

Socioeconomic position, mobility, and political participation among men and women 77+ in Sweden

A longitudinal study of education, income, social class, and voting.
Based on nationally representative sample of Swedes aged 77 years and older at follow-up.

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Introduction

- Political participation, e.g. voting, is important as it allows people to influence national/regional politics. From an egalitarian perspective it is desirable that everyone, irrespective of age, sex, socioeconomic position, and health, has the possibility to vote.
- The association between socioeconomic position and health and between socioeconomic position and life situation among elderly is well studied. Less is known about the association between socioeconomic position and political participation.
- We study the relationship between political participation, measured as voting, and three measures of socioeconomic position (social class based on occupation, years of education, and income), and how it varies with mobility (measured as the use of walking aids).

Data, measures and statistical analyses

Two nationally representative sample of Swedes aged 53 to 75 were interviewed in 1968 and 1981 respectively. Survivors from 1968 were again interviewed in 1992 (n = 461), survivors from 1981 in 2002 (n = 614). In 1968 the response rate was 88.2%, in 1981 76.2%, in 1992 95.3% and in 2002 it was 89.2%. (Additional information: www.sweold.se)

- **Voting:** Both 1992 and 2002 were election years in Sweden. A single item question regarding voting was posed – did you vote in the election?
 - **Socioeconomic position:** Measured as social class based on occupation, years of education, and log-income.
 - **Mobility:** Measured as walking aids outdoors was coded: 1) no aids; 2) some aids (cane(s), quadruped(s), crutch(es), walker); 3) wheelchair/never go out.
- Analyses:** Logistic regressions were used, controlling for sex, age, age-squared and cognition (mmse).

Table 1. Sample characteristics

Characteristic	Men		Women		Total
	Not voting	Voting	Not voting	Voting	
Walking aids, %					
0	33.3	65.7	36.0	51.6	54.2
1	44.4	29.9	42.1	40.2	36.8
2	22.2	4.4	21.9	8.2	9.0
Social class, %					
Manual	66.7	50.0	79.8	62.6	60.1
Lower non-manual	17.8	19.0	10.5	15.8	16.4
Higher non-manual	15.6	31.0	9.6	21.6	23.4
Years of education, (mean)	7.0	8.4	6.7	7.8	7.8
Yearly income, SEKt (mean)	74.8	136.3	30.3	49.0	80.2
Cognition (mean) ¹	6.5	8.2	6.7	8.1	7.9
Age (mean)	82.8	82.4	84.5	82.7	82.8
Number of observations	45	364	114	463	986

¹ Cognition, from mmse ranging 0-10 points: Registration and repeating three objects (1 point), orientation: (year/month/date/country) (0-4 points), delayed recall of three objects (0-3 points), subtracting 7 from 100 five times (0.4 points for each correct answer) (0-2 points).

Table 2. The relation between SEP and voting, controlled for cognition and use of walking aids

SEP measure	Men (n = 409)		Women (n= 577)	
	OR	P-value ²	OR	P-value ²
Social class¹	<i>Not controlled for cognition and use of walking aids (among all)</i>			
Lower non-manual	1.51	0.305	1.68	0.067
Higher non-manual	2.30	0.027	2.56	0.001
Social class¹	<i>Controlled for cognition and use of walking aids (among all)</i>			
Lower non-manual	1.30	0.555	1.91	0.066
Higher non-manual	2.13	0.095	2.54	0.008
Among persons with no walking aids³				
Lower non-manual	1.38	0.642	2.32	0.136
Higher non-manual	3.53	0.111	4.86	0.012
Among persons with some walking aids³				
Lower non-manual	1.38	0.647	2.70	0.090
Higher non-manual	1.46	0.546	5.55	0.023
Wheelchair/never goes out³				
Lower non-manual	1.05	0.966	0.52	0.448
Higher non-manual	2.06	0.582	0.27	0.072
Years of education	<i>Not controlled for cognition and use of walking aids (among all)</i>			
All	1.21	0.007	1.18	0.001
Years of education	<i>Controlled for cognition and use of walking aids (among all)</i>			
All	1.20	0.036	1.23	0.002
No walking aids ³	1.19	0.184	1.30	0.014
Some walking aids ³	1.23	0.123	1.22	0.068
Wheelchair/never goes out ³	1.13	0.599	1.08	0.577
Log income	<i>Not controlled for cognition and use of walking aids (among all)</i>			
All	2.03	0.001	1.71	0.001
Log income	<i>Controlled for cognition and use of walking aids (among all)</i>			
All	1.45	0.137	1.45	0.048
No walking aids ³	1.82	0.086	1.45	0.103
Some walking aids ³	1.05	0.884	2.00	0.006
Wheelchair/never goes out ³	2.76	0.059	0.62	0.169

¹ Reference category: Manual worker ² Results with p<0.100 in bold ³ Based on models including interaction terms

Key results

- Significant differences in voting were found for both sexes, for all measures of socioeconomic position when not controlling for mobility and cognition (Table 2) – people with a high socioeconomic position being more likely to have voted.
- The association between voting and socioeconomic position varied over mobility, but not systematically. Social class had had somewhat stronger association with voting among men without walking aids and among women without or with some aids (canes(s) quadruped(s), crutch(es) or walker). Among women that never go out or with wheelchair the likelihood for voting was lower in the higher social classes.
- Education had a somewhat stronger association among men and women using no or some walking aids.
- Income had the strongest association among men that never go out or with wheelchair and among women with some walking aids.

Conclusion

There are systematic socioeconomic differences in political participation measured by voting – people with a high socioeconomic position being more likely to have voted. There are however no systematic pattern in how the associations vary over mobility.



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