

Political Socialization Worksheet

Directions: Review the Political Socialization reading below. Answer the following questions and submit when complete.

- 1) What is the difference between direct and indirect socialization? Give some examples.

Direct political socialization sees political information and values explicitly communicated to individuals in a clear attempt to alter their views. Direct political socialization is apparent in political campaigns, for example. This is contrasted by indirect political socialization, whereby experiences and dialogue inadvertently shape political ideology, such as in the case of offhand comments by family members.

- 2) Why can patterns of socialization be unifying or divisive? What might divisive patterns of socialization lead to?

Political socialization can serve to be unifying by bringing members of a group together on a political issue, moving them towards agreement. Such patterns of socialization can be divisive, however, wherein opinions are sharply divided and the goal becomes to convince as many as possible of the validity of one opinion and the invalidity of all other opinions. This divisive pattern of socialization can lead to increased solidification of political boundaries and increased political conflict.

- 3) Describe briefly the impact of the following agents of political socialization and how these influences differ in various societies:

Agents of political socialization can vary both in terms of what they are and in how they operate as a result of societal differences. Across societies, differing values of family, education, what policies are important, and religion can have an affect on the degree to which such agents influence political ideology through political socialization.

Family:

Family shapes initial political ideas, often indirectly through offhand or casual remarks. Traditional political associations also play a role. In this way, indirect exposure to political beliefs causes children to reflect those same beliefs, as they understand them; it is either that, or they rebel against the family to set themselves apart. Increasing influence by public institutions have reduced familial influence in recent times. This generally holds amongst all societies.

Schools:

School clubs and student council promote learning of electoral processes by students, educating them on rudimentary descriptions of campaigning and voting. Government, civics, and history classes teach students about their country and government institutions, as well as current events. Depending on the society or the country, the degree to which schools directly influence political ideology may vary.

Being that educational policy itself is a political issue, debate about aspects of the educational system fosters change in political ideology of students.

Religious Institutions:

Religious groups typically have traditional political associations; for example, many Evangelical Protestant denominations in the United States are associated with 'Conservative' political affiliations. In Iraq, the Shi'ites were associated with the Ba'athists. Religious institutions also vary in terms of their involvement in shaping political ideology, depending on how religious the family of the child is and how taken in by religion the child is. Those families who more frequently attend worship services or religious activities will see their children more influenced by religious values and traditional associations of those religious institutions.

Peer Groups:

Peer pressure has less of an effect upon political ideology than lifestyle, but the 'mob mentality' can often influence, at least temporarily, the political beliefs of many youth. Issues that directly affect peer groups are an exception to this general rule, as having a greater stake in political issues correlates with increased thoughts of self-preservation, which influence political ideology. Peer groups, then, generally have similar political opinions as a result of proximity, character, and group think. This generally holds across all societies.

Social Class and Gender:

Financial standing and gender also affect political ideology, often to a significant degree. As a result of class politics and the innate desire for financial improvement, political beliefs are often shaped by economic circumstance. Thus, lower classes generally vote for greater benefits, for example. Gender groups function the same way; women often vote together in favor of platforms generally believed to have greater support for issues important to women. This varies from society to society, depending on how stark class differences are and how unequal the two genders are.

Mass Media:

Mass media is responsible for shaping the political beliefs of society at large; dissemination of information is controlled by the mass media, and what information an individual has access to can shape political views. Whether by ignorance or by belief in a specific narrative, individuals will accept a certain view on political issues based off of how the mass media represents information to them. This generally holds across all societies, no matter who controls the media, be it private or government owned.

Interest Groups:

Interest groups use money, lobbying, campaigning, and speaking to convince individuals to support specific policies important to the interest group. Representing the interests of certain sectors of society, utilization of these tools can be very effective in shaping political ideology. These interest groups generally exist in many developed societies to represent the interests of certain industries in government.

Political Parties:

Political parties use campaigning and tailored platforms to appeal to a broad range of voters. Adopting platform positions amenable to the majority of supporters can gradually direct individuals to reconsider their political beliefs and move towards support of new policies. In democratic societies, political parties play a significant role.

Political Socialization Reading

Political socialization is a lifelong process by which people form their ideas about politics and acquire political values. The family, educational system, peer groups, and the mass media all play a role. While family and school are important early in life, what our peers think and what we read in the newspaper and see on television have more influence on our political attitudes as adults.

Family

Our first political ideas are shaped within the family. Parents seldom "talk politics" with their young children directly, but casual remarks made around the dinner table or while helping with homework can have an impact. Family tradition is particularly a factor in party identification, as indicated by the phrases *lifelong Republican* and *lifelong Democrat*. The family may be losing its power as an agent of socialization, however, as institutions take over more of child care and parents perform less of it.

Schools

Children are introduced to elections and voting when they choose class officers, and the more sophisticated elections in high school and college teach the rudiments of campaigning. Political facts are learned through courses in American history and government, and schools, at their best, encourage students to critically examine government institutions. Schools themselves are involved in politics; issues such as curriculum reform, funding, and government support for private schools often spark a debate that involves students, teachers, parents, and the larger community.

Peer groups

Although peer pressure certainly affects teenagers' lifestyles, it is less evident in developing their political values. Exceptions are issues that directly affect them, such as the Vietnam War during the 1960s. Later, if peers are defined in terms of occupation, then the group does exert an influence on how its members think politically. For example, professionals such as teachers or bankers often have similar political opinions, particularly on matters related to their careers.

Mass media

Much of our political information comes from the mass media: newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and the Internet. The amount of time the average American family watches TV makes it the dominant information source, particularly with the expansion of 24-hour all-news cable channels. Not only does television help shape public opinion by providing news and analysis, but its entertainment

programming addresses important contemporary issues that are in the political arena, such as drug use, abortion, and crime. The growth of the Internet is also significant; not only do essentially all-news outlets have their own Web sites, but online **bloggers** present a broad range of political opinion, information, and analysis.