of research have consistently shown that women have less confidence in their abilities to influence the world of politics than men. In Europe, data from the European Social Survey shows a substantive gender gap in political confidence across the 23 countries. The graph below (Fig. 1) shows the gap between men and women on confidence to understand and get involved in politics.

Figure 1. The gender gap on confidence in understanding and participating in politics across European Countries in 2018
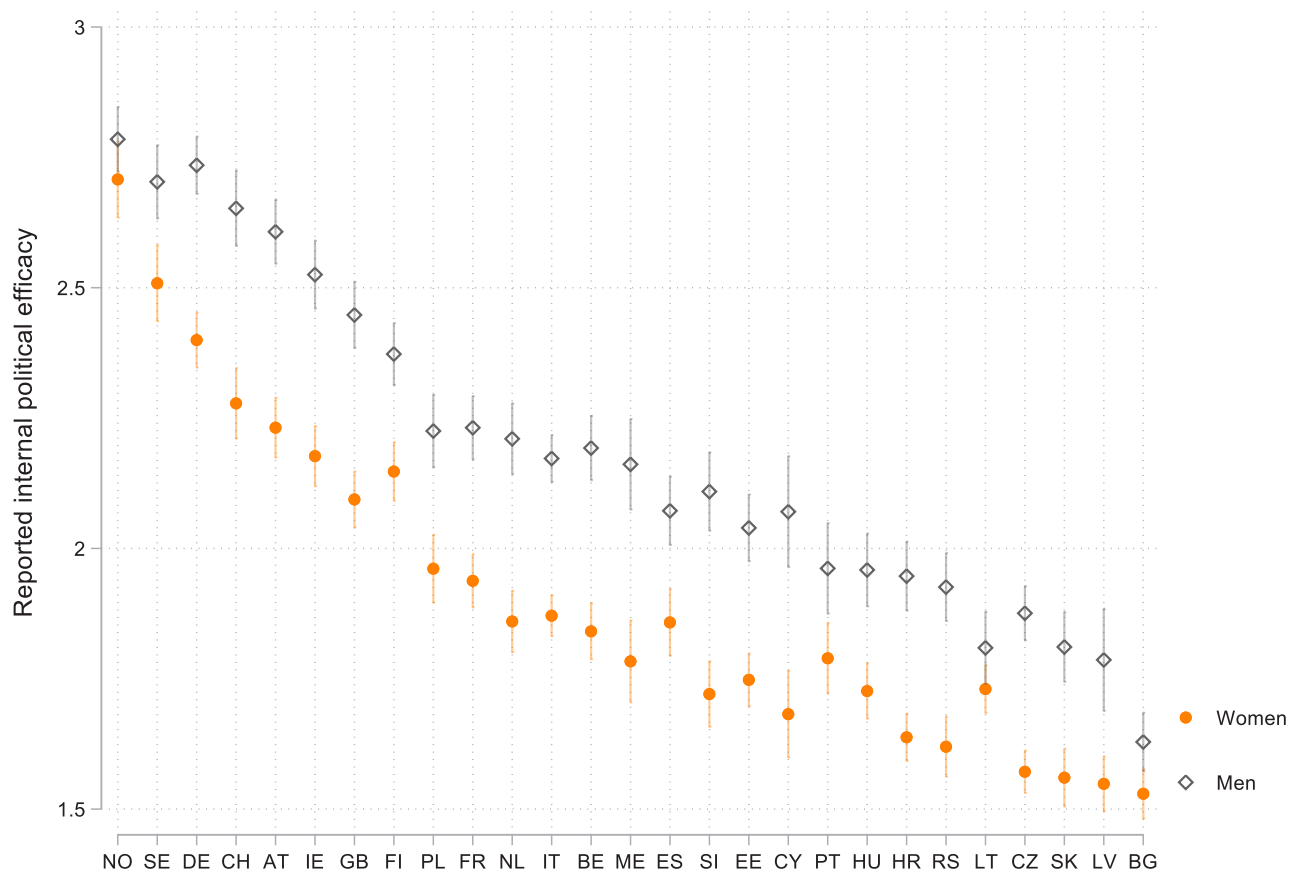
Note: Data points show the average and 95% Interval Coefficients of levels of political confidence/internal political efficacy for women and men. Source: ESS 9th wave, 2018. Dots represent respondents' agreement with two statements: "I am able to take active role in a political group" and "I feel confident in own ability to participate in politics". Measured on the scale from 1 Not at all able/confident to 5 Completely able/confident.

---

1   Following the guidance provided in Bos et al (2021) we use the term sex throughout this paper to refer to our binary measure that distinguishes between girls and boys (Bittner and Goodyear-Grant 2017). We refer to the social and cultural meaning imposed upon sex differences in terms of gender (McDermott 2016). We do this to provide conceptual clarity but acknowledge that there are limitations to the way we use these terms and that we do not address gender identity, which is nonbinary and can be fluid.

New study "Gender gap in political efficacy: the accelerating effect of an open classroom climate" (García-Albacete and Hoskins 2022)

Research using representative data[1] that follows individual students from the ages of 11 to 16 shows that the gap in political confidence emerges and grows substantially during this period. This study finds that the experience of discussions in school classrooms[2] reinforces boys' political confidence[3] and at the same time diminishes girls' political efficacy.

Based on gender theories[4], researchers interpret these results as, in classroom discussions, girls' voices are not given the same space and respect as boys' neither by their peers nor teachers.

"Quality and inclusive education is the foundation for personal fulfilment and active citizenship. It helps young people find their place in society and economy. It gives them the knowledge, skills and competences needed to thrive in life."

[Mariya Gabriel Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth.18 March 2021]

Some teachers use a variety of methods to attempt to increase the inclusivity of classroom discussions[5], for example through:

• Setting ground rules with students for classroom discussions, including identifying the importance of respectful listening,

• Supporting individual students with positive encouragement about their answers in small groups discussions before asking them in front of the class.

• Using different strategies to allow for all students to participate in answering teachers' questions, so that all the pupils get their chance to speak. These strategies include turn taking, targeted questioning, and the use of talk tokens to distribute time allocation for students to take the floor, and

• Asking girls to ask the first question in a discussion.

These methods along with new approaches will be explored and tested in the new EU/UKRI G-EPIC research project to assess their effectiveness.

---

1   The study uses the Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (CELS) data from England.
2   Discussions in classrooms is measured by a combined set of questions that ask students how free they feel to express their opinions in class and the extent they feel that their voice is respected and listened to in class
3   Confidence to understand politics is measured by the question 'Politics is so complicated that I can't understand' with the response options being strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree and strongly agree.
4   Bussey K and Bandura A (1984) Influence of gender constancy and social power on sex-linked modeling. Journal of personality and social psychology 47(6), 1292.
5   Facilitate Inclusive Discussions | Inclusive Pedagogy | The University of Chicago (uchicago.edu)

Recommendations

Recommendation 1:
Raise awareness among teachers on the importance of classroom discussions as having the potential to increase confidence in engaging in politics.

It is relevant for all teachers regardless of the subject that they teach, as discussions take place in all classrooms. Nevertheless, it is particularly relevant for teachers who teach citizenship education, social studies, and politics.

Recommendation 2:
Raise awareness among teachers that classroom discussions need to be managed to allow students from all social groups to participate.

This means that students are given equal space and respect to speak, regardless of their individual and social characteristics, such as gender, socioeconomic background, ethnicity and the intersectional overlap between these groups and that students are not dismissed or ignored because of these characteristics

Recommendation 3:
Develop initial teacher training and continued professional development opportunities for teachers that will train them on inclusive methods for classroom discussions.

Relevant for all teachers regardless of the subject they teach, it is particularly pertinent for teachers who teach citizenship education, social studies, and politics.

Recommendation 4:
Monitor the inclusiveness of classroom discussions through school inspection and regular research.

School inspections during school visits need to be observing the levels of equality of participation in classroom discussions. Inspectors need to request information from schools about how they monitor classroom discussions and their school policies for enabling equal participation.

Recommendation 5:
Develop further research to identify the constraints girls face to develop self-confidence in politics and design interventions that will be effective at reducing the gender gap on political confidence.

Building on the current study, this research will be undertaken by partners from the Young-in Cost Action in the new EU Horizon/UKRI 3-year funded project called 'Gender Empowerment through Politics in Classrooms' (G-EPIC) in Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Spain and the UK. www.g-epic.eu

More information

This policy brief is based on the research paper "Gender Differences in the Effect of an Open Classroom Climate at School on the Development of Political Self-Efficacy", presented at the panel "Political learning" at the European Conference of Politics and Gender (ECPG), University of Ljubljana, 6-8 July 2022.

In total, there are six policy briefs composed in the YOUNG-IN network. These are:

Policy Paper No.1 GENDER INEQUALITIES IN BECOMING A PARENT: How to Increase Gender Equality in Work-Family Balance

Policy Paper No. 2 CONSEQUENCES OF CURRENT LABOUR MARKET RISKS FOR FUTURE PENSIONS: How to Ensure an Adequate Old-Age Income for Young Europeans

Policy Paper No. 3 YOUTH WELLBEING DURING CRISES: How to Improve Young People's Resilience Through Civic Engagement

Policy Paper No. 4 REDUCING NEET RATE: How to Compose Efficient Policy Packages

Policy Paper No. 5 GENDER GAP IN CONFIDENCE TO GET INVOLVED IN POLITICS: How to Reduce It by Making Citizenship Education Inclusive

Policy Paper No. 6 STUDENTS DROPPING OUT: How to Design Student Financing to Support School Attendance

All policy briefs can be found at https://young-in.eu/

Acknowledgements