

Bridge Toolkit • Webinar Series

Module 3: Designing Feasible & Equitable Policies

Educational Policy & Trade-offs

Presented by

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Educational policies and trade-offs

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Webinar Part 2



More skills, more qualifications

Equal opportunities to achieve skills and qualifications



Economic growth, low unemployment

Equal opportunities to find employment, education gaps in earnings



More democracy

Equal representation and participation

Educational policies and trade-offs between functions of education

	Qualification		Allocation		Socialisation	
	<i>efficiency</i>	<i>equality</i>	<i>efficiency</i>	<i>equality</i>	<i>efficiency</i>	<i>equality</i>
Selection tracking	A	B	G	H	M	N
Standardisation						
of input (curricula)	C	D	I	J	O	P
of output (centralized testing)						
Accountability						
Vocational orientation						
Relative size vocational sector in education	E	F	K	L	Q	R
Relative size of dual system						

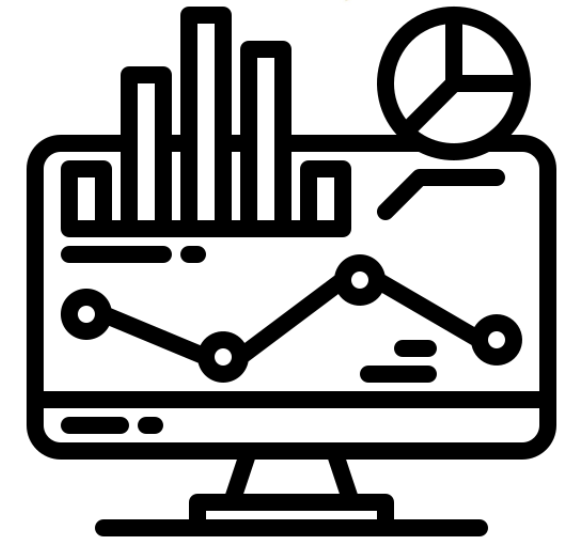
Differentiation policies

- Tracking (age, role of test score vs parental preferences)
- Occupationally specific education

Studying Trade-offs: setting the facts

- Educational differentiation policies and:

- 1. inequality of educational opportunity
- 2. labour market outcomes
- 3. civic and political engagement



→ The results translate into policy challenges if educational policies have mixed outcomes.

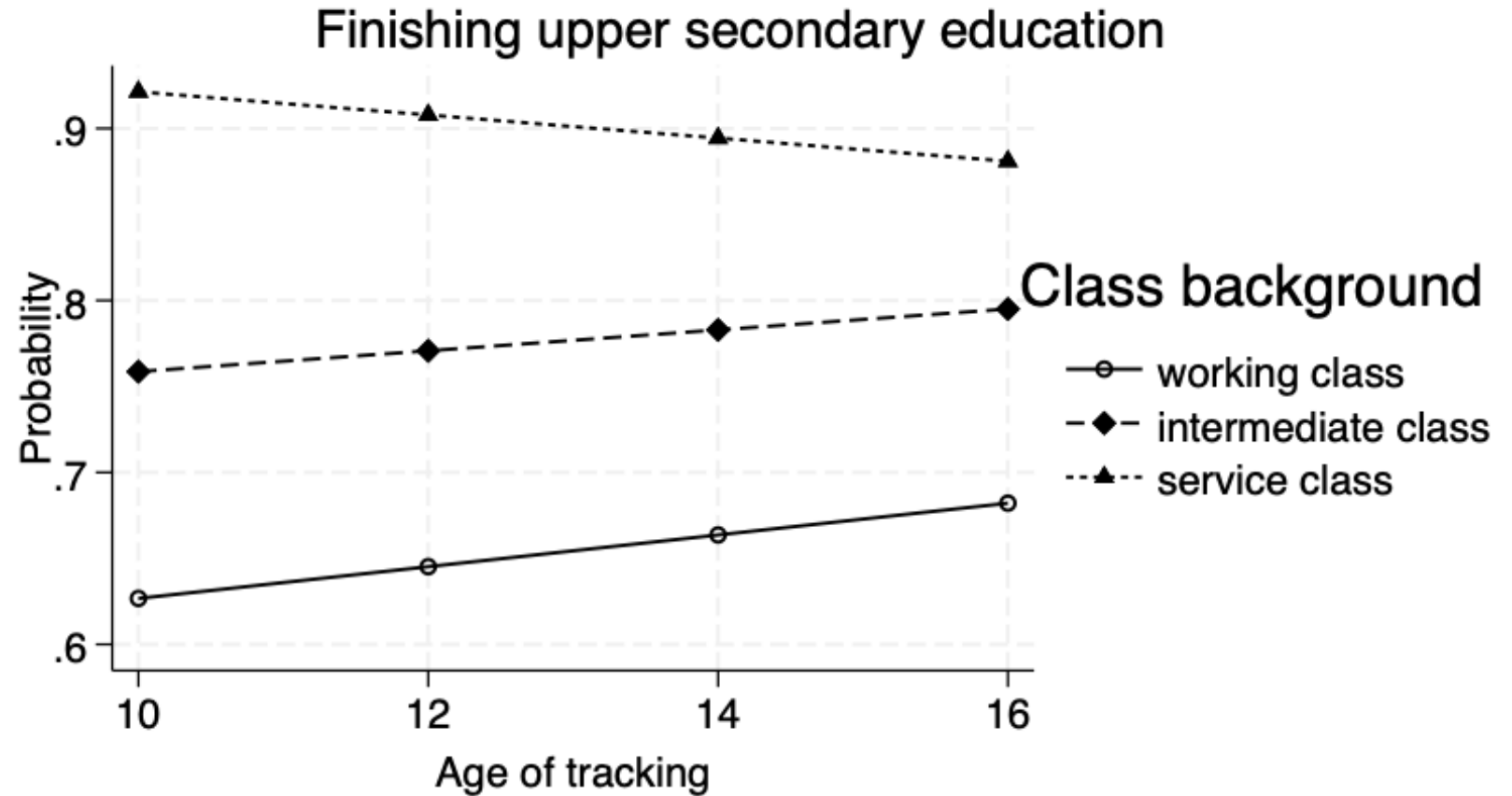
Early tracking and inequality of opportunity



- Comparing grade 4 and 15-year olds:
 - More rise in inequality in early-tracking systems.
 - Through sorting more than through cultural fit in schools

- Comparing before and after comprehensive school reforms:
 - Improved equality of opportunity
 - Because the working class improves, *and* the service class loses somewhat

Comprehensive school reforms have reduced socioeconomic inequalities in educational attainment in Europe



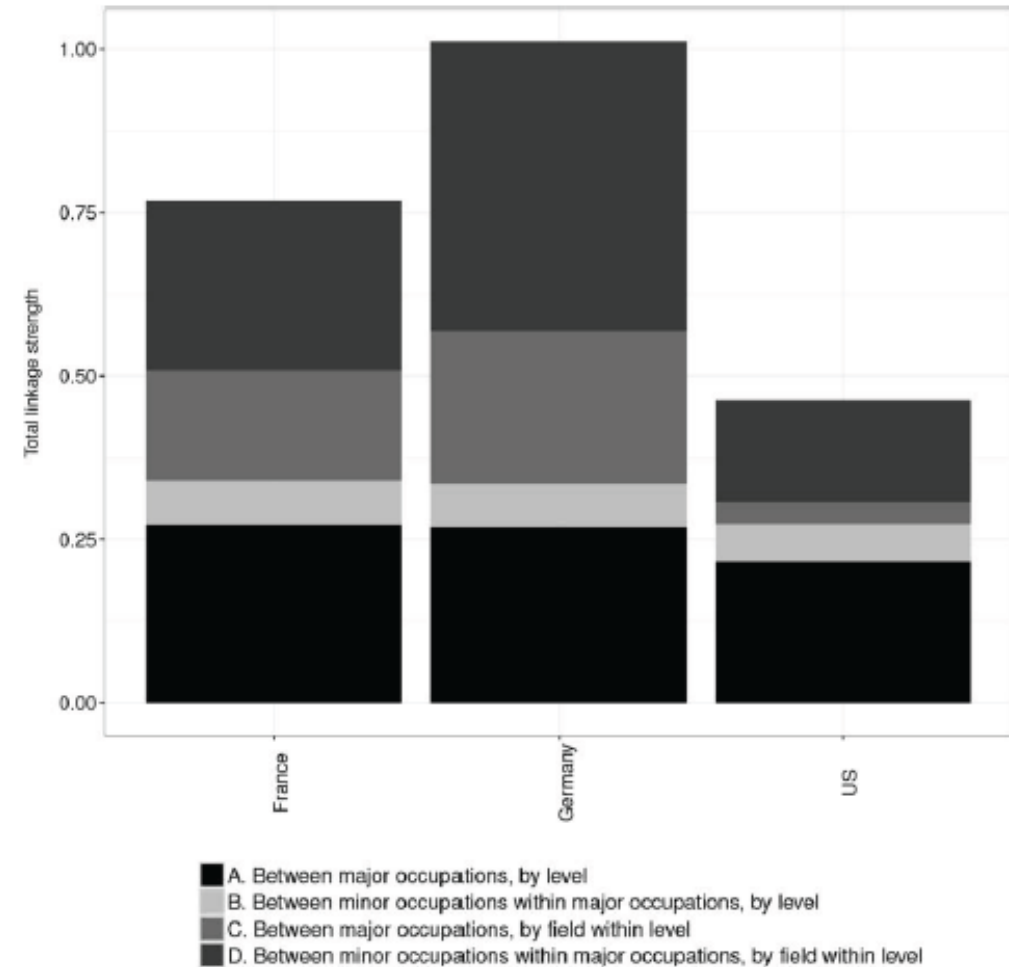
Note: Based on comprehensive school reform analysis on 21 European countries

Source: Van de Werfhorst, Herman G. 2019. "Early Tracking and Social Inequality in Educational Attainment: Educational Reforms in 21 European Countries." *American Journal of Education* 126(1):65-99. doi:[10.1086/705500](https://doi.org/10.1086/705500).

“School-to-Work Linkage”:
how strongly are
educational programmes in
a society sorting into
specific occupations?



Labour market outcomes



Source: DiPrete, Thomas A., Thijs Bol, Christina Ciocca Eller, and Herman G. van de Werfhorst. 2017. “School-to-Work Linkages in the United States, Germany, and France.” *American Journal of Sociology* 122(6):1869-1938. doi:[10.1086/691327](https://doi.org/10.1086/691327).

FIG. 1.—Total linkage strength of educational levels and fields of study in France, Germany, and the United States. Color version available as an online enhancement.

Also variation within countries

Source: Bol, Thijs, Christina Ciocca Eller, Herman G. van de Werfhorst, and Thomas A. DiPrete. 2019. "School-to-Work Linkages, Educational Mismatches, and Labor Market Outcomes." *American Sociological Review* 84(2):275-307. doi:[10.1177/0003122419836081](https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122419836081).



Figure 1. Linkage Strength in the United States, France, and Germany
Source: Enquête Emploi 2005 to 2011 for France; Microcensus 2006 for Germany; and the SIPP 2004, SIPP 2008, and American Community Survey 2009 for the United States.

And linkage pays off

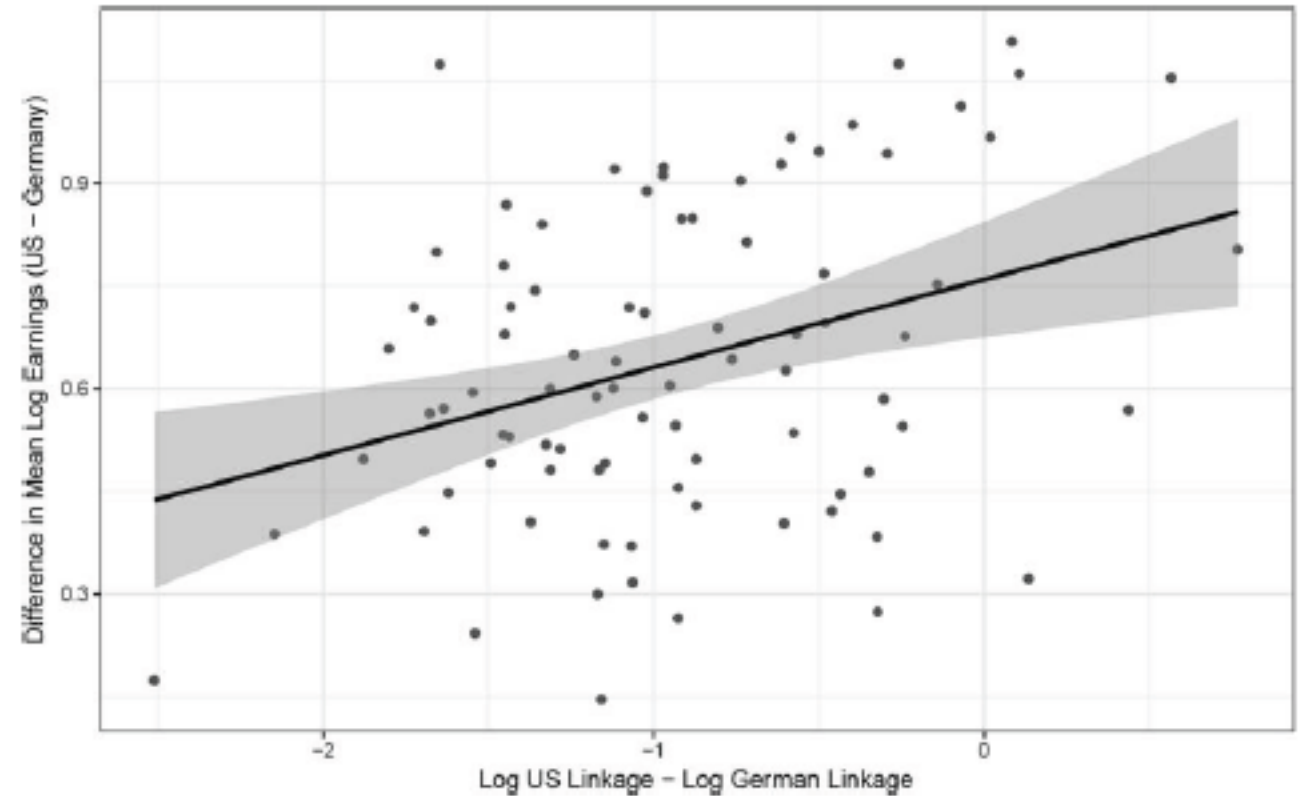


FIG. 7.—Occupational mean earnings difference between the United States and Germany by difference in linkage strength. Data are from the Mikrozensus. Observations are limited to occupations with at least 50 full-time worker respondents in both the United States and Germany. Color version available as an online enhancement.

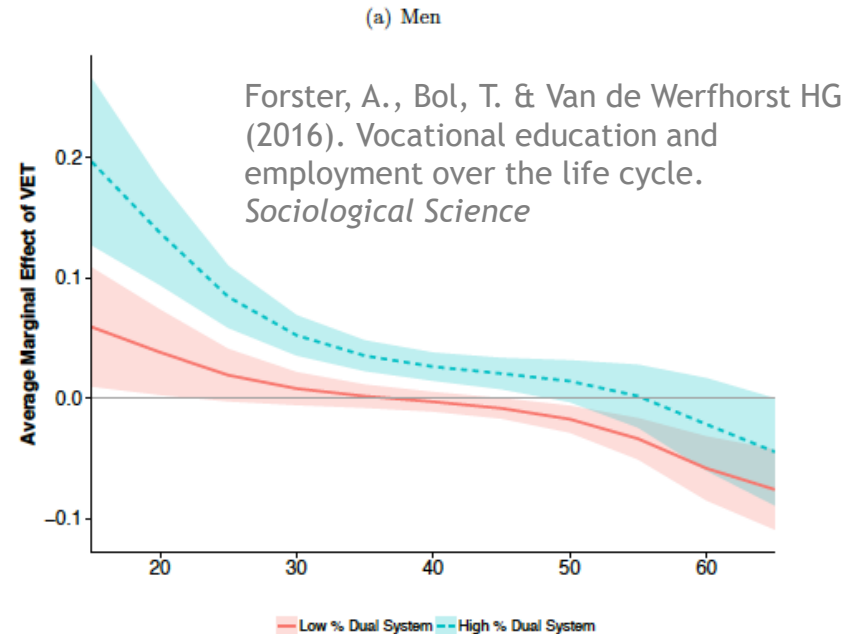
Vocational education and the life course?

- Do vocationally qualified lose their job first after age 50? Is a strong VET system harming older workers?

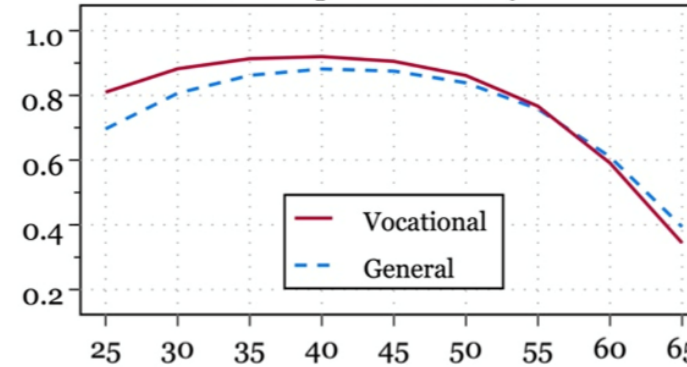
Vocational education and the life course



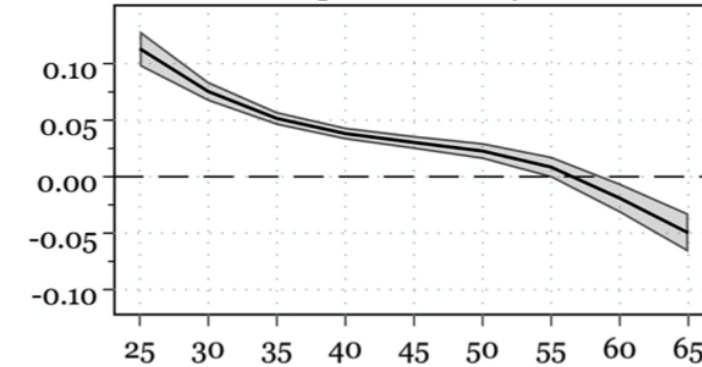
Figure 4: Average Marginal Effect of VET on Employment in Countries with Low and High Dual System Enrollment



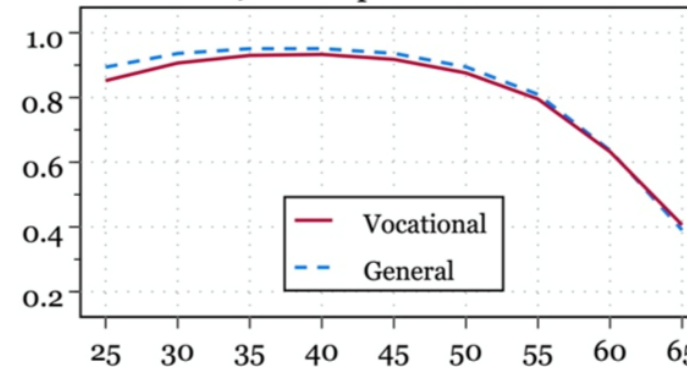
c) Profile plot - Germany



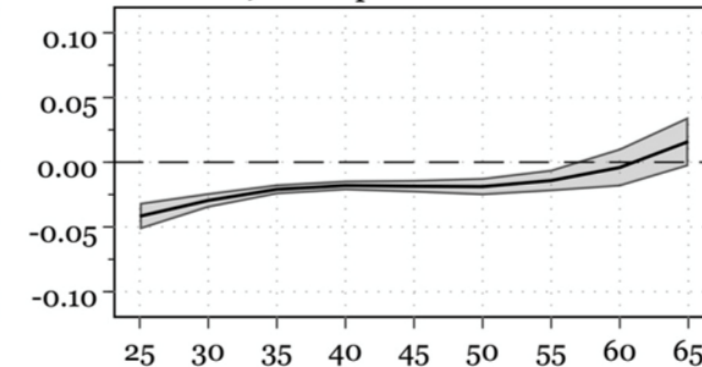
d) Effect plot - Germany



e) Profile plot - UK



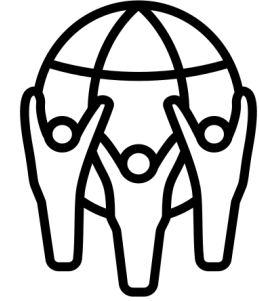
f) Effect plot - UK



Decker, Viktor. 2026. "Variation in Employment Inequality between Workers with Vocational and General Education over the Career." *Advances in Life Course Research* 67:100724. doi:[10.1016/j.alcr.2026.100724](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2026.100724).

Two cheers for vocational education

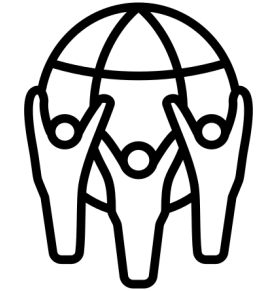
But not three...



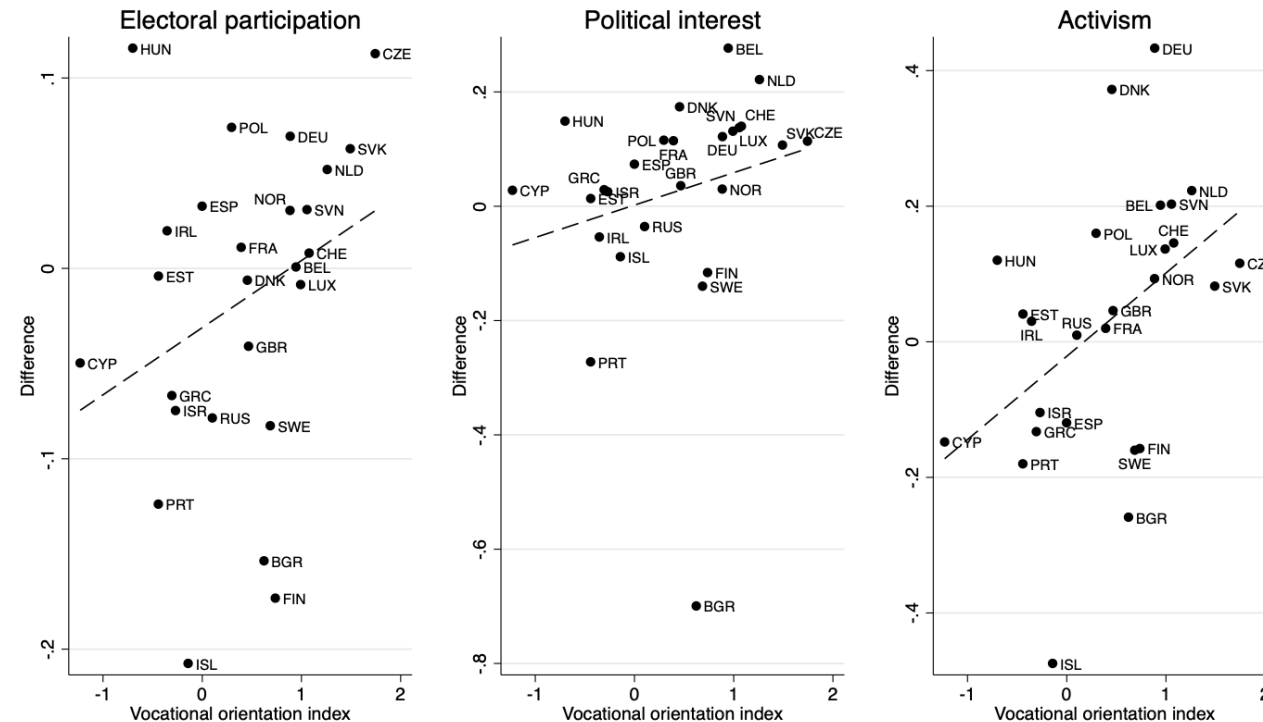
Civic and political engagement

- Educational differentiation and:
 - Education gaps across countries
 - Education gaps within countries between school tracks

Cross-national comparison: larger gaps in systems with strong VET system



Gap between general/academic and vocational education



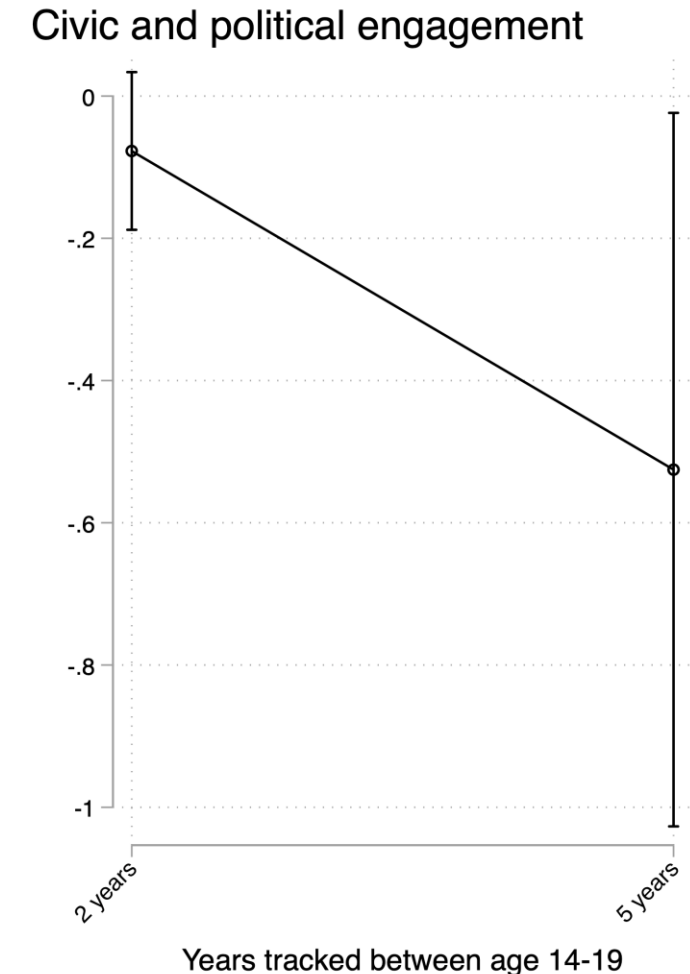
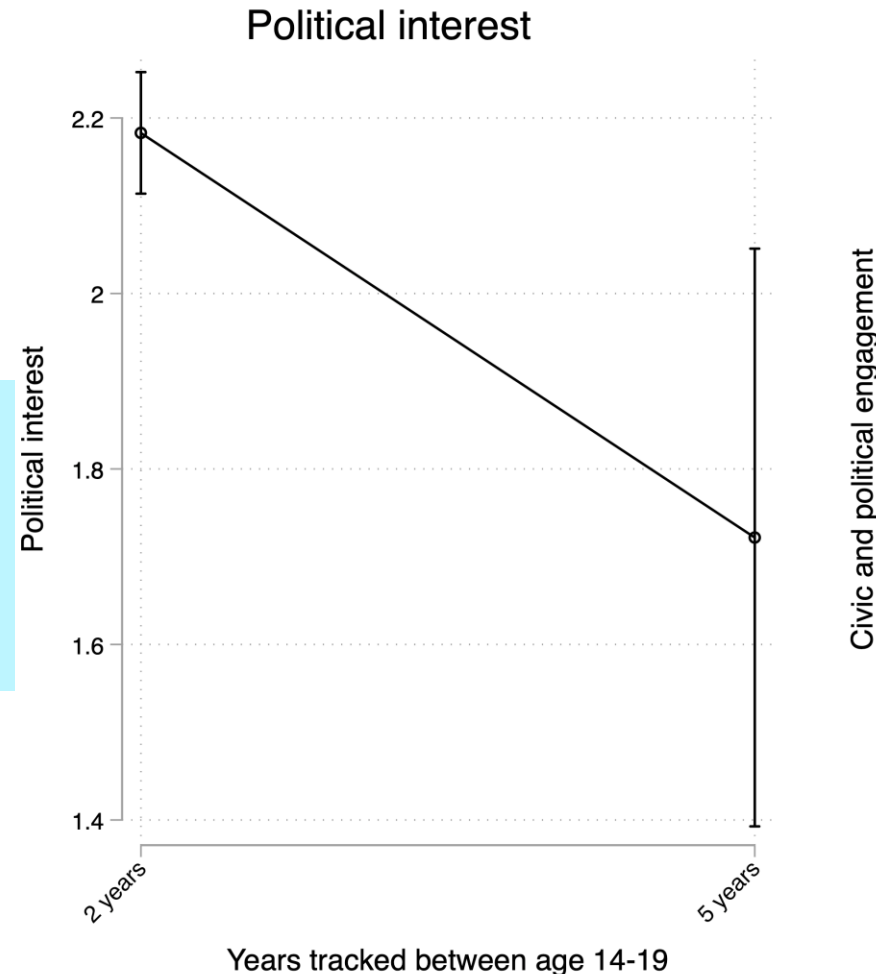
Source: ESS rounds 1-6

Source: van de Werfhorst, Herman G. 2017. "Vocational and Academic Education and Political Engagement: The Importance of the Educational Institutional Structure." *Comparative Education Review* 61(1):111-40. doi:[10.1086/689613](https://doi.org/10.1086/689613).

Comparing grade-8 with young adults

Also dynamically: strongly tracked educational systems associated with reduction in civic engagement in young adulthood.

Dif-in-dif at the country level, between grade 8 and young adulthood. 'Treatment': length of tracking in the system between ages 14-19.



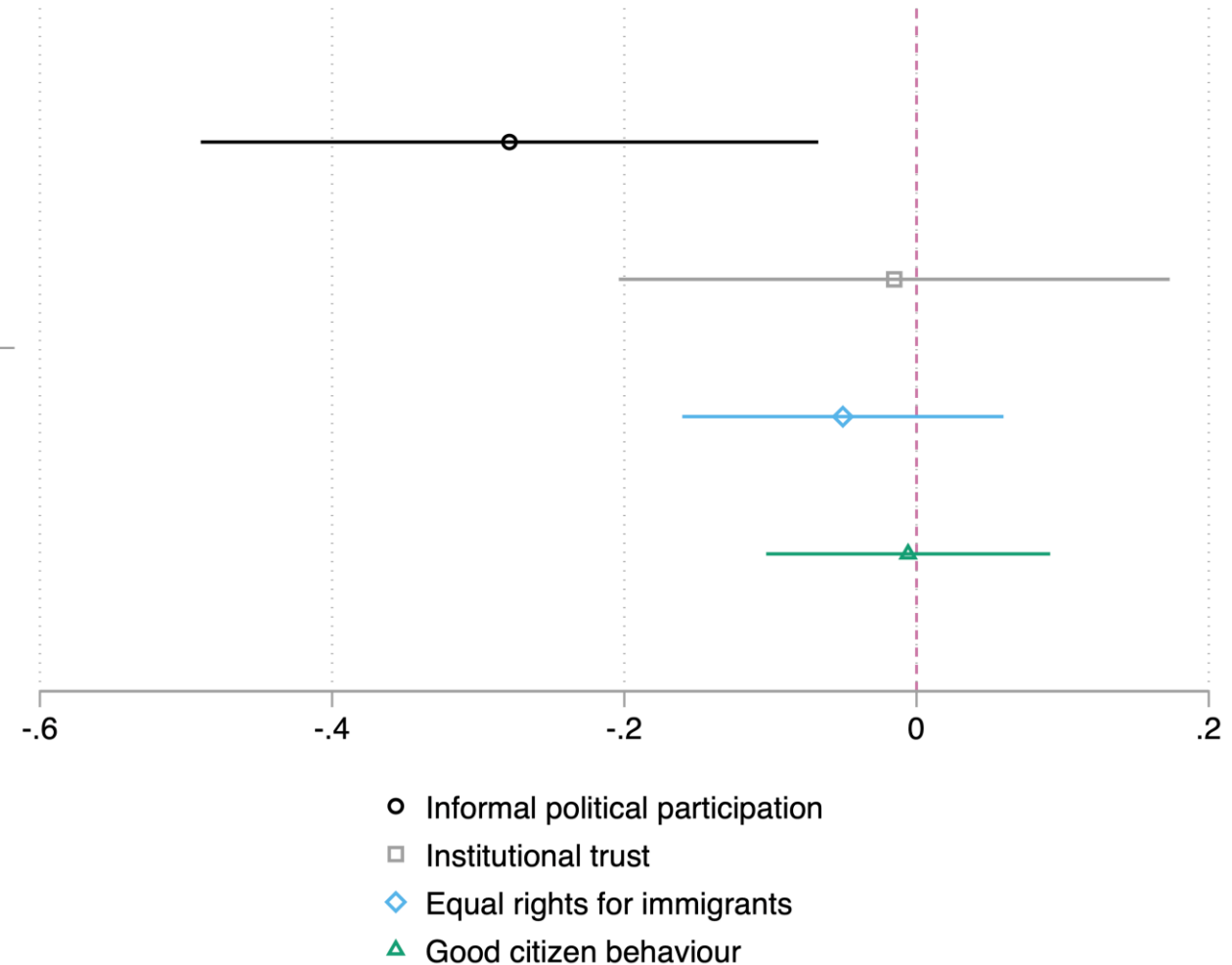
Source: CIVED, ISSP and ESS (18 countries). Two-way fixed effects models comparing grade-8 students with young adults in their 20s

Source: Witschge, J., & van de Werfhorst, H. G. (2020). Curricular tracking and civic and political engagement: Comparing adolescents and young adults across education systems. *Acta Sociologica*, 63(3), 284-302

Further comparative evidence (dif-in-dif)

In sum: larger gaps in strongly tracked and VET systems. Democratic inequality?

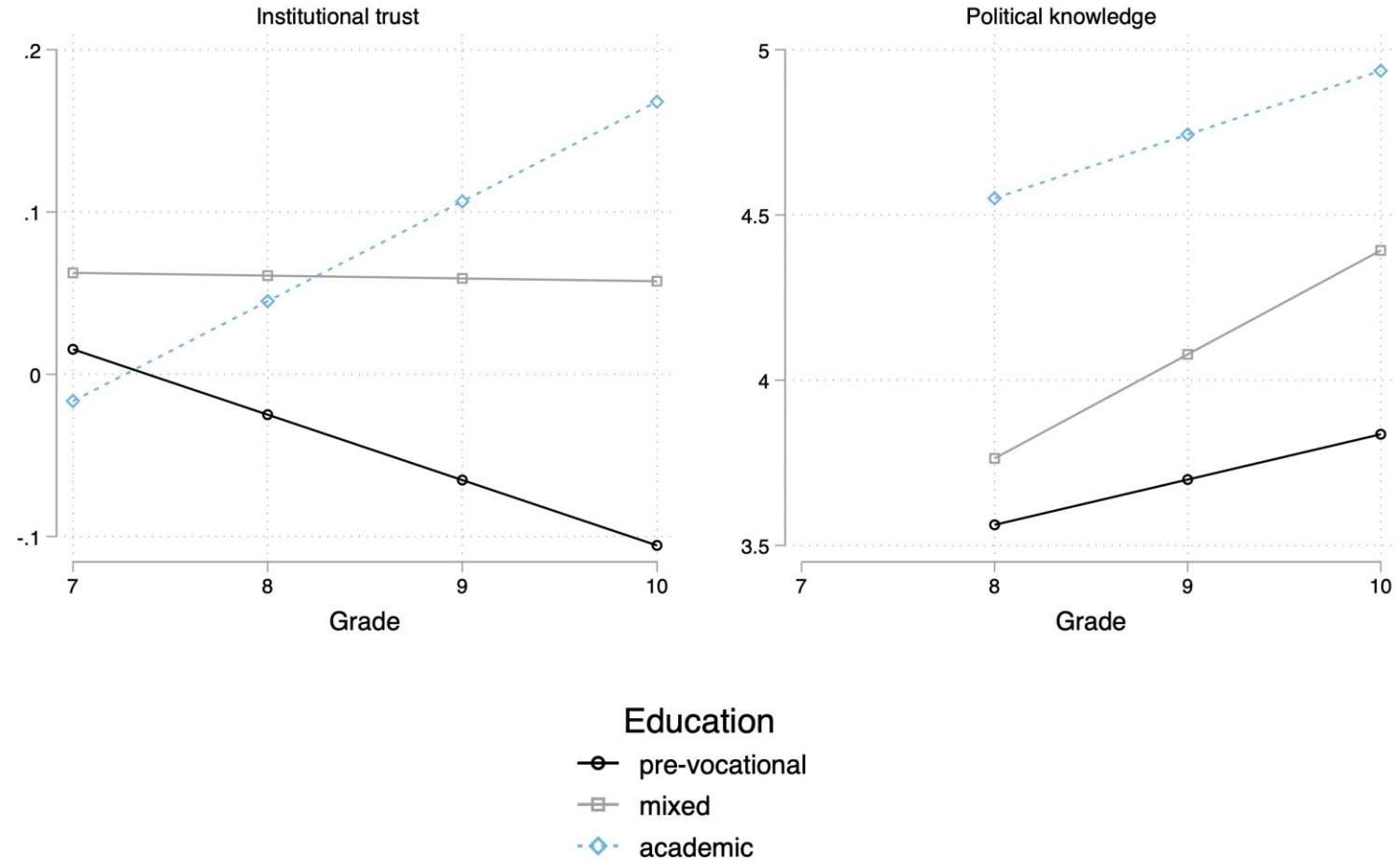
Effect per year of tracking –



Results from a country-level two-way fixed effects model comparing ICCS 2009 (grade 8) with young adults in ISSP or ESS.

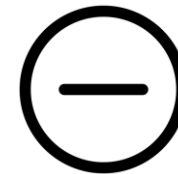
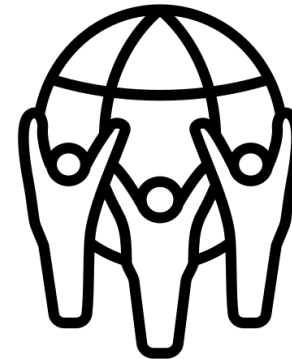
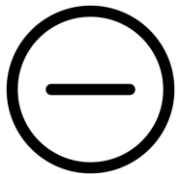
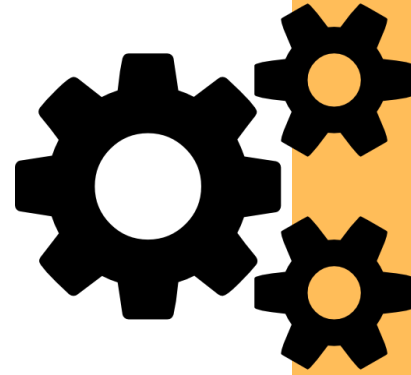
Trends across tracks within a country (NL)

Some evidence of growing gaps in institutional trust



controlled for gender, Mundlak SES, and migration background

Trade-offs in functions? How does educational differentiation fare?



Can we do it all? Three lessons

- Think of efficiency *and* equality
- Think of the economy *and* the civil society
- Understand trade-offs, and balance them in a well-informed way