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Developing Political Trust at Work: How Socialization Experiences in the Workplace Reduce Inequalities in Political Trust

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Abstract

Political trust is considered important for the stability of democratic political systems. However, there are large inequalities in political trust between groups in society, especially along educational lines. We focus on how these political inequalities develop in adult life. Specifically, we link political socialization in the workplace to political trust. We test how political socialization in the workplace fosters political trust and whether it compensates for or reinforces inequalities in political trust between educational groups. We use self-collected unique survey data ($N=2799$) and show that political socialization in the workplace relates to political trust: political discussions, an open workplace climate, influencing organizational policies, and having positive experiences with workplace voice are positively related to political trust. Furthermore, we find no support that political socialization in the workplace increases the inequalities in political trust between educational levels but rather that there is a compensatory effect of political socialization in the workplace.

Keywords Political trust · Political socialization · Workplace voice · Political inequalities · Political discussion

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Introduction

We study how political socialization at work affects political trust. We test whether political discussions at work, a safe work climate, coworker solidarity, and experiences with authorities at work either compensate for or accelerate inequalities in political trust between educational groups. Political trust is considered important for the stability of democratic political systems (Almond & Verba, 1963; Heterington, 2005; Van der Meer & Zmerli, 2017). Individuals with lower levels of political trust are less willing to participate politically and to comply with political decisions, which reduces the governability of contemporary societies (Catterberg & Moreno, 2006; Hooghe & Marien, 2013; Marien & Hooghe, 2011; Marien & Werner, 2019). In Western democracies, there are large gaps in political trust between individuals with different education levels: less-educated individuals typically have less trust in political institutions (Bovens & Wille, 2017; Christensen & Læg Reid, 2005; Mayne & Hakhverdian, 2017; Van Elsas, 2015). These inequalities have important consequences for political representation. Less-educated individuals are underrepresented in regard to political participants and politicians, which makes the political agenda biased towards higher educated priorities and preferences and ultimately undermines representative democracy (Bovens & Wille, 2017).

An explanation for the gap in political trust is that higher educated individuals receive more political socialization at school, which, in turn, builds political trust (Hoskins, 2017; Mayne & Hakhverdian, 2017). There has been relatively little attention for the effects of political socialization among adults, presuming that the political socialization of trust ends as soon as people leave formal education. In this paper, we argue that political socialization continues throughout life and focus on political socialization in the workplace. The workplace is an environment *par excellence* where political socialization takes place in adult life and is key for the operation of the socialization mechanisms that build political trust among adults. We address the question of how and to what extent political socialization in the workplace affects political trust. Previous studies show that political socialization in one environment can either compensate for or accumulate inequalities resulting from political socialization in another environment (Campbell, 2008; Finkel & Ernst, 2005; Langton & Jennings, 1968). If political socialization indeed continues at work, the workplace can be an environment for either the compensation or accumulation of differences between educational groups. Our second research question, therefore, addresses to what extent political socialization in the workplace reduces or increases the political inequalities between educational groups.

The development of political trust at school is attributed to interactions among students with different (political) views and the small-scale political arena that classrooms and schools constitute (Kranendonk et al., 2019). Political discussions sparked by different opinions, an open and safe discussion climate and participation in school politics foster political trust (Claes & Hooghe, 2017; Mayne & Hakhverdian, 2017). Parallel experiences take place in the workplace. Adults spend a large part of their waking hours at work (Kitchelt and Rehm, 2014), and social

interactions at work are likely to be among individuals with diverse political views because individuals have less freedom to choose with whom to interact at work than they do in interactions outside work (Djupe and Sokhey, 2014; Thommes & Akkerman, 2018; Warren, 1993). Furthermore, the workplace is also a political arena on a small scale and offers a training ground to build or damage political trust (Almond & Verba, 1963; Pateman, 1970; Sobel, 1993). Timming and Summers (2020) even demonstrate a positive effect of participation in workplace decision-making on a political trust-related concept, ‘pro-democratic affect’.

We advance the research on the antecedents of differences in political trust in two ways. First, we theorize and study the relationship between political socialization at work and political trust. Thereby, we expand the political socialization thesis, beyond experience during childhood and adolescence, to adulthood. Second, we investigate whether experiences in the workplace compensate for inequalities in political socialization in schools or accumulate these inequalities. We test whether individuals with higher levels of education benefit more from workplace political socialization because they are already more accustomed to and more receptive of political socialization or whether workers with lower levels of education benefit more because they lag behind and have more to gain. We do so using a unique survey of 2,799 individuals from the Dutch labor force.

Understanding Political Trust

Political trust is citizens’ evaluation of the extent to which political institutions are competent, caring, accountable, and predictable (Van der Meer, 2010). Individuals’ political trust has a wide range of antecedents, including psychological, cultural, and (macro-)institutional explanations (e.g., Inglehart, 1997; Mondak et al., 2017; Van der Meer, 2010), as well as explanations based on corruption (Hakhverdian & Mayne, 2012; Mishler & Rose, 2001), economic performance (Van Erkel & Van der Meer, 2016), electoral outcomes (Anderson & LoTempio, 2002; Keele, 2005), and mass media (Bowler & Karp, 2004; Mutz & Reeves, 2005).

Political trust may also find its roots in education (e.g., Christensen & Læg Reid, 2005; Claes & Hooghe, 2017; Mayne & Hakhverdian, 2017). One important aspect of the literature addressing the effect of education on political trust addresses the role of political socialization at school.¹ The expectation is that schools provide individuals with a particular curriculum and experiences with authority and social relations. The classroom is a site of political socialization in which students are exposed to experiences and contexts that affect political trust. Students gain experiences with bureaucratic rules at school, which are expected to provide information about the

¹ Alternatively, higher educated individuals may have higher levels of political trust because of their better socioeconomic position in society and their higher sense of political efficacy, or because they are better able to process information about the actual performance of political institutions. See Hakhverdian and Mayne 2012, for an elaborate discussion of these other aspects of an educational effect on political trust.

functioning of political institutions (Mayne & Hakhverdian, 2017). Therefore, the evaluation of political institutions also comes from experiences with authorities in other spheres (i.e., schools) (Claes et al., 2012); experiences with authorities in schools are generalized to the evaluation of the political system at large (Dawson et al., 1977; Mortimer & Simmons, 1978; Rothstein & Eek, 2009; Tyler & Smith, 1999). Differences in political socialization at school between education levels (Hoskins et al., 2017; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008), in turn, explain differences in political trust (Claes et al., 2012). From these studies, three aspects at school are especially important for political trust: political discussions, an open classroom climate, and participation in school politics (Claes & Hooghe, 2017; Mayne & Hakhverdian, 2017).

Developing Political Trust in the Workplace

We argue that political socialization is not limited to schools or adolescence. Adults are also socialized politically, and political trust changes after individuals leave school (Dawson et al., 1977; Jennings & Niemi, 1978; Mortimer & Simmons, 1978; Niemi & Sobieszek, 1977). Some even suggest that adults' political attitudes are more affected by later experiences (i.e., during adulthood) than by early political socialization experiences (Almond & Verba, 1963). We depart from the insights of the literature on political socialization at school and parallel the mechanisms offered. These mechanisms can also be relevant for interactions and experiences in the workplace. Specifically, we discuss three aspects of the workplace which are important for developing political trust in the workplace: political discussion at work, an open workplace climate, and participation in workplace politics.

Political Discussion at Work

Discussing politics fosters individuals' knowledge of civic affairs and political processes (Bennett et al., 2000; Cambell, 2006; Hively & Eveland, 2009; Morduchowicz et al., 1996; Niemi & Junn, 1996). This increased knowledge fosters political trust since it induces appreciation of the difficulties and complexities of politics (Cook et al., 2010; Denver and Hands, 1990; Galston, 2004).² Furthermore, discussion of political issues builds understanding of different views of political problems, which increases political trust (Mutz, 2002). After all, obtaining a better understanding of a diversity of political views makes individuals more likely to understand that the public interest is more diverse than one's own views (Jacobs et al., 2009; Mutz & Mondak, 2006). Even if outcomes of the political process are not in line with one's views, the process may still be conceived as acting in line with the public interest (Manin, 1987; Mutz, 2002). Mutz (2002) argues that without political discussion, the perceived legitimacy of outcomes (and consequently political trust) is hindered when policies are enacted that are not in line with one's own preference, because of

² In democracies with high levels of corruption, a different effect of increased knowledge is expected (see Mayne and Hakhverdian (2017) for a discussion).

a lack of awareness of the reasons for different views. Political discussions are especially effective if they are among individuals with opposing views (Mutz, 2002). The workplace is an environment in which individuals are relatively unable to choose their coworkers or with whom to interact (Djupe and Sokhey, 2014; Thommes & Akkerman, 2018; Warren, 1993). Consequently, political discussions at work are likely to transmit novel information, insights, and opinions and are important for understanding and appreciating the perspectives of others (Gibson, 2001; Mutz, 2002; Rohrschneider & Schmitt-Beck, 2002). Therefore, we expect political discussions in the workplace to increase political trust since they are likely to be among individuals with different political views (Mutz & Mondak, 2006). Therefore, we expect the following:

Hypothesis 1 Political discussion in the workplace is positively associated with political trust.

Open Workplace Climate

The second aspect of political socialization in the workplace is an open workplace climate. In an open workplace climate, employees are encouraged to discuss issues, articulate their opinions, and explore diverse perspectives.³ Operating in such an environment increase the feeling that individuals are trusted and respected by the authority and, therefore, adds legitimacy to the democratic procedures (Ehman, 1980; Flanagan & Stout, 2010). This increased legitimacy is generalized to the functioning of political institutions (Cleas et al., 2012; Torney-Purta et al., 2004). The expectation here is that individuals “*link actions within ‘small democracy’ (that is, the authorities they meet in everyday life) to those within ‘large-scale democracy’ (that is, representative institutions)*” (Abdelzadeh et al., 2015, p. 270). Thereby, the way the workplace functions is generalized towards the assessment of the trustworthiness of the political system as a whole. This mechanism finds empirical support when applied to an open classroom climate (e.g., Barber et al., 2015; Cambell, 2006; Claes et al., 2012; Dassonneville et al., 2012; Hahn, 1998; Hooghe et al., 2015; Kokkonen et al., 2010; Torney-Purta & Amadeo, 2004). We argue that the interactions within the ‘*small democracy*’ of the workplace develops expectations regarding persons in positions of authority, which are consequently directed to political authorities (Dawson et al., 1977). Therefore, we expect the following:

Hypothesis 2 A more open workplace climate is positively associated with political trust.

³ This concept is closely related to an open classroom climate, see Claes et al. (2012).

Participation in Workplace Politics

Participation in workplace politics is a well theorized aspect of the workplace that affects political behavior and attitudes. Almond and Verba (1963) argue that political attitudes are dependent on the opportunities to participate in decisions at work. Others show that involvement in a firm's decision-making process affects behavior outside of the workplace (Budd et al., 2018; Greenberg et al., 1996; Pateman, 1970). Through involvement and participation, individuals learn about procedures for collective decision making, the role of different parts of government, and the role of checks and balances, and think about the relation between government and public opinion (Niemi & Junn, 1996). Empirical studies show that participation experiences in non-political spheres are positively related to political trust. In the school context, participation is found to affect political trust (Cambell, 2006; Claes & Hooghe, 2017; Dassonville et al., 2012, Deimel et al., 2020; Gould et al., 2012; Torney-Purta & Vermeer, 2006). Furthermore, in the workplace context, Timming and Summers (2020) show that participation in decision-making at work (e.g., autonomy over daily work and influence on organizational policy decisions) induces 'pro-democratic affect': a combination of political trust and support for democracy. Experiences are especially likely to affect political attitudes when they occur at the same time (chronologically) and are similar in their degree of formality (the structure of authority relations) (Sobel, 1993). Since workplace authority experiences are close to political authority experiences in time and in level of formality (Almond & Verba, 1963; Greenberg et al., 1996), we expect:

Hypothesis 3 Participation in workplace politics is positively associated with political trust.

The effect of participation in workplace politics is likely to be dependent on the evaluation of such experiences (Dawson, 1977; Greenberg et al., 1996; Geurkink et al., 2022). The literature on the development of trust argues that fair treatment by authorities induces political trust (Abdelzadeh et al., 2015; Resh and Sabbagh, 2014). If experiences with participation in workplace politics are positive, for example, when workers feel supported, heard, or helped, they feel treated fairly. The feeling of being treated fairly by proximate authorities induces political trust because it signals that authorities are caring, accountable, and competent, and can therefore be trusted (Abdelzadeh et al., 2015; Marien & Werner, 2019).

In addition to having positive experiences with authorities, coworkers can affect the evaluation of political experiences at work, e.g., by giving advice, providing input, or supporting workers. These responses by coworkers can foster feelings of solidarity among workers and shapes expectations about and trust in others (Estlund, 2000; Flanagan & Stout, 2010). This generalized social trust is, in turn, expected to foster political trust; trust in people who individuals know, makes them more likely to trust those they do not know (Newton et al., 2018; Abramson & Inglehart, 1970; Keele, 2007; Brehm and Rahn, 1997; Schyns and Knoop, 2010). Zmerli and Newton claim and show that this social trust fosters a cooperative social climate, facilitates

collective behavior and thereby reinforces conditions in which political trust can flourish (2008). Glanville and Paxton (2007) show that ongoing experiences shape levels of political trust. Therefore, the positive experiences with coworkers during workplace participation are expected to induce individuals' trust in political institutions Mangum, 2011). Thus, positive experiences with participation in workplace politics are generalized to more political trust (Rothstein & Eek, 2009; Tyler & Smith, 1999). Therefore, we expect the following:

Hypothesis 4 Positive experiences with participation in workplace politics are positively associated with political trust.

Compensation or Acceleration?

There are large differences in the level of political trust between individuals with different levels of education, with less-educated individuals having less trust in political institutions (Bovens & Wille, 2017; Claes et al., 2012). These inequalities are linked to differences in political socialization at schools (Hoskins et al., 2017; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). Previous research argues that a lack of political socialization in one environment can be compensated by political socialization in another environment (e.g., Campbell, 2008; Finkel & Ernst, 2005; Langton & Jennings, 1968). However, the empirical results are mixed (see: Campbell, 2006; Neundorf et al., 2016) and not specifically focused on political trust or on political socialization in the workplace.

Education and political socialization in the workplace may interact in two ways. First, political socialization at work may have more influence on those with lower education levels (*compensation hypothesis*). Second, those with higher education levels may benefit more from socialization at work (*acceleration hypothesis*).

According to the compensation hypothesis, those who have higher levels of education are already likely to have adopted democratic norms and to envision themselves as participants in the political process (Neundorf et al., 2016). Their evaluations of trust in political institutions are more likely to be crystallized. Since, compared to higher educated individuals, less-educated individuals have received fewer political 'messages' at school (Hoskins et al., 2017; Kahne & Middaugh, 2008), their experiences at work are more likely to have an effect on their political trust. After all, political socialization experiences at work are less likely to be redundant, whereby the potential effects on political trust are larger (i.e., the marginal effect of such an experience is larger) (Campbell, 2008). In this way, political socialization at work partly levels out inequalities between education levels. Therefore, our compensation hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 5 The higher one's education level is, the weaker the association between experiences in the workplace and political trust.

Alternatively, political socialization in the workplace might deepen the inequalities between educational levels. This alternative expectation is that workers with

higher levels of education gain more from political socialization at work since they already have a foundation of familiarity with politics (Campbell, 2008). Enhanced political knowledge and understanding, gained via political socialization at school, makes it easier for individuals to develop further in the workplace (see: Neundorff et al., 2016). Therefore, the acceleration hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 6 The higher one's education level is, the stronger the association between experiences in the workplace and political trust.

Data and Measures

Data

We test our expectations using the Work and Politics Survey,⁴ which is a survey among Dutch individuals. This dataset consists of a representative sample of the Dutch labor force with regard to gender, age, education, and work situation. The data were collected using the TNS NIPObase, which consists of approximately 235,000 members from the Netherlands. The data was collected via internet (CAWI), and individuals were invited via email to participate in the survey. The first wave (T1) of the survey (N=7599) was collected between July and September 2017, and the second wave (T2) was collected between October and November 2018 (N=6008),⁵ with response rates of 64% and 83%, respectively.⁶ Our final models include 2,799 respondents.⁷ Although we have a survey with two waves, due to the structure of our data, most analyses presented in this paper should be interpreted as cross-sectional. Our dependent variable refers to individuals' current attitude, while the independent variables regard previous experiences and states. We use the first wave of the survey for information about individuals' previous level of trust.

⁴ The data and replication code of the article can be found here: https://osf.io/49j2c/?view_only=2f9d3614ff7f436c9e116997837c8583

⁵ We collected data on respondents at two time points (i.e., T1 and T2), but do not have information on changes in most of our variables of interest between these time points (except for political trust, see below). Therefore, our results should be interpreted as correlational.

⁶ With regard to attrition effects for the second wave, we find small differences in work situation and age. Survey dropouts are significantly more likely to be self-employed (11.7% vs. 9.6%) or to be students (10.6% vs. 9.1%) and less likely to work for the government (9.1% vs. 10.5%). Additionally, those who did not participate in the second wave are younger (38.4 years) than those who did participate (41.6 years). Dropouts do not differ significantly with regard to our main variables of interest.

⁷ This number of observations is mainly reduced because of the (responses to) workplace voice variables, which require individuals to have a job and to have a problem in the workplace. Additional analyses, excluding variables with regard to voice experiences, result in a higher number of observations (i.e., 4,831) and provide the same conclusions with regard to our hypotheses (see Online Appendix A).

Measures

Dependent Variable

Our main variable of interest is *political trust*, which is operationalized as a factor score from respondents' scores on four items addressing the amount of trust (0 “no trust at all”–10 “complete trust”) in “the government”, “the lower house”, “politicians” and “political parties” (Cronbach's α : 0.965).

Independent Variables

For the measurement of *political discussion*, we use a binary variable with “1” indicating that individuals have one or more colleagues with whom they can discuss politics. *Open workplace climate* is a factor score from the responses on three items indicating the extent (“1” *Totally disagree*–“5” *Totally agree*) to which workers feel free to express their opinion at work (e.g., “At work, I feel free to express my opinion”) (Cronbach's α : 0.767).⁸ For participation in workplace politics, we use three distinct measurements. We asked whether individuals are or have been (“1”) members of a *works council* or not (“0”) and asked the same question for *trade union* membership. Last, we measured *workplace voice* by asking individuals whether they had an issue in the workplace (e.g., insufficient career opportunities, dissatisfaction with wages, dissatisfaction with working hours, or feeling discriminated against)⁹ and, if so, whether they had voiced it either to a supervisor, coworker, or via another channel within or outside the workplace. If so, they received a “1” on this binary variable; if they had not voiced the issue, they received a “0”. For positive experiences with participation in workplace politics, we also use four measurements. *Coworker support* is a binary variable indicating whether individuals' workplace voice was supported by their coworkers (“1”) or not supported by their coworkers (“0”). For *supervisor support*, we asked about the response by the supervisor (“1” is support; “0” is no support), and *outcome satisfaction* indicates whether individuals were satisfied with the extent to which the problem was solved (“1” *very dissatisfied*–“5” *very satisfied*). Those who did not voice the issue received a “0” for coworker support, supervisor support, and outcome satisfaction.¹⁰ Furthermore, we use an item indicating the extent (“1” *Totally disagree*–“5” *Totally agree*) to which workers feel they *influence organizational policy*. The variable *education level* has three categories, indicating lower (“no or primary education” or “lower secondary

⁸ Although openness of the workplace climate is not an individual characteristic, the perception of this openness is. Furthermore, previous research has indicated that individual climate perceptions are better predictors than aggregated perceptions (Barber et al., 2015).

⁹ One might argue that individuals who experiences dissatisfaction are also distrustful. However, previous studies on workplace voice show that a certain level of trust is an important antecedent of the decision to voice issues in the workplace (see: Hatipoglu and Inelmen 2018; Holland et al., 2017).

¹⁰ Since we also include “workplace voice” in all models, the effect of support can be interpreted as the effect compared to no support.

vocational training”), middle (“middle-level secondary education”, “middle-level vocational training” or “higher-level secondary education or secondary scientific training”), and higher (“higher-level vocational training” or “university”) education.

We control for individuals’ *age* and *gender* in our analyses. Furthermore, the literature explaining political trust has indicated that the evaluation of political outcomes affects individuals’ political trust (Abdelzadeh et al., 2015; Anderson & LoTempio, 2002). Therefore, we include *political outcome satisfaction* by asking individuals, “How satisfied are you with how the government acted regarding the outcome of the referendum?”, after a non-binding referendum on a law on intelligence and security services (“1” *very dissatisfied*–“5” *very satisfied*). Additionally, we control for individuals’ *political interest*, using a binary variable indicating whether they stay updated about what happens in politics. Last, we also control for individuals’ previous *political trust*. This variable was measured in the same way as our dependent variable but using individuals’ scores in 2017 (Cronbach’s α : 0.962).¹¹

Results

Explaining Political Trust

In Table 1,¹² we present the effects of our independent variables on political trust.¹³ The OLS regression results show that political discussion in the workplace is positively related to political trust (in line with hypothesis 1).¹⁴ Individuals with opportunities for political discussion at work have a 0.14 higher level of political trust than those without. For an open workplace climate, we find that individuals with a more open workplace climate display higher levels of trust (in line with hypothesis 2), with every 1-unit increase in the open workplace climate variables resulting in 0.11 higher political trust. We find no significant relationships between works council membership, trade union membership, and workplace voice with political trust. So, contrary to hypothesis 3, we do not find that participation in workplace politics is positively associated with political trust. With regard to our expectation that positive experiences with participation in workplace politics are positively associated with political trust (hypothesis 4), we find that individuals who received coworker support after they voiced their issue have 0.09 more political trust than those who did not have their voice supported by coworkers. Furthermore, individuals who have more influence on organizational policies have more political trust than individuals with less influence. A 1-unit increase in influence results in a 0.06 increase in

¹¹ The appendix contains a descriptive table of all variables used in our analyses (Table B1) and a correlation matrix of all variables used in our analyses (Table B2).

¹² We multiplied the coefficient of age by 100 for interpretation purposes. The other effects are not affected by this.

¹³ See Online Appendix C for separate analyses of each mechanism (political discussion, open workplace climate, workplace participation, and experiences with workplace participation).

¹⁴ Additional analyses show that this effect remains significant even if we control for political discussion outside of work (see Online Appendix D).

Table 1 Explaining Political Trust

	Model 1
Political discussion	0.14*** (0.04)
Open workplace climate	0.11*** (0.03)
Works council	– 0.04 (0.05)
Trade union	– 0.04 (0.04)
Workplace voice	– 0.09 (0.06)
Coworker support	0.09** (0.04)
Supervisor support	0.04 (0.04)
Outcome satisfaction	0.04 (0.06)
Influence organizational policies	0.06*** (0.02)
Education level (<i>ref=high</i>) Middle Education Level	– 0.30*** (0.04)
Low education level	– 0.58*** (0.07)
Age (<i>0=15 years</i>) ^a	– 0.07 (0.15)
Gender (<i>1= male</i>)	0.01 (0.03)
Political outcome satisfaction	0.36*** (0.02)
Political interest	0.21*** (0.03)
Constant	– 0.77*** (0.08)
Explained variance	0.233

N = 2799

^aFor interpretation purposes, we presented the actual effect multiplied by 100

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05 standard errors in parentheses

Table 2 Explaining political trust controlling for the previous level of trust

	Model 2
Political discussion	0.07* (0.03)
Open workplace climate	0.00 (0.02)
Works council	– 0.01 (0.03)
Trade union	0.00 (0.03)
Workplace voice	– 0.01 (0.04)
Coworker support	0.05* (0.03)
Supervisor support	0.03 (0.03)
Outcome satisfaction	– 0.02 (0.04)
Influence organizational policies	0.02 (0.01)
Education level (<i>ref=high</i>) Middle Education Level	– 0.09** (0.03)
Low Education Level	– 0.17*** (0.05)
Age (<i>0=15 years</i>) ^a	– 0.14 (0.11)
Gender (<i>1= male</i>)	0.02 (0.02)
Political outcome satisfaction	0.17*** (0.01)
Political interest	0.06* (0.03)
Political trust (2017)	0.65*** (0.01)
Constant	– 0.35*** (0.06)
Explained variance	0.567

N = 2799

^aFor interpretation purposes, we presented the actual effect multiplied by 100

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05; standard errors in parentheses

political trust. However, for supervisor support and outcome satisfaction we find no significant relationship with political trust. If we add up the effects of the different types of political socialization in the workplace, workers who have discussion opportunities in the workplace, an open workplace climate, coworker support, and influence on organizational policies have approximately 0.85 more political trust than those who do not, which represents an 18.8% higher level of political trust.

These results support some of our expectations regarding the difference between workers with and without these political socialization experiences in the workplace. Therefore, we already contribute to the understanding of how workplace political socialization relates to levels of political.

trust and how it is related to inequalities *between* individuals. However, political socialization in the workplace might also relate to the level of political trust *within* individuals. The structure of our data allows us to test some of our expectations (i.e., those with regard to workplace voice) controlling for initial levels of political trust to reduce unobserved between-individual heterogeneity.¹⁵ We are able to test our hypotheses on workplace participation (hypothesis 3) and experiences with workplace participation (hypothesis 4) controlling for previous levels of trust. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 2.

First, we find that the effect of workplace voice on political trust is also non-significant here. Therefore, we find no support for our expectation about the relationship between participation in workplace politics and political trust (hypothesis 3). For experiences with participation in workplace politics (hypothesis 4), we find a positive significant effect for coworker support, controlling for previous levels of political trust. Furthermore, although political trust is correlated with previous levels of trust at similar levels as in previous studies with similar time intervals (e.g., Abdelzadeh et al., 2015), it also shows that there is room for change in political trust over time. In conclusion, these results provide additional evidence for hypothesis 4. Positive experiences with participation in workplace politics (i.e., coworker support) are positively related to political trust, even when controlling for previous levels of political trust.

Compensation or Acceleration

Our analyses show that political socialization in the workplace is positively related to political trust. Specifically, political discussion in the workplace, having an open workplace climate, receiving supportive responses of coworkers towards workplace voice, and having influence on organizational policy are positively related to political trust.

This section takes these findings a step further by addressing whether these effects are different for people in different educational groups. In our theoretical framework, we propose two contrasting hypotheses, suggesting that more education either increases or reduces the effect of political socialization in the workplace on

¹⁵ For the (experiences with) workplace voice, we are certain that these variables measure an experience that took place between wave 1 and wave 2 of our survey.

political trust. In Fig. 1,¹⁶ we present the findings for the types of political socialization in the workplace that interact with education.¹⁷

In Panel 1 of Fig. 1,¹⁸ we present the difference between the effect of having political discussion and not having political discussion for each level of education. The figure shows that political discussion correlates stronger with trust for middle-educated individuals than for higher educated individuals, with less-educated individuals in between. Panel 2 of Fig. 1 represents the interaction effect between education and an open workplace climate. We find that the effect of an open workplace climate decreases with education, with a significant difference between higher and middle-educated individuals. Panel 3 shows a similar effect, with a negative relationship between education and coworker support and significant differences between higher and less-educated individuals.

Because none of these panels show stronger effects for higher educated individuals, they do not support the acceleration hypothesis, expecting that higher educated individuals are more affected by political socialization (hypothesis 4). With regard to our compensation hypothesis (hypothesis 5), we do find support, but we only find significant differences between educational groups for political discussion, open workplace climate, and coworker support, and not for other types of political socialization in the workplace. Furthermore, while the effects for open workplace climate and coworker support seem linear, this is not the case for political discussion, with the strongest predicted effects for middle-educated individuals.

Conclusion

We address how political socialization experiences in the workplace affect political trust. Specifically, we find that political discussion at work, an open workplace climate, influence on organizational policies, and supportive responses to workplace voice are positively related to political trust. Additionally, we studied whether political socialization in the workplace has the potential to either increase or decrease existing inequalities in political trust resulting from education. We find support for the latter: individuals with less education seem to benefit more from political socialization in the workplace.

We find that coworker support relates stronger to political trust for lower educated individuals than for higher educated individuals and we find that political discussion and an open workplace climate relate stronger to political trust for middle-educated

¹⁶ Following recommendations when comparing two effects, we use 83% confidence intervals in Fig. 1 (see: Austin and Hux, 2002).

¹⁷ We added interaction effects for all variables of interest and only show those with significant interactions between political socialization in the workplace and education. We included previous levels of trust for all variables. However, for open workplace climate, only interactions were found without the inclusion of the previous level of trust. This might very well be because this climate is a more structural aspect of the workplace, instead of an immediate experience, however, this should be taken into account when interpreting the results (note that the base effect in Table 2 is also not significant for this variable).

¹⁸ See Online Appendix E for the full results of the interaction models.

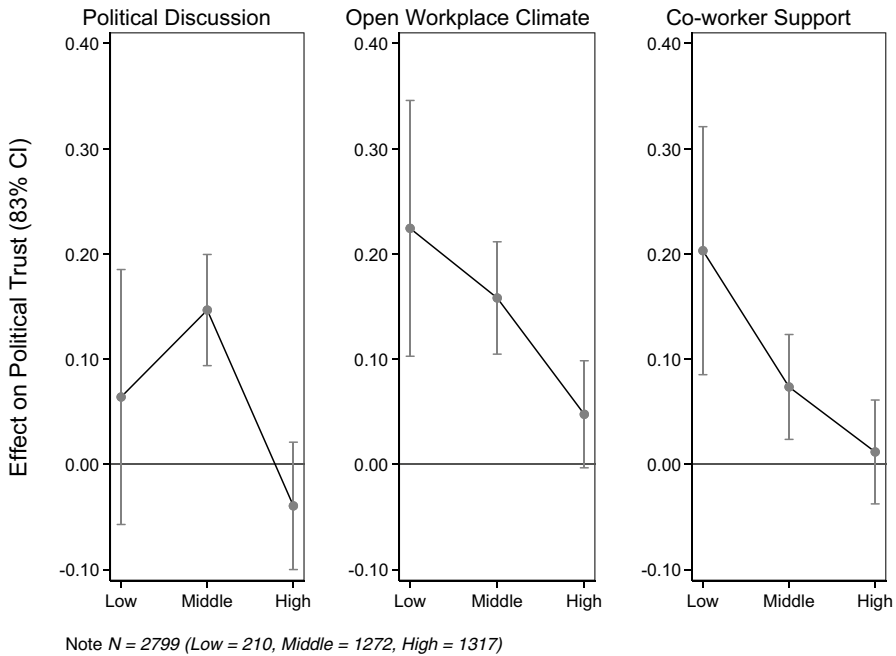


Fig. 1 Predicted effect of political discussion, open workplace climate, and coworker support on political trust by education level (with 83% confidence intervals)

individuals than for higher educated individuals; supporting the compensation hypothesis. Additionally, we do not find any support for the acceleration hypotheses. Showing the potential of the workplace as an equalizer of political trust, is an important new insight to our understanding of how political socialization influences political trust. Both this finding and the finding that this compensation effect is achieved through different forms of political involvement at work, opens up new and interesting alleys for future research.

What is more, in contrast to existing idea that in particular traditional forms of workplace participation and interactions with authority affect political attitudes (e.g., Almond & Verba, 1963; Pateman, 1970; Timming & Summers, 2020), we find no effects of works council membership, trade union membership, or supervisor support on political trust. Our study shows that social relations and interactions (i.e., political discussion, workplace climate, and coworker support) are important for developing political trust. Thus, a broader range of experiences in the workplace has the potential to affect political attitudes than previously assumed. As we expected, workers evaluations of participation in workplace politics are important for political trust. This suggests that future research should not only account for the mere participation only, but, also include the evaluation of workplace politics in studying the effects on political trust and broader political attitudes.

Assessing the impact of workplace political socialization, it is good to realize that already a relatively brief period of political socialization in the workplace (i.e., one year) affects political trust. Given that most individuals work over 40 years, the

effects of workplace socialization might be much larger than our analyses show. Longer intervals between more waves can shed light on the long-term effects of workplace political socialization on political trust and on whether multiple experiences accumulate over time.

Our study is a first step in uncovering the relationship between workplace socialization and political trust. Due to data restrictions, we were unable to make causal claims about the relationship between workplace socialization and political trust. Although we expect that workplace socialization affects political trust, we cannot exclude a reverse relationship or potential confounding variables. For example, highly trusting individuals may be more involved in political discussions in the workplace. Alternatively, highly trusting individuals may perceive responses of supervisors and coworkers as more supportive, for instance, because they have a more favorable outlook on other people in general. An interesting next step would be taking into account changes in political socialization at work and measures of generalized trust or even bi-directional relationships between workplace experiences and political trust.

Our study addresses the role of political socialization in the workplace in explaining levels of political trust in the Netherlands. Although the theoretical mechanisms we apply are expected to work across countries, we cannot test this assumption or the magnitude of their effect under different cultural and institutional context with the data at hand. Future research, applying cross country designs, could test these mechanisms in differing cultural and institutional contexts to unravel whether different work cultures, labor market characteristics, or political institutional contexts affect the relationships found in this research.

Political trust has important consequences for democracy and society. It induces (informed) voting, conventional political participation, volunteering, and willingness to comply with political decisions (Marien & Hooghe, 2011; Torney-Purta et al., 2004). Although studies have addressed political socialization in other spheres of adult life, such as neighborhoods (e.g., Cho et al., 2006) and voluntary associations (e.g., Cigler & Joslyn, 2002; Stolle, 1998; Theorell, 2003), workplaces as agents of political socialization have received less attention even though they are an important part of adults' life. With showing the importance of political socialization at work for political trust, our study reinvigorates the attention for this life sphere.

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