The Socialization Effect of Education on Authoritarian-Libertarian Values

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Introduction

Education is one of the most important determinants of authoritarian–libertarian values, a cleavage today considered as one of the most distinctive dividing lines of modern electoral behavior (Ford and Jennings, 2020; Stubager 2008). There is a notable geographic and temporal consistency in the correlation between educational attainment and libertarian values, with more educated people expressing greater support for libertarian values versus authoritarian ones (Lipset, 1981; Marshall, 2016; Simon, 2022). The importance of education has become especially salient in recent decades as the authoritarian–libertarian dimension increasingly predicts voters' choices (Attewell, 2022; Norris, 2005; Stubager, 2008). As such, Gethin et al. (2022) demonstrate that a rise in the political importance of sociocultural issues explains the last decades' decline in class-based voting and increase in education-based voting (cf. Bornshier 2018; van der Waal, Achterberg, and Houtman 2007).

Why education matters for socio-cultural preferences remains, however, an open question. The literature is marked by conflicting findings about the extent to which the correlation between education and political values can be attributed to indirect factors such as self-selection into educational programs (Lancee and Sarrasin, 2015; Simon, 2022) and about the extent to which enrollment in education causally shapes libertarian attitudes (Cavaille and Marshall, 2019; Scott, 2022). In the case of a causal effect of education, the dominant theory of explanation for attitudinal change during an individual's educational trajectory revolves around universities and schools as arenas for socialization. Accordingly, group-based identities that include norms about socially accepted attitudes are formed during the time spent in higher education (Newcomb, 1943; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Stubager, 2008).[1] Although some evidence suggest that part of the 'education effect' may stem from cognitive development (Nie et al., 1996), the aim of this chapter is thereby to review the social foundations of the connection between education and authoritarian-libertarian values.

The chapter first outlines the most central concepts for the 'education divide', and thereafter discuss the different models of explanation for the education divide in authoritarian-libertarian attitudes. It concentrates specifically on political socialization and connects it with the notion of education as a socializing milieu. Subsequently, the chapter addresses the contextual conditions that may increase the intensity of political socialization in education. It further addresses the methodological difficulties in identifying the influence of attending education, before suggesting potential avenues for future research.

[1] In terms of voting behavior, education is an important determinant of support for anti-immigration parties as well as green parties, which both tend to mobilize primarily on the authoritarian-libertarian dimension (Abou-Chadi and Hix, 2021).

Authoritarian-libertarian values

Two overarching political divides drive electoral behaviors in advanced democracies. The economic dimension connects to the state-market dynamic, while the authoritarian-libertarian conflict line concerns 'cultural' issues such as multiculturalism and law and order (Bornschier et al., 2021). While the influence of education on economic issues is commonly theorized as being material in nature, social values from a socialization-based transmission are often suggested to link education with varying authoritarian-libertarian preferences (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Stubager, 2008).[2] This non-economic dimension is conceptualized by the preferred extent of social hierarchies and levels of conformity. Put simply, authoritarians would prefer a system with clear rankings among individuals while libertarians strive towards egalitarianism (Flanagan, 1987; Flanagan and Lee, 2003; Kitschelt, 1994; see also Stubager, 2008, p. 328 for similar insights). The second integral aspect concerns the acceptance of nonconformity, where libertarians tend to demonstrate a higher level of tolerance towards those who deviate from societal norms than their authoritarian counterparts (Stubager 2008). Leading scholars have in the last decade advanced a definition of the dimension, highlighting the notion of material interests and principles within it. For example, Bornschier et al. (2021) describe the dimension as universalistic-particularistic, where the socio-cultural dimension includes distributive preferences concerning the allocation of resources between different social groups.

Empirically, the field concerning the influence of education on the authoritarian-libertarian dimension may be perceived as flawed by divergent and changing conceptualizations of the measured attitudes. While some studies combine sociocultural and economic issues as a general measurement of liberal attitudes (Marshall, 2016; Simon, 2022; Surridge, 2016), others examine alternative parts of the 'non-economic' dimension, such as attitudes towards immigration, European integration, or authoritarianism (Apfeld et al., 2022; Kunst et al., 2020; Scott, 2022; Stubager, 2008). Although the different outcome variables complicate direct comparisons between studies, Stubager (2008) concludes that the manifestation of the authoritarian-libertarian dimension will vary contextually. The relevant aspects that tap into the dimension depend on the specific area and time period, which ought to motivate researchers to address issues relevant to the historical and socio-political environment.[3]

[2]Recent studies challenge the different ideas that are believed to link education with economic and non-economic issues (see, e.g., Mendelberg et al. 2017).

[3]As examples, Stubager (2008) notes that while religious and moral issues have historically been more significant aspects of the dimension in the US, more secular countries tend to focus their debates on immigration and issues linked to criminality and law.

Political socialization and education

Interactions with a variety of socializing agents shape political preferences (Niemi and Jennings, 1991; Simon, 2022). In the traditional perspective of political sociology, socialization involves the formation of collective identities with shared political interests, as individuals are born into different segments of society (Bartolini, 1990; Rokkan and Lipset, 1967; Zollinger, 2022). The recognition of education-based identities reinforces the concept of an 'education cleavage' in advanced democracies, underscoring the significance of political socialization on the basis of the social structure (Bornschier et al., 2021; Stubager, 2009). However, while integrating insights concerning the importance of context, the framework of 'socialization effects' in education tends to concentrate on the interpersonal transmittance of attitudes and psychological processes (e.g., Nickerson, 2008; Stubager, 2008; Surridge, 2016). This social-psychology definition highlights the psychological value of group affiliation and social identities (Westholm, 1999; Zollinger, 2022), and places greater emphasis on attitudinal change during an individual's life course.

Accordingly, the most common ideas of socialization of education groups concern the adherence to prevailing norms and ideological orientations which fosters an individual's political identity (Stubager, 2008; Stubager, 2009; Surridge, 2016). Given that experiences during the impressionable years are disproportionately important for fostering political orientations with durable effects across the life span (Inglehart, 2018; Sears, 1975), educational institutions are likely to be key socializing environments for an individual's value formation. Most individuals undergo their education within this formative age range, generally considered to extend to about the time a person turns 25 years old (Rekker et al., 2017).[4] However, since families undeniably play important roles in the transmission of values during this time period as well (Niemi and Jennings, 1991), separating the influence of the different socializing actors remains a challenge for socialization research (Muxel, 2022).

Does education cultivate liberal attitudes, and if so, why?

The field of 'education effects' centers on two main research questions: whether attitude-schange during the time spent in education, and what factors may explain such changes. A substantial body of research challenges the idea that attending university causally affects attitudes. Confounding variables like family background, genetics, and intelligence may increase the likelihood of pursuing specific educational trajectories, in both level and field, and cause specific attitudes (Campbell and Horowitz, 2016; Weinschenk et al., 2021). There is thus a debate regarding the extent to which participation in education changes attitudes in itself, as several factors are likely to influence the strength of the relationship. Indeed, recent

[4]However, the exact boundaries for this period remain under debate.

research does support the notion of a 'null effect' of the relationship between education and political preferences (e.g., Finseraas et al., 2018; Kunst et al., 2020; Lancee and Sarrasin, 2015; Simon,2022). Nonetheless, numerous studies with comparable empirical strategies identify a causal effect of attending university (e.g., Cavaille and Marshall, 2019; d'Hombres and Nunciata, 2016; Marshall, 2016; Mendelberg et al., 2017; Scott, 2022). Consequently, the second major question in the literature involves identifying the mechanisms that may alter individuals' political attitudes during their time in higher education.

The most supported explanation in the literature highlights universities as environments for socialization, even if attitudinal changes may also arise from increased psychological security (Jenssen and Engesbak, 1994; Weil, 1985), or a cognitive sophistication (Nie et al., 1996) resulting from the academic studies. The socialization mechanism suggests that education exposes individuals to new values and norms which they subsequently internalize (Dey, 1996; Mendelberg et al., 2017; van de Werfhorst and De Graaf, 2004). As previously noted, social influences and political discussion significantly impact political attitudes (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1991; however, cf. Farrar et al., 2009). If university attendance has a causal influence on political preferences, interpersonal socialization may thus play a role in this process (Strother et al., 2021). Stubager (2008, p. 344) expresses it as follows:

> The authoritarian-libertarian value differences existing between high and low education groups reflect deep-seated differences in socializing experiences of the members of the two groups rather than differences in labor market experiences and associated allocative outcomes.

Even though several leading scholars suggest processes of socialization as the main driver of the linkage between education and political attitudes (see e.g., Dey, 1996; Paterson, 2009; Scott, 2022; Stubager, 2008; Surridge, 2016), they vary in the weight they assign to formal and informal agents of socialization. It may be the professors (Apfeld et al., 2022; Gross and Fosse, 2012; Jenssen and Engesbak, 1994), or possibly the curriculum (Cantoni et al., 2017) that influence students to adopt more liberal views during their time in universities. These notions thereby align with the perception of universities 'indoctrinating' their students (Simon, 2022). Lindskog and Oskarson (2023) further observe cross-country and generational variations in the correlation between education and the authoritarian-libertarian dimension where a weaker effect of education on attitude formation can be seen among younger generations. Similarly, education appears to be more effective in mitigating anti-foreigner sentiment in older democracies than in newer ones, this is possibly due to a greater emphasis on democratic values and tolerance for minorities within these countries' educational programs (Thomsen and Olsen, 2017).

However, results from studies concentrating on individual-level change tend to yield inconclusive and often null results when investigating the attitudinal effect of faculty norms

(Mendelberg et al., 2017; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). A possible attitudinal effect thereby seems to derive from informal social norms. Leading scholars emphasize the importance of peers as the main socializing agents within the university milieu (Mendelberg et al., 2017; Sidanius et al., 2008; Stubager, 2008; Surridge, 2016). Students are believed to transmit norms on campuses about what is regarded as socially accepted political preferences, either through their close ties and direct interaction or through projections of peers' political orientations (Dey, 1996; Mendelberg et al., 2017). The salience of a political preference would make students converge towards that attitude (Newcomb, 1943). Accordingly, the various dominant norms could also contribute to explaining differences in attitudes depending on the field of education (Stubager, 2008; van de Werfhorst and De Graaf, 2004).[5]

While the socialization model assumes an absolute effect of education on attitude formation, there are further indications that the effect of education may be relative, taking the form of a positional advantage. Discussions about the relative impact of education have primarily centered on political participation (Nie et al., 1996), but there are studies connecting it to authoritarian-libertarian attitudes (Stubager, 2008) and attitudes toward immigrants (Borgonovi, 2012; Janmaat and Keating, 2019).[6] According to the 'relative education model', the effect of education operates through the social position an individual achieves through their education (see also Van Noord et al., 2019). Social status is a relational good, where the advancement of one person in the hierarchy leads to a status decline of another (Campbell, 2013). Hence, while the positional effect is based on an influence of education, it does not necessarily result in an overall change in a population's attitudes with increasing education levels on the aggregate (Persson, 2013). This characteristic distinguishes it from the model of education as an absolute effect, which would imply that as societies become more educated, they also become more tolerant and libertarian as a whole.

Empirical strategies to estimate the socializing effect of education

Methodological challenges complicate accurate assessments of both the causal effect of higher education on attitudes and the possible mechanisms driving it. The challenge of accounting for all potentially significant pre-adult traits, and measurement errors in the data collected through surveys (as noted by Simon, 2022, and Campbell and Horowitz, 2016), may inflate estimates of both the effect and its underlying mechanisms. To reduce the risks of intervening confounders, scholars have therefore, in recent years, leveraged multiple research designs to

[5]Several studies demonstrate that graduates in fields with content that encourages communicative skills tend to be moreliberal than graduates from more technical programs (Ma-Kellams et al., 2014; Paterson, 2009).

[6]As such, Nie et al. (1996) argue that the influence of education on attitudes (as opposed to participation) is channeled through cognitive developments and thereby should be unaffected by the relative positional value of education.

examine the 'higher education effect'.

Recent empirical studies tend to exploit panel data, within-sibling analyses, quasi-experimental designs, and instrumental variables to estimate the causal effect of attending education on attitude formation (Simon, 2022). While most studies report a causal effect of education on authoritarian-libertarian attitudes (e.g., Apfeld et al., 2022; Cavaille and Marshall, 2019; Nunziata and d'Hombres, 2016; Scott, 2022), others do not find support for such an estimation (Finseraas et al., 2018; Kunst et al., 2020; Simon, 2022). For instance, Cavaille and Marshall (2019) and d'Hombres and Nunziata (2016) study compulsory schooling reforms in Europe and estimate that one additional year of schooling alters attitudes in a liberal direction. However, Finseraas et al. (2018) criticize their findings since they cannot control for general cohort effects that could occur parallel to the countries' educational investments. Instead Finseraas et al. focus on Norway, where additional years in education were implemented in a staggered fashion over different regions and find that education does not affect political attitudes.

Other studies make use of panel data. Scott (2022), Paterson (2009), and Surridge (2016) study within-individual changes using longitudinal British data and report a change in attitudes following participation in higher education, in line with the results from Velásquez and Eger's (2022) study in Norway. In contrast, Lancee and Sarrasin (2015) could not observe a similar pattern in Switzerland. Another identification strategy concerns so-called 'sibling analyses', that is, comparisons between siblings from the same family, to avoid the influence of confounding background factors. These studies tend to find support for a weak effect of edu- cation on attitudes (Campbell and Horowitz, 2016; Sieben and de Graaf, 2004; Simon, 2022). However, previous research also presents attitudinal spillover effects between siblings, which may weaken the reliability of their findings (Eckstein et al., 2018). Interestingly, Scott (2022) and Simon (2022) arrive at conflicting findings when studying within-variation on students in Britain. While Scott (2022) finds support for a substantial causal effect of higher education attendance when focusing on students who graduated pre-2000, Simon (2022) focuses on students in more recent cohorts and reports a fundamentally weaker effect of higher education.[7]

Of all the possible mechanisms driving the education-attitudes linkage, where selection mechanisms undoubtedly represent a large share of the association, several studies point towards the influence of socialization-based transmission, particularly between peers (see e.g., Dey, 1996; Paterson, 2009, 2014; Scott, 2022; Stubager, 2008; Surridge, 2016). However, few studies test the underlying mechanism directly. Consequently, support for the socialization mechanism often relies on ruling out alternative explanations (Scott, 2022; Stubager, 2008;

[7]Besides the different findings from studies relying on similar research designs, the studies further tend to focus on different aspects of an individual's education. Some papers focus on education in high schools or earlier, while others focus on university education. (Marshall, 2019: Surridge, 2016).

Surridge, 2016) or on results derived from data collected several decades ago (Dey, 1996; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). A notable exception is the study by Mendelberg et al. (2017), which utilizes cohort data allowing for the examination of class norms. This study focuses on the peer group's economic views and consumption behavior, finding that affluence levels and majority attitudes in class can make individual attitudes more conservative (see also Newcomb, 1943; Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). The education effect is thus not always liberalizing, which provides further support for the notion that socialization processes are contingent on the period and location studied.

The transmission mechanism is thought to occur mainly through political discussions (Shehata and Amnå, 2019), and studies have examined the influence of specific class features, such as how free students are in expressing their political views (e.g., Torney-purta, 2002). Paradoxically, Nickerson (2008) offers one of the most comprehensive studies on peer socialization and identifies no change in attitudes when students were randomly paired with roommates who frequently discussed politics. In contrast, Strother et al. (2021) emphasize the influence of close relationships on attitude formation, observing that students assigned to live together become more politically similar over the course of their studies, even if they did not find support for a general causal effect of higher education on attitudinal change. The authors thereby conclude that interactions outside of classrooms are likely to be more formative for individuals' political identities. The influence of close relationships on the formation of political attitudes thus remains a complex and nuanced subject, with studies offering conflicting insights.

Conclusion: Education and value formation

Social scientists have long been occupied with the connection between higher education and authoritarian-libertarian values. In recent decades, the topic has extended its relevance from scholarly circles to public debate as well (Simon, 2022). While politicians sometimes assert that a college education fostersan individual's political views, the findings from this chapter conclude that there is a lack of data to convincingly substantiate such claims. Instead, recent studies have estimated the causal impact of higher education on authoritarian-libertarian attitudes to be either nonexistent or weak. Analyzing the underlying mechanisms of such an effect may thereby appear arbitrary and imply that we need to revise the idea of political socialization processes in higher education. However, even if there indeed is no profound general effect of studying at higher education levels, socialization effects may be at play within the university milieu but foster political attitudes solely under certain conditions and for certain groups of students. As the studies by Mendelberg et al. (2017) and Strother et al. (2021) demonstrate, students are sometimes impacted by each other and change their attitudes in the direction of their reference person or group. Potentially, such underlying

differences between time periods and regions could explain the divergent findings in the field. In addition, students with low political efficacy may avoid political discussions and thereby be less impacted by the majority attitude (Vedel and Thompson, 2017). Questions consequently remain in the field as to how socialization in education operates and who is likely to incorporate the prevailing norms.

Beyond the influence of selection effects, several processes occur simultaneously when individuals enter universities: they both develop skillsand become socially embedded in a new environment. Future studies therefore need to concentrate on improving the identification strategies for separating the different mechanisms to move the field forward. It is further unclear under which conditions socialization in education may intensify. It is not unlikely that the effect of socialization is stronger in specific school class compositions, educational systems, or political climates. Political socialization in education might be stronger in a politically polarized context (Boxell et al., 2022), than in contexts where political discussions are less heated and frequent. To distinguish between the attitudinal effects of the educational content and the influence of interpersonal relationships, one promising approach could be to identify sudden shifts in the educational format, such as transitions from in-person to online learning. Another useful approach might involve comparing individuals who travel to school with those who reside on campus. Both methods provide opportunities to explore exogenous variations in inter-group socialization among students without necessarily affecting the content of their education.

Another promising avenue for future research is to shift focus from the socio-psychological mechanisms at play within universities to the evolving role of education in knowledge-based societies, connecting to the political sociology concept that involves the socialization of an 'education cleavage'. Although education today plays a central role in determining an individual's life chances, it offers poorer rewards and more constrained opportunities for upward social mobility than in previous decades (Ansell and Gingrich, 2017). Consequently, the material interests of educational groups may vary over time and across regions, which raises questions as to how the different matches between education and labor market position impact group belongings and status hierarchies. By examining these questions, it might further enable the introduction of qualitative work into the field. In addition, there is evidence that education may be more formative for students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Lindgren et al., 2019; however, see Mendelberg et al., 2021). With a decreasing proportion of students having low-educated parents because of the last decade's educational expansion, this would accordingly imply that the formative effect of education is slowly diminishing with generational replacement (cf. Lindskog and Oskarson, 2023). Hence, while the relationship between higher education and value formation remains a complex and multifaceted issue, this chapter underscores the need for more nuanced approaches that go beyond simply

attributing political values to educational experiences or examining the general attitudinal effects of studying one additional year.

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