

Public affairs: why americans are ill informed

[Politics](#)



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Beyond reasonable doubt, most Americans, including civic leaders holding elected office lacked basic civic knowledge. According to a research carried out by the intercollegiate studies institute (ISI), half of American adults cannot name the three arms of government while 43% of elected civic leaders do not know that the Electoral College is a constitutionally mandated assembly that elects the president (NBC Universal Network). Concisely, of the More than 2, 500 randomly selected Americans who took the ISI's basic 33-question test on civic literacy, more than 70% of them failed, getting a score of below 50%.

This is proof enough that Americans are ill informed about public affairs, more so, politics. It is imperative, therefore, to establish the reason for this. Though many of these Americans may vote and take part in their other civic duties, their political socialization may be wanting. Political socialization is “ the process through which an Individual acquires his or her particular political orientations—his or her knowledge, feelings, and evaluations regarding his or her political world” (Cable Data Networks, 184-185). Achievement of this is through the Family, Education, Popular Culture, Environment, and Media.

I will examine the role of each in detail. During the formative years, a child spends most of his time and associates a lot with members of his or her family. Children borrow a lot from their parents and immediate family as they grow, including political affiliations and knowledge. An analysis of 1992, the National Election Study data proves this. Voters whose parents considered themselves Independent, 67% of them voted in similar fashion with their parents. About 59% of the children of both Democrats and

Republicans also exhibited this characteristic (Computer Data Networks, 185).

Now that it proven that many adults are semi-literate where politics and history are concerned, the same may reflect on their children and generations down the line. This brings forth a population of Americans who know little, if anything about, their social issues. Secondly, the media plays an important role in political socialization. Most youngsters spend either more time watching television (in excess of 1500 hours/year) than they do in school (900hours/year) or communicating with their parents (The Nielsen Company).

The American time use survey of 2011 reported that Watching TV was the leisure activity that occupied the most time. This accounted for about half of all the average leisure time in a day (2. 8 hours per day), and that people above 75 years of age averaged 58 minutes of reading per weekend in comparison to a paltry average of 7 minutes per weekend day for the 15-19 year olds (Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)). It is true therefore, that television has now become one of the major ways through which people, especially children, learn.

It is fast replacing parents and teachers as a source of information. How much they watch may not be as important an aspect as what it is that they watch for all those long hours. Many children and young adults will seldom watch news or follow politics on TV or even on print media. The average American newscast viewer is 58 years old. Much of political education in America is informal. High schools teach civics or government classes which

may be as limited and as shallow as the role of the president and the number of senators each state has.

Teaching of most details does not occur in the classroom. The details in a formal classroom, except to political science students who are very few compared to the rest of the population. This may be sending a signal to the younger generation that politics is not as important as the other subjects offered may and therefore not worth following. Popular culture and environment are also bound to influence political and social affiliations more so because politics is a behavior that one learns and perfects with age and accumulated experience.

In America, statistics show that the older one gets, the more they participate in politics until they get too old to participate. Prevailing circumstances and their outcomes are also a great influence and their results as seen in the immediate environment (Computer Data Networks, 187). The people that one interacts with, their dwellings and among other factors will influence it. All these factors lead to particular public opinions which may be positive or otherwise and which will further influence the learning process.

It is impossible for the government to teach everyone everything about politics, or to control political thought and affiliations as the Germans tried and failed during the Nazi era. However, it is possible to promote the learning process. The school is a good place to start. The formal curriculum should include more information that will encourage social awareness. In addition, election into office should only be possible to those who are well versed with social issues since the leaders are in a better position to teach the rest of the public and when they themselves are in the dark, the situation is

of course desperate, to say the least. Finally, Harvard School of Public Health recommends TV viewing time reduction to no more than two hours in a day. This will solve many health problems such as obesity and low sperm count among adult males, while at the same time allow the citizens to invest their time in other learning activities such as reading, communication between parents and their children, and research. This will promote more positive political awareness and social values.