

Parental Influences on the Political Behavior of College Students

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After establishing data through a semester's worth of question construction, discussing sampling techniques, and finally reaching out for the voice of young people's public opinion on political engagement, the results have been accumulated and prepared for respective research papers. In my specific research paper, the issue I am focusing on is the impact of parental influence upon young people. I am interested to find out how this parental influence varies; based primarily on whether or not the respondent is enrolled full-time in a four year college. For my paper I propose the suggestion that those currently enrolled full-time at a university are less likely to follow the voting trends of their parents than their un-enrolled counterparts. In order to examine this issue, I will be analyzing an array of questions on the survey pertaining to an individual's political engagement and orientation, as well as that of their parents; and the aspects of the political relationship that respondents and their parents reveal collectively

In writing this research paper, I feel that the central question that my analysis revolves around is measuring the degree of effect that one's parents have over the particular polled individual. I believe that finding an answer to this question is important for a number of reasons, including both present and future matters. Due to the fact that this question spans multiple generations, the compiled information and subsequent results could very possibly unearth previously unseen trends. If this survey could uncover tendencies between young people and their parents, especially in relation to the political and social sphere, it would undoubtedly be useful as a tool to gain valuable information. Learning the amount of influence that today's youth draw from their parents pays

immediate dividends in aiding the estimation of voting patterns, as well as hold information on how to market to this generation, maximize their effect and even provide insight into possible shifts in the future.

One of the basic concepts that initially got me interested in researching such a topic is the fact that change is constant. Along with this, especially in the political and social realms of our lives, the change that occurs from generation to generation is increasingly liberal. There are everyday normalities for individuals in the 18 to 24 year-old age group that their parents would find to be excessively radical and daring. Looking into the lives of these parents, whose viewpoint has now swayed to the conservative end, their preferences were viewed as liberal and even extreme to the generations that preceded them. Commonly accepted, as stated by Russell Middleton and Snell Putney in *Student Rebellion Against Parental Political Beliefs*, is “the rebellion is overwhelmingly to the left rather than to the right of their parents...If they do rebel from their parents, they are more likely to rebel away from conventionality than toward it” (Middleton and Putney, 377). From the social issues of what clothes to wear and music to follow, to the political realm where both a woman or a black man are now in their first major opportunity for our nation’s presidency, the movement of young people’s minds towards new ideas and liberal-thinking are at the heart of this research. Coupling this with the rising awareness at the vast potential of young people’s ability to impact the voting process has given this analysis added incentive to try and reveal possible voting trends. As seen in the film *18in08*, “In 2008, over 29 million people between the age of 18 and 24 will be eligible to vote...how many will?” (Burnstein, “18 in '08”). It is one of many ideas trying to motivate the same voting group that we researched in our survey, a

documentary with the mission statement aimed at stimulating the political involvement of 18 to 24 year-olds and inviting them to vote and effect elections with their preferences and ideas. Having the historical pattern of constant political movement towards liberal ideas is the beginning; making strides to uncover which particular groups of young people are either persuaded or unaffected by their parent's generation's political influence is not only the natural next step, it is an incredibly powerful tool to use towards voting and political anticipation.

For my research paper, I believe that those currently enrolled full-time in a four year college or university will be influenced far less than non-enrolled respondents by their parent's social and political views. These relationships will differ due to the differences between those at a four year college, who are receiving a constant and strong alternate outlet of information from the school, their professors and their peers; and those who are not currently attending a full-time university, and are thus not receiving the alternate influence in either quantity not quality. Another difference directly related to whether or not one attends school full-time would be the amount of time that is spent interacting with one's parents; as those at school won't be seeing their parents as much as an individual of the same age who isn't enrolled and is more than likely to still be living in the same residence as their parents. In this hypothesis, the main analysis that the survey is trying to uncover is how often the respondent's disagree with their parents. Acquiring this information along with knowledge about the individual, such as one's potential enrollment in particular, will create a relationship that can be compared using the collected data. This political disagreement being the overall goal of our research, it can be termed as the dependent variable, which as explained by Peter Nardi in *Doing*

Survey Research, is “the outcome we are seeking to understand...we hypothesize that its variability in our sample *depends on* particular explanations or causes” (Nardi, 44).

Moving into Nardi’s statement, the explanations that create a varying amount of disagreement with one’s parents will be the factor of whether or not a respondent is attending a full-time four year college or university. Further specifying the type of hypothesis that I am utilizing in my analysis of the research, I have predicted that there is a clear relationship between the two variables that have been identified. Also included, and requiring questions within the research, are independent variables which signify an individual’s likelihood to vote in 2008, as well as their relationships with their parents politically; through the frequency of political discussions and disagreements or their parent’s perceived interest in politics. However, instead of leaving the exact relationship unstated, my hypothesis moves forward in expecting that those who attend a full-time school will carry less political influence from their parents than their non-enrolled counterparts. Known as a negative, or inverse, hypothesis, “it goes in the opposite or inverse direction: As one variable increases across the sample of people in the study, the other variable decreases” (Nardi, 47). Unlike a hypothesis with an unstated opinion on the relationship, a two-directional hypothesis which is left open, my proposition has a definite answer, either being right or wrong.

In order to discover the variables required to test and prove the hypothesis, particular questions needed to be placed on the survey to create the data. The question utilized to address the core of my hypothesis stated:

- How often do you disagree with one or both of your parents when it comes to politics or social issues?
 - Frequently
 - Occasionally
 - Seldom
 - Never
 - I don’t talk to them about politics or social issues

Reflecting the central focus of my research, this question determined the dependent variable of the hypothesis, gathering the stable information needed in order to test the premise on varying quantities of parental influence in the political sphere.

Another question used very early in the survey, serving multiple purposes, inquired on the respondent's educational status:

- Are you currently enrolled full-time in a four year college or university?
-Yes -No

For the purpose of the questionnaire itself, this particular question was used to split the polled population into two even groups of 500 individuals between the ages of 18 and 24. Much in the same way for my research, this question has served as the primary independent variable in dividing the answers on parental political influence along this line. In my hypothesis, attempting to prove that those attending a four year university full-time will gather less influence from their parents than respondents that are not currently enrolled, this question provides a foundation to analyze my dependent variable on. However, there are also other important variables to consider, all taking the forms of questions that can affect the desired outcome of the hypothesis. Each of the four following questions is able to tap into the underlying concept of the hypothesis through their relation to either the polled individual or one's parent's mentality towards politics, providing elaborate insight through their supporting evidence:

- About how often do you discuss political or social issues with one or both of your parents or guardians?
-Never -Very rarely -A few times a month -A few times a week
-Once a day -Don't know
- Level of interest in politics and public affairs: (Asked about both parents)
-Very interested -Somewhat interested -Not very interested
-Not sure, don't know
- We understand that plenty of young people are not registered to vote, but we are wondering if you are you currently registered to vote?
-Yes -No -I don't know

- How likely is it that you will vote in the general election for president next year?
 - Definitely will vote
 - Probably will vote
 - 50-50 chance of voting
 - Probably will not vote
 - Definitely will not vote
 - Don't know, not sure

Along with the possibility of disagreement among parents and their children, there is also the frequency with which these conversations occur, along with the parent's interest in politics and the respondent's activity in political procedures. These questions are all important to the answers that this research paper will later uncover, through their ability to either endorse or diverge from the primary analysis.

Upon establishing a hypothesis and the subsequent questions required to gain the analysis, putting the entire survey into action was next in achieving the desired sample. For this particular survey, in which all research was directed towards the political and social thought process of young people, the population was made up through the creation of a target sample. In order to achieve an unbiased subsample of respondents, it was decided that the results of exactly 1,000 individuals needed to be recorded, 500 full-time four year college students and the other 500 not currently enrolled, and all of the aforementioned respondents being between the age of 18 and 24 years old. In order to require this subsample, 1,629 individuals needed to be polled. Emphasizing that these 1,629 samples needed to be taken in order to find the 1,000 respondents shows the importance of drawing a random sample, as stated in *Doing Survey Research* "that the larger the random sample size, the more likely it is to capture the diversity that exists in the population" (Nardi, 147). Once these 1,629 samples had been taken, in order to create a true random sample; the characteristics of the responses needed to be filtered through to stratify 500 enrolled and non-enrolled full-time college students that were also within the age of 18-24 years old at the same time. As described by the Palo-Alto based

YouGovPolimetrix company, “there were two groups of respondents for your study. 993 respondents were invited directly to your study from a set of active panelists...the remaining 636 interviews were conducted with screenouts from other studies that were fielded at the same time” (Polimetrix). With the population and subsamples determined, the survey was taken through an internet-based survey, an increasingly popular type of polling due to its efficiency of distribution through a highly-used network. Through the internet, we were able to gather a response rate of 31.2% from 993 respondents invited directly and a 66.7% rate from the 636 respondents redirected to our survey from other studies. The greatest advantages to internet surveys are the fact that they instantly retain the data they’ve collected and also remove any possibility of human error in the data-collection process. Internet survey’s increasing popularity has come at the cost of other forms however, as phone and face-to-face interviews are now being used less and less due to their respective shortcomings; easy disconnection if a respondent doesn’t feel obliged to answer and the personal characteristics of the interviewer affecting a potential individual’s responses. However, the internet also comes with its own disadvantages in surveying, most notably in the varying opportunity to access the internet. Separate social classes have differing access to the internet, based on their ability to afford it, and this can become a serious issue for a surveyor looking for a wide-based population.

Upon receiving the data acquired through the surveying process, statistical results could be concluded primarily through cross-tabulation analysis. Also known as contingency tables, cross-tabulations are useful in visually analyzing the variables of a hypothesis. Explained by Nardi, “they illustrate the number and percentage of occurrences in the sample of each value of one variable simultaneously with each value

of the other variable” (Nardi, 154). With the categories I am looking to compare adding combining to add up to 100% and provide truthful and unbiased sample representations of today’s young people, these cross-tabulations are used as convincing evidence to support claims made in the hypothesis. For my hypothesis in particular, the cross-tabulation of whether or not one is a full-time college student with the frequency that the individual disagrees politically with their parents is the central piece of data to my premise:

disagreepar Frequency - political disagree with parents * wsb216 Full-time college Crosstabulation

			wsb216 Full-time college		Total
			1 Yes	2 No	
disagreepar Frequency - political disagree with parents	0 I don't talk to them about politics or social issues	Count % within wsb216 Full-time college	27 5.4%	69 13.8%	96 9.6%
	1 Never	Count % within wsb216 Full-time college	25 5.0%	49 9.8%	74 7.4%
	2 Seldom	Count % within wsb216 Full-time college	117 23.4%	133 26.6%	250 25.0%
	3 Occasionally	Count % within wsb216 Full-time college	244 48.8%	187 37.4%	431 43.1%
	4 Frequently	Count % within wsb216 Full-time college	87 17.4%	62 12.4%	149 14.9%
Total	Count % within wsb216 Full-time college	500 100.0%	500 100.0%	1000 100.0%	

As seen above, there are corresponding percentages to the hypothesis, showing that full-time college students disagree more frequently with their parents than those not enrolled full-time at a four year school. While we see higher numbers of non-enrolled youths that either never (4.8% higher) or seldom (3.2% higher) disagree with their parents, we get larger disparities once we move into the categories where the number of disagreements increase. To go along with a larger amount of college students conflicting with their parents frequently (5% higher than respondents not enrolled full time,

disagreements that occur occasionally creates the largest difference between the two groups of young people. 11.4% more collegiate youths disagree with their parents in this group, combining to create a 16.4% increase in those currently in a four year school who disagree with their parents on political topics more than rarely, well above the possible margin of error at 4-5%. Further examining this relationship between enrollment and the frequency of political arguments with one's parents, 67.2% of those going to school full-time disagreed with their parents on political topics either occasionally or frequently, as opposed to the 49.8% of those who did so and were not enrolled in a four year college. In fact a slim majority of non-enrolled respondents, being 50.2% and overlooking the margin for error, rarely or didn't disagree with their parents over political and social issues or didn't talk about the aforementioned topics.

Presenting tables with supporting evidence for this established premise included other independent variables which were cross-tabulated based on the chosen questions that I had prefaced earlier. In refuting the opposition that suggests that since college students aren't in direct contact with their parents as often, it may point towards misleading information; the survey presented data proving just the opposite. In two cross-tabulations based on the respondents status of enrollment intersected with the political interest of both parents, we drew interesting results. In both cross-tabulations over 60% of youths enrolled full-time stated that both their parents were either somewhat interested or very interested in politics, 74.8% for the first parent and 63.7% for the second; while the political interest of non-enrolled individuals' parents struggled to maintain the majority, gathering 60.2% for the first parent and 51.9% for the second in the same categories. Showing an average difference clearly in favor of college-attending

youths, the fact that their parents showed more interest in politics was provided its own back-up through the cross-tabulation of frequency to engage with one's parents politically or socially;

discussp1 Frequency - discuss issues with parents * wsb216 Full-time college Crosstabulation

			wsb216 Full-time college		Total
			1 Yes	2 No	
discussp1 Frequency - discuss issues with parents	1 Never	Count	25	60	85
		% within wsb216 Full-time college	5.0%	12.2%	8.6%
	2 Very rarely	Count	127	120	247
		% within wsb216 Full-time college	25.6%	24.4%	25.0%
	3 A few times a month	Count	148	136	284
		% within wsb216 Full-time college	29.8%	27.6%	28.7%
4 A few times a week	Count	137	89	226	
	% within wsb216 Full-time college	27.6%	18.1%	22.9%	
5 Once a day	Count	47	50	97	
	% within wsb216 Full-time college	9.5%	10.2%	9.8%	
6 Don't know	Count	12	37	49	
	% within wsb216 Full-time college	2.4%	7.5%	5.0%	
Total	Count	496	492	988	
	% within wsb216 Full-time college	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

While this information certainly refutes the claim that full-time college students disagree more often with their parents political due to a lack of communication, it appears to even suggest the opposite. One point brought out by the statistics is that full-time college students clearly discuss the issues with their parents more, as all categories that include a more-than weekly occurrence favor full-time students. Combining the percentages of discussing 'a few times a week' and 'once a day' 37.1% of enrolled students fall under these categories, almost 10% higher than their counterparts in the un-enrolled category (28.3%). On top of this, over 12.2% of respondents not currently at college full-time never discuss political issues with their parents, the 3rd highest percentage of the 6 categories, begging the question as to if they are just more likely to

adapt the politics of their parents, without needing to discuss particular political issues or without receiving a strong alternative message from a university setting.

A final pattern that was found in the data corresponds to the questions of youth's political activity and its implications for the amount of disagreement one has with their parents over political issues. As seen in the following two cross-tabulations, this piece of evidence is particularly important because it provokes drastic results in the mentalities of respondents which diverge from the conformity of one's parents:

vote2008 Likelihood - vote in 2008 * wsb216 Full-time college Crosstabulation

			wsb216 Full-time college		Total
			1 Yes	2 No	
vote2008 Likelihood - vote in 2008	1 Definitely will vote	Count	254	444	698
		% within wsb216 Full-time college	86.1%	69.7%	74.9%
	2 Probably will vote	Count	17	78	95
		% within wsb216 Full-time college	5.8%	12.2%	10.2%
	3 50-50 chance of voting	Count	16	57	73
		% within wsb216 Full-time college	5.4%	8.9%	7.8%
	4 Probably will not vote	Count	3	26	29
		% within wsb216 Full-time college	1.0%	4.1%	3.1%
	5 Definitely will not vote	Count	5	32	37
		% within wsb216 Full-time college	1.7%	5.0%	4.0%
Total	Count	295	637	932	
	% within wsb216 Full-time college	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

This first table, showing the cross-tabulation between the enrolled and non-enrolled respondents with the likelihood to vote in 2008, points out one very vivid fact from its compiled analysis. Looking at those who have decided that they will definitely vote in 2008, we see that 86.1% of full-time college students in the study plan to do so. A vast majority on its own, combining it with those likely to vote from the probable category make a percentage of 91.9%. Now, using this data in particular to reflect upon the next cross-tabulation, another dramatic inference can be made:

			disagreepar Frequency - political disagree with parents					Total
			0 I don't talk to them about politics or social issues	1 Never	2 Seldom	3 Occasionally	4 Frequently	
vote2008 Likelihood - vote in 2008	1 Definitely will vote	Count % within disagreepar Frequency - political disagree with parents	28 35.9%	41 51.3%	188 77.4%	327 81.5%	114 87.0%	698 74.8%
	2 Probably will vote	Count % within disagreepar Frequency - political disagree with parents	11 14.1%	10 12.5%	31 12.8%	31 7.7%	12 9.2%	95 10.2%
	3 50-50 chance of voting	Count % within disagreepar Frequency - political disagree with parents	14 17.9%	12 15.0%	17 7.0%	26 6.5%	3 2.3%	72 7.7%
	4 Probably will not vote	Count % within disagreepar Frequency - political disagree with parents	14 17.9%	2 2.5%	2 .8%	11 2.7%	1 .8%	30 3.2%
	5 Definitely will not vote	Count % within disagreepar Frequency - political disagree with parents	11 14.1%	15 18.8%	6 2.1%	6 1.5%	1 .8%	38 4.1%
Total		Count % within disagreepar Frequency - political disagree with parents	78 100.0%	80 100.0%	243 100.0%	401 100.0%	131 100.0%	933 100.0%

Singling out the vast majority of those enrolled respondents who are planning on voting in 2008, it certainly shows that there is information outside their parents that is supplying them with persuasive knowledge. Knowing that nearly 90% of those currently enrolled full-time are planning on voting in 2008, we see that there is also a relationship amongst those voting in 2008 with the frequency of political disagreements that one has with one's parents. Looking at the table, it is clear that 87% of those who frequently argue with their parents are planning on definitely voting in 2008, 81.5% who occasionally disagree, 77.4% who seldom disagree, and only 51.3% who never disagree. Using the information we have unlocked from this survey research, it becomes apparent college students are not only planning on voting in the 2008 election, but also that the vast majority of them are planning on voting with differing opinions from their parents on political issues. Assuming that a good portion of their alternative opinions are drawn from their education at the university through its many faculties, it is clear that this information is not only getting into the mentality of young people, it is replacing the mindset of these individual's parents.

In doing my research for this hypothesis, I have gone through premises, historical trends, question creation and wording, cross-tabulation tables and statistical results. Reviewing the survey in relation to my hypothesis, I am pleased to conclude that there is a significant difference (safely beyond the margin of error) between the parental influence of enrolled and non-enrolled young people's political beliefs. Through analysis on respondents between the age of 18 and 24 years old, we have recovered data pertaining to their characteristics; such as their likelihood to vote in 2008 and their activity in voting registration, as well as their political relationships with their parents; be it in the frequency of political discussions and disagreements or their parent's perceived interest in politics. In a conclusive research assignment, I have come to the conclusion that there is truth to the theory that young people currently enrolled full-time in a four year college are more likely to disagree with their parents on political and social topics than their youthful counterparts who are not enrolled. However, in coming to this inference, there is also some critiquing of my research that I clearly see needs to be done. In first analyzing the question wording, I feel that while the decision to break up the respondents into enrolled and un-enrolled individuals, a question asked designating the specific amount of education a polled youth had received would have been more helpful. Drawing from a question asked about one's parents in the questionnaire, with slight answer modifications, I feel the following inquiry would have served my research even better:

- What is your highest completed level of education:

-Some high school/No diploma enrollment	-High school diploma/GED	-2 years of University
majoring in political science	-Bachelors degree	-Bachelors degree
-Not sure	-Masters degree	-Doctoral degree

Adding this additional statistics to my analyze could allow me to pinpoint even stronger, more detailed conclusions, cross-tabulating the above answers with the other aforementioned questions. As for the population and sample utilized by the questionnaire, in terms of my particular topic, I felt that it worked extremely well in providing me with a random sample to base the collective insight of today's young people on. On the topic of surveying implication, I feel that another strong method that could have been used but wasn't to gain the sample would have been through face-to-face interviews. Due to the fact that we were looking for a variety of young people, some of which are not privileged with the same amount of access to the internet, there would be a possibility of bias towards those with the opportunity. However, with the ability to enter college campuses and other congregational areas for young people, the response rate for face-to-face interviews often produce the highest of any sampling type. This being said, it is merely a suggestion for an alternative method of implementing the survey to achieve the sample. I recognize that the amount of energy, through both cost and man-hours, could quickly become an issue and the fact that this survey was done efficiently through the internet and avoiding bias is a very acceptable form of acquiring the essential data.

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