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Political Socialization

Paul W Nesbitt-Larking

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**U.S. Campaigns,
Elections, and
Electoral Behavior**



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Money is important because the party needs such resources to campaign for its candidates. It is shown that presidential candidates are allowed by the Federal Election Commission (FEC) to spend up to two cents times the national voting population. House candidates, the national and state parties each may spend \$10,000 plus an inflation adjustment, and the national and state parties can each spend \$20,000 or two cents times the state's voting population. The party needs cash to pay for the information, skills, and manpower necessary for winning elections. There are roughly five sources for candidate finance: individual contributors, Political Action Committees, political parties, the candidates themselves, and public funding. Individual contributors are the top contributors to campaigns. The candidate or party organization acquires most of its money from individual contributors; there is a distinct plan of action to raise this money. For example, the party is active in personal solicitation, mail solicitation, fundraising dinners, other types of parties or campaign-related trips, and pure patronage.

Political Action Committees (also known as PACs) are groups that are not connected with a specific party or candidate, but that are usually tied to an interest group. These committees focus on raising money to influence the outcome of an election. PACs normally support issues; they spend their money in two main ways: in support of a candidate, and in opposition to the election of a candidate.

While political parties themselves give money to specific candidates, this money is not the only money available, but it is helpful in those districts where a race is close. The next contributors are the candidates themselves, these resources can be helpful except when a voter, believing that a candidate does not need money, is reluctant to contribute to their campaign. Lastly is public funding, which is only available to a presidential nominee, who must follow strict guidelines and limitations with these funds. Money is vital to a political party; there are so many needs and uses for it. Individual contributors on the grassroots level raise most of the party money; these contributors are supporters from the local level.

SEE ALSO: Party Image; Party Platforms; Two-Party System.

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Political Socialization

POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION IS the learning and internalization of information, beliefs, values, and sentiments that are available in the polity surrounding the individual. Through the internalization of cultural principles, the individual learns politically relevant knowledge and values and is thereby equipped to reproduce the political culture through subsequent behavior. Because political cultures change, not all socialization results in the complete reproduction of political cultural values. To a greater or lesser extent, socialized agents may amend, modify, reinterpret, or reject the cultural cues to which they are exposed. Those engaged in political socialization may experience role confusion or role ambiguity resulting from their exposure to competing role models.

While political socialization during childhood is primary, it is a process that continues throughout a person's life, and the impact of the social environment is constantly in play. A pattern of political socialization is more likely to endure if it is established and continues in a time of relative political stability. Conversely, times of sociopolitical upheaval may well prompt turbulence in political socialization. The historical record is replete with instances of large groups of people undertaking a deliberate re-evaluation of dominant cultural or ideological forces during a relatively short period of time.

The process of acquisition incorporates many sociopsychological steps. In the context of the immediate family, children learn both through imitation, notably that which is rewarded, and through identification, which is a more developed process of internalizing the ideas and values of significant others. Political learning can be indirect, such as learning a generic sense of trust in authority figures, or a sense of autonomy and creativity in one's own agency. Political learning becomes more direct as the child grows in the more elementary forms of political knowledge. Reproducing political

consent is the principal effect of political socialization. Beginning in early childhood, political socialization consists of those natural practices through which people impart knowledge, emotional reaction, values, and opinions about political matters to those within their sphere of influence. Routine patterns of political socialization in liberal democracies encourage political participation and the expectation that citizens mobilize at election time.

Socialization is never entirely a one-way process, and it does not always go smoothly. Although it is concentrated in the early years of a person's life, it is never entirely complete. It is possible to think of the process of socialization as one of induction or even indoctrination, in which the agencies of socialization, such as parents, school, peers, and media, tell the person being socialized what to believe. While agents of socialization can exert a great deal of influence, they are never entirely successful. The person being socialized can always talk back, disagree, refuse the message, or even socialize the socializer. Cultural communication, even between unequals, is mutual.

Although what is learned early in life may not persist, a great deal of the deeper learning of dispositions and values can be regarded as durable, if not entirely continuous. Learning specific information or political reasoning and political choice does emerge later. While early studies in political socialization concentrated on children in the elementary school system, later studies came to regard the high school and young adult years as more critical to political formation. If the young child has learned some basic indirect tools for political involvement, and as an adolescent has acquired some elementary political information and values, it is entry into adulthood that is most relevant to political learning.

If the basic ideological frames thrashed out in early adulthood persist through adulthood, adult events including marriage, parenthood, careers, and property ownership influence the subsequent development of political learning. In the context of a general decline in partisan loyalty across liberal democracies, the transmission of political party identification from generation to generation has weakened, resulting in the enhanced impact of adult political socialization, as manifested in patterns of voter volatility.

While any sociodemographic variable, such as sex, race, class, and religion, influence it, political social-

ization can be studied in specific age groups in the population. An understanding of age-specific inputs from the broader political culture helps to explain the complexity of political orientations. Major cultural experiences, known as period effects, notably if they are transformative and experienced in the early years, can exert a culture shift of socialization, diminishing older ways.

Cohort effects occur when a major change in political culture socializes only one generation. It remains culturally distinct from its predecessors and successors, and its impact gradually diminishes as its numbers decline through death. Life-cycle effects are patterns of socialization that routinely condition political learning in different ways for different age groups. The impact of political socialization in periods, cohorts, and through life cycles is evident in the level and the nature of political involvement.

SEE ALSO: Efficacy, Political; Period Effect; Political Culture; Psychological Reasons for Voting and Nonvoting; Trust in Government; Voter Knowledge/Ignorance.

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Political Theorists

POLITICAL THEORISTS POWERFULLY shape the fundamentals of American society and its elections. On the importance of theory, many state constitutions warn: "a frequent recurrence to fundamental principles is essential to the security of individual right and the perpetuity of free government." (Washington State Const. Art. I, § 32.) However, because voters and policymakers often do not consider "first principles," changes in the form and content of democratic elections are often controlled by at least two other factors. These factors are unexamined assumptions about democracy and its core values of liberty and equality, as well as the spillover of