Comparing Youth Opinions Toward Compulsory Voting Across Five Countries

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Abstract: This study uses a comparative case study design to examine youth (ages 13–20) opinions toward compulsory voting across five democratic countries: Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and the United States. Youth responses toward compulsory voting demonstrate how youth come to learn about citizen rights and responsibilities with varied understandings of what it means to participate in a democracy. Four themes represent the most notable variations of reasons given by youth to support and oppose compulsory voting: rights and duties, corruption, inclusion of minorities, and strong democracy. Further, the majority of students gave at least one reason for and against compulsory voting demonstrating students' ability of perspective-taking, to give reasons for the perspective with which they disagree. This study provides an analysis of how youth political opinions are constructed and negotiated by social and political influences. The findings have implications for educational researchers and social studies teachers as they work to improve civic education.

Key words: Civic Education, Political Socialization, Voting, Democracy, Latin America

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Introduction

Throughout the 1980s, the worldwide spread of liberal democracy signified "the end of history," according to political scientist Francis Fukuyama (1989, 1992). Fukuyama posits that the post-Soviet era represents the end of the ideological evolution and he argues the universalization of democracy as the final form of government. The ideology of democracy continues to traverse the world, and several countries are currently gaining benefits of democratization. However, maintaining democracy is demanding. Newer democracies face challenges, such as building civil society and establishing societal norms and political practices. Older democracies encounter low levels of political participation, voter apathy, and demographic changes related to immigration. New and old democracies require their citizens to have the tolerance, knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable civic participation and critical thought. Such citizen attributes are important because democratization is an evolving project and citizens in a democracy must manage and support democratic processes.

Electoral participation is one pillar of democracy. Citizens participate in their democratic governments by voting for political representatives and voting on key issues. Compulsory (or mandatory) voting has been introduced in a variety of contexts throughout history as a way to encourage and enforce voting, although debates concerning the merits of compulsory voting continue. Personal values of rights and responsibilities inform arguments for or against compulsory voting and question what roles citizens should play in democracy. The key question is whether citizens should have a _personal right_ or a _legal obligation_ to attend the polls during elections. Often

in liberal democracies, citizens believe it is their right to choose to vote, that it is their individual freedom to exercise if desired. On the other hand, citizens may also perceive voting as a duty, a responsibility that must be fulfilled.

Most academic literature on the subject centers on increasing electoral participation (Birch, 2009). Research reports (Electoral Commission, 2006; Keaney & Rogers, 2006) provide background and present arguments to both support and oppose compulsory voting. Proponents argue compulsory voting increases voter turnout (Hill, 2000; Lijphart, 1997); promotes political awareness (Birch, 2009); and encourages electoral participation among minorities, economically disadvantaged individuals, and more vulnerable population groups (Keaney & Rogers, 2006). The focus on inclusion is important because low voter turnout is typically associated with strong patterns of inequality (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995).

Focus of Study and Research Questions

In this study, I focused on students' (ages 13–20) opinions toward compulsory voting across five countries: Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and the United States. My purpose was to analyze how the sociopolitical environment impacts students' opinions toward compulsory voting. The students (n = 2,510) deliberated the policy issue of compulsory voting in their classrooms. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does youth support for compulsory voting vary across countries?
2. To what degree do youth demonstrate perspective-taking in relation to the issue of compulsory voting?
3. What themes and patterns are reflected in youths' reasons for and against compulsory voting?
4. How are these themes and patterns reflective of country context?

Democracy and Elections

Democracy or "rule by the people" developed in early Greece and has traversed the globe through shared ideas of government, colonization, globalization, and economic liberalization. Although the term "democracy" is defined by the context of the country, common characteristics such as equality and freedom prevail. Democratization has occurred at various times for different countries. The United States has remained a democracy, while many of the countries of Latin America have become democratized more recently. Several Latin American countries had authoritarian or military regimes before turning to democracy throughout the 1980s (Payne, Zovatto, & Mateo Díaz, 2007). Before 1978, only Colombia, Costa Rica, and Venezuela elected their leaders through competitive and free elections (Reimers, 2007). Currently, all Latin American countries, except Cuba, hold democratic elections.

Compulsory voting is a system in which electors are legally required to vote in political elections. Currently, 29 countries worldwide require participation; this includes about 25% of all democracies (Birch, 2009). However, countries vary in *how* compulsory voting is mandated, and whether the laws

are enforced. If enforced, individuals are penalized for not voting, and may either have to pay a fine or face other punishments with varying levels of severity. If not enforced, citizens are legally required to vote but are not penalized. In some countries, where voting is required, some individuals are exempt. Determinants if an individual is required, allowed, or exempt from voting may be age, literacy level, mental incompetence, legal citizenship, imprisonment, and uncompleted military service. Further, whether compulsory or not, societal and political influences set norms for voting. Some individuals feel pushed to vote based on personal values and social expectations (Verba et al., 1995). For example, in the former Soviet Union societal pressures strongly encouraged participation in non-competitive elections; not voting was viewed as political dissidence throughout society (Karklins, 1986).

People are compelled to vote for a number of reasons, but an aim for democratic governments should be to increase and support electoral participation. A democracy depends on its citizens and their willingness to participate. Therefore, the investigation of how citizens—including young citizens—think about democratic practices and institutions is a step to strengthen democracy. Moreover, recent expansion of democracy throughout Latin America and the need to preserve democracy in the United States demands research of citizens' opinions toward democracy.

Previous Research

I found no studies investigating youth attitudes toward compulsory voting, however, researchers have studied adolescents' political attitudes toward electoral politics and democratic participation. The following sections outline relevant previous research.

Political Attitudes

The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Civic Education Study conducted in 1999 in 28 countries surveyed 14-year-olds' perspectives toward political participation. The study's researchers indicated that increased civic knowledge is positively correlated to socioeconomic status and age (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001), and young peoples' anticipation of future voting and actual voting after completion of high school (Hart, Donnely, Youniss, & Atkins, 2007). In addition, students reported positive attitudes toward voting, although they were open to alternative types of participation, such as participating in non-violent protests or raising money for social causes (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). However, in the two Latin American countries (Chile and Colombia) that were involved in the study, more knowledgeable youth at ages 14 and 17 were less likely to endorse social-movement activities, suggesting that the more academically successful students are entering life trajectories disjointed from public life (Torney-Purta & Amadeo, 2004).

More recently, the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), conducted in 2008–2009 in 38 countries, also surveyed 14-year-olds' perspectives. This time six Latin American countries participated: Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico, and Paraguay. Across the six countries, the study suggested that civic knowledge is comparatively low. In addition,

students expressed low levels of trust in political parties, courts of justice, and police (Schulz, Ainley, Friedman, & Lietz, 2011). Low levels of trust in governmental institutions are often typical in societies that have recently undergone political transitions (Klingemann, 1999).

Doubts about democracy are prevalent among adults throughout Latin America. Latinobarómetro, a public opinion survey, polled individuals in 18 Latin American countries. The 2002 survey revealed high levels of dissatisfaction with democratic institutions, and limited support for democracy as a form of government (Reimers, 2007). The survey results showed that 50% of people are willing to accept an authoritarian regime if it resolves the country's problems and 75% of respondents agree that solutions to these problems do not depend on the existence of a democratic government (Latinobarómetro, 2002). In addition, a United Nations Development Program Report (2004) indicated that approximately 19% of people in Latin America are identified as *participative democrats*, 35% as *ambivalent non-democrats*, and 22% were identified as those people who *have doubts about democracy or are opposed to it, and are politically active*. Due to democratic doubts and non-participation, Latin American countries face the challenge of deepening their democratic institutions and practices (Adams, 2003). These democratic doubts are the consequence of deep social inequalities, corruption, intolerance, public distrust, violence, and crisis in the justice system (Cox, 2010; Schulz et al., 2011).

Student Learning

Studies have investigated students' definitions of democracy and have found that a majority of youth can accurately define democracy (Avery, Levy, Simmons & Scarlett, 2012; Flanagan, Gallay, Gill, Gallay, & Nti, 2005). Age and parents' level of educational attainment (Flanagan et al., 2005), students' perception of classroom climate, and students' level of political engagement (Avery et al., 2012) influence students' accuracy and the complexity of the definitions they offer. In addition, Avery and her colleagues' study of students in Eastern Europe and the United States demonstrated youth were likely to use the terms "freedom" and "rights" in their definitions of democracy.

Several research studies (Ehman, 1980; Hahn, 1998; Niemi & Junn, 1998; Torney-Purta et al., 2001) demonstrate how students who report they were encouraged and felt comfortable to discuss controversial public issues in a classroom environment were more likely to have higher levels of civic knowledge, political efficacy, political interest, sense of civic duty, and expectations of voting as adults than peers without such experiences. This research provides evidence that an open classroom climate where students and teacher discuss substantive public issues in a respectful way matters. Classroom discussions positively influence students' confidence and agency in political and social issues, and these experiences become part of how youth are politically socialized.

Perspective-Taking

In addition, structured classroom discussions cultivate opportunities for students to set aside their predispositions toward an issue and consider the justifications associated with other positions (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996). This process, known as perspective-taking, involves the ability to

identify reasons for positions with which one does not agree. Perspective-taking is an integral part of democratic education (Hess, 2009; Parker, 2003).[1] However, throughout democratic societies, opportunities to participate in thoughtful, evidence-based discussions that weigh various options and consequences are uncommon. Rarely do individuals evaluate multiple positions on an issue; rather individuals become attached to their personal opinions and infrequently encounter opposing arguments. To some extent this occurs because individuals generally associate with those who are like-minded (Mutz, 2006). These situations contradict democratic ideals; democracies are supported on the assertion that people of diverse viewpoints can come together to discuss difficult issues of common concern (Habermas, 1989). Therefore, structured classroom discussions that incorporate perspective-taking is one strategy to prepare future citizens to participate in a pluralistic, multicultural democracy.

Conceptual Framework

Political socialization is the conceptual framework that guides this study. Political socialization frames how individuals engage in political development and learning and how they construct relationships to the political contexts in which they live (Sapiro, 2004). Researchers in this area examine how political systems instill norms and practices upon their citizens and how political culture is transmitted. Several agents (e.g., family, school, religion) influence how an individual is politically socialized. However, political socialization is a complex process. Political attitudes are based upon a conglomerate of factors, including: political context, personal experience, key events, and local and global realities. A way to explore these multiple factors is through Bronfenbrenner's (1988) ecological model. This model investigates the complexity of social context and adopts a systemic approach to study youth civic engagement. This prompts the investigation of not only the students' attitudes, but also the interconnected set of contexts in which the students are located. It examines how an individual develops and functions within systems such as the family, school, peer groups, organizations, community, and institutions. Moreover, the model recognizes that political attitudes and beliefs are not passively received; political socialization is not solely something that adults do to youth, it is also something youth do for themselves (Yates & Youniss, 1999). Put another way, adolescents are active mediators influencing and being influenced by their environment and interactions with others (Wertsch, 1991).

Methodology

I implemented a comparative case study design (Yin, 2009) to explore youth opinions toward compulsory voting across five countries. Each country—Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and the United States—represented the unit of analysis. For each country, I analyzed adolescents' qualitative responses, looking for meaning embedded in the contexts of school, community, and country (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). Then I compared themes and patterns across countries (Yin, 2009).

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[1] Perspective taking is also an important component of fostering historical empathy as a way to increase understanding of past experiences (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Brooks, 2011; Davis, Yeager, & Foster, 2001).

Program Context

The students for this study were selected because their teachers were involved in an international professional development project[2] designed to promote one model of discussion, Structured Academic Controversy (SAC) (Johnson & Johnson, 1979), to teach controversial public issues in classrooms. SAC systematically formats classroom discussion to allow students to investigate and deliberate two opposing viewpoints, formulate an opinion, and possibly reach group consensus. The SAC model encourages students to develop the skill of perspective-taking by detailing arguments for a side with which they disagree (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

For the project, teachers conducted three SACs in their classrooms throughout the 2011–2012 school year. Teachers were allowed to choose two topics, but were all asked to deliberate the issue of compulsory voting. Although teachers played a major role in the professional development project, their students were the focus of this study.

Participants

Students (n = 2,510) from 111 classrooms were part of this study. The mean age of youth was 17.1 years and approximately 52% of the youth were female and 47% were male. Table 1 details youth demographics by country.

Table 1. *Youth Demographics by Country*

Site	Youth (n) %		Mean Age (Range)	Gender	
	n	%		F %	M %
Colombia	298	12	16.9 (14-19)	39	61
Ecuador	100	4	16.7 (14-20)	57	42
Mexico	522	21	17.2 (15-20)	52	48
Peru	286	11	16.8 (13-18)	63	35
USA	1,304	52	16.0 (13-19)	53	46

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[2] The Deliberating in a Democracy in the Americas (DDA) Project was directed by the Constitutional Rights Foundation Chicago (CRFC), in collaboration with the Constitutional Rights Foundation in Los Angeles (CRF) and Street Law, Inc., with a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (#Q304A100003), October 2010 – September 2012. The *DDA Project* involved 134 teachers and more than 9,300 students in five countries. Further information about the project can be found at: http://deliberating.org. I served as one of the evaluators for the project.

Total	2,510		16.2	52	47

Note. The number of females and males does not equal the total number of students because some students left the gender question blank.

Multiple public and private schools were part of this study. Schools represented a diverse range of student populations, socioeconomic standings, size, and location. Most schools were located in urban and suburban settings. Ecuadorian students were from schools located in or near Guayaquil or Quito. Colombian students attended schools in Bogota. Mexican students attended schools located within Mexico City and neighboring communities. Peruvian students attended schools in and nearby Lima. The U.S. students were from California, Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, North Carolina, and Virginia.

Country Context

The students were from countries that hold different laws for electoral participation. Of the five countries represented in this study, two do not have compulsory voting (Colombia and the United States), two have compulsory voting (Ecuador and Peru), and one has compulsory voting that is not enforced (Mexico).

Although Colombia and the United States do not have compulsory voting, arguments for compulsory voting are debated. In the United States, proponents for compulsory voting believe it would increase participation, grant more opportunity for minorities to vote (Verba et al., 1995), and serve to increase poor peoples' voice in Congress (Mann, 2012). In the United States, in 2004, voter turnout was 60.4% of all eligible voters, compared to 62.3% who voted in 2008, and 57.5% who voted in 2012 (Bipartisan Policy Center, 2012). In Colombia, in 2006, 45.1% of eligible voters participated in the presidential election and in 2010, 44.4% of voters participated (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance [International IDEA], 2013).

Mexico legally has compulsory voting, but does not require electors to actually cast a vote. Perhaps as a consequence, turnout is relatively low in comparison to other countries with compulsory voting (Electoral Commission, 2006). In total, 64% of eligible voters in 2012 and 58.5% in 2006 participated in presidential elections (International IDEA, 2013). Despite the low turnout, importance is placed on voter identification cards. The cards act as a means of identification used by banks and other official institutions and permit individuals to vote in local and national elections.

Ecuador and Peru legally enforce compulsory voting through use of sanctions. In Ecuador, voting is mandatory for people between the ages of 18 and 65 who are literate (Electoral Commission, 2006). If Ecuadorans do not vote, they are fined (about $25 USD). In Peru, voting is mandatory for people between the ages of 18 and 70. Eligible voters who do not participate face financial penalties, are prohibited from making banking or other public administrative transactions for three months, and may also be denied public services and public sector employment (Electoral Commission, 2006).

Voting turnout for presidential elections in Ecuador and Peru has remained fairly high, with roughly 70-80% eligible voters attending the polls the last 15 years (International IDEA, 2013).

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected as part of a larger evaluation of the international project to increase democratic discussion in classrooms. For the evaluation, students completed a 53-item post-program questionnaire (Avery, Kundin, Sheldon, & Thompson, 2012). For this study, I only report on the students' responses to questions related to compulsory voting. The data were derived from the following three items on the questionnaire:

1. What reasons are there to support a compulsory voting law? List up to five.
2. What reasons are there to oppose a compulsory voting law? List up to five.
3. Choose one statement: I support a compulsory voting law. I oppose a compulsory voting law.

The questionnaire was administered after students participated in three SACs. The questionnaire was available in both Spanish and English and distributed via online or paper format. All qualitative student reasons written in Spanish were translated to English for ease of analysis.

For data analysis, I systematically coded each student's reasons for and against compulsory voting. First, I coded valid reasons and invalid reasons. Invalid reasons included nonsensical (e.g., "reading is good", "life is hard"), vague (e.g., "democracy is best", "rights"), and repetitive or redundant answers. Second, to measure perspective-taking, I calculated the number of valid reasons students gave to support their personal opinion and the number of valid reasons to support the side with which they were in disagreement. Third, I categorized themes and patterns for or against compulsory voting. To categorize reasons, I began with an initial set of codes (e.g., increase participation, duty to vote, individual rights) and added codes as other themes became apparent (e.g., corruption, inclusion of minorities). Reasons were coded and grouped into categories to examine trends both within and across countries.

Limitations

This study has three primary limitations. First, participants' socioeconomic status is unknown. This would have added an additional element of the role social class plays in responses toward compulsory electoral participation. Second, participant selection does not reflect a representative sample of youth in each country. Third, I draw on a single data source, the questionnaire. Integration of student interviews would have added greater understanding of why students support or oppose compulsory voting.

Findings and Discussion

The findings present the students' responses to the questionnaire items and the notable categories of students' thinking about compulsory voting. In this section, I first outline students' quantitative

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responses. I explain how youth support for compulsory voting varies across countries and how youth demonstrate perspective-taking. Then, I present a thematic analysis of youth responses. I detail categories of students' qualitative reasons given for and against compulsory voting. When reviewing students' qualitative reasons, I apply the political socialization framework to explore possible themes and patterns that reflect country context.

Quantitative Analysis

Across the five countries, 2,510 youth deliberated compulsory voting in their classrooms. After the deliberation, they were to indicate whether they supported or opposed compulsory voting. Table 2 displays students' final position toward compulsory voting.

Table 2. Youth Support and Opposition to Compulsory Voting by Country

Country (n of students)	% Support (n)	% Oppose (n)	% No Response (n)
Colombia (298)	37% (110)	62% (184)	1% (4)
Ecuador (100)	40 (40)	59 (59)	1 (1)
Peru (286)	60 (172)	37 (106)	3 (8)
Mexico (522)	54 (285)	45 (235)	1 (2)
United States (1,304)	35 (455)	64 (831)	1 (18)
Total (2,510)	42 (1,062)	57 (1,415)	1 (33)

Students' position toward compulsory voting varied across countries and their position was not always aligned with their country's voting policy. The United States and Colombia do not have a

compulsory voting law. A majority of students in the United States (64%) and in Colombia (62%) opposed compulsory voting. Peru and Ecuador have a compulsory voting law, but youth hold contrasting standpoints. While, a majority of students in Peru (60%) *supported* compulsory voting, a majority of students in Ecuador (59%) *opposed* compulsory voting. Mexico has compulsory voting that is not enforced. Mexican youth were rather split on the issue, 54% supported and 45% opposed compulsory voting.

Of the 2,510 youth who deliberated compulsory voting, 87% wrote valid reasons to either support or oppose compulsory voting. Thirteen percent (n = 328) of students chose not to write or wrote invalid statements, however, identified whether they personally support or oppose compulsory voting. Therefore, all youth wrote statements and/or selected if they personally support or oppose compulsory voting. On average, youth wrote 2.35 valid reasons to support compulsory voting and 2.04 to oppose. The median response for both sides was 2.0 valid reasons.

Youth perspective taking was measured by taking the number of reasons students offered in support of their personal opinion and comparing the number offered in support of an opinion with which they disagreed. Table 3 displays the mean number of reasons given to support and oppose compulsory voting by student position.

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Table 3. *Mean Number of Reasons to Support or Oppose by Student Position*

	Students Who Support Compulsory Voting		Students Who Oppose Compulsory Voting		Students Who Are Undecided	
Country (n)	Mean Number of Reasons to Support (n)	Mean Number of Reasons to Oppose (n)	Mean Number of Reasons to Support (n)	Mean Number of Reasons to Oppose (n)	Mean Number of Reasons to Support (n)	Mean Number of Reasons to Oppose (n)
Colombia (298)	2.67 (110)	1.71 (110)	2.65 (184)	2.71 (184)	2.50 (4)	3.0 (4)
Ecuador (100)	2.03 (40)	1.43 (40)	2.20 (59)	2.15 (59)	1.0 (1)	0 (1)
Mexico (522)	2.75 (285)	1.95 (285)	2.55 (235)	2.46 (235)	2.50 (2)	2.50 (2)
Peru (286)	2.40 (172)	1.95 (172)	2.81 (106)	2.82 (106)	2.25 (8)	2.25 (8)
United States (1,304)	2.04 (455)	1.47 (455)	2.12 (831)	2.17 (831)	1.94 (18)	1.22 (18)
Total (2,510)	2.35 (1,062)	1.70 (1,062)	2.04 (1,415)	2.31 (1,415)	2.09 (33)	1.73 (33)

Most students gave at least one reason of support and opposition regardless of their position toward compulsory voting. A paired-sample t-test was conducted to compare the students' number of reasons given to support and oppose. There was a significant difference in the reasons given to support and oppose by students who supported compulsory voting; $t(1061) = 19.63$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.59, .71]. This was confirmed across all countries, students who supported compulsory voting wrote significantly more reasons to support. For example, in Ecuador there was a significant difference in

reasons to support (*M* = 2.03) and reasons to oppose (*M* = 1.43); *t*(39) =. 92, *p* = .001, 95% CI [.28, .92]. However, there was not a significance difference in reasons to support and oppose by students who opposed compulsory voting. Students who opposed wrote an equal number of reasons for both sides, although generally they listed slightly more reasons to oppose.

Thematic Analysis

A number of reasons to support or oppose compulsory voting were given across the five countries. Some categories were more prevalent than others. Reasons given to support weighed heavily on legitimacy and increased participation. Reasons to oppose focused on individual rights and liberties. Multiple factors likely influenced youths' reasons to support and oppose compulsory voting. Bronfenbrenner's (1988) ecological theory recognizes complex, contextual factors such as social group interactions, societal influences, political institutions, and social experience cumulated over time that impact the development of an individual. Given the limitations of this study, I did not examine all factors. Some factors that I included were: the political system, key country events, economic indicators, education policies, and school context. In total, four themes—rights and duties, corruption, inclusion of minorities, and strong democracy—represent the most notable variations of reasons of youth across countries. Each theme was evident on both sides of the argument. For example, youth addressed rights and duties in their reasons for and against compulsory voting. For each theme, I analyzed students' reasons and then theorized some possible factors that may have influenced students' thinking.

Rights and Duties

In a democracy should individuals have the right to vote or the duty to vote? More often, students' reasons described voting as their right rather than their duty, obligation, or responsibility. In total, 30.4% of youth reasons against compulsory voting explained voting as a right, freedom, and/or personal liberty. The following examples illustrate students' reasons:

> Democracy is about having the freedom to choose and so voting should be a choice. (U.S. American female, 15-year-old, opposes compulsory voting)

> Compulsory voting violates our freedoms in a democracy. (Colombian female, 17-year-old, opposes compulsory voting)

> Voting as a duty may make people take it more seriously. (U.S. American male, 16-year-old, supports compulsory voting)

Although students in all five countries advocated for the protection of rights rather than the mandate of duties, students in the United States mentioned rights more frequently. In the United States, 32.6% of students described voting as a right. In comparison, the student response rate in Latin America ranged between 23.4% and 25.5%.

Students' inclusion of rights in their reasons is likely influenced by the longstanding, liberal tradition of personal rights. Marshall (1965) divides citizenship rights into three categories: civil rights,

political rights, and social rights. Marshall posits these rights should be guaranteed to all citizens regardless of race or class; however, an individual may opt out, or not participate due to his/her personal, private rights as a citizen. Although this holds true in several democracies, U.S. citizens draw predominantly on the liberal tradition in emphasizing these private, individual rights. These rights have a legal sanction protected in a court of law and are framed as freedoms guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. Kymlicka and Norman (1994) argue this conception of citizenship limits responsibilities. They call for the need to replace the passive acceptance of civic rights with the active exercise of political civic responsibilities and duties bestowed on citizens of a country.

U.S. students do not appear as aware or supportive of political participation as being an obligation, duty, or responsibility. This is also evident in other studies. Conover, Crewe, & Searing's (1991) study asserted that U.S. citizens place more emphasis on their rights as citizens than on their responsibilities. Avery and her colleagues' (2012) study also demonstrated adolescents were likely to use the terms "freedom" and "rights" in their definitions of democracy. Moreover, U.S social studies textbooks and standards display a strong emphasis on rights (Gonzales, Riedel, Avery, & Sullivan, 2001). U.S. students seem to be encountering content that speaks to rights more often than responsibilities. This highlights an important question: Has U.S. society encouraged youth to be fixated with rights and forgetful of responsibilities? As we consider how we educate youth for democratic citizenship across all countries, we should be cognizant of how youth receive messages of both rights and duties.

Corruption

Corruption undermines democracy and good governance by contradicting accountability and subverting political processes. Students discussed the problems of corruption in reasons to both support and oppose compulsory voting. The following statements are generally representative of students' reasons:

> It really does not change the amount of corruption in Colombia. Nobody said more votes would be less corrupt. (Colombian female, 13-year-old, supports compulsory voting)

> Non-voting is a way to deal with corruption because if all are inept politicians, it is not the best option to vote. (Colombian male, 16-year-old, opposes compulsory voting)

> Several of the politicians are corrupt. (Mexican female, 16-year-old, undecided)

Although corruption was a notable theme, students referred to corruption across all five countries at differing rates. In Colombia, 25% of students mentioned corruption. This is starkly higher than the other four countries. Students in Mexico (10.3%), Ecuador (9%), Peru (5.6%), and the United States (3.5%) mentioned corruption at lower rates. Latin American students referred to corruption more frequently than U.S. students.

Corruption is an issue for many Latin American countries (Cox, 2010). Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)[3] scores countries on a scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). The CPI 2012 Report indicates a corruption problem in the four Latin American countries in this study. Scores range from 32 for Ecuador to 38 for Colombia. The United States score is 78, considerably less corrupt than the Latin American countries. The CPI asserts Ecuador is more corrupt than Colombia, yet Colombian students were more apt to cite corruption throughout their reasons.

In both supporting and opposing reasons, roughly one in four Colombians mentioned corruption. There are several factors that may have contributed to Colombian students' concerns. Perhaps curriculum foci influenced students' reasons. Current Colombian civic education curriculum devotes attention to corruption, social struggle, civil warfare, social disintegration, and human rights violations (Shultz et al., 2011. Therefore, students in Colombia may be more likely to learn in school about the problems of corruption. In addition, Colombian students' reasons indicated that citizens would have to vote for "bad candidates" if a compulsory voting law were to exist. Students' perceptions of "bad candidates" may signify low levels of trust. Colombian students have exhibited low levels of trust for political parties, courts of justice, and people in general (Shultz et al., 2011).

Mexican youth also discussed corruption throughout their reasons. In Mexico, corruption has been a point of concern due to political bribery, drug trafficking, and kidnapping (Serrano, 2012). These events likely influence Mexican students' perceptions of corruption. Further investigation should pinpoint additional influencers of students' attitudes and their perceptions of corruption. Corruption is a concern for democratization. Causes of corruption and possible anti-corruption strategies and remedies should be sought to strengthen democratic processes and institutions.

Inclusion

The third notable theme is inclusion, which students explain would encourage and boost voter participation. In total, 28.4% of youth explained how compulsory voting would increase participation. However, 4.1% of youth specifically stated compulsory voting would increase participation and grant more opportunities to vote for minorities and individuals who are poor or are living in rural areas. Further, students in the five countries referred to inclusion at differing rates. In Ecuador and Mexico, less than 1% of youth mentioned how compulsory voting would increase participation of minorities or disadvantaged individuals. The rate was 3.9% in the United States and 2.3% in Colombia. But, in Peru 15.7% of youth stated minorities are or should be included. Two representative Peruvian responses include:

> The rural zones must have a right to participate and share their opinion. (Peruvian male, 14-year-old, supports compulsory voting)

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[3] CPI is the most widely used indicator of corruption worldwide. See more at:
http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2012/results/#sthash.iQ0LmCtm.dpuf

> The people in the poor sectors will be more informed; they will have more of a chance to vote. (Peruvian female, 17-year-old, supports compulsory voting)

In Peru, students explained that compulsory voting would increase participation and include minorities and individuals disfranchised from the political system. Their reasons highlighted the need for individuals who are illiterate, poor, disabled, and elderly to vote. Several students' reasons also stated compulsory voting grants opportunity for indigenous groups to participate.

Peruvian students seem to be more tolerant in encouraging participation and inclusion of multiple social groups. The higher rate of reference to inclusion also may signal how social class impacts students' reasons. This study did not include specific information on students' individual social class, but school location may give an indication. Peruvian youth in this study attend schools located in lower and middle class neighborhoods. Therefore, the students are likely to be poor and/or to have had encounters with individuals who are poor. This situation is quite different from that of Ecuadorian students. The Ecuadorian students attend private, elite, bilingual schools in more affluent neighborhoods somewhat sheltered from poorer areas. Further, Ecuadorian students are likely to have traveled outside the country and many plan to attend universities in the United States or Europe. The differing experiences between Peruvian and Ecuadorian students highlight the important role social class plays in youth experience, especially when social class is rigidly divided.

Latin America is one of the more economically unequal regions in the world. National income and wealth are in very few hands (United Nation Development Program, 2004). The region has had high and persistent income inequality, although there has been improvement. The Gini coefficient[4] declined from an average of 0.529 in 2000 to 50.9 in 2009 (Levy & Schady, 2013). Despite this decrease, income inequality in Latin America still remains a concern.

The economic divide separates cities and neighborhoods. This separation may, in part, explain why Ecuadorian students appear less cognizant of inequalities. Perhaps they are simply unaware of individuals who are poor or unknowledgeable of the significance of the problem of inequality. The economic divide potentially has other consequences. Since Ecuadorian youth attend schools separate from lower classes, they may have differing opinions. Their opinions may be disconnected from Ecuadorian public life (Torney-Purta & Amadeo, 2004). This may partially explain why these Ecuadorian youth held political opinions toward compulsory voting not aligned with current Ecuadorian policies. Although a compulsory voting law exists, a majority of Ecuador students opposed the law. Peru also enforces compulsory voting, but unlike Ecuador, youth in Peru were more likely to support compulsory voting. Future studies of Latin American countries should include more specific social class identifiers due to the role social class may play in the formulation of political opinion.

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[4] The Gini coefficient is commonly used as a measure of inequality of income or wealth. The Gini coefficient is an index that can take values between 0 and 1; the closer it is to 0, the more equal the distribution in question.

Democracy

The final theme, democracy, incorporates the previous themes, as they are all components to acknowledge for strengthening democracy. However, this theme is included because students specifically discussed compulsory voting in terms of democracy; 12.8% of students mentioned democracy in their reasons to support, and 8.6% mentioned democracy in their reasons to oppose. Reasons of support articulated how compulsory voting would maintain, improve, and/or strengthen democracy. Reasons of opposition explained that compulsory voting would hurt or hinder democracy by forcing people to vote. Although students across all countries specifically mentioned democracy, they did so at differing rates. Table 4 reflects the percentages of students' reasons that incorporated democratic concepts in support and opposition of compulsory voting.

Table 4. *Youth Reasons Incorporating Democracy by Country (n = 2,510)*

Country	Students' Reasons to Support (%)	Students' Reasons to Oppose (%)
Colombia	12.8%	16.4%
Ecuador	10	8
Mexico	31	9.8
Peru	11.9	12.9
United States	5.9	5.5

Generally, Latin American youth were more likely to include democracy into their statements. In both reasons to support and oppose, U.S. students incorporated democracy the least. Mexican students were most likely of the five countries to mention democracy in either supporting or opposing reasons.

Democracy in Latin America is a relatively recent development. The region experienced a democratic wave during the 1980s and the 1990s. Despite this democratic turn, instabilities exist. In several countries, social conflicts and civil and political liberty violations pose a risk to democratization (Emmerich, 2009). These conflicts and violations curtail citizens' support for democracy (Latinobarómetro, 2002). Due to the recent arrival of democracy and its instability, social studies teachers in this region may be more aware of political change and current challenges, and readily infuse democratic terms into their teaching. In addition, teachers in this study volunteered to participate in this international project. Because they chose to engage in professional development, they may represent a more committed group of teachers. Since the project's aim is to support democracy, teachers may have been attracted to this project as a way to promote democracy within their classrooms. Furthermore, Latin American scholars and educators have adopted U.S. ideas for

democratic education, such as models in the philosophical and pedagogical literature and curriculum from non-profit organizations (e.g., Center for Civic Education and Civitas International) that specialize in exporting programs for democratic civic education (Levinson, 2005). Due to an influx of programs to support democracy, students may be receiving multiple messages from teachers and curriculum regarding democracy.

Implications

Within and across the five countries, students' reasons to support and oppose compulsory voting exhibit similarities and differences. The protection of rights is the strongest reason against compulsory voting. Increased participation, the promotion of democracy, and legitimatization of elections are the most common reasons to support compulsory voting. These findings are important for both civic education researchers and social studies teachers.

Educational researchers should investigate multiple factors that illustrate the transmission of political culture. These factors include, but are not limited to, family, religion, language, and cultural background; media and technological influences; and peer and social group relationships. In sum, political socialization of youth is a complex process, but it is an important evolving process that must be dissected, for it offers insight of how future citizens are prepared for living and participating in a democracy.

Social studies teachers should recognize how social context molds young peoples' beliefs. For example, students' reasons in Colombia were influenced by past and current corruption activities, while students in Peru were impacted by income inequalities present in their community. Teachers should identify social and political factors that influence their students' beliefs. Moreover, within their classrooms, teachers have a pivotal role to play. As their students are being influenced by social context, teachers ought to offer opportunities for their students to increase awareness and practice agency to influence social context. To do this, teachers should provide opportunities for students to engage in educational practices (e.g., deliberation, perspective-taking) that may foster informed and participatory youth (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003; Parker & Hess, 2001). Through practicing these democratic activities at a young age, youth may learn how to act democratically as adults. Therefore, teachers have a role to play in preparing future generations to be knowledgeable, engaged citizens.

Conclusion

One assumption of this study is that it is worthwhile to investigate students' opinions toward complex political issues. Examining how youth perceive issues related to democracy and how their opinions are situated in context allows for greater understanding of the ways in which youth are politically socialized in complex, dynamic environments. This study paints a broad picture of how social context influences young peoples' political opinions across countries. Future comparison studies should further examine the multiple factors that shape youth political beliefs and how these beliefs are cultivated in context. This is especially pertinent in newer democracies throughout Latin America that are currently building and sustaining democratic institutions and processes.

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