

BETWEEN HOME AND EUROPE: YOUTH POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION IN OVERLAPPING SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract. *Political socialization research has traditionally emphasized the formative roles of family, school, peers, and national institutions. Contemporary young people, however, also encounter political ideas and practices through migration, European integration, and digital communication. This conceptual article develops the notion of overlapping socialization environments to explain how these contexts interact in the formation of political orientations. Methodologically, the article employs an integrative, conceptually driven review of foundational political socialization theory and selected scholarship on Romanian migration, European identity, and digitally mediated youth participation. The proposed framework treats family relationships, educational institutions, migration experiences, European integration, and digital communication not as isolated or merely additive influences, but as interconnected environments whose effects may reinforce, modify, or challenge one another. Their relative importance varies across individuals and contexts and may change over time. The framework does not establish causal relationships; instead, it organizes complementary bodies of scholarship and identifies a research agenda for testing how interactions among socialization environments shape political knowledge, values, identities, and participation. This perspective offers a more context-sensitive account of youth political socialization in increasingly interconnected European societies.*

Keywords: *youth political socialization; migration; European integration; digital communication; transnationalism; political identity.*

1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Political socialization has traditionally been understood as the process through which individuals acquire political knowledge, values, identities, and orientations. Classical research located much of this process within the family, school, peer groups, and national political institutions (Easton & Dennis, 1969; Jennings & Niemi, 1974). These perspectives remain fundamental for explaining how young people encounter political authority and develop dispositions toward citizenship and participation. They were also formulated in social settings in which political learning was largely embedded in relatively stable, nationally bounded institutions.

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The conditions under which young people form political orientations have since become more complex. European integration, educational and labor mobility, migration, and digital communication expose young Europeans to institutions, norms, and public debates originating in more than one national context. Political learning still occurs within families, schools, and local communities, but it may also draw on transnational family relationships, experiences of mobility, supranational institutions, and digitally mediated interaction.

Romanian scholarship provides particularly useful illustrations of this transformation. Research on Romanian migration documents the networks and transnational social spaces that connect communities of origin and destination (Anghel, 2013; Sandu, 2005, 2010). Studies of European integration and identity similarly show that national and European forms of belonging can coexist and be reinterpreted through institutional and social change (Brie et al., 2012; Ciot, 2023; Petrila & Brie, 2023; Sălăjan, 2018). Research on first-time voters further demonstrates that young Romanians' online campaign engagement is connected to political interest, information, and existing participation rather than to digital activity alone (Gherghina & Mitru, 2023). Taken together, these studies suggest that political orientations may develop through experiences that cross institutional, territorial, and communicative boundaries.

Yet these bodies of scholarship are usually organized around distinct questions. Political socialization research examines agents and processes of political learning; migration studies analyze mobility and transnational relationships; European studies focus on institutions, integration, and belonging; and digital communication research investigates media use and participation. Each tradition offers important insights, but considering them separately can obscure how their objects of study intersect in young people's everyday lives.

1.1. Research Purpose, Objectives, and Guiding Proposition

The purpose of this conceptual article is to develop an integrated framework for examining youth political socialization across interconnected national, transnational, institutional, and digital contexts. It addresses the fragmentation between political socialization research and scholarship on migration, European integration, and digital communication.

The article pursues four objectives. First, it revisits classical approaches to political socialization and identifies their continuing explanatory relevance. Second, it examines how migration, European integration, and digital communication extend the environments in which political learning takes place. Third, it introduces and defines the concept of overlapping socialization environments. Fourth, it develops methodological implications and an empirical research agenda for studying interactions among these environments.

The analysis is guided by the following research question: How can the interaction among family, educational, migratory, European, and digital environments be conceptualized in the study of youth political socialization?

Because the article is conceptual rather than empirical, it does not test a causal hypothesis. It advances instead the following guiding proposition for subsequent empirical testing (P1): the political significance of a socialization environment is conditioned by its interaction with the other environments present in young people's lives. Accordingly, family, education, migration, European integration, and digital communication should not be treated exclusively as independent or additive influences. Their interaction may reinforce, modify, translate, or challenge political knowledge, values, identities, and orientations.

1.2. Methodological Design and Levels of Analysis

Methodologically, the article employs an integrative literature review oriented toward conceptual synthesis and theory building. Unlike a systematic review designed to identify and evaluate all publications meeting predetermined criteria, an integrative review brings together theoretically relevant contributions from different research traditions in order to clarify concepts, identify relationships, and develop a new analytical perspective.

The reviewed literature consists of two main categories. The first includes foundational contributions concerning political socialization, primary and secondary socialization, political authority, socialization agents, and socially acquired dispositions. The second includes selected Romanian and comparative studies addressing migration and transnational relations, European integration and political belonging, and digitally mediated political participation. Sources are included for their conceptual relevance to the mechanisms, contexts, and interactions through which young people may acquire political orientations. The review is therefore purposive and conceptually driven rather than exhaustive.

The analytical procedure comprises three stages. First, the reviewed studies are organized according to the principal environment examined: family and education, migration and transnational relations, European integration, or digital communication. Second, the mechanisms associated with each environment are identified, including interpersonal transmission, institutional learning, cross-national comparison, identity negotiation, political information, and participation. Third, the analysis examines the points at which these mechanisms intersect, leading to the formulation of simultaneity, interaction, and variability as the defining characteristics of overlapping socialization environments.

The framework connects three levels of analysis. At the micro level, it concerns young people's political knowledge, values, identities, interpretations, and participation. At the meso level, it examines families, schools, migration networks, peer relations, and digitally mediated communities as social settings through which political meanings circulate. At the macro level, it considers national political systems, European institutions, migration contexts, and broader transformations in communication. The framework's central analytical interest lies in the connections among these levels rather than in the isolated effect of any single factor.

This design does not permit causal inference or estimates of the relative strength of different socialization environments. Its purpose is to construct a coherent conceptual framework and to derive questions and propositions that can subsequently be examined through comparative, longitudinal, network-based, or mixed-methods research.

The article proceeds in four further stages. Section 2 reviews classical perspectives on political socialization and scholarship on migration, European integration, and digital communication. Section 3 defines the conceptual framework and develops its principal characteristics and theoretical implications. Section 4 discusses the contribution, limitations, methodological implications, and empirical research agenda generated by the framework. Section 5 concludes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Classical Perspectives on Political Socialization

Classical research on political socialization sought to explain how individuals acquire orientations toward political institutions, authority, and citizenship. A central concern was the formation of political attitudes before individuals entered adult political life.

Easton and Dennis (1969) examined the development of political orientations during childhood, with particular attention to perceptions of authority and political legitimacy. Their work established that the relationship between individuals and the political system begins to take shape before the acquisition of formal electoral rights. From this perspective, political learning is not restricted to direct participation; it develops gradually through early encounters with political symbols and institutions.

Jennings and Niemi (1974) shifted attention toward adolescence and the agents involved in political learning. Their analysis considered families, schools, teachers, and peer groups, as well as variation across social categories and over the life cycle. Although the family occupied an important place in their research, it was not treated as the only source of political orientation. Political socialization was therefore presented as a process shaped by several social settings rather than by a single mechanism of parental transmission.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) did not formulate a theory of political socialization. Their distinction between primary and secondary socialization nevertheless offers a broader sociological basis for understanding how socially shared meanings are internalized. Primary socialization introduces the child to a social world through significant others, whereas secondary socialization involves the internalization of institutionally organized subworlds. Applied cautiously to politics, this distinction helps explain how understandings of authority, citizenship, and collective life become part of subjective reality.

Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus adds a further dimension. Habitus describes durable and transferable dispositions generated through social conditions and experience. These dispositions contribute to practices and representations without operating as explicit rules. Although Bourdieu does not address political socialization directly in this work, the concept offers a way to understand how socially acquired dispositions can inform later political perceptions and practices.

Together, these works provide complementary accounts of early political development. Easton and Dennis emphasize orientations toward authority; Jennings and Niemi identify agents and contexts of political learning; Berger and Luckmann explain the internalization of social reality; and Bourdieu draws attention to durable dispositions generated by social conditions. These perspectives remain essential, but their primary empirical and theoretical focus lies in identifiable institutions and predominantly face-to-face settings. They do not directly address political learning across migration networks, supranational institutions, and digital media. The following sections examine how these contexts extend the environments in which political orientations may form.

2.2. Migration and Transnational Social Environments

Research on Romanian migration demonstrates that migration cannot be reduced to the physical movement of individuals across borders. It also encompasses social relations, networks, communication, and practices connecting communities of origin and destination.

Sandu's (2005) analysis of temporary and circular migration from Romanian villages situates individual mobility within local communities, regional contexts, and migration networks. The study shows that migration is patterned by community characteristics and prior forms of mobility, rather than being solely the product of individual decisions. This perspective places social organization at the center of migration processes and helps explain how mobility is sustained over time.

Sandu (2010) develops this approach through the concept of the “social worlds” of Romanian migration. The volume analyzes life projects, remittances, communication, return, and transnational orientations across several levels of social organization, from individuals and families to communities and regions. Migration thereby appears as a social field connecting experiences abroad with relationships and expectations at home.

Anghel (2013) provides a complementary account through a comparative study of Romanian migrants in Germany and Italy. By examining migration, incorporation, social status, and transnational connections, the book shows how migrants' experiences are shaped by both destination-country institutions and continuing ties to Romania. Migration is not presented as a complete transfer from one bounded social world to another; it creates relationships and reference points that extend across national contexts.

These works do not explicitly formulate theories of youth political socialization. They nevertheless alter the conceptual map on which such theories operate. When family relationships, status comparisons, information flows, and life projects span more than one country, the experiences from which political meanings are drawn may also become transnational. Young people may encounter political institutions indirectly through relatives abroad, compare public services and democratic practices across countries, or interpret national politics through experiences circulated within migrant networks.

Migration should therefore be treated not as a substitute for primary socialization but as a context that can intersect with it. Transnational experiences may reinforce family narratives, introduce alternative standards of evaluation, or produce tensions between inherited norms and observations from elsewhere. This possibility leads to the next element of the framework: European integration as an institutional and symbolic environment that enables multiple forms of political belonging.

2.3. European Integration and Multiple Political Belongings

European integration is both an institutional process and a source of social interaction. In her analysis of Romania's accession, Ciot (2023) shows that preparation for membership involved not only governmental negotiation but also public institutions and civil-society organizations. Accession therefore broadened the range of actors involved in adopting and interpreting European norms and practices. Although this work is not a study of political socialization, it demonstrates how integration can reshape the institutional environment in which citizens encounter politics.

The implications of integration become more visible in research on identity. Brie et al. (2012) describe European cultural identity through the coexistence of unity and diversity. Their formulation of Europe as a “culture of cultures” does not require the disappearance of local, regional, or national identities. European integration instead creates a broader framework within which different cultural forms may coexist and interact.

Sălăjan (2018) traces the redefinition of Romania's Euro-Atlantic national identity during the period preceding EU accession. Her analysis treats identity formation as dependent on both domestic and international interaction and shows how political actors articulated multiple self-images in relation to Europe. For the present argument, the important point is that identification with Europe is not an automatic product of membership; it is interpreted and negotiated through discourse, institutional change, and historical experience.

Petrila and Brie (2023) further illustrate the variable relationship between national and European attachments. Their analysis of nationalism and Euroscepticism during successive European crises shows how uncertainty can increase the salience of national

narratives without eliminating European identification. National and European identities can thus operate as parallel frames whose relative importance changes across political circumstances.

This literature suggests that European integration creates an additional institutional and symbolic environment for political learning. It does not displace family, school, community, or national institutions. Instead, it introduces norms, rights, symbols, and comparisons that may be interpreted through those existing contexts. For young people, mobility programs, EU citizenship, cross-border travel, and public debates about Europe may become resources for understanding democracy and belonging. The socialization implications of European integration therefore lie not in a uniform “Europeanization” of political identity, but in the interaction between European reference points and other social environments.

2.4. Digital Communication and Political Socialization

Digital communication does more than add another source of political information. It connects people and experiences that originate in different social and territorial contexts, making it especially relevant to a framework centered on overlap.

Shah et al. (2009) conceptualize communication competence as a foundation for civic competence. Their model connects family communication, classroom deliberation, public-affairs news use, and interpersonal discussion. These processes allow young people to encounter ideas, interpret public issues, express opinions, and develop competencies associated with citizenship. The model is important here because it treats communication as a link among several sites of socialization rather than as an isolated media effect.

The expansion of digital media has increased the number and accessibility of such communicative opportunities. A meta-analysis of 106 survey-based studies found that positive associations between digital media and youth engagement depend primarily on directly political uses, including online news, blogging, and political discussion (Boulianne & Theocharis, 2020). The evidence also supports the possibility of reciprocal influence: political engagement can motivate politically oriented media use, while such use may be associated with further engagement. Digital activity in general should therefore not be equated with political socialization or participation.

Different forms of Internet use also have different relationships with public orientation. Using longitudinal data, Ekström et al. (2014) distinguish among online spaces oriented toward news, social interaction, games, and creative activity. Their findings emphasize the relevance of news and social-interaction orientations while cautioning against assuming uniformly positive effects from social media use. This differentiation is crucial for any framework that seeks to incorporate digital communication without treating it as a homogeneous influence.

Social and political context further conditions online participation. Allaste and Saari's (2020) comparison of Estonia and Finland shows how similar platforms become embedded in different participatory cultures and democratic histories. In Romania, Gherghina and Mitru (2023) find that first-time voters' engagement with preferred candidates on Facebook was associated with political interest, information, and other forms of participation. Online engagement was not random or reducible to habitual platform use; it extended political orientations and activities developed elsewhere.

Digital communication also reduces the territorial constraints on political attention. Himmelroos and von Schoultz (2023) show that, among Finnish external

citizens, following political news from the country of origin was associated with participation in origin-country elections. The relationship held for traditional media and social media, whereas following residence-country politics did not produce the same mobilizing pattern for origin-country voting. The content and territorial focus of media use therefore matter alongside format.

Taken together, these studies support three conclusions. First, political uses of digital media are more relevant than general use. Second, their significance depends on the surrounding social and political context. Third, digital communication can connect family discussions, educational experiences, migration networks, and political events across borders. Within the framework advanced here, digital communication is therefore both a socialization environment and an infrastructure through which other environments encounter one another.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: OVERLAPPING SOCIALIZATION ENVIRONMENTS

The literature reviewed above indicates that contemporary youth political socialization cannot be fully understood through a single context. Classical perspectives emphasize family and educational institutions, whereas migration research, European studies, and digital communication scholarship draw attention to transnational relations, supranational belonging, and mediated participation. These literatures address different questions, but together they show that young people's political orientations may form across multiple environments that are present at the same time and connected in practice.

3.1. Defining Overlapping Socialization Environments

In this article, *overlapping socialization environments* refers to the interconnected social and institutional contexts through which young people develop political knowledge, values, identities, and orientations. The concept focuses on interactions among family relationships, educational institutions, migration experiences, European integration, and digital communication. These environments are analytically distinguishable, but they are not necessarily experienced separately.

The term *overlapping* has three implications. First, several environments can be relevant simultaneously. Second, experiences from one environment can affect how messages from another are interpreted. Third, the environments need not point in the same direction. A family's political narratives may be supported by experiences communicated through relatives abroad, modified by formal education, or challenged by European and digital reference points.

The concept does not assume that all environments have equal influence or that their effects are uniform. Their relative importance may vary by age, family history, education, migration experience, media practices, and national context. The framework also does not presume that overlap is inherently democratic, integrative, or beneficial. Interactions can generate learning and participation, but they can also produce contradiction, withdrawal, polarization, or uncertainty. The central proposition is narrower: political socialization is more fully understood when the relationships among environments are examined rather than when each environment is analyzed in isolation.

3.2. Characteristics of Overlapping Socialization Environments

The first characteristic is simultaneity. Young people do not simply move through a fixed sequence in which family influence ends when schooling, mobility, or digital

communication begins. Earlier dispositions can remain active while new institutions and relationships become relevant. Political orientations may consequently reflect several contemporaneous sources of meaning.

The second characteristic is interaction. Experiences in one environment may reinforce, translate, modify, or challenge those acquired in another. A migrant relative's account of a host country's institutions can become part of family political discussion; an EU program can be interpreted through national narratives; and digital platforms can carry both classroom content and transnational political debate. Political socialization is therefore not merely the sum of separate effects. Its meaning is partly produced through the relationships among environments.

The third characteristic is variability over persons, contexts, and time. Direct migration experience will not have the same significance as indirect exposure through relatives; political news use differs from entertainment-oriented platform use; and European identification varies with social position and political events. The salience of each environment may also change as young people leave school, travel, vote for the first time, or enter new networks. The framework consequently treats political socialization as dynamic and context dependent rather than as a uniform pathway.

3.3. Theoretical Implications

The proposed perspective has several implications for political socialization research. Most importantly, it shifts attention from identifying isolated agents toward examining configurations of environments. This does not diminish the explanatory value of family, school, migration, European integration, or digital communication. It asks how their influence changes when they are connected to other contexts in young people's lives.

The framework also distinguishes interaction from accumulation. An additive approach would estimate the independent contribution of each influence. An interactional approach asks whether an experience in one environment changes the meaning or effect of another. This distinction can generate different research questions: whether transnational family ties alter the relationship between parental attitudes and youth orientations; whether educational mobility changes how national political narratives are evaluated; or whether politically oriented digital media connect migration experiences to electoral engagement.

Finally, the framework creates a common conceptual language for literatures that use different units of analysis. Political socialization studies often focus on individuals and agents; migration research examines networks and transnational spaces; European studies analyzes institutions and identity; and communication research studies media practices. Overlapping socialization environments does not replace these approaches. It offers a way to formulate hypotheses about their points of contact and to design empirical research around those interactions.

4. DISCUSSION

This article develops *overlapping socialization environments* as an integrated perspective on youth political socialization. Its contribution is not the identification of previously unknown agents. Family, education, migration, European integration, and digital communication are all established objects of research. The contribution lies in treating them as potentially interconnected contexts and in specifying simultaneity, interaction, and variability as properties that empirical studies should examine.

This perspective has methodological implications. Cross-sectional models that include several independent variables may identify associations but cannot, on their own, show how environments acquire meaning through one another. Research designs should therefore measure not only exposure to each environment but also the ties connecting them. Relevant indicators could include political communication within transnational families, the interpretation of mobility experiences, the territorial focus and political purpose of media use, and the ways in which national and European identities are discussed across home, school, and online settings. Mixed-methods research could connect such measures to the interpretive processes through which young people reconcile or contest competing messages.

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the framework is conceptual and does not establish causal relationships. Second, the five environments discussed here are not exhaustive; peers, religious organizations, workplaces, parties, social movements, and major political events may also be important. Third, the framework does not specify the relative weight of different environments. Influence is likely to vary across individuals, generations, and national contexts. Finally, the integrative review is selective rather than systematic. It was designed to develop a conceptual synthesis, not to estimate the prevalence or strength of particular effects.

These limitations define an empirical research agenda. Comparative studies could examine whether particular configurations of environments recur across European societies with different migration histories and levels of integration. Longitudinal research could identify how the salience of environments changes around transitions such as leaving school, migration, return, or first electoral participation. Network analysis could map how political information travels across family and transnational ties, while interviews and digital ethnography could examine how young people interpret conflicting messages. A further task is operationalization: developing measures that distinguish exposure to multiple environments from meaningful interaction among them.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Contemporary youth political socialization occurs in societies where political experiences are rarely confined to one institution or territory. Classical agents remain important, but their influence may intersect with migration networks, European institutions and identities, and digital communication. Understanding these intersections is necessary for explaining how young people develop political orientations in an interconnected Europe.

The concept of *overlapping socialization environments* offers a framework for that task. It emphasizes that several environments can be simultaneously relevant, that experiences may reinforce or challenge one another, and that their importance varies across people, contexts, and time. The framework brings together complementary insights without claiming that all influences are equal or that overlap produces a predetermined political outcome.

The value of the concept will ultimately depend on empirical testing. Its immediate purpose is to make the relationships among socialization environments visible and researchable. By shifting attention from isolated influences to their configurations and interactions, the framework provides a basis for a more context-sensitive account of youth political socialization.

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