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Q1(d)

Discuss the political socialization of open and closed societies.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · PSIR GS 2 · 10 marks · Politics of Representation and Participation

Politics of Representation and Participation: Political parties, pressure groups and social movements in advanced industrial and developing societies.

Core demand of the question

- Define political socialisation
- Contrast agents and content in open (plural, contestable) versus closed (monopolised) societies
- Give comparative illustrations
- Note that no society is perfectly open or closed

Revision summary

Political socialisation is the learning of political attitudes, skills and identities.

Open societies use competing agents - family, school, parties, plural media - and allow doubt.

Closed societies monopolise the story through party, clergy or police and punish dissent.

Almond, Verba, Easton, Hyman and **Popper** supply the vocabulary; Iran, China and backsliding democracies are living cases.

No regime is perfectly open or closed; smartphones and migration leak closed systems.

Introduction

Political socialisation is the learning of political attitudes, skills and identities across a life.

Herbert Hyman, **Almond and Verba**, and **Easton and Dennis** made it a comparative variable. The contrast between **open** and **closed** societies is about who may teach, what may be doubted, and whether exit and voice exist.

Body**Open societies**

In an open society - **Karl Popper**'s phrase, used here as a political type - family, school, party, union, temple or mosque, and a plural press compete. Children meet disagreement. Adult socialisation continues through elections, courts and social media. The civic culture can be participant without being unanimous. Mistakes are public. **Democratic backsliding** in the 2020s shows the type is fragile: capturing the public broadcaster, punishing campuses, or flooding the net with a single story is how an open order begins to close.

Closed societies

A closed society monopolises the story of the state. The party, leader, clergy or secret police is the authorised teacher. Family and school repeat the line. Dissent is treated as disease or treason. **Hannah Arendt** on total ideology, and later studies of the Soviet Union, Maoist campaigns, North Korea and theocratic police, describe intense closed socialisation.

Contemporary **Iran** after Woman, Life, Freedom shows both the monopoly (morality police, compulsory hijab) and its leak: private satellite, Instagram, and the **red lipstick** of protest. China combines market opening with tight control of history, Xinjiang and the internet - a hybrid, not a pure type.

Agents and outcomes

Agents are the same nouns - family, school, media, peer group, workplace - with unlike verbs. Open systems produce **cross-pressured** citizens and peaceful turnover, but also polarisation and conspiracy. Closed systems produce conformity, fear, and sudden breaks when the script fails (1989, Arab Spring, 2022 Iran). Migration and smartphones make perfectly closed socialisation harder. Perfectly open socialisation is a myth too: every democracy has official history, a flag, and a security taboo.

Comparative politics therefore treats openness as a **spectrum**. Electoral autocracies socialise for applause, not for alternation. Liberal democracies socialise for contest, and then argue about whether universities and platforms still allow it.

Flow diagram

Open society -> Competing agents
Closed society -> Monopoly script
Competing agents -> Doubt and turnover
Monopoly script -> Fear and rupture

Conclusion

Open societies socialise through competing teachers and the right to doubt. Closed societies socialise through monopoly and fear. Most living regimes sit between, and move.

Facts & figures

Almond and Verba

Civic culture is learned; participant, subject and parochial orientations are products of socialisation, not only of law.

Easton and Dennis

Children acquire diffuse support for the political system before they acquire issue opinions.

Popper

The open society is one in which policies and rulers can be criticised and replaced without violence as the first tool.