

**The Attitudinal Sources of Political Interest:
Cynicism, Party Affinity and Civic Duty**

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In this era of "rebirth of political socialization" (Niemi and Hepburn 1995), youth are back on the radar. The low level of electoral participation by young people relative to older voters is certainly related to this revival of interest, but not the only cause. Young people, after all, have always voted less than older cohorts (Teixeira 1992; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). The difference, nowadays, is that today's youth participate less in elections than was the case 20 or 40 years ago. Wattenberg (2007), in a study looking at 18 democracies, showed that the ratio of old to young voters changed in most countries from the beginning of the 1970's to 2000. At the beginning of the 1970's, 11 out of 18 countries were found to have a ratio of 1 to 1. By 2000, this ratio was more commonly 1.5 to 1, with diminishing numbers of younger voters accounting for the change. Youth, therefore, has been identified as responsible for the recent decline in overall participation (Blais *et al.* 2004; Franklin 2004; Wass 2007).

Young people may participate less today, but do these findings necessarily mean that they are no longer interested in politics? Many scholars propose alternative explanations for the apparent lack of interest. Henn, Weinstein and Wring (2002) note that when politics is conceptualized more broadly, young people are more apt to report an interest in it. Similarly, Dalton (2007) proposed two kinds of citizens, one oriented toward duties (among which voting is important), and the other oriented toward more unconventional forms of engagement, such as protests and boycotts. According to Dalton, young people are more often found among the second group of citizens than the first. For some, it is therefore primarily a debate between "apoliticism" and "new politics" (Hudon *et al.* 1991).

That being said, one great question remains: if youth continue to be interested in politics, in whatever form interest may take, how does this interest develop? Are some factors more likely to encourage or discourage the development of interest in politics? In the recent years, a growing number of scholars have worked on this question (Dostie-Goulet 2009; Neundorf, Smets and Albacete 2009; Prior 2008, 2009; Shani 2009). This paper intends to contribute to the larger debate on youth and politics by offering a better understanding of the role certain attitudes play in the development of political interest.

This paper will focus on three attitudes in particular: cynicism, party affinity and civic duty. Using a panel of over 600 adolescents, this paper considers the extent to which these attitudes have an effect on change in political interest, and conversely, the extent to which political interest affects change in these attitudes. The link between interest and these attitudes will be examined, as well as the temporal order of their appearance.

Political Attitudes

There are many reasons why young people may become interested in politics. One of the most studied is certainly the transmission model, which "sees children as being more or less direct recipients or inheritors of parental political traits" (Beck and Jennings 1991, 744). Non-familial social forces may also play an important role, among which the school occupies a major place (Campbell 2006; Claes, Stolle and Hooghe 2007; Denver and Hands 1990). Other explanations could involve the influence of friends, role models, or some other facet of a young person's social network.

In this paper, though, the focus is not on agents of socialization, but on attitudes that may increase or decrease political interest. Cynicism, party affinity and civic duty have been chosen. It

goes without saying that many other attitudes could have been included in this study, self-confidence or efficacy for example. Cynicism, party affinity, and civic duty were chosen because clear correlations between these attitudes and political interest have been demonstrated in past studies (see following paragraphs for references). The purpose of this paper is to begin with these correlations and go beyond them. The effect of these attitudes on the *change* in political interest has not yet been studied, nor has the direction of causality. The aim of this research is to understand the relationship between these attitudes and political interest further.

Political interest

Studying the development of political interest is not as straightforward as one may think. While there is a clear distinction between voting and abstention, every person conceptualizes his or her interests in politics differently. Similarly, each scholar chooses his or her own way to interpret this interest.

Some scholars conceptualize interest as involvement, implying concrete actions such as the attention one pays to media (Jennings and Niemi, 1981). For Lupia and Philpot, political interest is "a citizen's willingness to pay attention to political phenomena at the possible expense of other topics" (2005: 1122). From my point of view, the absence of action does not necessarily imply a lack of political interest. Therefore, one's level on political interest is a personal subjective judgment, and so the way to measure it is to ask individuals to identify their own degree of interest. Further details on the measure will follow in a subsequent section.

Cynicism

Schyns, Nuus and Dekker define cynicism as "an individual's attitude, consisting of a deep-rooted conviction of the inherent evilness of politicians, political institutions, and/or the political system as a whole" (2004, 3). Cynics have the feeling that governments do not care what people really think. Citizens are cynical when they believe the government to be irresponsible, when they have lost confidence in politics and politicians (Blais *et al.* 2002, 108).

Some scholars have looked more precisely at the impact of cynicism among young people. In a study of young voters, Blais and colleagues (2007) found that those who were cynical were less likely to be interested in politics. In the same study, cynicism, although not directly linked to participation, had an indirect effect, with political interest serving as an intermediary variable.

While cynicism is likely to have an effect on political interest, we cannot exclude the possibility that political interest would, in turn, influence cynicism. This could be the reason why politically interested youth have lower levels of cynicism, as noted by Dermody and Hamner-Lloyd (2004). However, this effect might be less clear if political interest *increased* cynicism in some cases. Those who are more interested might become better informed. If the information a young person receives is more negative than positive, cynicism might increase.

Party Affinity

Party affinity refers to psychological attachment to a party. Following Percheron (1978), I believe the term "party identification" is too often used when referring to young people. It is particularly true in the case of youth who might not be old enough for formal membership in a partisan group. Because youth are just beginning to know about parties and to develop preferences, it makes more sense to talk about party affinity than party identification.

The concept of party affinity bears some resemblance to party identification, but is distinct in that it does not consider whether or not an individual is a member of a partisan group, or the extent to which an individual feels a part of a partisan group, as party identification would seek (Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002).

Other scholars have also chosen to focus on party affinity rather than party identification. Gaffié, Marchand and Cassagne, in looking at the effect of political position on group perception, asked their respondents to identify "the political party to which they felt closest" (1997, 180), which they called political affinity.

The positive relationship between party identification and political interest has been demonstrated (Miller and Shanks 1996). According to Jennings and Niemi, "It is likely that partisanship itself affects the later acquisition of political knowledge and attitudes" (1974, 37). Campbell and his colleagues (1960) report that "the stronger the individual's sense of attachment to one of the parties, the greater his psychological involvement in political affairs" (p.143). This positive relationship should also apply for party affinity, which, like party identification, includes this notion of "sense of attachment".

The reverse effect of political interest on party affinity is also possible. Wong (2000) showed that media exposure (the main component of political interest, according to Lupia and Philpot 2005) increases the likelihood of immigrants identifying with a major party in the United States. Katz makes exactly this point with his claim that "those with weak partisanship are likely to be that way precisely because they are uninterested" (1979, 161).

Civic Duty

The third attitude is civic duty. The democratic state is perceived by some as a place where citizens have both rights and duties. Civic duty is usually understood and described by scholars as the civic duty *to participate in elections* (Blais 2000; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Measured as such, this attitude is among the main predictors of turnout, and its correlation with political interest is important (Blais 2000).

While Campbell (2006) uses the term social or civic norm in reference to activities such as voting, he considers this attitude more broadly. For him, "a norm is rooted in a sense of obligation" (2006, 25) and enforced through social sanctions. The social norms can also be internalized: "as young people undergo socialization, they are imprinted with norms that have the potential to guide their behavior throughout their lives" (2006, 99). Campbell's analysis emphasized the effect of high school as a climate in which the development of civic norms is fostered (2006, 163).

Following Campbell, this paper does not confine civic duty to the act of voting. Because respondents in this study are not yet allowed to vote, a question on how important it is to vote did not seem appropriate. Hypothetical questions can lead to a gap in answers' acuity, particularly among youth (Percheron 1978). It is one thing to say that it is everyone's civic duty to vote when one cannot vote. It is another thing when a person could actually do so. Civic duty is therefore conceptualized in this paper as the civic duty *to be informed about politics*.

Other scholars have conceptualized civic duty in a similar fashion. Couldry and Langer note that their respondents "had a sense that their role as citizens was heavily associated with a duty to be informed" (2005, 249). Data from a study on young voters in Montreal (Blais *et al.* 2007) indicate that 82% of those who said that it is their duty to be informed about politics also said that it is their moral duty to vote. We can therefore imagine that most of the respondents from this

study who answered positively to the civic duty question would be inclined to answer similarly to a conventional civic duty question if they had the right to vote.

Scholars have been less inclined to work on the reverse effect of political interest on civic duty, even though chances are high that causality runs in both directions. When someone is very interested in a particular subject, this person is more likely to believe that those who do not pay attention to this subject are missing something important. Civic duty, as measured in this study, represents the sense that it is important to be informed about what is going on in the world of politics. Those who are interested in politics should therefore be the first to give importance to information about politics.

Objectives and Hypotheses

Cynicism, party affinity and civic duty are good examples of cases where "the assumption of unidirectional causality is not tenable" (Finkel 1995, 23). Conventional wisdom holds that political interest would be, in part, a result of these attitudes. It is worth asking, however, how political interest might affect the development of these attitudes. Do teenagers who have a greater interest in politics experience a change in their level of cynicism, party affinity or sense of civic duty, and if so, in what direction is this change? The goal of this paper is therefore twofold: to determine if cynicism, party affinity and civic duty have an effect on change in political interest among teenagers, and to determine to what extent there is a reverse causal effect of political interest on these attitudes.

Cynicism is usually associated with political disinterest (Dermody and Hamner-Lloyd 2004). I expect to find the same relationship among my sample. Moreover, I expect cynicism to have an impact on how political interest changes over time, that is, to induce a change toward disinterest. Those who are cynical should become less and less interested. I also expect to find that political interest affects the development of this attitude. This effect should be smaller, however, given the nature of cynicism. Some with interest might become less cynical, while others become more cynical, resulting in a null or very small aggregate effect.

Because a link between party identification and political interest has been shown in studies involving young voters (Blais *et al.* 2007) and the whole population (Miller and Shanks 1996), I expect a positive relationship with party affinity here as well. I expect those who have an interest in politics to develop an affinity for one party in particular, and as interest increases, so might the individual's affinity for his or her preferred party.

The direction of causality, however, could very well be the opposite. Those who like a political party might be more inclined to pay attention to new information concerning this party. They should be stimulated by electoral campaigns, political discussions, and by media coverage concerning this party. This increase in attention should help foster the development of political interest generally. Therefore, teenagers who express an affinity for a partisan group should be more likely to develop an interest in politics.

The direction of causality in this case implies that something other than political interest must cause an individual to like a party in the first place. It is not unlikely, considering the importance that scholars attribute to family transmission in the early years of development (Campbell *et al.* 1960; Fiorina 1981), that parents would play an important role in this process. An individual might be conditioned to like a particular partisan group, and then develop an interest in politics more generally as a consequence.

Concerning civic duty, young people who believe it is their duty to remain informed about politics will certainly be more attentive to what is going on in politics, either by following the

news or talking about politics with friends and family. As with party affinity, a greater sense of civic duty should have a positive effect on the development of political interest. Similarly, teenagers who are interested in politics should be more likely to experience a positive change in civic duty. I expect the effect of political interest on civic duty to be particularly strong.

Data and Methodology

To look at the link between these attitudes and political interest, I draw on multi-wave individual level survey data gathered from students at four Montreal high schools (two public schools and two private schools). The Montreal School Board (CSDM) was contacted and asked to participate in the study, as well as the principals of many private schools in the area. Schools that participated were those that received the approval of their regional subcommittee and the support of their principal. Because there were many fewer bureaucratic hurdles to their participation, private schools were more apt to grant permission to be included in the study. As a result, a greater number of students from private schools participated. The sample, therefore, is not representative of the Quebec youth population, but with over 600 students, it offers a valuable perspective on the current attitudes of Quebec youth.

The first wave of the survey took place in spring 2006. All students in level 3¹ of the four schools were asked to participate. Respondents were generally aged 14 or 15 during this first wave. High school students, because they are required to attend class, are a more captive public than respondents approached by phone, mail, or in person. As a result, I obtained a response rate of over 90 per cent. Looking only at teenagers also allows for the study of the development of political interest and other attitudes at a period of life during which substantial change occurs constantly and in all spheres. According to Niemi and Hepburn (1995), it is the perfect period to conduct developmental studies.

The same four schools visited in 2007 were visited again in Spring 2007 and Spring 2008, while the students were in level 4 and level 5, respectively. As many as possible of the same students were surveyed. Most participated in all three waves. Because the questions related to civic duty and party affinity were asked only during the second and third years of the study, this paper looks exclusively at respondents who participated in at least these last two waves. This provided a sample of 622 students.

The longitudinal nature of the study allows us to observe the evolution of political interest (as well as other attitudes) and identify the factors responsible for this evolution. By following the same respondents over time, we can determine which moved first (or at all), political interest or other attitudes. As Finkel claims: "The presence of lagged *Y*, or the "lagged endogenous" variable, allow us to analyze explicitly the *changes* in *Y* over time, and if we can show that a variable *X* is associated with changes in *Y*, this would represent more direct evidence of a causal effect from *X* to *Y* than is possible to obtain in static cross-sectional designs" (1995, 4).

While a panel study is a fantastic analytical tool, one must be aware of the possibility of contamination risk. This is the interference of the questionnaire itself in the development of political interest (Blais and Durand 2003). Some teenagers might have developed an interest in politics because they participated in the first wave, and this increased interest would contaminate subsequent waves of the study. The risk of this sort of contamination should be minimal,

¹ There is no universally recognized method for labeling the school levels in English in Quebec. Schools use the terms "level 3", "secondary 3" and "grade 10" to talk about the same level. In any case, students in this grade level are typically 14 or 15 years old.

however, as there was a full year separating each wave of the study. Even if some teenagers did develop interest as a result of answering the questionnaire, they had plenty of time to return to their "normal" level before the next wave.

One of the primarily dependent variables is respondents' political interest. Respondents were asked to rate their interest in Quebec politics on a scale from 1 to 10 (see the Appendix for question wording). I chose interest in Quebec politics as the dependent variable because of the question referring to party affinity, which refers only to the Quebec political landscape.

The variable *cynicism* is an index made up of three questions. Respondents were asked to indicate if they agreed with the following sentences: "I don't think the government cares much what people like me think" and "Politicians are ready to lie to get elected". Cronbach's Alpha for the index is .40 in 2007 and .50 in 2008. *Cynicism* is a scale from 0 to 1, where 0 means that an individual is not cynical at all and 1 that this person is very cynical.

Concerning party affinity, respondents were asked if there was a party they liked in Quebec politics. *Party affinity* is coded 1 for those who reported that there was a party they liked a lot, and 0 otherwise. This measure of party affinity is similar to the usual measure of party identification, but distinct from party identification in that it refers only to subjective attachment to a party.²

The variable *civic duty* represents the sense that individuals have a responsibility to be informed about politics. Respondents were asked to tell which of these two sentences better described their position: "It is my duty to be informed about politics" or "There are more important things in life than to follow politics". *Civic duty* is coded 1 if the respondent identified with the first statement, 0 if the respondent identified with the later. A significant relationship was found between civic duty and the actual amount of time devoted to watching news on television, reading newspapers or listening to news on the radio.

Table 1: Political interest, cynicism, party affinity and civic duty: summary

	2007	2008	Correlations 2007-2008
Political interest (1 to 10)	5.24 (2.47)	5.08 (2.35)	.70
Cynicism (0 to 1)	.70 (.19)	.68 (.19)	.53
Party Affinity (like one party a lot)	18%	16%	.66
Civic Duty	45%	46%	.71

Note: Standard deviation is in parentheses.

Table 1 presents a summary of these four variables. While the mean level of political interest appears stable at the aggregate level between 2007 and 2008, a great deal of change occurred at the individual level. Political interest did not move in one direction but in all directions at once, explaining its aggregate stability. The changes that individuals experienced between 2007 and 2008 ranged from -7 (decrease in political interest) to 9 (increase). Looking more closely at this change, it appears that 15% of the panel respondents experienced some or an important increase,

² It should be added that by considering only those who said they liked a party a lot, I am using a conservative measure of party affinity.

while 21% experienced some or an important decrease in political interest. The remaining 64% did not experience change in political interest between 2007 and 2008, or experienced only minor change of one point.

Cynicism, on the other hand, slightly decreases. In 2007, 73% agreed that the government does not care much. The percentage decreased to 64% in 2008. This degree of cynicism is similar to results found elsewhere. Blais and his colleagues (2002) found that 64% agreed to the same question in 2000 among young Canadian voters (18 to 30 years old). However, the fact that it is decreasing is surprising since young people are usually less cynical than their older counterparts (Blais 2002; Dermondy and Hanmer-Lloyd 2004; Jennings and Niemi 1968).

In 2007, an election year in Quebec, only 18% of respondents reported having a party they liked a lot. This level remained relatively stable at 16% in 2008. This finding, although quite low, does not differ greatly from what others have found with more traditional party identification questions. Zuckerman, Dasović and Fitzgerald note that, "unlike their parents (...), most young persons do not claim to be partisans" (2007, 91). In a study of Quebec youth, one-quarter of high school students claimed affiliation (Hudon *et al.* 1991). Similarly, Henn, Weinstein and Forrest (2005) reported 28% of party identification among young Britons.

There is a high level of correlation (.66) from one year to another concerning affinity for a party. Among those who did not like a particular party in 2007, 66% continue not to like any party in 2008. Similarly, 55% of those who liked a party a lot in 2007 still do in 2008. Only 4% of respondents went from not linking a party to linking one a lot, and 5% went from linking a party a lot to not linking any of them.

Concerning civic duty, 45% of respondents indicated that it was their duty to stay informed about politics in 2007, 46% in 2008. Again, the correlation between the two measures is fairly high (.71).

One important control variable is included in the models, the amount of political discussion within the social network. The variable is an index made up of three questions. The respondents were asked to report how often their parents, friends and teachers talked about politics. It is a continuous variable where 0 means that a teenager's social network is absent political discussion, and 1 indicates that members of a teenager's social network often discuss politics.

Other control variables include whether the school was public or private and the respondent's gender. Many scholars have found a gender gap in political interest, young men showing a greater interest in politics than young women (Gidengil *et al.* 2004; Muxel 2002).³

Findings and discussion

Before looking at the effect of cynicism, party affinity, and civic duty on change in political interest (and vice versa), it is interesting to explore the relationship that exists between these attitudes and political interest to begin with. As discussed previously, we should expect a negative correlation between political interest and cynicism, and positive correlations for party affinity and civic duty.

³ Other socio-demographic characteristics might have influenced political interest among youth, particularly the socio-economic status of the respondent's family (Blais 2000). Unfortunately, though, getting this kind of information from young people is problematic. Teenagers often have difficulty judging parents' income and level of education (comment made by teenagers who participated in pretest).

Table 2: Correlation between attitudes and political interest

	2007	2008
Cynicism	-.27	-.24
Party Affinity	.41	.37
Civic Duty	.52	.47

The Pearson's correlations go in the expected directions for each attitude (table 2). Further, results from 2008 are similar to those found in 2007, which suggests that the relationship is consistent and not context specific.

The model of change

The model of change used in this study is referred to as the lagged effect static-score, with two dependant variables, "each variable at time 2 being predicted by its previous value as well as the time 1 value of the other variable of interest" (Finkel 1995, 24).

The following structure illustrates the model from which the causal link between political interest and cynicism, party affinity and civic duty will be studied:

$$\text{Interest}_t = \beta1\text{Interest}_{t-1} + \beta2\text{Attitude}_{t-1} + \epsilon1_t \quad (1)$$

$$\text{Attitude}_t = \beta3\text{Attitude}_{t-1} + \beta4\text{Interest}_{t-1} + \epsilon2_t \quad (2)$$

Coefficient $\beta1$ indicates the amount of stability in political interest over the two years of the survey. It represents the impact of political interest in 2007 on political interest in 2008. The logic is the same for Coefficient $\beta3$. A positive coefficient is expected. Those who were interested in politics in 2007 are more likely to remain interested in 2008. The same logic applies concerning political attitudes. The interest of the model lies in coefficients $\beta2$ and $\beta4$. Coefficient $\beta2$ represents the effect of an attitude in 2007 on political interest in 2008, controlling for initial interest in 2007. By using the attitude measured in the *previous* year, the risk of endogeneity is reduced, as political interest in 2008 could not influence the level of an attitude in 2007. Similarly, coefficient $\beta4$ represents the effect of political interest in 2007 on the same attitude in 2008, controlling for initial level in the attitude in 2007.

Table 3 shows results from three regressions obtained from the first model presented above. Control variables included in the regressions are the amount of political discussion in the social network, gender and French as language spoken at home. Standard errors are adjusted for school clusters and results are weighted according to whether the school was public or private.

Table 3: The determinants of change between 2007 and 2008 in youth political interest (OLS)

	Political interest 2008	Political interest 2008	Political interest 2008
Political interest 2007	.61 (.03) *	.59 (.02) *	.55 (.04) *
Cynicism 2007	-.58 (.50)		
Party affinity 2007		.48 (.23) *	
Civic duty 2007			.72 (.17) *
Political discussion in the network 2007	2.15 (.29) *	2.13 (.27) *	1.81 (.34) *
Men	-.12 (.14)	-.13 (.12)	-.11 (.12)
Private school	.30 (.05) *	.27 (.04) *	.24 (.04) *
Constant	.79 (.29) *	.43 (.18) *	.64 (.27) *
N	448	448	448
R2	.56	.57	.58

* : significant $\alpha \leq .05$

Note: Standard errors adjusted for four clusters (the four schools). Only panel respondents are included in regressions.

Results presented in table 3 show a fair amount of stability over time in political interest. Each coefficient is positive and significant. Those who were interested in politics in 2007 were very likely to remain interested in 2008 (the same holds true for those who were uninterested).

Contrary to what was expected, cynicism does not have a significant effect on change in political interest. Those who were cynical in 2007 are not less likely to be interested in politics in 2008. Some studies have shown that cynicism is a good indicator of participation in political activities other than voting (Fournier *et al.* 2007). Cynicism, therefore, might be a cause of disinterest in conventional (electoral) politics, but not a cause of political disinterest at large. Cynicism may have only resulted in a change in the nature of one's political interest, rather than the overall decrease in political interest that was predicted. Since the questionnaire did not specify the kind of politics when respondents were asked to indicate their level of political interest, it is unclear if this is the case.

Concerning party affinity and civic duty, both were found to have a significant and positive effect on change in political interest. Those who felt an affinity for a party in 2007 were more likely to experience a change in their level of political interest between 2007 and 2008 ($\beta = .48$). Similarly, teenagers who considered it their duty to follow politics in 2007 were more likely to develop an interest in politics by 2008 ($\beta = .72$).

The amount of political discussion in a respondent's social network in 2007 was also found to have an influence on change in political interest from 2007 to 2008. Previous research has revealed a separate effect for three different agents of socialization, parents, teachers, and friends (Dostie-Goulet 2009). It is noteworthy to find that even when these three agents are combined into a single variable, the effect remains significant. When parents, friends and teachers are tested separately in this regression, the strongest and most constant effect results from parents' political discussions.

Findings concerning party affinity and civic duty are useful in that they confirm conventional wisdom and refine our understanding of the relationship among these variables, but they also bring up some important questions, particularly with respect to the direction of causality. One cannot eliminate the possibility that political interest would, in turn, play a role in the development of these attitudes. Do teenagers who develop a greater interest in politics experience a change in their level of party affinity or sense of civic duty, and if so, in what direction is this change?

Table 4 presents the same tests as those presented in Table 3, but in this case, the change in cynicism, party affinity, and civic duty functions as the dependent variable. Initial measures of political interest serve as independent variables. Results concerning party affinity and civic duty are drawn from logit regressions. In the case of party affinity, 1 means that someone likes a party a lot and 0 that this person does not like a party or likes a party only a bit. For civic duty, 1 means that an individual thinks that it is his or her duty to be informed about politics. Again, gender and language are included as control variables, as well as the amount of political discussion in the social network. Standard errors are adjusted for school clusters and results are weighted according to whether the school was public or private.

Table 4: Political interest as a determinant of change in youth political attitudes (OLS and logit)

	Cynicism 2008	Party affinity 2008	Civic duty 2008
Political interest 2007	.002 (.006)	<i>.03 (.02)</i>	<i>.18 (.07) *</i>
Cynicism 2007	.50 (.11) *		
Party affinity 2007		2.52 (.12) *	
Civic duty 2007			1.54 (.17) *
Political discussion in the network 2007	-.06 (.09)	<i>.27 (1.12)</i>	<i>1.18 (.13) *</i>
Men	-.01 (.04)	<i>-.27 (.31)</i>	<i>-.20 (.12)</i>
Private school	.02 (.01)	<i>.72 (.31) *</i>	<i>.42 (.05) *</i>
Constant	.30 (.04) *	<i>-3.22 (.66) *</i>	<i>-2.78 (.38) *</i>
N	448	448	448
R2 or pseudo-R2	.23	.21	.21

* : significant $\alpha \leq .05$

Note: Standard errors adjusted for four clusters (the four schools). Only panel respondents are included in regressions. Results displayed in italics are drawn from logit regressions.

As Table 4 indicates, there was a great deal of stability over time concerning these three attitudes. Political interest seems only to affect change in civic duty.

The results presented in table 4 also serve to emphasize the complexity of the relationship between cynicism and political interest. When we look at the effect of one variable on the other *during the same year*, the effect is always significant and quite strong. However, when measuring the degree to which the amount of one (cynicism or interest) in 2007 influences the amount of the other (cynicism or interest) in 2008 (controlling for the first one), no significant effects are found.

This exemplifies the dangers involved when talking about causality when one finds a relationship between two variables.

Concerning party affinity, there were two possibilities. In one case, young people would first begin to like a party, possibly due to the influence of parents, and subsequently develop political interest. On the other hand, it is possible that in order to like a party a lot, a young person must first have some interest in politics. This interest would lead this person to follow politics, and as a result, he or she might start to like a party. Table 4 shows no significant effect of political interest on the change in party affinity. Political interest does not appear to be a precondition for developing an affinity for a party.

The first possibility, that political interest follows party affinity, appears to be more likely. Table 3 showed a significant and positive effect of party affinity on the change in political interest, and other data from this study suggest that party affinity is often passed from parents to children. When both parents like the same party, teenagers are even more likely to like this party also (see table 5). It is therefore easy to imagine a scenario in which teenagers first begin to like a party because their parents like a party, and then develop interest in politics *as a result* of the party affinity. While the influence of party affinity weakens as young adults are exposed to new influences and develop their own opinions (Beck and Jennings 1991; Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002), great intergenerational similarity between parents and their adolescence children has been found in the United States (Jennings and Niemi 1974), as well as in Great Britain and Germany (Zuckerman, Dasović and Fitzgerald 2007).

Table 5: Percentage of teenagers with the same party affinity as their parents

	Father	Mother	Both parents
Liberal Party	70%	74%	80%
Parti Québécois	77%	84%	87%

Note: Approximately 300 respondents are considered here. The others could not identify which party their parents preferred. The percentages listed on the table should be understood as follows: The 70% found in row 1, column 1, indicates that 70% of respondents whose father likes the Liberal Party also like the Liberal Party. There were not enough respondents who chose the two other Quebec political parties (Action démocratique du Québec and Québec Solidaire) to present their results here.

Finally, as expected, there is an effect of political interest on change in civic duty. It can be interpreted to indicate that each unit increase in political interest is associated with an increase in the probability that someone who did not consider it important to be informed about politics in 2007 expressed a different opinion in 2008. Civic duty is therefore the only attitude for which there clearly is endogeneity with political interest.

Conclusion

Political socialization research would be incomplete without an in-depth study of political interest. Who is interested? What is the content of interest? Where does interest originate? These are all vitally important questions. This paper considers the last of these: what factors can account for the development of political interest?

Cynicism, party affinity and civic duty are important variables for those interested in the study of political behavior. Each clearly has a link with political interest, but the direction of the relationship is not evident. By taking advantage of my panel data, I have been able to go a step

further and test for potential reciprocal causal effects between political interest and these three attitudes. While, of course, results do not *prove* causality (or absence of), they give us an idea of what might be going on between political interest and some attitudes.

The foremost conclusion of this study is that each of the three attitudes examined here has a completely different relationship with political interest. In the case of cynicism, correlation does not appear to lead to causality. Concerning party affinity, it seems that this attitude did not appear *because* of political interest or disinterest. It does, however, positively influence the development of political interest. Finally, results demonstrate a reciprocal relationship between civic duty and political interest. Those who think it is important to be informed about politics are more likely to develop political interest, and in turn, those who are more interested in politics are more likely to develop a sense of civic duty. The two are mutually reinforcing.

Appendix: Variables Used in the Analysis

Political Interest

- On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means *no interest* and 10 means *a lot of interest*, what is your interest in Quebec politics?

Cynicism

- Politicians are ready to lie to get elected
(strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree)
- I don't think the government cares much what people like me think
(strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree)

The index is the sum of the two scores, divided by 2

Party Affinity

- When you think of Quebec politics, do you have a preference for a political party?
(There is a party I like a lot; there is a party I like a bit more than others; No, none)

This variable has been recoded in a dummy, where "there is a party I like a lot" is coded 1 and the other categories are coded 0.

Civic Duty

On the following two positions, which is closest to your own opinion:

- It is my duty to be informed about politics
- There are more important things in life than to follow politics

Political Discussion

- Are your parents talking about politics often, sometimes, rarely or never?
- Are your friends talking about politics often, sometimes, rarely or never?
- During the last month, have your professors talked about politics in class often, sometimes, rarely or never?

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