

# Association News

## M. Kent Jennings: An Intellectual Profile

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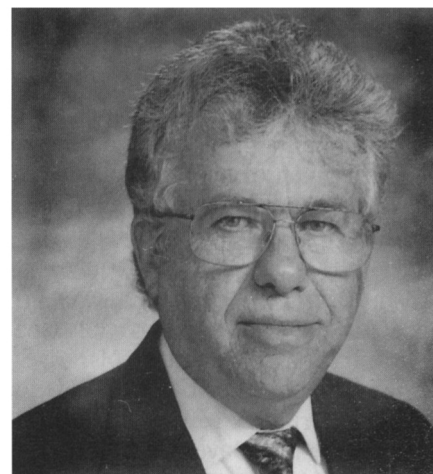
Political science long has been concerned with the central questions of democratic political behavior: What are the prevailing *patterns* of citizen political opinion and behavior? How do these patterns *change* over time and across nations? What are the *sources* of these opinions and behavior, and changes in them? How and how much do citizens *influence* their leaders and their government? Distinguished scholarly careers have been built around providing answers to just one of these questions from the limited vantage point of a single time or country case. It is the rare scholar who has addressed more than one question or one case.

M. Kent Jennings has offered answers to all four of the central questions of democratic political behavior in a variety of settings. He is best known for his path-breaking work on the patterns and development of political preferences and behaviors among young Americans, which is chronicled in two important books (Jennings and Niemi 1974, 1981) and numerous articles in leading journals. Employing the powerful lense of one of the most elegant research designs in the social sciences, his focus has encompassed the life-long development of political attitudes and behavior and illuminated both continuity and change in political behavior. Why people develop the preferences that they have is probably the least understood area of our enterprise, and it is here that Kent's work has proven most indispensable. Throughout, he has returned time and again to the question of citizen influence—in urban communities, school boards, political parties, and mass movements, as well as families and schools. Not content to base his answers on the single

American case—however rich it might be—he extended his scholarly reach into Western Europe and, in recent years, into China in search of more general statements about political behavior.

Kent Jennings was born at the depths of the Depression in the small central valley town of Chowchilla, California. He did his undergraduate work at the University of Redlands and then went on to graduate study at the University of North Carolina, where he earned his Ph.D. in 1961. At the time of his arrival, the North Carolina department had become one of the most intellectually stimulating political science departments in the nation, especially in pioneering the study of political behavior, and Kent quickly immersed himself in this new disciplinary direction. As he was finishing up at North Carolina, he landed a position with the Brookings Institution where he was associated with an important study of the occupational values and perceptions of government employment held by federal employees and the public (Kilpatrick, Cummings, and Jennings 1964a, 1964b).

In 1963, Kent began his academic career as an assistant professor at the University of Michigan. He rose quickly from assistant to associate to full professor and enjoyed a long association with the University's Institute for Social Research (first with its Survey Research Center, then as a core member of the Center for Political Studies) and the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, where he has served as an associate director for over twenty years. He was one of the intellectual leaders of Michigan's political behavior program, whose



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studies of voting behavior and public opinion were establishing it as one of the world's great centers for political science research, and a valuable mentor to a long string of political science students who went on to careers in some of the nation's leading universities. Kent remained on Michigan's faculty for thirty years—until he returned home to California in 1982 to take a position at the University of California—Santa Barbara. But his Michigan ties proved too strong to totally sever, so in 1984 he began dividing his time between Santa Barbara and Michigan before returning full time to the Santa Barbara faculty in 1996.

Over the course of his career, Kent Jennings' work has met the highest standards of our discipline, and he has won some of the highest accolades a political scientist can receive. Few political scientists can match his record of scholarly accomplishment. Among his more than three score papers in refereed journals and edited books are 14 articles

in the *American Political Science Review*, seven articles in the *American Journal of Political Science*, and four articles in the *Journal of Politics*. His books have been published by the Free Press, Princeton University Press (2), and the University of Michigan Press, among others. Kent has served as president of the interdisciplinary International Society of Political Psychology and vice-president of the Midwest Political Science Association. A member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences since 1982, he has been a fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences, the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences, and the National Center for Education in Politics. He also has received a Guggenheim fellowship and has taught as a visiting professor at the University of Tilburg in the Netherlands and the University of California–Los Angeles.

The origin of attitudes and behaviors has proven to be an elusive subject of study for social scientists, who have excelled at the perhaps easier tasks of tracing out choices *given* preferences, changes in attitudes under laboratory stimulation, and the cross-sectional correlates of attitudes and behaviors. By directing our attention to political learning in the years before adulthood, Kent Jennings has made his most valuable contributions to our discipline. His analyses of a national sample of high school seniors in 1965, with linked samples of their parents, teachers, and classmates, provided much of the substance for the burgeoning field of political socialization in the late 1960s and early 1970s. His subsequent studies of these members of the “Class of 1965” in 1973, when they were in their mid-twenties, and in 1982, when they were approaching mid-life, and their parents have provided the crucial bridge between childhood and adult socialization, showing both plasticity and stability in American political attitudes and behavior well into adulthood. His current project in pursuing the class of 1965 into the late 1990s, as they have reached their fifties, will provide an even more complete picture of this generation’s passage through

the life cycle—all of this during one of the most dynamic periods of American politics.

With the vanishing of political socialization as a “hot” field of scientific inquiry and (possibly because of) its integration into the mainstream of the broader study of citizen political behavior, it is easy to take these landmark studies for granted, so familiar have their results become. The importance of the family as a source of partisan loyalties, long assumed before the Jennings’ studies, was firmly established by his early work on the 1965 data (Jennings and Niemi 1968, 1974), and by his subsequent longitudinal analysis of two and then three waves of parent-youth panel data (Jennings and Niemi 1975; Jennings and Niemi 1981; Jennings and Markus 1984). Yet inheritance of familial partisanship was shown to be affected both by parental nurture and the nature of the prevailing familial and extra-familial environment. Where parental partisan cohesiveness was absent, Jennings’ unique comparison of 430 father-mother-child “triplets” revealed that cross-pressured seniors eschewed partisanship themselves or, where they did adopt a partisan loyalty, were more inclined to adopt the mother’s than the father’s (Jennings and Langton 1969; Jennings and Niemi 1974; Beck and Jennings 1975), thus challenging the conventional wisdom about male dominance in political matters.

Even more serious challenges to the conventional wisdom emerged when Kent trained his analytical sight on the sources of policy preferences and orientations toward the political system. Exposure to high-school civics instruction proved to have little influence on civic attitudes (Jennings and Langton 1968; Jennings and Niemi 1974), raising questions about the effectiveness of this staple of educational training and undermining previous claims for the primacy of schools in the political socialization process. Yet, it was soon obvious that the influence of the family paled beyond the realm of partisanship; there was only modest parent-child attitudinal association on the issues of the day, in diffuse support of government, and on a variety of other political matters

(Jennings and Niemi 1968, 1971, 1974, 1978). Even partisanship (Niemi and Jennings 1991; Beck and Jennings 1991) and participation (Beck and Jennings 1982) were shown to be highly responsive to post-adolescent forces in addition to parental influence.

Perhaps these findings were but a harbinger of the intergenerational discontinuity commonly associated with the 1960s, or perhaps they demonstrated the fragility of the intergenerational transmission of political values in any rapidly-changing society (Jennings and Niemi 1974). Whatever the case, Kent Jennings and his associates were instrumental in turning the study of political socialization away from a concentration on intergenerational continuity toward an appreciation of discontinuity and of the openness of at least this generation of adults to the forces of the immediate political period (Jennings 1979; Jennings and Niemi 1974, 1981; Beck and Jennings 1979, 1991), especially peer-group pressures and the experiences of early adulthood (Jennings and Niemi 1974; Jennings and Markus 1977; Jennings 1987; Jennings and Stoker 1995). In so doing, they hastened the submergence of the political socialization field into the political behavior mainstream.

Kent Jennings has not been content to restrict the focus of his work on the development of political orientations to the United States. He has investigated the impact of social structure and family on attitudes towards political change and diversity in Germany (Jennings and Jansen 1976), generational conflict in Germany (Jennings 1976), the family’s role in France (Percheron and Jennings 1981), and the intergenerational transmission of political ideology in the U.S. and seven other western nations (Jennings 1984). The themes of generational change and familial influence so prominent in his American work are echoed in these studies of the socialization process in Western Europe.

Kent’s cross-national research interests also have been focused on political participation, initially through his involvement in a major multinational study of political participation and the potential for pro-

test. The first phase of this study, based on parallel cross-sectional surveys in Austria, Britain, the Netherlands, the United States, and West Germany in 1974 (Barnes, Kaase, et al. 1979), documented an increased potential for protest and other forms of unconventional participation in western publics, driven by changes in fundamental values that seemed more attributable to enduring generational differences than to passing life cycle or period factors. Firmer empirical support for the emergence of this broader repertoire of citizen political action and for a generationally-related value change explanation of its causes was provided by a 1979–81 sequel study (Jennings, Van Deth, et al., 1989), which drew, on data from the Netherlands, the United States, and West Germany employing both panel and cross-sectional components. Presently, he is examining political participation at the local level in China (Jennings 1996, 1997a).

A powerful current flowing through Kent Jennings' American and cross-national research efforts is its focus on political dynamics—on generational, life-cycle, period, and compositional change. Many scholars have been content to view political behavior cross-sectionally and, perforce, only relationally. Kent's preference is to look at change (or the absence of change) over time, usually employing longitudinal and quasi-longitudinal designs. His famous socialization study examined the dynamics of political attitudes and behavior in 1965 high school seniors and their parents across one of the most tumultuous periods of American politics and now is poised to follow the younger cohort through 1997. Building upon early interests in party elites (Jennings and Thomas 1968; Jennings and Niemi 1969) and the representation of women in party politics, Kent and his long-time colleague Warren Miller, whose *festschrift* he coedited (Jennings and Mann 1994), were able to attribute changes in the political attitudes of Democratic and Republican national convention delegates from 1972 through 1980 (Miller and Jennings 1986), alternatively, to delegate circulation and individual change. Kent's persistent focus on continuity

and change, especially his elucidation of the powerful processes of intergenerational change in contemporary Western societies, appears in his cross-national study of political participation (Jennings, Van Deth, et al. 1989) as well.

Another characteristic of Kent Jennings' research agenda has been his long-standing interest in the political behavior of important subgroups—especially protesters, veterans, women, and the elderly—in contemporary societies. Of course, attention to the generation who came of age in the 1960s has been the hallmark of his work on socialization and political action. His work on anti-war protesters (Jennings 1987) and Vietnam-era veterans (Jennings and Markus 1977) from that generation helped to illuminate the effects of their divergent experiences. A recent study of differences in support for confrontational tactics among AIDS activists (Jennings and Anderson 1996) brings his focus on unconventional participation and participants into contemporary times. Moreover, his was some of the earliest research on gender differences (Jennings and Langton 1969; Jennings and Niemi 1971; Jennings and Thomas 1968), a focus that has continued throughout his career (Jennings and Farah 1980, 1981; Jennings 1983, 1990; Jennings and Niemi 1981; Jennings 1997b). He also has been able to chart the effects of aging on political participation (Jennings and Markus 1988) for the now-elderly members of the parent cohort from his 17-year panel study.

Never far below the surface in even his most micro-level studies is Kent's concern with the interaction between citizens and leaders that is the hallmark of democracy. This theme dominated his first major project, an APSA-prize-winning dissertation on community power in Atlanta, later published as *Community Influentials* (Jennings 1964). It receives explicit treatment again in his study of local school board politics (Jennings and Zeigler 1971; Zeigler and Jennings 1974) and his comparison of citizens with national party convention delegates (Miller and Jennings 1986). Jennings and Van Deth (1989) conclude on this

democratic-theory note in considering the relationship between citizen involvement and governmental performance and the consequences of political action. Of course, questions of influence, this time of more immediate authorities in the home and school, were central to his studies of the agents of political socialization.

These substantive and theoretical contributions typically were made possible by the adoption of imaginative research designs well-tailored to the questions at hand. His panel study of the high school class of 1965 and its parallel panel of their parents is a prototype for longitudinal research. Instead of having to make heroic assumptions to support generational-change explanations, Kent was able to track these changes directly as his respondents passed through several life stages and political periods. Instead of having to rely on the notoriously-biased recall of parental orientations, his linkage of interview materials from parents and their children has allowed more direct analysis of the influence of parents—and, using his famous father-mother-child triplets from 1965, of the relative effects of fathers and mothers (Jennings and Niemi 1971)—as well as of schools and peers. The power of the appropriate design also was illustrated in his cross-national political action project (Barnes, Kaase, et al. 1979) and in his study of national convention delegates (Miller and Jennings 1986), where longitudinal data enabled him and his collaborators to provide answers to research questions about which previous scholars could only speculate.

Scholars often resort to high-powered statistical techniques to overcome inadequacies in research design, but this corrective never can be entirely satisfactory. In showing us the advantages of adopting the right design in the first place, Kent Jennings has made an excellent case for investing as much care in choosing our designs as we do in applying our statistical methods. My favorite example of the power of a research design is his recent study of the effects of spouses on political participation: Using the first two waves of the socialization panel to compare the changes in participation levels

for those who had married and not married between waves, Jennings and Stoker (1995) showed how marriage to a politically-active spouse stimulated a previously-inactive partner into participation. To theories of participation because of political mobilization, then, this study adds the powerful force of social mobilization.

It is commonplace to award the highest honors in our profession, especially the presidency of the American Political Science Association, to the most distinguished scholars among us. This, of course, is entirely appropriate, and Kent Jennings is eminently deserving of this honor on these grounds alone. But professors of political science also can contribute to the development of their discipline through their preparation of the next generations of scholars. Kent Jennings has made extraordinary contributions as a mentor, as is recognized by the Mentor of Distinction Award he received from the Women's Caucus for Political Science in 1989 and by the respect he commands among his many Ph.D.s. A constant source of encouragement, support, and high standards during their Ph.D. student years, he has continued to nurture his students through professional collaboration and advice as they have pursued their post-Ph.D. careers. Not only has Kent Jennings studied the transmission of values from generation to generation, he has been an active player in that process throughout his professional life.

Kent Jennings' selection as President of the American Political Science Association comes at a time of significant continuity and change in his own career. He continues a career-long interest in political socialization and in the persistence and change of political values. The fourth wave of his famous socialization panel, funded by the National Science Foundation, is underway to study the 1965 high school seniors as they reach 50 and to compare them with their own offspring, the grandchildren of the parent sample interviewed in 1965. At the same time, his interest in democratic political participation has shifted to a very different venue—the village level in China (Jennings 1996, 1997a, 1997b).

The leading political scientists are driven by an abiding concern with answering important questions about the world around them. His long-standing interest in democratic political behavior has led Kent Jennings to inquire, across a variety of venues and with some of the discipline's most sophisticated research designs, how and why political values and behaviors have changed (or persisted) over time in both citizens and elites. His answers to these questions, arrived at through careful analysis of rich data, have greatly enhanced our understanding of the processes of political socialization here and abroad, of changes within the American parties and their leaders, and of involvement and participation in politics. He has trained his powerful analytic lenses on some of the most important political events of our times—the intergenerational conflicts in the United States of the 1960s, the reforms of American parties in the 1970s, the emergence of new forms of political action in western societies in the 1960s and 1970s, and early signs of what many hope will turn out to be the growing democratization of China. M. Kent Jennings' quest for understanding his world has contributed valuably to our understanding of our world and especially its political continuity and change.

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## About the Author

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## Report of the Executive Director

**Catherine E. Rudder, American Political Science Association**

### Highlights

Few organizations are blessed with the quality of leadership and participation that APSA members willingly offer to this scholarly society. From the creativity of President Elinor Ostrom to the conscientiousness of an anonymous reviewer of an *APSR* or *PS* manuscript, members are served in thousands of ways each year by each other. Our job in the national office is to help orchestrate all the activities of this Association. We suggest, we facilitate, we represent, we implement, and we serve. Ultimately, the strength of our cooperative society rests on all of us who are improving existing programs and creating new ones.

Consider, for example, some of the achievements of this past year. Together, the Association's members, committees, officers, and staff have:

- *Established a Civic Education Task Force*, under President Ostrom's leadership, to address the need to

teach students the theory and skills of civic involvement, and held a two-day retreat to plan the group's activities.

- *Hosted delegations of Eastern European scholars and teachers* from Russia, Latvia, Poland, Bosnia, Hungary, and the Czech Republic for programs at the national office on civic education.
- *Extended the German participation in the Congressional Fellowship Program*, thanks to a stellar review from and the generosity of the German Marshall Fund.
- *Established a journal donation program for Sub-Saharan African universities* upon the end of the AAAS-ACLS journals program, adding to our ongoing contributions to Eastern and Central Europe.
- *Concluded an agreement with the Political Science Association of the United Kingdom to engage in joint projects*, the first of which will be the inclusion of British institutions in next year's *Guide to Graduate Faculty and Programs*.

- *Instituted the Frank J. Goodnow Award* to recognize contributions to the discipline and Association.
- *Conducted focus groups of APSA members on the planned Centennial Campaign* to celebrate the discipline's first 100 years by investing in the next 100.
- *Recruited the leadership for the Campaign*, and organized the Executive Committee and President's Council of the Campaign.
- *Expanded by one-third the Small Research Grants Program* to include projects on the evolution of the discipline and profession.
- *Established a Higher Education Advisory Group* composed of senior academic administrators to advise APSA on higher education issues and to assist APSA in our representational activities.
- *Created a pilot on-line archive of Annual Meeting papers*.
- *Expanded APSA's Web site* to include a searchable index of *APSR* articles and the Annual Meeting Program; set up an interactive fea-