

## **Political Socialization**

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The definition of citizenship is the quality of an individual's response to membership in a community. I believe that my grandpa, Terry Myers, is a great example of this. He participates in local elections as well as the presidential election. My grandpa also has very strong political views. He watches the news and is up-to-date on what is happening in the world politically. The main reason I know this is because he likes to share his political views with me. I wondered how he attained those certain political views, and I learned that political socialization has a factor in determining political views. "Political socialization is the process by which we learn our political orientation and allegiances" (Barbour and Wright 336). There are certain socialization agents that we experience as a child and an adult that politically socialize us. Some agents of political socialization are family, friends, workplace, and political experiences. Everyone will be politically socialized but all in different ways. I wanted to know how my grandpa was politically socialized. I believe that political socialization has a huge impact on one's political views.

My grandpa is currently seventy-one years old and the oldest of five siblings. My grandpa had to grow up fast. He started his first job at the age of twelve and even paid ten to twelve dollars to his parents for cost of living. When my grandpa went to high school and his political views started to take form, he believed that you work hard and deserve to be treated equally. When he turned eighteen, you could say these beliefs had an influence on his voting. He got to vote in the John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon presidential elections. He voted for JFK because he had the same views about working hard and being treated equally. My grandpa

believed that JFK was going to do great things and change the world. My grandpa remembers JFK stating in his inaugural address, "And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man" (Inaugural Address). This statement meant a lot to my grandpa. It showed that JFK was a man that wanted the country to work together and achieve goals as a whole. This is something that my grandpa supported and believed. Another reason my grandpa voted for him was because he was behind the younger generation. This is one way that my grandpa was politically socialized by his work. Since my grandpa had to start working at such a young age and had to work hard for the money he earned, he chose to vote for the people that also had those same beliefs. When I asked my grandpa if he would give up his right to vote for anything he had, he said no. He believes that it is important to be able to vote for the person you want to run your country.

My grandpa is very strong on the views about guns. He started recreational trap shooting in the early sixties. Before that, my grandpa was an avid hunter and shot rifles and pistols at gun ranges. My grandpa also taught the hunter safety course for thirty-seven years. Terry is also the coach of my high school's trap shooting team. He has been the coach for four years. It has been a joy to him to be able to teach kids how to recreationally shoot guns and safely handle them. With all these experiences around guns and teaching about gun safety, my grandpa's views about gun control are quite strong. He strongly believes in the Second Amendment. The Second Amendment states, "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a Free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed" (Constitution). He also thinks that everyone should have the right to be taught and learn how to use firearms. His beliefs on gun control are that we should control more of the "people" instead of the guns. He does not like to

call it gun control, but “people control.” When I asked him more about this, he said that we should look more into people’s mental state and who is applying to get a gun. He grew up in a very rural town, in a one- room school where it was okay to bring a gun to school, store it, and then go squirrel hunting after school and no one would think twice about it. Now that the world has changed, he believes that the stipulations and control on guns need to change too. My grandpa is also a life member of the NRA (National Rifle Association). Being a part of this very strong interest group has shaped his political views. He believes in what the NRA’s causes are, and that is “protecting an individual’s right to bear arms” (NRA). “The National Rifle Association is the world leader in firearm education, safety and training” (NRA Explore). This value of the NRA is a main reason why my grandpa joined the NRA. He believes that everyone should know how to handle a firearm safely. These elements had a huge part in shaping my grandpa’s political views about guns. So being a part of these groups and activities about guns has politically socialized him in to having strong views about guns.

My grandpa is also an active community member in Henderson County. My grandpa is currently a member of the county board. He manages the county’s business and finances. He also votes on certain topics, and some of the topics include the budget, health care, and zoning of property or buildings. He is also on a number of committees; those committees include jail, road and bridge, audit, finance, and buildings and grounds. One thing my grandpa got to be a part of deciding was if they could purchase an SUV for the Henderson County Police. As you can see, my grandpa is very busy. He said that he feels like he is a part of something by being a part of the county board. They get to make key decisions for the community and amend things that might need fixed. I asked how these might affect his political views, and he answered that it made him think of the bigger picture—that you have to look at everyone’s point of view and

allow everyone to have a say in things. You not only have to look at the Republican point of view, but also the Democrat's point of view. Being a member of the county board socializes my grandpa's political views, and it makes him think differently about each political party's views.

My grandpa has lived in an agriculture-based community. He also grew up and became a farmer himself. After he finished high school, he helped out on the farm. He grew up and started farming himself. He has been a farmer for more than half of his life. While being a farmer you view things differently. For example, his views about the environment would differ than those who are not farmers. He is a strong supporter of keeping the environment healthy. This would affect his opinions on certain candidates running for a congressional and state representative for Illinois. Gail Russell was running for state representative, and the reason my grandpa was in support of him was because Gail is a farmer; he is a supporter of the Second Amendment, and also a good friend of my grandpa. I think that my grandpa's views are shaped and socialized on the fact that he was a farmer. For example, he would always favor political candidates that favored the agricultural field or understood smaller communities like the one my grandpa currently lives in. While being a farmer, my grandpa has learned to help out those in need and treat everyone with respect. If someone in the community was having a hard time harvesting all of their crops in time, my grandpa would be there lending a hand or his combine. I remember one time specifically when one of my grandpa's friends had become very ill. My grandpa had stopped what he was doing to help his friend out. Growing up and becoming a farmer has socialized him into favoring candidates that were looking out for the agriculture communities.

All of these experiences or things that my grandpa is involved in are agents of socialization. My grandpa's parents, family members, workplace, and political experiences are just a few of those agents. I think that growing up with such a bigger family taught my grandpa

to respect people and you would be respected back. This had a major impact on the way he viewed candidates that were running for a position. If he did not believe that the candidate was a respectable man or woman he chose not to vote for them. With my grandpa also being a part of the interest group, the NRA helped instill the political views about firearms and guns onto my grandpa. My grandpa also is a very active community member by being a part of the Henderson County board. By being on the county board it is a small piece in what a government office might be like. This is why my grandpa takes the time to hear all sides and every viewpoint on topics before he decides his own. All of these agents of socialization have an impact on one's political views.

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