Chapter Three: Political Socialisation – Learning about politics.

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Consider this: *In 2015 soccer fans of the Hong Kong team booed the Chinese national anthem at a match. In response, in 2017 the Chinese government introduced new legislation which outlined the harsh sanctions, including prison, it would impose for any malevolent revisions to the lyrics or disparaging performances of China's national anthem, or otherwise any other ways in which the national anthem could be perceived to be disrespected. The Chinese government have argued that the law will help foster social values and promote patriotism. This raises several significant questions about the individual and their relationship to the larger social whole. How do we become accustomed to the political norms and values of a country? How far can the state go in socializing individuals into the values, norms and symbols of the country? When does learning and being told to respect the national anthem move from instilling pride in people to outright indoctrination?*

3.1 Introduction

The above example of the Chinese national anthem law leads us to begin thinking about political learning and about the mechanisms and processes of how the individual learns about politics. How do we learn about the norms and values which constitute the political life in which we live? What are the origins of our political views? And when do we learn about politics? At first sight these questions might seem quite banal. There are a fairly predictable range of sources from which we learn about the political world: families, newspapers, the Internet, formal education, direct political participation and so on. However, the question of how people learn about politics is far from simple. First of all, how we learn about politics depends upon what we understand as politics. As we saw in the introduction, what constitutes politics is a complex question. It is not just limited to possessing knowledge about the particular forms of government and institutions of a particular nation or sets of nations. Politics also concerns the values and attitudes we hold both individually and as part of a larger social whole. Such values and attitudes also shape our interaction with the broader political community (not just political institutions, but civil society too) and our understanding of the nature and relations of power. Therefore, how we learn about politics is fundamental to our orientation as individuals within a broader political system and the relations of power which underpin that system.

Secondly, as we noted above, while there are obvious social agents for our political learning (e.g. family, school, media etc.), it is important to understand that if we observe politics as being in its broadest sense about relations of power, then there are also less apparent social agents which inform the political values we hold. For example, popular culture, especially in the era of global digital media where we can access culture, global news

and ideas from a swipe of a smart phone, can play a fundamental role in shaping our view of politics. Likewise, specific contingent events such as 9-11 or the United Kingdom's referendum vote to leave the European Union can influence our view of politics and the frequency and intensity of our political participation.

What we learn about politics, how we learn it, and from whom, also depends on the wider social and political context within which political learning takes place. Political learning in the early 21st Century takes place in very different circumstances to those in the mid-20th Century. Moreover, the shape, type and outcome of political learning is contingent upon the type of political system an individual is being socialised into. Political learning takes a different form in Western liberal democratic political systems than it does in say autocratic systems in the post-Soviet space or in the Arab monarchies of the Persian Gulf. To further complicate matters, political learning can take place in a dynamic environment. People may become politically socialised in one type of system and then through a process of social change find themselves having to adapt and learn the values and norms of a new type of political system. This was the situation faced by people who had grown up in the communist states of Central and Eastern Europe but then, after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, found themselves having to adapt to the norms and values of a democratic system.

There is also the question of *when* people learn about politics. This is a question which has incited a great deal of debate in the study of political socialisation. On the one hand, there are those who emphasise the importance of early-life, pre-adult experiences, and see families and education as the prominent social agents in shaping political views. On the other hand, there are those who argue that the process of learning about politics is influenced decisively by the various experiences throughout our lives which changes our circumstances and

outlook on the world.

Finally, there is the question of why political socialisation is important? The study of political socialisation is important because it has attempted to produce generalizable findings which can inform us about political behaviour. It can also tell us about the potential long-term impact of political learning on political culture and political participation in democratic systems. Similarly, understanding political learning can shape our understanding of stability and change in non-democratic systems too.

This chapter will unpack these issues which underpin how political scientists have sought to come to terms with the question of the acquisition of political knowledge and political views. Including a chapter on political socialisation at the beginning of this book was a deliberate decision. After all, we could have started with a discussion of political institutions or with an analysis of the main strands in political thought over the centuries. To start with the issue of learning about politics, or political socialisation, gives you a chance to reflect upon your own socialisation, your own political views and your own experience of politics. Moreover, it may also help to reinforce the points made in the Introduction about how political phenomena do not necessarily confine themselves to the world of governments, parliaments and political parties.

3.2 What is Political Socialisation?

As individuals we do not engage with the political and social world as fully formed rational conscious adults. We are not born with an innate sense of the political world. Thus, as Michael Rush puts it:

Political socialisation may be defined as the process by which individuals in a given society become acquainted with the political system and which to a certain degree determines their perceptions and their reactions to political phenomena.

(Rush 1992: 92)

Broadly put, political socialisation concerns how we as individuals develop basic sets of political skills, attitudes, orientations and practices. This broad definition could be further disaggregated into two components: political socialisation at the macro and micro levels. As Virginia Sapiro argues:

At the macro level, political socialisation frames research on how polities and other political societies and systems inculcate appropriate norms and practices in citizens, residents or members. At the micro level, political socialisation frames research on the patterns and processes by which individuals engaging in political development and learning, constructing their particular relationships to the political contexts in which they live.

(Sapiro 2004: 2-3)

Differently put, as a macro process political socialisation concerns ensuring individuals are instructed in the necessary values and attitudes to sustain a particular political system. As a micro process political socialisation relates to how political learning shapes their participation in, and relationship with, different forms of political activity and political agents.

A number of questions emerge from defining political socialisation in this way:

    1. What is the purpose and context of political socialisation?

    2. What do we learn?

3. When do we become political socialised?

4. From whom do we learn about politics?

5. Why is political socialisation important?

These five questions form the guiding thread of this chapter.

3.3. What is political socialisation for?

Through political socialisation we learn those values and norms which allow us to participate and play an active and productive role in society. The content of what is transmitted as part of the social learning process has been viewed by scholars as being critically important to the perpetuation of values which are consistent for the long-term benefit of the governing of a nation (Dennis 1968). Differently put, it can explain the persistence of different types of political systems as political knowledge, attitudes, norms and values are passed from one generation to the next (Easton and Dennis 1967). This is known as inter-generational transmission and can be useful in exploring the relationship between the values and attitudes children learn from their parents and families and their proclivity for political participation in adult life (Quintelier 2015).

The function of political socialisation can be understood in two ways: as a benign form of civic education and as malign form of political indoctrination. Let's take each of these forms in turn.

Civic Education

For a fully functioning democratic polity we require a politically literate citizenry. It echo's Aristotle's (384–322 BC) famous maxim in *The Politics* that 'man is by nature a

political animal' (Aristotle 1985: 3). By this, Aristotle meant that people, by virtue of their natural propensity to congregate, need to be part of a political community in order to flourish as human beings. It follows that since humans are political in the most basic sense of that term, they need to acquire political skills to take part in the most complete expression of human community – the state.

Political socialisation, therefore, provides us with knowledge necessary to understand the role and importance of elections, political parties and government to the democratic process. It conditions us to appreciate the moral and political norms of a democratic society such as concepts like freedom, justice and equality, despite their contested nature. Often the transmission of such norms can be implicit through our daily interactions in school, with family and by watching the news. But democratic governments can also make an explicit effort to transmit political knowledge in order to socialise individuals. A good example of this is post-WWII West Germany. After the Second World War, the American and British authorities sought to 're-educate' the German people who had fallen under the spell of Nazi **totalitarianism**. Through the Federal Agency for Civic Education (FACE) the post-War German government sought to instil a democratic culture through the teaching of 'community studies', 'social studies' and the so-called 'state-citizen upbringing' (Himmelmann 2006). Civic Education continued to be important for the German state especially after reunification of West and East Germany in 1990. There was resistance, however, from teachers and educators who felt that politics should be taught in a neutral fashion without exposing students to the ideological views of the teacher. FACE continues to play a substantial role in civic education in Germany as the below extract from its missions and activities taken from their website demonstrates.

Key Word: Totalitarianism is a political system in which the state strives to maintain total control of the public and private space and which is characterised by dictatorship, a single mass party, a guiding ideology, terror and violence, monopoly of communication and a centrally planned economy.

The Federal Agency for Civic Education: Our Mission and Activities

The Federal Agency for Civic Education (bpb) provides citizenship education and information on political issues for all people in Germany. The bpb's work centres on promoting awareness for democracy and participation in politics. The broad range of educational activities provided by the bpb is designed to motivate people and enable them to give critical thought to political and social issues and play an active part in political life. Considering Germany's experience with various forms of dictatorial rule the Federal Republic of Germany bears a unique responsibility for firmly anchoring values such as democracy, pluralism and tolerance in people's minds.

Source:http://www.bpb.de/die-bpb/138853/our-mission-and-activities

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Think point

- Why does FACE see its role as important for German society?

- What difference can citizens possessing political knowledge make to a political system?

- Can the teaching of politics and civic values ever be neutral?

Germany, of course, is not the only state which offers some form of civic and political education and we can find some version of it in most countries in the world. For instance, Citizenship Studies was introduced in the United Kingdom as a part of the National Curriculum in 2002 by the Labour government because of concerns around political disengagement from the democratic process. The new subject aimed to help students 'become

informed, thoughtful and responsible citizens who are aware of their duties and rights' (Department for Education and Skills 2005). Moreover, a great deal of research conducted on the topic of political socialisation in the United States in the 1960s focused on the role of the civic curriculum in shaping long-term political orientations. Some studies believed such forms of civic education was fundamental to shaping political attitudes in America (Almond and Verba 1963), while other studies found there was a lack of evidence that the civic curriculum has a significant effect on the political orientation of the great majority of American high school students (Langton and Jennings 1968). Nevertheless, the formal teaching of political knowledge has been a key function of political socialisation for new and established democratic systems.

Political indoctrination

To this point we have only considered political socialisation as possessing a benign purpose in that it allows us as individuals to become 'good' citizens and participate to the fullest extent in our democratic communities. Alternatively, we might turn this function on its head. We could also suggest that any regime requires mass political socialisation to ensure individuals possess regime friendly norms. Such acquiescence to the governing authority via the indoctrination of particular values can aid the maintenance of less benevolent regimes. This could be viewed as a more sinister and malign form of political socialisation. It is a process through which people are conditioned into particular kinds of behaviour. Individuals are moulded into specific roles and attitudes which are there to serve the political regime at the head of the system.

Despite claims by Francis Fukuyama (1992) that the collapse of the Soviet Union meant the 'end of history' and the victory of liberal democracy globally, the 21st Century continues

to be replete with examples of non-democratic regimes using political indoctrination to instil regime friendly values into citizens. Turkmenistan is one of the most acute examples of this phenomenon. Turkmenistan became an independent country when the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991. The former First Secretary of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyazov, became the country's first president and quickly established a personality cult eerily familiar to the Stalinist cult of the 1930s. Niyazov's portrait adorned buildings and the inside of taxi cabs and he re-named himself Turkmenbashi (Leader of all Turkmen). The education system also became dominated by the Niyazov-penned pseudo-spiritual guidebook for the nation, the *Ruhnama* (Book of the Soul), in which it was estimated that half of class time in school was given over to the teaching of Niyazov's book. Moreover, entry into universities in Turkmenistan was also dependent upon demonstrating knowledge of the *Ruhnama*, while potential state employees also had to pass an exam on the text in order to take up a position in the civil service (Bohr 2016: 42). A giant mechanical statue of the book was also erected in the capital Ashgabat and each evening the statute would open-up and a recorded passage from the book is played out on loud speakers. The book was an important element of a system of political indoctrination which aimed to inculcate values which would provide political support for Niyazov's all-pervasive personality cult. Niyazov died in 2006, but his successor Gurbanguly Berdymukhemdov has followed suit in establishing a personality cult and system of political indoctrination.
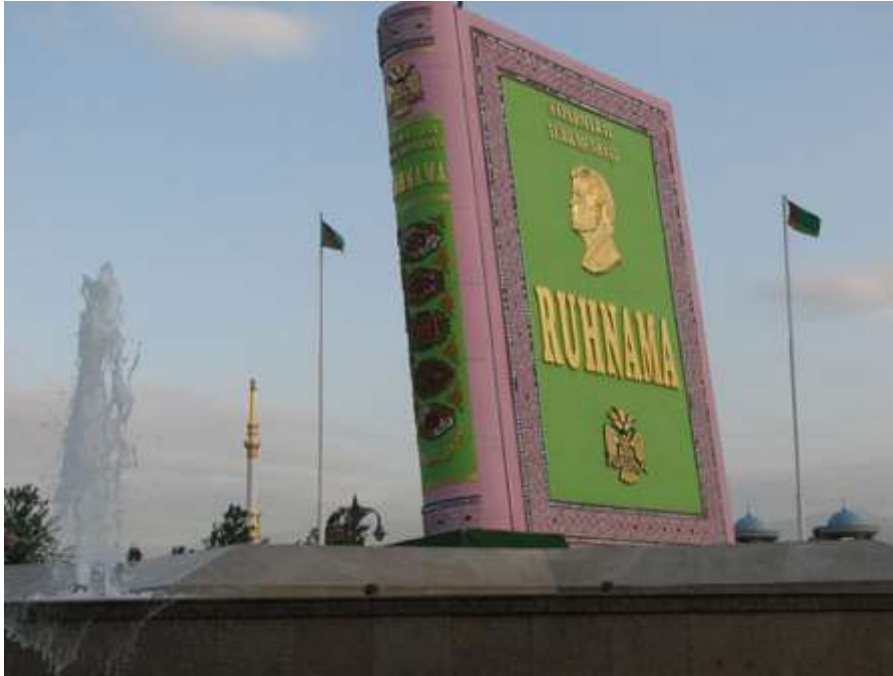
The Ruhnama statute monument in Ashgabat

The case of Turkmenistan echoes the more well-known example of North Korea where it is compulsory for young children to join the Young Pioneer Corps at just 9 before joining the Socialist Youth League aged 14. Through schooling, songs and social activities children learn the official history of the regime and their place within it and they declare their allegiance to Kim Jong Un and call him 'father' (O'Brien 2014). These youth organisations and the educational role they perform ensure that generation after generation of young recruits are instilled with the values which ensure that they are good and loyal citizens to the North Korean Regime.

It is very difficult to both quantify and qualify any correlation between political indoctrination and support for a non-democratic regime. Often scholars assume that non-democratic regimes are relatively stable, perhaps because mechanisms such as youth political socialisation ensure a steady replacement of generational support for the regime. Thus, observers are often taken by surprise when non-democratic regimes suddenly collapse

without what seems any prior warning as was the case with the fall of the communist regime in the USSR and the fall of governments in the Arab world in 2010-11 (in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt). However, it would be short-sighted to think that the pro-regime support cultivated via political indoctrination disappears over-night. In recent decades where non-democratic regimes have been over-turned by popular revolt such as the Arab Spring or through external invasion (such as in Iraq), democratic gains have been quickly reversed. For instance, the military returned to power in Egypt in a coup in 2013, while it is believed that many of Saddum Hussein's former military officers and spies are leading ISIS in both Iraq and Syria (Sly 2015).

Both Turkmenistan and North Korea are recent examples of political socialisation as form of indoctrination which have taken their cues from the totalitarian regimes of the 20th Century, most obviously that of the Soviet Union. When Vladimir Lenin and the Bolshevik Party seized power in Russia in October 1917 they only amounted to a few thousand workers and party professionals. Yet, they were attempting to govern an imperial population of 170 million. Given the Italian philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli reminds us that that the maintenance of power emerges from a balancing act between cruelty and clemency and liberality and meanness (Machiavelli 1961), Lenin and the Bolsheviks needed to use a mechanism other than violence and coercion to preserve power. They were able to achieve this through dedicated political education (or re-education) and indoctrination to the values of communism. The excerpt of a speech delivered by Lenin in 1920 demonstrates the importance of political education to the revolutionary cause in Russia.

> **V. I. Lenin Speech Delivered at An All-Russia Conference of Political Education Workers of Gubernia and Uyezd Education Departments, November 3, 1920**

In all bourgeois states the connection between the political apparatus and education is very strong, although bourgeois society cannot frankly acknowledge it. Nevertheless, this society indoctrinates the masses through the church and the institution of private property. It is one of our basic tasks to contrapose our own truth to bourgeois "truth" and win its recognition…. Education workers, and the Communist Party as the vanguard in the struggle, should consider it their fundamental task to help enlighten and instruct the working masses, in order to cast off the old ways and habituated routine we have inherited from the old system, the private property habits the masses are thoroughly imbued with. This fundamental task of the entire socialist revolution should never be neglected during consideration of the particular problems that have demanded so much attention from the Party's Central Committee and the Council of People's Commissars. What kind of structure should the Chief Committee for Political Education have? How should it be linked up with other institutions? How should it be linked up, not only with the centre but with local bodies? These questions will be answered by comrades who are more competent in the matter, have already gained considerable experience, and have made a special study of the matter. I would like merely to stress the main principles involved. We must put the matter frankly and openly affirm, despite all the old untruths, that education cannot but be linked up with politics.

There are three significant things of note from Lenin's speech. Firstly, this form of political socialisation is overt and conscious. Secondly, the extent to which we may consider this process as sinister or oppressive depends largely on our perspective of the regime. Lenin and the Bolshevik Party believed they were working in the 'real' interests of working people and that political education was essential to ensuring that people realized their true interests. In other words, the Russian Empire's subjects' emancipation laid not with the old order, but

with revolutionary zeal of the Bolshevik party. Therefore, depending upon your perspective, one can ask if there is a difference between the benign and malign forms of political socialisation. What might be socialisation for one person may be indoctrination for others. Both forms imply the formal and deliberate education of individuals. Individuals learn to conform to the prevailing norms and values of the particular system. As much as Lenin sought to engineer society to socialist norms, could it also be the case that citizens in liberal democratic systems are socialised to believe that democracy is the best form of government and capitalism, predicated on wealth creation over social equality, is the best type of economic system?

The political philosopher Herbert Marcuse considered this question in his book *One Dimensional Man* (1960) in which he critiqued both capitalism and the communist system in the Soviet Union. He argued that capitalism, in what he termed 'advanced industrial societies', creates social and political conformity whereby individuals are indoctrinated into the existing system of production and consumption via mass media, advertising, technology and the dominant modes of thought. For Marcuse, this portends to a form of social control. On the surface it might seem like we have freedom, but underneath the available choices are constrained and the public space for critical thought is limited. No doubt there are problems with Marcuse's thesis, not least in its failure to explain reactions against global capitalism which reared their head in 1968 and which can still be seen more recently, for example in cases such as the Occupy Movement, which emerged in response to the global financial crisis of 2008, and the electoral success of left-wing parties in Europe. For example, SYRIZA in Greece which won the 2015 parliamentary election in the country, or Podemos in Spain, which obtained 20 percent of the vote in the December 2015 national elections. Nonetheless, Marcuse's argument does urge us to challenge our assumptions regarding the underlying

norms of the political system in which we are socialised into. Moreover, it is important to recognize that how we understand political socialisation can depend on very different ways of looking at the world.

Thirdly, Lenin's speech highlights that often in situations such as revolutions incoming elites require citizens to 'unlearn' old political values, traditions and habits. Sometimes this process of re-education is enforced through brutal indoctrination, as in the case of the Khmer Rouge regime of Pol Pot in Cambodia in the 1970s. Similarly, ISIS' destruction of cultural sites in Palmyra and throughout Syria is an attempt 'to annihilate the local sense of belonging, and the collective sense of memory among local communities' to establish a new set of cultural values and impose its own vision regarding history and heritage (Harmanşah 2015). Nevertheless, as we noted above in relation to political indoctrination, any shift in patterns of socialisation is likely to encounter the legacy of old patterns.

Research on transitions from communism to democracy in Central and Eastern Europe points to the important legacies of communist rule in shaping post-communist politics across the continent. This was especially the case with regards to the survival and success of Communist Parties in new democratic environments (Grzymala-Busse 2002) which suggests that voter preferences for the politics of the old Communist order were harder to eradicate than first thought. There were concerns from the outset that in the 'new' democracies of Central and Eastern Europe there would be an erosion of support for democracy and the neo-liberal economic reforms taking place (Przeworski 1991). In one country, at least, such apprehension was prescient. Contemporary politics in Hungary has been marked by the rise of a so-called **illiberal democracy** which has featured the concentration of power in the hands of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his party Fidesz (Innes 2015). No doubt any

'illiberal turn' is marked by the effects of the 2008 global recession. Research by The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development found that in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis public support for democracy and the market economy had fallen in Hungary and other former Communist countries which are now members of the European Union (Estonia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic and Poland) (Grosjean, Ricka and Senik 2013). The findings illustrate that support for democracy and the market economy are sensitive to the contingency of business cycles and also it reveals the shallow roots of democratic culture in Hungary and other Central East European states which were planted after the collapse of communism.

Key Word: Illiberal Democracy is a form of governing system in which elections do take place, but general civil liberties and effective pluralism are limited. Key institutions of the state which typically offer oversight of government policies in democracies are constrained in illiberal democracies via the appointment of government friendly officials. Large portions of the public space and the media are also controlled by government friendly agencies.

What the case of Hungary demonstrates is that we should be wary of jumping to premature conclusions in political science. While there are those who would seek to re-socialise populations, whether in non-democratic regimes, or for those systems undergoing a transition to market economies and liberal democratic politics as in post-communist Europe, old political attitudes and orientations are hard to remove and can appear to intervene in unpredictable ways.

Think point

- What do you think of the distinction between benign and malign forms of political socialisation?

- Why do you think it is difficult for citizens to 'unlearn' old attitudes, values and norms in states which are transitioning from non-democratic to democratic rule?

3.4 What do we learn?

So far, we have considered the purpose of political socialisation in the forms of civic education and indoctrination. What we need to turn our attention to now is the content of that political socialisation. Broadly speaking what we learn through the process of political socialisation whether in democratic or non-democratic systems can be absorbed into three categories: attachment to political institutions, partisanship; and participation.

Attachment to the political system

Political socialisation emerged as a sub-field of political science as part of the boom in **Behaviouralism** of the 1950s and 1960s. Some of the most prominent studies in this period explored how through childhood political socialisation practices in the United States, children became attached to government, institutions and political personalities. Easton (1965 cited in Sears 1975) differentiates three objects of attachment. The first relates to an attachment to the broader political community within which individuals find themselves situated. In essence we learn very early on in childhood that we belong to a particular 'national' community. This is elicited through both a conscious and unconscious process. Consciously, from an early age we are made aware of the symbols of nationhood, the flag, national anthem, and key personnel such as monarchs, presidents and prime ministers. We learn that these are symbols and persons who represent a bounded community group with which 'we' belong too. The most obvious example is in the United States where at least half of the States require children to recite the pledge of allegiance.

Key Word: Behaviouralism A movement in post-war political science, notably in the USA, concerned with establishing law-like generalisations about the political world and with shifting the emphasis of political studies away from its traditional legal-institutional manifestation. With a focus on individual behaviour, the 'behavioural approach' means literally a focus upon individual behaviour. The 'behavioural approach' is linked with quantitative research techniques designed to generate testable hypotheses about measurable attitudes and observable behaviour, thus rendering the study of politics more scientific.

Pledge of Allegiance of the United States (1954 current version)

"I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

At the same, time we are subject to unconscious socialisation towards national symbols. This is what Michael Bilig (1995) termed **banal nationalism** which concerns the everyday and routine 'flagging' of the nation by way of sporting events, national songs, routine words and phrases, currency, television and media representation of the national community. Just consider how international competitive sporting events, such as the Olympics, fosters a sense of attachment to the national community. Of course, not all early attachments are to a 'national' community. It is important to recognize that individuals can learn attachment to other identities such as religion, ethnicity, class and gender.

Key Word: Banal Nationalism Is the idea of every day representations of nationalism within democratic states. Banal nationalism represents the ideological daily habits of nationalism which more often than not go unnoticed such as the flag standing in the background, the portrait hanging of the wall, and the use of terms such as 'us' and 'them' in

national media. Banal nationalism is the continual flagging of the 'nation' in the background of daily life through political discourse, cultural products and news media.

The second object of attachment which is part of our political learning concerns the particular system we are socialised into. This could be a liberal democracy, authoritarian regime, monarchy or any other type of polity. According to Sears (1975: 114), from a young age we become accustomed to the specific constitutional order, 'including political roles and institutions and the rules and norms for handling matters politically'. In other words, we begin to understand the specific mechanisms through which power is obtained and wielded. In a democratic system this would concern learning about elections and political parties. In our earlier examples of Turkmenistan and North Korea this might instead focus on learning about and developing an attachment to the personality cults of President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov and Kim Jong un.

The third object of attachment are particular occupants of authority roles. We learn in school from an early age the names and personalities of leading political figures and we understand that they are imbued with political authority. We also learn of important figures throughout history. In the US, school children are taught very early on about the important role of 'great' presidents such as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, while in the UK, school children are taught of the important role of Winston Churchill during the Second World War. Feminists would critique the fact that often absent from these historical venerations of specific public figures of authority are women.

Partisanship

A key research finding in many studies of political socialisation is that children often

acquire political partisanship from their parents. The correlation between parental and child political preferences and attitudes is observed to be strong (Jennings & Niemi, 1968). Studies have consistently showed that political orientations such as party identification and political ideology are transmitted between generations (Alwin, Cohen and Newcomb 1991; Jennings and Niemi 1982; Mattei and Niemi 1991). For example, Jennings (1984) illustrated how parents can affect the particular ideological orientation of their offspring on the left-right spectrum. Therefore, a child might follow their parents' political orientation towards a particular political party. The assumption is if parents supports a Socialist Party then the child will develop a preference for a Socialist Party too.

The question, however, is what causes such reproduction of partisanship? A recent (Quintelier, Hooghe and Badescu 2007) comparative study of data from Belgium, Canada and Romania found that there were three broad causal mechanisms: the active promotion of values and attitudes by parents; parents positioned as 'role models'; and transmission via socio-economic status. The research found that greater interaction within the family and families with a higher economic status were more effective in promoting intergenerational partisan political orientations. Moreover, the evidence of the study suggested intergenerational partisanship is more stable in established democracies such as Canada and Belgium than it is in emerging democracies such as Romania.

This is where the issue of context is crucial. The fact is there is variability in the extent to which parents affect political partisanship within their off-spring. This variability can depend not just upon the type of political system, but also different parenting styles (Murray and Mulvaney 2012) and in the case of democracies the type of party system. As Ventura (2001: 686) has examined in the case of the European party systems, in two-party systems, parents

usually convey to their children their party identification; in competitive multiparty systems there is a transmission of ideological identification along the left-right axis; and in competitive multiparty systems with several cross-cutting cleavages, parents tend to diffuse an identification with a bloc of parties, sharing a common denominator in terms of one of the cleavages.

What the above alludes to is that how we learn political partisanship is complex and can be dependent upon many different contextual factors. A problem with the idea of inter-generational transmission of party and ideological orientation is that it cannot explain change or variability of party or ideological identification over time. Is it really the case that what we politically learn from our parents sticks over the long-term? Or are we subject to more important influences over our life cycle? This is a central question we will return to below when considering the question of *when* we become political socialised.

Participation

The final category of our political learning is participation. The process of political socialisation introduces us to the expectations placed upon us as citizens of the broader social group to play an active role in the political process. In democratic systems we learn about elections and parties and therefore the important function voting has for the working of the democratic process. In democracies participation is 'an opportunity to communicate information to government officials about their concerns and preferences and to put pressure on them to respond' (Verba, Lehman Schlozman and Brady 1995: 37). As we will see in the following chapters, however, participation is not just limited to voting. Given we understand politics in this book in a broad sense which correlates with the idea of power and its underpinning relationships, then political participation can take many forms. The same goes,

therefore, for the different types of political participation we can learn through the process of political socialisation. Aside from voting, the extent to which we are involved in political activism, whether campaigning for a party, standing for election, attending a protest or a march, donating money to a political campaign and even getting involved in political discussions via social media forums such as Facebook and Twitter, can largely depend on the context of our political learning. For example, Ellen Quintelier (2015) found in the case of Belgium that children's propensity to participate in political activity in later life is mediated by the extent to which they grew up in an active political family and come from a higher socio-economic group.

This section has provided us with an insight to some of the research which explains what we learn through the process of political socialisation. By learning attachment, partisanship and participation as individuals we develop a palette of norms, values and attitudes which underpin our political orientation to the social world. However, as we have noted above the intensity and longevity of what we learn can depend on the specific context and it raises a fundamental question concerning *when* we become politically socialised. If it is the case that parental influence is important in explaining long-term partisanship and participation, then we would think that early years socialisation is crucial. However, that does not account for elements of change within our individual political orientation. The following section explores this issue.

3.5 When do we become politically socialised?

The *when* question has been a matter of lively debate in the literature on political socialisation. Dennis Kavanagh labels the two sides of the debate the *primacy* and *recency*

schools. The titles are suggestive of the emphasis given to the crucial period of political socialisation. Adherents of the primacy school emphasise the importance of childhood (and early childhood in particular), whereas analysts from the recency perspective point to the importance of the ongoing socialisation and re-socialisation processes that occur throughout life. However, it is important to remember that this is more than simply a debate about when political learning takes place. It is sometimes forgotten that the primacy and recency schools are based upon very different assumptions and thus represent thoroughly different ways of thinking about the world in general and human learning in particular.

Primacy theory draws upon a branch of psychology that places emphasis upon the centrality of the early years to individual development. The key concept of the 'critical period' becomes useful here. The argument is that the brain is best equipped for the receipt of certain sorts of information at certain critical (or 'sensitive') periods in early childhood. Studies of language acquisition reveal that it is extremely difficult for a person to learn basic linguistic skills in the period beyond childhood. This is believed to be because children are physiologically and psychologically ready to respond to external stimuli in ways that lead them to obtain the knowledge and skills associated with language. So, individuals are likely to be socialised to certain sorts of key political information in a critical period in early childhood, probably in the environment provided by immediate family and guardians. Obviously, infants and young children will not have the mental equipment to develop fully formulated opinions on the pressing political issues of the day; neither will they arrive at sophisticated notions of voting preference. The argument of primacy theorists is that the sorts of values which are embedded in the early stages of childhood 'kick in' during later life as the individual becomes acquainted with the public world of politics.

In contrast, *recency* approaches to political socialisation are built around the view that political learning is an ongoing process related to changing experiences throughout the life cycle. This position draws on psychological studies of identity formation which suggest that self-definition and self-understanding are subject to change. In particular, there is a sense in which the development of a 'mature' identity involves the rejection of earlier influences. In terms of political learning, the argument appears to be that the results of socialisation are never fully embedded, that changing circumstances can produce crises of political identity and re-socialisation into new habits, norms and beliefs.

Think point

Think about your own experience of politics.

■ Which of the two frameworks outlined above, 'primacy' or 'recency', seems best placed to explain your political socialisation?

Both positions have been supported by empirical research. The first classic study in this area was Herbert Hyman's *Political Socialization* (Hyman 1959). Hyman's data appeared to support the claim that children in the United States tended to acquire the political preferences of their parents. This could be taken as evidence of the transmission of political values in childhood. In their research reported in *Children and the Political System* David Easton and Jack Dennis (1969) studied the acquisition of political values in childhood. They concluded that childhood political socialisation occurred as a four-stage process in which children learned about authority. In the first stage children would recognise that certain individuals were somehow endowed with authority. So, a parent would be able to stipulate bedtime, or a police officer would be able to arrest miscreants. Second, children would realise that authority has both public and private faces. At this stage it would become apparent that the

type of authority exercised by the parent is qualitatively different from that of the police officer. In the third stage children would recognise that authority can be embedded in institutions such as governments, parliaments and courts. The final and most sophisticated stage would occur at the point when children understood that institutions have an existence that is separate from the individuals who work within them.

The third and fourth stages in the Easton and Dennis model constitute recognition of what is commonly understood to be the political world: the domain of authoritative institutions. What is interesting is that Easton and Dennis understand the process of learning about politics as beginning prior to a formal understanding of politicians, parties, parliaments and so on. From this viewpoint it is not necessary to be able to understand oneself in relation to 'political' objects in order to be socialised politically. Moreover, what is learned early matters:

> What enters the mind first remains there to provide lenses and categories for perceiving and sorting later perceptions. Furthermore, early learning occurs during the period of plasticity and openness: the assumptions acquired in childhood frequently appear to be absorbed in an unquestioned fashion. Such assumptions can become inarticulate major premises which then exercise a background effect on thought and overt behaviour precisely because they are not made sufficiently conscious to become open to challenge.
>
> (Greenstein *et al*. 1970, cited in Kavanagh 1983: 45)

A problem with the primacy school is that it largely ignores adult socialisation. The political socialisation we are subject to in childhood may not necessarily equip us with the values and attitudes to meet the challenges of political decision making in adult life. As

individuals we undergo many personal changes and unexpected events throughout our life and it is important to recognize how our political outlook can change when we adapt to new (political) environments. The emphasis within the recency school, therefore, is on how our identities develop and evolve over time in response to different political and social stimuli:

"Lifelong socialisation becomes a cumulative process whereby the individual is able to adapt existing knowledge and behaviour to new situations. A bank of social values, attitudes and actions is built up and the social actor can draw on them in combination to suit the needs of changing role situations"

(White 1977, cited in Rush 1992: 100)

As Roberta S. Sigel (1989) has noted, a good way of thinking about adult socialisation is in terms of chronological age. There are certain political activities which we can only undertake once we are adults such as voting or running for office. At the age of three we do not have the cognitive capacity to engage in such meaningful political behaviour, thus we require additional political learning to perform such activities as voting, campaigning or even becoming a politician. Our political learning therefore continues into adulthood. Our political preferences will also shift with age too. As a 20-year old we might possess policy preferences based on fair access to university education, career development and opportunities to get on the housing ladder, but as a 65-year old our policy preferences may be more directed towards issues such as the age of retirement and social care. It is reflective of psychological research which shows that people act in self-interest when their stake in a particular policy is clear and when they understand the benefits a particular policy might bring for them personally (Chong, Citrin and Conley 2001).

Changing circumstances such as university education, marriage, different work environments and unexpected contingent events can shape and re-define an individual's political consciousness. It is not just a case of political socialisation, but re-socialisation to different norms and values, and perhaps even de-socialisation, the un-learning of existing views and attitudes. This raises fundamental questions about what we retain and what do we change, and why and with what effects? Perhaps the best way to demonstrate the recency approach is to consider personal biographies of lifelong political socialisation in action.

In his 2016 book *Exit Right: The People Who Left the Left and Re-Shaped the American Century*, Daniel Oppenheimer details the political journeys of six figures in American politics who adapted their political attitudes from the left to the right of the political spectrum and in doing so had a profound effect on American political life. A notable case is that of Christopher Hitchens who was a public intellectual. Hitchens formative political years where in the counter culture movement of the 1960s. In the febrile atmosphere of the time, Hitchens, influenced by Marxism and the ideas of the New Left, attended protests and demonstrations against US involvement in Vietnam. For three decades he was a leading public voice on political issues and causes of the left and was a self-described Trotskyist. However, by the 2000s Hitchens political world view had changed and he became an advocate of US president George W. Bush's neoconservative agenda especially in relation to his support for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Hitchens suggested that his change in political outlook was driven by a series of on-going political events including the fatwa against Salman Rushdie, the failure of the international community to respond to the Bosnian-Serb genocide and the Rwandan genocide, the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on September 11th, 2001, and Saddam Hussein's treatment of the Kurdish population. Hitchens shift from left to right demonstrates the complex relationship between earlier held values and how they might

influence a revision in political outlook in later life. It is clear from the above that while the contingent events of Salmon Rushdie's *fatwa* and 9-11 precipitated an ideological shift from left to right, Hitchens also suggested that this shift could be detected in his earlier objection when on the left to all things totalitarian. For Hitchens, therefore, his political journey from arch-Trotskyist to neoconservative was entirely consistent with long-held beliefs regarding opposition to dictatorship and the anti-democratic nature of fascism, which for him was reflected in contemporary Islamic fundamentalism. This is reflective of the interactive relationship between early and adult political socialisation. As David Marsh (1971: 458) has noted 'attitudes in later socialisation may indeed be more significant than has been realized. However, attitudes which developed at an early age might still be the most stable over time shaping and influencing the perception of those later attitudes.

What Christopher Hitchens case alerts us to is how contingency and major political events can be catalysts for political socialisation (Sears and Valentino 1997). Research on the impact of the events of the terrorist attacks of 9-11 on the political behaviour of victims' families is very revealing in this respect. Eitan Hersh traced the families of 1729 victims of 9-11 to examine if or how their political activities changed since the event compared to a similar (control) group of New York residents not directly affected by the attacks on the Twin Towers. His research produced two central findings. Firstly, families and neighbours of victims became more involved in politics after the attack including being more likely to vote, to be more involved in the selection of party candidates and to provide more financial support to favoured candidates. Secondly, while families, and to a lesser extent neighbours, became more involved in party activities, there was also a shift in allegiance to the Republican Party (Hersh 2013). Over a 12-year period Hersh found that family members of victims were 5 percent less likely to be members of the Democratic Party. What Hersh's research does not

tell us is why families of victims shifted to the right – it could have been because they were impressed with how Republican President George Bush dealt with the aftermath of the attacks or an increased policy preference for issues of domestic security, something which the conservative Republican Party has reputation for protecting. Nevertheless, as Hersch notes '9/11 catalysed long-lasting political changes among those most affected', and this serves to exemplify the way in which large-scale contingent events can re-socialise adults' political norms and values.

Think Point

- Consider a major event which has altered your behaviour and perspective towards political issues.
- How did it impact you? How might the event have contributed towards changing your political outlook?

Primacy and recency identify different stages and processes important to the attainment of political identity. Differently put, it is not the case that one school of thought is right or wrong, both reflect different periods when we learn about politics. Some values may stick in early life – while other may shift in relation to changes in our lives. Neither has a complete explanation for political socialisation. Primacy can be a useful theoretical lens for analysing political partisanship and voter alignment over time. More precisely, the extent to which parental preference and social class can determine our party preference. For example, in their landmark study of electoral choice in Britain in the 1960s, Butler and Stokes (1969, cited in Rush 1992) found there was a high correlation between the party their survey respondents voted for and the party preferences of their parents. Recency, however, can help explain de-partisanship and voter de-alignment which represents a 'partial uncoupling of the association

between party preference and class' (Rush 1992: 105). Greater social and geographic mobility and the exposure of more economic opportunities can potentially alter our policy preferences leading people to switch party allegiance.

3.6 How do we learn about politics?

Implicit in our discussions so far are some of the different **agents of socialisation** who can shape our political orientations. We have seen earlier on in this chapter that that family are perceived to have a long-term effect on the political partisanship of their offspring. Much early research on political socialisation of the 1960s and 1970s highlighted the role of parents as social agents in shaping the political attitudes of their children. Education and schooling is also important, as we saw with the deliberate political socialisation in the cases of Turkmenistan and North Korea. But education has an important role in democratic societies too, as we saw with civic education programmes. And as we have just observed how contingent events such as the attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001 can have an influence on our political attitudes over the longer-term.

Key Word: Agents of socialisation Those individuals, groups or institutions which are responsible for the transmission of the information through which people acquire their socialisation

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There are many agents of socialisation we could point to which might shape the norms and values we hold. We might look at the socialising impact of gender, workplace, social class, peer groups, leisure activities or membership of religious groups. One agency worthy of deeper investigation here is popular culture and mass media. Popular culture can be understood to range from books, television shows, music, films, the Internet, radio, video

games and of course print media (newspapers and magazines). For the purposes of this discussion, we will attend briefly to the socialising role played by books and films.

On the surface, popular culture can often seem disposable and lacking in substantive political content. Yet, culture and stories are very powerful mediums with which to transmit ideas, values and norms about society. The question is can such representation of values and norms through popular culture shape our political outlook and behaviour? Recent research suggests there is indeed a correlation between popular culture and certain political attitudes. Anthony Gierzynski has produced empirical evidence to demonstrate how the Harry Potter series has influenced the political values and outlook of the millennial generation. Gierzynski (2013: 6) carried out a national survey of 1100 college students in the United States and found that those who had read the books had a proclivity 'towards greater levels of acceptance for out-groups, higher political tolerance, less predisposition to authoritarianism, greater support for equality, are less cynical, and possess greater opposition to the use of violence and torture'. All in all, Gierzynski found that those who had grown up with and read the Harry Potter series were more liberal.

Gierzynski and his colleagues conducted further research on the influence of the Television programmes *Game of Thrones* and *House of Cards*. Gierzynski notes that a key theme of both shows is the concept of justice, or more precisely lack of justice. Anyone who has watched *Game of Thrones* knows that any character who is characterised as morally 'good' will unlikely last until the end of the season, typically perishing in some violent and gory way at the hands of the less moral, or at least morally ambiguous, characters. The show, therefore, possesses a tendency to reward injustice. Netflix's House of Cards is very similar in this respect. Kevin Spacey's character Frank Underwood is a cynical, lying and

manipulative US senator who will resort to any means necessary, including murder, to achieve his goal of becoming president. Conducting a survey of 1003 of college students Gierzynski et al (2015: 37) found that audiences of these shows scored lower in believing in a 'just world', in other words they have a tendency to see the world as cruel and unjust. They also scored higher in believing that ends justify the means, and in the case of *House of Cards*, a propensity towards cynicism about government. The implication of these findings is that as consumers of media we have a tendency to see the world as it is presented through media representations (Shrum and Lee 2012). In psychology this process is called transportation – whereby narratives can influence beliefs (Green and Brock 2000). Research has suggested that transportation has occurred in relation to the influence of Oliver Stone's 1991 film *JFK*, which details a conspiracy theory implicating the CIA in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. A Gallup poll found that in 1992 75 percent of US citizens believed there to have been a conspiracy in the murder of JFK, an increase on previous years polling, a fact the polling company put down to the influence of Oliver Stone's film (Gallup 2001).

Think Point

- Consider if there are any forms of popular culture which have shaped your political outlook. What values might they have promoted? Did they change or confirm existing political attitudes you held?

- What do you think are the weaknesses of popular culture as an agent of political socialisation?

- What are the limitations of using popular culture as a tool to study political socialisation?

As political scientists we should always cast a critical eye over such research findings as

above. Indeed, we should treat the relationship between the influence of popular culture texts such as Harry Potter or *Game of Thrones* with caution. The first thing we should note is that all these findings point toward correlation not causation. In other words, while they may be a statistical link between students reading Harry Potter and possessing more liberal views, it does not mean that reading J.K. Rowling's book series causes students to be more tolerant and liberal. As David Jackson has noted, survey research which draws a correlation between popular culture preferences and political beliefs produces a mixed-bag of results which cannot always easily be made sense of (Jackson 2008: 27). For example, Jackson conducted a survey of 456 young Anglophone Canadians on the influence of rock star Bono's political views on their beliefs and he found that while young Canadians respected his views there was no evidence that Bono's political outlook specifically shaped or caused those views (Jackson 2007). Second, any choice of entertainment we consume may reflect our pre-existing beliefs and prejudices. Therefore, we might seek out particular forms of popular culture because they confirm our existing political beliefs. We might watch Oliver Stone's *JFK* because we have predilection to conspiracy theories. *House of Cards* might appeal to us because it confirms pre-held views we possess regarding the cynical nature of politicians and government. The third issue we should be cautious about is whether it is simply the case, as implied by this research and the notion of 'transmission', that we are passive receivers of media messages? The research tends to assume that we arrive at these forms of popular culture without prior political knowledge, beliefs and ideas. As individuals we have agency to negotiate the messages we receive through the media and to draw out fact from fiction. We develop our political outlook not from any single source and neither just from sources of entertainment. In other words, we arrive at a position whereby we are not just passive receivers of messages but as activate participants who balance competing messages from varying sources and who possess agency in sifting through such sources to develop our outlook on the political world.

Culture has also been an important tool of political socialisation in non-democratic systems. The most obvious example would be the use of cinema as a propaganda tool by the Soviet elites in the early days of the USSR as they sought to educate the masses into new patterns of social, economic and political behaviour. The silver screen was used to spread the Soviet's ideological message and was dragooned to offer an idealised portrayal of the values of the Russian Revolution and heroism of the proletariat. Film was especially useful in the areas of the former Russian Empire which were perceived to be more 'backward' and 'primitive' such as the Central Asian region (modern day Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). This area did not have an established cinema network so to reach these populations the Soviet authorities established travelling cinemas which would go from region to region showing the latest *kul'turfil'my* (cultural films). These were short documentary films which were used to demonstrate the civilizing nature of the new Soviet authorities. One of the most widely known of such films was the 1929 documentary film *Turksib* directed by Viktor Turin. *Turksib* was aimed at promoting one of the successes of the first five-year plan, the construction of the Turkestan-Siberian railway. Films such as *Turksib* were a crucial tool for the Soviet authorities as they sought to gain power and control over Central Asia. The visuals of cinema were fundamental to promoting a positive message of the Soviet authorities' intentions and activities in the region, not least because many of the different ethnic groups in Central Asia did not have a standardized form of written language.

However, it is important to question the lasting power of such media messages. Despite 70 years of cinema, media, literature and other cultural forms pumping out the values and norms of communist propaganda, the Soviet regime still collapsed in 1991. It does raise questions

regarding the effectiveness of culture in shaping political values and attitudes. In the case of the Soviet Union, by the 1970s and 1980s there was a gap between the artistically imagined political and social life of the state as presented in film and other cultural mediums, and the lived day-to-day experiences of Soviet citizens. At the same time, however, cinema became a medium for subtle dissent against the Soviet system. The 1970s in Soviet cinema saw the emergence of so-called *bvtovy* (slice-of-life) films which sought to depict the 'real' day-to-day life and problems of Soviet citizens. Anna Lawton notes how Sergei Mikaelian's 1975 film *the Bonus* is a good example of such cinema. The film tells the tale of how a factory supervisor challenges the falsification of the over-fulfilment of planned targets and consequently rejects a financial bonus. In the movie, while the Communist Party officials support the supervisor, the film in fact depicts the corruption and inefficiencies which were systemic in the planned Soviet economy (Lawton 1992: 11). It would be a stretch to claim that this type of subtle political dissent through popular Soviet culture shaped political attitudes to such an extent that it contributed significantly to the collapse of the Soviet Union. But what it does illustrate is that popular culture can act to challenge prevailing political and social norms whether in a non-democratic or democratic system.

This discussion on the role of popular culture as an agent of socialisation illustrates how a less obvious social agent can influence or shape our political beliefs. However, we should be cautious about the extent of its influence and instead see it as part of the panoply of influencing agents such as family, school and peers. Popular culture, like other agents, may precipitate or re-confirm our existing views. Ultimately, it can depend on personal experience.

3.7 The importance of political socialisation

The study of political learning or political socialisation is not an insulated discrete topic. That much should already be clear. To conclude this chapter, it is worth addressing three particular questions about the wider implications of political socialisation for, respectively, political science, politics and the political system.

What does political socialisation tell us about political science?

Why did political scientists become interested in socialisation? This is worthy of some extended discussion. Anyone who has seriously thought about politics would have contemplated either the relationship between political learning and political action or the way in which types of regime might be underpinned by certain sorts of formal or informal socialisation. We have seen that these ways of thinking go back at least as far as ancient Greece. But political socialisation as a *concept* emerged very much in the environment of political science in the United States during the 1950s.

As most commentators acknowledge, the appearance of political socialisation as a serious subject of empirical enquiry was bound up with the so-called behavioural revolution in political science. In this viewpoint of **behaviouralism** the main purpose of political, and for that matter social, science is the explanation of individual and collective behaviour. As David Sanders puts it, '[t]he central question that behaviouralists ask is: "Why do individuals, institutional actors and nation states behave in the way that they do?"' (Sanders 1995: 74). Framing the problematic of enquiry in this way suggests that behaviouralists are interested in establishing patterns of causation.

Furthermore, behaviouralists insist that we must be able to observe behaviour and test

hypotheses empirically. The resulting body of empirical political theory will be open to verification or falsification. In other words, the behavioural movement was entangled with the quest to make the study of social phenomena more *scientific*. We have already addressed the question of whether or not the study of politics can be scientific in the Introduction to this book, and it might be worth thinking about that issue again. For behaviouralists, the accumulation of empirical data from observable political phenomena in pursuit of particular hypotheses could lead to the tantalising prospect of law-like generalisations about the political world. But it was not just that the results of research would be scientifically valid. Behaviouralists – like others of a positivist persuasion – also believed that the ways in which they devised and conducted research projects should aspire to operate in the manner of the natural sciences.

The importance of political socialisation should be clear. If we are able to derive empirical generalisations about how, when and from whom people learn about politics, then we have a potentially powerful set of tools for explaining how people behave politically. In addition, because of the behaviouralist concentration upon what is readily observable, enquiries into political socialisation have tended to concentrate on measurable sources of political information such as school curricula or the mass media or research into the patterns of learning among children across time.

Think Point

■ What do you make of behaviouralist approaches to the study of politics?

■ Do they have any obvious weaknesses?

For its advocates, behaviouralism had a number of advantages over other forms of political

study. Perhaps the least controversial claim made on the approach's behalf was that it widened the scope of political science. Behaviouralism, argue its champions, focused attention away from the traditionally legalistic study of political institutions and constitutions towards the political actions of real people in all levels of the political system. More contentiously, behaviour is treated as the single most important unit of analysis in the study of politics; more important than, for example, institutional rules or norms. Doing political science in this way was made possible by advances in research methods that employed large-scale surveys amenable to sophisticated statistical analysis. Developments in computer hardware and software have made such techniques less burdensome on the researcher and enabled the collection and processing of enormous quantities of data.

For its opponents, behaviouralism was a deeply flawed approach to the study of politics for two reasons. The first line of criticism is that behaviouralism is likely to produce work that is overtly empiricist. In other words, the tenets of behaviouralism are said to encourage the asinine accumulation of facts. Generalisations emerge once regularities begin to form within a mass of accumulated empirical data. For many social scientists this approach is wrong-headed because it neglects the importance of devising theoretical and conceptual categories prior to the accumulation and manipulation of data (Sartori 1970). What we get is a political science based on phenomena that are amenable to easy measurement rather than those that are of theoretical importance. Theories, runs the argument, are the only things we have to help us sort through the disordered mess of the social world so that we may ask meaningful questions and choose relevant data. Indeed, there are elements of the political world that cannot be counted or meaningfully quantified, suggesting that behaviouralists run the risk of missing out important elements of their explanations.

In his discussion of behaviouralism, Sanders (1995) argues that this tendency is likely to neglect potentially important explanations on the grounds that they may be difficult or impossible to organise. He points to studies of voting behaviour which have managed to achieve quite sophisticated analyses of individual motivations for voting based upon the interplay of various factors such as social background, ideological and party identification and economic perceptions. But there is no incorporation into voting studies of, for example, the ways in which individuals conceptualise themselves. As Sanders puts it, 'it is very hard to envisage how the responses to such questions – given the difficulty of measuring those responses systematically – could ever be incorporated into formal analysis. As a result, they are largely excluded from the analytic frame' (Sanders 1995: 66).

The second and related point is that behaviouralist political science elevates the quantifiable and relegates the theoretical. Behaviouralist-influenced political scientists have a predisposition for measuring things. Data are valid if they can be measured. The other side of the coin is that data are not valid if they are not quantifiable. This betrays a rather contentious set of assumptions about the political world and how that world might be studied. For instance, many critics note that the pseudo-scientific bent of behaviouralism leads many researchers to neglect the fact that they themselves are actors in the social and political world that they seek to explain. Objectivity is not easily achieved. Of particular importance is the behavioural assumption that theory and observation can be separated. The researcher is portrayed as an objective onlooker who then builds empirical theory based upon what he or she has observed. But we can argue quite strongly that all observation is influenced by a pre-existing theoretical position. Thus, how the researcher observes is likely to be subject to some sort of theoretical preconception. Indeed, the selection of what is to be observed is equally likely to be conditioned in the same way. This scientism is also accused of neglecting the

normative element of political enquiry. So-called value freedom is taken to be a good thing among behaviouralists, but the marginalisation of values also potentially side-lines the great questions of political philosophy – questions about rights, freedom, justice and so on.

The use of powerful arguments of this sort by critics has led to the abandonment of much of the most zealous and positivistic behaviouralism. Having said that, behaviouralism is still one of the most influential components of contemporary political science. A behavioural emphasis is central to the study of elections and voting, perhaps the best-known and most publicised manifestation of the study of politics.

In the context of this volume, behaviouralism is important, not only because it provides a good case study of a particular way of 'doing' political science, but also because of the content of this chapter and of Chapters 3 and 4. As we will see, it is not necessary to be a behaviouralist to study political behaviour. But it very difficult to understand the work that has been done on socialisation, political culture and political participation without a basic sense of what behaviouralist political science was all about.

What does political socialisation tell us about politics?

This can be stated with more brevity. As indicated above, the work done on political socialisation rather suggests that politics is a very broad-based activity, by no means confined to the world of formal political institutions. The study of political socialisation opens up the study of politics to both the analysis of political behaviour (how individuals and groups operate within the bounds set by institutions) and research into the factors lying behind political action. Moreover, one of the basic assumptions of much work on political

socialisation is the idea that orientations to political objects are the product of the mobilisation of other sorts of values which we may learn in other arenas, whether as a child watching a Disney film or as an adult confronting problems in the workplace. So, politics is not necessarily a separate sphere of human existence somehow apart from all other aspects of life. In many ways it is our life.

What does political socialisation tell us about the political system?

The study of political socialisation raises some intrinsically interesting questions about the ways in which individuals acquire their political views and their orientations towards political objects. However, it is also worth drawing out some rather bigger issues that will be developed and argued through in the course of the next few chapters. Most prominently, there is the matter of the relationship between what we learn about politics and the stability or otherwise of the political system within which we live. Is what we learn about politics, in terms of particular chunks of knowledge as well as deeper values, somehow supportive of the regime? On the other hand, might it be possible to learn and mobilise around dysfunctional or anti-regime values?

Unfortunately, we will have to leave these questions hanging for now. In addition, you should not expect to have any clear-cut answers to this issue even by the time you have finished reading this book. Unfortunately, political science is never that simple, but eventually you should be able to address these questions with greater conceptual sophistication.

3.8 Conclusion

We all learn about politics, but not in ways that may be immediately obvious. How often do we think that a 6-year-old child sitting in a classroom, completing a writing exercise set by the teacher, is being socialised politically? When we sit down to watch a film, do we imagine that it may propagate certain sets of values that reinforce or clash with our own? Of course, there is considerable dispute about whether either of these examples should be understood as an instance of the acquisition of political values and norms. Much depends upon what we think politics is all about and what we regard as politically relevant knowledge. The great advantage of studying socialisation is that it raises these difficult questions. With any luck, in so doing it makes us less complacent about the subject we study.

Chapter Summary

- Learning about politics is not just about acquiring formal knowledge about the workings of a political system. Rather, it is a matter of developing core values and attitudes as well as perceptions of authority that together influence political views and shape political behaviour.

- Political scientists use the phrase 'political socialisation' to capture this process.

- What we learn and how we learn about politics can depend on the wider political, social and economic context.

- It is difficult to see how a regime could remain legitimate or stable without its subjects being socialised into sets of relevant norms. This may be viewed as a process of malign indoctrination or a benign form of civic education.

- Debate rages as to whether the key processes of political socialisation occur within the early stages of a person's life, or whether changing life experiences produce significant moments of re-socialisation. These two views may be usefully labelled the

'primacy' and 'recency' views.

- Political socialisation takes place through different agents of socialisation, such as families, schools, peer groups, media and popular culture.

- The study of political socialisation directs us towards some of the less formal aspects of the political process. Moreover, it is studied because some political scientists believe that patterns of socialisation into core societal values explain the ways in which different political systems work.

Further Reading

Easton, D. and Dennis, J. (1969) *Children and the Political System: Origins of Political Legitimacy*, New York: McGraw-Hill. The most famous study of pre-adult political socialisation.

Eulau, H. (1963) *The Behavioural Persuasion in Politics*, New York: Random House. A helpful discussion from a leading practitioner of behaviouralism.

Hyman, H. (1959) *Political Socialization: A Study in the Psychology of Political Behaviour*, New York: Free Press. Still worth a read. Usually regarded as the first systematic study of political socialisation.

Kavanagh, D. (1983) *Political Science and Political Behaviour*, London: Unwin Hyman. A clear, critical discussion of the main themes of behavioural political science.

EXERCISE

Write a short statement of between 500 and 1000 words reflecting on your own political

socialisation experiences. Putting these thoughts down on paper should be a valuable exercise; it will help you to see the connections between personal experience and the study of politics. Remember you will not be writing about your views on particular political issues. Rather, you should be thinking about where those views came from and the factors in your life which have had cause to influence or change your perspective on the political world.

The following guidelines may be of help:

1   What are my political views? Not just which political party do I support but how do I feel about broader issues; indeed, do I have any discernible political views?

2   Can I identify any agents of socialisation that may have acted as formative political influences? Here we are talking about parents, teachers, friends as well as the media.

3   At what points in my life do I think my key socialisation experiences occurred? Childhood, adolescence, adulthood?

4   Have my views about politics changed over time? If so, do these changes reflect new socialisation experiences brought about in new environments (such as moving to a new area, changing schools or starting a new job)?