

Examining Individuals' Childhood Experiences with Politics: Interview Project

Created by Drs. Meagan M. Patterson and Nicole Perry (University of Kansas) for [Monograph Matters](#), a companion resource to the *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*

Contact: meaganpatterson@ku.edu

Project Description:

These materials are designed to accompany the SRCD monograph *Toward A Developmental Science of Politics*.

This project allows students to build on their learning from reading the monograph by reflecting on key findings, collecting interview data, and analyzing data using a coding system similar to one used in the monograph research project. This interview project could be used for courses in psychology, sociology, political science, education, or human development.

For additional materials related to the monograph, visit <https://monographmatters.srzd.org/>

Project Objectives:

This project explores the ways that people come to learn about politics via relevant childhood experiences. From this project, students should be able to:

- Understand the question of “how do we learn about politics?” as an open-ended inquiry that we don’t know the exact answer to. Scholars are currently trying to understand this topic better, and this monograph is one example.
- Understand ways in which scholars might collect and analyze data relevant to childhood political socialization.
- Identify ways that the education that children receive about politics (from sources such as schools, media, and parents) might justify or undermine the status quo. In other words, students should gain some initial understanding of the power dynamics embedded in how we educate young people about politics and the implications this has for people’s understanding of and engagement with politics.

Discussion Questions:

1. What were the main results of this study? Did these results surprise you?
2. What do you remember about the 2016 election? How did you or other people you know react to the election outcome?
3. The students in this study were ages 5-11. What do you remember about elections that occurred when you were in elementary school? Do you think these elections influenced your attitudes about politics?

SCHEDULE

- **Day 1:** Discussion of monograph (reserve last 5-10 minutes of class to go over how conduct interviews)
- **Homework before Day 2:** Students conduct interviews as homework
- **Day 2:** Analysis and discussion of interview findings
 - Focus of this class should be on discussing the interviews & comparing answers across students
 - Students should fill out the “interview analysis worksheet” during class time
 - For “coding the interview” section of worksheet:
 - Explain that the purpose of coding interviews is to look for broad patterns across multiple interviews. Sometimes it is challenging to boil a complex statement down to a simple “positive” or “neutral” category, but working through that should show students the complexities of doing qualitative research.
 - *Optional activity for instructors: After you collect the worksheets, you could enter them into a spreadsheet & tally the responses. Reporting back to the students on Day 4 (or after the student presentations) about the overall results from the class could show them the power of looking at responses holistically and prompt a good discussion about possible explanations for patterns you see across interviews.*
- **Day 3:** Discussion / prep for presentations
 - Start discussion to help students make connections between their interviews & the overall research questions
 - Framing question for the unit: What do we know about how people learn about politics based on interviews?
 - How do the answers from our interviews compare to what children said in the Patterson et al. study?
- **Days 4 & 5:** Student presentations

INTERVIEW GUIDE

General directions

Identify someone who is willing to be interviewed (a roommate, a friend, etc.). Ideally, this person should be between 18-24 years old.

Some things to remember while interviewing:

1. Your goal is to understand the person's experiences learning about politics. Even if the person you are interviewing is a friend, refrain from expressing your opinion during the interview.
2. Jot down a few quotes underneath each question as the person is talking. Immediately after the interview, write down any additional notes under each question while it is still fresh in your mind.
3. If you want to record the interview, ask for permission before the interview starts.
4. Hand in this Interview Guide with your notes.

Interview guide

Introductory script: "For this interview project, we're interested in understanding how people learn about politics as they are growing up. I have a few questions for you, and the whole conversation should take around 30 minutes. If you want to stop the interview at any point, just let me know. Ready to get started?"

Part 1: Information about you

- a. Your age:
- b. Where you are from:
- c. What gender category do you identify with?
- d. What racial/ethnic category or categories do you identify with?

Part 2: "First, I'd like to ask you some general questions about your experience learning about politics during your childhood."

- a. **School:**
 - i. Do you remember learning about politics in school?
 1. What do you remember learning?
 2. How did you feel about what you were learning?

b. Interactions:

- i. Are there any particular interactions or events that stuck out to you as being relevant to politics while you were growing up? For example, do you remember a particular conversation, movie or television show, or news event that was important for your understanding of politics?
 1. As a child, what did you interpret this event to mean?

c. Other:

- i. Besides school and your interactions with other people, were there any other sources of information that you think you used to inform your understanding of politics as you were growing up?
 1. What did you learn from these sources?

Part 3: “Next, I’d like to ask you a few questions about your experiences with elections.”

- a. Do you remember a presidential election occurring when you were in elementary school?
- b. What do you remember about this election? (For example, did you see candidates on television, did your school hold a mock election, did you go with your parents to vote?)
- c. Do you remember how people around you felt about this election? How did their reactions shape your feelings about the election as a child?

INTERVIEW ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Step 1: Interview basics	
<i>Answer all known fields</i>	
Date of interview	
Location of interview	
Length of interview	
Interview subject	
Race	
Gender	
Age	
Where they are from	

Step 2: Code the interview	
Sources of information about politics	
What source(s) did the person report for information about politics (e.g., school, parents, peers, media)?	
Did the messages about politics differ across different sources?	
Examples of messages	
Reaction to presidential election	
Did the person report that people around them primarily had a positive, neutral, or negative reaction to the presidential election in their childhood? (Circle one)	Positive / Neutral / Negative
Examples of reactions	

Step 3: Contextualize the interview	
<p>What factors might be impacting how the person you interviewed answered the questions?</p>	
<p>Which answers from the interview are most likely to be reliable, and which ones have the highest potential for inaccuracies? Explain your reasoning.</p>	
<p>What contextual information should be noted about you, the researcher (i.e. your race, age, gender, familial and social background, etc.)? How might that influence how the interview was conducted or how you interpret the interview answers?</p>	

Step 4: Draw conclusions from the interview	
<p>What is one statement that can be made using the interview as evidence?</p>	
<p>What statements <u>cannot</u> be made using only this interview as evidence? <i>Think about the limitations of the interview data and comment about what would be an inappropriate claim to make based on the amount of evidence you have.</i></p>	
<p>What do you still not know, and where can you find that information?</p>	