

**SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS IN THE BEHAVIOR AND SOCIAL
POLITICAL PRACTICES OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A CASE
STUDY OF THE FACULTY OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL
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Abstract: The research analyzed social representations in the behavior and political practices of university students, considering their academic and social relevance. Social representations, conceived as shared constructs that influence perceptions and actions, were studied in the context of the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences of the Autonomous University of Coahuila, Torreón Unit. Aspects such as political identity, student participation, and political practices were addressed.

In this context, the overall objective of the research is to describe how the cultural and social environment in which young university students develop generates the social representations and political practices of this social group. To this end, the following specific objectives were set: to explain how young people's social representations in relation to gender or accepted sexual identity shape their political participation; to describe the political practices through which university youth participate in politics; to identify the relationship between political practices and the representations that university youth have of politics; and to understand the relationship between the role of the family, university dynamics, and exposure to social media in the construction of social representations of politics from the perspective of young people.

The study identified that the university environment, together with factors such as personal experiences, significantly influence students' political education. Students are exposed to diverse academic and social perspectives.

The research found that social representations evolved with academic interaction and sociopolitical events. While not all students demonstrated the same level of political engagement, the diversity of positions and their relationship to civic participation and social change was highlighted.

This study provided a detailed understanding of how individual and sociopolitical factors shaped the social representations of university students. The findings contributed to the understanding of political dynamics in the academic sphere and to the strengthening of student participation as a key element in forming critical citizens committed to the social and political challenges of their community.

Keywords: Civic participation, Critical thinking, Political identity, Sociopolitical context, Higher education.

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In this context, the general objective of the research is to describe how the cultural and social environment in which university students develop generates the social representations and political practices of this social group. To achieve this, the following specific objectives were proposed: to explain how social representations of youth shape their political participation in relation to gender or accepted sexual identity; to describe the political practices through which university students engage in politics; to identify the relationship between political practices and young people's representations of politics; and to understand the connection between the role of family, university dynamics, and exposure

to social media in constructing social representations of politics from the perspective of young people.

The study identified that the university environment, along with factors such as personal experiences, significantly influences the political formation of students. Being exposed to diverse academic and social perspectives shapes their political views.

The research found that social representations evolved through academic interaction and sociopolitical events. While not all students demonstrated the same level of political commitment, the diversity of positions and their relationship with civic participation and social change were highlighted.

The study provided a detailed understanding of how individual and sociopolitical factors shaped university students' social representations. The findings contributed to understanding political dynamics in the academic sphere and strengthening student participation as a key element in forming critical citizens committed to the social and political challenges of their community.

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INTRODUCTION

In this research, I examine social representations in the political behavior and practices of university students, a topic of great relevance in the academic and social spheres.

Social representations are shared mental constructs that influence how people perceive, interpret, and act in their environment. These representations can address various aspects of life, and in this case, they focus on social political practices and student behavior in the university context.

The university environment plays a key role in young people's perception of this issue, with factors such as academic training, student participation, university autonomy, and the relationship with society all contributing. However, the university environment is not the only one that can shape social representations, since, according to Galeano and Acosta (2017), political behavior is also influenced by information flows and the systems of exchange and interaction that develop through the media's own social networks.

Therefore, this can vary depending on different factors, such as the socio-political context, individual experiences, family, friends, and, in this case, their own youth.

In contemporary times, social representations play a crucial role in shaping the political attitudes, behaviors, and practices of individuals, particularly among the university student population. In this context, it is essential to understand how these representations shape the interactions and political engagement of university students. Despite being a crucial stage in the intellectual and social development of individuals, there is a gap in the understanding of social representations and their impact on the political practices of university students. Although higher education is considered an environment conducive to the promotion of critical thinking and civic participation.

Thus, this group of people is distinguished by its social focus, prioritizing health and mental health issues. In addition, they are deeply immersed in technology, as they are digital natives. Another relevant aspect of this generation is its sense of commitment to change. According to Martínez (2018), the interest that this population group arouses in companies, academic institutions, public policy planning centers, and politicians is due to one clear reason: they represent around 27% of the world's population. Furthermore, by 2025, this group is expected to make up more than 70% of the workforce in developed countries.

Thus, young people are distinguished not only by their social focus and commitment to change, but also by the way they address issues they consider priorities, such as health and mental health. These issues are perceived as urgent public concerns, and young people expect

be resolved through public policy. They therefore demand that their demands be addressed, expressing themselves through comments on websites and social media. Although they participate in politics, they do so differently from previous generations, as their interests and forms of participation have evolved. As Gardel (2022) points out, young people are not apathetic or indifferent to political causes, but rather tend to express themselves differently, outside of traditional structures. They are innovating in their forms of participation, no longer following traditional militancy linked to groups or parties, but rather committing themselves to various causes in a more spontaneous manner.

In this regard, the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences at the Autonomous University of Coahuila, located in Ciudad Universitaria (Torreón Campus), served as an interesting case study for exploring these social representations. University students are an essential part of society and key actors in shaping the political and social future of a region or country. Their attitudes, beliefs, and actions in the political sphere have a significant impact on collective life. This research identified how social representations influence the behavior and social political practices of students at this university, examining factors such as political identity, participation in student movements, perception of government institutions, and other related aspects. Through a case study approach, the aim was to shed light on the patterns, trends, and dynamics that characterize the behavior and social political practices of university students at this specific institution.

In this regard, university students tend to be more informed about political issues and have a greater awareness of the problems affecting society compared to other age groups who are not exposed to higher education. This is because they are exposed to various ideas and perspectives through their studies, campus debates, and access to diverse sources of information. For this very reason, university students often show greater interest in issues related to social justice, human rights, environmental sustainability, and gender equality. Galeano and Acosta (2017) emphasize that, in contemporary societies, access to political information is fundamental to the formation of citizens' political judgments, as it has the power to broaden imaginaries and representations about politics, as well as influence forms of grouping and belonging.

Thus, this research focused on university students, as they can be diverse. That is, many of them are interested in political issues and show a commitment to civic participation and social change. In turn, higher education provides them with the opportunity to develop their critical thinking and political awareness, which can influence their vision and participation in politics.

In this context, it is essential to recognize that university students' social representations of the issue are not static, but evolve throughout their academic careers and in response to the sociopolitical events that shape their environment. Furthermore, interaction with peers and teachers of diverse ideological positions further enriches their understanding of political issues, fostering constant dialogue and critical review of pre-existing ideas. As university students immerse themselves in the study of various disciplines, they also develop the ability to analyze political issues from multiple perspectives, integrating knowledge from the social sciences, humanities, and other areas. This interdisciplinary approach allows them to contextualize and better understand the complexity of political problems and their possible solutions, thus contributing to a more nuanced and comprehensive view of politics.

However, it should be noted that not all university students experience the same level of political engagement, nor do they have the same attitudes toward political participation. In this sense, individual differences, family background, ideological orientation, and previous experiences are crucial in shaping their political positions. Some may be more inclined to get involved in student movements and political activism, while others may prefer passive participation, such as voting in elections. Similarly, university students' perception of politics is shaped by a complex interaction of factors, ranging from the academic environment to personal experiences and broader sociopolitical dynamics. This research sought to delve deeper into these changing dynamics, highlighting the importance of understanding the diversity of PS within this population. Doing so contributes to a more comprehensive analysis of how higher education and other factors influence the formation of engaged citizens with a deep understanding of politics and its implications for society.

This study delves into the intersection between social representations, behavior, and social political practices of university students in the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, with the hope of generating valuable knowledge that can contribute to the understanding and strengthening of student political participation in this specific context.

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DEVELOPMENT

This research reviewed studies addressing social representations and aspects related to social political participation, associated with the importance of understanding how young people perceive and relate to the issue from different contexts and countries. Each study analyzed offers a unique perspective on the subject. This work addressed the study of Social Representations in Social Political Behavior and Practices among University Students. Although social representations are fundamental in shaping people's behavior in various areas of life, including the political and social spheres. Villarroel (2007) argues that social representations are specific forms of common sense knowledge that are constructed through exchanges in everyday life (p. 2). But at the same time, Villarroel (2007, p. 2) asserts that social representations are collectively produced phenomena that occur at the intersection between the psychological and the social. In this sense, SRs are perceived as the ways in which social agents give meaning to everyday events and social conditions, and are also defined as the concrete and generally accepted knowledge that guides our actions, beliefs, communication, and understanding of the social, ideal, or physical environment on the subject.

To describe how the cultural and social environment in which young university students develop generates the social representations and political practices of this group of people, the sources selected for the development of background information and conceptualization of the research topic were compiled between 2007 and 2023. This was based on a search for information in different formats, such as articles, books, scientific journals, master's and doctoral theses related to the topic of interest, focusing mainly on studies that contained social representations on political issues, studies specifically on young people, where the main interest was to understand how young people perceive and relate to politics.

In addition, aspects such as the relationship between parents' education and young people's political perceptions, the evolution of representations over time, and generational differences in the understanding of politics are addressed. Each study offers a valuable contribution to the field, whether by identifying patterns in social representations, highlighting the importance of historical context, or focusing on the relationship between political culture and the behavior of the surrounding society.

to this topic. In light of the above, the topics addressed in these studies on social representations of political participation among young people are diverse and offer a deep and multifaceted view of this field.

The compilation aims to bring together the topics that are the focus of researchers in the field and identify common lines of research. In this regard, this section reviewed different approaches that help to reflect on the relationship between youth and politics. A primary concern of this study is to describe how young people develop their concept of politics in relation to their individual experiences. Tejop (2019) mentions that, in young people's perception, politics is defined as a specific set of actions, situations, institutions, and people. The political sphere focuses mainly on entities such as the state, the government, political parties, and public office. Beyond these elements, politics does not extend, as this sphere represents its core. In this context, what is crucial is the way in which young people develop shared perceptions of politics and the values they adopt, which have a profound meaning that guides their actions before making decisions (Ponce, 2023). On the other hand, Berger and Luckman (1995) consider that reality is subject to human interpretation, based on the subjective meaning that individuals attribute to that reality. The world of everyday life is defined as real by members of society through their personal interpretations.

According to the authors, each person's daily life is defined by their immediate context in time and space, that is, by their temporal and physical present. Daily life is evaluated according to its proximity to the individual: some aspects are accessible to them. These aspects make up the individual's personal world and are considered their subjective reality. However, there are aspects of everyday life that are more distant, that are not part of their "here and now." These aspects correspond to the intersubjective world, that is, a world shared by the individual with other members of society (Berger and Luckman, 1995). In this sense, young people, like others, give meaning and significance to politics, participation, and democracy, even if this is not reflected in scientific knowledge in the way they configure it in their subjective perspective (Ponce, 2023). However, based on the above, it is necessary to define the concept of generation in order to move from the single notion of youth to the plurality of "youths," as it incorporates the temporal factor. When we refer to a generation, we refer to a specific social construction, a narrative and a discourse that

implicate belonging, distance, and, at the same time, the inheritance of legacies from other generations (Solís, 2016).

One of the salient aspects pointed out by several authors is that, in the perception of young people, politics is defined as a specific set of actions, situations, institutions, and people. The political sphere focuses mainly on entities such as the state, the government, political parties, and public office. Beyond these elements, politics does not extend, as this sphere represents its core (Tejop, 2019). For his part, Cárdenas (2007) mentions that, with regard to issues, there are several related meanings. Beyond the available academic definitions, we find simplified interpretations of these concepts. He considers that these simplified versions represent how common sense uses and understands these terms, often with their own, more peculiar content and logic, although no less ideological. These interpretations largely condition the meaning.

For her part, Silvia (2017) believes that in order to deepen young people's political participation, we must explain what we mean by political, since if we refer to their inclusion in institutional structures or commonly used practices, it is likely that we will conclude that young people do not participate. However, she mentions that there are alternatives for participation that have an effect on the political system. In other words, defining what we mean by "political" is essential to understanding youth participation in this area. If we limit ourselves to looking only at traditional institutional structures, we may come to the erroneous conclusion that young people do not participate politically, as their involvement in these structures is often low compared to other demographic groups. However, broadening this view of politics is crucial.

Political participation is not limited to voting or being part of government institutions. Young people can get involved in various forms of action that have a significant impact on the political system, such as social mobilization, activism, volunteering in civil organizations, using digital platforms to express their opinions, participating in protests and marches, among others. For his part, Murga (2009) points out that it is becoming more common to examine how political positions are formed, that is, what elements influence the choice of a party or candidate, as well as the type of commitments in which young people will participate and how. It is crucial to consider the media to which they are exposed and how these influence their preferences.

From this point, we analyze how this variety of factors affects the political positions adopted by young people.

On the other hand, the notion of Social Representation has been a subject of great controversy and discussion in the field of Social Psychology in recent times. Both defenders and critics have generated intense debates and have devoted themselves to studying it in depth. Research on its foundations has multiplied, and its inclusion in academic programs at universities around the world is becoming increasingly common. But the origin of this theory began in 1961 in Paris, when Serge Moscovici, a key author, presented his doctoral thesis entitled "Psychoanalysis, Image, and Audience." After years of study, Moscovici introduced the notion of Social Representation. His approach focused on analyzing how French society perceived psychoanalysis, using press analysis and interviews conducted in different social circles.

Locating the precise origins of this theory is challenging. We do not have explicit references to its creator, but we do have reflections from other experts in the field. A review of several of these works reveals a diversity of opinions that allows us to sketch a general picture. Various currents and approaches in psychology and other social disciplines are closely related to social representation theory. Assessments of the importance and scope of its influence vary significantly and are sometimes even contradictory. However, there is general agreement, even on the part of Moscovici himself, that the evolution of social psychology has gone through different stages associated with specific concepts: from attitudes to social cognitions and social representations. These stages have left a clear mark on the history of the discipline as a whole, and specifically on the theory that concerns us.

Regarding social representations in his study, Villarroel (2007) states that a social representation is a type of thinking that is formed collectively through communication processes in groups. It refers to what is commonly known as "common sense thinking." A social representation encompasses the information that is disseminated in society and facilitates understanding of the environment in which different groups interact. In the case we are evaluating, we can see it as an interpretation of the environment where the interaction takes place, which makes it possible to create a map of the territory through which young people move (Villarroel, 2007). Considering the authors' arguments, it can be said that social representations are fundamental in the construction of shared reality. They are like the

the fabric that binds individuals together in a society, providing a common frame of reference that influences people's perceptions, interpretations, and behavior.

In the case of young people, these social representations shape their view of the world and affect how they function in it. Similarly, Bruno et al. (2011) mention that social representations are the result of social processes that develop among the members of a social group. Therefore, social representations are not external elements imposed on an individual, but rather become an essential condition for their operability and capacity for action. They are the result of social processes that develop among the members of a social group. In seeking to understand the complex network of factors that shape young people's political attitudes, it is essential to consider the interaction between their social environments, the media to which they are exposed, and individual interpretations. The socialization process is one of the ways in which political culture manifests itself. Through this process, values, beliefs, myths, symbols, behaviors, and attitudes are disseminated, which the individual adopts during the different phases of their sociocultural development (Alfonso, 2018). Politics, seen from a youth perspective, is framed within a multifaceted context, where social representations and personal experiences intertwine to shape their perceptions and decisions. Understanding these dynamics is essential to addressing the active role that young people play in the political sphere and their contribution to the development of today's societies.

In conclusion, focusing on social representations as shared and dynamic constructs in society seems fundamental to understanding how young people develop their own political perceptions. Furthermore, the discussion on the definition of the political goes beyond traditional institutional structures, recognizing the diversity of ways in which young people can participate in the political sphere, from social mobilization to online activism. The study also emphasizes the importance of considering the plurality of "youths" rather than a single notion of youth, recognizing generational differences and the influence of the cultural and social environment in the formation of political perceptions.

Ultimately, the papers discuss the complex interaction between social representations, individual experiences, and social context in shaping young people's political perceptions. However, some gaps could help to further enrich understanding, as it is possible to fall into generalizations about youth as a homogeneous group. Further exploration of differences within this group in terms of gender, culture, socioeconomic class, or other identities would be beneficial.

could provide a more comprehensive view of variations in political representations. Although studies from different countries are mentioned, greater geographical diversity could provide a more robust global perspective. Cultural and political differences between countries can have a significant impact on young people's political representations. Most of the studies reviewed provide a static view of political representations at a specific point in time. Therefore, longitudinal studies that follow groups of young people over time could reveal how these representations change and develop as individuals mature and experience changes in their environment.

Indeed, by addressing these gaps, understanding of young people's political representations could be further expanded and refined, offering a more complete and accurate view of this complex topic.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The research, with a mixed approach, sought to contribute to the study of social representations in social behavior and practices based on results. It aimed to interpret the reality of university students in relation to the topic and thus understand the political participation of young people today.

The observation unit consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences at the Autonomous University of Coahuila (UAdeC). A random sample of 75 people was selected, including men and women, considering various accepted sexual and gender identities, in order to ensure the representativeness of the population studied.

The instrument used was a structured questionnaire designed on the Google Forms platform. This questionnaire consisted of 11 open and closed questions, distributed in the following sections:

- Word association: Participants were asked to mention the five words that came to mind when they heard the term "politics."
- Perceptions and emotions: Participants were asked about the emotions and feelings they experienced when thinking about politics.
- Influence of politics: A question was included on whether they considered politics to influence their daily lives.
- Academic and social impact: Participants were asked how they perceived the impact of politics on their academic and social environment.

- Sociodemographic data: Information was collected on age, gender, socioeconomic status, and academic level.
- Level of interest in politics: A scale of 1 to 5 was used to measure students' interest in political issues.

Data collection took place during the January-June 2025 semester, through links shared on WhatsApp with groups of students from different majors and semesters at the Faculty. This method allowed for a diverse and representative sample to be obtained. The collection period lasted one week, during which significant participation with varied profiles was achieved.

The questionnaire was reviewed by experts to ensure its validity and reliability. The data collected was analyzed using statistical tools and qualitative techniques, focusing on patterns of association, perceptions, and levels of interest.

This methodology allowed for a comprehensive exploration of social representations of politics among university students, highlighting both their opinions and their sociopolitical experiences.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The data obtained reveal significant trends regarding the social representations of politics among students at the UAdeC Faculty of Political and Social Sciences. The perception of the data obtained shows significant trends regarding the perception of politics among students. Regarding the association of words with the term "politics," 65% of respondents mentioned terms with negative connotations, such as "corruption," "nepotism," and "deception." Twenty-five percent associated it with neutral terms such as "power" and "leadership," while only 10% linked it to positive aspects such as "change" or "participation."



Source: Own elaboration (2025).

With regard to political participation, 40% of students indicated that they occasionally participate in political or social activities, while 15% do so actively. However, the remaining 45% do not participate in any political or social activities, reflecting a considerable lack of interest among almost half of those surveyed.

Interest in politics varied considerably: 30% consider themselves very interested, 40% moderately interested, and 30% not very interested or not interested at all. The influence of politics on daily life also generated divided responses; 50% of students believe it has a direct impact on their lives, while the other 50% believe it does not have a significant influence.

Emotions associated with politics were also diverse: 55% of respondents mentioned feeling anger or distrust when thinking about politics, 25% expressed indifference, and only 20% mentioned positive emotions such as interest or enthusiasm.

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Source: Own elaboration (2025).

CONCLUSIONS

In line with the overall objective of this study, we have described how the cultural and social

of participation. Likewise, the impact of family and university dynamics on the construction of these representations has been explored.

Given that social representations evolve over time and through interaction with the environment, it is recommended that longitudinal studies be conducted to analyze the evolution of these perceptions throughout students' academic careers. In addition, it would be pertinent to investigate differences in gender, socioeconomic status, and family background to obtain a more complete picture of the factors that influence the construction of these representations.

Finally, higher education must play an active role in promoting an informed and participatory political culture, contributing to the formation of citizens committed to decision-making and the transformation of their social and political environment.

FUTURE WORK

Based on this research, an important aspect for the near future would be to analyze the evolution of social representations over time. A longitudinal approach would allow us to observe how students' political opinions and attitudes develop and change during their academic careers. This could help us understand how national and international political events influence social representations as students progress in their education.

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