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# Cold War, Chilly Memories: The Role of Political Socialization on International Perceptions

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# Cold War, chilly memories:

## The role of political socialization on international perceptions

Allison Shea

University of Rhode Island

### Introduction:

Political socialization is the inheritance of political attitudes, beliefs, and values that explain one's interaction with the political world. The effect of parents, here meaning the primary caregivers, on their children's political socialization is both profound and lasting. Kenneth Langton found about 80% of his respondents shared their parents' political party preference (Langton, 1969, p53). In fact, a child is more likely to "inherit" the party preference of their parents than "any other social predisposition except religion" (Riccards, 1973, p40). In the United States party identification typically results in lifetime attachment with children adopting and adhering to their parents' party identification (Ventura, 2001, p667). Until now research has focused on political socialization regarding domestic politics. My work explores parental political socialization influence on international politics. Parents should have the same level of influence over international political perceptions as they do domestically. This study is modeled after others used by political socialization theorists, with additional questions focused on international relations.

### Hypothesis:

Parental political socialization will have the same level of influence on their children's international political perceptions as on domestic policies.

### Research Design:

A survey was designed to discover whether parental political socialization impacts international political thinking at the same level previous research has determined it does for domestic politics. The first part of the survey probed respondent feeling toward a variety of international political issues including threats to the United States and the United States involvement in other countries. Other questions were designed to help gain an understanding of respondent feeling on domestic issues. The next part of the survey gathered demographic data including gender, age, race, religious and political alignment. A third portion of the survey asked respondents to reflect on their perceptions of their parents and provide information on their age, education level, and political affiliation etc. Finally, respondents described themselves, and their parents as one of the following "Isolationist", "Internationalist", "Accomodationist" or "Hard-liner." This survey was distributed to 231 students in an introductory political science course at the University of Rhode Island.

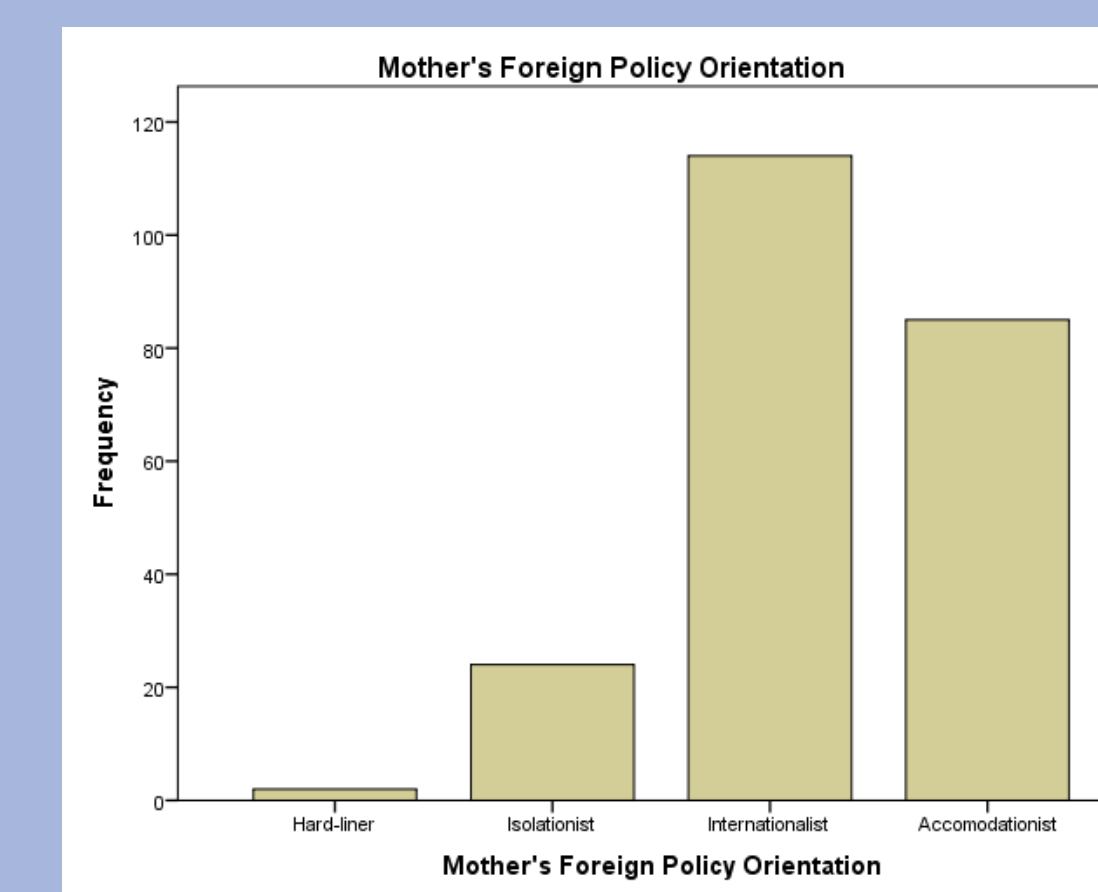
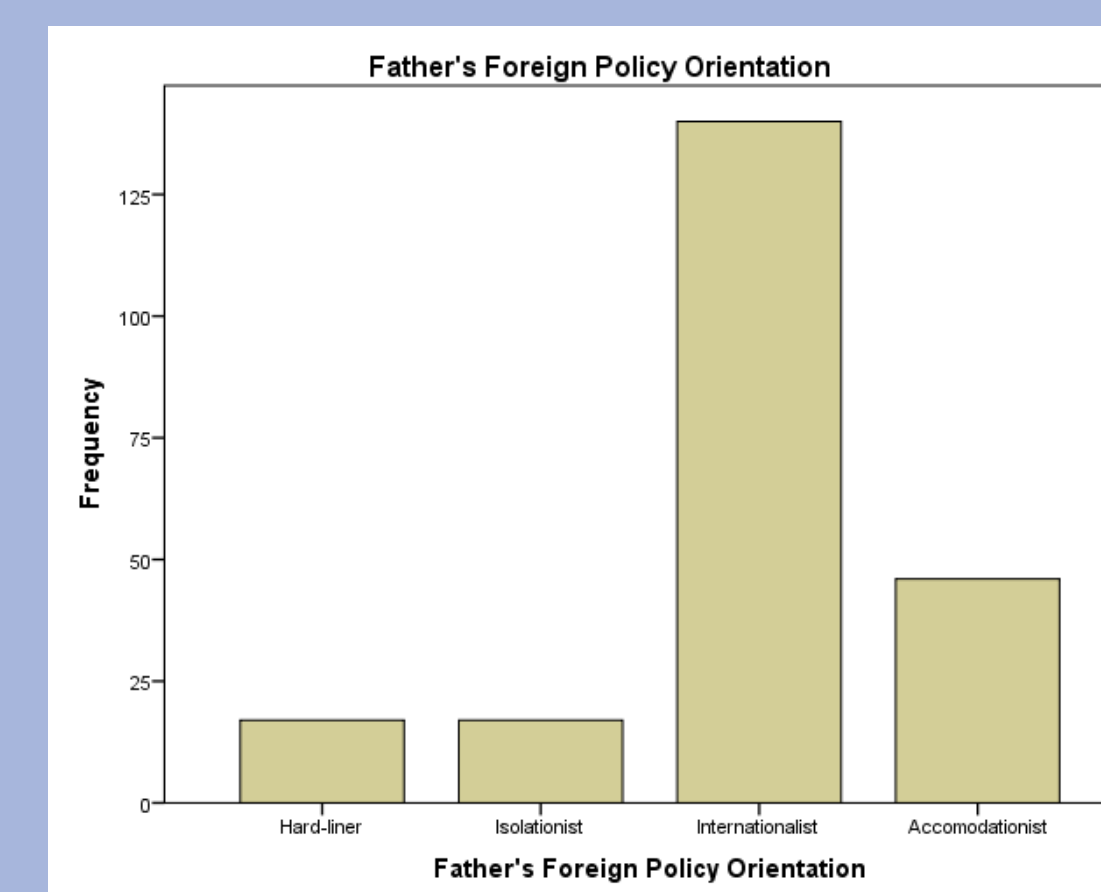
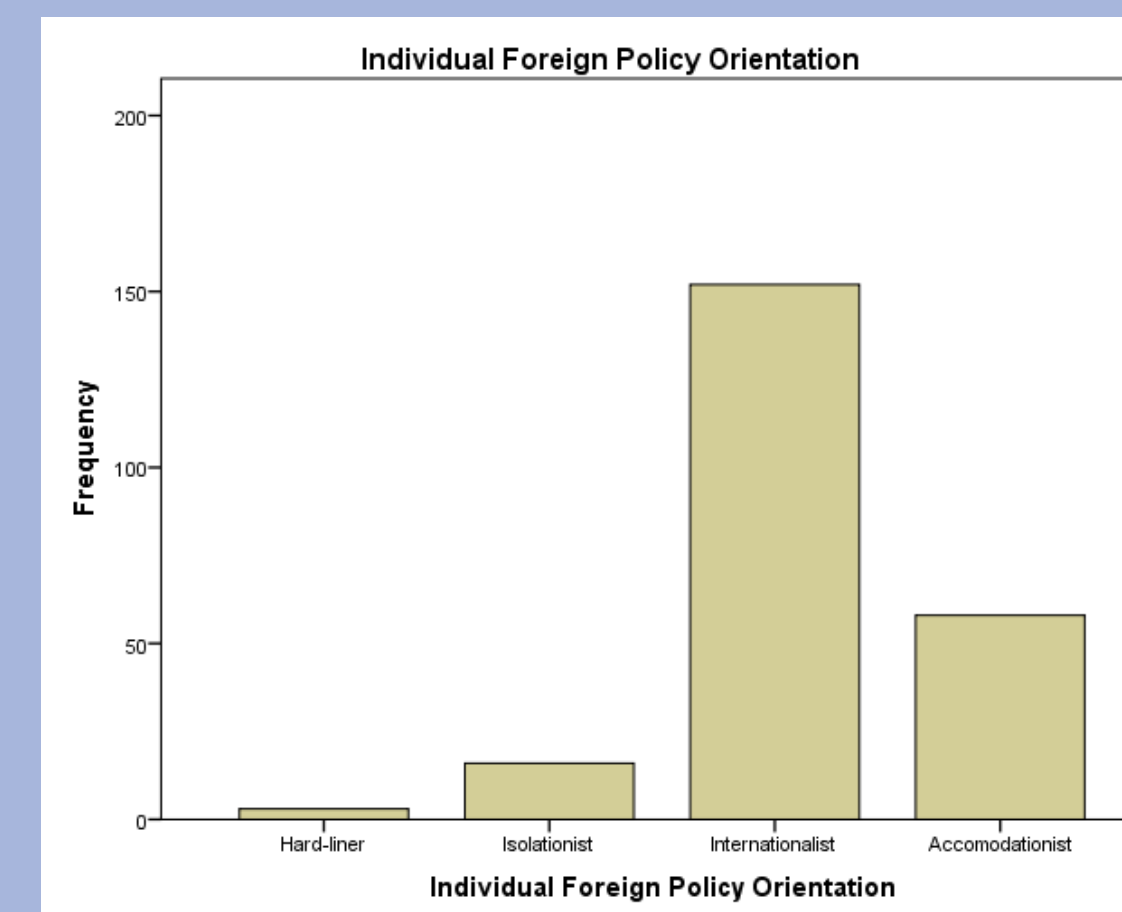
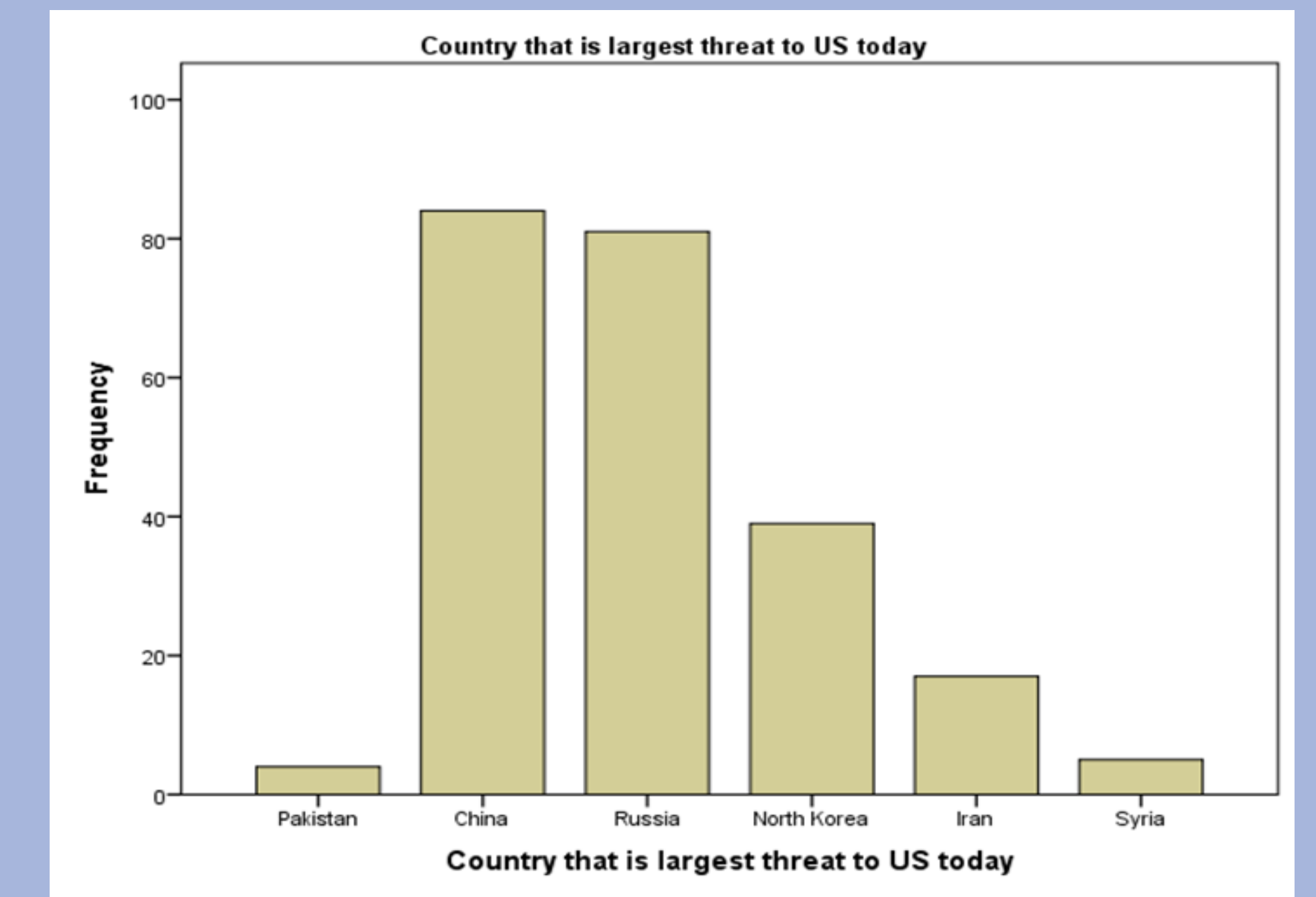
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Republican	52	22.5	25.7	25.7
Democrat	66	28.6	32.7	58.4
Independent	84	36.4	41.6	100.0
Total	202	87.4	100.0	
Missing System	29	12.6		
Total	231	100.0		

	individual political party id	mother's political party id	father's political party id
individual political party id	1	.556**	.523**
		.000	.000
		173	162
mother's political party id		1	.493**
		.000	.000
		173	160
father's political party id			1
			.000
			162

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.311	.085		3.643	.000
mother's political party id	.331	.063	.379	5.270	.000
father's political party id	.320	.063	.364	5.068	.000

a. Dependent Variable: individual political party id



	individual foreign policy orientation	father's foreign policy orientation	mother's foreign policy orientation
individual foreign policy orientation	1	.268**	.289**
		.000	.000
		229	220
father's foreign policy orientation		1	.266**
		.000	.000
		220	220
mother's foreign policy orientation			1
			.000
			225

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.432	.148		9.655	.000
father's foreign policy orientation	.163	.051	.212	3.200	.002
mother's foreign policy orientation	.183	.058	.208	3.132	.002

a. Dependent Variable: individual foreign policy orientation

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.184	.270		4.388	.000
father's foreign policy orientation	.166	.059	.210	2.808	.006
mother's foreign policy orientation	.183	.068	.202	2.692	.008
individual political party id	.062	.074	.078	.848	.398
individual political id	.040	.056	.067	.722	.471
gender: male 0-1	-.223	.098	-.179	-2.269	.025
age of respondent	.054	.051	.084	1.070	.286
race of respondent	.094	.039	.183	2.384	.018
hours spent reading or watching news in day	.035	.053	.053	.663	.508
frequency of voting	-.027	.035	-.063	-.782	.435
how often do you discuss politics?	.105	.056	.157	1.883	.062
area where you primarily grew up: urban to rural	-.064	.063	-.076	-1.017	.311

a. Dependent Variable: individual foreign policy orientation

### Discussion:

Indicators show a statistically significant correlation between youth's domestic political affiliation and their parents' domestic political affiliation. A child's international political tendencies are correlated with slightly less statistical significance (still at the .01 level) to how they perceive their parents' views on international politics. Using regression analysis, I find statistically significant relationships between individual's foreign policy attitudes and both parents' foreign policy attitudes.

Even after controlling for other predictors of foreign policy attitudes, the statistically significant relationships between parents' attitudes and individual attitudes remain. Parental foreign policy orientations strongly shape an individual's international policy views later in life. My analyses reveal that mothers have the single greatest impact on policy orientations both domestically and internationally. While race and gender play a role in foreign policy orientation, they are not as influential as parents' orientations. Shockingly, individual political party identification has no statistically significant impact on foreign policy orientation.

After running linear regressions the null hypothesis can be rejected. The t-values are above the absolute value of 2 for both parents in both regressions. With confidence we can say the observations seen are not simply chance.

While we were not able to procure where the parents of the respondents actually consider themselves politically either domestically or internationally, this does not invalidate the findings. Political socialization is the internalization of another's attitudes, beliefs, and values; therefore, the way a child perceives their parents is as important as the parent's real feelings, for it is the perceived attitudes the child will internalize.

There is a great deal of work to be done to validate this research. For example, a larger and more diverse sample size would be preferred.

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