Gendered Political Socialization

Diagnosis and Cures

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In Canada and other Western countries, men and women are 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 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). However, studies have also found that men 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[1] (Bashevkin 1993; Bennett and Bennett 1989; Gidengil, Giles, and Thomas 2008), to give correct answers to knowledge questions on political institutions (Dolan 2011; Fraile 2014; Stolle and Gidengil 2010; Verba, Burns, and Schlozman 1997), to vote in second-order elections[2] (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 2005). Finally, women are more likely than men to be interested in the politics of health care and education (R. Campbell and Winters 2008), to give correct answers to knowledge questions on government services and benefits (Stolle and Gidengil 2010), and to engage in private activism such as boycotting and signing petitions (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010). Moreover, many of these gender differences influence each other (Ondercin and Jones-White 2011), and 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. Looking at raw numbers though, it appears that politics is still mainly a men's game: political issues are mainly discussed by men and settled by assemblies with a majority of men legislators at all levels of power (Tolley 2011). Still, policies often have different effects on men and women which can be influenced by policymakers' gender (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004; Donato et al. 2008).

Political engagement has been used as an umbrella term 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). Since the gender differences just mentioned refer to attitudes and behaviours related to politics but do not include ideational factors — such as ideology or opinion on political issues — this umbrella term will be used to describe forms of commitment to politics through attitudes and actions. By contrast, political participation is meant to exclude political attitudes and only include political actions, such as boycotting, participating in protests, donating money to candidates, or voting.

[1] 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).

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

Where do gender differences in political engagement come from?

In opposition to *modernization theory*, which supposes that women would eventually catch up to men on indicators of political engagement, Bashevkin (1993) puts forward the *dual cultures thesis*: men and women have different political cultures and different experiences of politics that stem from different patterns of socialization. Women's lower involvement in politics, political interest and political efficacy would thus be a reaction to *men*'s politics, not politics *per se*. Fraile and Gomez (2017) further contend that the gender gap in political interest among children can only be bridged through changes in early childhood socialization, though for adults gender equality policies can reduce the gap. Therefore, this section focuses on gender differences in early political socialization, seeking to find the roots of gender differences in political engagement.

Parents

The role of parents in transmitting political engagement to their children has been found to be gendered by some, but study findings have often conflicted with each other.

A few studies have investigated the gender patterns in parent-child political discussions, finding little consensus. Noller and Bagi (1985) find that children discuss politics more often with their fathers than mothers, but Mayer and Schmidt (2004) and Hooghe and Boonen (2015) find no significant difference between fathers and mothers. Moreover, while Noller and Bagi (1985) find that parents discuss politics more often with their sons, Mayer and Schmidt (2004) find that parents discuss politics as much with their daughters than sons. These studies were conducted at different points in time and countries, potentially explaining their varying results.

More substantively, the specific ways in which fathers and mothers discuss politics with their children might be different. Hooghe and Boonen (2015) find that adolescents who discuss politics with their father tend to share the same voting intention, but no similar effect is found for those who discuss politics with their mother. The effect size is similar for parental discussions with daughters and those with sons: only parents' gender seems to matter here. The authors suggest this might be because fathers focus more on electoral and party politics than mothers in political discussions with their children.

Apart from political discussions, parents can also influence their children's political engagement through indirect means which can be gendered, including their level of education. Beauregard (2008) shows a mother's education has a positive influence on her daughter's political interest. Moreover, Gidengil, Wass, and Valaste (2016) find parents' education influences their children's future voter turnout, giving some support to insights from *status transmission theory*, according to which "well-educated parents are more likely to provide a politically stimulating home environment and, more importantly, they are more likely to have children who are well educated" (p. 373).

However, Gidengil, Wass, and Valaste (2016) find parental voting influences children's turnout even more than parental education, lending even greater support to *social learning theory* than *status transmission theory*. Social learning theory explains that children learn through observation and model their behaviour after their parents, especially their same-sex parent. The authors find that voting mothers have more influence on their sons and daughters' future voting than voting fathers, which seems to run against social learning theory, but the effect is stronger for mothers-daughters than mothers-sons. Beauregard (2008)'s findings also support social learning theory: mothers' political interest influences their daughters' political interest, and the same is found for fathers and sons. Gidengil, O'Neill, and Young (2010)'s findings go in the same direction: while politically engaged fathers' influence on daughters' political engagement is not statistically significant, politically engaged mothers can act as political role models and have a positive influence on their daughters' political engagement. Since adult women are less interested in politics than adult men, there could be a trickle-down effect to their daughters, which could explain why girls are also less politically interested.

Books

Gender stereotypes are common in books, even those recommended to parents as nonsexist: Diekman and Murnen (2004) find that even these books 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 in Greek textbooks as women, 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. Stereotypical representations of women in family roles are present, but less so than older textbooks. For political leaders, Lay et al. (2019) also find gender stereotypes 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.

Teachers

School teachers have been found to initiative just as many positive classroom interactions with boys and girls, but more negative interactions with boys (S. M. 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). Gouvias and Alexopoulos (2018) further find that Greek teachers are generally not able to identify gender stereotypes in the textbooks they use or, in some cases, they are aware of these stereotypes and favourable to their persistence. It is not clear that these kinds of gender differences are related to future political engagement, however.

School discussions

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 interruptions occur as frequently between adolescents whatever their gender, while in general girls' presence has a slight positive impact on girls' speaking time.

Blankenship (1990), D. E. Campbell (2007) and Maurissen, Claes, and Barber (2018) find that 8th- to 12th-grade girls are more likely than boys to report an open classroom climate. Open classroom climate is defined by these authors as well as Quintelier (2015) as (1) teachers' tendency to present many sides of an issue; (2) their encouragement to students to voice opinions that go against the rest of the group; and (3) students' feeling that they can voice controversial opinions. Open classroom climates matter, as Quintelier and Hooghe (2013) find that students' perceptions of an open and participatory classroom climate increases their intention to vote.

Peers

McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook (2001) explain that *homophily* is "the principle that a contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people" (p. 416). They also suggest that girls play in smaller and more homogeneous groups than boys at a young age, and that both boys and girls are more likely to drop friends who have a friend from the other sex than to add the other-sex friend to their own group of friends. These patterns diminish after puberty. Still, even among adults, Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995) find that 84% of men report discussing politics only with men, while 64% of women report discussing politics only with women. Moreover, voters have sometimes been found to vote for same-gender candidates, but this might only be the case under specific electoral rules (Golder et al. 2017), and the pattern has been found to be stronger for men (Holli and Wass 2010) or for women (Golder et al. 2017).

Genetics

Fowler, Baker, and Dawes (2008) find monozygotic twins have more similar voting habits than same-sex dizygotic twins, after controlling for a large number of socio-economic factors. Dawes and Loewen (2009) subsequently find that the CHRNA6 gene is related to more patience and a higher probability of voting. Moreover, Klemmensen et al. (2012) find political interest and political efficacy are heritable and come from the same underlying genetic factor, and Loewen and Dawes (2012) find the same for the sense of duty to vote. However, these studies do not explain why men and women, despite their genetic differences, still tend to participate in politics in roughly similar numbers.

Ideational factors and modernization

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.

Women's presence in politics

Political context when one is a teenager can have an impact on women's subsequent political engagement through the *political role model theory*. D. E. Campbell and Wolbrecht (2006) find that the presence of viable women candidates increases girls' intended political participation. Wolbrecht and Campbell (2007) similarly find that the proportion of elected women has a positive impact on adolescent girls' tendency to discuss politics and intention to vote later, while Dassonneville and McAllister (2018) find that this proportion has a positive impact on 18- to 21-year-old women's political knowledge. Foos and Gilardi (2020) also find that women politicians speaking to other women directly about their experience and the obstacles they faced succeed in increasing women's interest in the current election campaign but not in increasing their level of political ambition.

Impact of VAAs

While campaign pledge evaluation tools (CPETs) are a new topic of inquiry — they have only been reviewed three times in French- or English-speaking publications (Tremblay-Antoine et al. 2020) — voting advice applications (VAAs) have been the topic of inquiry of several studies, some of which focus on VAAs' impact on political socialization and gender differences in their use.

VAAs are judged to be useful by four out of five users (Alvarez et al. 2014). Indeed, in a panel survey, Vassil (2011) finds that VAAs can influence users' vote choice, with 17 percent more users changing their minds after a VAA recommendation that is very surprising to them than one which is not at all surprising to them. Self-reported centrists seem to be more likely than right-leaning and left-leaning people to be influenced by VAAs. VAAs might have shifted 1 to 2 percentage points between political parties in the 2011 Danish parliamentary election, to the disadvantage of left-wing parties (Hoff and Farimagsgade 2013). However, VAAs may also be missing their main targets, since Mahéo (2016) finds that VAAs' influence on preference formation only has lasting effects for already interested voters, older voters, and more educated voters.

Apart from vote choice, VAAs can also encourage intended nonvoters to vote. This *activation effect* is as strong for women as for men in Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom (Ramos, Padilla, and Chueca 2019). However, it seems to be stronger for young, less knowledgeable and less educated voters (Gemenis and Rosema 2014; Vassil 2011). Gemenis and Rosema (2014) evaluate that a Dutch VAA increases voter turnout by 4.4 percentage points, using self-reported turnout data.

Still, VAAs do not affect all components of political engagement. Hoff and Farimagsgade (2013) find that VAAs do not seem to have an impact on voters' internal political efficacy, for instance.

Men are more likely to use VAAs than women in most countries where VAAs exist, including European countries and Brazil (Andreadis, Wall, and Krouwel 2015; Marzuca, Serdült, and Welp 2011; Pianzola 2014; Raab 2013; Vassil 2011; Wheatley 2016), though no gender difference in use are found in Denmark and the Netherlands (Gemenis and Rosema 2014; Hoff and Farimagsgade 2013) and the difference is less stark among users less than 20 years old (Marzuca, Serdült, and Welp 2011). While men use the Internet more often than women and for longer time periods — especially for information-seeking purposes (Raab 2013) — they remain more likely to use VAAs even after controlling for Internet use (Andreadis, Wall, and Krouwel 2015). This finding contrasts with the fact that women voters are *more* likely than men users to appreciate most of the visual and technical features of VAAs (Alvarez et al. 2014).

Research question and puzzle

VAAs have been found to increase citizens' political engagement, but there are gender differences in many aspects of political engagement. This thesis will try to provide an answer to the following research question: "Are e-democracy tools' positive effects on political engagement gendered? Who benefits the most from these tools: men, women, or both alike?"

Theory 1: E-democracy tools reinforce gender differences in political engagement. Studies find that VAAs are mainly used by men, so they should have more effects on men. Even among the user base, bigger effects should be found among men, since Mahéo (2016) finds the biggest effects of VAAs on vote choice are for people who are already interested in politics — mostly men. It is possible that VAAs, instead of increasing political engagement across the board, has the perverse effects of increasing political engagement among groups which are already highly politicized, therefore missing their main targets.

Theory 2: E-democracy tools reduce gender differences in political engagement. Voter turnout is already similar across genders for first-order elections. VAAs' effects on voter turnout are as strong for men as for women (Ramos, Padilla, and Chueca 2019), which means that they increase turnout for everyone, regardless of their gender. People with less institutional political knowledge have been found to benefit the most from VAAs (Gemenis and Rosema 2014), which could also indirectly reduce the gender gap in institutional political knowledge — men generally have much higher scores than women on institutional politics questions.

Data and methods

Observational and experimental data on two e-democracy tools will be collected: the Vote Compass (VC) VAA, whose algorithm has been recognized (Linden and Dufresne 2017), and the Polimetre CPET. This research will require collaboration with Vox Pop Labs, who owns the VC as well as the Ontario Polimetre.

The thesis will first present descriptive statistics by age and gender on the following aspects of political engagement in Ontario and Quebec: political interest, political knowledge, knowledge of government benefits and services, internal efficacy, external efficacy, political discussion, political debating, intention to vote, participation in protests, participation in boycotts, participation in petitions, party membership, and ease to change vote choice. Canadian Election Study (CES) and VC data will be used at this stage. Questions on knowledge of government benefits and services and political debating will need to be added to the VC survey.

Observational data for both tools will be collected through the VC's integrated survey and a survey advertized at the top of the Polimetre's main page. The VC will include questions about respondents' appreciation of the tool, things that would make them more likely to re-use it or recommend it to friends, and additional features that might help them develop their political engagement. These data will be analyzed by gender.

Experimental panel data on VC and Polimetre users will also be collected to identify gender differences in effects on political engagement in the 2022 Ontario and Quebec elections. Three experimental groups will be created: a control group, a treatment group with exposure to the Vote Compass only, and another treatment group with exposure to the Vote Compass and substantial exposure to the Polimetre, including a small mandatory survey for participants in that treatment group to check whether respondents remember some pledges that have been fulfilled or broken.

My worries

1. The literature on how political engagement becomes gendered during childhood seems far removed from considerations of how a specific tool is gendered. This is especially the case since VAAs and CPETs are not created to reduce gender differences. I don't know how I would interpret experimental results based on childhood socialization. At the same time, I don't know what other kinds of literature I could refer to apart from (1) VAAs' effects and (2) descriptive gender differences in political engagement. What should be included in my literature review and what should be excluded from it?

2. While no study has tested gender differences in the effects of VAAs, this might be because they haven't found any such differences. Studies have reported differences in other socio-demographic variables for VAAs' impact on political engagement, which might make this thesis project less unique in that regard. If I find no significant gendered effects of VAAs, what will I be able to tell? Is this project too risky? At the same time, I am interested in many aspects of political engagement a[illegible] I would have a big-N study, so results will likely be robust and convincing, even if they are null.
3. For the Polimetre, it feels strange to analyze gender differences in its effects in the first ever study looking at this tool. Is it fine? Maybe a technical paper needs to be conducted first to document how the Polimetre works. This would likely require that the salience indicator we are developing for the Vitrine démocratique is ready. This project is currently moving slowly, and it is Camille's doctoral project, which is due for 2024, while mine is due for 2023.
4. I thought about including international data on the effects of citizenship education on gender differences in political engagement. I have access to school-level, student-level and teacher-level data on all aspects of political engagement through the 2016 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS). However, no similar Canadian data is available. I was also told citizenship ed[illegible]on seems a bit far removed from e-democracy tools for adults, and this might make the overall [illegible]is project too big. Should I include these data as part of my data collection or leave them aside?
5. Vox Pop Labs might refuse to collaborate with me, in which case I would need to work with another VAA and another CPET, potentially in another country, which will require further r[illegible]rch about the specific tool and country. Can I realistically count on Vox Pop Labs' collaboration?

Alternative thesis plan (because of my plan A's worries!)

- *Title*: "Gendered Political Discussions: From Elementary School to Parliament"
- *Research question*: "What do men and women MPs do differently in the ways they interact? Do these patterns match with what is found for mixed-gender political discussions in the broader population or are they specific to the political area? Do they date back to childhood or emerge later?"
- *Puzzle*: Assemblies with more women MPs are often seen as more consensual or less aggressive (S. Jones, Charles, and Davies 2009), and electing more women is often seen as a way to change the political culture (Dahlerup 1988). However, these claims have not yet been formally tested, and they have not been linked to long-standing gender patterns in political discussion among the broader population. Is it true that women discuss politics differently in daily life, and does this translate to the political area?
- *Data and methods, step 1*: Systematic literature review on gender differences in political discussions, including speaking time, interruptions, rationality, emotionality, consensus searching, and aggressiveness.
- *Data and methods, step 2*: Participant observation in discussion groups in elementary schools to investigate gender differences.
- *Data and methods, step 3*: Participant observation in discussion groups with adults to investigate gender differences.
- *Data and methods, step 4*: Textual data analysis of gender differences in parliamentary debates in the House of Commons using Lipad and in the Quebec National Assembly using Agora+, OpenParliament data on dissent, and Eric Grenier's data on heckling.
- *Worry 1*: The pandemic might make it harder to organize in-person discussion groups among children and adults where I could engage in participant observation. Would Zoom political discussions with adults and/or children be an option? Are there other avenues I should consider?
- *Worry 2*: The qualitative data collection would require a lot of work to be publishable. I would need to select many classes across the country, including students from different provinces and elementary and high schools, to be able to see when some gender differences emerge exactly. Is it too much time spent for too little reward, just as was the case for my MA thesis? I still enjoyed the experience.
- *Worry 3*: I was told the University of Toronto's ethics committee might make it hard for me to conduct participant observation in elementary schools. I was able to collect data among high-school children for my MA with the approval of Université Laval's ethics committee, but this time I might need to change several parts of my project or remove classroom observation altogether for approval. Is it too risky?

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