Political Socialisation and the Making of Citizens

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Introduction

Observing the regularity and continuity of individuals' patterns of political behaviour over time, already in the 1950s scholars drew attention to the need of studying processes of early political socialisation. Hyman (1959, 25) defined political socialisation as an individual's "learning of social patterns corresponding to his societal position as mediated through various agencies of society". Socialisation is a process of largely informal learning that almost everyone experiences throughout their lives as a consequence of interactions with parents, family, friends, neighbours, peers, colleagues, etc. Merelman (1986: 279; emphasis not in original) further describes political socialisation as "the process by which people acquire relatively *enduring* orientations toward politics in general and toward their own political system".

Early life experiences are generally considered to form the basis for political attitudes (e.g. political values and identity), political engagement (e.g. political interest and political efficacy), and ultimately political behaviours (e.g. conventional and unconventional forms of political participation). Young citizens, it is believed, are not yet set in their political ways and are, subsequently, more easily influenced by external factors. Still, today, there is no agreement how enduring these early socialisation experiences are. Some argue for lifelong plasticity based on the idea that citizens update their preferences and behaviour as they go through the life span and experience important life events (Alwin and Krosnick, 1991). Others argue that basic orientations acquired early in life structure later political orientations and beliefs, and that these orientations and beliefs tend to be enduring and persistent (Easton and Dennis, 1969).

This chapter provides a comprehensive discussion of the scholarly debate on political socialisation posing a number of questions that arise in the study of political socialisation and the making of citizens. First, what is it about early life experiences that makes them matter for political attitudes, political engagement, and political behaviour? Second, what is the age that is crucial in the development of citizens' political outlook? Third, who and what influences political orientations and behaviour in early life and how are cohorts coloured by the nature of time when they come of age? Fourth, how do political preferences and behaviour develop after the impressionable years?

The first section of this chapter discusses the development of the field of political socialisation and its quest for the origin and the development of political preferences and behaviours. We address the impressionable years and the mechanisms behind the socialisation approach. Next, we discuss the influence of socialising agents. An important factor that has often been overlooked in the socialisation literature is how the political, economic and social context in which people grow up colours the political views of whole generations leading to potential societal changes. In connection to this we also discuss the idea of generational change. The third section describes the long-term dynamics of socialisation through an overview of the Age-Period-Cohort (APC) approach. In the final section, we provide an outlook of the theoretical and methodological challenges and opportunities for the study of political socialisation.

Political socialisation: history and key concepts

Early empirical socialisation studies mainly focused on political orientations and behaviours of young children, as it was believed that political attitudes were acquired very early in life (see for example Easton and Dennis, 1969). This early research was driven by two assumptions. First, it was assumed that what is learned earliest in life is most important, as early experiences serve as a value basis for future attitudes and behaviours (Niemi and Hepburn, 1995). Second, it was presumed that attitudes and behaviours acquired prior to adulthood remained unchanged in later life. A large volume of research on the formation of political attitudes and behaviour assessed these two assumptions (c.f. Dennis and McCrone, 1970; Jennings and Niemi, 1974; Sears and Valentino, 1997), and the classical example of an enduring attitude is the concept of party identification studied in detail in the seminal work 'The American Voter' by Campbell et al. (1960).

However, later research showed that the persistence of preferences and behaviours developed in early life had been overestimated (Searing, Wright and Rabinowitz, 1976), and it became evident that political ideas developed during childhood were revised later in life (Searing, Schwartz and Lind, 1973). In fact, a decade later Kinder and Sears (1985, 724) concluded that the more plausible view on the development of political preferences and behaviour is one that combines the impressionable years and persistence hypotheses with the

possibility of small but still noticeable levels of change in later life. The focus of scientific discussion at this point shifted from early political socialisation to more in-depth studies of ageing. Especially Marsh's (1971) critique of the early studies of political socialisation changed the understanding of "what, when and how people learn political behaviour and attitudes" (Hepburn, 1995, 5). Marsh challenged in particular the assumption that "adult opinions are in a large part the end product of political socialisation" (Marsh, 1971, 455). Such persistence, Marsh concluded, applies only to important personality variables, whereas the enduring nature of political attitudes remains uncertain.

Research accordingly shifted focus from attitude stability to the conceptualisation of socialisation as an individual political development and a process of learning. Party identification is a central concept in the study of political science and served as the main battle field for the advocates of different views. Party identification was originally conceptualised as an identity, i.e. something that could be developed without the cognitive skills to fully understand the political world. Later scholars proposed to think of partisanship less as an identity – being stable over the life-cycle – and more of an attitude that arises as a function of informed reactions to the performance of governments and opposition parties on a number of policy areas, most notably the economy (c.f. Ordeshook, 1976; Fiorina, 1981; Page and Jones, 1979; Franklin and Jackson, 1983; MacKuen, Erikson and Stimson, 1989). As governments and economic good times are never permanent, an individual's affiliation with a political party is always subject to 'rational updating'. Hence this research tries to uncover how the nature of the *current* time affects the direction and strength of certain political attitudes such as partisanship.

The focus on performance-based evaluations of government and their impact on party identification diminished the importance of early political socialisation. This explains why political socialisation disappeared from the academic agenda for a period of time between the 1970s and 1990s, before re-emerging as important and salient in the early 2000s.

The impressionable years: when and what

The general consensus after decades of research thus appears to be that political learning is a life-long process, starting at an early age (Easton and Dennis, 1969; Jennings and Niemi,

1981; van Deth et al., 2007). The 'impressionable or formative years' between childhood and adulthood are generally believed to be a crucial period during which citizens form the basis of political attitudes and behaviours (see e.g. Jennings, 1979; Strate et al., 1989; Highton and Wolfinger, 2001; Kinder, 2006). Young citizens have not yet developed political habits and are, therefore, more easily influenced by external factors (Alwin and Krosnick, 1991; Flanagan and Sherod, 1998; Sears and Levy, 2003). Personal, social, cultural, political, and historical changes affect young citizens disproportionally, thus creating generational differences in patterns of political attitudes and behaviour.

The crucial impressionable years are traditionally situated between the ages of 17 and 25 (Jennings and Niemi, 1981). For example, when examining macro-partisan trends among adults, Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson (2002) found that political events had the largest impact at age 18 and 19. Nonetheless, both a clear definition and operationalisation of the impressionable years are lacking, and political learning is certainly not confined to these adolescent and early adulthood years. Moving away from pre-defining the boundaries of the impressionable years, recent studies have found that children in their first year of primary school, who are not yet literate or numerate, can recognise political problems and issues, and already show consistent, structured political orientations (van Deth, Abendschön and Vollmar, 2011). Bartels and Jackman (2014) in their study of political learning, as expected, found evidence for a period of heightened sensitivity to political events during adolescence, but the peak period of sensitivity was found to be between the ages of 7 and 17. Ghitza and Gelman (N.d.), following up on the work by Bartels and Jackman, likewise present empirical estimates of the formative years. Based on their estimation the height of formative experiences is between the age of 14 and 24, with two peaks – one at 15-16 years and another at 21-22 years.

Recent research therefore suggests that children may be socialised into politics already at a very young age. This implies that the lower age band of the impressionable years should be brought down. At the same time there is also evidence that the period of political learning nowadays is extended. Research by Bhatti and Hansen (2012b), for example, suggests that turnout drops after the first voting experience at the age of 18 and that only by the age of 35 citizens bounce back to their first-time turnout levels. This can be linked to the

theoretical expectation that life-cycle events experienced during early adulthood influence the development of political interest and political participation (Neundorf, Smets and García Albacete, 2013). Delays in the transition to adulthood imply that defining the impressionable years too narrowly entails to miss out on a number of important life-cycle changes (Iacovou, 2002; Council of Europe, 2005; Smets, 2016). Boundaries of the impressionable years may, moreover, be context dependent.

How does socialisation work?

If political socialisation processes already start at a young age, what are the mechanisms through which children learn about politics? First, children learn directly or indirectly about social and political issues from different socialising agents. Such agencies can be diverse: family, peers, school, mass media, and even the political context. There is also a mobilising element to political socialisation as those around us can influence, encourage or discourage our behaviour. We will address these two mechanisms in more detail in the next section.

Thinking about the mechanism of political socialisation, let us make an analogy to describe the idea of socialisation to form relatively stable political preferences. Imagine that we have a finite bookshelf that holds our political values, identities and behaviour, which is empty when we are born. During our childhood and adolescence this shelf is slowly filled with stories that we receive from the various agents of socialisation and our own experiences. We learn about the political world and are exposed to (biased) information about political ideas. Each experience, conversation, and piece of information gets stored on our mental bookshelf. But at some point there is no more space on the shelf and we start to have pretty good ideas about politics and our own opinions. If asked what we think about a political issues or how we should behave politically, we go to our mental shelf and take the books that contain information and experiences related to this topic. The problem however is that as the shelf fills up, it is more and more difficult for new information to be considered, as this implies that old books need to be disregarded. New books might pile up somewhere on the floor, but they will not be stored as considerations in our set of beliefs and values. This idea of predispositions that are quite fundamental in a person's belief system and that come from socialisation processes goes back to the work of John Zaller (1992).

Another view-point on political socialisation is the idea of habit formation, a mechanism that has mostly been researched in relation to individual level voter turnout, i.e. a citizen's decision to vote or abstain in elections. In the political learning approach to political behaviour it is argued that citizens learn the habit of either voting or non-voting in the early stages of their adult life, and that past behaviour predicts present behaviour (Green and Shachar, 2000; Kanazawa, 2000; Bendor, Diermeier and Ting, 2003; Gerber, Green and Shachar, 2003; Aldrich, Montgomery and Wood, 2011; Dinas, 2012). Plutzer (2002, 44) explains the political learning perspective with the example of someone aged forty with a higher than average income. Based on this information we would expect this man or woman to have an above average level of political participation. What if a couple of years later the person loses his or her job and has to take on one that earns an average wage? Thinking of voting as a habit, a change in income is not likely to influence levels of political participation even though the possibility of disruptions in the habit of voting can never be completely be excluded (Plutzer, 2002; Strate et al., 1989).

The large impact of past turnout on current turnout decisions observed in the literature, is explained through various mechanisms (see e.g. Cutts, Fieldhouse and John, 2009; Aldrich, Montgomery and Wood, 2011; Dinas, 2012 for overviews). First, turnout is caused by a set of factors such as political interest or partisanship that are relatively stable over the life span (Prior, 2010; Neundorf, Smets and García Albacete, 2013). These factors may therefore influence the starting level of political participation (i.e. whether someone will vote at his or her first opportunity) but not so much the subsequent levels of political participation over the life span (Plutzer, 2002). Moreover, the act of voting is self-reinforcing as it increases positive attitudes towards voting and alters one's self-image to the extent that voting contributes to that image. Third, once voters have been to the polls they face lower information barriers and can make use of their hands-on experience and knowledge of the political system during subsequent elections. Despite a fair amount of empirical evidence of the existence of a habitual voting effect, the literature is not yet settled on the cause of repeated behaviour. Whether other forms of political behaviour are also habitual is also yet to be determined.

Socialisation agents: family, schools, and beyond

In the previous section we have addressed the importance of the impressionable years as well as the concepts of political learning and habit formation. The question we have not yet answered is who and what influences young people's political perceptions and behaviours during childhood, adolescence and early adulthood years. With political learning already taking place at a very young age, it comes as no surprise that much of the literature has focused on the influence that parents have on their children. Likewise the influence of education, or more specifically civic education has received ample attention in the literature. Some newer research also investigates the role of other socialisation agents: peers, (conventional and social) media, and even political events. Socialising agents either directly or indirectly teach children about politics, but also have a mobilising function as they influence, encourage or discourage young people's political preferences and political action.

Parents as socialisation agents

Scholars have emphasised the impact of the family as one of the main socialisation agents in the transmission of basic political orientations (Dalton, 1980; Jennings and Niemi, 1968, 1981; Jennings, Stoker and Bowers, 2009). The determinant influence of parental socialisation has mostly been stressed in conjunction with the development of party identification (Taylor, Peplau and Sears, 1994; Campbell et al., 1960; Jennings and Niemi, 1974; Kroh and Selb, 2009), political ideology (Percheron and Jennings, 1981) and political participation (Beck and Jennings, 1982; Verba, Schlozman and Burns, 2005).

Parents are considered to influence the development of their children's political orientations in at least two ways. First, parents influence their children's levels of political awareness through the explicit political characteristics of family life (Jennings and Niemi, 1968; Beck and Jennings, 1982). Highly politicised parents may foster positive civic orientations that stimulate engagement in politics (Beck and Jennings, 1982, 98). Moreover, Jennings, Stoker and Bowers (2009) offer evidence that successful parent-child transmissions occur more often when the family environment is more politicised, arguing that in this case parents provide consistent signals about where they stand politically. The presence of role models, parents in particular,

may lead to imitation and subsequently even adoption of behaviours and attitudes (see e.g. Kandel and Andrews (1987) and Dryer (1998) for more on imitation and socialisation).

The second way in which parents influence their children is through parental socio-economic status (SES). Parental socio-economic status can contribute to political involvement due to a direct effect on children's socio-economic status. Parents with higher socio-economic statuses have children that are more likely to have high levels of education. Children's levels of education, in turn, influence levels of political interest and knowledge. Parental SES, moreover, can contribute to the development of class-specific political orientations as well as encourage civic attitudes and involvement (Beck and Jennings, 1982, 96-97; Verba, Schlozman and Burns, 2005, 97; Jennings, Stoker and Bowers, 2009, 790).

However, Westholm (1999) shows that parent-child socialisation is not just a two-step process whereby the child creates an image of where parents stand politically and subsequently adapt their own behaviour and thinking to this. Instead, the image that children have of their parents' political view serves as and intervening rather than as a conditioning factor. Moreover, the relationship between children's own views and the image they have of their parents' views is reciprocal. Substituting children's image of their parents' views for actual parent data, obscures some of the socialisation mechanisms Westholm (1999, 542, 548), thus, warns that the use of children's subjective images of their parents' political views should be avoided in favour of studies based on multiple sources of parental political preferences (i.e. using both children and parents as sources).

Newer research on the influence of parents on their offspring has challenged the idea that children to a large extent adopt the views of their parents. Dinas (2014) shows that parent-child correspondence in party identification is dependent on parental politicisation. Those with politically interested and involved parents are indeed most likely to adopt their parents' party identification as adolescents, but also more likely to revise their party affiliation in (early) adulthood as 'those who are politically engaged are most likely to be exposed to new political stimuli in early adulthood' (Dinas, 2014, 827). Also researching the imperfections of parental transmissions, Wolak (2009) found both the personality of adolescents and their wider political environment to mediate parent-child transmission in party identification. Like Dinas, Wolak (2009, 581) finds that amore inquisitive adolescents and those who are more

attentive to political news, tend to have more volatile party preferences and thus are more likely to challenge their parents' political views.

The influence of school

Besides parent-child transmission of political attitudes and behaviours, the influence of school on the development of political engagement has been the attention of much research. Education itself is highly correlated with political knowledge, interest, voter turnout, and other forms of political participation. Yet it has been repeatedly suggested that this connection might exist largely because education serves as a proxy for social class or cognitive ability, or that education simply serves as a sorting mechanism that divides the population into higher and lower statuses (Nie, Junn and Stehlik-Barry, 1996; Denny and Doyle, 2008; Campbell, 2009). These and similar questions about the effects of education mean, in David Campbell's words, that 'we know relatively little about the civic development of adolescents. Specifically, we have a limited understanding of how schools do, or do not, foster political engagement among their adolescent students' (Campbell, 2009, 438).

With respect to the influence of civic education, the uncertainty is even greater. For a long time, it was argued that civic education and the curriculum more broadly had almost no influence at all on students' attitudes (Langton and Jennings, 1968). That proposition has been under fire for almost two decades now (Niemi and Junn, 1998; Nie and Hillygus, 2001). Still, the precise way in which schooling influences students is unclear. One possibility is that civics instruction itself – the classes students take that teach about one's government and one's role as a citizen – is the causal agent. Even then, the influence may stem from specific features of the class: whether it consists mostly of lectures, incorporates class discussions, involves students in group projects, and so on. Another possibility, which has found support from a major cross-national study, is that the climate of the classroom – how free students feel to express their opinions and have them discussed and respected – underlies student attitudes, political engagement, and even political knowledge (Torney-Purta, 2002). Community service, which may or may not be a part of formal classroom instruction, is yet another factor that may influence youths' feelings and actions about civic and political participation (Finlay, Wray-Lake and Flanagan, 2010).

The role of civic education on mobilisation and political participation has not only been explored in Western democracies. Based on research in the Dominican Republic and South Africa, Finkel (2002) finds that civic education also mobilises citizens in developing democracies, but that the impact depends on citizens' levels of political resources. Civic education and other mobilising processes are complimentary, which implies that civic education alone cannot overcome the unequal distribution of politically relevant resources in developing democracies.

More recent work on civic education has attempted to gauge the relative influence of multiple socialising agents. For example, in a recent paper Neundorf, Niemi and Smets (2016) study the combined effect of parental socialisation and civic education. As we have discussed above, the political environment at the parental home has a strong impact on the political development of children. However, many young people do not come from political families and hence are disadvantaged in developing political preferences and getting mobilised into politics. Neundorf, Niemi and Smets (2016) hence investigate whether civic education in school can compensate for missing parental socialisation. Their findings are based on panel data and suggest that civics training in schools indeed compensates for inequalities in family socialisation with respect to political engagement. This conclusion holds for two very different countries (the US and Belgium), at very different points in time (the 1960s and the 2000s), and for a varying length of observation (youth to old age and impressionable years only).

Peers and (social) media

School is one of the first environments where children get in touch with other people that are not parents, siblings or other family members. Not only are children mobilised by their peers, they also discuss socio-political issues together, share popular cultures, and develop (common or opposing) sets of values (Langton, 1967; Tedin, 1980). Peer groups also introduce social norms, and being part of a social network, moreover, establishes useful democratic and economic principles such as exchanges of goods, services, and information (Cochran and Brassard, 1979).

Peer cultures are also transmitted via (social) media. Wattenberg (2008) argues, that media nowaday socialise young people in a different way than they did previous generations. Commercialisation of the media has had consequences for both the content and form of all

items broadcasted. As a consequence, young people are less likely to be exposed to political information and more likely to be exposed to entertainment (see also Prior, 2005). This, in turn, has led to a growing disinterest in politics as well as lower levels of political knowledge among young people.

Of course, nowadays citizens spend an increasingly larger portion of their time online. One of the questions that has garnered a lot of scholarly interest is whether such new media forms foster interaction with people with different views, or rather tend to be echo chambers where citizens interact with like-minded people only. Work on the mobilising effects of new social media shows that these networks tend to be homophilic and that citizens mostly interact with people that have similar ideological preferences and political views (Barberá et al., 2015). These findings open up avenues for new ways of using big data collected through social media websites. For example, Barberá (2015) shows how social network activity – such as e.g. the use of Twitter – can be used to estimate citizen's ideological positions.

Political events

The political context in which citizens grow up has often been overlooked as a socialising agent. In his contribution on turnout in established democracies and the learning effect of voting, Mark Franklin argues that the way in which young voters react to the character of an election is crucial to this incoming cohort's future turnout levels (Franklin, 2004, 65). Short-term characteristics of elections influence younger citizens' turnout decisions but have much less impact on the decisions of older voters who have already established a habit of voting or abstaining (Franklin, 2004, 80). Electoral competition is especially important in this respect.

As Smets and Neundorf (2014) demonstrate, high stake elections tend to attract more voters than elections where the outcome already is a foregone conclusion. This mobilisation effect is strongest for young voters. Cohorts that grew up in a highly-politicised context have a higher propensity to turn out to vote in later life. However, using data from the US General Social Survey, they show that those coming of age in a highly polarised political context are less likely to vote in later life. In a two-party system like the United States large ideological distances may imply that voters have to choose between two parties that do not represent their views (Fiorina, Abrams and Pope, 2004). This is especially the case for voters

placing themselves in the center (Callander and Wilson, 2007). Hence, in the US setting, large ideological distances are more likely to have a negative effect on individual level turnout.

Schuman and Corning research the impact of critical periods that occur in the lives of citizens from adolescence onwards, and show that the experience of a transformative event during the critical years of later childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood as well as the experience of an event after the critical years can contribute to generation-defining memories (Schuman and Corning, 2012, 25). The role of political context in political socialisation is certainly not confined to the role of elections and electoral behaviour. Dinas (2013), for example, shows how the Watergate scandal affected young people's (negative) evaluations of President Nixon disproportionally. Another example by Erickson and Stoker (2011) demonstrates how the Vietnam war impacted political attitudes related to partisanship and international intervention among young Americans affected by the draft, a selective service system held by the US military in 1969 and 1971. The idea of critical events influencing behaviour has also been addressed outside the realm of political science. Malmendier and Nagel (2011), for example, show that experiencing macro-economic shocks leads to lower levels of financial risk-taking in later life.

The dynamics of socialisation: age, period and cohorts

In the previous sections we have mainly focused on the impressionable years and what triggers political learning in early life. Another key question is whether early socialisation experiences persist in later life or whether they are over-written and updated by newer experiences? For this we turn to the dynamics of socialisation through a discussion of age, period and cohort (APC) effects.

Defining age, period and cohort effects

Research into the question how an individual develops specific political attitudes or behaviours will usually hold three different – but highly-related – factors accountable: ageing, enduring intercohort experiences, and time. The idea behind the *life-cycle or age approach* is that people's patterns of political behaviour change as they age and that the relationship between

age and political behaviour is curvilinear: people are most active in middle life and least active in the earliest and latest stages of the life-cycle. While the curvilinear relationship with age does not seem to hold for all modes of political participation (see e.g. Stolle and Hooghe, 2011), there is ample of evidence that the relationship between age and voter turnout can indeed be described with an inverted U-shape. It is, however, not the number of candles on one's birthday cake, but the life experiences that accompany the transition to different life stages, that matter for political participation.

According to the life-cycle argument, young people participate less in politics given their low attachment to civic life: a characteristic that is fuelled by young people still going through education, being occupied with finding a partner, establishing a career, having higher mobility, dealing with the psychological transformation into adulthood, etc. These characteristics lead young people to be politically inexperienced and to have little interest in politics, low levels of knowledge and fewer skills (i.e. to have few political resources). This, in turn, makes political participation both more difficult and less meaningful in this first stage of the life-cycle (Strate et al., 1989; Jankowski and Strate, 1995).

In middle life, participation rates are thought to stabilise at a higher level as people experience life-cycle events that mark the transition to adulthood. Such events include leaving the parental home, starting a full-time job, cohabiting or getting married, buying a house, starting a family, settling down in a community, etc (Vogel, 2001; Billari, 2005). Even though many of these processes put a demand on time, they are associated with activities (involvement in organisations, associations, the community, etc.) that tend to enhance political participation due to increased mobilisation, skills, and pressure (Strate et al., 1989, 444, Lane, 1959, 218, Kinder, 2006). As stakeholders, home owners are more likely to be interested in property tax and mortgages. To those with (full time) jobs issues such as pensions and income tax become relevant (Flanagan et al., 2012). As a result the transition to adulthood increases attention to and familiarity with parties' and candidates positions, which in turn fosters party attachment and other forms of political engagement. All in all, the middle-aged seem to have the best cards to understand politics and their part in it (Jankowski and Strate, 1995, 91), which is most likely the reason why this stage of the political life-cycle is often used as a base against

which to compare the political participation levels of younger and older citizens (Braungart and Braungart, 1986, 210).

Participation rates among older age groups, finally, tend to drop under the influence of, for example, health problems, the loss of a politically active spouse, retirement, and declining family income. Summarising, it is the more general disengagement from social life that leads to a lower attachment to political life (Cutler and Bengtson, 1974, 163).

Focusing on individuals' life experiences, the political life-cycle or age approach neglects the fact that social, cultural and historical events can impact political attitudes and political participation as well. This is how the cohort or generation approach entered the spotlight of socialisation research. Common within these cohort and generation approaches is the idea that it is not so much the dynamics of biological ageing that make one grow into political life, but that social, cultural and historical factors shape the political participatory patterns of a cohort or generation (De Graaf, 1999; Braungart and Braungart, 1986). Historical differences and social change are, thus, considered to be the driving factors behind age differences in political preferences and behaviour.

The resulting *cohort effects* or, as they are sometimes called, *generation effects* are defined to be "enduring intercohort distinctions that are attributable to the common 'imprinting' of cohort members. With regard to attitudinal dependent variables, generation effects are often presumed to be the result of cohort members having shared similar socialising experiences, especially during late adolescence and early adulthood" (Markus 1983, 718; c.f. Mannheim 1952; Ryder 1965).

A cohort is very generally defined as a "number of individuals who have some characteristics in common" (Glenn, 2005, 2). This common characteristic is often the year of birth. Usually cohorts are divided into equal time periods (e.g. five year or ten year birth year periods), whereby the span of years for each cohort may be dictated by theoretical concerns or by data constraints. But cohorts may also be defined with reference to other variables of interest (e.g. persons who came of age at the same time or individuals who finished high school in a particular year).[1]

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[1]The terms 'cohort' and 'generation' are often used interchangeably. Generations are characterised by some common historical event such as the Great Depression (Elder, 1974). The distinction between generations is therefore not necessarily as strict as for cohorts. A common way to distinguish between generations in Western

Finally, specific observed attitudes or behaviour may be a function of the current political, economical, or societal situation, as well as idiosyncratic events that produce fluctuations over time. These *period effects* are therefore major events, such as the presence of war or economic downturn, that affect the population as a whole, and not just certain age, regional, gender, education or income groups (De Graaf 1999, 261; Norris 2003, 9; Cutler and Bengtson 1974, 165; Alwin, Hofer and McCammon 2006, 21).

Conover (1991, 130) argues that life-cycle and cohort effects are interwoven, as "people change in political orientations throughout their life, (but) generations respond differently to the same events". Inglehart in his famous studies on value change (Inglehart, 1977; Abramson and Inglehart, 1995) also argues that later learning must overcome the inertia of pre-existing orientations. Jennings (1989, 347) summarises these considerations noting:

> Young adulthood is the time of identity formation. It is at this age that political history can have a critical impact on a cohort's political make-up in a direct, experiential fashion. (...) The political significance of the crystallisation process lies in the content of that which is crystallising, the social, political, and historical materials that are being worked over and experienced by the young during these formative years. For it is this content that colours the cohort. If the colour differs appreciably from that attached to past cohorts, we have the making of a political generation.

He later adds that "what each cohort brings into political maturity has a good deal of continuity and provides a certain degree of stability in terms of what that cohort is likely to draw on as it moves through the rest of the life cycle" (Jennings, 1996, 249) . But as Niemi and Sobieszek (1977, 228) already pointed out 20 years earlier: "sorting out the relative impact of life cycle, generational, and period effects will no doubt prove to be extraordinarily complicated". Disentangling these various effects was and still remains one of the central challenges of socialisation research.

Generational change and generational replacement

Political research on socialisation processes has accumulated a vast body of valuable insights on how citizens acquire their political attitudes. Nevertheless, we still know relatively little about

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democracies is the following: pre-war generation (born before 1944), the baby boomers (1945–59), the 1960s generation (1960–69), the 1970s generation (1970–79), and the post-1970s generation (born in 1980 or later) (see e.g. Bhatti and Hansen 2012*a*; Blais et al. 2004; Wass 2007.)

whether these socialisation experiences lead to true generational differences in how citizens perceive and evaluate politics or behave in the political arena. Taking into account constantly changing societies, it is important to understand generational features of the electorate in order to make predictions for the future.

Figure 1 illustrates the inter-relationship of period and cohort effects by plotting the annual averages of attitudes against interracial marriage for four different birth cohorts from the United States between 1972 and 2004.[2] While same-sex marriage may have nowadays replaced interracial marriage as a salient political issue, the example illustrates the idea of generational replacement by focussing on a concrete political attitude. Figure 1 allows us to explore whether birth cohorts differ in their racial attitudes. The oldest cohort – born before 1930 – was still socialised in a highly racially divided country, whereas the cohort born after 1970 grew up after the turbulent times of the Civil Rights Movements in the 1950 and 1960s, when racial discrimination was legally abolished.[3] These changing historical legacies during the formative years of these four cohorts are assumed to have shaped racial attitudes and 'coloured' – as Jennings would put it – each group in a different way.

According to Figure 1, the cohort born before 1930 constantly exhibits the highest anti-racial attitudes with as many as 50 percent of the respondents advocating laws against interracial marriages in the mid-1970s. Each cohort born and socialised later in time is less adverse to interracial marriages. This simple graph reveals three findings. First, we observe a period effect, as all cohorts seem to become less racially intolerant over time. Second, the declining parallel lines of each cohort confirm that clear differences exist regarding racial attitudes depending on the time a respondent was born and hence socialised. Third, Figure 1 further illustrates what some people call *generational replacement*. The thick solid line plots the overall trend in anti-racial statements, which is declining. From the mid-1990s, the overall trend is lower than the average attitude among the cohorts born before 1950. The issue of interracial marriage becomes less salient over time and the explanation for this observation

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[2]The exact question wording reads as follows: "Do you think there should be laws against marriages between Negroes/Blacks/African- Americans and whites? – Yes or No". Figure 1 plots the percentages of those agreeing with the statement. The data were taken from the U.S. General Social Survey, which was administered annually or bi-annually between 1972 and 2010. The question on interracial marriage was, however, not included anymore after 2004.

[3]Most important for the abolishing of discrimination in public life was the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965.
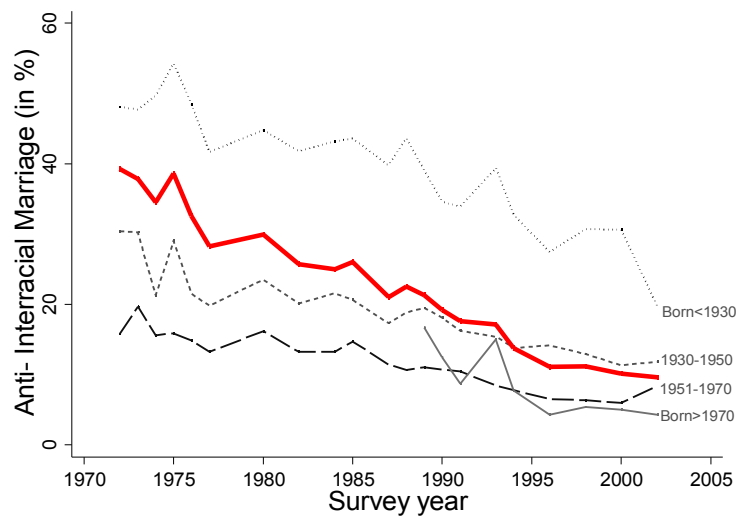
Figure 1: Illustration of Cohort Differences on Anti-Interracial Marital Attitudes

is simply that the weight of 'older' cohorts in the overall population is declining. The absolute number of members dwindles as the members of the two cohorts born before 1950 age. To use Ryder's (1965) words: "cohort succession, aging, and period-specific historical events provide accounts of social and demographic change" (cited in Smith, 2008, 287). The importance of cohort effects remains manifest today. Using longitudinal data, Watson (2015) for example shows how interaction with welfare state programmes influences cohorts' patterns of democratic engagement.

Bartels and Jackman (2014) propose a new model of political learning and how to think about these dynamics. They conceptualise two inter-related factors that capture the dynamics of political preferences: 1) period-specific "shocks" reflect the distinctive political events of a given time period, and 2) age-specific "weights" reflect the extent to which these shocks are internalised by individuals at various points in the life-cycle. Generational patterns of political change arise endogenously from the interaction of these basic elements. This model is a critique of the classic 'running tally' model by Fiorina (1981) and Achen (1992) who assume that the age-specific "weights" are equal. This posits that political scandals, presidential or government approval rates, natural disasters, economic crises, and any other kind of political,

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economic and social events impact each citizen equally no matter where this person is in the life-cycle.

An outlook: Challenges and opportunities for the study of political socialisation

In this chapter we have discussed four main questions that arise in the study of political socialisation and the making of citizens. First, what is it about early life experiences that makes them matter for political attitudes and behaviour in later life? Second, what is the age that is crucial in the development of citizens' political outlook? Third, who and what influences political behaviour in early life and how are cohorts coloured by the nature of time when they come of age? Fourth, how do political preferences and behaviour develop after the impressionable years?

The problem to finding an answer to these questions is usually of an empirical nature. Previous studies have often used inappropriate data (e.g. cross-sectional data) or methods (e.g. macro correlations over time) to answer questions about attitudinal and behavioural dynamics. More recently, researchers have used multi-wave panel studies that follow the same individuals over time to study the stability or volatility of political preferences (see e.g. Clarke and McCutcheon, 2009; Prior, 2010; Neundorf, Stegmueller and Scotto, 2011; Neundorf, Smets and García Albacete, 2013). These studies provide convincing evidence that the impressionable years are indeed important for the development of political orientations and that there is a great deal of stability in citizens' political identities and engagement in later life. There are however limitations to these studies, which rely mainly on household panel studies. Not designed by political scientists, the indicators available in these datasets are limited to just a few political variables: often only partisanship and political interest. It is both important and interesting to investigate attitude stability for other more policy-orientated preferences as well. Such preferences are, however, usually only included in election panel studies that span just a few years.

New internet-based panel studies might provide an exciting new avenue for this type of research. For example, the Dutch Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS), based on a probability sample, includes a wide range of questions on political preferences and

behaviour. The more than 8,000 respondents have been interviewed annually since 2007. A similar online panel study that includes numerous political variables was initiated in Germany with the German Internet Panel (GIP) in 2012.[4] These studies have the potential to provide data to test remaining questions about the dynamics of political preferences. Unfortunately, comparable data collection efforts have not yet been initiated in the United States or the United Kingdom.

As better data sources and better statistical methods become available, more fine-grained theoretical questions can be tackled. Recent research, for example, focuses on the interaction of different socialising agents (see e.g. Neundorf, Niemi and Smets, 2016) as well as on more complex household dynamics (see e.g. Dinas, 2014). Other work seeks to understand whether socialisation processes known to exist in Western democracies can be extended to new and emerging democracies (see e.g. Finkel, 2002 for work on the impact of civic education on political participation in emerging democracies; Neundorf, 2010 for work on the legacy of post-communist and post-authoritarian regimes; and Lupu and Peisakhin, N.d. for a study of the long-term impact of political violence on parental transmission of political views in post-Soviet states). Potentially heterogeneous political socialisation processes have also recently gained scholarly attention. As Ghitza and Gelman (N.d.) demonstrate, socialisation patterns are different for people from different ethnic backgrounds.

With regard to the timing of the formative or impressionable years, shifting away from predefining the age boundaries of this crucial period, recent studies point to socialisation processes starting at a much younger age than previously assumed. Both van Deth, Abendschön and Vollmar (2011) and Bartels and Jackman (2014) suggest that the impressionable years are taking place in late childhood and early adolescence and not only in late adolescence and early adulthood. The study by van Deth, Abendschön and Vollmar (2011), however, only includes young children but does not follow these growing up. It is, hence, not clear whether these early imprints have a long-lasting impact. On the other hand the study by Bartels and Jackman (2014) relies on a mathematical estimation of the formative years. These results, again, have not yet been fully put to the test. Both studies, however, point to the importance

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[4]For more information on the LISS visit: `http://www.lissdata.nl/lissdata/Home`, and for the GIP: `http://reforms.uni-mannheim.de/internet_panel/home/`.

of including younger respondents in panel studies that can then be followed as they grow older.

The timing of the formative years is important for studying the making of political generations. If we want to understand which are the factors that shape such generations, we need to make important assumptions about the timing citizens are most perceptive to external influences. Hence, the timing of political, economic, and social circumstances needs to be determined based on the age when citizens are socialised. However, the scientific debates of age, period and cohort effects on the one hand and the origins of political attitudes and behaviour on the other, are often unconnected.[5] We see, however, an enormous opportunity in the study of cohorts and the making of citizens. Cohort analysis as for example done by Dinas and Stoker (2014) and Smets and Neundorf (2014) provides us with a tool to understand social changes. Based on new and innovative statistical methods,[6] these studies allow testing the impact of factors such as the political, economic and social environment during a cohort's formative years on long-term political preferences and behaviour. These age, period, cohort studies hence allow us to gain insights in the socialisation processes of what colours whole generations or what makes political citizens.

By definition studying socialisation processes focuses on the impact of the personal and social environment of an individual on her values, attitudes and behaviour. This ignores the potential impact of biology. The last decade has seen fascinating new opportunities in studying the link between genetics and political attitudes, demonstrating that 'nature' or inheritance can have a strong impact on a person's political beliefs (Hatemi et al. 2007; 2009; 2010; Oxley et al. 2008; Smith et al. 2011). Questions about which factors and contexts can enhance or weaken certain genetic predispositions are still unexplored. There is still very little research on the interplay between genetics and environmental factors and how these interact over the

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[5]Examples of studies that explicitly focus on APC analysis: Baker (1978); Abramson (1979); Claggett (1981); Markus (1983); Miller (1992); Tilley (2002) and Tilley and Evans (2011) – partisanship; Klecka (1971); Lyons and Alexander (2000); Franklin, Lyons and Marsh (2004); Bhatti and Hansen (2012a); Smets and Neundorf (2014) – turnout; Cutler and Kaufman (1975) – ideology; Jennings (1996) – political knowledge; Jennings and Stoker (2004) – civic engagement; Down and Wilson (2013) – support for the EU; Mishler and Rose (2007) and Neundorf (2010) – democratic attitudes. This list is by no means comprehensive.

[6]Neundorf and Niemi (2014) for example present a series of articles in a special issue of *Electoral Studies* on methods of age, period, and cohort analysis.

life-time (with the exception of Hatemi et al. 2009), which is an exciting new avenue for future research in the field of political socialisation.

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