

Gendered Political Socialization


Diagnosis, Explanations and Cures

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1 Introduction

Why do men and women differ in their level and types of political engagement? Scholars have long found that men report a higher sense of political efficacy and are over-represented in the vast majority of countries' legislative assemblies. Findings about gender differences in other aspects of political engagement, including political interest, political knowledge and voter turnout, are more complex but also point to important gender differences. This dissertation hypothesizes that gender differences in political interest are mainly due to childhood political socialization, and in particular to the influence of same-gender peers and adult role models in early political discussions. By uncovering the distinct political topics these actors emphasize when they speak about politics to boys relative to girls, it becomes possible to have a clearer idea about what brings larger numbers of boys towards institutional politics after they become adult men. Notably, it is argued that interest for *partisan* politics is distinctly transmitted by men and to boys. 

Throughout this dissertation, the umbrella term *political engagement* is used to describe forms of commitment to politics through attitudes and actions — leaving aside the ideological content of these attitudes and actions. Political engagement has been used to refer to political interest, political discussion, political knowledge, voter turnout, political efficacy, and/or party membership (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010; Gidengil, O'Neill, and Young 2010; Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 1997). More narrowly, *political participation* is used to refer to political actions, such as boycotting, participating in protests, donating money to candidates, intending to

vote, or voting. *Political interest* is this study’s main variable of interest, but it is often studied alongside other aspects of political engagement, making *political engagement* a relevant category for analytic purposes. Unless otherwise specified, *political interest* refers to self-reported interest in politics in general.

Gender is understood here as “sets of socially constructed meanings of masculinities and femininities, derived from context-specific identifications of sex, that is, male and female, men and women” (Beckwith 2010, 160). While gender is viewed as a social construct, it is already observable at a young age and further develops through time due to biological factors — not environmental ones (Hatemi et al. 2012). Various other gender identities have been identified, including transgender, non-binary, gender-queer and gender-ambiguous people (Matsuno and Budge 2017). In the 2019 Canadian Election Study, people who identify as “Other (e.g. Trans, non-binary, two-spirit, gender-queer)” made up 0.8% of all online respondents. Due to this study’s sample size and theoretical grounding, only people who identify as men, women, boys and girls are studied, like most studies on gender differences in political engagement do. Further research using purposely selected samples of people who do not identify as men or women will be needed to get a better understanding of the determinants of their political interest.

2 The diagnosis

In Canada and other Western countries, differences in political engagement are complex and often subject to disagreement between studies. On some aspects of political engagement, it is hard to tell whether men or women are more engaged. They seem to be about as likely to vote in national elections (Kostelka, Blais, and Gidengil 2019), to participate in demonstrations and political rallies (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010), to donate money to political candidates (conflicting evidence from Coffé and Bolzendahl (2010) and Tolley, Besco, and Sevi (2020)), to express high levels of political trust (conflicting evidence from Dassonneville et al. (2012) and Schoon and Cheng (2011)), to win elections when they run for office (Golder et al. 2017; Sevi, Arel-Bundock, and Blais 2019), and to express interest in local politics (Coffé 2013; Hayes and Bean 1993).¹

However, other aspects of political engagement point in the direction of men being overall more politically engaged. Studies have found that they are more likely to be interested in politics in general, including national and international politics (Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 1997); to discuss politics (Beauvais 2020; Rosenthal, Jones, and Rosenthal 2003); to have an opinion on political issues (Atkeson and Rapoport 2003); to try to convince other people to vote for a candidate (Beauregard 2014); to feel a sense of political efficacy, both internal and external² (Gidengil, Giles, and Thomas 2008; Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 1997); to give correct answers to knowledge questions on political institutions (Dolan 2011; Ferrin, Fraile, and García-Albacete 2018; Fraile 2014; Norris, Lovenduski, and Campbell 2004; Stolle and Gidengil 2010; Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 1997); to vote in second-order elections³ (Dassonneville and Kostelka 2020; Kostelka, Blais, and Gidengil 2019); to be active political party members (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010; Stolle and Hooghe 2011); to be politically ambitious; and to run for political office (Fox and Lawless 2004, 2005).

Finally, some aspects of political engagement suggest women are more politically engaged. For instance, women are more likely than men to be interested in health care, education and gender issues (R. Campbell and Winters 2008; Ferrin et al. 2020), to give correct answers to knowledge questions on government services and social issues (Ferrin, Fraile, and García-Albacete 2018; Norris, Lovenduski, and Campbell 2004; Stolle and Gidengil 2010), and to engage in private activism such as boycotting and signing petitions (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010).

Gender differences in political engagement — whatever their direction — **influence each other** (Bennett and Bennett 1989; Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010; Coffé 2013; Ondercin and Jones-White 2017) and have consequences

¹Controlling for some of the other political attitudes mentioned here, women become *more* interested in local politics (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010) and *more* likely to vote in national elections (Coffé 2013) than men, but the current focus is on raw gender differences.

²*Internal efficacy*: an individual’s “self-perception that they are capable of understanding politics and competent enough to participate in political acts such as voting.” *External efficacy*: an individual’s “perception of being able to have an impact on politics.” (Gidengil, Giles, and Thomas 2008, 538)

³Second-order elections include European elections, municipal elections, and most types of other sub-regional elections.

on at least two types of substantive citizen participation: discussing politics with other people and running for elected political office.

Studies report men are more likely than women to discuss politics, but women and men tend to think about *partisan politics* more specifically when they think about politics (R. Campbell and Winters 2008; Ferrin et al. 2020). Traditional political discussion survey questions therefore mostly measure discussion of partisan politics, which is one aspect of politics on which men typically report more interest. As people usually discuss the topics they are most interested in, it seems likely that women discuss more often political topics for which they report more interest, such as health care or gender issues. Political discussion of various topics is seen as something desirable in participatory democracies.

Discussing with people with different ideas and views also creates a phenomenon of collective intelligence (Landemore 2013), which is seen as a desirable outcome from a democratic point of view, since it has been found both to reduce political polarization and to produce better reasoning, i.e., a better capacity at finding and evaluating arguments in deliberative context (Mercier and Landemore 2012). It therefore seems relevant to identify the socialization elements that lead to more diversity in political discussions — and men and women have different life experiences but also, often, different ideological viewpoints (Gidengil et al. 2005).

Studies find men have more political ambition than women. This might be due to the fact that women “are more than twice as likely as men to consider themselves ‘not at all qualified’ to run for office (29% of women, compared to 14% of men) [and] are roughly 22% less likely than men to report parental encouragement” (Fox and Lawless 2005, 654). Political interest, self-perceived qualifications, and family socialization all predict political ambition — i.e., having previously considered the possibility of running for office. Gender differences in political interest and political efficacy might therefore help to explain why women are under-represented in legislative assemblies in the vast majority of countries (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2021). In Canada too, political issues are most often settled by assemblies and executives where men are the majority. At the time of writing, while the Canadian federal cabinet is gender-balanced, the premiers of the 10 provinces are men, just like the majority of provincial ministers. Ten years earlier, Tolley (2011) also found that women represented less than 25% of Canadian legislators at the federal, provincial and municipal levels, and only 15% of mayors.

Women’s lower levels of political ambition is not the only factor contributing to their legislative under-representation. Discrimination against women by gatekeepers (Ashe and Stewart 2012) and by parties who make them candidates in hopeless ridings (Thomas and Bodet 2013) might explain part of the gender gap in legislative representation in the country, among other factors. Still, women are not discriminated at the polls by Canadian voters (Sevi, Arel, and Boudock, and Blais 2019) and elites discriminate against *men* when it comes to providing advice to political aspirants (Dhima 2020).

Since policies often have different effects on men and women, which can be influenced by policymakers’ gender (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004; Donato et al. 2008), the fact that women are under-represented in the legislative and executive spheres has practical consequences on the kinds of legislation adopted. Studying the perception and causes of gender differences in political engagement therefore seems relevant. By identifying causes, potential solutions can be sought by relevant actors who seek assemblies that are more gender-balanced.

For the sake of simplicity, and because political interest is an antecedent to both political ambition and political discussion, this literature review focuses on political interest, with references to other aspects of political engagement when relevant.


3 Puzzle: explaining the emergence of gender differences in political interest

This dissertation answers the following question: “*How and when do gender differences in political interest emerge?*” This section reviews the main theories that have been suggested to account for women’s lower overall levels of political interest and concludes that no unified theory has been proposed thus far to account for the emergence of this gap.

First, women politicians’ relative absence in politics might explain part of the gender gap in political interest.

Mayer and Schmidt (2004) find that adolescent boys and girls in the United States, Mexico, Japan, and China all think politics is a men's domain, and girls are more likely than boys to report so. Adolescent boys also report higher political interest. These two findings might be due to the fact that these four countries, like almost all countries in the world, are represented by a majority of men legislators. Bühlmann and Schädel (2012)'s study of 33 European countries finds political interest is higher among men than women, but this gap is smaller in countries with higher proportions of women in the legislative assembly. Still, predicted probabilities show that women would be significantly less interested in politics even in a country whose parliament has reached gender parity.

Second, Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer (2010) find that proportional election systems — but not federalism and parliamentary systems — reduce gender gaps in political interest and political discussion compared with plurality systems. However, this distinction does not address the root cause of the gender gap.

 Third, being newly a first-time parent has a bigger negative impact on political discussion and participation for women than men in the United States. This effect is directly the result of childbirth and is very strong in the short run since housework duties and child-rearing are disproportionately handled by women (Beauvais 2020). However, the effect diminishes in the long run, according to Beauvais (2020) and Kay et al. (1987). While a similar effect affects fathers, mothers are disproportionately affected by childbirth (Bhatti et al. 2019). These findings might also translate to political interest. However, Gidengil, Giles, and Thomas (2008) find that childbirth is not related to declines in political discussion or participation in Canada.

More generally, being a mother has a negative effect on political interest similar in size to being a father, though women are more likely to report lacking time to keep up with politics due to family time pressures (R. Campbell and Winters 2008).

Fourth, Jennings and Niemi (2014) fail to find strong effects of labour force participation on the gender gap in political interest. Similarly, Schlozman, Burns, and Verba (1999) “had expected that exposure on the job to a broader array of people and issues would heighten engagement with politics [including political interest], especially among women” (p. 44), but they instead find null results.

Fifth, the impact of genetics on political engagement has been confirmed by many studies (Dawes and Loewen 2009; Fowler, Baker, and Dawes 2008; Loewen and Dawes 2012). Klemmensen et al. (2012) specifically find that political interest and political efficacy are heritable and come from the same underlying genetic factor, but it remains unclear whether this underlying factor is more present among men, women or none of them. These studies also emphasize that genetic differences, when they are found, add to but do not replace differences in political socialization.

Sixth, women might simply be interested in those aspects of politics that are not viewed as “typical” politics. On average, women report more interest in topics such as health care, education and gender issues, while men report more interest for foreign policy, partisan politics, and law and order (R. Campbell and Winters 2008; Ferrin et al. 2020). Some topics, such as taxes, seem to be equally interesting to men and women. Both studies conclude that men and women are simply interested in different domains of politics and that politics is mentally associated with elections and parties, topics in which men have more interest. This therefore leads women to report lower levels of overall political interest.

R. Campbell and Winters (2008) show that men's higher *partisan political interest* derives from the fact that they are more *agentic*, i.e., focused on self-assertion, while women are more *communal*, i.e., focused on cooperation. Since politics is typically seen as more adversarial, it appeals more to agentic types — mostly men — who then develop higher political efficacy and overall self-reported political interest. Infante and Rancer (1996) similarly find that men are more likely than women to value arguing and engage in it, except for workplace-related arguing. Men are also more likely to engage in verbal aggressiveness, while women tend to believe that arguing is hostile and combative. Women MPs have also been found to be less likely to resort to adversarial language (Shaw 2002).

The first five theories — women's political under-representation, political institutions, motherhood, employment, and genetics — seem to provide at best a partial explanation of the gender gap in political interest. Interest for partisan politics stemming from men being more assertive and less communal than women seems

to explain the endurance of gender differences in overall self-reported political interest through life. However, it remains somewhat unclear why men become more agentic and women become more communal.

Two other theories that have been used to explain the relation between gender and political interest are mobilized to provide a tentative response to this question: *gender homophily theory* and *social learning theory*. Both theories point to the broader role of role models and gendered influences in political socialization.

Homophily is “the principle that a contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people” (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001, 416). *Gender homophily* refers to the ways in which children of the same gender tend to stick together and become friends, from at least the beginning of primary school (Stehlé et al. 2013). Children are even more likely to drop friends who have a friend from the other gender than to add the other-gender friend to their own group of friends (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). These patterns increase during primary school but diminish — without disappearing — after puberty (Shrum, Cheek Jr., and MacD. 1988; Stehlé et al. 2013).

Studies about gender homophily in social networking websites among teenagers and adults have yielded more nuanced results. Laniado et al. (2016) find strong gender homophily among adolescent girls and boys — though not always for the same kinds of online activities — on a Spanish social networking service. However, Thelwall (2009) finds that MySpace users have similar levels of interactions regardless of their gender.

Social learning suggests that children learn through observation and model their behaviour after their parents. Transmission of political attitudes is deemed to be more effective when cue-giving and reinforcement from the socializing agent are strong and consistent (Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers 2009). Research has found that social learning exhibits gender effects: *observer-model similarity* leads children to model their behaviour based on the behaviour of models that resemble them (Bandura 1969). Indeed, past research has shown that the trickle-down effect of political engagement is stronger for mother–daughter dyads than other parent–child dyads (Gidengil, Wass, and Valaste 2016). Observer-model similarity should also apply to the influence of other role models.

Gender homophily and social learning both suggest that children are influenced by same-gender models. These models include parents, as social learning theory finds it, and peers, as gender homophily theory finds it. However, it might be the case that other role models, including teachers and social media influencers, also have a broader influence on children of their gender. This would be coherent with the idea that observer-model similarity encourages children to model their behaviour on people who resemble them. Is gender homophily just one example among many of social learning through observer-model similarity?


Social learning theory has been used to study mothers and fathers’ relative impact on sons and daughters’ political engagement, but not to explain overall gender differences in political engagement, such as women’s higher interest for health care politics and men’s higher tendency to discuss partisan politics. A broader application of social learning that includes parents, peers, teachers and influencers would provide a comprehensive overview of the mechanisms of reinforcement of the gender gap in political interest through generations.


4 The transmission of political engagement through childhood socialization

The idea that gender differences in political engagement are rooted in early childhood socialization has been argued by many for a long time (e.g., Bashevkin 1993). Whether boys or girls are more politically engaged during childhood and teenage is up to debate. Most studies find that political participation is higher among girls (Alozie, Simon, and Merrill 2003; Hooghe and Stolle 2004; Malin, Tirri, and Liauw 2015; Quintelier 2010, 2015; Wilkenfeld 2009), with only a few dissenting voices ^{who} ~~which~~ find no significant gender gap (Eckstein, Noack, and Gniewosz 2012). However, other indicators of political engagement have not been studied as much and have yielded mixed results. Bos et al. (2020) find that boys are more interested in politics in elementary school, but Alozie, Simon, and Merrill (2003) find that girls are more politically interested than boys, a gap that emerges during childhood and endures through adolescence. Mayer and Schmidt (2004) find that political interest is slightly higher for boys than girls in grades 7–9 in China, Mexico and the United States, but not in Japan. For political knowledge, Pereira, Fraile, and Rubal (2015) find that boys are better

at naming political facts but girls are better at analyzing political matters, while Cosgrove and Gilleece (2012) find that 14-year-old girls have more civic knowledge in most countries.


Even for political participation, boys and girls' motivations seem to differ. Hooghe and Stolle (2004) find that 14-year-old girls want to engage in social movement-related forms of participation, while boys favour more radical and confrontational action repertoires. Malin, Tirri, and Liauw (2015) also show that adolescent girls' motivations to participate in politics are about helping other people, while boys' motivations are about defending their values, which reinforces Campbell and Winters's (2008) suggestion that men are more agentic and women are more communal — already in high school.

Overall, some gender differences in political engagement already exist during adolescence. Gender differences in political participation show that girls want to vote and participate in politics more than boys, but political participation at the adult age is fairly similar across both genders. On the other hand, international and longitudinal studies find that political interest remains remarkably stable through life, including for high-school students, whose political interest is already high (Fraile and Sánchez-Vitores 2020; Prior 2010). It seems worthwhile to study political socialization in the period of life where political interest is developed — childhood, teenage and early adult life — to better understand gender differences, since there seems to be some level of path dependency in individuals' political interest  afterwards. Still, part of the gender gap in some aspects of political engagement, such as political participation, might emerge later in life, highlighting the importance of studying political socialization among adults as well. Jennings and Niemi (2014) suggest that many aspects of political engagement become stronger from adolescence through early adult life, and even more so for men. Political socialization keeps happening at the adult age — albeit at a lower rate than among teenagers. Among older adults, Bhatti and Hansen (2012b) find that electoral participation among Danish women declines earlier than ^{among} men because their social capital declines earlier.

 Children's political engagement has been found to be influenced by four main agents of socialization: parents, teachers, schools, and the media, including the Internet.

4.1 Parents

The role of parents in transmitting political engagement to their children has been emphasized by numerous studies. Political engagement is transmitted in parent-child political discussions according to most (Mayer and Schmidt 2004; McIntosh, Hart, and Youniss 2007; Quintelier 2015; Wilkenfeld 2009) — but not all (Šerek and Umemura 2015). Parents' own political engagement (Cicognani et al. 2012; Warren and Wicks 2011), electoral participation, and level of education (Beauregard 2008) have also been linked to their children's political engagement. Social learning theory suggests that children learn through the observation of their parents, therefore making children of parents who vote more politically active. Jennings and Niemi (2014) show that young adults' political engagement is influenced more heavily by their parents' political engagement than by their own political engagement eight years earlier when they were adolescents, but that their engagement is less and less influenced by their parents through time. *Status transmission theory* suggests that “well-educated parents are more likely to provide a politically stimulating home environment” and therefore have politically engaged children (Gidengil, Wass, and Valaste 2016, 373). The role of other family members in the transmission of political engagement has been emphasized by some (Gidengil et al. 2020), but research remains scant on that aspect.

Most research has found that the trickle-down effect of political engagement from parents to children suggested by *social learning theory* works in gendered ways. Mothers' political engagement has a stronger effect on their daughters than sons' political engagement (Atkeson and Rapoport 2003; Beauregard 2008; Cicognani et al. 2012; Owen and Dennis 1988; Rapoport 1985),⁴ while the effect of fathers' political engagement is much less clear: it might have a stronger effect on their sons' political engagement (Beauregard 2008; Owen and Dennis 1988; Rapoport 1985), on their daughters' political engagement (Cicognani et al. 2012) or none of them (Atkeson and Rapoport 2003; Gidengil, Wass, and Valaste 2016 ). From the other perspective, daughters' political engagement seems to be influenced mostly by their mothers' political engagement (Atkeson and Rapoport 2003; Beauregard 2008; Bhatti and Hansen 2012a; Gidengil, O'Neill, and Young 2010; Owen and

⁴Gidengil, Wass, and Valaste (2016) find a stronger effect of mothers on their daughters than sons but the difference is not statistically significant.

Dennis 1988; Rapoport 1985), though some studies show the same impact of both parents on their daughters (Cicognani et al. 2012; Gidengil, Wass, and Valaste 2016). Finally, sons' political engagement seems to be influenced mostly by their father's political engagement (Beauregard 2008; Bhatti and Hansen 2012a; Owen and Dennis 1988; Rapoport 1985), though some studies again show the same impact of both parents on their sons (Atkeson and Rapoport 2003; Cicognani et al. 2012; Gidengil, Wass, and Valaste 2016).

Contrary to *social learning theory*, *status transmission theory* does not seem to work in gendered ways: parents' education has a positive influence on their children's political interest regardless of parents' gender and children's gender (Beauregard 2008).


Studies have also investigated the gender patterns in parent-child political discussions, but the amount of political discussions does not seem to vary based on parents and children's gender. While earlier studies found that children discuss politics more often with their fathers than mothers (Noller and Bagi 1985), more recent research has found no significant difference between fathers and mothers (Hooghe and Boonen 2015; Mayer and Schmidt 2004; Shulman and DeAndrea 2014). Similarly, while Noller and Bagi (1985) found that parents discuss politics more often with their sons, Mayer and Schmidt (2004) find they discuss it as much with their daughters than sons.

Overall, the link between mothers and daughters' political engagement is robust, but studies are less clear about the father-son link in political engagement. As Gidengil, Wass, and Valaste (2016) suggest, this might be the result of two separate processes. First, as a result of observer-model similarity, children tend to model their behaviour and attitudes after same-gender models (Bussey and Bandura 1999). Second, mothers, as primary caregivers, have more opportunities to influence their children's political engagement than fathers and therefore have a stronger overall influence on their children's political engagement (Bhatti and Hansen 2012a).⁵

Parents might also encourage gender norms in their way of educating their children. For example, Cicognani et al. (2012) suggest that adolescent boys are encouraged to be more autonomous and to participate in a higher number of groups outside the family than girls. However, recent studies have found that parents are just as likely to encourage autonomy among boys and girls (Bumpus, Crouter, and McHale 2001). A meta-analysis (Lytton and Romney 1991) also found that there is no difference in how parents treat their children when it comes to amount of interaction, achievement encouragement, warmth, nurturance, responsiveness, material reward, encouragement of dependency, discouragement of aggression, and clarity of communication. However, parents did encourage sex-typed activities among their children and give more physical punishment to boys in Western, non-North American countries. Fathers' disciplinary strictness was also stronger than mothers.

4.2 Peers

Friends and acquaintances can contribute to the development of political engagement, mainly through political discussions. Using longitudinal data on 16- to 21-year-olds, Quintelier (2015) finds that political discussion among peers has more influence on political participation than parents, schools, and the media. Other studies also find that political discussions with friends and acquaintances increase political engagement among child and adult respondents (B. A. Campbell 1979; Hoskins, Janmaat, and Villalba 2012; Klostad 2007; McClurg 2003; Pattie and Johnston 2009; Šerek and Umemura 2015) and that social networks can be vectors of political engagement (La Due Lake and Huckfeldt 1998). The influence of peers on political engagement seems to grow particularly strong after young adults leave their parents' home and parents' influence on their political engagement declines (Bhatti and Hansen 2012a). Adults with more social interactions and bigger social networks also tend to participate in politics more than those more isolated (Putnam 2000).

Political discussions among peers typically exhibit gender effects. Among adults, leaving aside relatives, 84% of men report discussing politics only with men, while 64% of women report discussing politics only with women (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995). Moreover, voters tend to vote  same-gender candidates under some circumstances (Golder et al. 2017; Holli and Wass 2010). Some studies have found same-gender voting is

⁵Gidengil, Wass, and Valaste (2016) also suggest a third mechanism: mothers are more likely than fathers to discuss politics openly instead of trying to impose their views, which typically makes children more likely to pick up their political affiliations. This third process might be flawed, however. While Shulman and DeAndrea (2014) find that the mother-child link in political preferences is stronger, Hooghe and Boonen (2015) find the father-child link is stronger.

more common among men (Holli and Wass 2010), but others have found it is more common among women (Golder et al. 2017). These findings seem to confirm the impact of gender homophily in political discussions.

Peer-group diversity can also contribute to the development of political engagement. Political disagreement has been found to have a negative impact on political participation, but a positive impact on other indicators of political engagement (Mutz 2002; Pattie and Johnston 2009). In practice, Quintelier, Stolle, and Harell (2012) also show that political participation and peer-group political diversity reinforce each other, and Quintelier (2015) also finds a link between both variables.

4.3 Media

The term *media* is used in its broadest sense to refer to “one of the means or channels of general communication, information, or entertainment in society, as newspapers, radio,” television (Dictionary.com 2021), but also the Internet (Bakker and De Vreese 2011; Quintelier 2015). This includes classical news channels such as CBC, CNN or Fox News, in their TV, radio and online formats, but also TV documentaries, information websites such as Wikipedia, and social networking websites including YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, Snapchat, and WhatsApp.

Political engagement is influenced by media consumption in some ways, but the type of media consumption heavily changes the link with political engagement. A negative relationship between time spent watching television and youth political participation is found by Quintelier (2015), mimicking findings among adults (Moy, Scheufele, and Holbert 1999; Norris 1996; Putnam 2000), though the causal mechanism leading to this relationship remains unclear and Bakker and De Vreese (2011) instead find a non-significant effect. On the other hand, time spent using the Internet does not seem to have any relation with youth political participation (Bakker and De Vreese 2011; Quintelier and Vissers 2008; Quintelier 2015), though Vissers and Stolle (2014) find small positive results. Internet use for services, online communication (Bakker and De Vreese 2011) and opinion expression (N.-J. Lee, Shah, and McLeod 2012) has a positive link with political participation. In particular, Bakker and De Vreese (2011), Kahne and Bowyer (2018) and Xenos, Vromen, and Loader (2014) find a positive link between the use of social networking websites and aspects of political engagement, though Baumgartner and Morris (2010) find negative results. Overall, these findings suggest the importance of social capital in fostering political engagement, i.e., spending online and offline time with people instead of watching TV alone.

In more politics-related media uses, keeping up with news through media is related to increased youth political engagement (Bakker and De Vreese 2011; N.-J. Lee, Shah, and McLeod 2012; Quintelier 2015). Digital media seem to have a stronger impact than traditional media in that regard, due to their interactive aspects (Bakker and De Vreese 2011; N.-J. Lee, Shah, and McLeod 2012; Warren and Wicks 2011). Seeking political information online, sharing political opinions online (N.-J. Lee, Shah, and McLeod 2012), and participating in online political discussion groups (Conroy, Feezell, and Guerrero 2012) have been found to be positively related to youth political engagement, though discussion groups do not seem to increase political knowledge (Conroy, Feezell, and Guerrero 2012).

Studies on media use among boys and girls do not find systematic gender differences. Roe (1998) shows that 9- to 12-year-old boys and girls’ media consumption becomes more and more different. More specifically, boys watched more television, while girls listened more to the radio — at a time when the Internet was not widespread. Gender differences in TV consumption are not found by S.-J. Lee, Bartolic, and Vandewater (2009) however.

Studies mostly find boys use the Internet more frequently than girls. Willoughby (2008) finds that boys use the Internet just as frequently as girls in early high school, but girls’ Internet use decreases in late high school, notably due to a decline in gaming, making older teenage boys more active on the Internet than girls. Tsai and Tsai (2010) also find boys use the Internet more than girls in junior high school, but purpose-wise, girls use the Internet for communication while boys use it more for Web exploration. Moreover, Lokithasan et al. (2019) find that young “female respondents are influenced by influencers who promote beauty products while male respondents are drawn to technology and gaming products,” [p. 21], and men give more value to entertainment content from influencers while women give more value to information content.

Online political engagement is more prevalent among boys than girls according to Cicognani et al. (2012), and Livingstone, Bober, and Helsper (2005) finds that boys are more likely than girls “to engage in online communication, information-seeking and peer-to-peer connection” (p. 306), although girls visit more political and civic websites.

4.4 Schools

Schools can influence childhood socialization in many ways, including citizenship education classes, classroom political discussions, extracurricular activities and active learning strategies.

While earlier studies found only weak links between citizenship education classes and political engagement (Langton and Jennings 1968), more recent studies find a positive link (Dassonneville et al. 2012; Galston 2001; Mahéo 2018, 2019; Neundorff, Niemi, and Smets 2016; Quintelier 2010, 2015). Warren and Wicks (2011) and Quintelier (2015) find a positive link between the frequency of school learning activities about politics and political engagement. However, Hoskins, Janmaat, and Villalba (2012) find that the quantity of citizenship education does not change political engagement; instead, the quality of such classes makes a difference. *Citizenship education* and *civic education* classes include classes teaching facts about government and politics but also promoting political engagement (Althof and Berkowitz 2006; Themistokleous and Avraamidou 2016).

Classroom political discussions in general can increase students’ political engagement. For instance, a large body of literature has found that students’ perceptions of an *open classroom climate* increases aspects of their political engagement (Dassonneville et al. 2012; Godfrey and Grayman 2014; Hoskins, Janmaat, and Villalba 2012; Knowles and McCafferty-Wright 2015; N.-J. Lee, Shah, and McLeod 2012; Manganelli, Lucidi, and Alivernini 2015; Martens and Gainous 2013; Persson 2015; Quintelier and Hooghe 2013).⁶ An *open classroom climate* is one in which “students experience the discussion of social and political issues while in class and [in which] they feel comfortable contributing their own opinions during such discussions” (D. E. Campbell 2007, 62). Campbell (2006, 2008) finds significant links between an open classroom climate and political engagement, but warns against assuming there is a causal effect, as the relationship might be endogenous and no experiment has studied the issue thus far.

The role of classroom political discussions in political socialization might be gendered. For instance, Mahony (1985) finds that girls are less likely to participate in classroom discussions of politics because boys make the classroom climate aggressive. However, Rosenthal, Jones, and Rosenthal (2003) show that, while girls’ presence has a slight positive impact on girls’ speaking time, interruptions occur as frequently between adolescents whatever their gender, and studies find that 8th- to 12th-grade girls are *more* likely than boys to report an open classroom climate (Blankenship 1990; D. E. Campbell 2007; Maurissen, Claes, and Barber 2018).

Extracurricular and active learning activities can also have an impact on youth political engagement. Service learning — “a credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility” (Bringle, Hatcher, and McIntosh 2006, 12) — has been found to increase political engagement (Quintelier 2010), just like community service in general (McFarland and Thomas 2006) and membership in school council (Dassonneville et al. 2012; Hoskins, Janmaat, and Villalba 2012; Quintelier 2010). Similar effects on political engagement have been found for voluntary associations (McFarland and Thomas 2006; Quintelier 2008, 2015), visiting parliaments (Quintelier 2010) and the quantity of class group projects (Quintelier 2015), but Dassonneville et al. (2012) find no such effects for these three variables. Moreover, Quintelier (2010) finds that the effect of active learning strategies on political engagement is the same for boys and girls.

Gendered characterizations are also common in educational textbooks. Diekman and Murnen (2004) find that even books recommended to parents as “nonsexist” portray women as having female-stereotypical personalities, domestic chores, and leisure activities, potentially encouraging the perpetuation of some gender inequalities. Gouvias and Alexopoulos (2018) further find men are mentioned twice as much as women in

⁶Quintelier (2015) finds no such effect.

Greek textbooks, for all kinds of social, professional and family activities. Women are often characterized as sentimental, weak, gentle and full of feelings, while men are characterized as being tough, cold-tempered, smart and talented. Representations of women in typical family roles are present, but less so than in older textbooks. For political leaders, Lay et al. (2019) also find gendered characterizations in *TIME for Kids*, a children's magazine widely used in classrooms across the United States: women politicians are portrayed as having feminine and communal traits more than men politicians.

School teachers have been found to initiate just as many positive classroom interactions with boys and girls, but more negative interactions with boys (Jones and Dindia 2004). Moreover, they tend to perceive boys as troublemakers and as better in math, while girls are seen as better at reading (Leaper and Brown 2014).

4.5 Society values and culture

M. L. Inglehart (1981) shows that women are more interested in politics in traditionally Protestant countries than in traditionally Catholic countries. R. Inglehart and Norris (2003) further suggest that modernization has a positive effect on cultural attitudes towards gender equality: as societies move from agrarian to industrial and from industrial to postindustrial, people, especially younger generations, become more open to the idea of gender equality, though history, religion and institutions also play a role in shaping countries' trajectory. However, D. E. Campbell and Wolbrecht (2006) find that beliefs about the appropriateness of politics for women have no impact on girls' intended political participation. Fraile and Gomez (2017) find that the gender gap in political interest can only be bridged through changes in early childhood socialization, especially in traditional family values.

4.6 Summary

Overall, studies generally find parents, peers and schools play an important role in the transmission of political engagement. Politics- and communication-related uses of media are also positively related with political engagement, but watching TV and using the Internet more often do not increase political engagement.

Mothers and fathers, despite speaking to their children about politics as much regardless of gender, have different influences on them that also vary based on children's gender. Peer political discussions, for their part, are heavily gender-segregated. Types of Internet use vary between boys and girls, with boys more likely to be politically engaged online. However, classroom climate is more likely to be seen as open to an exchange of ideas by girls than boys, and teachers are more likely to have negative interactions with boys than girls.

Again, most of these findings imply definitions of politics that implicitly emphasize partisan politics over other aspects, but without formally hinting at it.

5 Hypotheses

The literature on gendered political socialization lacks a bit of consensus and clarity. For instance, the father-son link in political interest transmission has been found to hold or not to hold in different studies. A more systematic account of the influence of parents alongside other influences would provide a fuller picture of the story.

Gender homophily predicts more same-gender than mixed-gender peer discussions, and this finding applies to political discussions as well. However, no study has thus far examined the implications of this theory for gender differences in political interest and other aspects of political engagement. I hypothesize that observer-model similarity plays a central role in explaining the emergence of these differences, with parents, peers, media and schools the most important agents of political socialization. Gendered patterns in political interest emerge during adolescence and through the early stages of adult life due to the influence of all four agents. Hypotheses 1–6 describe theoretical attempts in further detail and are summarized in Figure 1. The accent is put on political interest, since it is a proxy for most other aspects of political engagement.

Hypothesis 1: *Children's interest and knowledge for specific political topics is more affected by political discussions with their same-gender parent and same-gender peers than other-gender parent and other-gender*

peers.

For example, a father will transmit his interest for specific political topics to his sons through political discussion more easily than a mother. A mother will have more transmission potential of her interest for specific political topics to her daughters than sons through political discussion, however.

Hypothesis 2: *Children's interest and knowledge for specific political topics is more affected by the discourse of same-gender models — including parents, teachers, and social media influencers — relative to other-gender models.*

For example, a woman teacher will transmit her knowledge for specific political topics to girls through teaching more easily than a man teacher. A man teacher will have more transmission potential of his interest for specific political topics to boys than girls through teaching, however.

Hypothesis 3: *Interest and knowledge for law and order, foreign policy and partisan politics is transmitted mainly by men and to boys, therefore perpetuating these gender gaps.*

Hypothesis 4: *Interest and knowledge for health care, education and gender issues is transmitted mainly by women and to girls, therefore perpetuating these gender gaps.*

Hypothesis 5: *Gender differences in partisan political interest emerge during adolescence and reach their highest point in the early stages of adulthood.*

Hypothesis 6: *Men's higher interest in partisan politics leads them to develop stronger ambitions for political office than women on average.*

Women's lack of political representation has been attributed to many factors, among which their lower levels of political ambition.

6 Data and methods

This study relies on four sets of data, all collected in Canada. Canada is often classified by reports as one of the best countries for women (Conant 2019; Equal Measures 2030 2020; US News & World Report 2020), but only 39% of its elected MPs are women (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2021), making it a country worth studying.

First, Canadian Election Study (CES) data on various aspects of political engagement will be analyzed, including political interest, political knowledge, internal efficacy, external efficacy, political discussion, political debating, participation in protests, participation in boycotts, participation in petitions, party membership, donations to parties, and voting. CES data allows time series analyses of the evolution of gender gaps through time, as some political engagement questions have been asked since 1965. Time-series World Values Survey (WVS) data will also be used to provide better descriptive statistics on these elements when available. After being weighted to better represent the Canadian population, these data will visually represent descriptive statistics by age and gender on political engagement.⁷ These data will help to respond to Hypothesis 5 by showing how gender differences in political engagement vary with age among adults.

Second, data will be gathered among 7-year-old to 17-year-old Canadians in elementary and high schools. A partnership with a Canadian non-profit organization such as CIVIX or myBlueprint will be sought in order to conduct a survey experiment on a citizenship education program. Three of CIVIX programs are especially worth considering: Student Vote, Student Budget Consultation, and News Literacy. They are all school-directed citizenship education activities in elementary and high schools that are offered in a large number of classes throughout Canada. The survey experimental design would compare the evolution of political engagement for boys and girls in classrooms who took part in the program and in classrooms who did not by measuring political engagement both before and after the program, while the descriptive part of the survey would look at broader trends among both groups. For descriptive purposes, schools would be selected randomly to be part of the survey without regard to their participation in the program. Student Vote is the biggest Canadian citizenship education program and is offered in federal and most provincial

⁷I will also analyze descriptive statistics by age, gender and ethnicity, and age, gender and immigrant status.

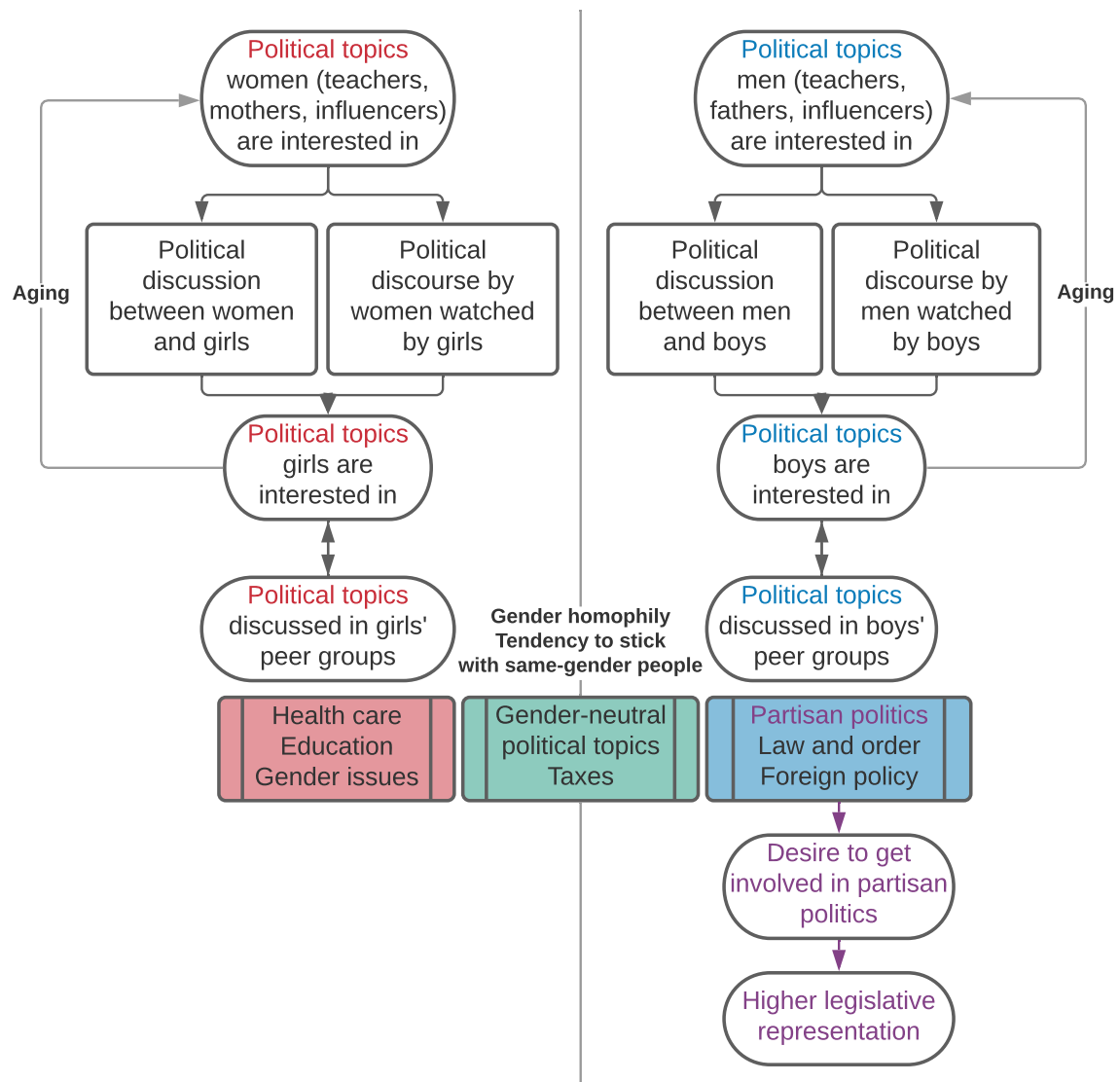


Figure 1: Dissertation Hypotheses Mind Map

elections in about half of classes across the country, so the next Canadian general election and the 2022 Ontario provincial election might be good occasions to conduct the experiment, with panel data being collected before the election (time 1) and after it (time 2). Questions would be asked about students' interest for various political topics, the political topics they discuss with their mothers, fathers and peers, and in school political discussions, as well as the political topics discussed by the people they follow in traditional and social media, among other things. The Personal Attributes Questionnaire (Ward et al. 2006) will also be used to assess students' degree of agency and communion. These data will be analyzed using multilevel modelling to help disentangle student-level, classroom-level, school-level and provincial-level effects (if it applies). They will help to respond to Hypotheses 1–5. In total, thousands of students should respond to the survey questionnaire.

Third, data will be gathered among surveyed children's parents. Parents will be contacted by selected schools and given the questionnaire to be filled if they so wish.⁸ Contrary to children, only one poll before the election will be conducted. Questions will be asked about parents' interest for various political topics and the political topics they discuss with their sons and daughters. To further test if parents speak about different topics to their sons and daughters, a question will be asked about the number of children of each gender parents have: families with daughters only might speak about different political topics than families with sons only. These data will help to respond to Hypotheses 1–4 and 6. In total, thousands of parents should respond to the survey questionnaire.

Finally, I will conduct participant observation of same-gender and mixed-gender peer group political discussions to get a better idea about the political topics boys and girls discuss with their mothers, fathers and peers, and in classroom and Internet political discussions, while analyzing the relative impact of same-gender and other-gender peers on the kinds of political topics discussed. These focus groups will include four to six children each. These data will help to respond to Hypotheses 1–4. Since they complement the second set of data with qualitative evidence, only a few purposely selected participant observations will be conducted: five to ten peer groups will be selected by teachers from different classes in different schools selected for the children's survey.

7 Dissertation chapters

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Gender differences in political engagement in Canada: trends from childhood to adulthood
- 3. Parents' influence in boys and girls' political engagement
- 4. Peers' influence in boys and girls' political engagement
- 5. Teachers and influencers' influence in boys and girls' political engagement
- 6. The impact of citizenship education on gender differences in political engagement
- 7. Conclusion

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⁸Each classroom will need to assign a personal number to children to be matched with their parents, so that I get access to anonymous but matching data.

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