

## Discussion Questions to Accompany, "Toward a Developmental Science of Politics"

Created by Dr. Rebecca S. Bigler (University of Texas at Austin) for [Monograph Matters](#), a companion resource to the *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* July 2019

These questions are designed to elicit students' collection, analysis, synthesis, and critical evaluation of information, as well as personal reflection, concerning the topics addressed in the monograph (rather than to assess knowledge of the content of the work). The discussion questions are organized by the monograph chapters; a set of 2 to 5 questions is provided for each chapter.

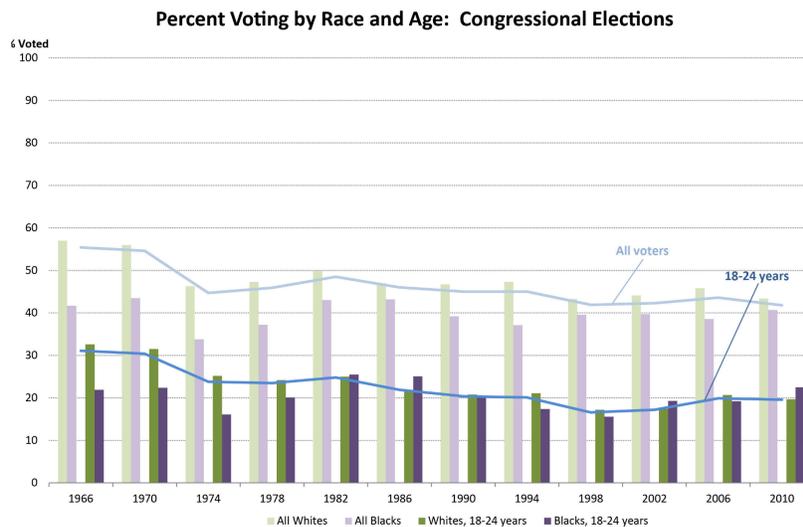
The full citation to the *Monograph* is the following:

Patterson, M. M., Bigler, R. S., Pahlke, E., Brown, C. S., Hayes, A. R., Ramirez, M. C., & Nelson, A. (2019). Toward a developmental science of politics. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 84(3). <https://doi.org/10.1111/mono.12410>

## Chapter I. Politics and Child Development

1. Should children be introduced to the topic of politics? Why or why not? At what age is it appropriate to introduce discussions of controversial political issues with children? Why? What are your earliest memories of political issues or debate? What do Patterson et al. argue about introducing children to politics and do you agree?

2. The graph below shows the low voting rate of young people (18- to 24-year-olds; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Youth\\_vote\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Youth_vote_in_the_United_States)). Why do young people vote at lower rates than older people? Is this pattern a problem? Why or why not?



3. Patterson et al. note that they are interested in social justice issues and report that they supported Clinton over Trump in the 2016 election. Do you think that their research is compromised by conflicts of interest? What types of conflicts of interest are there and does psychological science have a broad problem with conflicts of interest?

## Chapter II. Core Concerns, Past Approaches, and the Need for an Updated, Integrative Framework

1. Politics has not been a core concern of developmental psychologists (relative to topics such as family relationships, language, and aggression). Why do you think that this is true?

2. Lakoff describes two contrasting worldviews that underlie political ideology. How would individuals with these two worldviews view U.S. immigration policy? What kinds of immigration laws would individuals with these two worldviews seek to enact?

3. Why and how might civic engagement lead to political engagement? Are some types of civic engagement more (and less) likely to spur children's interest in politics?

### Chapter III. A Contemporary Theoretical Perspective on Political Development

1. Siblings who grew up in the same family (and thus same city, neighborhood, etc.) sometimes have political attitudes that are quite different from each other. How would (a) ecological, (b) constructivist, and (c) dynamic system theorists explain this fact?
2. Imagine that you are tasked with explaining the development of your own political views. Which factors most strongly affected your political development and are these factors consistent with the theoretical framework of (a) ecological, (b) constructivist, and (c) dynamic system theorists? How so?

### Chapter IV. Politics and Cultural Contexts

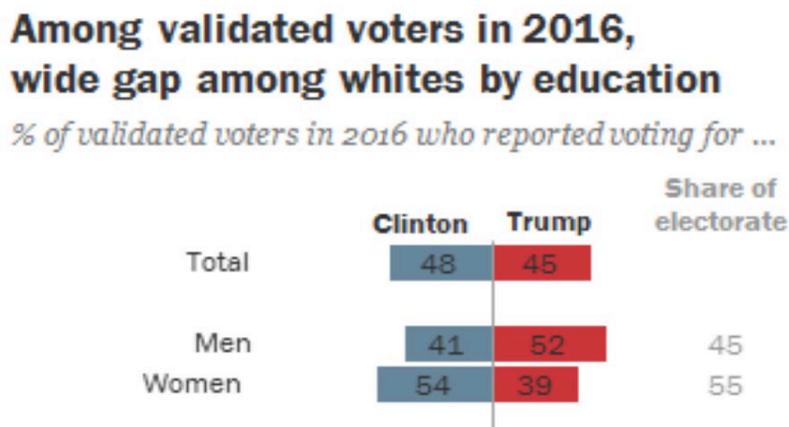
1. Overall, has social media improved or harmed political knowledge and discourse in the U.S.? What evidence supports your view?
2. Patterson et al. state that greater diversity of political ideology within children's communities (i.e., less political segregation within their towns, neighborhoods, or schools) might lead to increases in children's exposure to diverse political thought, *or* it might lead to decreases in children's exposure to diverse political thought. Which hypothesis do you think is correct and why?
3. Rural versus urban contexts appear to influence political attitudes and behavior. Patterson et al. speculate about why and how rural (vs. urban) contexts affect political development. Can you think of additional reasons that such contexts might be influential?
4. Is it important that social groups are represented in politics at the same rate at which they are represented in the population? For example, women are approximately 50% of the population in the U.S., so should they make up 50% of governing bodies (e.g., state legislatures, Congress, city councils)? Why or why not? If so, which groups deserve equal representation and how should it be achieved?
5. How well or poorly did the schools that you attended teach civics? What are some specific examples of instruction, programs, or settings that worked well or poorly to produce students who were knowledgeable and engaged in politics? Why did they work well or poorly?

## Chapter V. Politics and Family Contexts

1. Parents are thought to be a major influence on their children's thought. According to developmentalists, why and how might parents influence their children? Are your political attitudes the same as your parents' attitudes? Why or why not?
2. Do children ever cause changes to their parents' political attitudes? If so, why and how do you think this happens? Are children able to change their parents' views on some issues more readily than others?

## Chapter VI. Politics and the Child

1. According to the graph below (<https://www.people-press.org/2018/08/09/an-examination-of-the-2016-electorate-based-on-validated-voters/2-11-2/>), men and women voted differently in the 2016 presidential election. Why do you think that happened and what evidence is available to support your view?



2. Patterson et al. sought to include Latinx children from diverse backgrounds in their study. This video highlights why and how they did so: [https://youtu.be/1Tt-53Ta\\_FA](https://youtu.be/1Tt-53Ta_FA). Do you think that the inclusion of Latinx researchers and participants is important for every study in developmental science? Why or why not? Is the same true of individuals from other racial/ethnic backgrounds?
3. The criminal justice system has been the topic of much debate and political activism in the U.S. So, too, has the topic of gun violence in schools. Should schools in the U.S. routinely have police officers present? Would the presence of police in schools (a) make youth safer (or less safe) in schools? (b) promote positive (or negative) relationships between police and the communities they serve? If you were hiring police officers for a school setting, what qualities would you look for in applicants?

## Chapter VII. The 2016 U.S. Presidential Election: A Context for Hypothesis Testing

1. Patterson et al. claim that modern U.S. presidential elections are characterized by near-continuous media coverage, negative campaigning, and scandal. Do you think that these characteristics are inevitable? Should attempts be made to reduce any of these characteristics and, if so, how would you do so?
2. How often did you discuss your candidate preference in the 2016 election with others, and with whom did you most often have those conversations (e.g., close friends, relatives, work colleagues, teachers)? When you talked with someone about your candidate preference, why did you do so? Was the experience usually a positive or negative one?
3. Do you think that it is possible for teachers to introduce and facilitate discussions of political issues (abortion, gun control, climate change, immigration) in middle school, high school, and college classrooms in ways that are fair and unbiased? Should teachers ever be allowed to express their political opinions in school settings?

## Chapter VIII. Method

1. Patterson et al. used interviews to collect data on children's views of the 2016 election and gender/sex and politics. What do you think are the most serious limitations to their methodology? How else might researchers study children's political attitudes and behavior?
2. Some studies, like this one, are designed in response to specific events or conditions (e.g., political assassinations, natural disasters). What kinds of unique methodological obstacles might such studies encounter? How might interpretation of the results of such studies be different from other studies?
3. If you had been involved in designing this study, what two questions that were not asked by Patterson et al. would you most want to have included in the protocol? Why would these questions be interesting and important to include?

## Chapter IX. Results and Discussion

1. Of the quotations included in the tables, were any them especially surprising or especially moving to you? Why do you think that you had this reaction?
2. If you were asked to explain to a 5- or 6-year-old child why there has never been a female U.S. president, what would you say? Does your response fit into one (or more) of the categories that Patterson et al. used to code children's answers to that same question? Do you think that children are able to understand the reasons for the absence of female U.S. presidents in the same way as adults? Why or why not?
3. Overall, do you think that children were accurate in reporting on their parents' candidate preferences, interest in politics, and frequency of political communication? Why or why not?

## Chapter X. Highlights, Conclusions, and Future Directions

1. Patterson et al. recommend lowering the voting age in the U.S. to 16 years of age. Do you agree with the recommendation? What evidence do you have to support your opinion?
2. Patterson et al. recommend increasing efforts to teach children about historical and contemporary gender discrimination in politics. What do you think might be the risks (possible negative effects) and rewards (possible positive effects) of such efforts? How much of a problem do you think gender discrimination in U.S. politics is today (e.g., a minor or serious problem for female candidates for political office)?
3. As of 2019, the United States is the only country that has failed to ratify the United Nation's 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (<https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/frequently-asked-questions>). Why do you think that this is true and do you support or oppose ratification of the Convention?