

Preparing for Public Life: School Sector and the Educational Context of Lasting Citizen Formation

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School sector and educational context seem to make a difference in civic socialization. There is limited knowledge, however, of the mechanisms through which socialization may occur in public and private schools, and the extent to which they have any lasting effect. Does the private school effect on civic socialization persist into young adulthood, and if it does, what explains the effect? Analyzing data from NELS:88 using HLM, the results of this study show that, net of background controls, there is a private school effect on civic participation in young adulthood, but it is mediated through contextual factors in the family and school – such as parent-school involvement, intergenerational closure, student-teacher relationships and prior participation – that seem to account for the effect on adult civic behavior.

Education is socialization. That is how Durkheim, at least, understood the primary purpose of education for cultural and societal transmission to future generations.¹ In democratic societies, education is thought to play an important role in socializing for citizenship and civic participation (Dewey 1997[1916]; Nie et al 1996; Labaree 1997; Niemi and Junn 1998; Gutmann 1999). The precise process through which civic socialization occurs in schools, however, is difficult to explain. In addition, little is known about the extent to which schools have any lasting effect on the formation of citizens in adulthood.

In this study, I examine the comparative effects of public and private schools and their educational environments – factors in both school and family communities – on adult voter participation and volunteering. I analyze the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, a nationally representative sample of the high school class of 1992 that followed respondents from 1988 (8th grade) through 2000. I find that, relative to

I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia. I wish to thank Jeff Dew for his assistance with statistical analysis. I also thank Liz Gorman, James Hunter, Paul Kingston, Josipa Roksa, David Sikkink, Brad Wilcox, two anonymous Social Forces reviewers and Editor François Nielsen for helpful comments on earlier drafts. I would finally like to offer a special acknowledgement for the immeasurable assistance and encouragement of the late Steve Nock, without whom the project would not have been completed. Direct correspondence to Jeffrey Dill, Department of Sociology, University of Virginia, P.O. Box 400766, Charlottesville, VA 22904-4766. E-mail: jdill@virginia.edu.

their peers from public schools, graduates of private schools vote and volunteer at slightly higher rates after background controls are included. The private school advantage, however, is mediated through family-school environment variables. Thus, contextual factors in the family and school – specifically parent-school involvement, intergenerational closure, student-teacher relationships, the importance of participation among peers and volunteering during the school years – seem to account for the private school effect on adult civic participation.

The majority of the research on educational effects measures differing outcomes based on the *amount* of schooling in years or degrees (Pallas 2000); less research has been done on differing effects of education based on the *type* and *context* of schooling (Hallinan 2006). Although selection issues create serious difficulties, researchers have tended to find neutral-to-positive effects for private schooling on civic outcomes (Greene, Giammo and Mellow 1999a, 1999b; Campbell 2002; Wolf 2005, 2007). However, most of the current research focuses on the civic values and participation of students while they are still in school, measuring how practices and beliefs of school-aged children differ across sectors. Much less is known about the long-term effect of private or public schooling on civic values and participation, and still less is known about the mechanisms through which school sector may affect civic socialization. The present study examines the civic participation of young adults (after high school), testing whether or not school sector and educational context have any lasting measurable effect on voting and volunteering.

Schooling and Civic Socialization

Political socialization, or the process through which citizens are formed, begins long before adulthood. Habits, skills and attitudes affecting civic participation that are formed in the period of youth persist into adulthood (Nie et al 1996; Campbell 2006). The mechanisms through which this process occurs have proven difficult for researchers to fully explain, but community context (e.g., various family and school factors) seem to make a difference. Parents' political participation, literacy habits and their involvement with their children are factors in the family environment that contribute to youth political socialization (Verba et al 1995; Burns et al. 2001; Plutzer 2002). The school environment may also be a factor, in part due to classroom-based civics instruction, as political knowledge transmitted through the school curriculum has modest effects on various civic outcomes (Niemi and Junn 1998; Galston 2001; Gimpel et al. 2003). While the acquisition of knowledge may contribute to political socialization, past political participation is the biggest predictor of future participation among adults (Plutzer 2002). This is also true for young people transitioning

into adulthood, as participation in voluntary associations during the school years predicts civic activity later in life (McFarland and Thomas 2006).

Opportunities and motives for participating in youth associations are often dependent upon community context, specifically the structure and organization of schools (Schneider and Stevenson 1999; Guest and Schneider 2003). Schools that offer certain extra-curricular clubs and associations encourage political participation, and these experiences can have lasting effects (Verba et al 1995; Burns et al. 2001). The school environment can also be a factor in the civic socialization of young people through less visible means, often referred to as the “hidden curriculum” (Dreeben 1968; Butts 1989; Niemi and Junn 1998; Brint et al. 2001). Gutmann (1999) argues that pedagogical approaches that encourage critical reasoning and deliberation can be formative for democratic citizenship. Gimpel et al. (2003) similarly suggest that teaching an appreciation for “conflict processes” is effective; they also show that student perceptions of school “fairness” (discipline and grades) translate into later support or distrust of governing authorities. Recent work has suggested that certain forms of racial diversity in the classroom may hinder civic engagement because it limits political discussion (Campbell 2007; this may also be true at the community level, Putnam 2007).

These more implicit factors in civic socialization can also result from social relationships within school – between students and peers, students and teachers, and even students and other adults (coaches and parents of friends) – within the school environment. Coleman and Hoffer (1987) theorized that these relationships create social capital, embedded in “functional communities” that reinforce civic norms. Verba et al. (1995) lend support to this communal norm idea and show that political participation is strongly motivated by a sense of civic obligation. Campbell (2005; 2006) has recently found that the civic climate in a school (whether or not voting was seen as a social norm) had a positive impact on voting, and argues that duty and obligation, reinforced by communal norms, can act as motives for political participation.

Coleman’s work on social capital and communal norms was theorized within the context of school sector differences, and he argued the cohesion and collective identity of *private* schools was better situated to create a “functional community.” This contention is controversial, however, because the vision for *public* schooling in America has long been the formation of a collective character for the common good of the democratic society (Kaestle 1983; Glenn 1988). *Private* schooling in America, on the other hand, has been criticized for its theoretical inability to serve this function in society. Private schools, it is argued, are not public institutions and therefore are less democratic, less reflective of a diverse society and less likely to foster healthy participation in that society. Because private

schools rest exclusively on the particular interests and beliefs of a specific group, the process of public deliberation is not practiced, thereby calling into question the democratic commitment of these groups. This argument, made by political theorists like Barber (1997), Gutmann (1999), and Macedo (2000) has been succinctly summarized by Galston (2001:231): "Public schools have been regarded as the most appropriate sites for forming citizens, whereas private schools have been regarded with suspicion as sources of separatism, elitism, and antidemocratic principles." (Galston 2001:231) The public or private organization of the school, therefore, could have implications for the process of civic socialization.

This argument, for the most part, is grounded in theory more than data; the empirical research on school sector and civic education generally shows neutral to positive effects. Research on school sector differences has significant challenges, and measuring outcomes and controlling for selection effects present major hurdles. Indeed, much of the debate over "private school effects" is focused on how and what to control (see Braun et al. 2006, and Peterson and Llaudet 2006). These methodological challenges must always be considered, and results appropriately interpreted against them. Nonetheless several studies seem to suggest that the particular identity and collectively held norms of a private school may foster relational trust and a cohesive bond that unites its members behind a common vision, creating a "communal organizational culture." (Coleman and Hoffer 1987; Bryk et al. 1993; Bryk and Schneider 2002; Crosnoe et al. 2004; Campbell 2005, 2006; Sikkink 2009) These studies generally show neutral-to-positive, though not overwhelmingly substantive, academic and socialization effects of private, especially Catholic, schools.

Wolf (2005, 2007) completed a review of 21 empirical studies that focused on the effects of private schooling on civic socialization, specifically, the values and skills of students or parents comparable to students or parents in assigned public schools.² These studies varied from random assignment experiments with voucher plans to observational studies that used control variables in multivariate regression models. Wolf found that the results of the 21 studies suggest that the effect of private schooling on civic values tends neutral-to-positive. Only three negative findings were found. While selection remains a concern, even looking at results from only the random assignment experiments shows a neutral-to-positive trend for private schools.

While most of the studies in Wolf's review focused on the schooling effects of students *while in school* or the civic behaviors of parents, a few of them are directly related to the present study in that they focused on the long-term effects into adulthood. Greene et al. (1999a) found that adult Latinos who attended private schools voted at higher rates, and that they displayed modestly higher levels of political tolerance than public school

counterparts. The study focused on a limited population: a nationally representative sample of 3,400 adult Latinos from the Latino National Political Survey. The same authors found a similar result for another study on a limited population, a representative sample of adults in Texas. Both of these studies looked at private school effects on adult civic behaviors, but had limited samples. Greene (1998) also used an early wave of the NELS data in another study, finding positive effects of private schooling on volunteerism. This analysis was focused on questions asked when respondents were seniors in high school.

The literature on schooling and civic socialization suggests that some family and school climate factors may contribute to civic participation. Research also suggests that, despite the fact that they are private and not public, private schools seem to have neutral-to-positive effects on civic outcomes. It is possible that certain factors in the family-school environment serve as mediators of the private school effect. Most of the recent school sector studies were cross-sectional and/or focused on the civic values and participation of students currently in public or private schools and/or their parents. There is limited knowledge of the mechanisms through which socialization may occur in private vs. public schools, and the extent to which they have a lasting effect. The present study addresses two unanswered questions: does the private school effect on civic socialization persist into young adulthood, and if it does, what explains the effect?

Study Design and Execution

Data

The present study used the NELS:88 data set to examine the relationship between the type of high school a person attends and civic participation as an adult. The NELS:88 base-year survey employed a two-stage, stratified sample design, with schools as the first-stage unit and students within schools as the second-stage unit. The stratified, random sample of 8th graders nested within schools was surveyed in 1988, 1990, 1992, 1994 and 2000. The cohort of 8th graders was followed for 12 years, roughly from ages 14 to 26. Data for the first three waves of the study were collected using self-administered questionnaires through the respondent's school. The final two waves were collected through a combination of interviews (telephone and field) and self-administered questionnaires. Analysis in this study selected respondents who participated in all five waves of the study, were not missing data from the base year parent survey or the school-level file, and took the cognitive test in either the first or second follow-up waves. After applying the appropriate weights, the sample size is 8,594. In this sample, I used multiple imputation for missing variables.

Measures and Methods

The NELS data include four categories of schools: public, private Catholic, private non-Catholic religious, and private non-religious. Though it does not represent a random sample of schools, the variables for public/private schools in NELS:88 closely represent the percentages enrolled in these schools in population at large in 1992. The vast majority of students in America are educated in public schools (87% N=7,443). The 13 percent educated in private schools (N = 1,151) are split among the different types of schools: half in Catholic schools (7% N = 589) and the other half divided between non-Catholic religious (2% N=208) and non-religious (4% N = 354) private schools.

I first simplify these categories into a dichotomous variable of public and private schools to measure the broad differences, and then I look specifically at the various categories within private schools for a more nuanced examination of the differences. Results from prior studies offer theoretical grounding for examining the differences between types of private schools and civic socialization. Sikkink (2003) found that there were significant differences in the political engagement of *parents* among different private school alternatives. He found that compared to those of public school children, parents of Catholic school children were more politically engaged, non-Catholic religious schools less so than Catholics. Others have found similar results for students of different private schools (Campbell 2002; Wolf 2007).

The dependent variables target the concept of civic participation. The concept intuitively suggests the duties, responsibilities and privileges associated with the status of membership in a particular society. Theoretically, individual citizens should have some commitment to the larger common good of the society to which they claim membership. There are seven broad categories of civic values that most empirical studies in this area measure: political tolerance, political knowledge, social capital, civic skills, patriotism, political participation and volunteerism. These are all generally understood to represent the knowledge, attitudes and behaviors necessary for participation in a democratic society. Most of the research reviewed above concentrates on the knowledge and attitudes of students. This focus on civic "values" is important, especially because most liberal theorists are concerned that some private schools, especially religious ones, undermine core principles of liberalism such as tolerance, critical thinking and moral autonomy (Feinberg 2006). But civic *behaviors* are a different though related matter and equally important. The present study focuses on measures of key civic behaviors in adulthood: voting and volunteering.

Voting behavior is measured by a question asked in 2000 when

respondents were 26 years old: whether or not they voted in the 1996 presidential election. Volunteerism is measured by an index created to include any volunteering done by the respondent from 1994-2000, the years *after* high school. Variables included in this index are from two different follow-up waves, 1994 and 2000, and include volunteering for a host of organizations including religious, youth, civic, and political groups. In order to match the other outcome variables, the index was distilled to a dichotomous variable of volunteering/no volunteering and represents the respondent's participation in any volunteering in the eight years since high school graduation.³

More than 50 percent of the young adults in the sample volunteered for at least one organization in the eight years after high school. Despite their young age (around 22), they exhibited a strong voter turnout in the 1996 presidential election with 60 percent participation. The NELS:88 respondents self-reported participation in the 1996 election at a higher rate than the comparable age group percentage from the U.S. Census Bureau data (49%).⁴ In later analysis around the different types of private schools (see Table 4), a second voting measure is used, where respondents were asked (in 2000) if they had done "any voting in the last two years." Of the sample, 45 percent said yes.

While imperfect, these particular measures offer some idea of the degree to which individuals have a sense of duty or obligation to the larger society, manifested in their participation in elections and community groups. While these measures might miss some people who are indeed civic participants, it could be argued that anyone who has some degree of citizenship will be voting and volunteering.

There are several methodological challenges in measuring and explaining school effects of this sort. The first is the clustered nature of the school-level data: students are nested within schools. Using standard regression analysis in this case is problematic because it assumes an independence of observations that is not obtained with this sampling procedure. Employing standard regression techniques, which assume a random sample, leads to the real possibility of misestimating standard errors in a complex sample like NELS. To avoid this possibility, I use hierarchical linear modeling and employ a two-level logistic regression model that adequately accounts for the group-level and individual-level effects (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002). This procedure ensures that the variation in my individual level results is not due to similarities shared by students from the same school. This is especially important when attempting to examine *school* effects on *individual* behaviors. The individual level variables are group-mean centered and the school level variables are grand-mean centered (see McFarland and Thomas 2006). All variables are fixed, but the level 1 intercept is allowed to vary randomly.

Another central methodological challenge in measuring the effect of a school environment on behaviors in adult life is selection bias. Families who send their children to private schools rather than public school might be fundamentally different from those who do not. Any differences in graduates of public and private schools could be the result of a host of factors other than the type of school attended. While it is impossible to account for all selection effects through the use of observational study and control variables, controlling for a wide range of relevant variables is nonetheless an accepted alternative for measuring school effects (Pallas 2000). In addition, a propensity score method was used in regression adjustment. The propensity score estimator, first introduced by Rosenbaum and Rubin (1983), is defined as the probability of receiving treatment (private school attendance in this case) based on certain conditions. To generate the propensity score, I first ran a logistic regression predicting the likelihood of attending private school, controlling for several background features (SES, race, gender, marital status of parents, religion of parents, region and urbanicity). Next, the computer used the results from the logistic regression to predict each individual's probability of attending private school based on their characteristics. This propensity score, the probability of private school attendance, is used as a control variable in the analysis (see D'Agnostic 1998; Mocan and Tekin 2006). While it is still likely that there are unobservable factors that influence private school attendance, this method helps to decrease error from selection bias.

My multi-stage, two-level logistic regression model controls for outside factors that influence the relationship between civic participation and school type. Part of the difficulty in measuring school effects lies in deciphering which variables are exogenous and which are endogenous. For example, parent-school involvement (a strong predictor of the civic behaviors in my model) is higher in private schools. Is this factor exogenous – that parents who send their children to private schools are inherently more interested and involved in their child's education? Or is it endogenous, a result of private schools encouraging parents to be more active in their child's education? (This is actually the suggestion of Coleman's work.) Several of the studies reviewed above argue that parental involvement is an *outcome* of private schooling, and thus including it in the model "over controls" and eliminates variance that is a *result* of private schooling, *not* selection effects. While this argument is plausible, it is extremely difficult to decipher the causal direction in the relationship between these variables; however, not including highly correlated variables could lead to over estimating school effects. In order to anticipate this potential problem, I choose to include variables that are potentially or even clearly endogenous. I construct the models on a roughly temporal framework,

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Variables Used in the Analysis

Dependent Variables	Type/Scale	Mean	SD
Volunteerism	0-No/1-Yes	.57	.50
Voted in 1996 Presidential Election	0-No/1-Yes	.61	.49
School Independent Variables			
Private school	0-Public/1-Private	.17	.38
Enrollment	1(> 400) to 9 (< 2500)	4.73	2.40
% Free lunch	0 to 3 (< 50%)	1.40	.89
% White	1 (> 25%) to 5 (< 90%)	3.52	1.45
Region (South)	0-Other/1-South	.36	.48
Urban	0-Other/1-Urban	.37	.48
Individual Independent Variables			
Sex (female)	0-Male/1-Female	.53	.50
Black	0/1	.08	.28
Hispanic	0/1	.11	.31
Other race	0/1	.08	.27
Marital status (parents)	0-Unmarried/1-Married	.81	.39
SES (parents)	Percentiles 1-99	54.60	28.28
Cognitive test scores	30.31-71.82	52.62	9.64
Propensity score	0-.80	.13	.18
Catholic	0/1	.27	.44
Talks/does things with parent	1 (rarely/never) to 4 (everyday)	2.84	.98
Parental-school involvement	0 (none) to 5	1.54	1.58
Parent knows friends' parents	1 (none) to 3 (many)	2.16	.67
School discipline fair	1 (SD) to 4 (SA)	2.39	.94
School grades fair	1 (SD) to 4 (SA)	2.22	.92
Student-teacher relationships	2 (SD) to 8 (SA)	5.68	.97
Volunteering important among friends	1 (NI) to 3 (VI)	1.45	.57
Volunteer while in high school	0/1	.47	.50
Volunteering required in high school	0/1	.08	.27
Religious attendance in high school	1 (rarely/never) to 4 (every day)	1.89	.93
Some college	0/1	.15	.36
College degree	0/1	.36	.48
Grad degree	0/1	.05	.21
Private college	0/1	.16	.37
Occupation (supervisory)	0/1	.61	.49
Religious attendance (2000)	0-30 (days/month)	2.51	3.88
Total family income (respondent 1999)	0 to 1 million	40634.14	33263.22
Marital status (respondent 2000)	0-Unmarried/1-Married	.39	.49
Literacy habits (2000)	0-21	11.58	4.55

Note: N for students (8,594) and N for schools (1,160)

from background and family factors while in school, to adult factors after school that are known to most influence civic activity.

The independent variables are added to the analysis in three stages (Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for all variables). Model 1 includes factors at both the school level and the individual (family of origin) level that may be associated with voting and volunteering (Verba et al 1995) as well as the likelihood of attending private school. These are the variables that are important to include for identifying selection factors when examining school effects; failure to take into account many of these variables “can lead to exaggerated claims about schooling’s effects on adult outcomes of various types.” (Pallas 2000:522) At the school level, they include school size (scale from 1 = less than 400 to 9 = more than 2,500), school SES (measured by the percentage of students in the school who receive free or reduced lunch), school race (percent white), and dummy variables for region (South) and urbanicity (urban). These are important controls because the analysis seeks to understand what factors in the school environment influence civic participation later in life, and these variables account for important factors in the school community. At the individual level, controls include sex and race (a dummy variable each for Black, Hispanic, and Other) because educational opportunities and civic behavior are not necessarily the same between sexes or between races. I include the parents’ marital status (married/non-married) because family structure can impact the choice of the type of school a child will attend as well as achievement in school. I also include a measure of socio-economic status. This is associated with the likelihood of private school attendance and the civic behaviors of the parents. The variable I use was created by the researchers at NELS:88 from variables in the base year parent survey. It includes the education level and occupational status of both parents (if a two parent family) and total family income. Cognitive ability may also determine civic participation later in life, so a composite test score variable (from reading and math cognitive tests) was included. Finally, the propensity score, the probability of attending a private school based on background characteristics, was included (see above).

Model 1 includes variables that are clearly exogenous; the models 2 and 3 include variables that are potentially endogenous. Model 2 includes measures that focus on characteristics and behaviors of students (respondents) and their family and school environment *during the school years* that may affect civic behavior later in life. These variables represent both family and school factors, but they all are loosely tied to Coleman’s idea of a “functional community” (1987). These are environmental factors that are possible mechanisms through which civic socialization could occur. At the family level, the variables measure various types of social capital, both internal and external to the family, which could contribute to

civic socialization, given the positive effects of parent-child involvement in the literature (Verba et al. 1995; Burns et al. 2001). The first variable asked respondents how often they talked to or did things with their mother or father (1 – rarely/never to 4 – everyday). Parents who are highly involved in their children's lives affect the school experience, and parents who volunteer and participate are likely to raise children who do the same. For this reason, I include a computed variable representing the sum of parents' involvement in their child's school (comprised of five variables: membership in a Parent-Teacher Association, attendance at PTA meetings, involvement in PTA activities, volunteering at the school, and volunteering in other organizations with other parents from the school). A measure of intergenerational closure is also included, accounting for whether or not the respondent's parents know their friends and their friends' parents; this closure external to the family represents the social relationships in which norms are embedded (Coleman and Hoffer 1987).

The relationships between students and teachers mark another contextual avenue through which norms could be communicated (Gimpel et al. 2003); I constructed a variable combining two others, asking students how well they get along with teachers and the degree to which students feel teachers are interested in them. Student perceptions of the fairness of discipline and grades at school have been shown to effect civic participation (Gimpel et al. 2003), so measures of these perceptions are included. Peers are another possible social context for communal norms, and the extent to which volunteering is considered important among one's friends helps to understand this additional level of the school environment.

It is clear that civically oriented behaviors in high school are likely predictors of the same behaviors later in life (McFarland and Thomas 2006), and I included a measure of whether or not the respondent volunteered while in high school. Although it is difficult to determine if such a variable is endogenous or exogenous, it is nonetheless important to control, anticipating a lower bound effect in the finding. I also add a measure of the nature of this volunteering, whether it was required for school or simply voluntary. Private schools require volunteering more than public schools do, and this could bias the effect (Planty and Regnier 2003). Finally, religiosity and youth community service are related (Verba et al. 1995), and a measure of religious attendance while in school is included.

Model 3 includes factors that are adult characteristics associated with voting and volunteering. The socio-economic status of the respondent in young adulthood (measured when respondents were about 26 years old) comprises the majority of this model. Indicators include three dummy variables for level of education attained, total family income in 1999, and a dummy variable for occupation, measuring whether or not the respondent's job requires leadership, managerial or supervisory responsibilities, as these

occupations are associated with higher rates of participation (Nie et al. 1996). An indicator of attendance at a private, four-year college is also employed, as it is possible that volunteering in young adulthood could be an effect of a private college, as many private colleges encourage or require involvement in community service. The literacy habits of adults are key predictors of civic participation because they increase knowledge of political issues (Plutzer 2002), so a constructed scale indicating the frequency (in 2000) of newspaper and magazine reading, as well as television news viewing, is included.

Table 2: Total Adult Volunteerism

School Level	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	b	t-ratio	OR	b	t-ratio	OR	b	t-ratio	OR
Private school	.32**	(2.29)	1.38	.23	(1.64)	1.27	.12	(.80)	1.12
Enrollment	.004	(.20)	1.00	-.003	(-.15)	.99	-.004	(-.20)	.99
% Free lunch	-.04	(-.80)	.96	.01	(.20)	.96	.06	(1.00)	1.06
% White	.002	(.07)	1.00	-.005	(-.17)	.99	-.03	(-1.00)	.98
Region (South)	.08	(1.14)	1.08	.08	(1.00)	1.08	.12	(1.50)	1.13
Urban	-.02	(-.22)	.98	-.01	(-.01)	.96	-.07	(-1.70)	.93
Intercept (level 2)	-.05	(-.56)	.94	-.25***	(2.50)	.77	-.39***	(-3.55)	.68
Individual Level									
Sex (female)	.13**	(2.17)	1.14	-.04	(-.67)	.97	-.12**	(-2.00)	.88
Black	.28**	(1.87)	1.33	.33**	(2.36)	1.39	.23	(1.64)	1.26
Hispanic	.05	(.45)	1.05	.02	(.17)	1.02	-.01	(-.08)	.99
Other race	-.08	(-.57)	.93	-.06	(-.38)	.95	-.14	(-1.88)	.87
Marital status (parents)	.19**	(2.38)	1.20	.10	(1.25)	1.14	.04 (.08)	(.50)	1.05
SES (parents)	.007***	(3.50)	1.01	.005**	(2.50)	1.00	.002	(1.00)	1.00
Cognitive test scores	.03***	(9.98)	1.03	.02***	(6.67)	1.02	.01***	(2.50)	1.01
Propensity score	.37	(.74)	1.45	.35	(.67)	1.43	.30	(.58)	1.34
Catholic	.05	(.33)	1.05	.01	(.14)	1.01	-.05	(-.71)	.95
Talks/involved with parent				.06*	(2.00)	1.06	.04	(1.33)	1.04
Parental-school involvement				.05**	(2.5)	1.06	.04	(1.60)	1.04
Parent knows friends parents				.18***	(3.60)	1.19	.15***	(3.00)	1.16
School discipline fair				.02	(.50)	1.02	.03	(1.00)	1.03
School grades fair				.01	(.25)	1.01	.03 (.04)	(.75)	1.03
Student-teacher relationships				.003	(.10)	1.00	-.003	(-.10)	.99
Volunteering important among friends				.13**	(2.60)	1.14	.10*	(1.67)	1.10
Volunteer while in high school				.89***	(12.7)	2.43	.76***	(10.9)	2.14
Volunteering required in high school				-.13	(-1.00)	.88	-.09	(-1.75)	.92

Finally, the model controls for marital status and religious attendance in 2000. These adult characteristics are endogenous factors; that is, they occur after the effect that I am studying, school type. However, they are known to be highly correlated with the civic activities in my model (Pallas 2000), so not including them could bias the results – it could overestimate a positive effect or underestimate a negative effect.

Religious attendance in high school		.18***	(6.00)	1.19	.10***	(2.50)	1.11
Some college					.01	(.11)	1.03
College degree					.39***	(5.57)	1.47
Grad degree					.59***	(3.69)	1.81
Private college					.46***	(5.11)	1.65
Occupation					.21***	(3.50)	1.24
Religious attendance (2000)					.08***	(8.00)	1.08
Total family income (respondent 1999)					<.001	(1.00)	1.00
Marital status (respondent 2000)					-.02	(-.29)	.97
Literacy habits (2000)					.06***	(6.00)	1.06
Variance							
Model Statistics	Component	Degrees of Freedom	Chi-Squared	p-value			
Model 1	.106	1153	1829.56	.00			
Model 2	.107	1153	1796.66	.00			
Model 3	.125	1153	1814.10	.00			

Note: Results from Logistic HLM, NELS (N = 8,594)

*p < .10 **p < .05 ***p < .01 (two-tailed tests)

Analysis and Interpretation

Results

The private school effect on volunteering is significant and sizeable (1.38 odds ratio, Table 2). This shows that on average, after controlling for a host of background factors, individuals attending private school have 38 percent higher odds of volunteering as young adults compared to their public school counterparts. Clearly, people who went to private school

Table 3: Voting in Presidential Election 1996

School Level	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	b	t-ratio	OR	b	t-ratio	OR	b	t-ratio	OR
Private school	.33**	(2.06)	1.38	.26	(1.63)	1.30	.24	(1.41)	1.32
Enrollment	.002	(.10)	1.00	-.001	(-.05)	.99	-.007	(-.12)	.99
% Free lunch	-.12**	(-2.00)	.88	-.01*	(-1.76)	.91	-.08	(-1.33)	.93
% White	.01	(.33)	1.01	.008	(.27)	1.00	.001	(.03)	1.00
Region (South)	-.05	(-.63)	.94	-.06	(-.75)	.94	-.05	(-.63)	.96
Urban	.07	(.70)	1.06	.06	(.60)	1.06	.06	(.60)	1.06
Intercept (level 2)	.22*	(2.44)	1.25	.14	(1.40)	1.15	.07	(.70)	1.07
Individual Level									
Sex (female)	.17***	(2.83)	1.19	.08	(1.33)	1.10	.04	(.67)	1.04
Black	.13	(.87)	1.13	.15	(1.00)	1.16	.09	(.60)	1.10
Hispanic	-.20*	(-1.82)	.87	-.22*	(-1.83)	.80	-.22*	(-1.83)	.80
Other race	-.72***	(-5.14)	.49	-.73***	(-5.21)	.48	-.79***	(-5.64)	.45
Marital status (parents)	.15*	(1.88)	1.16	.10	(1.11)	1.12	.10	(1.25)	1.09
SES (parents)	.01***	(5.00)	1.01	.01***	(10.0)	1.01	.01***	(5.00)	1.01
Cognitive test scores	.02***	(5.00)	1.02	.02***	(5.00)	1.02	.01***	(2.50)	1.01
Propensity score	-.14	(-2.29)	.87	-.14	(-2.29)	.86	-.17	(-1.15)	.85
Catholic	.10	(1.43)	1.11	.08	(1.14)	1.10	.04	(.57)	1.04
Talks/involved with parent				.07*	(1.75)	1.07	.06	(1.50)	1.06
Parental-school involvement				.08***	(4.00)	1.08	.07***	(3.50)	1.07
Parent knows friends' parents				.06	(1.20)	1.05	.04	(.80)	1.05
School discipline fair				-.02	(-.50)	.98	-.03	(-.60)	.97
School grades fair				-.02	(-.50)	.98	-.02	(-.50)	.98
Student-teacher relationships				.09***	(3.00)	1.10	.09***	(3.00)	1.10
Volunteering important among friends				.06	(1.20)	1.06	.05	(1.00)	1.05
Volunteer while in high school				.43***	(7.12)	1.54	.37***	(5.29)	1.45
Volunteering required in high school				.02	(.17)	1.02	.03	(.25)	1.02

Note: Results from Logistic HLM, NELS (N = 8,594)

*p < .10 **p < .05 ***p < .01 (two-tailed tests)

differ in volunteering rates as adults from those who went to public school. If the background controls serve as accurate measures, the difference is not due to the fact that private school students disproportionately come from wealthy and intact families. The coefficient is significant even after controlling for a participant's propensity for private school attendance. What else may explain the variation?

Model 2 accounts for the "school effect." When family-school environment are added, the effect of private schooling on volunteering

Religious attendance in high school	.05	(1.67)	1.05	.02	(.50)	1.02
Some college				.14	(1.56)	1.15
College degree				.36***	(4.50)	1.43
Grad degree				.25	(1.56)	1.28
Private college				-.18*	(-1.80)	.84
Occupation				.12*	(1.70)	1.12
Religious attendance (2000)				.03***	(3.00)	1.03
Total family income (respondent 1999)				<.001	(1.00)	1.00
Marital status (respondent 2000)				-.10	(-1.67)	.91
Literacy habits (2000)				.04**	(4.00)	1.04
Model Statistics	Variance Component	Degrees of Freedom	Chi-Square	p-value		
Model 1	.13	1153	1880.88	.00		
Model 2	.13	1153	1863.27	.00		
Model 3	.13	1153	1853.75	.00		

Note: Results from Logistic HLM, NELS (N = 8,594)

*p < .10 **p < .05 ***p < .01 (two-tailed tests)

is no longer significant. It seems that variation in volunteering by school type is mostly mediated through the variables in this model and they are key factors in civic socialization. The family variables are significant – time spent in conversation or activity with a parent, parent-school involvement and the indicator of intergenerational closure. Student perceptions of “fairness” at school are not significant. Peer influence in the community context seems to make a difference, as the importance of volunteering among one’s friends is also significant. As expected, religious attendance is an important indicator of volunteering later in life. But the most important predictor in this model is clearly whether or not the respondent volunteered during the high school years (2.43 odds ratio). The required volunteering variable was not significant and is not in any models in this study.

Model 3 demonstrates that background factors in young adulthood are also powerful predictors of volunteering. While the significance of the private school variable was lost in Model 2, Model 3 reduces the coefficient by nearly 50 percent. In addition to the SES variables, attendance at a private college, religiosity and literacy habits are all significant predictors. This is, of course, not surprising. Interestingly, the inclusion of these variables does not eliminate the significance of several family-school environment factors. Intergenerational closure, peer importance of volunteering, volunteering during high school, and religious attendance all maintain significance in this final model. Although the educational attainment variables are quite substantive, volunteering while in high school is clearly the strongest predictor of volunteering later in life (2.14 odds ratio).

The results for voting in the 1996 presidential election reveal a generally similar pattern. With the background controls in Model 1, school sector effect is significant and substantive (1.38 odds ratio – Table 3). As with volunteering, the controls in Model 2 seem to mediate this effect, although the specific variables differ slightly. Here, the relationships between teachers and students are a significant factor that maintains through Model 3. While the closure variable is not significant, parent-school involvement is and remains so in Model 3. The peer influence appears to only make a difference on volunteering, as it is not significant in the voting models. Prior participation – volunteering while in high school – remains the most substantive predictor even on the voting outcome. As expected, variables in Model 3 are strong predictors of voting behaviors, but they reduce the coefficient for school type by much less than in the volunteering model.

In order to investigate how different types of private schools influence these measures, I implemented the same two-level logistic regression models as above and used three dummy variables, one for private non-religious schools, private Catholic schools and private non-Catholic religious schools respectively (public school is the omitted category). Table 4 shows the results for the school type variables only; the patterns

Table 4: Results by School Type

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	b	t-ratio	OR	b	t-ratio	OR	b	t-ratio	OR
Volunteering									
Catholic	.18	(1.00)	1.19	.07	(.41)	1.08	.02	(.11)	1.02
Religious (non-Catholic)	.45*	(1.67)	1.56	.38	(1.52)	1.46	.20	(.71)	1.23
Non-Religious	.77***	(3.35)	2.17	.68***	(2.72)	1.97	.41	(1.64)	1.51
Presidential Voting									
Catholic	.25	(1.32)	1.29	.18	(.90)	1.20	.16	(.84)	1.17
Religious (non-Catholic)	.33	(1.10)	1.39	.28	(.88)	1.33	.28	(.90)	1.32
Non-Religious	.67***	(3.19)	1.96	.60***	(2.61)	1.83	.53**	(2.30)	1.69
Any Voting Past 2 Years									
Catholic	-.13	(-.68)	.88	-.13	(-.65)	.88	-.13	(-.65)	.88
Religious (non-Catholic)	.73***	(2.81)	2.09	.74***	(2.84)	2.09	.76***	(2.81)	2.13
Non-Religious	.36	(1.50)	1.43	.36	(1.50)	1.43	.33	(1.32)	1.39

Note: Results from Logistic HLM, NELS (N = 8,594)
 Models listed include all corresponding controls from tables 2 and 3. Only results for school type are listed.

*p < .10 **p < .05 ***p < .01 (two-tailed tests)

Table 5: Predicted Probabilities

	Volunteering		Voting in Presidential Election		Any Voting in Past 2 Years		
	%	Model 1	Model 3	Model 1	Model 3	Model 1	Model 3
	Public		49	40	55	52	40
Private (all)		57*	43	63*	58	44	39
Catholic		53	41	62	56	38	33
Religious (non-Catholic)		60*	45	63	59	58*	54*
Non-religious		67*	50	71*	65*	50	44

Notes: *Represents a statistically significant difference from public school attendance. Calculated with the control variables set to their appropriate means at each level of analysis, so they represent the probability of a young adult from the average school with average individual level characteristics, volunteering or voting.

of significance for control variables in these models follow those from tables 2 and 3. For the volunteering and presidential voting outcomes, non-religious schools seem to drive the effect seen in tables 2 and 3. Another outcome variable, any voting in the past two years, is shown as well. While not significant when the model included a variable for all private schools, non-Catholic religious schools show a substantive effect on this outcome. The interesting finding here is the *lack* of effect for Catholic schools; they are not significant in any model.

It seems clear that various background factors in Model 3 locate a young adult in the social structure and serve as clear predictors of his or her civic participation; most of these factors are related to socio-economic status (level of education, occupation, literacy habits, but religious attendance is also important). But it is also clear that family-school environmental factors in Model 2 matter, and they seem to be mediators of any private school effect.

For easier interpretation, Table 5 shows predicted probabilities for the outcome variables based on school type. These were calculated with the control variables set to their appropriate means at each level, so they represent the probability of a young adult from the average school with average individual level characteristics, voting or volunteering later in life.

Discussion

Do private schools inculcate democratic practices less than their public school counterparts? The short answer is no; on the whole, students from private schools do not vote and volunteer at lower rates than their public school peers after controlling for selection effects. But the results of this study tell a more complex story about any discernable private school effect on the civic participation of young adults.

At one level, graduating from a private school makes one more likely to vote and volunteer later in life. This “advantage” is not explained by controlling for background features such as race and socio-economic status. It does, however, seem to be explained through the factors in Model 2. On the one hand, this demonstrates that political socialization is not simply a class-based process of social reproduction: net of background effects, there are family and school environmental factors that are contributors to civic socialization and key predictors for engagement and participation later in life. Relationships between parents, teachers and students – indicators of social capital – are important elements that reinforce norms and create an educational context that promotes lasting civic engagement, a certain kind of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1990) that socializes for public life. Most importantly, educational environments that encourage active civic participation (volunteering) will have long-term effects on young people (though not significant in my models, requiring service is probably not helpful; see Planty and Regnier 2003 and McFarland and Thomas 2006.) The evidence here also suggests that private schools are often more successful at creating and sustaining the climate and context within which these important factors thrive. This supports previous findings about the importance of school climate for social outcomes, especially in private schools where the collectively held norms within the school community bring a higher degree of relational trust, social

capital and “buy-in” for parents and students, motivating both groups to get involved in the community (Coleman 1987; Bryk and Schneider 2002; Campbell 2005; Sikkink 2009).

On the other hand, there may be an alternative explanation that could have some support in these findings. Perhaps the host of background controls included in the models do not completely account for selection bias and the effect of social class. Although the models do not lack for controls at both the school and individual level, it is possible that reducing the complexities of social class into these variables leaves some important factors unaccounted for or unobserved. Lareau (2000, 2003) has argued that many of the significant mediating family-school environment variables in my models are themselves markers of social class. In her terms, these factors are part of a “dominant set of cultural repertoires” (*habitus* by another name) that are steeped in middle-class life and rewarded in and through key social institutions like schools.⁵ Some of the significant variables in Model 3 – notably level of education and occupation – could be signals of these family-school environmental factors being rewarded later in life, and civic participation could simply reflect this process. The fact that the non-religious private schools – often the elite, wealthy schools – drive much of the private school effect could also potentially signal this process of social reproduction via civic socialization. (This explanation takes Bourdieu’s 1977 cultural and social reproduction approach into the realm of political socialization.)

It is difficult to determine if the family-school environment factors are endogenous or exogenous variables. Arguing a causal direction in this relationship would transcend the data and results of this study. There seem to be three possible explanations for why these factors make a difference: (1. it simply reveals a class-based selective group of involved parents and civically minded students, (2. the school community fosters these attitudes and practices or (3. both. My own speculation is that the third option comes closest to explaining reality. Selection is clearly at work, but (perhaps because of this) particular social norms are at work within a school community that have lasting effects in excess of selection factors.

In spite of these endogeneity issues, the results point to mechanisms through which civic socialization occurs. The educational context of young people, including the family and school environment, contributes to the formation of lasting citizenship. Although social class issues need to be considered, it is clear that parents make a difference in the civic participation of their children. Parents play a key role in creating and sustaining the social capital and networks that have normative power for civic engagement later in life. This serves as an important point of comparison for the theoretical work cited above which is concerned that parents’ role and involvement in a child’s education should be secondary to the role of the state. The

concern is mainly with indoctrination and abuse, and these results suggest that the concerns need to be met in a way that does not negate parental involvement in children's education. If public schools minimize parents' involvement (intentionally or not), they may weaken their ability to cultivate civic participation. Stated in the affirmative, in as much as public schools can involve parents and students in community life, they too will be places for cultivating active civic participation.⁶

The results show differences between the types of private schools on the measures of voting and volunteering that differ slightly with previous research. Non-religious private schools seemed to account for a large portion of the private school effect on later civic participation. Results for these schools in previous research (usually with outcomes during the school years) have been mixed (Wolf 2007); this study shows that their effect on volunteering and voting later in life is substantial. Non-Catholic religious schools have also had mixed results. Some research on these schools generally shows negative results on both academic and socialization measures (Carbonaro 2006; Schneider et al. 2006). In research on democratic citizenship, they seem to demonstrate poor results on tolerance measures but relatively positive results on participation measures such as those in this study (Wolf 2007). Perhaps the most remarkable finding in this regard is the evident *lack* of a "Catholic school effect." Catholic school effects have been well supported in school sector research in general (Coleman and Hoffer 1987; Bryk et al. 1993) and have been demonstrated in civic participation studies (Campbell 2002 and Sikkink 2003). One speculative possibility could be the significant changes Catholic schooling is undergoing on a number of levels, especially demographically, that may have effects on other outcomes (Kim and Placier 2004; Smith 2005; Meyer 2007). It is also possible that the Catholic school effect on civic socialization does not persist into adulthood. There was a significant and sizable effect of Catholic schooling on volunteering *while in high school* in my analysis, but not on participation later in life.

Conclusions

Consistent with the other studies in this area, the findings show that private schools produce "good citizens" as much as public schools, even after controlling for a host of factors. They seem to do at least an equally effective job as public schools in preparing students for public life in a democratic society. More importantly, the results also offer hints towards answering the question of *why* private schools, called "private" precisely because they are not "public," seem to do an equally effective job of inculcating citizenship as their public counterparts. Contextual factors in the family and school – parent-school involvement, intergenerational

closure, student-teacher relationships, the importance of participation among peers, and volunteering during the school years – played a role in civic socialization. To some extent, these factors may be rooted in the particular identity and collectively held norms of a private school and may foster relational trust and a cohesive bond and may create a “communal organizational culture.” (Bryk et al. 1993; Bryk and Schneider 2002; Sikkink 2009) The common bond between private schools is the particular identity that is central to their existence. These particular identities are expressed through collectively held norms; these norms are a form of social capital that is embedded within the social networks of private school communities (Campbell 2005). The family-school environment factors that mediated the effect of private school in my analysis could serve as indicators of these norms and collective identities that promote civic socialization.

Of course it is also possible that, background controls aside, the mediating factors are themselves markers of social class, and thus the educational context of lasting citizen-formation is merely a reflection of access to resources. In this sense, it is possible that other key factors, such as level of education and occupation, are signals of this process of reproduction. Adequately controlling for selection bias is extremely difficult in observational studies, so the possibility cannot be ruled out. The significance of school sector and contextual factors could vary by class in a way that simply controlling for background features does not fully realize. Further research that creatively examines the impact of social class on civic participation via family-school environmental factors could prove fruitful in understanding precisely how “cultural repertoires” affect the family-school relationship and political socialization. This study demonstrates that private schools seem to be embedded within a certain *habitus* that prepares students for public life well into adulthood. The extent to which this environment is more directly related to school culture or simply a reflection of social class needs to be explored carefully in further research.

Notes

1. He famously said: “Education is thus simply the means by which a society prepares, in its children, the essential conditions of its own existence.” (1972:203) While few contemporary sociologists of education would argue that socialization for citizenship is the *only* purpose for education, most would agree that it is a central one (see for example, Labaree 1997 and Brint 2006).
2. It should be noted that this review employed the “vote counting” method of meta-analysis that does not weight the strength or power of effect sizes, which has been subject to criticism; see discussion of the methodological debate around Eric Hanushek’s studies in Hasci 2003:188-94.

3. While collapsing these measures into a dichotomous variable enables me to capture any and all volunteering after high school and maintain consistency among outcome variables, this generalization could lose variation in the *kind* of volunteering done by graduates of different school types. Students from religious schools, for example, could volunteer in their churches, which may be theoretically different than non-religious volunteering. This is the difference between Putnam's (2000) bonding and bridging social capital. The variables that comprise my volunteering outcome (from the final two waves of NELS) only include church volunteering in the 1994 wave, not the 2000 wave. Initial analyses with this variable reveal little variation in church-related volunteering among students from different school types. Additionally, churches were not the organizations that received the most volunteering from students from religious schools (hospitals had higher rates). But again, the measures in NELS do not enable a thorough investigation of this possibility and further research is needed. Interestingly, Putnam's recent work (2007) suggests that bonding and bridging social capital may not be at odds with each other and the former may serve as a prelude for the latter.
4. These figures are from the Current Population Survey. Thomas Dee (2005) argues that self-reporting does not significantly weaken the credibility of the voting measure in his analysis of the High School and Beyond data. It is, however, possible that these figures reflect over-reporting, and that it could vary by school sector.
5. Similarly, Rothstein suggests that in his case studies of California schools, "parental involvement did not vary by whether a school was public or private but rather by whether the school's parents were lower or middle class." (2004:32; Rothstein et al. 1999) On the other hand, Domina (2005), while urging caution, suggests his results show "that the involvement of low-SES parents may pay greater cognitive and behavioral dividends than the involvement of high-SES parents." Neither study, however, was tied to civic outcomes. Planty and Regnier (2003) show that while higher SES students volunteered more in high school, class differences diminished for volunteering rates in young adulthood. Clearly, the relationship needs to be explored more fully, particularly in regards to school sector and civic socialization.
6. Recommendations made by Arum (2003) for smaller public schools with more personal contact could have this effect.

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1288 • *Social Forces* 87(3)

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