Gendered Political Socialization

Why Women and Men Differ on Political Engagement

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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 (Gidengil, Giles, and Thomas 2008; Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 1997) and are over-represented in the vast majority of countries' legislative assemblies (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2021). Findings about gender differences in other aspects of political engagement, including political knowledge (Stolle and Gidengil 2010; Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 1997) and voter turnout (Dassonneville and Kostelka 2020; Kostelka, Blais, and Gidengil 2019), are more complex but also point to important gender differences. This dissertation hypothesizes that gender differences in political engagement 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 keeps girls away from institutional politics after they become adult women.

Throughout this dissertation proposal, the umbrella term *political engagement* is used to describe forms of commitment to politics through attitudes and actions, excluding ideational differences. 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.

1 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),[1] and to express interest in local politics (Coffé 2013; Hayes and Bean 1993).[2]

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

[1] Still, Thomas and Bodet (2013) show that women are disproportionately more likely to be sacrificial lambs, i.e., candidates in districts where they have little chance of winning.

[2] Controlling 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.

internal and external[3] (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 elections[4] (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).

Multiple studies find that gender differences in political engagement influence each other (Bennett and Bennett 1989; Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010; Coffé 2013; Ondercin and Jones-White 2011). Notably, Fox and Lawless (2005) show that political interest, self-perceived qualifications, and family socialization all predict political ambition — i.e., having previously considered the possibility of running for office. Moreover, 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" (p. 654). 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, including Canada (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.

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. Studying the inception 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.

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

Four main theories have been suggested to account for women's lower overall levels of political interest. First, women politicians' relative absence in politics might have consequences. 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, being newly a first-time parent has a bigger negative impact on women's political discussion and participation than on men's participation in the United States. This effect is directly the result of childbirth and is very strong in the short run but diminishes in the long run, according to Beauvais (2020) and Kay

[3] Political efficacy has two components: *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") and *external efficacy* (an individual's "perception of being able to have an impact on politics") (Gidengil, Giles, and Thomas 2008).

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

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, but women are more likely to report lacking time to keep up with politics due to family time pressures (R. Campbell and Winters 2008).

Third, men and women might simply be interested in those aspects of politics that are not viewed as "typical" politics. Women are more interested in topics such as health care, education and gender issues, while men are more interested in foreign policy, partisan politics, and law and order (R. Campbell and Winters 2008; Ferrin et al. 2020). Some topics, such as taxes, are also 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.

Fourth, political interest might be transferred from one generation to the next by role models of the same gender. *Social learning theory* suggests that children learn through observation and model their behaviour after their parents, and research has found that the trickle-down effect of political engagement from parents to children works in gendered ways, with sons modeling their behaviour after their fathers and daughters after their mothers (Gidengil, Wass, and Valaste 2016). Since adult men report higher levels of overall political interest than adult women, there might be more fathers sharing their political interest with their sons than mothers sharing their political interest with their daughters. 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).

Among these four theories, the first two seem to provide at best a partial explanation of the gender gap in political interest. The third theory seems to hold in Canada and to explain the endurance of gender differences in political interest through life. However, it remains somewhat unclear why an enduring gender gap in political interest emerges somewhere during childhood or adolescence. This dissertation therefore answers the following question: "How and when do gender differences in political interest emerge?"

The gendered version of social learning theory seems promising since it provides an opportunity to check mechanisms of reinforcement of this gender gap through generations, and it has not been studied in a systematic way thus far, especially a way that includes attention to political interest transmission by actors other than parents.

3 The transmission of political engagement through childhood socialization

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 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.

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, Prior (2010), using longitudinal data from several countries, finds that political interest remains remarkably stable through life, including for high-school students, whose political interest is already high. Fraile and Sánchez-Vıtores (2020) find similar results. 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. However, 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.

Children's political engagement — i.e., political interest, efficacy, knowledge, and participation — has been found to be influenced by four main agents of socialization: parents, peers, schools, and the media, including the Internet.

3.1 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, while *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),[5] 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 2012; Gidengil, O'Neill, and Young 2010; Owen and 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 2012; 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).

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

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, 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 2012).[6]

3.2 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; Klofstad 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 2012). 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. *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). One implication of *homophily* is that boys and girls are 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. These patterns diminish but remain after puberty (Shrum, Cheek Jr., and MacD. 1988). Still, even among adults, 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 for same-gender candidates under some circumstances (Golder et al. 2017; Holli and Wass 2010). Some studies have found same-gender voting is more common among men (Holli and Wass 2010), but others have found it is more common among women (Golder et al. 2017). Social networks might be an exception to gender homophily however, as a study on MySpace users has found similar levels of interactions between people regardless of their gender (Thelwall 2009).

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.

3.3 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), or the Internet (Bakker and De Vreese 2011; Quintelier 2015). This includes classical news channels such as CBC,

[6] Gidengil, 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.

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.

Young people's media consumption has been found to have an impact on their 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 watch more television, while girls listen more to the radio. 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.

3.4 Schools

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

First, 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; Neundorf, 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).[7] 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). 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.

4 Hypotheses

Gender homophily predicts more same-gender than mixed-gender discussions, and this finding applies to political discussions as well (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995). 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 *social learning* and *gender homophily* play 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.

***Hypothesis 1**: Children's political 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.

[7] Quintelier (2015) finds no such effect.

Hypothesis 2*: Children's political 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 political interest emerge during adolescence and reach their highest point in the early stages of adult life.*

Hypothesis 6*: Men's higher interest in* partisan *politics leads them to develop stronger ambitions for political office than women on average, explaining part of the gender gap in political representation.*

5 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 29% 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.[8] These data will help to respond to Hypothesis 5.

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's 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 and identified as participating in the program or not. Student Vote is the biggest Canadian citizenship education program and is offered in federal and most provincial elections in about half of classes across the country, so the next Canadian general election or 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 the election (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. These data will help to respond to Hypotheses 1–5. In total, thousands of students should respond to the survey questionnaire.

[8] I will also analyze descriptive statistics by age, gender and ethnicity, or age, gender and immigrant status.

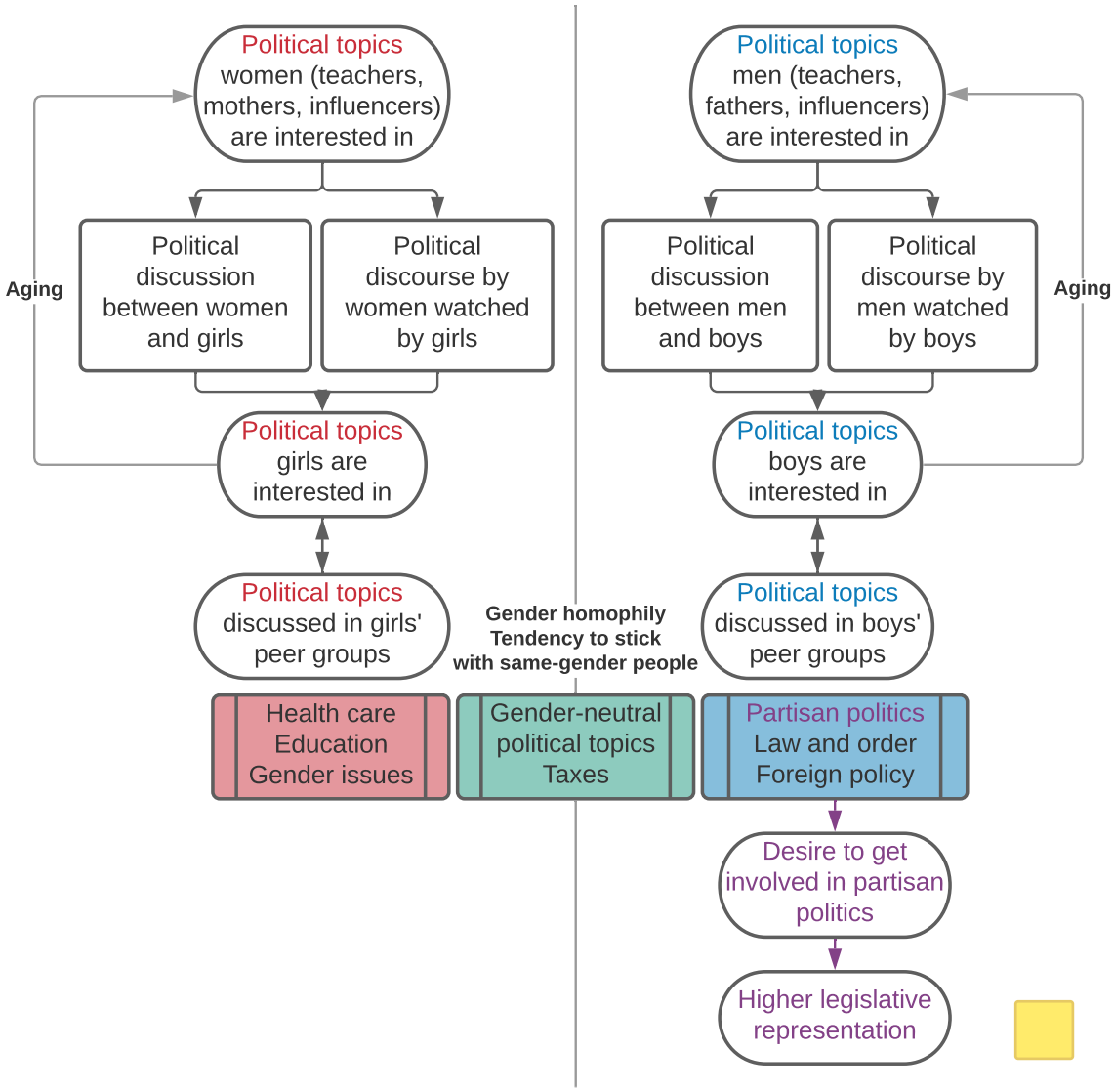

Figure 1: Dissertation Hypotheses Mind Map

Third, data will be gathered among surveyed children's parents. Parents could be contacted by selected schools and given the questionnaire to be filled if they so wish.[9] Contrary to children, only one poll before the election would be conducted. Questions would 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 would 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.

6 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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[9] Each 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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