

Gender and Political Interest Development

Canadian Trends from Childhood to Adulthood

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Before attempting to explain the causes of political interest development among children and teenagers, two basic questions need to be answered: *Over the course of the average person's life, when does political interest increase, decrease, or remain stable? How does the evolution of political interest over the life course differ between girls and boys, and later between women and men?* This chapter explores what studies have found in various countries and then uses Canadian data to provide context-specific answers.

Political Interest Evolution Over the Life Course

Longitudinal studies conducted in European countries have shown that political interest remains remarkably stable over the life course (Fraile and Sánchez-Vítores 2020; Neundorff, Smets, and Garcia-Albacete 2013; Prior 2010, 2019). This finding is robust to changes in

survey question wording. However, there is an important exception to this rule: children start with a lower and less stable level of political interest than adults.

Before the age of 15, it is unclear if children and teenagers experience rising, falling or stable levels of interest in politics. In the United States context, Hess and Torney (1967) find that children aged 7 to 14 report less and less political interest as they grow older, and Bos et al. (2022) show the same for children aged 6 to 12. On the other hand, more recent peer-reviewed studies by Russo and Stattin (2017) and Shehata and Amnå (2019) both find a slight increase in political interest between 13 years old and 15 years old. In the Canadian context, Dostie-Goulet (2009) also finds children's political interest falls between ages 14 and 15, before increasing between 15 and 16 years old. Around the age of 15, numerous European studies find children start experiencing an important uptick in political interest, which keeps increasing until they reach 25 years old approximately, after which it stabilizes (Neundorff, Smets, and Garcia-Albacete 2013; Prior 2019; Quintelier and Van Deth 2014; Russo and Stattin 2017; Shehata and Amnå 2019). Russo and Stattin (2017) and Prior (2019) suggest the rise in political interest among adolescents could be due to an increasingly clear sense of what politics is during those formative years (15–25), although it has also been found that by age 10, children have already gained an understanding of what politics means (Hess and Torney 1967).

How large is this increase in political interest between 15 and 25 years old? In panel data collected among British, Swiss and German respondents, Prior (2019) estimates there is a 10–15 percentage point increase. Political interest keeps increasing after 25 years old, but at a slower pace, and almost entirely due to cohort effects: older cohorts of voters, especially those born in the 1940s, are particularly interested in politics. However, within each cohort of people, after reaching 25 years old, political interest remains very stable until death. Prior (2019)'s findings are similar in all three countries studied.

Political interest also becomes more *stable* at the individual level over teenage years. Prior (2019) finds an increase in the stability of political interest between the ages of 11 and 20. Russo and Stattin (2017) also show that the stability of political interest increases drastically from 13 years old to 20 years old, after which it remains high. Using a 5-category response scale to measure political interest, they find that 21.8% of adolescents aged 13–15 changed their answer by two or more response categories over a two-year period, compared with only 4.5% of those aged 26 to 28.

Gender Differences in Political Interest Evolution

Size of the Gender Gap

Among scientific studies on the gender gap in political interest among children and teenagers, a first group of studies find that boys already report higher levels of political interest. Among children aged 7 to 14, Hess and Torney (1967) find a gender gap varying between 2 and 5

percentage points, with boys being more interested in United States government and current events. More recently, Arens and Watermann (2017) find a gender gap of 7.4 points for 12-year-old Germans, which increases to 10.8 points for 15-year-olds, where boys report being more interested in politics.

However, findings are not all consistent across studies and contexts. Dowse and Hughes (1971) find no statistically significant gender gap (-0.3 to +1.4 percentage point, where positive numbers are associated with boys) in political interest for children aged 11–17. Mayer and Schmidt (2004) also find that no strong gender differences in political interest exist between boys and girls aged 12 to 15 in China, Mexico, the United States, and Japan. Similar results are found among Quebec students aged 14 and 15 (Beauregard 2008; Dostie-Goulet 2009). Finally, Bos et al. (2022) find that *girls* are slightly but significantly (3.3 points) more interested in politics at 6–7 years old, but then the gap reverses and grows larger until early adolescence. By age 12, *boys* are 6.7 points more interested in politics. Overall, US boys are found to be 2.4 points more interested in politics than girls (Bos et al. 2020, 2022).

For older teenagers and young adults, starting at age 15 — the time when political interest starts increasing markedly — the literature is clearer: studies conducted in various contexts generally show an important gender gap in self-reported political interest, where men are the most interested, and the gap is growing through time for those who report longitudinal data. With positive numbers associated with men, the gender gap in political interest has been measured at +27 (Hyman (1959), Germany, 15–24 years old); +15 (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba (2001), United States, 18 years old); +15 (Muxel (2002), France, 18–25 years old); +2 (Dostie-Goulet (2009), Canada, 14–16 years old); +11 (Cicognani et al. (2012), Belgium, 15–19 years old); +2 (Koskimaa and Rapeli (2015), Finland, 16–18 years old); +20 (Fraile and Sánchez-Vítores (2020), UK, 15 years old); +30 (Fraile and Sánchez-Vítores (2020), UK, 25 years old); +5 (Janmaat, Hoskins, and Pensiero (2022), UK, 16 years old); and +22 (Janmaat, Hoskins, and Pensiero (2022), UK, 30 years old). Among these results, only Koskimaa and Rapeli (2015)’s are not statistically significant.

The increases in the gender gap between late adolescence and early adulthood reported by the recent studies of Fraile and Sánchez-Vítores (2020) and Janmaat, Hoskins, and Pensiero (2022) are substantially large, although both rely on the same panel dataset. Fraile and Sánchez-Vítores (2020) also test for sub-periods within the 1991–2009 time frame. However, they do not measure the evolution in interest for various topics.

It seems worthwhile to study political socialization in the period of life where political interest is developed, since there seems to be some level of path dependency in individuals’ political interest afterwards. A focus on teenagers is also warranted because gender differences seem to become starker at that moment: the early increase in political interest seems to be stronger for men (Jennings and Niemi 1981, 276), and political socialization seems to be faster-paced during the teenage years. Fraile and Sánchez-Vítores (2020) concur, suggesting that “the development of gender roles during early childhood is a crucial phase in the source of the gender gap, deserving further attention from scholars” (p. 89).

Among the general adult population, studies also point for a greater interest in politics by men compared with women. Van Deth (2000) shows a gender gap in political interest in the Netherlands, which has remained steady or increased through time. Among adults, Prior (2019) finds that men are 10–15 percentage points more interested in politics than women, a wider gap than the one found among younger respondents. Sánchez-Vítores (2019) finds a statistically significant gender gap in 13 countries. Fraile and Sánchez-Vítores (2020) suggest that after the formative years of 15 to 25 years old, “attitudes crystallize and so does the gender gap, remaining at the same size (around 30 percentage points of difference between women and men) over the life course” (p. 89). Using 2002 European Social Survey data, they find a gender gap across 15 European countries, varying between 4 and 13 percentage points.

Gaps in Interest for Certain Topics

Some studies conducted among teenagers report the types of interests girls and boys have, but do not always find significant differences there. Beauregard (2008) finds no gender gap in reported interest for domestic and international politics. Burns, Schlozman, and Verba (2001) also find null results with regards to interest in community and social issues, which contrasts with the gender gap in political interest they report. Finally, Oswald and Schmid (1998) find that “girls are more interested than boys in topics like peace, ecology and problems of the Third World, whereas boys are more interested in governmental and international affairs than girls” (p. 153). Authors reason that girls might not be “interested as much in the institutions of politics and in the everyday business of negotiation in government and parliament and that the single question measures mainly this sphere of front-page politics” (p. 153). All three studies focus on a relatively limited number of topics.

Among adults, on average, studies have found that women report more interest in topics such as health care, education and gender issues, while men report more interest in foreign policy, partisan politics, and law and order (Campbell and Winters 2008; Coffé 2013; Ferrin et al. 2020; Hayes and Bean 1993; Kuhn 2004; Sabella 2004; Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 1997). Topics such as taxes and local politics seem to be equally interesting to men and women.

Political Interest Evolution in Canada

Political interest has generally been found to be higher in Canada than in other Western countries. Howe (2010) finds that 59% of Canadian citizens report being very or somewhat interested in politics, a higher percentage than in most European countries. Similarly, using World Values Survey data, Gidengil et al. (2004) show that Canada ranks fourth among seventeen democratic countries when it comes to the average level of political interest.¹ On political interest evolution, mirroring trends in other Western countries, Canadians aged 21–29

¹The timing of the World Values Survey might be a confounding factor, since Canadian data was collected shortly before the Meech Lake Accord failed — a time of intense political discussion (Howe 2010).

have long been less interested in politics than those aged 50–65, and this age gap seems to be growing (Gidengil et al. 2004; Howe 2010).

Where people live affects how much interest they have in politics. Residents of Quebec and Saskatchewan are typically less interested (5.0) in politics in general than Canadians at large. Meanwhile, interest is highest in British Columbia (5.8), followed by Manitoba, Ontario, and Newfoundland and Labrador (5.7), and Alberta (5.6) (Gidengil et al. (2004), p. 24).

Gidengil et al. (2004) evaluate the gender gap in political interest between Canadian women and men to be worth 5 percentage points.

Data Analysis

CES, WVS and GSS

In order to explore what level of general political interest Canadian men and women report, three datasets are mobilized: the 2021 CES, the WVS's Wave 7 and the 2013 GSS. Figure 1 shows the rate of self-reported political interest by age and gender among Canadians, using a local regression model (LOESS). The trends among all three surveys are very similar, and match to some degree with cross-country WVS results as well.

In all three datasets, interest in politics increases as people age, but it does so relatively slowly between 18 to 50 years old — or not at all, according to CES data. A large gender gap also appears for those within that age group in all three datasets. For instance, CES data shows that on average, women aged 18 to 50 report being neither interested nor disinterested in politics — 5/10; men, on the other hand, report being somewhat interested in politics — 6.5/10. This 1.5-point gap is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

After age 50, both men and women start reporting higher levels of interest in politics, and this interest keeps increasing through their 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s. Moreover, again starting at age 50, the gender gap progressively reduces, as women's political interest increases more quickly than men's. Around age 75–80, the gap becomes statistically non-significant, although confidence intervals also becomes wider due to smaller sample sizes. For instance, in their early 90s, CES data shows that the average interest in politics stands at 8/10 for both men and women. Overall, throughout people's life course, CES data shows that women's political interest averages 5.4, while men's averages 6.8 ($p < 0.001$).

How does Canada compare with other countries? Across all 57 countries surveyed during wave 7 of the WVS (2017–22), the average political interest was 4.8/10 for men and 4/10 for women, and while political interest increased with people's age, the size of the gender gap remained relatively similar with age. Among Canadian WVS respondents, the average political interest was 6.2/10 for men and 5/10 for women: this gender gap is 0.35 points larger than the WVS

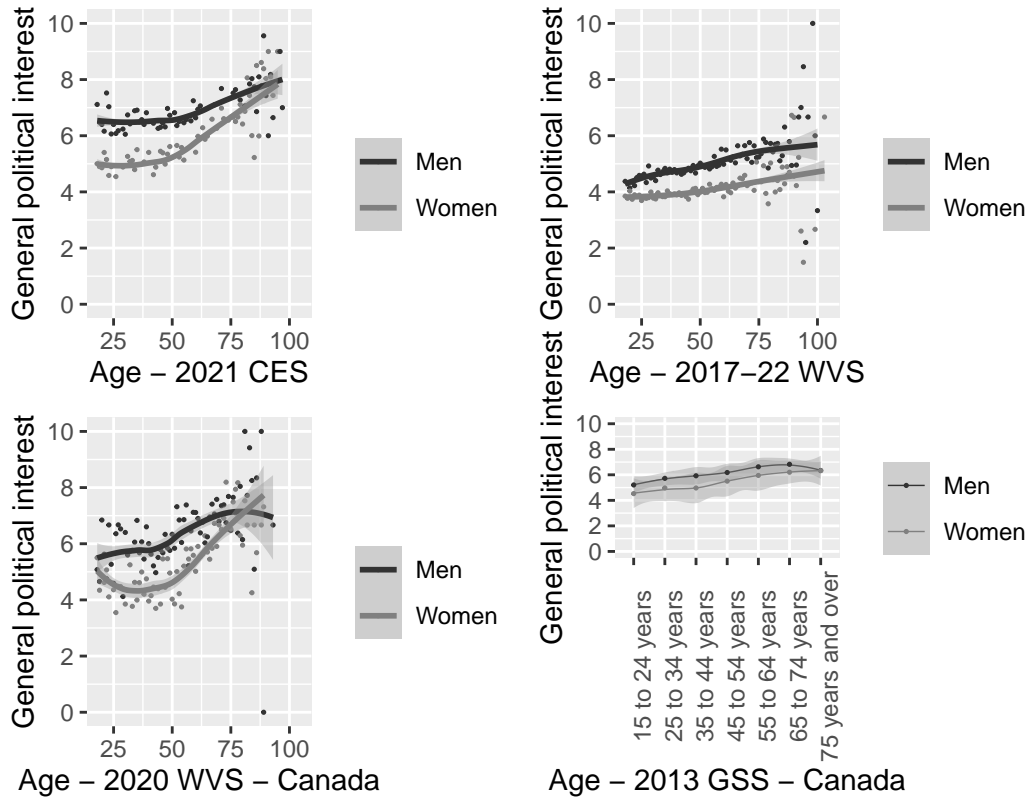


Figure 1: Self-Reported Level of General Political Interest by Age Among Canadian Adults, 2021 CES, 2020 WVS (Canada) and 2013 Canadian GSS

Notes: On the y axis, 0 = no interest at all, and 10 = a great deal of interest. Dots represent average interest by age and gender. CES, WVS and GSS weights are applied.

average and is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Moreover, as mentioned previously, the age pattern was somewhat different in the Canadian WVS compared with the WVS's cross-country results, becoming statistically insignificant around age 75. However, sample sizes are smaller for people aged 75 and over, and age averages vary substantially from year to year as the CES and WVS scatterplots show. The fact that all three surveys show a shrinking of the gap at that age, however, reinforces confidence in that finding.

[Question to Chris: Should I analyze longitudinal data about gender, race and political interest from 1965-2019 CES and 1981-2022 WVS (see Figure 2 and Figure 3)?]

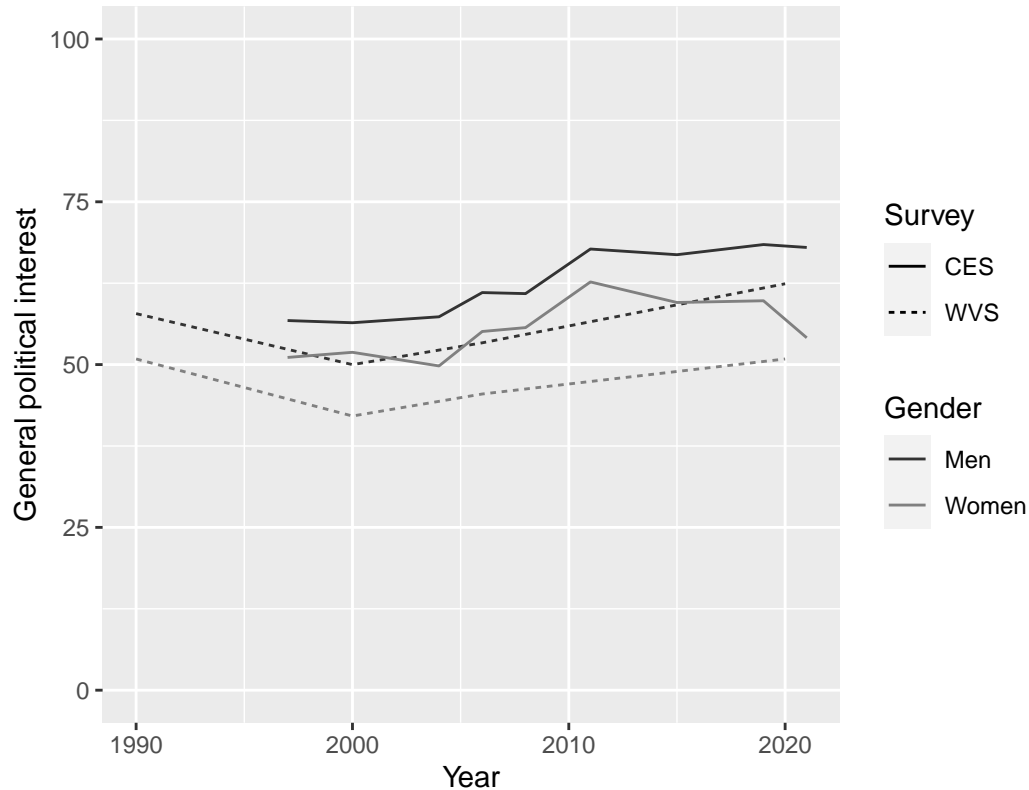


Figure 2: General Political Interest by Year and Gender Among Canadian Adults, 2021 CES and 2020 WVS (Canada)

Notes: On the y axis, 0 = no interest at all, and 10 = a great deal of interest. CES and WVS weights are applied.

[Question to Chris: Should I also analyze CES and WVS descriptive statistics by age, gender and ethnicity, and age, gender and immigrant status? If yes, should I do so in this chapter, or simply put them in the Appendix?]

[Question to Chris: Should I analyze time trends among adults for the evolution of internal efficacy, external efficacy, political knowledge, and other measures of political engagement?]

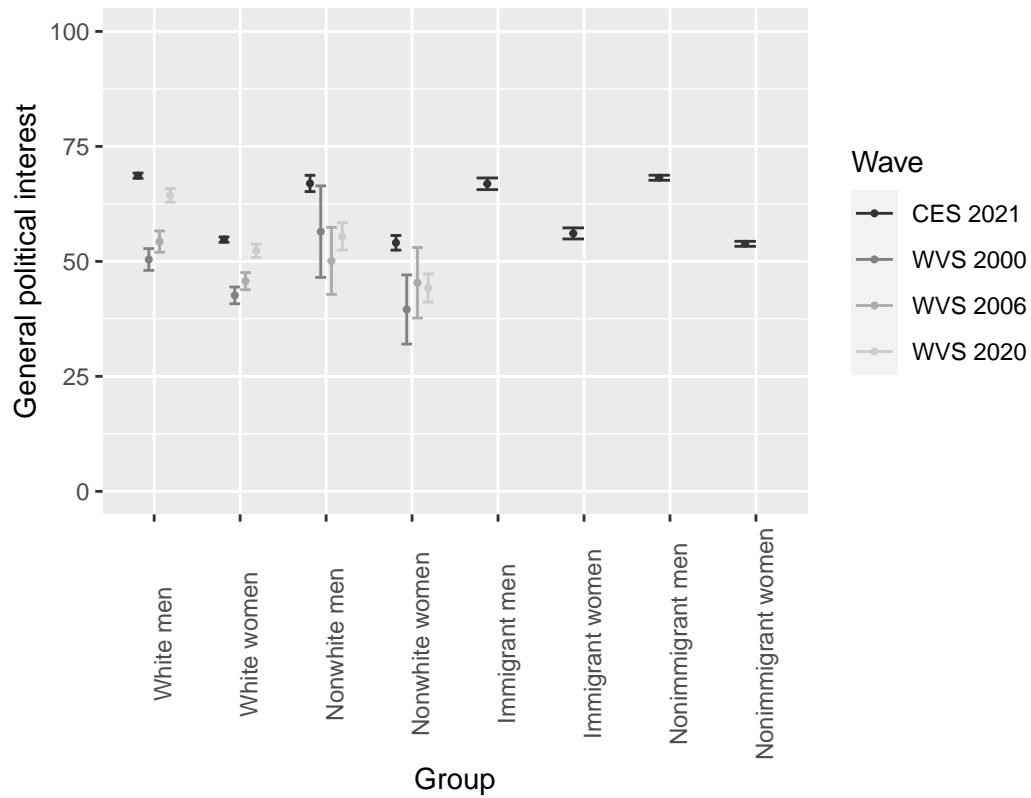


Figure 3: General Political Interest by Year, Gender and Race Among Canadian Adults, 2021 CES and 2020 WVS (Canada)

Notes: On the y axis, 0 = no interest at all, and 10 = a great deal of interest. CES and WVS weights are applied.

I do not have such information for children however. If yes, should I prioritize CES data, Datagotchi PES, GSS, or WVS?]

CCPIS

What kinds of political topics are children and adolescents interested in? Are there gender differences in how interested they are in these topics? CCPIS data is used to answer these questions. Table Table 1 shows the link between gender and interest in each of the topics among elementary and high school students. The upper part includes gender as the only predictor, while the lower part includes controls for socio-demographic variables.

In the upper half of the table, taking into account classroom fixed effects, boys generally report being more interested in politics than girls, but the gender gap is relatively minimal, standing at 0.43 for the 11-point political interest scale ($p<0.05$). Boys' interest in international affairs and partisan politics is higher than girls (1-point and 0.85-point difference respectively; both $p<0.001$). This seems to be in line with results among adult respondents. However, girls' interest in law and crime is also slightly higher (0.5 point, $p<0.05$). This result is more surprising given previous literature showing the contrary. Results for the other two topics, health care and education, are almost even between the genders, and not statistically significant, despite adult women usually reporting higher levels of interest in these two topics across studies.

However, in the lower half of the table, controlling for socio-demographic factors, all relationships between gender and interest disappear. It might be the case that girls are less interested in some of these topics by virtue of other socio-demographic characteristics, but there does not seem to be one other socio-demographic variable that reliably predicts interest in any of the topics. These multiple regressions results might be tainted by some multicollinearity between race, immigrant status and language. [Question to Chris: Which variables should I add or remove?]

Table 1: Students' political interest by gender

	Politics (general)	Health care	International affairs	Law and crime	Education	Partisan politics
(Intercept)	4.579*** (0.184)	4.041*** (0.167)	5.724*** (0.180)	4.956*** (0.173)	4.219*** (0.206)	4.007*** (0.171)
Gender (1 = girls)	-0.434* (0.207)	0.128 (0.197)	-0.980*** (0.229)	0.488* (0.231)	-0.103 (0.223)	-0.854*** (0.232)
SD (Intercept Class)	0.651	0.542	0.473	0.377	0.771	0.344
SD (Observations)	2.499	2.397	2.802	2.837	2.701	2.855
Num.Obs.	617	623	620	619	623	620
R2 Marg.	0.007	0.001	0.029	0.007	0.000	0.022

	Politics (general)	Health care	International affairs	Law and crime	Education	Partisan politics
:						
(Intercept)	-4.021 (13.493)	-1.235 (13.062)	0.253 (14.952)	4.881 (15.600)	27.025+ (15.173)	10.330 (14.425)
Gender (1 = girls)	3.071 (2.651)	-0.092 (2.478)	-3.122 (2.825)	0.357 (2.829)	0.845 (2.693)	1.237 (2.914)
Age	0.346	0.359	0.218	-0.393	- 3.560+	-1.227
Age squared	(1.796) 0.000 (0.060)	(1.736) -0.003 (0.058)	(1.994) 0.000 (0.066)	(2.080) 0.022 (0.069)	(2.008) 0.129+ (0.066)	(1.932) 0.045 (0.064)
Race (1 = white)	0.659+ (0.378)	0.154 (0.356)	0.860* (0.409)	-0.203 (0.411)	0.049 (0.395)	0.356 (0.422)
Immigrant	-0.072 (0.421)	-0.165 (0.392)	-0.748+ (0.452)	-0.956* (0.458)	-0.179 (0.433)	-0.428 (0.467)
English spoken at home	-0.918 (0.609)	- 1.020+ (0.565)	-1.255+ (0.651)	-0.515 (0.653)	-0.453 (0.625)	-0.264 (0.670)
French spoken at home	-0.088	-0.099	-0.591	-0.112	0.426	0.351
Agency scale	(0.342) 3.268*** (0.785)	(0.319) 1.127 (0.730)	(0.370) 2.185* (0.844)	(0.371) 1.748* (0.846)	(0.351) 0.674 (0.806)	(0.382) 2.343** (0.875)
Communality scale	1.251 (0.839)	0.719 (0.791)	1.986* (0.910)	0.954 (0.913)	1.042 (0.875)	0.603 (0.937)
School #4	0.196 (0.351)	-0.958* (0.407)	-0.577 (0.453)	-0.475 (0.493)	0.002 (0.531)	-0.444 (0.390)
School #3	0.990 (0.708)	-0.113 (0.754)	0.797 (0.836)	-0.518 (0.890)	-0.467 (0.933)	0.686 (0.761)
School #6	0.875 (2.157)	0.465 (2.122)	3.969 (2.396)	1.924 (2.479)	-3.158 (2.468)	1.760 (2.338)
School #2	0.195	- 0.817+	-0.551	-0.547	0.111	-0.447
School #5	(0.373) -0.529 (1.530)	(0.433) -1.081 (1.461)	(0.483) -0.263 (1.678)	(0.527) -1.482 (1.698)	(0.564) 1.013 (1.651)	(0.416) -0.320 (1.710)
School #8	2.824** (0.903)	0.324 (0.971)	-1.542 (1.093)	-0.392 (1.161)	3.343* (1.216)	0.768 (1.007)
School #7	-1.601	0.070	-3.829	-3.370	-2.073	-2.819

	Politics (general)	Health care	International affairs	Law and crime	Education	Partisan politics
	(2.045)	(1.957)	(2.891)	(2.923)	(2.843)	(2.950)
Gender (1 = girls):Age	-0.174	0.050	0.173	0.030	-0.030	-0.095
	(0.167)	(0.156)	(0.178)	(0.179)	(0.170)	(0.183)
Gender (1 = girls):Race (1 = white)	-1.191*	-0.542	-0.718	-0.355	-	-0.962+
					1.035+	
	(0.520)	(0.488)	(0.560)	(0.563)	(0.538)	(0.579)
SD (Intercept Class)	0.001	0.432	0.450	0.571	0.706	0.001
SD (Observations)	2.460	2.297	2.647	2.646	2.524	2.758
Num.Obs.	423	427	425	423	427	427
R2 Marg.	0.121	0.071	0.130	0.073	0.102	0.085
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Note: \sim + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Note: \sim Multilevel regression with random effects at the classroom level

Note: \sim Reference category for language: Other languages spoken at home

Tables Table 2 and Table 3 re-analyze those results for children aged 10–14 ($n=200$) and those aged 15–18 ($n=446$). Among younger students, the gender gap in self-reported political interest is 0.06/10 (not statistically significant). Among those aged 15–18, this gap grows to 0.53/10 ($p<0.05$). Notably, among both groups, both interest in international affairs and interest in partisan politics are higher among boys than girls, suggesting some gender differences in interests might take place before adolescence.

Table 2: Political interest by gender (ages 10-15)

	Politics (general)	Health care	International affairs	Law and crime	Education	Partisan politics
(Intercept)	3.990***	3.638***	5.356***	4.519***	3.569***	3.854***
	(0.294)	(0.232)	(0.310)	(0.293)	(0.257)	(0.321)
Gender (1 = girls)	-0.113	0.077	-0.891*	0.630+	-0.073	-0.755*
	(0.319)	(0.309)	(0.375)	(0.379)	(0.357)	(0.364)
SD (Intercept Class)	0.703	0.205	0.561	0.392	0.000	0.707
SD (Observations)	2.527	2.467	2.965	3.022	2.847	2.860
Num.Obs.	256	256	253	256	254	251

	Politics (general)	Health care	International affairs	Law and crime	Education	Partisan politics
R2 Marg.	0.000	0.000	0.021	0.011	0.000	0.016
(Intercept)	19.493 (46.116)	-3.115 (45.145)	-52.289 (53.853)	-56.980 (54.491)	22.959 (52.090)	15.364 (53.562)
Gender (1 = girls)	2.134 (4.901)	-1.485 (4.762)	-4.173 (5.362)	-4.736 (5.406)	-0.123 (5.185)	0.617 (5.331)
Age	-3.163 (6.914)	0.778 (6.771)	8.228 (8.072)	9.313 (8.166)	-2.621 (7.808)	-1.619 (8.029)
Age squared	0.123 (0.257)	-0.023 (0.252)	-0.303 (0.299)	-0.357 (0.303)	0.082 (0.290)	0.050 (0.298)
Race (1 = white)	0.798 (0.770)	0.386 (0.741)	1.214 (0.830)	-0.307 (0.844)	1.312 (0.815)	0.185 (0.838)
Immigrant	0.683 (1.110)	-0.430 (1.087)	-0.171 (1.237)	2.142+ (1.254)	0.835 (1.204)	0.416 (1.238)
English spoken at home	-1.859+ (1.048)	-2.249* (0.982)	-2.509* (1.116)	-0.496 (1.139)	- (1.070)	-2.699* (1.100)
French spoken at home	-0.209 (0.617)	-0.889 (0.608)	-0.577 (0.694)	0.150 (0.703)	-0.750 (0.667)	0.094 (0.686)
Agency scale	2.997* (1.416)	1.857 (1.372)	1.902 (1.585)	1.545 (1.605)	0.477 (1.532)	1.246 (1.575)
Communality scale	3.035* (1.449)	0.343 (1.422)	2.812+ (1.613)	1.665 (1.640)	0.843 (1.561)	1.238 (1.605)
School #4	0.540 (0.887)	-1.080 (0.823)	-1.473 (0.865)	-1.230 (0.930)	-0.298 (0.792)	-0.599 (0.814)
School #3	1.080 (1.031)	0.028 (0.945)	-0.071 (0.965)	-0.844 (1.038)	-0.588 (0.879)	0.275 (0.904)
School #6	-0.713 (3.242)	0.834 (3.130)	6.154 (3.620)	4.838 (3.700)	-3.186 (3.462)	0.685 (3.560)
School #2	1.302 (0.993)	-0.371 (0.922)	-1.267 (0.953)	0.618 (1.036)	1.419 (0.861)	-0.284 (0.885)
School #5	-0.136 (3.017)	-2.098 (2.937)	-0.287 (3.309)	-4.974 (3.380)	0.679 (3.191)	-1.899 (3.281)
School #8	4.630+ (2.250)	1.587 (2.156)	0.726 (2.397)	-0.525 (2.475)	5.375* (2.284)	5.597* (2.349)
School #7	-1.114 (2.416)	0.649 (2.311)	-3.243 (3.249)	-3.716 (3.325)	-2.055 (3.122)	-1.443 (3.211)

	Politics (general)	Health care	International affairs	Law and crime	Education	Partisan politics
Gender (1 = girls):Age	-0.102 (0.341)	0.184 (0.332)	0.238 (0.376)	0.444 (0.379)	0.098 (0.363)	-0.074 (0.373)
Gender (1 = girls):Race (1 = white)	-1.261 (0.986)	-1.049 (0.956)	-0.264 (1.073)	-0.967 (1.087)	- 1.985+ (1.051)	-0.387 (1.080)
SD (Intercept Class)	0.587	0.482	0.336	0.499	0.000	0.000
SD (Observations)	2.516	2.468	2.826	2.860	2.746	2.823
Num.Obs.	159	159	158	159	159	159
R2 Marg.	0.165	0.094	0.207	0.129	0.129	0.169
:	—-:	—-:	—-:	—-:	—-:	—-:

Note: $\sim + p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Note: \sim Multilevel regression with random effects at the classroom level

Note: \sim Reference category for language: Other languages spoken at home

Table 3: Political interest by gender (ages 16-18)

	Politics (general)	Health care	International affairs	Law and crime	Education	Partisan politics
(Intercept)	4.997*** (0.184)	4.365*** (0.202)	5.903*** (0.209)	5.291*** (0.208)	4.621*** (0.247)	4.097*** (0.202)
Gender (1 = girls)	-0.546* (0.271)	0.213 (0.261)	-0.932** (0.293)	0.473 (0.293)	-0.013 (0.293)	-0.886** (0.302)
SD (Intercept Class)	0.174	0.458	0.318	0.321	0.674	0.000
SD (Observations)	2.484	2.354	2.682	2.659	2.621	2.815
Num.Obs.	345	349	349	345	351	351
R2 Marg.	0.012	0.002	0.029	0.008	0.000	0.024
:	—-:	—-:	—-:	—-:	—-:	—-:
(Intercept)	-136.895 (156.856)	-30.503 (137.403)	149.356 (161.764)	98.815 (167.899)	220.357 (149.124)	-246.198 (164.357)
Gender (1 = girls)	-0.483 (9.780)	5.854 (8.948)	-3.756 (10.326)	15.528 (10.522)	5.428 (9.723)	2.834 (10.684)

	Politics (general)	Health care	International affairs	Law and crime	Education	Partisan politics
Age	16.603	3.632	-17.463	-12.298	-	29.632
					26.984	
	(18.852)	(16.517)	(19.446)	(20.234)	(17.927)	(19.758)
Age squared	-0.494	-0.094	0.525	0.399	0.836	-0.884
	(0.566)	(0.496)	(0.584)	(0.609)	(0.538)	(0.593)
Race (1 = white)	0.552	0.026	0.722	-0.086	-0.382	0.448
	(0.440)	(0.412)	(0.472)	(0.463)	(0.448)	(0.491)
Immigrant	-0.172	0.094	-1.108*	-1.520**	-0.366	-0.490
	(0.467)	(0.430)	(0.493)	(0.492)	(0.466)	(0.516)
English spoken at home	-0.249	-0.201	-0.466	-0.496	0.658	1.448+
	(0.767)	(0.708)	(0.813)	(0.797)	(0.765)	(0.852)
French spoken at home	0.030	0.317	-0.626	-0.168	0.980*	0.568
	(0.422)	(0.384)	(0.443)	(0.436)	(0.415)	(0.463)
Agency scale	3.209**	0.760	1.971+	2.017*	0.703	2.733*
	(0.964)	(0.885)	(1.015)	(0.998)	(0.957)	(1.065)
Communality scale	0.232	0.935	1.294	0.460	1.115	0.267
	(1.064)	(0.985)	(1.131)	(1.111)	(1.068)	(1.179)
School #4	0.224	-	-0.170	-0.203	0.441	-0.220
		0.896+				
	(0.433)	(0.503)	(0.540)	(0.518)	(0.660)	(0.480)
School #2	-0.041	-	-0.196	-0.789	-0.011	-0.371
		0.995+				
	(0.437)	(0.503)	(0.541)	(0.522)	(0.650)	(0.485)
School #5	-0.653	-0.478	-0.833	-1.418	0.555	0.690
	(1.873)	(1.752)	(2.004)	(1.962)	(1.954)	(2.061)
School #8	2.129+	-0.313	-1.866	-0.127	2.901*	-1.063
	(1.056)	(1.107)	(1.221)	(1.184)	(1.358)	(1.177)
Gender (1 = girls):Age	0.054	-0.326	0.226	-0.899	-0.322	-0.163
	(0.598)	(0.547)	(0.631)	(0.643)	(0.594)	(0.653)
Gender (1 = girls):Race (1 = white)	-1.343*	-0.186	-1.164+	-0.536	-0.736	-1.486*
	(0.638)	(0.591)	(0.677)	(0.667)	(0.640)	(0.707)
SD (Intercept Class)	0.000	0.460	0.426	0.386	0.758	0.000
SD (Observations)	2.423	2.229	2.562	2.513	2.400	2.700
Num.Obs.	264	268	267	264	268	268

	Politics (general)	Health care	International affairs	Law and crime	Education	Partisan politics
R2 Marg.	0.088	0.049	0.099	0.083	0.099	0.092
:	—:	—:	—:	—:	—:	—:

Note: \sim + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Note: \sim Multilevel regression with random effects at the classroom level

Note: \sim Reference category for language: Other languages spoken at home

For health care and education, results among Canadian children — which show no gender gap — might come as a surprise given the number of studies that show adult women report being more interested in the political aspects of these topics in various contexts. Still, experiences of several women as mothers and caregivers later in life might be the elements that shape the importance they give to both issues.

Figure 4 shows how students view each of the 10 concrete issues associated with the 5 topics as political or non-political. As expected, the two issues related to partisan politics are almost universally seen as political, followed by issues related to international affairs. These are the two topics for which boys report being more interested. Findings for issues related to the other three topics are perceived by 25% to 60% of students as being non-political — a substantially large proportion.

[Question to Chris: I could qualitatively analyze the survey question about open-ended definitions of political interest, or use automated textual analysis here (698 respondents, some in French and some in English). Any suggestions?]

Datagotchi PES

How do these interests change when people reach adulthood? This question is best answered using Datagotchi PES data. As Table 4 shows, Quebec men generally report being more interested in politics than women. Men's interest in international affairs and partisan politics is also higher than women's (0.7-point and 0.6-point difference respectively; both $p < 0.001$). Men's interest in law and order is also slightly higher (0.2 point, $p < 0.1$). However, women are significantly more interested in health care and education (0.7-point and 0.5-point difference respectively, both $p < 0.001$) than men are.

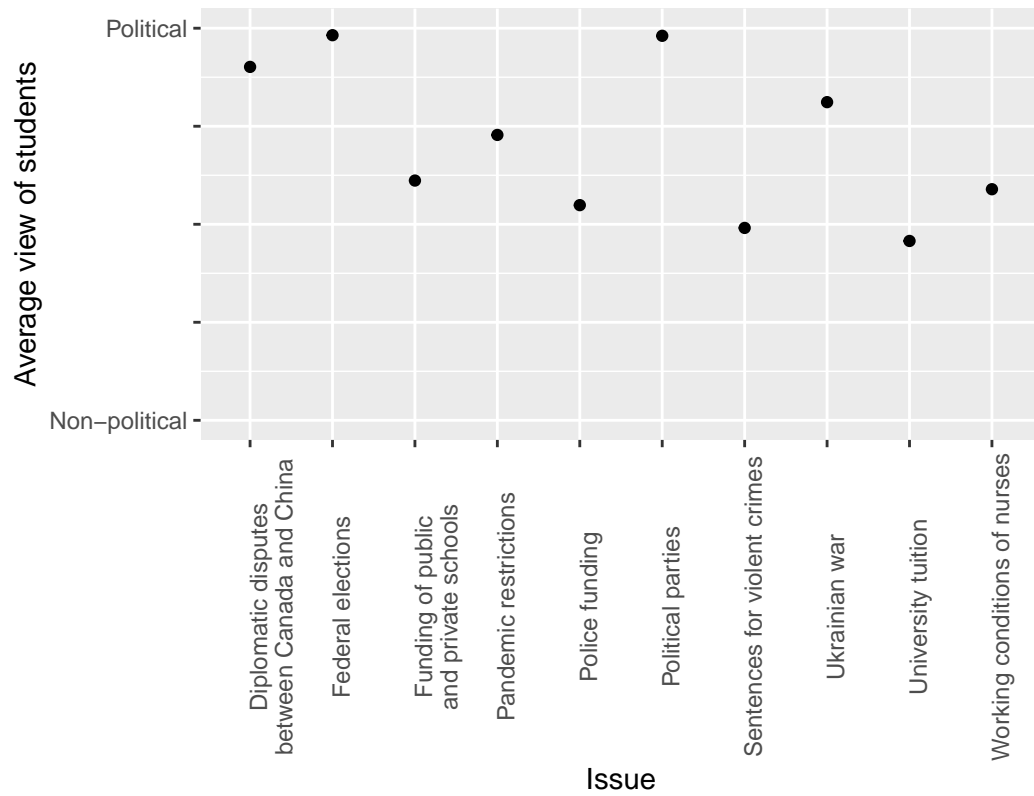


Figure 4: Views of Topics as Political or Non-Political By Canadian Students, 2022

Table 4: Political interest by gender

	Politics (general)	Health care	International affairs	Law and crime	Education	Partisan politics
(Intercept)	7.736*** (0.059)	6.473*** (0.070)	7.517*** (0.066)	5.408*** (0.073)	6.607*** (0.070)	6.342*** (0.077)
Gender (1 = women)	-0.828*** (0.090)	0.706*** (0.108)	-0.653*** (0.102)	0.184+ (0.112)	0.530*** (0.107)	-0.565*** (0.119)
Num.Obs.	1800	1800	1800	1800	1800	1800
R2	0.045	0.023	0.022	0.002	0.013	0.012
R2 Adj.	0.044	0.023	0.022	0.001	0.013	0.012
Log.Lik.	-3702.748	-	-3922.656	-	-	-4202.267
F	83.948	4020.146	40.871	4088.971	4010.567	22.384
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(Intercept)	7.266*** (0.676)	4.359*** (0.791)	6.160*** (0.754)	5.391*** (0.843)	6.052*** (0.798)	6.922*** (0.897)
Gender (1 = women)	-0.557 (0.627)	1.538* (0.733)	-0.562 (0.698)	0.426 (0.781)	-0.288 (0.740)	-1.005 (0.831)
Age	-0.034+ (0.019)	0.038+ (0.023)	-0.006 (0.022)	0.014 (0.024)	-0.025 (0.023)	-0.073** (0.026)
Age squared	0.000* (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.001* (0.000)
Race (1 = white)	0.496 (0.443)	-0.262 (0.518)	-0.244 (0.493)	-0.936+ (0.552)	-0.449 (0.523)	0.558 (0.587)
Immigrant	-0.354+ (0.207)	0.345 (0.242)	0.262 (0.230)	-0.463+ (0.258)	0.139 (0.244)	-0.332 (0.274)
French spoken at home	0.163 (0.292)	0.132 (0.341)	0.481 (0.325)	-0.058 (0.363)	0.381 (0.344)	0.209 (0.387)
Income between \$60,000 and \$150,000	0.054 (0.123)	0.138 (0.144)	0.214 (0.138)	0.263+ (0.154)	0.080 (0.146)	0.164 (0.164)
Income above \$150,000	0.232 (0.143)	0.306+ (0.167)	0.493** (0.159)	0.482** (0.178)	0.207 (0.169)	0.434* (0.190)
Education: college	0.164 (0.199)	0.254 (0.232)	0.366+ (0.221)	0.201 (0.248)	0.604* (0.234)	0.116 (0.263)

	Politics (general)	Health care	International affairs	Law and crime	Education	Partisan politics
Education: university	0.485** (0.185)	0.407+ (0.216)	0.615** (0.206)	-0.121 (0.230)	1.324*** (0.218)	0.475+ (0.245)
Gender (1 = women):Age	0.018** (0.006)	0.005 (0.007)	0.019** (0.006)	-0.011 (0.007)	-0.001 (0.007)	0.026*** (0.008)
Gender (1 = women):Race (1 = white)	-1.119+ (0.592)	-1.014 (0.692)	-0.953 (0.659)	0.369 (0.737)	0.840 (0.698)	-0.806 (0.785)
Num.Obs.	1800	1800	1800	1800	1800	1800
R2	0.071	0.087	0.075	0.019	0.050	0.030
R2 Adj.	0.065	0.081	0.069	0.012	0.044	0.024
Log.Lik.	-3677.474	-	-3872.398	-	-	-4185.857
		3959.286		4073.506	3976.231	
F	11.392	14.219	12.132	2.809	7.889	4.628
:	—	—	—	—	—	—
	—:	—:	—:	—:	—:	—:

Note: ~ + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Note: ~ Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression

Figure 5 inquires about any time trends in the evolution of interest in each of the topics, including gendered aspects. No clear gender pattern emerges, beyond the finding that the gap in general political interest becomes statistically significant among Quebecers aged 75 and over.

Discussion

This chapter highlights gender differences in interest for various political topics, but also shows differences between children and adults. For international relations and partisan politics, male students report more interest in these topics, just like adults in previous studies. However, girls' higher interest in law and crime and similar levels of interest in health care and education compared to boys contrast with data previously found among adults (Campbell and Winters 2008; Coffé 2013; Ferrin et al. 2020; Hayes and Bean 1993; Kuhn 2004; Sabella 2004; Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 1997). Given the results of the Datagotchi PES, which shows higher levels of interest in the political aspects of health care and education among adult women

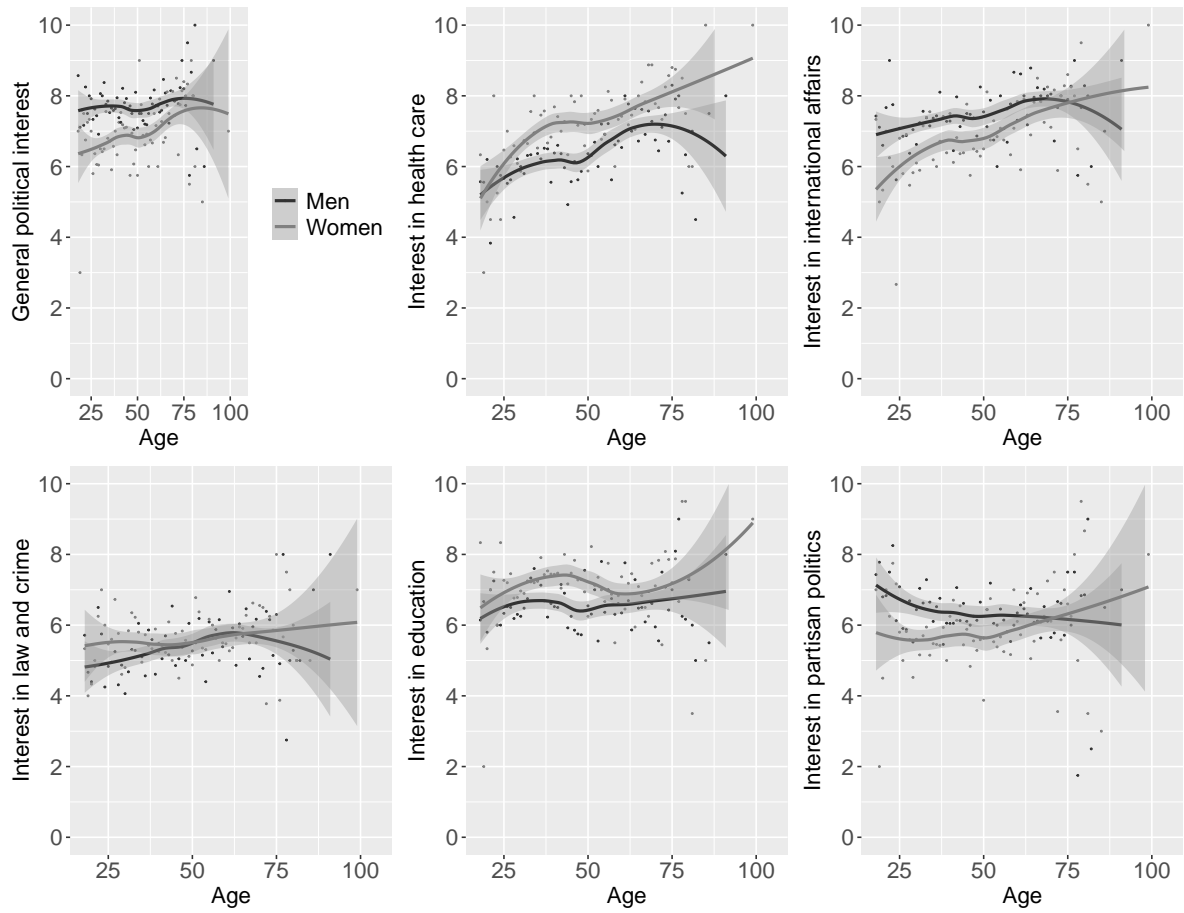


Figure 5: Self-Reported Level of Interest in Various Topics by Age Among Canadian Adults, 2022 Datagotchi PES

Notes: On the y axis, 0 = no interest at all, and 10 = a great deal of interest. Dots represent average interest by age and gender. No weights are currently applied.

than men, it seems that the gender gap in interest in these topics emerges in early adulthood, perhaps as a result of life events that happen at that stage, such as women becoming more likely to care for children and relatives. Given the absence of longitudinal data collected among Canadians, it is not possible to tell at what point in time girls or women become more interested in health care and education issues relative to men. However, given current results of two datasets, it is possible to note, for the first time, that some differences in interests are not necessarily pre-existent among adolescents. On the other hand, reported interest for politics in general, partisan politics and international affairs is already higher among boys aged 10 to 18.

In the Swedish context, Russo and Stattin (2017) suggested that “political interest is malleable before 18 years of age, and that the greatest scope for change in political interest is between the ages of 13 and 15. It is during this period that parents, teachers, and role models in general can potentially raise youths’ interest in political and societal issues” (p. 655). Applying these results to the Canadian context, interest in politics does increase for both women and men after they reach adulthood. This is also the point in time where a gender gap in interest for politics more generally emerges, with boys/men reporting higher interest in politics in general than girls/women.

This chapter has some limitations. First, student data is taken from a convenience sample. Students were not chosen randomly across the Canadian population, but were instead parts of classes who accepted to be part of the study. Several school boards, schools and classes refused to take part in the study, with an estimated rejection rate above 90%. Most of that data is collected among francophone students. Second, the sample size is relatively small, due to difficulties in accessing the field. 698 observations collected among children aged 10–18 comprise the final dataset. [Question to Chris: I am not sure whether these limitations should be acknowledged here or in the conclusion?]

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