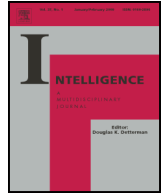




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Intelligence



Cognitive ability and party affiliation: The role of the formative years of political socialization[☆]

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ABSTRACT

We study the effect of time on the relationship between intelligence and party affiliation in the United States. Our results indicate that time affects this relationship, and that this effect is due to the formative years in which political preferences were developed rather than the time in which the survey was conducted. For people who were born in the 20th century, the later their formative years, the more positive the relationship between intelligence and Democratic, as opposed to Republican, affiliation. The current results shed light on recent conflicting findings about the relationship between intelligence and party affiliation in the US, and suggest that the effect of intelligence on party affiliation changes with time.

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1. Introduction

Studies on the relationship between intelligence and political preferences have focused primarily on the relationship between intelligence and liberal attitudes. Most studies in this area suggest that intelligence is positively correlated with liberal attitudes (Deary, Batty, & Gale, 2008a; Deary, Batty, & Gale, 2008b; Heaven, Ciarrochi, & Leeson, 2011; Hodson & Busseri, 2012; Kanazawa, 2010; Pesta & McDaniel, 2014; Pesta, McDaniel, & Bertsch, 2010; Schoon, Cheng, Gale, Batty, & Deary, 2010; Stankov, 2009). However, because of the complexity of the connection between political attitudes and political behavior, there is growing interest in recent years regarding the relationship between intelligence and another type of political preference – party affiliation, which is more closely related to political behavior. Most of this research was conducted on American samples (but see Deary et al., 2008b and Karadja, Mollerstrom, & Seim, 2014 for studies involving English and Swedish samples, respectively) in which party affiliation is most conveniently defined on a scale ranging from strong affiliation with Republicans to strong identification with Democrats. For simplicity we label this variable Democratic Affiliation (DA).

Because liberal attitudes are considered to be associated with DA, the most natural hypothesis is that the relationship between intelligence and DA is positive. Yet Carl (2014a, 2014b) found that this relationship is negative, while Ganzach (2016) found “No important differences” between Democrats and Republicans. (Ganzach, 2016, explains the negative relationship found by Carl as resulting from a lack of control for socio-economic status and racial identity). But even

Ganzach's (2016) findings of few differences leave us with the question of why – given that intelligence is positively correlated with liberal beliefs – are Democrats not more intelligent than Republicans when important background characteristics are controlled for?

Our answer is that the intuition that liberal attitudes are associated with Democratic Affiliation is based on recent experience. Although in recent years liberal attitudes are strongly associated with DA, this association was weaker in earlier times (Abramowitz & Saunders, 1998; Levendusky, 2009; Miller & Schofield, 2008. And in particular, see Meisenberg's, 2015, data below).¹ Both Carl's (2014a, 2014b) and Ganzach's (2016) conclusions were based on the GSS surveys conducted between 1972 and 2012, years in which the relationship between social and economic attitudes and party affiliation in the American electorate changed considerably (Layman & Carsey, 2002). Thus, the relationship between intelligence and DA in Carl's (2014a, 2014b) and Ganzach's (2016) studies represent aggregate relationships, collapsed over many survey years, which may overlook time-dependent effects underlying the formation of party affiliation, particularly the dependence of the effect of intelligence on time. In the current paper we suggest that in addition to studying the main effect of intelligence on party affiliation, it is also important to examine the interaction between time and intelligence, as this interaction may be an important factor in explaining party affiliation. In particular, if the association between liberal attitudes and DA were weaker in earlier times, we should expect

¹ Another answer to the question of why democrats are not more intelligent than republicans was suggested by Carl (2014a), who argued that intelligence is positively associated with both socially liberal beliefs and economically rightist beliefs (i.e., classical liberal beliefs), and that “higher intelligence among classically liberal Republicans compensates for lower intelligence among socially conservative Republicans” (p. 142). However, this answer cannot explain the temporal pattern of the effect of intelligence on DA that is described in the current paper.

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that the association between intelligence and DA would also be weaker at these times.

We distinguish between two types of hypotheses regarding the time \times intelligence interaction. The first, which we label the period hypothesis, suggests that the effect of intelligence on DA is more positive in later than in earlier periods (i.e., survey years). For example, it suggests that surveys conducted in the early 21st century will show a more positive relationship between intelligence and DA than surveys conducted in the 1970s. If liberal attitudes entice DA, if intelligent people are more liberal, and if the association between liberal attitudes and DA is stronger in later than in earlier survey years, then the association between intelligence and DA should be stronger in later survey years.

The second hypothesis, which we label the cohort hypothesis, is based on the idea that young adulthood is a critical period in which political preferences are formed (Alwin, Cohen, & Newcomb, 1991; Peterson, 1983. See Hess, 1973, for a review of the review of critical periods in other domains). It suggests that the effect of intelligence on party affiliation is more positive for people whose formative young adulthood years occurred in later times than on people for whom these years occurred in earlier times. For example, it suggests that the effect of intelligence on DA is stronger for people who became young adults in the 1960s than for people who became young adults in the 1920s. The logic behind this hypothesis is the same as the logic behind the period hypothesis except that the relevant time in which the association between liberal attitudes and DA, and therefore the association between intelligence and DA, is formed, is the time of young adulthood.

Meisenberg (2015) took a first step in examining the interaction between time and intelligence. However, Meisenberg's analysis was based on simple correlations between intelligence and political preferences for various periods between 1972 and 2012, and therefore he examined only the interaction between period and intelligence, and in fact confounded this interaction with the interaction between cohort and intelligence. In addition, this correlational analysis does not allow for control of possible confounds, particularly control for socioeconomic status, and does not provide a reliable statistical test for the time \times intelligence interaction. Nevertheless, Meisenberg's results are very informative for our subject. In Table 1 I reproduce Meisenberg's (2015) central findings in order to highlight the patterns that are the starting point for the current research. First, the data in this table suggests that the relationship between liberal attitudes and DA became more positive during the years. This positive relationship was rather weak in the 1970s and considerably strengthened in later years (although this trend was weaker

among Blacks than among Whites). This trend is consistent with a general interaction between time and intelligence in which the effect of intelligence on DA increases with time. Second, there is also evidence in Meisenberg's data for a weak trend among Whites (but not among Blacks) for the relationship between intelligence and DA to become more positive during the years. But even these two temporal trends in Meisenberg's (2015) data are mute regarding the question of whether the interaction between time and intelligence is the result of an interaction between period and intelligence or with an interaction between cohort and intelligence.

2. Study 1

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Data

Data were taken from the 1972–2012 waves of the General Social Survey (GSS). The GSS collects data on demographic characteristics and attitudes of US residents. The survey is conducted face-to-face with an in person interview of a randomly selected sample of noninstitutionalized adults (18+). The survey has been conducted every year from 1972 to 1994 (except in 1979, 1981 and 1992), and every other year since 1994. The survey takes about 90 min to administer. Thus, as of 2012, 28 national samples with 57,061 respondents and 5417 variables had been collected. Participants were, on average, 45.7.8 (18–89 age range, SD. 17.5) years old.

2.1.2. Measures

2.1.2.1. Intelligence. The GSS measures the verbal intelligence of its respondents by a ten-item multiple-choice measure of vocabulary knowledge called Wordsum. Adding up the number of correct answers yields a total test score. For the case of presentation, raw scores are converted to the commonly used IQ scale with a mean of 100 and standard deviation of 15. Due to the high correlation between verbal intelligence and general intelligence this measure is often used as an indicator of intelligence in GSS research (e.g., Hauser & Huang, 1997; Kanazawa, 2004).

2.1.2.2. Time. In view of our hypotheses, we used two measures of time. Year of Survey (YOS) is the calendar year in which the survey was conducted. Year of Birth (YOB) is the calendar year in which the participant was born. This variable represents, and is directly related, to the participants' formative years of young adulthood ($YOB = YOS - Age$, where age is the age at the survey year²). For convenience the actual YOS and YOB were divided by 100.

2.1.2.3. Party affiliation. Our measure for party affiliation was based on the question,

"Do you think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what?" This question has eight response categories: "strong Democrat", "not strong Democrat", "Independent, near Democrat", "Independent", "Independent, near Republican", "not strong Republican", "strong Republican" and "other". We assigned values ranging from 1 to 7 to these responses, the higher the value, the stronger the Democratic Affiliation. We label this variable Democratic Affiliation since the higher the value, the stronger the affiliation with the Democratic party and the weaker the affiliation with the Republican party.

2.1.2.4. Control variables. Education was measured by the number of years of full-time education completed. Income was the log transformed family income in 1986 dollars. Other controls were sex (coded as 1 for

Table 1
Correlations of liberal attitudes with Democratic Affiliation (Lib-DA), intelligence score with liberalism (IQ-Lib), and intelligence score with Democratic Affiliation (IQ-DA).

Group	Period	Lib-DA	IQ-Lib	IQ-DA
1	2	3	4	5
White male	1974–1981	0.234***	0.018	−0.135***
	1982–1991	0.315***	0.010	−0.090***
	1992–2001	0.437***	0.009	−0.025
	2002–2012	0.547***	0.089***	−0.025
White female	1974–1981	0.168***	0.068**	−0.072**
	1982–1991	0.285***	0.086***	−0.051**
	1992–2001	0.404***	0.070***	−0.004
	2002–2012	0.543***	0.081***	0.030
Black male	1974–1981	0.008	0.138	0.045
	1982–1991	0.084	0.179***	−0.039
	1992–2001	0.140	0.036	0.032
	2002–2012	0.169***	0.152***	0.035
Black female	1974–1981	−0.066	−0.080	0.017
	1982–1991	0.049	0.091	0.104**
	1992–2001	0.078	0.074	0.060
	2002–2012	0.153***	0.054	0.084

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

² Note that YOB, YOS and age are perfect linear functions of each other and therefore their effects cannot be estimated simultaneously. The choice of which effect to estimate is theory-dependent. We further consider this issue in the discussion section.

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