

The Roots of Political Interests

How Gender Still Shapes Childhood Socialization

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Context: A Gender Gap in Political Interest?

How do people conceptualize political interest?

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- ▶ They typically associate politics with partisan politics & foreign policy
- ▶ But they do not associate politics with health care or education
- ▶ Politics refers to both agency & communality

Why Does this Matter?

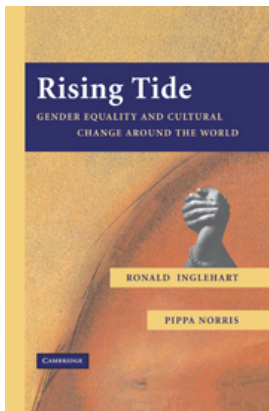
Table 1. Men's and women's interest in politics and political issues

	1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>Cohort</i>	Interest	Education	NHS	Foreign policy	Partisan politics	Law and order
18–24	–0.294***		0.372***	–0.423***	–0.300**	–0.306**
25–34	–0.522***		0.284***	–0.413***	–0.370***	
35–44	–0.480***	0.407***	0.403***	–0.387***	–0.364***	
45–54	–0.400***			–0.373***		
55–64	–0.321***		0.182*	–0.305***	–0.174**	
65+	–0.273**			–0.329**		
All	–0.391***	0.147***	0.243***	–0.359***	–0.240***	–0.075*

*** $p = >.001$; ** $p = >.01$; * $p = >.05$. Weighted data: *N* for each age cohort: 18–24 year olds – 236; 25–34 year olds – 500; 35–44 year olds – 433; 45–54 year olds – 341; 55–64 year olds – 1003; 65 and over – 367; All – 2,887.

Figure 1: Political interests by gender (Campbell and Winters 2008)

Sources of the Gender Gap in Self-Reported Political Interest



Structural factors
(Inglehart and Norris
2003)

Politics & Gender, 4 (2000), 515–561. Printed in the U.S.A.

The Gender Gap in Self-Perceived Understanding of Politics in Canada and the United States

Elisabeth Gidengil

McGill University

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University of Calgary

Melanee Thomas

McGill University

Despite the gains women have made since the advent of second-wave feminism, women remain less confident than men of their ability to understand politics. This gender gap has remained unchanged for decades, yet it has attracted surprisingly little scholarly attention in recent years. This article uses data from the 2000 American and 2004 Canadian election studies to assess whether differences in women's and men's socioeconomic resources help to explain the gender gap. We also examine whether there are differences in the ways that socioeconomic resources affect women's and men's self-perceived ability to understand politics. We focus particular attention on the effects of parenthood on women's confidence in their understanding of politics. Finally, we consider the role of feminism and gender role conceptions.

Life-cycle events
(Gidengil, Giles, and
Thomas 2008)

The Origins of Political Attitudes and Behaviours: An Analysis Using Twins

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1. Introduction

In what must surely rank as one of the strangest episodes in the entire history of science, two generations of our immediate forebears in the social sciences managed to virtually ignore the "Darwinian" theory of biological evolution and to exclude from their purview any sustained consideration of the role of biological factors in the shaping of human behaviour. (Corning, 1971: 321)

The curious practice Corning describes above has continued through a third generation of political scientists and sociologists and is now reaching into a fourth. Although bio-evolutionary perspectives are now mainstream in psychology and the paradigm is beginning to have a major impact in the emerging fields of behavioural economics and neuroeconomics, most political scientists and sociologists are still "missing the revolution" (Barkow, 2006). Some change is on the horizon in those disciplines, but the general picture there is one of splendid isolation from the concepts, methods and findings of evolutionary biology and behavioural genetics.¹

Genetics (Bell,
Schermer, and
Vernon 2009)



Prior (2019)

A more robust explanation for the Canadian context: socialization

Homemade citizens: The development of political interest during adolescence and young adulthood

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Abstract Despite being among the most important indicators of political participation, relatively little is known about the origins and the development of political interest over the lifespan. The formative years between childhood and adulthood are generally considered a crucial phase in which future electors form and strengthen political habits. The aim of this research is to better understand this important stage by examining the way in which parental socialization and life-cycle events affect the formation and growth of political interest during adolescence and young adulthood. While parental influences are expected to take place during childhood and persist over-time, life-cycle events are considered to influence development in early adulthood for those adolescents who did not grow up in a highly politicized environment. We assess these assumptions by applying latent growth curve modeling and using the German Socio-Economic Panel, which spans from 1984 to 2007. Our findings confirm strong parental socialization effects on interest levels during teenage years. While life-cycle events are not found to strongly affect the development of political interest during the formative years, the transition to adulthood is indeed a more critical period for those individuals who did not acquire high levels of interest from their family.

Acta Politica (2013) 48, 92–116, doi:10.1057/ap.2012.23;

published online 19 October 2012

Keywords: political interest; young adulthood; parental socialization; life-cycle events; latent growth curve analysis; panel data

Neundorff, Smets, and
Garcia-Albacete (2013)

Parents' Role in Political Interest Transmission

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- ▶ Causal link between parents' and children's political interest
- ▶ Main causal mechanism: parent–child political discussions

Gender Differences in Transmission of Self-Reported Political Interest

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- ▶ Mothers and fathers talk as much about politics with sons and daughters

Social Learning Theory

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- ▶ Social learning is easier when the role model shares the child's gender (observer–model similarity)
- ▶ Works through social pressure
- ▶ Research questions: *When and how does political interest transmission occur? To what extent do mothers influence political interest development in their children? Do they have a greater influence on their sons or daughters? What about fathers?*

- ▶ **Hypothesis 1a:** *Children's interest in specific political topics is more affected by political discussions with their same-gender parent(s) than other-gender parent(s).*

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- ▶ **Hypothesis 1k:** *Children's interest in specific political topics becomes more and more affected by political discussions with their parent(s) between ages 11 and 15, after which the parental effects stabilize.*

Data and Methods

Children Political Interest Survey (CPIS): Data collected among 698 students aged 8–18 from 7 elementary & secondary schools + 1 school board's Student Senate between August 2022 & January 2023

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- ▶ 15-minute bilingual Qualtrics online survey questionnaire filled during classroom time
- ▶ Multilevel regressions, classroom fixed effects, controls for SES & personality traits

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 - ▶ Education (i.e., university tuition, funding of public and private schools)
 - ▶ Partisan politics (i.e., federal elections, political parties)

Results

Table 1: Interest in Topic by Gender, CPIS

	Politics (general)	Health care	International affairs	Law and crime	Education
<i>Without Controls</i>					
(Intercept)	4.579*** (0.184)	4.041*** (0.167)	5.724*** (0.180)	4.956*** (0.173)	4.219*** (0.206)
Gender (1 = girl)	-0.434* (0.207)	0.128 (0.197)	-0.980*** (0.229)	0.488* (0.231)	-0.103 (0.223)
SD (Intercept Class)	0.651	0.542	0.473	0.377	0.771
SD (Observations)	2.499	2.397	2.802	2.837	2.701
Num.Obs.	617	623	620	619	623
R2 Marg.	0.007	0.001	0.029	0.007	0.000
<i>With Controls</i>					
(Intercept)	1.413 (1.337)	1.138 (1.187)	4.458*** (1.315)	2.838* (1.254)	0.218 (1.436)
Gender (1 = girl)	-0.432* (0.212)	0.128 (0.201)	-0.973*** (0.232)	0.492* (0.237)	-0.122 (0.229)
Age	0.218* (0.086)	0.192* (0.076)	0.099 (0.084)	0.176* (0.079)	0.253** (0.092)
Ethnicity (1 = white)	0.160 (0.250)	-0.024 (0.237)	0.570* (0.270)	-0.143 (0.276)	-0.107 (0.267)
Immigrant	-0.255 (0.322)	0.273 (0.308)	-0.794* (0.352)	-0.702+ (0.360)	0.385 (0.349)
English spoken at home	-0.781+ (0.454)	-0.253 (0.429)	-1.801*** (0.492)	-0.632 (0.497)	0.118 (0.491)
French spoken at home	-0.112 (0.284)	0.136 (0.271)	-0.402 (0.308)	-0.293 (0.313)	0.389 (0.305)
SD (Intercept Class)	0.598	0.470	0.442	0.318	0.665
SD (Observations)	2.476	2.375	2.728	2.811	2.690

- ▶ For each of the following topics, which parent do you discuss most often with?
 - ▶ Health care
 - ▶ My mother
 - ▶ My father
 - ▶ Don't know/Prefer not to answer
 - ▶ International affairs
 - ▶ Law and crime
 - ▶ Education
 - ▶ Partisan politics

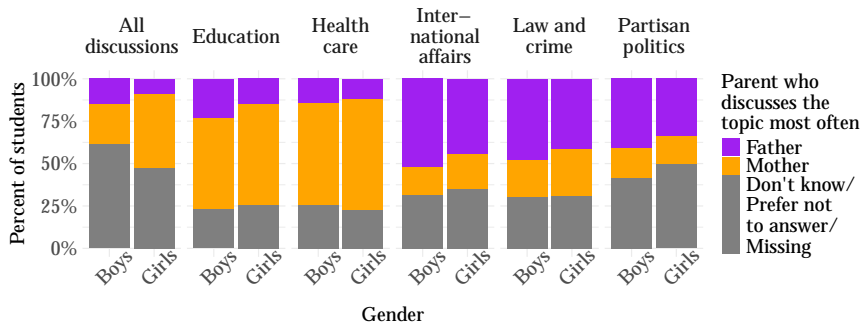


Figure 2: Topic most often discussed with parents, 2023 CPIS data

- ▶ Among these five topics, which one do you discuss most often with your mother(s)?
 - ▶ Health care
 - ▶ International affairs
 - ▶ Law and crime
 - ▶ Education
 - ▶ Partisan politics
 - ▶ Don't know/Prefer not to answer
- ▶ Among these five topics, which one do you discuss most often with your father(s)?

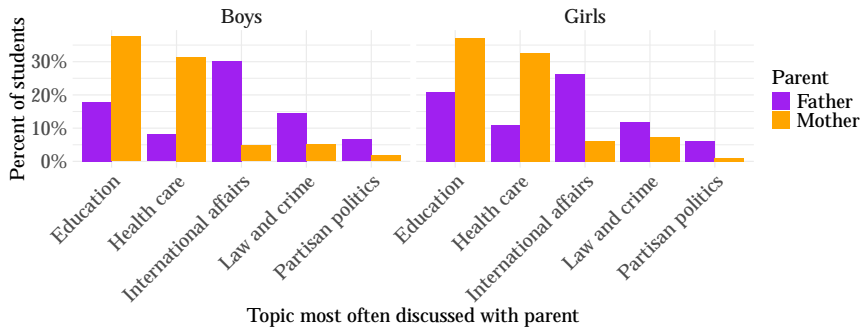


Figure 3: Topic most often discussed by mothers and fathers, 2023 CPIS data

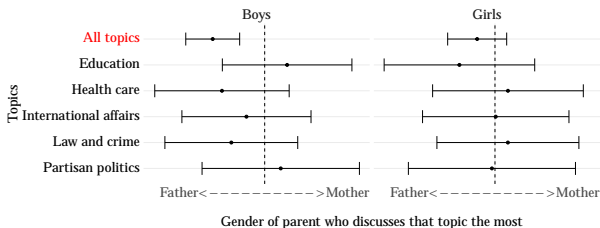
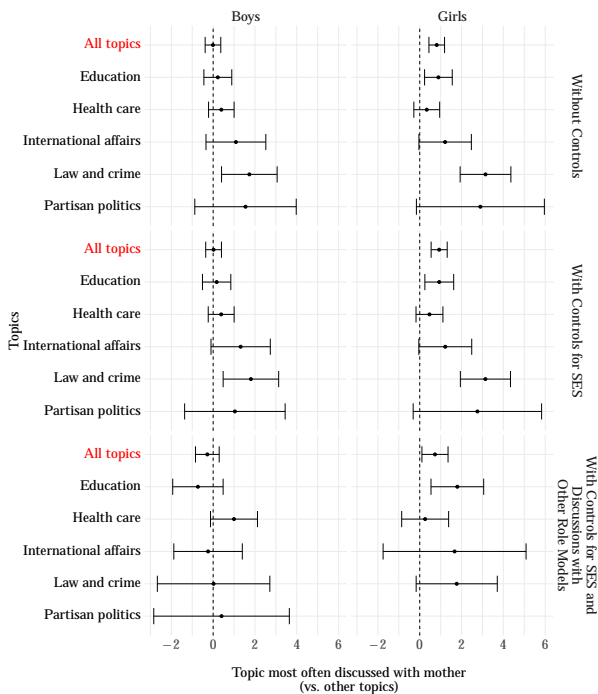


Figure 4: Interest in topic by gender of parent who discusses that topic the most (with controls)



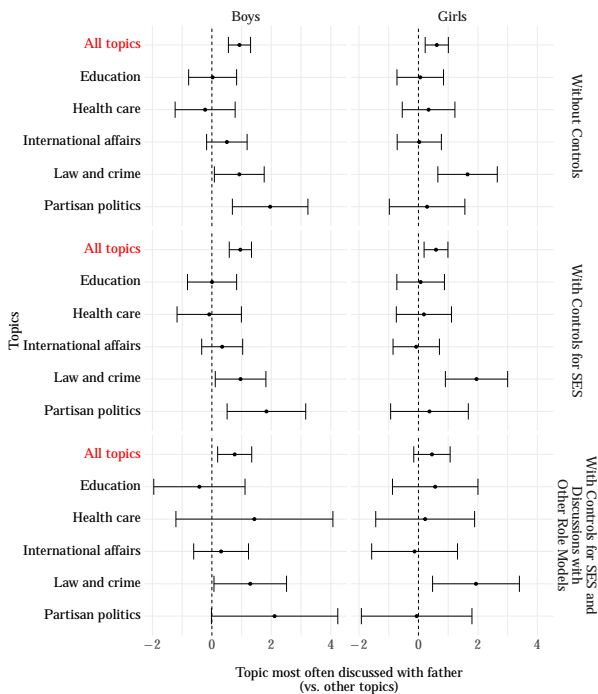


Figure 6. Children's topic interests by gender, age, and family structure.

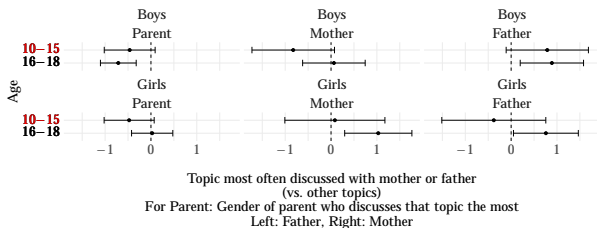


Figure 7: Parent-child political interest relationships by age group (with controls)

Conclusion

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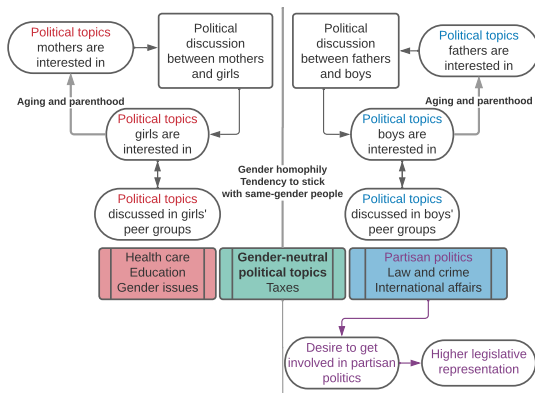
THANKS!

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Appendix

Hypotheses



Questionnaire

- ▶ How interested are you in politics generally? Set the slider to a number from 0 to 10, where 0 means no interest at all, and 10 means a great deal of interest.
 - ▶ (0–10 slider)
 - ▶ Don't know/Prefer not to answer

- ▶ If you were to open a news website and see the following articles how interested would you be in reading each article? Set the slider to a number from 0 to 10, where 0 means “Not at all interested, I would not read it,” and 10 means “Very interested, I would most likely read it.”
 - ▶ Health care (i.e., pandemic restrictions, working conditions of nurses)
 - ▶ International affairs (i.e., diplomatic disputes between Canada and China, Ukrainian war)
 - ▶ Law and crime (i.e., police funding, sentences for violent crimes)
 - ▶ Education (i.e., university tuition, funding of public and private schools)
 - ▶ Partisan politics (i.e., federal elections, political parties)

- ▶ What is the gender of most of your friends?
 - ▶ Girls
 - ▶ Boys
 - ▶ About the same for both genders
 - ▶ Don't know/Prefer not to answer
- ▶ Among these five topics, which one do you discuss most often with your male friends?
 - ▶ Health care
 - ▶ International affairs
 - ▶ Law and crime
 - ▶ Education
 - ▶ Partisan politics
 - ▶ Don't know/Prefer not to answer
- ▶ Among these five topics, which one do you discuss most often with your female friends?

How Political is Each Topic?

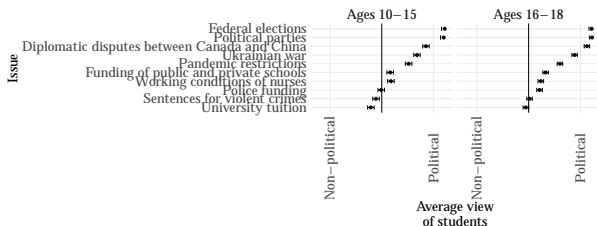


Figure 9: Views of Topics as Political or Non-Political By Canadian Students, 2022

Figures Without Controls

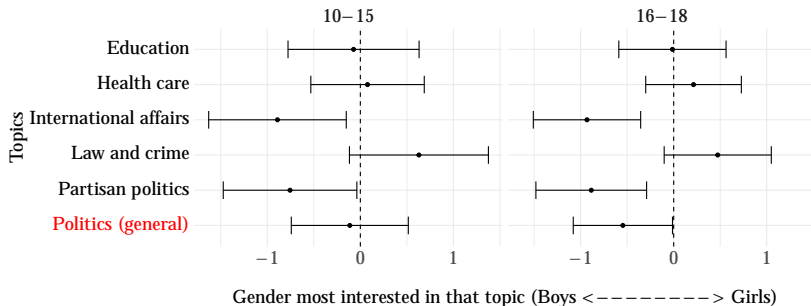


Figure 10: Gender Differences in Interest for Specific Political Topics by Age Group Among Canadian Children, 2022 CPIS

Notes: No controls are added.

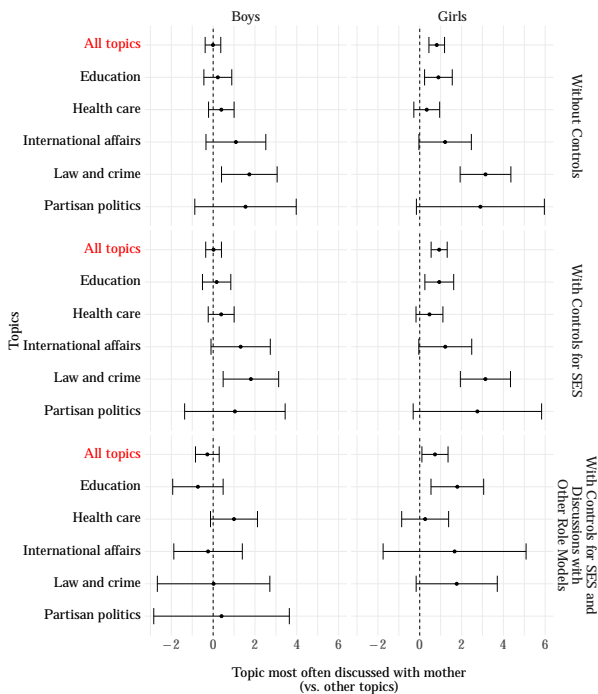


Figure 11. Topic most often discussed with mother (vs. other topics) by gender and condition.

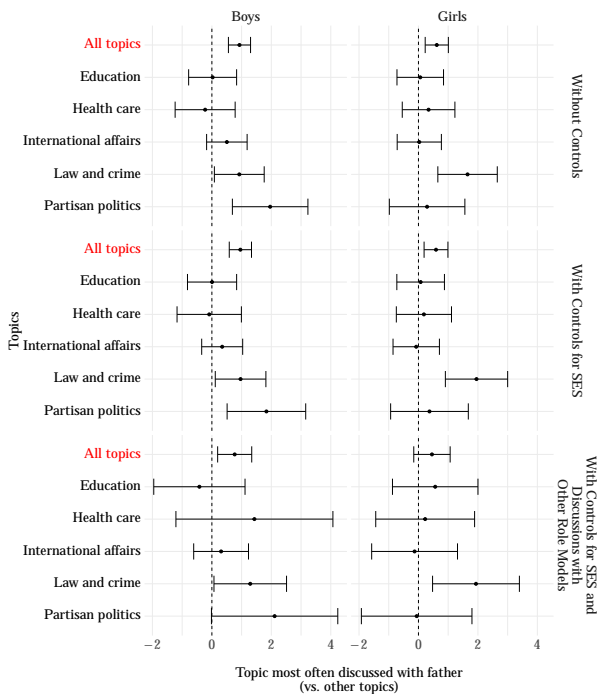


Figure 10. Topic most often discussed with fathers, by gender and model.

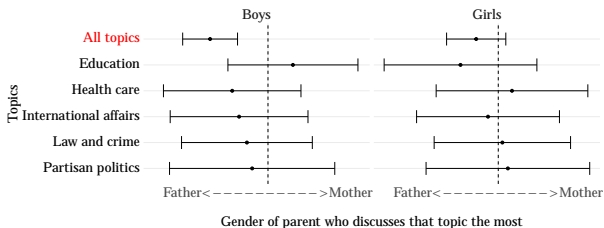


Figure 13: Interest in topic by gender of parent who discusses that topic the most

Definitions

Politics

- ▶ Contested concept for a long time (Gallie 1956)
- ▶ “The concept is extremely broad and comprises any kind of leadership in action” (Weber (1919), p. 1)
Politics, in its broadest sense, is the activity through which people make, preserve and amend the general rules under which they live. Politics is inextricably linked to the phenomena of conflict and cooperation. On the one hand, the existence of rival opinions, different wants, competing needs, and opposing interests guarantees disagreement about the rules under which people live. On the other hand, people recognize that, in order to influence these rules or ensure their enforcement, they must work with others (Heywood (2019), p. 34).

Other definitions (Conover, Searing, and Crewe 2002; Fitzgerald 2013; Heywood 2019; Lane 1962; Sapiro 2013; Walsh 2004):

- ▶ The art of government
- ▶ Public affairs in general
- ▶ The non-violent resolution of disputes
- ▶ Power and the distribution of resources
- ▶ Conflictual discussion of controversial topics

Agency & Communal

Campbell and Winters (2008) shows that men's higher self-reported political interest derives from the fact that they are more *agentic*, i.e., focused on self-assertion [or competition], while women are more *communal*, i.e., focused on cooperation. Since the concept of *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, a finding also shared by Schneider et al. (2016).

Kuhn (2004): compassion & cooperation vs. contest & competition