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DEBATE/DEBATE: A LOOK AT ADOLESCENCE FROM THREE PERSPECTIVES/UNA MIRADA HACIA LA ADOLESCENCIA DESDE TRES PERSPECTIVAS

Editorial: Adolescence, Political Socialisation and Early Citizenship

Editorial: Adolescencia, socialización política y ciudadanía temprana

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ABSTRACT

This editorial introduces the two articles that form the discussion section. It approaches political socialisation in adolescence from a sociological perspective, reviewing the significance of citizenship through past research alongside recent studies published in social sciences journals indexed in SCOPUS and Web of Science between 2021 and 2026. The findings point to both change and continuity. The family remains central to political socialisation, alongside the school, the peer group and digital environments. While the family continues to be the primary site for the transmission of values and civic customs, the peer group and the school reinforce civic learning, and social media offers unprecedented opportunities for political engagement – though with significant inequalities of access. Adolescence is understood here as a stage of active rather than passive agency in the formation of citizenship, in which participation is conceived broadly and multidimensionally, and socialisation processes interact with emotions, identity and social structures to shape differentiated political trajectories and pathways towards democratic participation.

KEYWORDS: political socialisation; adolescence; early citizenship; youth participation; socialisation agents.

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RESUMEN

El presente editorial tiene como objetivo presentar los dos artículos que forman el debate. Para ello aborda la socialización política en la adolescencia desde una perspectiva sociológica. Se revisa la importancia de la ciudadanía en las sociedades democráticas mediante investigaciones clásicas. Además, se seleccionan investigaciones recientes publicadas en ciencias sociales en SCOPUS y Web of Science (2021-2026). Los resultados muestran cambios y permanencia. La familia sigue teniendo importancia en la socialización política junto con la escuela, el grupo de iguales y los entornos digitales. Aunque la familia sigue siendo central en la transmisión de valores y hábitos de participación, los pares y la escuela refuerzan aprendizajes cívicos, mientras que las redes digitales ofrecen oportunidades inéditas de compromiso político, aunque con desigualdades de acceso. Se subraya la adolescencia como etapa de agencia activa, no pasiva, en la construcción de la ciudadanía, donde la participación se entiende de manera amplia y multidimensional, y donde los procesos de socialización interactúan con emociones, identidad y estructuras sociales, configurando trayectorias políticas diferenciadas y potenciales caminos hacia la participación democrática.

PALABRAS CLAVE: socialización política; adolescencia; ciudadanía temprana; participación juvenil; agentes de socialización.

1. Introduction

This editorial contextualises the debate on political socialisation in adolescence from a sociological perspective and presents the articles that comprise this section. Against simplifying, homogenising or stigmatising accounts of adolescence, the articles gathered here draw on data and evidence to illuminate the diversity of experiences, attitudes and political orientations among young people, offering a scientifically grounded, empirically based analysis of particular relevance to contemporary political life and citizenship. The editorial reviews both earlier research and the results of searches in the Web of Science (WoS) and SCOPUS social sciences databases for the period 2021–2026, addressing the importance of adolescent political participation and the changes undergone by socialisation agents.

Following the editorial, the first article, 'Spanish Adolescence: A Political and Emotional Characterisation', offers a detailed examination of adolescents' opinions, attitudes and concerns, drawing on microdata from the Spanish Institute of Youth's (INJUVE) 2023 Youth Survey. The analysis maps adolescents in Spain ideologically, charts their emotional and affective situation, and identifies their main social concerns and civic affinities.

Far from presenting young people as a homogeneous collective – and challenging narratives that characterise them as apathetic or disengaged from politics – the results reveal a remarkable complexity and plurality of positions which enrich public and academic debate. The data depict a generation that is critical of institutional politics, raising important questions about the possibilities and forms of political re-enchantment at this stage of the life cycle, while also attending to their emotional situation, a dimension of growing interest in research.

The second article, 'Arguments and Evidence in the Debate on Lowering the Voting Age to 16,' addresses a timely question in the field of democratic citizenship: the possible reduction of the minimum voting age to 16. Through a rigorous review of the international literature, drawing primarily on research conducted across various European countries, the article systematically sets out the arguments for and against this measure and evaluates them in the light of available empirical evidence. It also incorporates findings from the INJUVE and the May 2025 barometer of the Centre for Sociological Research (CIS, survey 3510), which shed light on the views of Spanish citizens on the issue. Together, these results move the debate beyond normative or intuitive positions and connect it directly to the processes of political socialisation that precede coming of age.

Taken as a whole, the contributions in this Discussion section situate the analysis of political attitudes in adolescence and voting at 16 within a broader framework of reflection on political socialisation and the construction of citizenship. In doing so, they advance a more complex, nuanced and empirically grounded understanding of youth political participation and of the challenges posed by the expansion of democratic rights in contemporary societies.

2. The importance of participation in democratic societies

The word 'participation' derives from the Latin *participare* and carries the sense of intervening, engaging, collaborating, contributing and helping. It concerns, on the one hand, the democratic representation of power and, on the other, the democratic accountability of those entrusted with authority – the two legs, as Murillo (1963) put it, on which the democratic body walks. Citizens are called upon to participate and to commit themselves across domains as varied as consumption, food, agriculture, health and education. This requires that they are aware of their rights and obligations and that they engage in different settings. One example is the call to conscious consumption: knowing one's rights, how to lodge complaints or demonstrate for causes in which one acts as a consumer, activist or citizen (Novo and Lozano-Cabedo, 2021).

Political sociology has long engaged with these questions. More than twenty years ago, Benedicto and Morán (2002) argued for the need for an active citizenship in which young people could become engaged and involved in participatory contexts, their presence constituting a fundamental experience in forming a competent citizenship conscious of its obligations. Fostering social practices in the construction of civic identities also entails creating the spaces in which those practices can take place; today, the digital space has emerged as one such site for encounter and debate.

Participation, moreover, cannot be reduced to voting and organisations. An expanded and diversified understanding of the channels and forms through which citizenship can be exercised is needed (Parés, 2014). According to Alarcón (2022), public debate on youth participation consistently overlooks the multiple ways in which new generations engage politically. Drawing on the European Social Survey (2018), Sobczyk *et al.* (2022) identify the activities that attract the highest proportions of young people, which include signing petitions, sharing or posting political content online, and boycotting or avoiding certain products. Rather than treating these as evidence of apathy or disaffection, research today focuses on understanding the meanings young people themselves attach to these actions and on recognising the role these forms play in youth activism (Aarab *et al.*, 2025).

In the educational sphere, two participation-related issues stand out. The first is the involvement and engagement of families in schools. Families are essential agents of both individual and collective participation; in this regard, Joyce Epstein was a pioneer, from her doctoral thesis (1974, unpublished) onwards, in studying the family–education relationship and proposing six types of family involvement (Epstein, 1992) – work she continues today through the development of research-based programmes for family and community engagement. In Spain, Jordi Garreta has pursued a similar line of inquiry (Garreta, 2008), with particular attention to diversity and intercultural mediation in schools.

The second concerns the role of the educational system and the family as agents of primary socialisation, transmitting values and norms through the curriculum. Discussing, forming opinions, taking on leadership roles and participating in the community can all be learned in the classroom. Thirty years after the publication of Apple and Beane's *Democratic Schools* (1995), their argument remains pertinent to the debate presented here. The authors lamented that, for many, democracy was an adult prerogative; against this, they insisted that education in a democracy was obliged to empower young people to become active participants in the *public sphere*, while also working through the tensions and contradictions this involves.

3. The role of agents in political socialisation in adolescence

3.1. The family

The family has long been regarded as the primary agent of socialisation in general and of political socialisation in particular (Jaime-Castillo, 2000; 2010). Two contemporary issues raise questions about the declining importance of the family in this process. The first is that during adolescence the peer group moves to the fore: in the search for autonomy and independence, conflict within the family is a common feature of this stage. The second is the significant role that relationship, information and communication technologies (RICTs) now play in adolescent socialisation, generating considerable tension in family life (Sanmartín *et al.*, 2025).

Research indexed in SCOPUS for the period 2021–2026 suggests that, despite these pressures, the family remains an important agent in political socialisation. Beyond parents, siblings also contribute (Kudrnáč *et al.*, 2026), as does the extended family – grandparents, aunts and uncles in particular (García-Espín, 2025; Tamariz *et al.*, 2026). The family is key to institutional trust: it transmits not only ideology or partisan identification but affective orientations towards the political system (Elsayed, 2024). Voting intention is likewise shaped by both family and school, though the school complements rather than replaces the family (Wiseman, 2025).

Kestilä-Kekkonen *et al.* (2025) offer a robust response to this question drawing on Finnish adolescent panel data. Their study, tellingly titled *Family Beats School?*, concludes that family background and parental voting habits outweigh the effect of educational track on voting intention. Even within a strong education system such as Finland's, the political *habitus* cultivated at home – the understanding of voting as a civic duty – proves the most resilient predictor.

This transmission is not, however, a process of ideological cloning. Weiss (2023) examines the complexity of left–right ideological transmission, showing that it is strongly mediated by gender and parenting styles: mothers and fathers influence daughters and sons differently, and parenting style – authoritarian versus democratic – acts as a moderator, with a family environment open to debate facilitating more effective value transmission than dogmatic imposition (Adorno *et al.*, 1950; Baumrind, 1966). Ideology, then, is not inherited as a genetic trait but negotiated through the dynamics of power and affection within the home.

A further finding relevant to family socialisation concerns its early onset. Family socialisation begins well before adolescence. Carballo-Losada *et al.* (2025) offer a revealing perspective by studying children aged 5 to 8, demonstrating that children's concern for global issues such as climate change depends directly

on parental perception and communication. If parents do not verbalise the importance of an issue or act as models of ecological concern, children are unlikely to integrate it into their own hierarchy of concerns, regardless of environmental education at school. This underscores the family's role as a kind of 'gatekeeper' that decides which problems in the world deserve attention.

Finally, the family can also be a source of disaffection. Jungkunz and Weiss (2024) explore the link between negative relational experiences and populism, finding that adolescents who experience conflictual or rejection-based relationships with parents, teachers or peers are more likely to develop populist attitudes. Relational discomfort and a lack of recognition in the immediate environment translate into generalised distrust of authority figures and institutions. Youth populism, in this reading, may be rooted in microsocial relational dysfunction as much as in macrostructural conditions.

3.2. The school

Research on socialisation within the education system highlights the influence of subject choice on political orientations: studying arts and humanities or business and economics each leaves a distinct imprint on voting behaviour (Martin *et al.*, 2025). Popular culture, too, educates and politicises. Sun (2023), through an analysis of international youth literature, shows that cultural products are powerful transmitters of ideology: youth literature constructs imaginaries of justice, rebellion, authority and historical memory, and the narratives young people encounter at this stage become cognitive frameworks through which they interpret contemporary political reality.

Classroom debate has been shown to promote gender equality in political participation, given that girls tend to participate less in this sphere (García-Albacete and Hoskins, 2025), and activities such as simulated voting experiences in secondary schools increase political interest (Jung and Lee, 2025; Sun and Janmaat, 2025). Discussions with peer groups and adults predict subsequent political motivation.

The school is also the site where cultural identities are negotiated. Kubi *et al.* (2022) show that 'school ethnic-racial socialisation' is decisive: the implicit and explicit messages schools convey – through a Eurocentric curriculum or differential disciplinary treatment – shape critical awareness among young people. When the school fails to validate students' identities, it can paradoxically foster resistance activism; the democratic ideal, however, requires that the school be a space for empowerment rather than merely one of defensive conflict.

3.3. The peer group

During adolescence, young people orient themselves increasingly towards their peers. Classical sociology tended to view the peer group as a potentially 'deviant' agent capable of undermining civic values; recent research, however, complicates this picture.

Karkdijk *et al.* (2025) introduce the concept of 'congruence' in civic attitudes. Examining the similarity of values among adolescents and their mothers, fathers and friends, they find a high degree of homophily: young people tend to associate with peers who share the core values of their families. In many cases, then, the peer group functions as a social echo chamber that reinforces and consolidates primary socialisation rather than challenging it. Rather than the image of a rebellious adolescent breaking with everything learned at home, the data reveal continuity: friendships are formed with those who resemble the family in terms of institutional trust and civic values, creating consensus bubbles that can limit exposure to divergent perspectives.

3.4. Digital socialisation

On social media, adolescents tend to recognise the importance of politics while simultaneously distancing themselves from political debate, associating it with conflict and the fear of judgement and exclusion. Social media subtly shapes their opinions through entertainment and contributes to normalising polarised narratives (Paz-Rebollo *et al.*, 2026). As for the influence of online messages, the research shows that adolescents are no more susceptible than adults: in both cases, what proves most persuasive is not the number of likes a message receives but whether it is endorsed by a party one already identifies with (Arceneaux *et al.*, 2025).

In the era of the algorithm, Maurissen and Claes (2023), drawing on comparative data from 21 countries, confirm that the digital environment offers unprecedented opportunities for political engagement – but caution against *techno-optimism*. One reason for this is that access to these forms of participation remains unevenly distributed: second-order digital divides in skills and usage replicate offline socioeconomic inequalities. Not all young people use the internet for political activism; for many, it remains primarily a space for entertainment, a dynamic that widens rather than closes the civic divide.

3.5. Other factors influencing socialisation

It is also important to consider socialisation in the most extreme contexts. Bähr and Taylor (2023) propose a 'Developmental Peacebuilding Model', based on research in areas of armed conflict, challenging the dominant narrative of young people as either traumatised victims or violent perpetrators. Their findings show that, even in conditions of violence, young people can develop meaningful agency as

peacebuilders: through community engagement and the cultivation of empathy for the 'other' group, they are capable of breaking intergenerational cycles of violence. This is a powerful testament to resilience and to democratic socialisation even when institutions have failed.

4. Conclusion

Recent literature on political socialisation in adolescence has moved away from classical vertical and unidirectional models towards approaches that conceive of it as a dynamic, multidimensional and bidirectional process. The family remains a central agent, though its influence depends on relational context, political communication and adolescent interest. The school contributes not only through the curriculum but above all through a participatory and deliberative climate. Peers and associations reinforce forms of lateral socialisation tied to early participatory practices. Media and digital networks shape political knowledge, attitudes and participation in ways whose effects are ambivalent and context-dependent. Research consistently highlights adolescents as active agents in their own socialisation and underlines the importance of structural context, inequalities and social diversity in shaping differentiated political trajectories. Contemporary debate, in short, understands political socialisation at this stage of life as contextual, interactive and non-deterministic – not as the passive transmission of values.

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