Political socialization in teenagers: To what extent are socialization agents associated with the political dispositions of adolescents aged 14–18 ?

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Political socialization, the process by which individuals become acquainted with politics and form their own political values and beliefs, is primarily based on the information provided by socializing agents (e.g., friends, family members, public figures). This study seeks to explore the extent to which these influences may be associated with or shape the beliefs of adolescents, considering the rapidly evolving state of political affairs and means of socialization over time. It was hypothesized that there would be a strong association between the political dispositions of the individual and those of their primary sociopolitical influences; in other words, an individual would be more likely to share similar political beliefs with close familiars. A survey was distributed to high schools within a southeastern United States school district via a random cluster sample, in which students (n = 151) self-reported their own political beliefs as well as those of their sociopolitical influences. After conducting several chi-square tests for independence (α = 0.05), there seems to be a strong association between the beliefs of influencers and an individual. Contrary to what was hypothesized, the parental unit seems to be the most prominent influence on adolescents' political dispositions, although the associations found regarding agents of socialization were found to be very strong. Further and improved research in this field may be conducted to more thoroughly explore political socialization and the development of political ideologies in adolescents.

Introduction

The concept of political socialization was first explicitly coined and defined by Hyman (1959) as the "learning of social patterns corresponding to his societal position as mediated through various agencies of society," and further specified by Merelman (1986) as "the process by which people acquire relatively enduring orientations toward politics in general and toward their own political system." In particular, the expression of this phenomenon among younger generations is seen to result in more tentative dispositions in both their political behavior and the values that they may hold. Early life experiences, as they are understood, are considered to be a crucial factor in the development of personal identity, alongside the predominant influence of peers and relatives (Dahl, 2004). On this, Quintelier (2015) posits that socialization agents — broadly defined by Ballantine et al. (2016) as sources and institutions that influence the social values and behaviors of individuals[1]— may have an implicit, longitudinal impact on the beliefs of adolescents. Such individuals are found to be highly impressionable due to being cognitively underdeveloped (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992), and because of this immature judgment, they are more vulnerable to outside influence. This concept is modeled by Farnen (2007) in what is known as the "political environment": common agents of socialization within a community are seen to interact with the individual, which in turn impacts the expression of their beliefs; how the individual in question interprets these beliefs results in a cycle of feedback between the influencers and the individual. This idea, otherwise known as the impressionable years hypothesis, refers to how "individuals are highly susceptible to attitude change during late adolescence and early adulthood," although this impressionability mostly subsides thereafter during adult life (Krosnick & Alwin, 1989). Therefore, it may be reasoned that political opinions would also be affected by social influences.

Even so, the exact extent to which such factors influence adolescent political ideologies remains a subject of debate. Zaller (1992) argues that individuals "filter" political information through the lens of their own political values, which are further considered to be integral to one's political preferences and experiences. Schwartz and Bilsky (1987) comparably claim that basic human morals may "transcend specific situations," and this therefore relies on a similar premise for political values. This presents the idea that when an individual is confronted with a certain political issue, they will rely on existing predispositions to inform their conclusion. As such, even when a person may lack all necessary information on the topic or a particular ideology, political behavior is generally a product of fairly independent and coherent thought. Essentially, if it is assumed that political values guide a person's actions and beliefs, it is consequential that such values are fundamentally stable and immutable. Despite the conflicting arguments in this field, adolescent political dispositions are nonetheless shown to be somewhat dubious to outside influence.

Significance

It may seem unnecessary to analyze the beliefs of younger people as they are not entirely relevant to political society, primarily since they are not of voting age and currently have little participation overall. However, based on generational replacement — a theory by Abramson and Inglehart (2009) that "attributes changes in values between young people and their elders to their different circumstances growing up" — the beliefs of younger people have far-reaching implications for the future of American politics. This is corroborated by Jennings and Niemi (1974), stating, "If institutions, role definitions, and the larger environment remain relatively stable, succeeding generations can be successfully socialized into an existing, unchanging mold" (p. 33). For adolescents, since many teenagers are on the brink of votership, the environment in which they develop their own beliefs and attitudes — specifically in a political context — determines the future administration and political climate of the United States. Even so, if such a keystone population has unstable attitudes that are easily subject to social influence, then it is difficult to trust these individuals to make reasonable and founded political choices instead of simply taking on a baseless opinion. In consideration of these factors, this study seeks to explore the extent to which socialization agents and other influential factors may be associated with the political dispositions of teenagers, specifically in relation to adolescents aged fourteen to eighteen.

Literature Review

The consumption of political information has been transformed with the ubiquity of digital technology and social media, which therefore impacts how people interpret and interact with this material. Alongside technological developments, politics have rapidly evolved with the generational replacement of voters, changes in administration, and new issues that present themselves over time. Therefore, a reevaluation of these influential factors must be brought into account in order to fully understand the character of the modern political environment.

In consideration of the aforementioned impressionable years hypothesis (Krosnick & Alwin, 1989), adolescents are theoretically the most susceptible to sociopolitical influence due to age-based attitude instability. These individuals are generally found to have immature judgment, which may be attributed to psychosocial and physiological determinants alike (Steinberg & Cauffman, 1996). Since adolescents are still developing psychologically, their cognitive capacity and rational judgment are fundamentally limited. Although this argument generally explains teenage inclinations to high-risk behavior (e.g., substance abuse, sexual activity, reckless driving), this immaturity additionally suggests that their decisions — and more significantly, their opinions and values — may not be well-founded (Luciana, 2013). As part of the larger phenomenon of socialization, it is thus proposed that adolescents will naturally internalize the information in their environment as they mature in order to inform their own identities and beliefs.

In addition, it has been seen that social influences have an impact on political engagement and participation as a whole (Quintelier, 2015; McClurg, 2003). On this topic, Dostie-Goulet (2009) considered how political interest in Quebecian teenagers is affected by political discussion among various socialization agents (namely parents, friends, and teachers). Political discussion with these individuals was associated with stronger interest and engagement in politics — especially with one's parents and relatives — although it was more interestingly suggested that classes such as history or government have an impact on interest as well. Media is also seen to exacerbate political polarization by exposing citizens to extremist viewpoints on social media platforms (Bail et al., 2018). A study of media practice from the 2016 presidential election, for instance, suggested that leading platforms on the left and right equally employed partisan journalism, thus exacerbating the extremism previously mentioned (Faris et al., 2017). As illustrated by Althaus and Kim (2006), the types of opinions that a person is exposed to on a topic in news discourse are seen to prime the beliefs that they hold as well. For instance, the first opinion that an individual hears on a topic — especially by a respected sociopolitical influence — will tend to be the one they agree with, which further implies that the opinions that someone is most often exposed to will be the ones that they will most closely identify with. Thus, this demonstrates how agents transform the political experience one has and therefore the expression of those values and one's engagement in politics.

In a study conducted by Connors (2020), it was indicated that political values are socially reinforced by one's sociopolitical environment; essentially, an individual is more likely to appropriate the political opinions that are endorsed by an individual's social circle. In addition, the degree of the homogeneity of these attitudes within this circle influences said likelihood of transference; in other words, if a person's familiars share similar or identical beliefs with each other, the person in question is more likely to identify with these beliefs. Conversely, exposure to a diverse set of views — a heterogeneous social network — will largely "cancel out" the influence of these competing political frames (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Thus, similar to the concepts of "peer pressure" and social conformity, individuals may imitate the conduct and adopt the dispositions of these positively-perceived groups (Mutz, 1998). This signifies the influence of social settings and their impact on how one chooses to express their beliefs, such as by suppressing an unpopular opinion or reframing their ideals around a specific partisan identity; for instance, if an individual's friends are largely liberal, the individual in question may choose to adopt a more liberal mindset. The formation of political beliefs thus appears, in some part, to be precipitated by one's social context rather than a personal conviction. Furthermore, independent political thought in these younger, more impressionable generations seems to be constrained by the need to "fit in."

Papaoikonomou (2017) additionally explored how political socialization influenced the social behaviors of adolescents by surveying secondary students in Greece, specifically about issues concerning nationality, gender, and religion. The students tended to express more socially dominant and progressive beliefs, although males and students from rural areas appeared to hold more conservative and socially intolerant beliefs by comparison to females and those that lived in suburban or urban areas. These findings imply that males and those from lower-income households may tend to have more conservative or right-leaning opinions; conversely, females and students in higher-income situations would hold more liberal views. Students additionally held definite and relatively extreme political views, although a low percentage was politically active or involved. In other words, high opinionation was associated with low political participation and interest in adolescents.

Research Gap

Concerning the gap that this study seeks to address in current research, much of the primary literature on political socialization in adolescents in specific is concentrated in the twentieth century. With recent technological and digital developments, the way the general public consumes political information and news has drastically changed since these studies were conducted — i.e., the rise of social media — and thus makes the relationships explored in the past rather outdated. Conversely, contemporary studies tend to focus on the rise in teenage activism and political participation rather than studying the factors that may influence political behavior. In addition, this study not only seeks to explore how socialization agents affect the beliefs that adolescents may hold but also how they may impact the *expression* of these beliefs. For example, someone who personally identifies with more conservative beliefs and has more liberal friends might be more likely to externally advocate for the other side of the argument because it is more acceptable within their social group. The demographic region being explored also has a large bearing on the beliefs seen across the United States; the political environment one is located in presumably affects their political experience which, in turn, affects their political beliefs. Altogether, this study seeks to address the historical gap by exploring political socialization in its most modern context as well as employ a more individualized yet holistic take on this phenomenon.

Hypothesis

Literature in this field predominantly suggests that individuals will share similar beliefs with and even adopt those of a major socialization agent, namely peers and parents, because it is seen as socially acceptable to do so. Based on previous research, it was hypothesized that a strong association would be indicated between the reported political dispositions of one's sociopolitical influences and those of the individual. It was further surmised that the social circle would have the most significant association with the beliefs of an individual compared to other interpersonal relationships such as one's parental unit (Connors, 2020; Dostie-Goulet, 2009). Underlying this prediction, it was theorized that exposure to a relatively homogeneous social network of political beliefs would be positively associated with the likelihood that an individual identifies with and/or endorse these beliefs. This, however, presents the question of a null hypothesis, referring to a situation in which there is no statistically significant difference between the variables tested. This is especially plausible in light of previous literature, in which exposure to varying sets of beliefs would have little to no bearing on one's individual disposition; these differing beliefs may, as stated before, "cancel" each other out. Socialization is a rather subjective phenomenon between individuals, which therefore makes it difficult to make a comprehensive statement on specific influences. As a result, it is virtually impossible to comprehensively account for one's entire nature of one's political environment.

Methods

Variables

This study primarily intends to explore the relationship between one's beliefs and those of their sociopolitical influences. However, the dispositions of the adolescent individual are determined to be the *explanatory variable* as they are the primary respondent from which an association may be determined. The dispositions of potential sociopolitical influences are thus designated as the *response variable*, although in reality it would be assumed that these figures would be affecting the dispositions of the individual. *Lurking variables* accounted for in the survey that may have confounded results were demographic since, for instance, there may be a potential association between political beliefs and one's race or income.

Research Design & Data Collection

As a means of correlational research, a survey was considered an appropriate *instrument* for primary experimentation and data collection. This approach was intended to explore a potential case of association between an adolescent's political dispositions and socialization agents, namely media/public figures, their social circle, and their parental unit. High school students within a suburban school district in South Carolina were the main *participants* tested in this study. As stated previously, this sampling parameter is likely not to influence any correlational findings since — rather than acting as a census of adolescent beliefs — it primarily seeks to explore the relationship between the dispositions of one's familiars and their own. To collect the sample of respondents, the homeroom classes in each school were assigned a random number ranging from 1 to the total number of classes at the school, although physical education, special needs, and trade classes were excluded from the selection process at these schools' recommendation and request. Using a random number generator, five of the considered classes were selected per school to distribute the survey to. The teachers of these classes were then instructed to post the link via Google Classroom, and responses were collected from January 6th to January 31st, 2021. For ethical purposes, response to the survey within these randomized groups was entirely by choice. However, the topic of the survey was excluded from the post to minimize voluntary response bias. This was because several voluntary response samples tend to be inaccurate since people tend to respond if they hold strong opinions regarding the topic, conversely resulting in an undercoverage of those who have little interest (Smith, 2012). Although this was not an infallible method, the exclusion of the topic at hand — particularly for something potentially divisive as something labeled "political" — would likely minimize potential response bias. Even so, this remains a point of consideration, as those who choose to participate in the study would potentially be more engaged students that would respond to the survey if encouraged by their teacher. Despite the ultimately voluntary nature of data collection, randomization was still implemented in order to maintain a fairly diverse sample pool of respondents, namely in terms of age, grade level, and the academic level of students[2].

Survey Distribution

The survey was created using Google Forms and distributed via a link posted in Google Classroom. This made it easy to distribute across several schools and made it more accessible to students, especially since the application is often used for online quizzes or school-related questionnaires within the district. Additionally, since the survey was given on a school-administered platform, Google Forms restricted the accessibility of the link to those within the district. All responses are automatically imported into a separate spreadsheet as well, so the basic features of this software allowed for easier organization of the data collected. In addition, with the coronavirus outbreak, the issue of survey distribution at the time of study presented various health concerns, which therefore made it inadvisable to create printed forms in order to prevent potential contraction and spread. Organization of large amounts of data if collected in this manner — especially considering the length of the questionnaire and the size of the response pool — would be far more difficult compared to other online services. As a result, it was decided that virtual administration of the survey was the most appropriate and practical means of data collection both because it was a relatively familiar and straightforward platform for students and because it was to be distributed to several schools within one district.

Questionnaire Content

The survey was separated into three separate sections along with an introduction confirming anonymity; a full copy of the questionnaire may be seen in Appendix A. Since a specific published survey could not be found, it compiled and imitated several previously used survey questions from authenticated sources, such as from the Pew Research Center (2020), along with other aforementioned studies exploring political socialization (Connors, 2020; Papaoikonomou, 2017; Dostie-Goulet, 2009). For this same reason, several questions were original based on the intention and focus of this study[3]. Although this would otherwise serve as a source of potential bias, the entire survey was drafted in consultation with and reviewed by R. Oldendick[4] (personal communication, December 2020) and the institutional review boards at each of the high schools for approval prior to distribution.

The first section asked questions regarding basic demographic and biographical information of the respondent (age, gender, grade level, race/ethnicity, average annual household income, religion) which were adapted from relevant prompts from the 2020 United States Census (United States Census Bureau, 2020). While demographic was not a primary testing variable as it is not an influencer or agent of socialization, such attributes may serve as possible predictors of certain political beliefs or serve as a confounding variable otherwise unaccounted for in the survey. For instance, there may be a potential association between race or income and an individual's political ideology. The second section consisted of questions asking about the respondent's individual political disposition (e.g., "Which description best represents your political ideology?"). The third section within the survey was intended to gather information about the respondent's sociopolitical influences and their respective political dispositions[5]. The final section was optional and free-response, asking for any statements to clarify certain responses and for feedback on the survey; this last prompt was to improve the survey for potential future use and to identify any limitations of the study based on the survey experience and design. Aside from the post-thoughts section, the entire survey was multiple-choice, although an "Other" option was added to account for possible answers not listed. Other prompts used a 1–5 Likert rating scale[6]. For ethical purposes, all prompts included a "skippable" response ("prefer not to say") as well as an option for "not applicable" or "don't know" where appropriate.

Limitations

Since the survey was entirely self-reported and anonymous, there was no way to ensure the accuracy of the responses to the true beliefs of the individual. This survey was distributed across individual high schools with students that may be familiar with one another, but the existing relations between these individuals could not be taken into account by the survey. In a similar way, since adolescents between the ages of fourteen and eighteen were the main subjects of this research, high school students were the sole respondents to the survey, meaning that the dispositions of the socialization agents themselves were not self-reported. In other words, participants were required to evaluate and report on the dispositions of their familiars (i.e., parents, close peers); as a result, many of these responses may have been inaccurately reported because of the respondent's bias and

their knowledge of others' dispositions, which would only be based on secondhand exposure to these influences. Still, this shortcoming presents an interesting implication in how the participant perceives the beliefs of their familiars, whether they be similar to or different from their own.

Data Analysis

Because this study explored various forms of qualitative data, data were primarily analyzed using Pearson's chi-square test for independence. Calculations were conducted using the statistical software Minitab-19, as this prevented human error. As a means of correlational research, this was used to determine whether an association exists between the political alignment of the individual and the political alignment of their sociopolitical influences. Data were analyzed considering a confidence level of 95% and thus an α-value of 0.05, as is the case with most behavioral studies. This was used to determine the critical value (χ^{2}*) used, which is based on the significance level tested (α = 0.05 throughout) as well as the degrees of freedom (*df*) in each test. However, each test would result in differing degrees of freedom as it is based on the number of independent observations, or essentially the mass of data collected; for instance, a question asking about political alignment with a multitude of options would have varying degrees of freedom compared to a yes/no prompt simply because of the variety of possible responses. Following this calculation, the resulting chi-square value in each test would be compared to the critical value found in order to determine whether the association was truly significant. Additionally, the prompts that pertained to individual disposition in each test were labeled as the "independent" set of data, although the same chi-square statistic would be yielded if the variables were switched.

Results & Discussion

Data Editing

A total of 157 responses from the survey were collected. However, certain individual responses were excluded from the final results. Examples included those that reported an age outside of the considered range (14–18); indicated a retake of the survey, in which the individual commented so in the post-thoughts section (verified based on a duplicate response); consisted entirely of answer choices such as "Prefer not to say," "Don't know," and "Not applicable"; or contained derogatory or otherwise inappropriate material (such as profanity or slurs). Due to the exclusion criteria, only 151 of the collected responses were considered.

Additionally, some of these responses required some minor revisions to more accurately analyze data. For instance, the prompt "What is your race?" included a choice for "Caucasian," but one individual responded "white" in the free-response option. Similarly, text inconsistencies or grammatical errors were manually corrected as well; answers like "na" and "Not applicable" were changed to "N/A," for example. This was not intended to change the meaning of the original responses, however, and was done to ensure that the reported data were consistent in post-analysis. The specific editing criteria for the applicable prompts may be found in Appendix B (Tables 4–38).

Demographic Trends

Given the parameters of this study, participants ranged in age from 14 to 18, with a mean age of 15.96. However, there still seemed to be a rather disproportionate demographic of respondents, which is most likely due to how the survey relied on voluntary participation, as previously mentioned. For instance, the gender distribution indicates that the majority were female (98), which was nearly double the number of male respondents (50). Overall, the majority of participants were aged sixteen (32.2%), female (64.5%), sophomores (34.6%), middle-to-high class[7], and Protestant/non-denominational Christian (52%). The complete demographic distribution of participants may be found in Appendix B (Tables 4–9). Additionally, the results from the chi-square tests conducted regarding these traits may be seen in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Distribution of results from chi-square tests for independence for individual demographic trends

Compared prompts	*df*	LR	χ^{2}*	χ^{2}	*p*
Demographic vs. Spectrum [a]					
Age	16	21.451	26.296	18.569	.292
Gender	8	13.737	15.507	18.037	.0210
Race/Ethnicity	24	31.533	36.401	26.079	.349
Income	24	36.623	36.415	35.849	.0568
Religion	28	37.577	41.337	43.564	.0307

Note. p-values calculated are significant at the *p*<0.05 level.
[a] The prompt stated: "Please indicate below where you personally identify yourself on a liberal-conservative spectrum of political beliefs."

Demographics altogether had varying associations with individual political disposition. Age, race/ethnicity, and average annual household income all yielded *p*-values that exceeded the α-value of 0.05, indicating that these factors are likely independent of individual political dispositions. These results were unexpected, namely since both race/ethnicity and income were shown to be consistent indicators of political belief in previous research (Papaoikonomou, 2017). However, gender and religion were found to be significant (*p*=0.021 and *p*=0.0307, respectively). More interestingly, the chi-square contributions for gender demonstrated that females were more likely to hold left-leaning attitudes, as self-reported on a 1–5 liberal-conservative spectrum. These reports were right-skewed with a mode of 2; males, on the other hand, were approximately Normally distributed with a mode of 3. Religion was found to be a fairly consistent indicator of these attitudes as well, particularly with Protestant/non-denominational Christians representing a strong contribution on the spectrum value of 2 for left tendencies.

Individual Political Dispositions

Regarding how individuals placed themselves on the aforementioned liberal-conservative spectrum, responses indicated that the participants held largely moderate dispositions, as most commonly reported themselves to be a moderate 3 on a liberal-conservative spectrum (47, 31.5%). This was further shown in the prompt about personal ideology, in which the largest portion of respondents (56, 32%) reported themselves to be moderate; and the prompt about political party, in which the largest portion (50, 31.4%) reported themselves to be unaffiliated or Independent. This was rather unexpected due to the previously explored political polarization among the American population (Pew Research Center, 2014), which was surmised to be reflected in extremist values among participants. However, results were still slightly right-skewed along the spectrum, indicating that respondents were largely left-leaning. This was most clearly illustrated in responses referring to their presidential vote in the 2020

election (Table 21), as the majority (76, 50.3%) reported that they supported the Biden-Harris ticket, which was nearly double the number that supported the Trump-Pence ticket (40, 26.5%). Still, like the moderate dispositions considered earlier, a considerable number stated that they were undecided/unaffiliated (27, 17.9%). Along with this, associations about individual political dispositions concerning their overall engagement were found to be very strong. The results from these chi-square tests may be seen in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Distribution of results from chi-square tests for independence regarding individual political participation

Compared prompts	df	LR	χ^{2*}	χ^2	p
Political Participation vs. Spectrum [a]					
Political Interest	16	44.341	26.296	51.336	.0000140
Activity and Engagement	16	53.084	26.296	53.534	.0000062
Rally Participation	8	20.484	15.507	25.369	.00134

Note. p-values calculated are significant at the $p<0.05$ level.

[a] The prompt stated: "Please indicate below where you personally identify yourself on a liberal-conservative spectrum of political beliefs."

All relevant tests demonstrated significantly low p-values, demonstrating that these relationships are most likely not independent. Concerning personal interest in politics, individuals that reported left-to-moderate attitudes on the liberal-conservative spectrum (2–3) additionally reported minor-to-moderate interest (2–3). Interestingly, left-leaning respondents (1–2) tended to demonstrate greater personal interest than their right-leaning counterparts (4–5) based on their chi-square contributions (32.015 and 9.423, respectively); this disparity may also be partially attributed to how there were a smaller number of right-leaning individuals (39, 25.8%) compared to those left-leaning (65, 43.0%). The overall distribution represented a trend of minor-to-moderate interest, which corroborated the hypothesis as well as previous findings (Papaoikonomou, 2017; Quintelier, 2015), in which adolescents would hold rather weak political interest and have overall minor engagement in politics. Further regarding individual dispositions, select answers from the free-response section of the survey may be seen in Appendix C.

Associations Among Socialization Agents

As reported, the most common sources from which participants receive political information were found to be online news articles (118, 77.6%) and social media platforms (118, 77.6%). Parent(s)/guardian(s) (103, 67.8%) and one's friends/close peers (97, 63.8%) were the next most common, which was unsurprising based on the premise of this research. When asked about the most important source, online news articles (50, 33.1%) and social media platforms (37, 24.5%) were once again the most popular response from the list provided. However, the predominant interpersonal source from this list was one's parent(s)/guardian(s) (18, 11.9%) — which had the highest count in the previous prompt as well — followed by one's friends/close peers (8, 5.3%). Altogether, the most significant media that inform adolescents' dispositions are determined to be digitally disseminated material, most commonly from online news sources and social networking platforms. It may further be determined that adolescents' parental unit and social circle are the most prominent interpersonal sources of political information, which is corroborated by previous literature as well (Ballantine, 2016; Dostie-Goulet, 2009). A complete distribution of the statistics may be found in Appendix B (Tables 22–23).

Participants generally reported that they did not frequently check mainstream news for political information, however (Table 24). The distribution of this frequency was right-skewed, with a mode value of 2 for "rarely" (52, 34.4%) and a mean of 2.662. However, the distribution for social media usage (Table 26) was moderately left-skewed, with a mode value of 5 for "very often" (65, 43.0%) and a mean of 3.94. A considerable number additionally reported that they use social media to follow various institutions of political prominence (48, 31.8%; Table 27). Many stated that they use social media to see what certain public figures (46, 30.5%; Table 29) and their social circle (58, 38.4%; Table 30) think about current political issues. Even so, the majority of respondents reported that they did not use social media in a political manner. It was also found that individuals tended to discuss politics more with their parental unit (Table 36) than their social circle (Table 32); on the 1–5 frequency scale, these reports averaged at 3.13 and 2.89, respectively. Aside from this, the chi-square data from the relevant independence tests may be seen in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Distribution of results from chi-square tests for independence regarding the political dispositions of socialization agents and survey respondents

Compared prompts	df	LR	χ^{2*}	χ^2	p
Presidential Vote [a]					
Individual vs. Social Circle	20	80.572	31.410	79.667	.00000000447
Individual vs. Parent	24	77.693	36.415	88.087	.00000000298
Ideology & Political Affiliation [b]					
Individual vs. Social Circle	36	65.078	50.998	68.571	.000857
Individual vs. Parent	36	65.336	50.998	73.862	.000203
Liberal-Conservative Spectrum [c]					
Individual vs. Social Circle	16	88.725	26.296	95.322	<.0000000001
Individual vs. Parent	16	51.843	26.296	53.660	.00000589

Note. p-values calculated are significant at the $p<0.05$ level.

[a] Rephrasing where applicable, the prompt stated: "Which of the following party tickets did (you/the majority of your social circle/your guardians) support/vote for in the 2020 presidential election?"

[b] The prompt for the individual stated: "Which description best represents your political ideology?" Rephrasing where applicable, the prompt regarding sociopolitical influences stated: "What would you say is the majority political affiliation of your (social circle/guardians)?"

[c] Rephrasing where applicable, the prompt stated: "Please indicate below where you (personally identify yourself/believe the majority of your social circle fall/believe your guardians fall) on a liberal-conservative spectrum of political beliefs."

The political dispositions of potential socialization agents were found to be very strongly associated with those of the individual. Each of the calculated p-values for these tests were shown to be significantly lower than the α-value of 0.05. One's social circle was seen to be the most strongly associated in terms of their relative placement on a liberal-conservative spectrum, although p-values for both tests were extremely low. The distribution for the social circle on the spectrum was seen to be slightly right-skewed and moderate-to-left (Table 34) in a similar manner to that of the respondent, which is likely why this relationship was represented so strongly. However, the parental unit otherwise held the strongest association about the tests for preferred party ticket and political ideology. The chi-square contribution for identical votes (e.g., individual and social circle[8] both supporting the Biden ticket) were the most significant values for each statistic and summed at 27.709 for the association with one's parental unit and 33.789 for one's social circle. The alignment of these political affiliations followed a similar trend, signifying that similar and/or identical ideologies (e.g., right-leaning and very conservative) were the most strongly associated observations.

Conclusion

Implications & New Understanding

Virtually all associations tested in the study had a significantly strong relationship, particularly those relating to the alignment of the beliefs between the respondent and various agents of socialization. Contrary to what was originally hypothesized, the parental unit was seen to be the most strongly associated agent of socialization; but as stated earlier, these associations still had extremely low significance levels, so this observation does not undermine the influence of either agent. Most notable were the distributions for preferred presidential ticket, political affiliation, and spectrum placement, which altogether strongly supported the hypothesis that individuals tend to hold similar or identical beliefs with their familiars. As such, these correlational findings overall have significant implications concerning adolescent political socialization and the field of political psychology as a whole. As it has been previously suggested that individuals are highly socially motivated (Cosmides & Tooby, 1998), this study reinforces the concept that adolescent's dispositions are dependent upon their social contexts, most prominently by the influence of their social circle, peers, and parental unit. The scope of this research encompasses the potential interdependence of adolescent beliefs and those of their familiars, and the strong associations found here are primary indicators of how this complex sociopolitical network may ultimately define and shape these beliefs.

Limitations

This study simply explores a potential association between agents of socialization and an individual and is by no means comprehensive of all of the sociopolitical factors in one's life, nor the full extent of their influence. The design itself presented several limitations, most obviously in that a correlation between two variables does not indicate a case of causation. Essentially, finding an alignment between the beliefs of two parties does not mean that the influencer had any actual bearing on the individual's beliefs. In other words, an influencer sharing similar beliefs with an individual may simply reflect on how one will surround themselves with like-minded people, which is not indicative of a causal relationship. The survey was entirely self-reported as well, and coupled with its voluntary and anonymous nature, it could not wholly account for illegitimate and/or inaccurate data; someone who took the survey seriously could not be differentiated from one who chose answers arbitrarily. The survey was one-sided and only relied on the perspective of the individual, who clearly may not have a correct understanding of the ideologies of their peers or parental unit. Even for participants that were as transparent as possible, it is important to consider that an individual may inaccurately report the beliefs of potential influencers due to their own assumptions and perception biases. For instance, they may be more likely to report their influencer's beliefs as being similar or even identical to their own, as being friends with someone may lead an individual to assume that they would share compatible beliefs, thus causing them to report similar political inclinations. This additionally may be due to potential priming in the questionnaire since respondents were asked to report their own political dispositions prior to those of their influencers. Conversely, had these sections been reversed, the survey may have been more flawed and prone to response bias. By similar logic to the original survey design, reporting the beliefs of others prior to the beliefs of the individual may have made the respondent more likely to report similar beliefs to their influencers as, once again, they may believe their opinions to be somewhat compatible; this also may be due to a subconscious bias to "agree" with the beliefs that they reported of their primary influencers. In summary, while the dispositions (as reported in this study) were found to be associated and are therefore likely not independent, this does not directly signify that agents of socialization are an influential factor in informing an individual's political beliefs.

Future Directions

In terms of the steps that may be further taken in this field of research, with more available resources and an improved research design, future studies could more accurately determine the extent of influence by agents of socialization. The use of a different method to explore this topic (e.g., case study, experiment) may also yield more reliable results because they are more focused and controlled in nature. The true dispositions of the individual's influencers were unable to be verified, so expanding the participants to relate to entire social groups instead of secondary, one-sided reports would create a more comprehensive view of the sociopolitical network. The study was ultimately voluntary as well; more effectively employing randomization and having a less concentrated sample of respondents — by, for example, conducting research on a national level — would significantly minimize potential skewness in results. Overall, despite the shortcomings of this study, the potential relationship between people's belief systems remains a strongly relevant, if unexplored, facet of modern politics.

Notes

[1] Including, but not limited to: peers, family members, the media, public figures, legal systems, religion, etc.

[2] The final factor of academic level was not asked about or accounted for in the survey.

[3] Example prompts include: "Are you involved in any political clubs, organizations, and/or extracurriculars?" and "Have you previously taken and/or are currently taking a political or governmental class/course?"

[4] A professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of South Carolina.

[5] Example prompts include: "How often do you engage in political discussion with your parent(s)/guardian(s)?", "Do you frequently use social networking sites/social media platforms to see what friends, peers, other users, etc. think about political issues?"

[6] Example prompts include: "How interested would you say you are in politics?" and "Please indicate below where you personally identify yourself

on a liberal-conservative spectrum of political beliefs."

[7] Based on average household income, in which 18.7% reported an income of $200,000 or more and 18.7% reported $50,000–$100,000. However, a considerable number of respondents selected "Don't know/Prefer not to say" for this prompt (34%), so this trend cannot be entirely verified.

[8] The higher value for the test regarding one's social circle does not mean that it was necessarily more significant to the individual's response than the parental unit. It only represents the value contributed to the chi-square statistic for that specific test. These values are considered to be independent of each other and are not to be compared.

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Appendix A

Following is a copy of the questionnaire used in this study. Some information and questions were removed or modified for the purpose of anonymity.

Section I: Demographic Information
The following questions are solely intended to explore a potential association in the study based on demographic and biographical information. None of these responses will be attached to your name, contact, or any other personally identifiable information. While you may choose a skippable option, it would be preferred if you provide a listed response to all questions.

What is your age?
- ☐ 14
- ☐ 15
- ☐ 16
- ☐ 17
- ☐ 18
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other: _____

What is your gender?
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other: _____

What is your grade level?
- ☐ 9th
- ☐ 10th
- ☐ 11th
- ☐ 12th
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other: _____

What is your race/ethnicity? Only select multiple options if you are of several different racial/ethnic origins.
- ☐ Caucasian
- ☐ African American
- ☐ Hispanic/Latin American
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ☐ Unknown/Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other: _____

What is your annual household income?
- ☐ Less than $25,000
- ☐ $25,000 to $50,000
- ☐ $50,000 to $100,000
- ☐ $100,000 to $150,000
- ☐ $150,000 to $200,000
- ☐ $200,000 or more
- ☐ Don't know/Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other: _____

If applicable, please specify your religion.
- ☐ Roman Catholic
- ☐ Protestant/other non-denominational Christian
- ☐ Judaism
- ☐ Islam
- ☐ Buddhism
- ☐ Hinduism
- ☐ No religion
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other: _____

Section II: Individual Dispositions
The following section contains questions on your political views. If you would like to more accurately determine your political dispositions, the following sites may be useful:

https://www.politicalcompass.org/test
https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/quiz/political-typology/
http://www.youthleadership.net/econgress/political_ideology_survey
https://www.isidewith.com/political-quiz

If you are eighteen or older, did you vote in the recent election?
☐   Yes
☐   No
☐   Prefer not to say
☐   Not applicable

Are you involved in any political clubs, organizations, and/or extracurriculars? If yes, please indicate if one of the following. If your affiliated group is not listed, please identify it in the "other" option.
☐   Model United Nations Club
☐   Young Democrats Club
☐   Teenage Conservatives Club
☐   Global Ambassadors Club
☐   Not applicable
☐   Prefer not to say
☐   Other: _____

Have you previously taken and/or are currently taking a political or governmental class/course? If yes, please indicate if one of the following. If your class/course is not listed, please specify it in the "other" option.
☐   Current Issues
☐   US History and Constitution
☐   US Government
☐   Prefer not to say
☐   Other: _____

Which of the following political parties do you personally identify with the most? If it is a third party, please specify it in the "other" option
☐   Democratic Party
☐   Republican Party
☐   Unaffiliated (Independent)
☐   Prefer not to say
☐   Other: _____

Please indicate below where you personally identify yourself on a liberal-conservative spectrum of political beliefs.

1	2	3	4	5
Liberal	Left-leaning	Moderate	Right-leaning	Conservative

Which description best represents your political ideology?
☐   Very Liberal
☐   Liberal
☐   Moderate
☐   Conservative
☐   Very Conservative
☐   Libertarian
☐   Prefer not to say
☐   Other: _____

How interested would you say you are in politics?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	Slightly	Somewhat	Moderately	Very

Would you consider yourself to be politically active, engaged, and/or educated?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	Slightly	Somewhat	Moderately	Very

Have you ever taken part in a political march, protest, demonstration, or rally?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Did you take part in a political march, protest, demonstration, or rally in 2020?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

If yes to either of the two questions above, please specify the political cause, issue, or event. If this is not applicable to you or you do not wish to answer, respond with "N/A".

_____

Which party ticket did you vote for in the 2020 presidential election? (Or, if you were not eligible to vote, which party ticket would you have voted for?) You may identify a third party ticket/candidate in the "other" option if the choices given are not applicable to you.
- ☐ Joe Biden-Kamala Harris
- ☐ Donald Trump-Mike Pence
- ☐ Undecided/unaffiliated
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other: _____

Section III: Information & Influence

From which of the following sources do you receive political information? Select all that apply.
- ☐ Online news articles/newsletter (e.g., CNN, Fox News, Washington Post, New York Times)
- ☐ Newspaper/magazine
- ☐ TV
- ☐ Social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter, Reddit, Facebook)
- ☐ Internet (e.g., blogs, forums)
- ☐ Radio
- ☐ Public figures/celebrities/popular influencers
- ☐ Popular media/culture (e.g., movies, music, memes)
- ☐ Church
- ☐ School (e.g., class on current issues, political club)
- ☐ Teachers
- ☐ Friends/close peers
- ☐ Parents
- ☐ Siblings
- ☐ Relatives
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other: _____

Which of the following would you consider to be your primary or most important source of political information?
- ☐ Online news articles/newsletter (e.g., CNN, Fox News, Washington Post, New York Times)
- ☐ Newspaper/magazine
- ☐ TV
- ☐ Social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter, Reddit, Facebook)
- ☐ Internet (e.g., blogs, forums)
- ☐ Radio
- ☐ Public figures/celebrities/popular influencers
- ☐ Popular media/culture (e.g., movies, music, memes)
- ☐ Church
- ☐ School (e.g., class on current issues, political club)
- ☐ Teachers
- ☐ Friends/close peers
- ☐ Parents
- ☐ Siblings
- ☐ Relatives
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other: _____

How frequently do you check mainstream news?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often

Are you subscribed to a specific news outlet/newsletter (e.g., CNN, Fox News, Washington Post, New York Times), or have a particular source that you trust/check frequently for current news (e.g., blogs, forums, social media accounts)? If so, please specify the source below. If this is not applicable to you or you do not wish to answer, please respond with "N/A".

_____

How often do you use social networking sites/social media platforms?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often

Do you use social networking sites/social media platforms to follow any politicians, political parties, political commentators, etc.?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

If yes, please specify the individual(s)/group(s) below, as well as the specific site(s)/platform(s). If this is not applicable to you or you do not wish to answer, please respond with "N/A".

_____

Do you frequently use social networking sites/social media platforms to see what a particular public figure, celebrity, group, etc. thinks about political issues?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

If yes, please specify the individual(s)/group(s) below, as well as the specific site(s)/platform(s). If this is not applicable to you or you do not wish to answer, please respond with "N/A".

_____

Do you frequently use social networking sites/social media platforms to see what friends, peers, other users, etc. think about political issues?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to say

If yes, please specify the specific site(s)/platform(s). If this is not applicable to you or you do not wish to answer, please respond with "N/A".

_____

How often do you engage in political discussion with your social circle/friends/close peers?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often

What would you say is the majority political affiliation of your social circle/friends/close peers?
- ☐ Left-leaning/Liberal
- ☐ Right-leaning/Conservative
- ☐ Unaffiliated (Independent)
- ☐ Mixed (relatively even)
- ☐ Undecided
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other: _____

Please indicate below where you believe the majority of your social circle/friends/close peers fall on a liberal-conservative spectrum of political beliefs.

1	2	3	4	5
Liberal	Left-Leaning	Moderate/Mixed	Right-Leaning	Conservative

Which of the following party tickets would you say that the majority of your social circle/friends/close peers supported from the 2020 presidential election? You may identify a third party ticket/candidate in the "other" option if the choices given are not applicable.
- ☐ Joe Biden-Kamala Harris
- ☐ Donald Trump-Mike Pence
- ☐ Undecided/unaffiliated
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other: _____

How often do you engage in political discussion with your parent(s)/guardian(s)?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often

Please indicate below where you believe your parent(s)/guardian(s) fall on a liberal-conservative spectrum of political beliefs. If mixed, split, or moderate/undecided/unaffiliated, the center option (3) is appropriate.

1	2	3	4	5
Liberal	Left-Leaning	Moderate	Right-Leaning	Conservative

What would you say is the political affiliation of your parent(s)/guardian(s)? Please indicate below if you have multiple parents/guardians that hold differing dispositions.
- ☐ Left-leaning/Liberal
- ☐ Right-leaning/Conservative
- ☐ Unaffiliated (Independent)
- ☐ Mixed (relatively even)
- ☐ Undecided
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other: _____

Which of the following party tickets did your parent(s)/guardian(s) vote for in the 2020 Presidential Election? Please indicate below if you have multiple parents/guardians that voted for different candidates. You may identify a third party ticket/candidate in the "other" option if the choices given are not applicable.
- ☐ Joe Biden-Kamala Harris
- ☐ Donald Trump-Mike Pence
- ☐ Mixed/split
- ☐ Undecided/unaffiliated
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Other: _____

Section IV: Post-Thoughts
This section is optional, so feel free to submit your responses.

The spectrum of political dispositions is extremely broad and complex, so this survey may not have been accurate to the beliefs and behaviors of yourself or your familiars. Do you have any further comments to clarify your responses? (Or, is there anything else I should know?)

_____

Is there anything you believe that could be improved in this survey?

_____

Appendix B

The following data are frequency tables of the response distributions for each of the questions in the survey, presented in the order asked. Percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth. Responses are edited as needed, as specified in the footnotes of the prompts applicable.

Table 4
Distribution of reported age of respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage
14	13	8.1%
15	43	28.2%
16	48	32.2%
17	26	17.6%
18	17	12.1%

Table 5
Distribution of reported gender of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	50	32.9%
Female	98	64.5%
Other	6	3.9%

Table 6
Distribution of reported grade level of respondents

Grade	Frequency	Percentage
9th	25	16.3%
10th	53	34.6%
11th	36	23.5%
12th	35	22.9%

Table 7
Distribution of reported race/ethnicity of respondents

Race/Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage
Caucasian	115	76.7%
African American	24	16%
Hispanic/Latin American	9	6%
Asian	5	3.3%
American Indian/Alaska Native	1	0.7%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	2	1.3%
Other	4	2.7%

Table 8

Distribution of reported annual household income of respondents

Income	Frequency	Percentage
Less than $25,000	2	1.3%
$25,000 to $50,000	7	4.7%
$50,000 to $100,000	28	18.7%
$100,000 to 150,000	20	13.3%
$150,000 to $200,000	13	8.7%
$200,000 or more	28	18.7%
Don't know/Prefer not to say	51	34%

Table 9

Distribution of reported religion of respondents

Religion	Frequency	Percentage
Roman Catholic	10	7.7%
Protestant/other non-denominational Christian	78	52%
Judaism	0	0%
Islam	2	1.3%
Buddhism	2	1.3%
Hinduism	0	0%
No religion	40	26.7%
Other/Prefer not to say	18	12%

Table 10

Response distribution: If you are eighteen or older, did you vote in the election?

Response	Frequency [a]	Overall Percentage	Percentage of Eligible Voters
Yes	5	3.3%	29.4%
No	12	7.9%	70.6%
Not applicable	134	88.7%	*

Note. These counts were edited since several participants that reported an age under 18 selected "no" rather than "not applicable"; this was done since the "no" option indicated that an individual was *eligible* to vote but chose not to. Essentially, the yes/no choices were revised to only encompass participants that reported an age of 18 in order to more easily differentiate these statistics.

Table 11

Response distribution: Are you involved in any political clubs, organizations, or extracurricular activities?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Model United Nations Club	2	1.3%
Young Democrats Club	6	4.0%
Teenage Conservatives Club (Young Republicans Club)	0	0%
Mock Trial	1	0.7%
Not applicable	142	94.0%

Note. These counts were edited since several participants reported extracurriculars that were not politically relevant (e.g., tennis, dance team, Beta Club). Responses that indicated such were manually changed to "Not applicable" instead. Essentially, these responses were revised to only encompass participants that reported involvement in a political extracurricular in order to more easily differentiate these statistics.

Table 12

Response distribution: Have you previously taken and/or are currently taking a political or governmental class/course?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Current Issues	13	8.6%
US History and Constitution	46	30.5%
US Government	33	21.9%
Other	2	1.3%
Not applicable	77	51.0%

Note. An error was made in the draft of the survey, and an option for "No" or "Not applicable" was not available for those that had not taken a relevant course. Several participants reported this in the "Other" option, and these responses were changed to "Not applicable" post-collection in order to more easily differentiate these statistics.

Table 13

Response distribution: Which of the following political parties do you personally identify with the most?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Democratic Party	42	27.8%
Republican Party	48	31.8%
Unaffiliated (Independent)	50	33.1%
Prefer not to say	8	5.3%
Other [a]	3	2.0%

[a] Responses referred to the Libertarian Party, the Communist Party, and the Socialist Party.

Table 14
Response distribution: Please indicate below where you personally identify yourself on a liberal-conservative spectrum of political beliefs.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 (Liberal)	19	12.6%
2 (Left-leaning)	46	30.5%
3 (Moderate)	47	31.1%
4 (Right-leaning)	28	18.5%
5 (Conservative)	11	7.3%

Table 15
Response distribution: Which description best represents your political ideology?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very Liberal	9	6.0%
Liberal	25	16.6%
Moderate	56	37.1%
Conservative	27	17.9%
Very Conservative	7	4.6%
Libertarian	6	4.0%
Undecided	3	2.0%
Prefer not to say	18	11.9%

Table 16
Response distribution: How interested would you say you are in politics?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 (Not at all)	22	14.6%
2 (Slightly)	35	23.2%
3 (Somewhat)	42	27.8%
4 (Moderately)	33	21.9%
5 (Very)	19	12.6%

Table 17
Response distribution: How politically active, engaged, and/or educated would you consider yourself to be?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 (Not at all)	23	15.2%
2 (Slightly)	43	28.5%
3 (Somewhat)	42	27.8%
4 (Moderately)	33	21.9%
5 (Very)	10	6.6%

Table 18
Response distribution: Have you ever taken part in a political march, protest, demonstration, or rally?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	27	17.9%
No	118	78.1%
Prefer not to say	6	4.0%

Table 19
Response distribution: Did you take part in a political march, protest, demonstration, or rally in 2020?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	19	12.6%
No	130	86.1%
Prefer not to say	2	1.3%

Table 20
Response distribution: If yes, please specify the political cause, issue, or event.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Black Lives Matter	12	8.0%
LGBTQ+	2	1.3%
Trump Parade	1	0.7%
Chick-Fil-A	2	1.3%
Other	2	1.3%
Prefer not to say	14	9.3%
Not applicable	118	78.1%

Table 21
Response distribution: Which party ticket did you vote for in the 2020 presidential election? (Or, if you were not eligible to vote, which party ticket would you have voted for?)

Party Ticket	Frequency	Percentage
Joe Biden-Kamala Harris	76	50.3%
Donald Trump-Mike Pence	40	26.5%
Undecided/unaffiliated	27	17.9%
Prefer not to say	7	4.6%
Other	1	0.7%

Table 22
Response distribution: From which of the following sources do you receive political information?

Source	Frequency	Percentage
Online news articles/ newsletters	118	77.6%
Newspaper/magazine	18	11.8%
TV	92	60.5%
Social media platforms	118	77.6%
Internet	80	52.6%
Radio	65	42.8%
Public figures/celebrities/ popular influencers	46	30.3%
Popular media/culture	52	34.2%
Church	16	10.5%
School	57	37.5%
Teachers	33	21.7%
Friends/close peers	97	63.8%
Parents	103	67.8%
Siblings	51	33.6%
Relatives	54	35.5%
Other	4	2.6%

Table 23

Response distribution: Which of the following would you consider to be your primary or most important source of political information?

Source	Frequency	Percentage
Online news articles/ newsletters	50	33.1%
Newspaper/magazine	1	0.7%
TV	16	10.6%
Social media platforms	37	24.5%
Internet	10	6.7%
Radio	0	0%
Public figures/celebrities/ popular influencers	0	0%
Popular media/culture	2	1.3%
Church	0	0%
School	2	1.3%
Teachers	1	0.7%
Friends/close peers	8	5.3%
Parents	18	11.9%
Siblings	0	0%
Relatives	3	2.0%
Other	3	2.0%

Table 24

Response distribution: How often do you check mainstream news?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 (Never)	24	15.9%
2 (Rarely)	52	34.4%
3 (Sometimes)	38	25.2%
4 (Often)	25	16.6%
5 (Very Often)	12	7.9%

Table 25
Response distribution: Are you subscribed to a specific news outlet/newsletter, or have a particular source that you trust/check frequently for current news (e.g., blogs, forums, social media accounts)?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
New York Times	11	7.3%
CNN	10	6.7%
Fox News	6	4.0%
Washington Post	3	2.0%
Newsmax	2	1.3%
Other	16	10.6%
Not applicable	114	75.5%

Note. Several respondents reported that they review a number of sources for current news but never specified specific names. These responses were thus included in the "Other" count. This count included sources with only one response as well: NBC, BBC World News, Daily Wire, *The Atlantic, The Economist,* UN News, The Skimm, Breitbart Conservative News, Google, Twitter, and Buzzfeed.

Table 26
Response distribution: How often do you use social networking sites/social media platforms?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 (Never)	11	7.3%
2 (Rarely)	12	7.9%
3 (Sometimes)	17	11.3%
4 (Often)	46	30.5%
5 (Very Often)	65	43.0%

Table 27
Response distribution: Do you use social networking sites/social media platforms to follow any politicians, political parties, political commentators, etc.?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	48	31.8%
No	98	64.9%
Prefer not to say	5	3.3%

Table 28
Response distribution: If yes, please specify the individual(s)/group(s) below, as well as the specific site(s)/platform(s).

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Donald Trump	10	6.7%
Mike Pence	3	2.0%
Joe Biden	14	9.3%
Kamala Harris	9	6.0%
Barack Obama	6	4.0%
Michelle Obama	4	2.6%
Bernie Sanders	4	2.6%
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez	10	6.7%
Trevor Noah	2	1.3%
NAACP	2	1.3%
CHNGE	2	1.3%
Other	15	9.9%
Not applicable	109	72.3%

Note. Several respondents reported that they follow several individuals, groups, organizations, etc. on social media but never stated specific names (e.g., "some Democrats," "certain moderate politicians"). These responses were thus included in the "Other" count. This count included those with only one response as well: Hillary Clinton, Ben Shapiro, The South Carolina Delegation to the United States Congress, Henry McMaster, Dick Harpootlian, Nathan Ballentine, the Communist Party, Andrew Yang, and Candace Owens.

Table 29
Response distribution: Do you frequently use social networking sites/social media platforms to see what a particular public figure, celebrity, group, etc. thinks about political issues?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	46	30.5%
No	102	67.5%
Prefer not to say	3	2.0%

Table 30
Response distribution: Do you frequently use social networking sites/social media platforms to see what friends, peers, other users, etc. think about political issues?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	58	38.4%
No	90	59.6%
Prefer not to say	3	2.0%

Table 31

Response distribution: If yes, please specify the specific site(s)/platform(s).

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Instagram	40	26.5%
Snapchat	17	11.3%
Twitter	14	9.3%
TikTok	12	7.9%
Facebook	8	5.3%
YouTube	3	2.0%
Not applicable	100	66.2%

Table 32

Response distribution: How often do you engage in political discussion with your social circle/friends/close peers?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 (Never)	17	11.3%
2 (Rarely)	41	27.2%
3 (Sometimes)	48	31.8%
4 (Often)	31	20.5%
5 (Very Often)	14	9.3%

Table 33

Response distribution: What would you say is the majority political affiliation of your social circle/friends/close peers?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Left-leaning/Liberal	29	19.2%
Right-leaning/Conservative	32	21.2%
Mixed (relatively even)	60	39.7%
Unaffiliated (Independent)	4	2.6%
Undecided	4	2.6%
Don't know	20	13.2%
Prefer not to say	2	1.3%

Table 34
Response distribution: Please indicate below where you believe the majority of your social circle/friends/close peers fall on a liberal-conservative spectrum of political beliefs.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 (Liberal)	13	8.6%
2 (Left-leaning)	32	21.2%
3 (Moderate/Mixed)	65	43.0%
4 (Right-leaning)	29	19.2%
5 (Conservative)	12	7.9%

Table 35
Response distribution: Which of the following party tickets would you say that the majority of your social circle/friends/close peers supported from the 2020 presidential election?

Party Ticket	Frequency	Percentage
Joe Biden-Kamala Harris	54	35.5%
Donald Trump-Mike Pence	45	29.8%
Mixed	30	19.7%
Undecided/unaffiliated	5	3.3%
Don't know/Prefer not to say	15	9.9%
Other	3	2.0%

Table 36
Response distribution: How often do you engage in political discussion with your parent(s)/guardian(s)?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 (Never)	19	12.6%
2 (Rarely)	34	22.5%
3 (Sometimes)	34	22.5%
4 (Often)	37	24.5%
5 (Very Often)	27	17.9%

Table 37
Response distribution: Please indicate below where you believe your parent(s)/guardian(s) fall on a liberal-conservative spectrum of political beliefs.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1 (Liberal)	16	10.6%
2 (Left-leaning)	16	10.6%
3 (Moderate/Mixed)	43	28.5%
4 (Right-leaning)	40	26.5%
5 (Conservative)	36	23.8%

Table 38
Response distribution: Which of the following party tickets did your parent(s)/guardian(s) vote for in the 2020 presidential election?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Joe Biden-Kamala Harris	43	28.5%
Donald Trump-Mike Pence	62	41.1%
Mixed	7	4.6%
Undecided/unaffiliated	6	4.0%
Didn't vote	2	1.3%
Don't know	19	12.6%
Prefer not to say	12	7.9%

Appendix C

The following data are select responses from the final section of the survey, namely for the question "Do you have any further comments to clarify your responses?" Responses are entirely unedited and thus disregarded any grammatical errors and inconsistencies.

The reason I don't get information from the media is because it twists the truth. I would give my own hypothesis that people who receive information from the media would lean more to the left. This is from my personal observation. However, it happens on both sides.

I don't really follow politics. I agree with some stuff left and some stuff right. I do not usually agree with far right and far left stuff.

I believe some things the liberals say like climate change; however I don't think they will actually do anything about it. They just wanted more votes. I never been very political till last year. I always and still think the government is stupid and corrupt. All they want is money, but sometimes you have to choose the better of the two evils.

I try to base my political decisions on what the Bible says, and so I try not to take my personal beliefs so far as to distance myself from people that are loved by God. I also try to avoid politics as much as possible because people will say truest hateful things towards me when I say what I believe, so I avoid sharing my opinions. You could call me part of the "silent Majority" of republicans

my parents raised me a certain way, however because of social media i was able to see both sides in politics and i personally changed my political views. im pretty open on how i believe and im not completely sure if my parents agree with that, however i just dont like how they think.

I do not have social media. I find myself unable to converse with my peers politically because of the mass misinformation presented to them through social media. Many of them truly believe outrageous statements that are not based in fact because of social media.

My friends are mostly either very liberal or very conservative though I have an equal number of each so my response for that question may be misleading. I also would say I hold mostly strong view points and am not usual moderate on specific issues though the net average of my view points and their conservative or liberal perspective is moderate

In general I am interested in the goings-on in the political scene of our world. However, I find it impossible to stake any claims due to the mass information that is present in our society.

I am still undecided on my own opinions. I am exposed to both sides which I am thankful for so I can get information and hear peoples opinions on both sides. This also causes a dilemma for me. My friends and family both make me feel pressured by forcing their political beliefs on me. They try and force me to side and I really don't know if I can yet. This pressure comes mostly from my parents.