

Special Issue Editorial: Political Socialization as Desiderata of Developmental Psychology

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Issues related to the political socialization of young people have become a significant topic of academic research and societal debate in recent years. Political violence and related problems impact not only emerging and developing countries in Africa and the Middle East but also increasingly threaten liberal democracies in industrialized countries in Europe and North America, primarily due to the rise of right-wing populist parties and movements. The problems under consideration are manifold and by no means limited to political violence in the physical sense. Prejudice, hate and agitation against minorities, the spread of devaluation narratives and conspiracy theories, the denial of scientific and social facts, as well as acts of discrimination, ranging from verbal to physical violence, serve as indicators that the democratic consensus and the commitment to indivisible human rights are not self-evident. Instead, they represent cultural and civilizational achievements that must be actively defended.


In scientific terms, this raises the question of which developmental conditions lead to deviant or particularly favourable patterns of political attitudes and actions, respectively. To date, explanatory models mostly derive from political science, sociological,


and social psychological theories (such as classical extremism theories or intergroup theories of prejudice and discrimination). These approaches suffer particularly from the fact that they contain only a few differentiated ontogenetic assumptions about how such phenomena arise in the course of human development. Yet it has long been assumed that political socialization is a key issue during late adolescence, which has proven to be a sensitive and particularly impressionable period and appears to have a major influence on further political development of young people (Sears & Brown, 2013).

Intensive research in related fields, such as the development of antisocial behavior problems, has taught us that deviant developmental processes can only be adequately understood as a dynamic interaction between risk and protection processes (Jessor, 2016). In recent years, based on extensive literature reviews and meta-analyses, we developed a theory of radicalization that adopts this developmental perspective (e.g., Beelmann, 2020). We see many advantages to such a conceptualization. Firstly, it aligns much better with the conditions under which political violence and other discussed phenomena arise. These problems do not develop overnight or in the short term as a result of current political or social events. Such events may act as triggers for certain psychological processes but are not in themselves capable of satisfactorily explaining, for example, hatred towards a particular social group and violent political actions.

Instead, we have to assume long-term developmental processes and diverse developmental pathways

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that are characterized by heterotypical continuity, equifinality, and multifinality. On the other hand, suitable and evidence-based recommendations for prevention measures can be derived based on developmental findings (Beelmann & Lutterbach, 2021), which encompass both particularly favourable developmental stages (windows of opportunity) and content-related considerations (such as which risks should be reduced or which competencies should be promoted for a certain target group; Beelmann, 2012). Furthermore, within the framework of positive youth development (Silbereisen & Lerner, 2007), there are extensive insights into the necessities and requirements for the healthy and socially competent development of young people, which also hold great importance for political socialization. All of these discoveries give hope that the perspective of modern development-oriented research will be fruitful for the field of political socialization and prevention efforts, too (Beelmann, 2021; Patterson et al., 2019).

The papers collected in this volume are committed to this perspective and are largely drawn from presentations at the 26th Workshop on Aggression, held November 10 to 12, 2022, at Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, Germany, titled “The Nature and Prevention of Political Violence.” Originally initiated as an informal German-speaking meeting, it has increasingly evolved into an international conference in recent years, as evidenced by the 2021 meetings in Finland and the upcoming one in London in November 2023. The papers gathered here address important questions related to political socialization from a developmental perspective as outlined above. They summarize significant findings from previous research through systematic reviews (Feddes et al., 2023; Jahnke et al., 2023), examine specific phenomena of political socialization in childhood and adolescence (Castellanos et al., 2023; Körner et al., 2023; Kollek et al., 2023), and explore possibilities for early prevention of hate and intolerance (Marx et al., 2023; Pfetsch & Ulucinar, 2023; Shani et al., 2023).

As organizers of the 2022 Workshop on Aggression, we hope to advance development-oriented research in the field of political socialization with this Special Issue, contributing also to societal debates on political violence and other related subjects. Even though there is a considerable distance between empirical research and corresponding political decision-making, we are confident that this development-oriented perspective offers noteworthy opportunities to promote democratic and human

rights-oriented attitudes as well as civic orientations. These efforts are directed toward establishing living conditions that more closely correspond to the diversity of human existence and the premises for a peaceful development.

We would like to express our gratitude to the editor-in-chief of IJDS, Herbert Scheithauer, for his willingness to include the selected contributions from the Workshop on Aggression 2022 in this Special Issue. We also appreciate his tireless efforts in the process of reviewing and revising the contributions. Furthermore, we extend our thanks to the authors who promptly delivered their contributions and participated in revising their manuscripts. Lastly, we are grateful to all conference participants for their fruitful contributions, and particularly the active participation of our keynote speakers Arie Kruglanski, Sophia Moskalenko, Tina Malti, and Barbara Krahe who have been extensively engaged in researching on aggression, radicalization, extremism, and political violence for many years.

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Bio Sketches

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