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Nieuwelink, H.

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CHAPTER 4

GROWING INTO POLITICS?

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADOLESCENTS' VIEWS ON DEMOCRACY OVER TIME⁶

Abstract

Adolescence is often seen as the stage of life in which young people become better acquainted with and more interested in politics, and in which they develop more complex views on democratic decision-making. However, because of a lack of longitudinal studies we do not really know how views on politics and democracy develop during adolescence. In the present study forty Dutch adolescents were interviewed in their second year of secondary education and two years later. The results show that although, with age, the interviewees become more familiar with politics, their initial more complex views regarding democratic decision-making in everyday situations become attuned to their more one-dimensional perception of the workings of formal democracy. Instead of growing into politics, their perception of the functioning of parliamentary democracy seems to be colonizing their preferences towards collective decision-making. The implications of these findings for understanding the political socialization of young people are discussed.

Keywords: perceptions of politics, political socialization, adolescents, decision-making preferences, models of democracy

⁶ Based on: Nieuwelink, H., Ten Dam, G., Geijsel, F., & Dekker, P. (submitted). Growing into Politics? The development of adolescents' views on democracy over time.

For a democracy it is important that people possess democratic orientations, such as a reasonable level of political trust, a feeling of efficacy, a willingness to deliberate, and a preference for democratic ways of decision-making. It is often acknowledged that adolescence is a formative period for acquiring democratic orientations. Young people become better acquainted with and more interested in the political world. During adolescence and young adulthood people are expected to develop an interest in social and political issues, to be ready to discuss politics, and to become more strongly aware of the complexity of social interactions. Even though people may keep developing their attitudes towards politics and democracy throughout their lifetime, the foundation for these attitudes is laid during adolescence and young adulthood (Abendschön, 2013; Flanagan, 2013; Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2009; Sapiro, 2004; Sears & Levy, 2003). However, there is a scarcity of research focusing on the individual development of democratic orientations (Amnå, 2012). Most studies have compared age groups instead of comparing individuals at different points in time. Consequently, it is unclear how individual adolescents develop attitudes towards aspects of democracy and whether trajectories in the development of democratic orientations can be identified.

To gain more insight into how adolescents' views regarding democracy develop over time, this chapter reports about the results of a longitudinal study with repeated interviews. The study aimed to gain more insight into the development of adolescents' views on democracy. We investigated these views in situations where democratic issues are at stake. These issues involve multiple perspectives on the best solution for a problem, and aspects of democracy (e.g. collective decision-making, discussions, societal engagement) may be regarded as venues to deal with these issues by confronting people with conflicting democratic principles such as freedom, equality, majority will and minority rights. We focus on decision-making as an important aspect of democracy that young people experience in their daily lives. Concentrating on democratic views is particularly important as previous studies indicate that young generations are less positively orientated towards democracy and more focused on their private interests instead of the collective good (Manning, 2013; Cammaerts, Bruter, Banaji, Harrison, & Anstead, 2014). Moreover, adolescents appear to have only limited knowledge of and experience with politics (Galston, 2001; Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito 2010). In particular their views on the workings of political actors such as the presidency, parliament and political parties and related attitudes (political efficacy, political trust and willingness to participate in politics) are not well developed (Gimpel, Lay, & Schuknecht, 2003; Sapiro, 2004). By investigating democratic decision-making in the context of adolescents' daily life, we aim to provide a deeper understanding of the development of their democratic views and how this is linked to their perception of democracy in the political domain.

Developing Democratic Views During Adolescence

Many studies across different parts of the world have shown that adolescents generally take a positive view of democracy and democratic values such as tolerance, equality and free speech (see for example Schulz and colleagues (2010) for Europe, Asia and Latin America, Khoury-Kassabri and Ben-Arieh (2006) for Israel and Palestine, and Helwig et al. (2007) for Canada and China). In this chapter we define politics as those actors and processes in the sphere of government that are explicitly labeled as political: politicians, parties, and parliament. Political socialization research shows two related developments in gaining a fuller perspective on the political world: increasing familiarity with politics and increasing complexity in reasoning about democratic issues. As to the first development, adolescents become more *familiar* with politics by starting to develop orientations towards abstract institutions and principles such as government, parliament and the concept of democracy (Hooghe & Dassonville, 2011; Greenstein, 1965; Husfeldt & Nikolova, 2003; Sapiro, 2004). While children develop views and attitudes towards aspects of everyday situations such as choice of friends, bullying, and boundaries of parental control over the preferences of their children (Helwig & Turiel, 2002), adolescents usually also develop democratic orientations (Adelson, 1971; Husfeldt & Nikolova, 2003). The outcomes of their learning experiences appear to be transferred from everyday situations to more distant social and political domains, such as civil society, political institutions and political actors, with which adolescents gradually familiarize themselves (Abendschön, 2013). Studies show that at age sixteen adolescents possess more knowledge of politics and democracy than at an earlier age (Husfeldt & Nikolova, 2003; Greenstein, 1965), and that they are more strongly oriented towards and interested in political issues (Adelson & O'Neill, 1966; Neundorf, Smets, & Garcia-Albacete, 2013). With age, adolescents also tend to use more abstract notions in their moral and democratic reasoning. While children and younger adolescents formulate objections to infringements of freedom rights in psychological terms, older adolescents tend to use democratic principles to formulate their objections (Gallatin and Adelson, 1971; Galston, 2001; Helwig, 1998; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Sigel & Hoskins, 1981).

A second development in their political socialization is that adolescents tend to become more aware of the complexity of the social and political world. A first aspect of complex reasoning is multidimensionality in the sense that people take a plurality of democratic principles (such as freedom and equality) into account when arguing about a democratic issue (Pennock, 1979). A second aspect concerns being able to draw a distinction between different situations and contexts when reasoning about an issue. In this respect, complex reasoning implies that people base their assessment of the topic at issue or on the context in which the issue is situated (Helwig & Turiel,

2002). Empirical research shows that while younger children tend to take a relatively naïve perspective on the organization of social and political life, adolescents develop a more complex understanding of what the concept of democracy entails. They develop more multi-layered perspectives on moral and democratic issues that encompass different moral or democratic principles as well as considerations about the feasibility of solutions (Adelson, 1971; Flanagan, Gallay, Gill, Gallay, & Nti 2005; Greenstein, 1965; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Helwig, Arnold, Tan, & Boyd, 2007). Older adolescents more often take several, contradictory principles into account (Adelson, 1971; Kinoshita, 2006; Mann, Tan, MacLeod-Morgan, & Dixon, 1984; Moessinger, 1981; Sigel Eckstein & Noack, 2016; Elchardus & Siongers, 2016 Hoskins, 1981). They also tend to argue that a decision about what is fair depends both on the issue at stake and on the social context in which the decision is made (Helwig, 1998; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Flanagan, 2013; Flanagan & Stout, 2010). Therefore, studies find that with age adolescents are more inclined to use more complex reasoning with regard to democratic issues. Thus far, relatively little is known about the relationship between becoming more familiar with politics and the complexity of views on democracy.

Studying adolescent reasoning on democracy is especially relevant because attitudes acquired during adolescence can have a lasting impact (Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2009; Sears & Levy, 2003). Recent studies have shown that certain adolescent political attitudes (e.g. political interest and willingness to participate in politics), acquired from the age of fourteen, are more or less persistent, whereas other attitudes (e.g. voting intention, political confidence) fluctuate during adolescence and early adulthood (Eckstein, Noack, & Gniewosz, 2012; Hooghe & Wilkenfeld, 2008; Hooghe, Dassonneville, & Marien, 2014; Prior, 2010; Quintelier & Van Deth, 2014).

That the period in life from fourteen years onwards is a formative phase in the political socialization of young people, can be explained by both their cognitive development and the role of socializing agents. When adolescents grow older, their cognitive abilities increase and this enables them to take different principles into account when arguing about a moral or democratic issue. It also enables them to understand the meaning of formal structures of democracy (Rest, Narvaez, Thoma, & Bebeau, 2000). At the same time, adolescents are introduced to social and political issues by parents, teachers, peers, voluntary organizations and media, which raises their awareness of these issues (Amnå, 2012; Quintelier, 2015). Adolescents learn about political issues by discussing them with others, but also by everyday experiences with, for example, decision-making processes. Since many adolescents seldom discuss political events (e.g. elections, impactful debates in parliament, formation of a new cabinet, political crises) with others (Gimpel et al., 2003; Manning & Edwards, 2014), they are supposed to develop views and attitudes toward political institutions,

actors and principles primarily through everyday experiences (Flanagan, 2013; Greenstein, 1965; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Hess & Torney, 1967; Hooghe & Wilkenfeld, 2008; Sapiro, 2004). For example, encounters with school management have been shown to impact adolescents' external political efficacy (Gimpel et al., 2003). In sum, with increasing age, adolescents develop more abilities to reason democratically and have more experiences with democratic institutions and processes.

Adolescents' Views on Decision-Making

In the current study we focus on one aspect of democracy, namely decision-making. Democratic decision-making can take different forms and reasoning about it is generally multidimensional and complex. Political theory distinguishes at least three different models: A majoritarian democracy, which is typified by competition among citizens' preferences and voting as a decision-making mechanism; a consensual democracy, in which citizens try to achieve agreement through negotiation about their fixed preferences; and a deliberative democracy, in which rational dialogue is intended to lead to agreement among citizens about the best solutions to social and political issues. Discussion is a central element in all three models of democracy but its function varies. In majoritarian decision-making discussion is needed to develop and present alternatives to choose between. In consensual decision-making discussion is basically negotiation to find a compromise. In deliberative decision-making discussion is needed to learn about different perspectives and to find the most reasonable option (Dahl, 1956; Pennock, 1979; Held, 2006; Keane, 2009; Lijphart, 1999; Hendriks, 2010). In the three models of democracy, no fixed balance can be found between potentially conflicting democratic principles, such as freedom and equality (Pennock, 1979; Thomassen, 2007). In all these models contradictory principles of democracy are taken into account (such as majority vote, minority interests, power of arguments, finding agreement), which tends to make these models multidimensional and complex in nature (e.g. majoritarian democracy also takes freedom rights of minorities into account). In line with this, democratic reasoning about decision-making is generally complex in the sense that several contradictory or competing principles are taken into account when arguing about collective choices and decisions.

Only a few studies, primarily from a developmental psychological perspective, have studied the development of adolescents' attitudes and views regarding democratic decision-making, all using a cross-sectional quantitative approach. In some of these studies adolescents were asked to compare majoritarian and consensual models of decision-making (e.g. Helwig, 1998) whereas other studies have focused solely on majoritarian decision-making (e.g. Kinoshita, 2006; Mann, Tan, MacLeod-Morgan, & Dixon, 1984). To our knowledge no study has taken deliberative modes of dem-

ocratic decision-making into account. Participants in the studies of Helwig *c.s.* (Helwig, 1998; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Helwig et al., 2007) preferred democratic decisions (e.g. majoritarian, consensual) to authoritarian or oligarchical based decisions and this preference increased with age. These studies also show an age effect for the preferred decision-making model: younger adolescents tended to prefer consensual democracy or direct democracy, whereas older adolescents more often preferred representative democracy (Helwig, Arnold, Tan, & Boyd, 2003). With regard to majority decisions, older adolescents tended to see more problematic aspects than younger adolescents (e.g. Kinoshita, 2006; Mann, Tan, MacLeod-Morgan, & Dixon, 1984). However, because these studies were cross-sectional their contribution to an understanding of the development of views at an individual level is rather limited.

As considered from the above studies about adolescents' views on democratic decision-making, adolescents across different global regions are positively oriented towards democracy and older adolescents have acquired more multidimensional perspectives on decision-making. Therefore, these results indicate that with regard to democratic decision-making adolescents grow into politics: older adolescents seem to a larger extent aware of the contradictory character of democratic principles and more inclined to take the multidimensionality of democracy into account when reasoning about democratic issues. But because of the dearth of longitudinal studies on adolescents' democratic views we do not have much knowledge about the development of these views over time. In the present study we therefore aim at gaining an insight into the ways in which adolescents grow into politics with regard to their views on various ways of democratic decision-making. To this end, we seek to answer the following research question: *Do adolescents, with age, become more familiar with the political domain, and do they develop more complex views regarding democratic decision-making?*

In exploring the development of adolescents' views on decision-making, we utilized a qualitative approach applying repeated interviews. This enabled us to deepen our understanding of adolescents' views on this aspect of democracy from their own point of reference. In contrast to previous research, the participants in our study were able to formulate their own preferences regarding democratic decision-making, including majoritarian, deliberative or undemocratic ones. Given that adolescents tend to entertain limited perspectives on the political domain (e.g. parliament, political parties, and government), and to relate their attitudes toward democracy, political institutions and political actors to their everyday experiences (Abdelzadeh, Zetterberg & Ekman, 2014; Flanagan, 2013; Gimpel et al., 2003; Sapiro, 2004), the starting point of our research lies precisely with these everyday situations, which will be related to situations of parliamentary democracy. In our analysis we will differentiate for gender and educational track as these are considered to be important factors

in adolescent political socialization. While previous studies show that adolescents in higher (e.g. pre-academic) educational tracks develop greater familiarity with politics and complexity in their reasoning than those in lower (e.g. vocational) educational tracks (Gaiser, Gille, Krüger, & De Rijke, 2003; Schulz et al., 2010), their findings with regard to gender are unstable: some studies indicate that adolescent boys grow to larger extent into politics than adolescent girls, while other studies show no difference or even (in some countries) a reversed development (e.g. Wolak & McDewitt, 2011; Schulz et al., 2010).

Method

For this study we interviewed forty Dutch adolescents twice: when they were in their second year of secondary education (aged 13 to 15; 2011) and two years later (2013). We chose to interview students in eighth and tenth grade for three reasons. Firstly, previous studies indicate that this period is pivotal for the political socialization of adolescents (see above). And secondly, after grade ten about half of Dutch students, those in the pre-vocational educational track, leave secondary education and change over to tertiary vocational education. This hampers a comparison with students in the pre-academic track of secondary education (continuing until the twelfth grade).

As to the selection of participants a well-balanced dispersion was aimed at with regard to gender, socio-economic status, ethnic background, and religious orientation. The twenty boys and twenty girls were equally distributed between pre-vocational (PV) and pre-academic (PA) education tracks, with thirteen adolescents from an ethnic minority. These students attended one of the four following schools in the Netherlands: an orthodox Protestant school providing both pre-vocational and pre-academic education for a homogeneous population of non-minority students in the northeast of the Netherlands; a public school that only provides pre-vocational education for a mixed urban/rural population of both migrant and non-migrant students in the middle of the country; a public school that only provides pre-academic education for a mixed population of students in Amsterdam; and a Roman Catholic school providing both pre-vocational and pre-academic education for a predominantly non-migrant population in the northwest of the country. By selecting participants with different backgrounds and varying characteristics we established a diversity in our sample which helped us to find perspectives on democracy from many walks of life.

Interview and Procedure

The semi-structured interviews were organized in the same way in both rounds of interviews and lasted approximately 90 minutes (see Table 2). They were con-

ducted by the first author. The interview structure was piloted in 6 interviews. During the interview several cases and statements were discussed.

The structure of the interview involved answering a few introductory questions followed by the presentation of two cases about issues of democratic decision-making. In the first case, participants were asked how they would deal with disagreement among students about the rescheduling of a class. During the discussion of this case interviewees were asked to explain their views in more detail and whether they would change their preferences whenever the situation in the case would be different (e.g. ‘Does it matter how many students object to rescheduling the class?’, ‘Does it matter what kind of argument is being used?’). In order to prevent that the use of certain terms (e.g. decision-making, democracy) would influence the ways these adolescents interpret the case, we used politically neutral terms (e.g. choosing, solving the problem). This case builds forward on the research of Helwig and colleagues showing that substantial groups of respondents follow significantly different decision-making strategies in a classroom context (e.g. Helwig & Kim, 1999). The presentation of this case was intended to gain an understanding of how interviewees deal with decision-making. As we used open-ended questions, unlike Helwig and colleagues, adolescents were able to formulate their own perspectives on fair decision-making.

In the second case, students were asked to select a group they objected to (e.g. atheists, religious fundamentalists, nationalists) from a list and then give their views on whether or not that group — if it were to constitute a majority group — should be allowed to abolish the freedom rights of other groups. This case draws upon research showing that people make different judgments when it comes to abstract versus concrete situations (e.g. Helwig & Turiel, 2002). This case was meant to provide an insight into the reasoning of adolescents with regard to the boundaries of collective decision-making.

The interviewer next asked the adolescents explicitly about the meaning of ‘democracy’ and their evaluation of it. The concept was deliberately not mentioned by the interviewer earlier in the interview in order to allow students to give their own interpretation of democracy and decision-making.

Finally, interviewees were asked to respond to fourteen statements. Two statements gave them an opportunity to sum up their views with regard to decision-making and explicitly formulate these (‘When making a decision it is important to find agreement even though it takes more time,’ ‘When making a decision it is important that the majority decides’). With other statements we tried to gain an insight into the adolescents’ perspectives with regard to the political domain (e.g. ‘Politicians do not care about my opinion or that of my relatives’, ‘Politicians are mostly concerned with their own interests’). This enabled us to relate their views on

everyday situations to their perspective on formal politics, which has not been done before.

In order to find out if the interviewees might be trying to remain consistent in their views in both rounds of interviews, they were asked in 2013 whether they remembered the contents of the prior interview. Most interviewees (25 of the 40) remembered that they had been interviewed, but did not recall what the interview was about. Only fifteen interviewees (twelve PA-students and three PV-students) roughly remembered the topic of the interview. That is, they could broadly refer to the concept of the interview but did not recall the answers given two years earlier.

Coding and Analysis of the Data

All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. With the help of ATLAS.ti the interviews were analyzed with a focus on similarities and dissimilarities in response patterns (cf. Miles & Huberman, 1994). The transcribed interviews were coded using the following categories and subcategories:

- Decision-making: majoritarian decision-making, consensual decision-making, deliberative decision-making, changing viewpoint according to size of minority, changing viewpoint because of minority argument;
- Decision-making in parliament: no perspective, some perspective, elaborated perspective.
- Meaning of democracy: decision-making procedure, liberty, equality, other sub-categories.

To determine the reliability of the coding, an independent judge coded the fragments of the transcribed interviews for comparison with the original coding. Next, Cohen's kappa reliability coefficient was calculated. For 'decision-making', the resulting kappa was 0.82, for 'decision-making in parliament' 0.83, and for 'meaning of democracy' 0.86. These reliability values fit into the category of 'almost perfect' (0.8-1.0).

In order to interpret the views of participants with respect to the three models of democracy (majoritarian, consensual, or deliberative), these views were classified in the following manner. They were classified as referring to 'majoritarian decision-making' whenever it was primarily argued that the majority should decide; as referring to 'consensual decision-making' whenever negotiation was chosen to find agreement, on the presumption that people have fixed preferences; and as referring to 'deliberative decision-making' whenever a preference was expressed for coming to an agreement through rational dialogue in which all participants can put forward their viewpoints and collectively search for the most preferable outcome in the public sphere. When an interviewee was found to consistently argue in favor of a specific model of democracy, the interview was labeled as such. When an interviewee was

found to provide responses that were compatible with more than one model, the expressed views were labeled in accordance with the model of democracy chosen as the most important one in his/her response to the statements about decision-making.

Results

This study focuses on the question whether adolescents, with age, become more familiar with the political domain of democracy and possess more complex views on democratic decision-making. The results for the two aspects of this question will be dealt with in turn.

Becoming More Familiar with Politics

Previous cross-sectional studies showed that older adolescents have more elaborated views on democracy than younger ones. We therefore expected that by growing older adolescents would become more familiar with politics, with the way decisions should be made in parliament, and with the concept of democracy. Among the interviewed adolescents, this was indeed the case. Although discussing politics and giving their interpretation of democracy was a difficult task for them, this difficulty decreased with age. In the first round of interviews, for a substantial group of participants formulating their perspective on the workings of Dutch politics was too difficult a task, especially for girls and students in the lower track (PV). They were, for example, not able to explain whether politicians are willing to listen to people like themselves or unable to argue whether politicians are only focused on their personal interests. At this age, the political domain was unfamiliar and abstract to these adolescents. Two years later all interviewees were able to formulate at least some basic ideas about the workings of Dutch politics and to give their perspective on topics such as the responsiveness of politicians.

As the adolescents became more familiar with politics, their ability to formulate their preferences regarding decision-making in parliament increased. In the first round of interviews about half of the interviewees were unable to describe their preferred way of coming to a decision in parliament. The other interviewees (predominantly boys and PA- students) were able to formulate some basic preferences. Two years later all interviewees formulated at least some basic ideas about decision-making in parliament. They expressed views that are related to the three models of democracy. The largest group of interviewees (predominantly boys and PA-students) preferred majority rule while some of them (predominantly PV-students) preferred consensus to be negotiated and others (only girls) preferred rational deliberation leading up to an agreement about the best option.

Becoming more familiar with politics would suggest that adolescents also become more familiar with the concept of democracy. However, this seemed not to be the

case. In both rounds of interviews, a substantial number of adolescents (predominantly PV-students) were unable to provide a description of democracy and, thus, did not show increased familiarity with the concept of democracy with age. Those interviewees who were able to provide a description of democracy mentioned majority rule as a central component. At both points in time, most adolescents regarded majority rule as playing some part in democracy. With increasing age, other interviewees stuck to their strictly majoritarian interpretation of democracy while other adolescents developed such views. Only some young people stuck to a definition in other terms (e.g. freedom of speech, rule by representation).

Increasing Complexity in Reasoning?

Previous cross-sectional studies also showed that older adolescents have deepened their views on democracy and have more complex views of decision-making. This suggests that with age adolescents take more principles into account when coming to a decision and base their preferred decision-making procedure both on the topic that is being discussed and on the context in which the decision-making process takes place. The results of our study are not in line with these outcomes. When growing older our adolescents tended to base their democratic decision-making in everyday situations more strongly and sometimes even exclusively on the preferences of the majority. With age, a significant group of these adolescents more often applied this principle rather straightforwardly to decisions about freedom rights and decision-making in parliament. This was especially the case among boys and students in higher educational track (PA). A deepening of their views was not observable, suggesting that they developed less complex views on democratic decision-making. The results for the aspects of complex reasoning mentioned above (e.g. taking more principles into account, differentiating between topics and differentiating between contexts) will be discussed in turn using the interview themes, see Table 2.

Stronger focus on majority rule

Because adolescents' experiences with politics and formal democracy are limited, we started discussing decision-making with the interviewees with regard to day-to-day situations, predominantly classroom situations (see Table 2). In these situations their views regarding decision-making were related to one of the three models of democratic decision-making. In both rounds of the interviews, most adolescents expressed views that were consistent with the same model. The largest group (increasingly boys) clung to preferences related to majoritarian decision-making or developed views towards that model. They explained that all participants should be able to voice their opinions in order to make clear what preferences exist. After discussing these preferences, they stated, a vote can be taken. Other adolescents

Table 2. Themes in interviews

Case about rescheduling a class	Interviewees were asked to discuss their preferred way to deal with a situation in which some students objected to rescheduling the class.
Case about the abolishing freedom rights	Interviewees had to pick a group they objected to (e.g. atheists, religious fundamentalists, nationalists) from the list. Then it was discussed whether this group – if it were to constitute a majority group – could abolish the freedom rights of other groups.
Statements about national political system	Interviewees were asked to respond to statements such as the following: ‘When making a decision it is important to find agreement even though it takes more time’, and ‘Politicians do not care about my opinion or that of my relatives’, leading up to a discussion about their views on decision-making in the national political system.

(predominantly girls) stuck to their views relating to deliberative decision-making or developed views in that direction and argued that the central aspect of decision-making is that agreement should be found on the best possible solutions. Lastly, some adolescents (boy, girl, both tracks) formulated preferences for a consensus democracy at both moments in time and one girl (PV) developed such views. These students believed that all participants should negotiate to find solutions in which all or most of them feel that some of their preferences are being met.

Adolescents’ views also varied with regard to the number of principles they took into account. In the response of interviewees two types of reasoning can be distinguished. Some interviewees only emphasized the central aspect of their preferred model (e.g. voting, negotiation or deliberation), while other interviewees not only emphasized one of these principles but also took other democratic principles into account when arguing about a democratic issue (e.g. the majority will, the importance of collective decision-making, interests of minorities, arguments used by participants in the decision-making process, and the desirability of finding agreement).

Whereas it might be expected that the number of adolescents who would take multiple principles into account when reasoning about a democratic issue would increase, the opposite seemed to be the case: in the second round of interviews more adolescents focused on one single principle. Some interviewees showed stable views regarding the number of principles they took into account, either focusing on one principle or taking more than one principle into account in both rounds of interviews. Among other interviewees, however, we saw a decrease in the number of principles. This decrease was brought about by a stronger focus on majority decisions and led the views of these adolescents in two different directions.

The first developmental path was observable among some interviewees, mainly girls, with consensual or deliberative views on decision-making. In the first round of interviews they rejected majority rule but two years later they argued that voting is sometimes necessary, thereby taking multiple principles into account. The reasoning of two adolescents, one with consensual views and one with deliberative views, is illustrative for this development. One of them, who argued from a consensual perspective, stated in the first round of interviews that, if an agreement cannot be negotiated, the minority should be able to veto a decision: '[The majority] is not necessarily right. You should take the interests of others into account and find the best solution (boy, PA).' However, two years later, he took a different stance with regard to voting by arguing that it is sometimes a necessary decision-making procedure: 'I think that it is better to find an agreement than to cast a vote. You really should try to find consensus, but if that does not work out, you should cast a vote. [Have a] plan B, so to speak.'

The other adolescent, who had deliberative views on decision-making, stated in the first interview that all participants should strive for agreement on the best solutions on rational grounds: 'I do not agree with [voting]. I do not think that it is important... The best arguments should be decisive (girl, PV).' However, two years later, she had a different perspective: 'If they both have good reasons, you cannot allow for all opinions. Then you cannot solve this problem... Then I would say that the majority should decide.'

The second development regarding the number of principles adolescents took into account was present among interviewees with a majoritarian perspective, mainly, and increasingly, boys. These young people argued in the first round of interviews that argumentation, finding agreement, and interests of minorities are also relevant, but two years later they stated that in decision-making only the preferences of the majority count. Thus, they developed views that are strictly focused on one democratic principle. In this respect the reasoning of one interviewee is exemplary. In the first round of interviews this adolescent stated: 'First of all, what matters is the arguments that are put forward. But if the arguments from both sides are of equal weight, the majority will decide (boy, PA).' Two years later, this interviewee weighed the interests of participants in decision-making processes differently: 'Those three students will have no say, because the others are with more people.... I would want to know why they object, but even if they have a good reason, we will still reschedule the class, because otherwise it will be disadvantageous for the others.'

While adolescents' views on democratic decision-making in everyday situations diverge, in the second round of interviews a perspective on decision-making with a strict focus on majority rule is even more dominant than two years earlier, which applies in particular to boys. No substantial differences were found for educational

track. Whereas previous studies indicated that with age adolescents take more principles into account and that, accordingly, their views become more multidimensional and complex, the opposite trend shows up among the interviewees in the present study.

Voting about freedom rights

The views discussed above were formulated regarding a case of decision-making in everyday life where no high stakes were involved. In order to identify whether the adolescents applied principles of democratic decision-making to situations in which the freedom rights of minorities are at stake, interviewees were also presented with a second case (see Method). In both rounds of interviews, the majority of interviewees argued at both points in time that a collective decision could not be made in such a situation. For them, the fundamental rights of people outweigh collective decision-making.

However, the number of those arguing that simple majority decisions can be made in such situations increased with age (predominantly boys and PA-students). All of these adolescents strictly focused on majority rule in a classroom context, and with regard to the case concerning freedom rights, although certain members gave counterarguments, they also considered majority decisions to be democratic and fair. For these interviewees, democracy amounts to majority decisions and the fundamental rights of minority groups do not represent an essential part of it. The reasoning of one interviewee, in the second round of interviews, is exemplary. When reasoning about the abolishment of freedom of religion he stated: ‘What they want is very extreme, but you would have to do it the same way as with other topics: the majority has to decide.... But this would conflict with other legislation, such as freedom of religion. So that would make it very difficult.... It is a very sensitive topic.... But if they change all the conflicting legislation, and follow correct procedures, as a majority they should have the permission to [abolish these rights] (boy, PA).’

These findings show an increase in the number of interviewees who equated democracy with majority rule, as well as applying this principle to nearly all aspects of their views on collective decision-making. This conflicts with the expectation that older adolescents make more distinctions between topics when arguing about which decision-making procedure is the most equitable. Such a deepening of adolescents’ views, in the sense that they distinguish more often between different topics with age, was not observed among these interviewees.

Similar reasoning across contexts

Differentiating between contexts regarding the preferred model of decision-making can also be regarded as an aspect of complex reasoning. Interviewees were ques-

tioned about their perspective on decision-making in everyday situations and in the political domain. Many adolescents stuck to their views regardless of the specific context. Others, who did not have opinions on decision-making in parliament in the first round of interview, developed similar views where the same decision-making procedure is applicable with regard to everyday situations and politics two years later. Thus, for both groups, contexts do not significantly differ when it comes to decision-making. The statements of one interviewee are exemplary. He argued in both interviews that the majority should decide both in the classroom and in parliament, attaching little weight to minority interests. In 2013, he stated the following with regard to decision-making in parliament: ‘The majority has to decide. Otherwise it will be a chaos... Because otherwise there are so many different opinions, and if you have to convince everyone it may take years... I think that a small majority is sufficient (boy, PA).’ As these interviewees became more familiar with politics, their preferences for decision-making in parliament did not become more complex with regard to the differences between contexts and to the role of such aspects as the will of the majority, minority interests, or the power of argumentation.

In both rounds of interviews only a few adolescents argued that parliament is different from the classroom while a couple of other students developed such views. In different contexts the decision-making process should be different as well. However, these interviewees disagreed about the implications of this reasoning. Some of them who argued for a majority perspective in the classroom setting stated that in parliament it is better to look for consensus (predominantly PV-students). The reasoning of one interviewee is exemplary. He stated that decisions in politics are made about very important topics: ‘You should look for as much agreement as possible... It may take more time than in other situations, but that’s fine.... Both parties have a bit of their way and you reach common ground’ (boy, PV).

Other interviewees argued that majority decisions are most important when it comes to politics (predominantly PA-students). Several interviewees, who reasoned from a deliberative perspective in the classroom setting, argued that it is not feasible to take all perspectives into account or to reach agreement in politics. One of them, for example, explained this perspective as follows: ‘I prefer everyone to agree, but I think that voting is the best procedure, because otherwise it would take a year to come to a decision... That is because people have different opinions (girl, PA).’ In their reflections on decision-making in parliament the adolescents took feasibility into account and made their initial preferences secondary. These interviewees differentiated between contexts, which is an indication of complex views of decision-making. However, it is notable that about half of the adolescents who did not emphasize majority rule in everyday situations, changed their preferences when it came to decision-making in parliament. Also with regard to this aspect of democracy

a trend towards a stronger focus on majoritarian decision-making was manifest.

‘This Is How It Works in Politics’

According to many interviewees, voting is the best decision-making procedure in a parliamentary democracy. A substantial and increasing group of adolescents (predominantly PA-students) stuck to or gave only in the second interview an explanation for their stronger emphasis on this majority rule. From their point of view, the majority simply makes the decisions in parliament. When discussing the case about rescheduling a class (see Table 2), these interviewees more often referred to decision-making in parliament to underpin their views. The reasoning of one adolescent is exemplary. In the 2013 interview he formulated his views on decision-making in school: ‘Majorities will always come first. It is the same as with elections. [Last time] the liberal party won more votes than the labor party. It is the same in this situation [in school]... You simply have to vote: in favor or not’ (boy, PV).

Some other adolescents who argued in the classroom context from a consensual or deliberative perspective, claimed that it is fairer when decisions are made in a different manner than with a majority vote. In line with this view, they formulated a rather critical perspective on the working of Dutch democracy. They first argued that the majority should decide outcomes both in the classroom and in politics, as this is the case in the Dutch parliament, but they later reformulated their views. However, this critical perspective of parliamentary democracy was quite rare among the interviewees. A substantial group adjusted their perspective from focusing on fair decision-making to how they perceived the current practice in Dutch democracy.

Conclusion and Discussion

The present study aims to gain more insight into the development of adolescents’ views on democracy. Previous cross-sectional studies have shown that older adolescents are more familiar with politics and possess more complex views and that this holds particularly for those in the higher educational tracks (e.g. Adelson & Beall, 1970; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Sapiro, 2004; Schulz et al., 2010). Our study shows that the interviewed adolescents do become more familiar with politics but do not simultaneously develop more complex views on decision-making. Many interviewees claimed that decisions in parliament are simply made by a majority, and the largest group of the adolescents endorsed this notion of coming to a decision in some form. As a consequence, especially boys and students in the pre-academic track, adjusted their preferences regarding decision-making in everyday situations to how they perceived the workings of Dutch politics. The initial complexity in their views made room for a one-dimensional majority perspective on democratic decision-making. With regard to track differences, we observed that students in the pre-

vocational track were less often familiar with politics and took more principles into account when coming to a decision. In their expressed views more complex reasoning did not appear to be related to experiences with political and democratic processes. It rather seemed that adolescents who took more principles into account by stating that ‘all democratic principles are important’ had *not* thought about situations where democratic issues are at stake. It is interesting to explore in future research whether this relationship between democratic views and educational track also holds for other aspects of democratic reasoning. Our study also diverges from previous studies which have shown that adolescents base their attitudes towards democracy and political institutions on everyday experiences (e.g. Flanagan, 2013; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Gimpel et al., 2003; Manning, 2013; Sapiro, 2004). Our findings suggest more or less the opposite: adolescents do not gradually grow into politics but (their image of) politics is colonizing their social life preferences towards decision-making. Contrary to other, political, studies focusing on democratic views in the context of formal democracy or – to a lesser extent – psychological or educational studies concentrating on everyday situations, we adopted a design in which we asked participants about both contexts and explicitly asked them to relate these to each other. This enabled us to show that adolescents’ perspectives on the workings of formal democracy influence their initial preferences regarding democratic issues in everyday life instead of the other way around.

Before elaborating on the findings of our study, we mention some limitations of our approach. One limitation concerns the small, and thus not representative sample of the study. Large scale research is needed to investigate whether the development we observed is present among different groups of adolescents in various cultural and political contexts. Another limitation concerns the interviewees’ young age (thirteen to seventeen years) and the limited time span between the interviews (two years). It is possible that during young adulthood the interviewees further develop or even change their views. However, although research shows that the development of adolescents’ attitudes toward citizenship is a non-linear process (Geboers, Geijsel, Admiraal, Jorgensen, & Ten Dam, 2015; Keating, Kerr, Benton, Mundy, & Lopes, 2010), at least for some attitudes there is stability between the ages of fourteen and thirty (Jennings, Stoker, & Bowers, 2009; Prior, 2010). This is an indication that the development found in our study towards more and stricter focus on majority rule can have a lasting impact for adolescents.

Several explanations might be considered for the strong and increasing focus on strict majority rule. First, the role of media in the political socialization of adolescents has changed, as many scholars have indicated (Abendschon, 2013; Sapiro, 2004; Manning & Edwards, 2014). Current generations of adolescents generally use interactive social media for as sources of political news (e.g. Stoker & Bass, 2011). The

image of politics and democracy they receive through these media is different from the image in traditional media, for example in connection with the frequent use of polls as a means to come to a decision. Secondly, while traditionally the Dutch political culture is consensual (Hendriks, 2010; Lijphart, 1999), there are indications that the political culture in the Netherlands and in other European countries has become harsher and less concerned about minority rights (Hendriks & Michels, 2011). We interpret the finding that many of the interviewees who were most familiar with politics claimed that in politics a small majority decides, also about fundamental freedom rights, as an indication of how formal democracy is actually portrayed to young people and how this influences their views on democratic decision-making. Although these trends are possible explanations for the strict focus on majority rule future studies should address this question more thoroughly.

A third explanation for the results in the light of previous studies can be found in differences in research design. In contrast to most previous studies, we have adopted a longitudinal orientation in our design with repeated interviews and were thus able to focus on individual trajectories regarding the development of democratic views. Consequently we could observe the developments described above which perhaps remained invisible when focusing on one point in time. Furthermore, we took a qualitative research route which allowed us to discuss the interview topics thoroughly with the participants. Consequently, the interviewees were perhaps more aware of the consequences of their initial arguments and alternative views than they would have been in situations where they would have filled in a questionnaire. This can have resulted in different choices and perhaps more principled views.

How should we appreciate a trend towards one-dimensional views on democratic decision-making? On the one hand, it may be regarded as positive that adolescents at different ages possess a by and large democratic way of reasoning. It can also be said that the emphasis on majority rule is a sign of realism, as this is the decision-making procedure that is most feasible in many situations. But we regard the stronger focus on majoritarian rule at the same time as problematic. Firstly, an increasing number of adolescents applied majority rule to situations in which fundamental freedom rights were at stake and neglected other democratic principles, such as respecting minority interests. These views can therefore be understood as reflecting a tyranny of the majority (Held, 2006; Keane, 2009; Maletz, 2002). Therefore, especially the view that freedom rights can be abolished by a single majority can hardly be seen as an indication of a *realistic democratic* perspective. Secondly, the fact that decision-making processes in Dutch democracy are complex holding elements of negotiation to come to consensus and deliberation about given arguments, appears to be overlooked by these adolescents. They do not seem to develop a sophisticated account of the functioning of (Dutch) democracy, which limits their ability to judge the functioning of its actors and institutions on its actual merits.

All in all, the present study shows that these adolescents do not seem to grow into politics with age but that their views of just ways of dealing with democratic issues seem to be adjusted to their perception of how formal democracy works. If this result generally holds, it implies that the present-day experiences of young people with politics are perhaps rather one-sided and have a restricting influence on their views on democracy. This holds an important challenge for socializing agents to show adolescents both the problematic aspects of a strict implementation of majority rule and the strengths and limitations of the workings of formal democracy. Thereby, they can help adolescents to reflect on these aspects which can be an impetus for the development of richer perspectives on politics and democracy.