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**POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE OF YOUTH AND THEIR PRONENESS
TO PREJUDICE:
EMPIRICAL TEST OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECT VIA
RIGHT-WING AUTHORITARIANISM**

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Abstract:

In this paper, we explored how political knowledge related to generalised prejudice, defined as the common variance of three highly correlated specific prejudice concerning ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation. We aligned our hypotheses with the Cognitive Ability and Style to Evaluation (CASE) model by Dhont and Hodson (2014), which postulates the mechanism underlying the relationship between individual-level cognitive variables and intergroup outcomes. As knowledge in its many forms correlates with and serves as a proxy of cognitive abilities, we hypothesised that political knowledge, when considered a precursor of prejudice, can be expected to act similarly to cognitive variables within the CASE model. We performed an empirical test of the hypothesised relationships on a nationally representative sample of Croatian students in their final year of secondary education (aged 17-19). As expected, there was a significant negative association between political knowledge and generalised prejudice, both direct and indirect via right-wing authoritarianism. Youth with higher political knowledge had significantly lower levels of generalised prejudice. In addition, while there were differences in the overall levels of political knowledge, right-wing authoritarianism and generalised prejudice between students attending different secondary education programmes, the pattern of relationships between these concepts was found to be stable across educational settings.

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INTRODUCTION

There are number of strong arguments that can be used when advocating timely, quality and developmentally appropriate political socialisation of children and youth. One of them is the effect that political socialisation has on intergroup relations. This argument is becoming increasingly important due to globalisation and diversification of the modern world. Through socialisation processes, young people acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes which shape their understanding of and behaviour toward people from various groups.

In the present paper, we analyse if and how political knowledge of youth, as one of the indicators of youth political socialisation, relates to their proneness to prejudice toward different social groups. The focus is on generalised rather than specific prejudice, i.e. on the relation between political knowledge and the common variance of three specific types of prejudice directed toward unconventional and marginalised groups - ethnic, gender and sexual prejudice. We outline theoretical standpoints and empirical data regarding two broad questions: *'Does (political) knowledge predict intergroup attitudes?'* and *'What is the role of right-wing authoritarianism in the relationship between (political) knowledge and (generalised) prejudice?'*. An empirical test of the presented hypotheses is performed on the original data collected within a project on political literacy of a nationally representative sample of students in their final year of secondary education in Croatia. We also examine the role of the secondary education programme in the established relationships, acknowledging consistent differences in the level of political knowledge of students attending grammar, four-year vocational and three-year vocational programmes in Croatia (Bagić, 2011; Baketa et al., 2021), which is connected to their disproportionate exposure to relevant school subjects or otherwise taught content pertaining to humanities and social sciences¹.

Namely, education, as one of the most important socialising agents, has been heralded as a major force for tackling high levels of prejudice and intolerance, mainly through the transmission

¹ Grammar schools programmes in Croatia provide broad, general education and have four-year programmes. In addition to the general grammar school programme, there are, depending on the nature of the subjects that have increased teaching hours, four other types of grammar school programmes – language, classical, natural sciences and mathematics, and natural sciences programmes. Grammar schools programmes are seen as a basis for continuing education in higher education institutions. On the other hand, vocational programmes are focused on particular professions and are aimed at providing both competencies and formal qualifications for students to enter the labour market upon graduation. There are five- (medical schools only), four- and three-year vocational programmes in the Croatian secondary education system. For more details, please see: <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/croatia/upper-secondary-and-post-secondary-non-tertiary-education>

of democratic and liberal values. However, the educational effect is not clear-cut (Schaefer, 1996). For example, even though post-secondary education is key for reducing right-wing authoritarian attitudes (Carnevale et al., 2020), it is also related to higher ideological prejudice (Henry and Napier, 2017). Furthermore, the educational effect on prejudice depends on the country's democratic tradition, and it is higher in those countries with stronger tradition (Hello et al., 2002). Still, some studies show that there is an impact of secondary education on prejudice, more specifically, the impact of the type of school programme. In a longitudinal study with German secondary school students, Weber (2020) showed students of lower secondary school track (similar to vocational programmes) had higher levels of prejudice than those in higher track. This difference persisted from age 15 to 23, and even for those who, after finishing the lower track programme, enrolled in college. Similarly, Stubager (2008) showed that it is not only the length of education that impacts individual's values, but the educational milieu, particularly the difference between grammar and vocational programmes.

Thus, the present study explores individual-level aspects of political socialisation, but also their interaction with the most important meso-level socialising agent - school programme (Escuin Checa and Taylor, 2017). It follows the promising evidence denoting significant effect of the political socialisation on the development of right-wing authoritarianism and generalised (but not specific) prejudice of adolescents in Belgium (Meeusen and Dhont, 2015). Finally, it contributes to the field by examining the relationship between the concepts that were, to the best of our knowledge, previously unexamined within a single study – political knowledge, right-wing authoritarianism and generalised prejudice.

Does (political) knowledge predict intergroup attitudes?

Political knowledge, just like knowledge of any type, can be considered a cognitive variable. Hence, in developing our hypotheses we often resort to the theoretical basis and empirical data on the relationship of prejudice with other cognitive variables and its strong correlates (e.g. education). Knowing its cognitive base, it is not surprising that political knowledge is rarely explored in relation to prejudice. Namely, the interest in how one's cognitive abilities relate to prejudice has been perceived as controversial for many decades in prejudice research (Dhont and Hodson, 2014; Hodson, 2014; Onraet et al., 2015). When referring to cognitive base of intergroup

attitudes, scholars rather relied onto “less delicate” cognitive variables and its correlates, such as cognitive style (e.g. Dhont et al., 2011; Van Hiel et al., 2010) or education (e.g. Meeusen et al., 2013; Wodtke, 2012). Due to that, in the meta-analysis examining the association of cognitive style and cognitive abilities with different sociocultural beliefs, Van Hiel et al. (2010) used a broad array of cognitive variables, such as cognitive and integrative complexity, preference for complexity/simplicity, years of education etc. In a subsequent meta-analysis, different knowledge domains were taken as a proxy of cognitive abilities. The authors analysed the relationship of cognitive abilities and prejudice from 23 studies - 14 focused on specific prejudice, 9 on ethnocentrism or generalised prejudice (Onraet et al., 2015). Their conclusion was that lower cognitive abilities correlated with higher prejudice, with the average effect size of $-.19$. This parameter was stable across different indicators of cognitive abilities. However, significant difference in the effect size was observed for the type of prejudice, showing higher correlation between cognitive abilities and prejudice in studies using ethnocentrism or generalised prejudice measures ($-.28$) compared to those using specific prejudice measures ($-.16$; Onraet et al., 2015; see also Van Hiel et al., 2010). Newer evidence corroborated and extended these conclusions. For instance, Brandt and Crawford (2016) found negative correlations of verbal cognitive ability with sexual prejudice, anti-immigrant prejudice and anti-atheist prejudice, holding after accounting for gender, age, education, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. Along the same line, Wodtke (2016) found that individuals with higher verbal cognitive ability tend to express less negative racial prejudices, compared to their counterparts with lower verbal ability. To summarise, existing evidence consistently showed there is a negative, low to moderate association between prejudice and cognitive variables, including knowledge.

Political knowledge is intertwined with the concept of political sophistication, i.e. the complexity of cognitions regarding politics (Luskin, 1987, 1990). While political knowledge is conceptually at least a prerequisite for a more complex concept of political sophistication, in practice political knowledge is either equalised with sophistication or used as its empirical measure. The first theoretical account on the relationship between political sophistication and prejudice was put forward by Sidanius (1988). Specifically, Sidanius hypothesised that political sophistication should impact deviations from social norms in at least two ways. First, with more political information and knowledge, one should be aware of more evidence of one’s position, which should lead to less moderate and more clear and strong position regarding various issues. At the same time,

political sophisticates should have higher self-confidence and self-esteem, making them less likely to deviate from social norms, i.e. support racist policies (Federico and Sidanius, 2002; Sidanius and Lau, 1989). In other words, political sophisticates should hold strong anti-prejudice attitudes. Newer studies confirm these accounts. For example, Mansouri and Vergani (2018) found that higher levels of general political knowledge and specific knowledge about Islam were related to lower anti-Muslim prejudice and Coronel and Federmeier (2016) showed that political sophistication weakened the automatic responses to gender stereotypes. This relationship is also found in studies that focus on political tolerance, which is at times defined as a lack of prejudice and has been linked to empirical measures of prejudice (van der Noll et al., 2010; also see the discussion in Ng et al., 2021). Namely, Hall (2018) showed that even short lectures that increased individual's levels of political knowledge had positive impact on political tolerance and Golebiowska (2020) reported that, regardless of individual's educational level, higher cognitive sophistication was related to higher political tolerance.

The relationship between knowledge and prejudice can be considered within the propositions of the Cognitive Ability and Style to Evaluation (CASE) theoretical model (Dhont and Hodson, 2014: 457). In a nutshell, CASE model postulates the mechanism behind the relationship of individual-level cognitive variables and intergroup outcomes, by introducing several mediators of the relationship. According to the theoretical model, lower cognitive abilities and more rigid cognitive style (e.g. high need for structure, order and predictability) enhance the perception of changing social environment as threatening. This leads to the activation of the prevention focus, which is aimed at keeping the *status quo* and reducing the uncertainty and anxiety that individual feels. Perceived threat and prevention focus can further lead to right-wing, socially conservative attitudes that are related to resistance to change, and consequently, stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination (Dhont and Hodson, 2014).

Present paper hypotheses align with the theoretical assumptions of the CASE model, denoting that political knowledge (as a cognitive variable, antecedent) relates to prejudice (outcome), indirectly via right-wing authoritarianism (mediator). This is also in line with the literature that widely recognised the role of right-wing authoritarianism as intervening variable between prejudice and its distal predictors, such as personality traits and cognitive variables (Dhont and Hodson, 2014; Hodson and Busseri, 2012; Perry and Sibley, 2012; Sibley and Duckitt, 2010). The hypothesised causal sequence according to which cognitive abilities affect prejudice via

inclination to right-wing ideology is consistent with the findings of prior longitudinal studies (e.g. Deary et al., 2008; Hodson and Busseri, 2012; Schoon et al., 2010). In the next section, we outline the nature of right-wing authoritarianism and its role as prejudice precursor in more details.

What is the role of right-wing authoritarianism in the relationship between (political) knowledge and (generalised) prejudice?

An individual's inclination and adherence toward right-wing ideology is well captured by the classical Altemeyer's (1981) construct of right-wing authoritarianism, encompassing conventionality, authoritarian aggression and authoritarian submission. A person scoring high on measures of right-wing authoritarianism tends to hold traditional values and value morality, security, authority, order and control. This person can also be defensive, exhibit ethnocentrism and be malevolent toward outgroup members (Altemeyer, 1998; Duckitt, 2005; Whitley, 1999).

There is a negative association between right-wing authoritarianism and cognitive abilities. The average effect size obtained in meta-analysis is $-.30$ (Onraet et al., 2015; see also Choma and Hanoch, 2017; Van Hiel et al., 2010). Significantly higher correlations between cognitive abilities and right-wing ideological beliefs were found in studies with adolescents, compared to studies with children and adults. Furthermore, higher correlations were observed in studies that operationalised cognitive abilities as the domains of long-term memory, understanding-knowledge and writing and reading, rather than fluid abilities and short-term memory. Education, as a proxy of cognitive abilities, was found to negatively correlate with right-wing authoritarian tendencies and related phenomena (Bagić, 2011; Hello et al., 2006; Ostapczuk et al., 2009; Wodtke, 2012). Finally, political sophistication was also related to right-wing authoritarianism, with those higher in authoritarianism having lower factual political knowledge (Federico et al., 2009; Pavlović and Todosijević, 2017; Peterson et al., 2002).

Much in line with the CASE model theoretical predictions (Dhont and Hodson, 2014), the association between cognitive abilities and prejudice was often interpreted through one's adherence to conservative, right-wing ideology. According to this interpretation, people with lower cognitive abilities, worried that outgroups will cause the disintegration of the existing moral standards and traditions, might tend toward socially conservative right-wing ideology that strives to maintain the *status quo* in society and provide a sense of psychological stability, control and order.

Consequently, they might be more susceptible to prejudice development (Heaven et al., 2011; Hodson, 2014; Onraet et al., 2015). Conversely, people with higher cognitive abilities tend to form open, liberal attitudes and expose themselves to experiences that contribute to the suppression of prejudicial attitudes toward unconventional and marginalised targets (Carl, 2014, 2015; Deary et al., 2008; Schoon et al., 2010).

Hence, right-wing authoritarianism should predict prejudice toward groups that are seen as morally deviant and threatening to norms and values of the society (Duckitt and Sibley, 2007). Empirically, it is well documented that right-wing authoritarianism acts as a predictor of a wide range of socio-political, ideological and intergroup phenomena (e.g. Newheiser and Dovidio, 2016; Satherley and Sibley, 2016). According to Sibley and Duckitt’s (2008) meta-analysis, the bivariate correlation of right-wing authoritarianism and prejudice is .49. Therefore, right-wing authoritarianism can be regarded as one of the strongest predictors of prejudice from the individual differences domain (alongside the social dominance orientation, e.g. Asbrock et al., 2010).

As stated earlier, right-wing authoritarianism was often found to function as a mediator of the association of cognitive abilities and prejudice (e.g. Brandt and Crawford, 2016; Dhont and Hodson, 2014; Hodson and Busseri, 2012; Matic, 2018). For example, Hodson and Busseri (2012) found that the g factor of intelligence in childhood negatively correlated with racism in adulthood, with adherence to conservative ideology mediating majority of this effect. Same authors found negative correlation of abstract reasoning with prejudice toward homosexuals, partially mediated by right-wing authoritarianism. Nonetheless, many studies also captured the direct effect of cognitive abilities on prejudice (Brandt and Crawford, 2016; Deary et al., 2008; Hodson and Busseri, 2012; Matic, 2018; Schoon et al., 2010), besides the indirect effect via right-wing authoritarianism (and other mediators), which is in contrast with (to date under-examined, see Onraet et al., 2015) CASE model predictions.

To wrap up, in the present study we test the hypothesis that lower political knowledge of Croatian secondary education students is related to their higher proneness to prejudice. Due to non-consistency in earlier findings, we test both direct and indirect (via right-wing authoritarianism) effects underlying the association of political knowledge and generalised prejudice. As it was mentioned in the introduction, grammar and vocational school programmes in Croatia focus on different educational outcomes, and earlier studies found the consistent differences in students’ levels of political knowledge, authoritarianism, and prejudice based on the school programme

(Bagić, 2011; Baketa et al., 2021; Bovan and Širinić, 2016; Matić, 2018). While we expect to find similar differences in means in this study, we did not find theoretical arguments nor empirical studies that argue that the basic relationships within the CASE model will be different in various educational settings. However, we will use this opportunity to empirically test whether the hypothesised mediation of right-wing authoritarianism in the association between political knowledge and generalised prejudice is moderated by the school programme.

Finally, there are some important historical and political specificities of post-socialist Croatia where the data were derived (see Löw et al., 2022 for a brief explanation of the relevant socio-political context in contemporary Croatia). At the same time, the vast majority of knowledge in prejudice area comes from the prominent WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrial, Rich, and Democratic) countries, bringing into question the generalisability of it to East European and other under-researched contexts (see e.g. Sibley and Duckitt, 2008). However, it should be noted here that the conclusions of the related prejudice research conducted in Croatia so far (e.g. Matić, 2018; Matić et al., 2019) did not importantly deviate from the comparable findings in other contexts. Thus, we expect present paper findings to be largely generalisable to other contexts.

Goals, methods and the analytical plan

This study focused on two goals. First, we wanted to analyse the relationship between political knowledge, right-wing authoritarianism and generalised prejudice within a model specifying such causal sequence that is well founded in theory (Dhont and Hodson, 2014) and well established empirically (e.g. Deary et al., 2008; Hodson and Busseri, 2012; Schoon et al., 2010). We hypothesised that political knowledge will be negatively related to generalised prejudice, and that the relationship will be (at least partially) mediated by right-wing authoritarianism. Second, we wanted to explore if the established relationships are moderated by the school context, more specifically, by the secondary education programme that students are enrolled in.

To achieve these goals, we used the data from the project REMOVED FOR PEER REVIEW, exploring political knowledge of youth, but also their diverse socio-political attitudes. A stratified cluster sampling procedure was used based on geographical region and school programme, to acquire a nationally representative sample. Data were collected during school hours in March 2021, via an anonymous online survey, with a project associate present in the class during

the survey administration. The final sample consisted of 1122 students in their final year of secondary education (aged 17-19). Students were nested in 67 classes from 59 schools. A little over half of participants were male (52.2%), most of them were enrolled in four-year vocational programmes (47.2%), followed by grammar (29.7%) and three-year vocational programmes (23.3%). The participation was voluntary and all participants gave their consents for participation. In few cases, when schools insisted, parental consents for students' participation were also obtained, though in Croatia this is not mandatory for participants aged 17-19.

The questionnaire, which can be found in the online appendix², included items measuring political knowledge and various socio-political attitudes and behaviours. Political knowledge was measured with 19 items covering three broad topics – basic political concepts, Croatian constitution and political system, and everyday political information. All items had four responses with only one being correct. Examples include understanding of the division of powers in a democracy; what do liberal parties stand for; what is the political system in Croatia; which party currently holds the parliamentary majority etc. All other concepts were measured via five-point Likert scales (REMOVED FOR PEER REVIEW). Ethnic prejudice was measured with eight items; examples are “Ethnic Croatians should have more rights than other Croatian citizens” and “Croatian tradition is richer than traditions of other nations”. Gender prejudice was measured with six items; examples are “Men are the ones that should work and feed the family” and “We do not need more women at high power positions since their primary role is family care”. Sexual prejudice was measured with five items; examples are “Homosexuality is a form of disorder or disease” and “Homosexuals should not be allowed to work with children”. Finally, right-wing authoritarianism was measured with 16 items; examples are “What the majority supports is always right” and “One should not displease those in power”.

The analytical plan was the following. First, by using inter-item correlations and confirmatory factor analysis we checked the latent structure for individual measures. Second, via structural equation modelling, we checked the measurement model with all measures simultaneously. Next, we added the structural part of the model and compared the full and partial mediation models. Finally, we checked whether the school programme moderated the better fitting mediation model from the previous step. We did this by comparing the model that freely estimated

² Online appendix can be found at https://osf.io/nv5j3/?view_only=77245eb65f994b2594dd21195039daca.

regression coefficients in each school programme group and the one in which those coefficients were fixed to be equal.

Results³

The first step in the analysis was to evaluate the latent structures of individual measures. We checked the inter-item correlations for ethnic prejudice, gender prejudice, sexual prejudice and right-wing authoritarianism and removed several items from the further analysis because of their low correlations with other items. After that, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses for each scale (see Table 1). Data show that all scales have acceptable levels of reliability and fit indices⁴.

Table 1. Results of confirmatory factor analyses and descriptives

	N (items)	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Political knowledge	19	/	/	/	8.78	3.41	/
Ethnic prejudice	5	0.968	0.984	0.054	2.48	0.81	0.72
Gender prejudice	6	0.956	0.973	0.077	2.14	0.86	0.83
Sexual prejudice	5	0.984	0.992	0.067	2.83	1.23	0.89
Right-wing authoritarianism	5	0.979	0.989	0.038	2.5	0.72	0.68

Since school programme is a relevant variable in this research, descriptives based on school programme are shown in Table 2. There is a clear “effect” of school programme - students enrolled in grammar programmes had the highest levels of political knowledge and the lowest levels of ethnic prejudice, gender prejudice, sexual prejudice, and right-wing authoritarianism. Furthermore, students from three-year vocational programmes had lowest levels of political knowledge, and highest levels of specific prejudice and authoritarianism.

³ All analyses were performed using R (R Core Team, 2022). R notebook (which includes the code and all data from the analyses) can be found at https://osf.io/nv5j3/?view_only=77245eb65f994b2594dd21195039daca.

⁴ For all analyses in this article we report robust estimations of fit indices.

Table 2. Descriptives* across school programmes

	Grammar	Four-year vocational	Three-year vocational	Significant differences
Political knowledge	11.57 (3.03)	8.71 (2.88)	6.40 (2.42)	all
Ethnic prejudice	2.09 (0.76)	2.57 (0.77)	2.69 (0.78)	(1)-(2); (1)-(3)
Gender prejudice	1.74 (0.76)	2.14 (0.85)	2.48 (0.81)	all
Sexual prejudice	2.21 (1.08)	2.88 (1.26)	3.31 (1.06)	all
Right-wing authoritarianism	2.11 (0.64)	2.54 (0.67)	2.81 (0.67)	all

* Mean with standard deviation in parenthesis; significant differences are based on analyses of variance and post-hoc Tukey HSD tests ($p<0.05$)

Before testing the hypotheses, we needed to check the plausibility of generalised prejudice factor. To do so, we added ethnic prejudice, gender prejudice and sexual prejudice into a single model, within which we added the generalised prejudice second-order factor. Results point to a good model fit (TLI=0.956; CFI=0.963; RMSEA=0.056), and all first-order factors contributed significantly to generalised prejudice factor.

Next, we moved to testing the mediation hypothesis. On top of the second-order prejudice model, we added the structural part of full and partial mediation. As can be seen in Table 3, the chi-square difference between the two models was significant, which is expected due to large number of participants. Thus, we turned to the comparison of fit indices, particularly the Akaike information criterion (AIC) and Bayesian information criterion (BIC). Both indices were lower for the partial mediation model, which means that adding additional constraint (fixing the direct impact of political knowledge on generalised prejudice to zero) worsened the model fit.

Table 3. Comparison of partial and full mediation models

	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	AIC	BIC	Chi-square difference
Partial mediaton	0.940	0.947	0.045	69909.79	70153.64	67.349***
Full mediation	0.931	0.939	0.049	69979.98	70218.84	

Results of the partial mediation model (Figure 1) showed that political knowledge related both directly and indirectly⁵ to the generalised prejudice. The direct path (c) was significant, showing that an increase in political knowledge, regardless of the level of right-wing authoritarianism, is accompanied by a decrease of generalised prejudice level. At the same time, political knowledge was negatively related to authoritarianism (path a), while right-wing authoritarianism was positively related to generalised prejudice (path b), revealing the significant indirect effect of political knowledge to generalised prejudice, via right-wing authoritarianism.

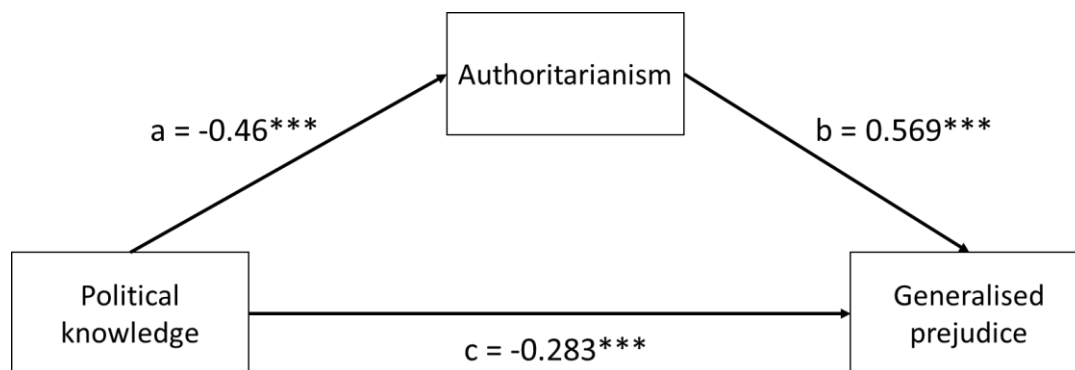


Figure 1. Partial mediation model (showing standardised estimates)

To test whether the school programme moderated the identified mediation, we first established scalar invariance for the first-order factors and metric invariance for the second-order factor. Then we compared two models. In the first model, we fixed the mediation coefficients (paths a, b, and c) between groups based on school programme. This effectively means that this model supposed there was no difference in the mediation model between school programmes, i.e., there

⁵ Both the indirect effect ($a*b$) and the total effect ($a*b+c$) were statistically significant.

was no moderation. In the second model, these coefficients were allowed to be estimated freely. As can be seen in Table 4, while the chi-square difference was statistically significant, fixing the coefficients slightly increased AIC, but more strongly lowered BIC. This implies that adding additional constraints improved the model fit, which means that the above-identified mediation was not moderated by school programme. In other words, the mediating role of right-wing authoritarianism in the relationship between political knowledge and generalised prejudice was stable across different school programmes.

Table 4. Comparison between models with and without moderation by school programme

	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	AIC	BIC	Chi-square difference
Fixed coefficients (no moderation)	0.925	0.929	0.048	71946.3	72794.86	14.38*
Free coefficients (moderation)	0.926	0.93	0.047	71940.73	72819.42	

Discussion and conclusion

The goal of this study was to explore the relationship between youth political knowledge, their levels of right-wing authoritarianism and generalised prejudice, pertaining to common variance of ethnic, gender and sexual prejudice. The hypothesis regarding the mediated nature of the political knowledge-generalised prejudice relationship was based on the CASE model (Dhont and Hodson, 2014). A test of the full CASE model was beyond the scope of the present study. However, we confirmed its basic assumption that lower cognitive abilities predict one’s inclination toward right-wing socio-cultural ideology, which in turn predicts prejudice. The latter was found for the previously understudied form of cognitive abilities - political knowledge, in a previously understudied population – secondary education students. However, along with the indirect effect of political knowledge on generalised prejudice via right-wing authoritarianism, we also found evidence for the direct effect. Though not postulated within the CASE model, direct effect of cognitive abilities on prejudice was observed in some earlier studies (e.g. Brandt and Crawford, 2016; Deary et al., 2008; Hodson and Busseri, 2012; Matić, 2018; Schoon et al., 2010). While previous studies have linked political sophistication, i.e. political knowledge, to prejudice (e.g.

Coronel and Federmeier, 2016; Sidanius, 1988), and to right-wing authoritarianism (e.g. Federico et al., 2009; Peterson et al., 2002), as far as we are aware the relationship between all three concepts has not been tested within a single study. In the present study, youth political knowledge was found to relate to their generalised prejudice level, both directly and indirectly via right-wing authoritarianism. The strength of the observed associations was comparable to that reported in the meta-analyses by Sibley and Duckitt (2008) and Onraet et al. (2015). Having in mind the causal order of the variables depicted in the CASE theoretical model (Dhont and Hodson, 2014: 457) and established in previous studies (Deary et al., 2008; Hodson and Busseri, 2012; Schoon et al., 2010), this suggests that increasing political knowledge and/or decreasing levels of right-wing authoritarianism should result with a decrease of generalised prejudice in youth. However, the present study is using the cross-sectional data, and because it is (as far as we know) the first to test the relationship between political knowledge, right-wing authoritarianism and generalised prejudice, a longitudinal verification of its findings would be advisable.

At this point, it is also important to emphasise that the present paper focused on generalised prejudice as a second-order factor that represents shared variance of specific prejudice toward unconventional and/or marginalised groups (ethnic, gender and sexual prejudice) and thus our findings might not generalise to other specific prejudice targets. Namely, new developments in the (generalised) prejudice field show that prejudice can be well explained by a worldview conflict hypothesis and that prejudice exists in different forms on the political left and right, but are directed toward different prejudice targets (Brandt and Crawford, 2020). Therefore, our findings indicating that lower political knowledge predicts higher prejudice, directly and via inclination to right-wing authoritarian ideology, can only hold if unconventional and/or marginalised groups are considered as prejudice targets. If, for example, generalised prejudice based on specific prejudice toward Christians, heterosexuals and men was in focus, these conclusions would probably not be equivalent.

Finally, we argued that education is one of the socialising forces through which prejudice and intolerance toward marginalised and unconventional (but also other) targets can be tackled. The mechanism for achieving this includes transmission of democratic and liberal values, and questioning the authoritarian and dominating tendencies (e.g. Carnevale et al., 2020). Though education effects on prejudice can be rather complex (see e.g. Guimond et al., 2003; Schaefer, 1996), there is a vast evidence showing that students from grammar school programmes are less

prejudiced than their peers from vocational programmes, especially three-year vocational programmes (Bagić, 2011; Bagić and Gvozdanović, 2015; Stubager, 2008; Weber, 2020). Our results are in line with these findings. Grammar school students had the highest levels of political knowledge and the lowest level of prejudice and right-wing authoritarianism, followed by four-year vocational students and three-year vocational students (for more details, see REMOVED FOR PEER REVIEW). However, since there is a lack of studies that explored the relationship between knowledge and prejudice in various educational milieus (school programmes), we checked the stability of the partial mediation in grammar, four-year and three-year vocational programmes. We found no difference in the relationship between political knowledge, right-wing authoritarianism and generalised prejudice between school programmes. This means that, while there are differences in the overall levels of these concepts between school programmes, the relationship among them is stable in various settings. Thus, it is safe to assume that the same interventions for reducing prejudice, e.g. through increasing political knowledge and promoting liberal values and reducing right-wing authoritarian tendencies, should work in diverse educational settings. The best way to do so should be through civic education programmes that can bolster both the factual levels of political knowledge and the non-authoritarian values. These programmes should be particularly helpful for students in vocational programmes, whose curricula generally lack humanities and social science content. Even more so they should be beneficial for three-year vocational programme students whose levels of political knowledge are the lowest and authoritarianism and prejudice toward marginalised and unconventional targets the highest in the secondary school students' body. Future studies should test these implications and evaluate the effects of the related interventions. Moreover, the developmental trajectories of students' prejudice related to secondary education programme exposure could be a promising avenue for future research.

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