

Political Socialization and the Limits of State Authority to Autonomy: State Driven Education in the United States, the United Arab Emirates, and Syria

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ABSTRACT

Often, State driven education is understood from a basic opposition: States socialize, Individuals resist. This paper examines that distinction by analyzing how education simultaneously develops political conformity and also gives the intellectual building blocks to move beyond it. Using qualitative comparative analysis of centralized education systems, like the United Arab Emirates and Syria, and decentralized systems like the United States, this paper combines political philosophy and educational theory on how different educational frameworks can affect a state's citizen autonomy, political socialization, and the cohesiveness within the state. Falling back on work such as Freire, bell hooks, Socrates, Gellner, Meyer, the paper proposes its own framework titled the Dialectical Cycle of State Education to Individual Autonomy. A five stage model that argues how institutional compliance can transition to developing consciousness to individual autonomy. The comparative evaluation found that neither centralized or decentralized education systems result in independently creating citizens who are either socially compliant or politically autonomous. Instead, it provides certain circumstances where individuals will encounter challenges within the political system. Therefore, the paper argues that autonomy establishes itself through an individual's capacity to engage critically with existing knowledge. This paper's framework contributes to arguments within existing scholarship adjacent to political socialization with reconceptualizing education as first a mechanism for state formation and second a potential foundation for individual autonomy.

I. INTRODUCTION:

Every single political system aims to educate its citizens. A democracy can teach its constitutional values, an authoritarian regime can teach political and personal allegiance towards the state, and a revolutionary state can foster an entirely new definition of citizenship. However, the difference between political indoctrination and civic education remains significantly disputed. If education reforms and builds nations, where should we limit the state's influence over political identity being drawn? Education has been a vital tool that has designed and reconstructed a nation's fundamentals throughout history, moving beyond just the exchange of knowledge but further developing a state's national identity and politically legitimizing a country globally (Gellner, 1983). Governments have used education as a way to foster a shared national

identity, strengthen political institutions and encourage social cohesion within the country and states. The general consensus of schools is that they are an institution built on purely academic instruction, yet they also function as systems that focus on constructing political ideologies, history, and the responsibility of citizenship. Moreover, schools can also be the rudimentary foundations for reinforcing the dominant ideology of society as well (Gramsci, 1971). Therefore, education holds a formative role within the process of state building.

The relationship between state building and education is largely examined, previous scholarship regularly tends to place education as either a mechanism for democratic liberation or a tool of conditioning to a dominant ideology. Comparatively, there has been varied research into the possibility of these functions both coexisting. Therefore, it is contended that state controlled education results in a dialectical paradox: institutional structures that may seem at first to create conformity may also provide the intellectual basis that are important for individual autonomy. Instead of presenting ideological formation and personal thought to be separate, the paper argues that meaningful resistance first begins by mastering the institutional logic, language and assumptions part of the system being challenged. In order to conceptualise this paradox, this paper presents the *Dialectical Cycle of State Education to Individual Autonomy*, a conceptual structure that builds on existing theories of ideological reproduction and critical pedagogy, proposes that being compliant to institutional indoctrination can function as a precondition for critical consciousness.

Where the relationship between education and state building become particularly evident, is by comparing completely different governmental and political frameworks. The United Arab Emirates, United States, and Syria each apply education as a means to develop a shared national identity, though still differing substantially when education policy is represented through centralized state building, democratic division, and authoritarian political control. Most importantly, this paper asserts that state-controlled, educational institutions do privileges quantified rote memorization and conformity – indoctrinating individuals to fit the the role of the ‘just citizen’ – going through this institutional molding is foundational for intellectual autonomy. For an individual to properly critique the state's indoctrination and question authority, they must first master the framework of the state's citizen model. Thus, in this essay, I will be examining how *centralized education models (UAE, Syria) and the decentralized model (US) differently affect individual autonomy and societal cohesion, and the role transition from institutional compliance to critical consciousness play in producing that effect?* By examining these differing structures, this paper provides an insight into the functions of education, not simply as an institution, but as a mechanism where governments focus on sustaining political legitimacy and building political identity.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1 Education, Power, and Ideology

Education is perceived by existing scholarship as a neutral, sometimes positive framework, where an institution's sole focus is on the steady transmission of knowledge. However, existing scholarship argues

that the basis of how education is formed, ruled and controlled all hold a certain degree of authority and domination – never being politically neutral (Freire, 1970). Instead of simply just teaching students, educational institutions focus on shaping how citizens comprehend and perceive history, authority, citizenship and their relationship with the state. As a result, it places education in a morally grey position, while it does have the abilities to develop certain civic values, it can equally develop into a tool where states use it as a mode of strengthening political authority and reproducing certain ideologies.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire argues against the conventional assumption that education is a politically neutral concept, rather redirecting us to how education is a tool for domination, reflecting the morals and values of the society that constructs it (Freire, 1970). Freire discusses that the ‘banking model’ of education, when teachers passively deposit knowledge into students’ brains, expects them to simply memorize information without critically analyzing and understanding it. Freire continues to state that the student who successfully does deposit this information is acknowledged and validated by the educator, in turn perpetuating mindless behaviour of storage – insufficiently having formed a critical consciousness, they ultimately adapt to existing political and social structure (Freire, 1970, pp 72-76). Conversely, Freire’s ‘problem-posing model’ of education promotes a dialogical approach to learning, where students and teachers both engage in conversation to both learn instead of just simple one way lectures (Freire, 1970, pp 80-81). This model transforms education into a process where learners perceive the world not as just a singular dimension of what’s told to them, accepting reality as it is – but instead as Freire stated: “a reality in process, in transformation” (Freire, 1970, pp 83). In essence, Freire presents education as an inherently political and ethical concept, implying that the importance of its purpose is if the intended outcome of independent thought is developed.

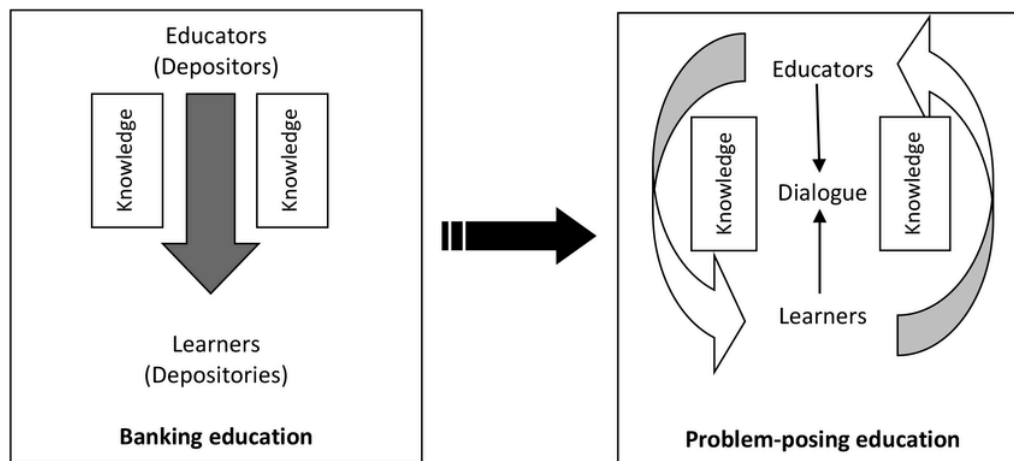


Figure 1: Contradictory educator-learner relationships between the banking education and the problem-posing education (Anis Shaari & Hairul Nizam Ismail, 2010)

Similarly to Freire's conception of education as a practice to self autonomy and freedom, Hooks rejects the traditional transmission of knowledge and instead promotes a collective learning process where both teacher and student learn through mutual intellectual conversation, with the goal of personal growth for

both. In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the freedom to practice*, Hooks asserts that teachers must not develop a hierarchical structure that focuses on only transmitting knowledge, but rather to share that intellectual and spiritual growth with their students, making learning collaborative within the classroom (hooks, 1994, pp 11-13). Self actualization is the rudimentary principles within hooks theory, wherein educators constantly pursue intellectual, ethical and emotional growth as a way to preserve the classroom as a liberatory environment rather than a controlled environment (hooks, 1994, pg 16-18). Therefore, self actualization suggests that education should develop scholarly autonomy that is relevant for both students and teachers rather than passively acceptance, moreover it can be perceived as a safeguard against unethical production of political ideology. Essentially, hooks conceptualizes education to not just resist oppression, but perpetually create inclusive learning environments and communities founded on critical thinking, shared participation and mutual responsibility.

Both Freire and hooks establish education as an ethical and political concept where individuals develop the frameworks to critically question, instead of simply just consuming dominant ideologies and structures of authority mindlessly, without properly synthesizing it. Instead of quantifying success in education by the amount of knowledge you can remember, it instead establishes success in education through the cultivating of consciousness, intellectual autonomy and dialogue – all imperative parts to meaningful learning. Using this structure, the ethical question of legitimacy within education isn't simply how it influences political identity – such can be argued that this influence is unavoidable – but instead how that influence is utilized. Hook's advocacy of engaged pedagogy, and Freire's problem-posing education model, show that society can develop personal self actualization and intellectual consciousness, allowing individuals to properly assess political ideologies independently rather than passively following or being against them.

2.3 State formation, Hegemony and International legitimacy

Modern states often require far more political institutions or territorial boundaries to support themselves. While governments may hold legal authority over their own populations, protecting that authority is only maintained when citizens of the nation collectively recognize their place in a shared political community. Moreover, education as a tool encompasses a more significant role over its conventional use of academic teaching, transcending into a mechanism that governments use to reshape an individual's national identity and reinforce political legitimacy (Gellner, 1983). In *Nations and Nationalism by Ernest Gellner*, Gellner states that nationalism is intrinsically “a theory of political legitimacy”, having the national and political unit identical rather than separate identities (Gellner, 1983, pp 1). The earlier conceptions of a nation was assumed by the state that these nations were timeless and naturally occurring societies. Gellner however contended the fact that these nations were not timeless and that nationalism surfaced as a result of industrialization, where bureaucracies and complex economies needed a culturally standardized population able to work and communicate through shared language, shared labour and shared national identity (Gellner, 1983, pp 33-35). Historically, People didn't need to share similar cultures, pre industrial societies could survive on being in smaller communities. Education itself was limited to only the ultra

wealthy and was not a necessity to low income families since physical labour benefited them more than developed intellectual abilities and other opportunities that education provides. However, after industrialization was introduced as a driving mechanism of economic growth for states, bureaucracies and modern economies had to function based on people being able to read and write, communicate in a standardized language and understand laws within society. Industrial societies need a common culture, and the ideology of nationalism supports this (Gellner, 1983, pp 33-38). Therefore, education extends beyond just developing literacy or intellectual abilities; it becomes a foundational institution that cultivates a shared national consciousness, allowing citizens to associate with the state, eventually also strengthening political legitimacy as well. This framework, argued by Gellner, positions education no more as a politically neutral institution, but as a tool of nation building that protects the political legitimacy of the modern state.

Moving forward, although Freire and hooks describe the effect of education and either reproducing conformity or consciousness on an individual, Antonio Gramsci places education between the broader frameworks through which political and social power is maintained. Gramsci argues that the concept of intellectual activity belongs to a certain class labelled the 'intellectuals', claiming that every individual performs some form of intellectual pursuit and contributes to modifying and sustaining a certain "conception of the world" (Gramsci, 1971). However, educational institutions play an imperative role in establishing this intellectual pursuit, as Gramsci defines education as a mechanism used in which different levels of intellectuals are created (Gramsci, 1970). This bridges education closely to his conception of hegemony, where 'dominant groups' sustain authority not simply from conformity, but also from the organization of social consent. Gramsci identifies between political society, where the state and civil society exercises its domination, that leads dominant groups to exercise hegemony, and obtain the 'impromptu' consent of the population (Gramsci, 1971). Therefore, education can be comprehended to be a part of a wider social process, in which certain conceptions and ideas of society become normalized.

Whilst education is often viewed as a national institution, contemporary education systems never develop secluded from the expansive, international community. Modern states often design their education systems and educational policies in support of internationally, western recognized models that control what constitutes a modern and legitimate state. *John W Meyers, The World Society and the Nation State's* paper expands on this idea on his World Society Theory, contending that the nation state is not solely developed by domestic, internal policies, but instead through worldwide generalized norms and institutional models that have been culturally accepted, influencing the state's domestic policies (Meyer et al, 1997). Instead of seeing education as this national mechanism, Meyer instead asserts that governments take on a certain education structure not because it is designed for the country but because it is globally legitimized as necessary features of a modern nation state. Education within a state can reflect the internationally accepted frameworks around citizenship, human rights, socioeconomic development, and even equality – many of which are spread between international communities (Meyer et al, 1997). This creates what Meyer describes as isomorphism, where states that have completely different political, historical and cultural structures all produce similar education systems and policies because they all adopt and respond to the same internationally recognized models of legitimacy of education. As Meyer says,

worldwide models “define and legitimate agendas for local action,” changing education policies in every nation state, despite domestic circumstances (Meyer et al, 1997). Thus, education is not understood as a tool governments use to meet national objectives, but to also follow global expectations to provide legitimized statehood.

Together, Gellner and Meyer provide us with a foreground of how education works as a dual political function. Internally, Gellner demonstrates how shared national identity for citizens to establish political legitimacy and the modern state, whilst Gramsci presents how normalizing these shared conceptions also add to the reproduction of social consent and political power. Internationally, Meyer shows how a modern state conforms to global institutional expectations of modern statehood. Therefore, education works as a tool for governments to consolidate authority, organize social consent and position themselves within international political order. Such theoretical frameworks provide a background for understanding why different governmental systems adopt different education structures and how that influences nation building across the United Arab Emirates, United States and Syria.

2.4 The Socratic Method and Critical Inquiry

The Socratic method offers us a philosophical foundation for comprehending education as a mode for forging critical thought rather than passive absorption of established knowledge. Instead of positioning the educator as the singular authority, providing corrected answers, the Socratic method depends on constant dialogue and questioning, supporting students to study the assumption behind their conclusions and beliefs (Conor, Colorado State University, nd). Thus, the purpose isn't to simply get the correct answer, but uncover the uncertainty and complexity behind an argument, making sure the learner reassess what they previously perceived as true. As shown in the Figure 2 below, the structure begins with questioning an observation before going through inductive reasoning to develop a general principle; using that formed principle to get tested through deductive reasoning, supporting that principle with facts and data, that returns to the learner continuing to question (Shanahan, Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, nd). With this, knowledge becomes a system instead of a final product. This is meaningful to present research since it provides a philosophical basis for the shift from institutional compliance and critical consciousness for my dialectical model.

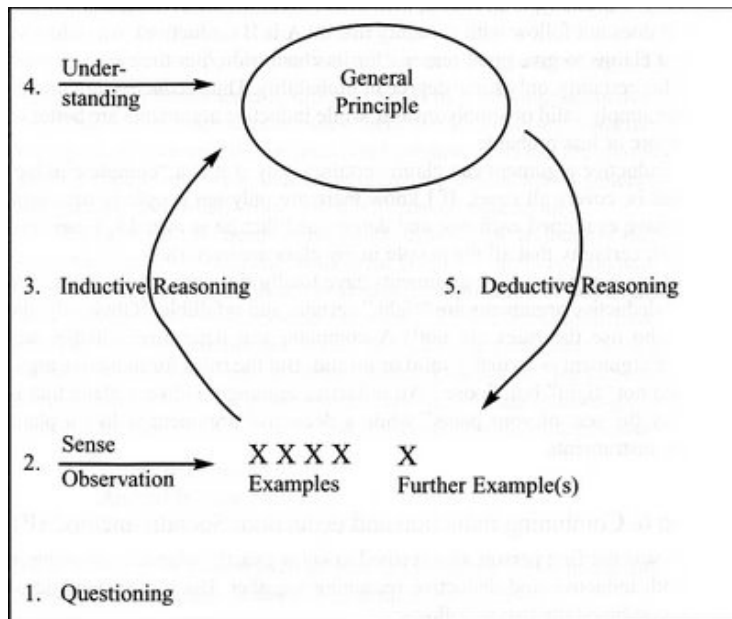


Figure 2: The Socratic process of questioning, observation, and reasoning. (European Influence on American Education, nd)

2.5 The Central Limitation of Educational Autonomy

Throughout all the previously mentioned literature, demonstrates a perpetuated criticism with conventional education. Freire and hooks both argue that the system makes learners passive consumers of information without properly developing critical thinking, while Socratic education questions instead of simply accepting established knowledge. Nevertheless, all these theoretical frameworks possess a political limitation: states do not develop an education system to purely optimize individual autonomy. Like Gellner stated, education contributes to political legitimacy and national identity, as well Meyer establishes how these states influence their education systems with internationally recognized structures of legitimate education. Hence, a state is likely unwilling to abandon or modify standardized education structures, even if alternative methods may promote more critically conscious citizens, since it could challenge national cohesion, international legitimacy, and institutional authority.

A contradiction therefore exists within existing literature. Pedagogical theories frequently recognize limitations in the passive teaching models of existing educational structures and put forward more liberatory alternatives, yet the international and political circumstances recognized by those theorists with state formation make implementation difficult. Therefore, the issue is not if a state should cultivate more autonomous learners, but instead how individual autonomy can develop when education must perform its political purpose for the state. Autonomy cannot be realized as replacing state driven education for an idealistic alternative. Rather, it's more critical to analyze if the existing educational structures can provide itself autonomy for individuals with the existing intellectual resources required, that ultimately questions it. The Dialectical Cycle of State Education to Individual Autonomy proposes a method that addresses

both the state's need to legitimize and politically socialize and the individual's necessity for individual judgment.

2.6 The Research Gap and this Papers Contribution

The existing scholarship that has thoroughly researched this topic establishes that education is used as a tool for political socialization, state building, national identity, and civic growth. Research on countries like the UAE, USA, and Syria present how these processes all function under different education frameworks: centralized, decentralized and centralized under conflict. However, there is less focus on how these frameworks affect our relationship between societal cohesion and individual autonomy through cultivating critical consciousness. Thus, this paper tackles that gap with a comparative analysis of the three countries studied whilst also simultaneously introducing an original framework titled the 'Dialectical Cycle of State Education to Individual Autonomy' as its analytical structure. This model puts forward a five step progression – from the first stage of 'necessary evil', where it establishes conforming and entering the existing system, moving to the next stage 'the banking phase', mastering and absorbing the knowledge, then 'encountering contradiction' where the learner encounters an inconsistency within the existing knowledge, leading them to the 'critically re-evaluating' stage where they begin using the intellectual tools given to them to begin questioning the fallacies and the world around them, then the final stage of 'becoming the autonomous thinker' where critical consciousness is achieved, allowing learners to properly utilize the intellectual tools and question or challenge the state's ideological assumptions and fallacies. The framework lets the paper analyze if education moves a citizen beyond institutional conformity and compliance, whilst sustaining the social cohesion that education focuses on producing.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Methodology & Case Selection

The paper uses qualitative, comparative methodology influenced by political and educational theory. Instead of attempting to measure autonomy or state a direct causal relationship between political behaviour and education, the paper examines how different educational structures could produce constraints on political socialization and autonomy. The three chosen case studies: United Arab Emirates and Syria's centralized education system and United States decentralized system – each case study was chosen exclusively for a centralized system, decentralized and a system within conflict. The analysis resources will consist of the academic literature, educational policy documents, institutional and government reports, and previous research on political socialization. Each case study is analyzed from a political philosophical lens and framework, focused on the transition from institutional conformity to critical consciousness. Moreover, this paper employs the Dialectical Model of State Education to Individual Autonomy to study how students first acquire the norms and knowledge of the existing institution, and then apply those intellectual tools to critically dissect the political structures that formed

them. Instead of saying which educational structure is ‘superior’, the chosen methodology evaluates the friction each model cultivates among social cohesion, state authority, and individual autonomy

3.2 The Dialectical Cycle of State Education to Individual Autonomy

The Dialectical Cycle of State Education to Individual Autonomy proposes that individual autonomy and institutional compliance are not opposing concepts. Instead of assuming that state driven education creates permanent conformity – the model contends that the similar institutional frameworks that individuals initially learn from already provides the intellectual tools required to evaluate those structures individually. Although, this development isn't automatic. The model consists of five stages: The ‘Necessary Evil’, The Banking Phase, Encountering Contradiction, Critically Re-evaluating, and finally Becoming the Autonomous Thinker.

Dialectical Cycle of State Education to Individual Autonomy.

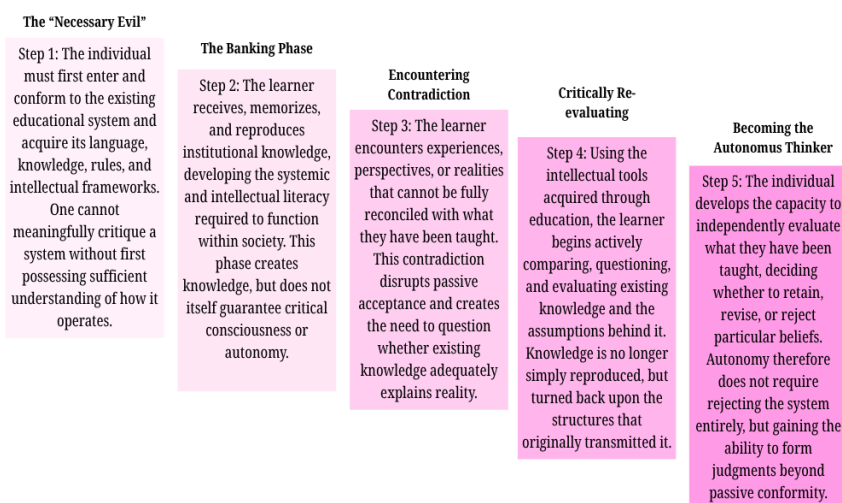


Figure 3: Conceptual framework to demonstrate the Dialectical Cycle of State Education to Individual Autonomy (Authors own model)

The First stage – ‘The Necessary Evil’ – acknowledges that you must enter the existing system of knowledge before meaningfully questioning it. A learner cannot critique historical narrative, institutional assumptions and political structures before obtaining some level of understanding of the concepts, language, etc. Knowledge provided by the state may be specific, incomplete or ideological, however complete intellectual independence without institutional knowledge is not necessary nor possible for complete individual autonomy. Instead, the educational institution provides the essential intellectual concepts – in which the wider political and social world becomes comprehensible.

This leads to the next stage, Stage two – *The Banking Phase*. Falling back on Freire's concept of 'the banking model', the learner takes in information, memorizes, and reproduces the institutionally sanctioned information. The individual learns to perform and conform with the system to obtain institutional success by mastering concepts, language and the standards to success. The model does not claim that by memorizing information an individual will develop critical consciousness. Many learners can hold an abundance of knowledge and still be conformist. Knowledge acquisition, however, should not be classified as harmful to self autonomy. Learners must obtain knowledge to formulate arguments, compare ideas, identify inconsistencies, and evaluate political claims. Therefore, the Banking Phase provides all the systematic and intellectual literacy skills essential for individual critique, even if it may not guarantee that critique to happen.

However, the transformation from conformity to autonomy materializes in the third stage, stage 3 – *Encountering Contradiction*. Learners will encounter an experience, conflicting perspective, or social or political reality that cannot be justly resolved with that existing knowledge they had obtained previously. This moment begins in most learners, exposing the limitations, contested nature or incompleteness of the existing knowledge and disrupts an individual's passive acceptance. A single contradiction won't automatically build critical consciousness, an individual may respond by ignoring it or conforming even more. Nonetheless, it begins a possible transformation by making basic information memorization to be intellectually insufficient.

Continuing, the fourth stage, *Critically re-evaluating*, begins when a learner now actively uses the intellectual tools they obtained from the second stage, to evaluate the existing knowledge from which they were formed originally. Instead of just questioning what knowledge to memorize, they begin questioning why the specific information is taught, and how it is relevant to their existing realities and others. Therefore, the individual develops a new relationship with knowledge. No longer is it receiving, memorizing, and reproducing, but now questioned and challenged as well. Stage four reflects the significance of critical questioning, whilst not having the learner automatically oppose the state or reject all institutional knowledge.

Finally, the fifth stage, *Becoming the Autonomous Thinker*. Stage five represents autonomous individuals having the capacity to independently evaluate what is being taught to revise, retain, or reject specific beliefs. Autonomy is not classified as opposition towards authority and the state. Individuals could agree with the state, retain knowledge originally taught by classic institutions, and even accept national identity perpetuated by education – while still having autonomy, provided that it results from after an individual critically judges and assesses instead of passive conformity. Rejecting the state itself does not prove autonomy if that rejection is passive reproduction from an ideology without previous examination. The factor of success is if the individual develops the intellectual freedom to classify their personal position independently.

All these stages: The 'Necessary Evil', The Banking Phase, Encountering Contradiction, Critically Re-evaluating, and Becoming the Autonomous Thinker, explain how critical consciousness can develop

within instead of outside existing educational frameworks. The model does not assume all learners will successfully advance through each stage, or that the states cultivate the conditions of education for individual autonomy. Rather, it proposes that since states cannot demoralize the role of education in political socialization, international legitimacy, and national cohesion, pursuing autonomy also must recognize the system as it exists. Thus, the paradox of state education is the knowledge that was transferred to make individuals socialize can, once exposed to an inconsistency and subject themselves to critically examine it, transform into individuals who hold the capacity to evaluate the system that educated them independently.

IV. COMPARITIVE ANALYSIS OF UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, UNITED STATES AND SYRIA

4.1 Centralization, Decentralization, and its Construction on National Identity

The role of education is rarely only about education, it's a doctrine set by the state that tells what a citizen must be. Before the student is even taught what the state expects them to understand, that very state has already determined what is worth and what isn't worth knowing. Therefore, the curriculum becomes more than just a collection of subjects, simply taught: it becomes a mode where society defines itself and propagates the identity it wants its citizens to take on. With this, as this process becomes more centralized, the more control and authority the state holds in cultivating a common, shared national history, citizenship, culture and identity. Centralized governments therefore create more cohesion since citizens are disclosed the same national narratives and institutions; however, the process of establishing a common identity, inherently restricts the citizens ability to question the built assumptions in which identity is being constructed.

The main difference between decentralized and centralized education is not the level of state control, but the difference each develops between an individual's capacity and societal cohesion to understand the politics they are taught. This itself, develops a central contradiction regarding state managed education. Nations must require a level of common belief in order to uphold social cohesion, but if the more powerful a state's authority over that belief is emphasized, the possibility of cohesion turning into compliance becomes more significant. First, the citizen is taught the values, language, rules, history and conception of "good citizen" within the nation; it's only after that they are allowed to question if the values they are taught deserve acceptance. A decentralized system however changes this narrative. By delegating control across states, authority is distributed – affecting local institutions, education, teachers, communities and the state itself. The United States isn't excluding political socialization, rather constructing national identity becomes more contested and less singular. Citizens within may encounter different perspectives on American history, citizenship and even political responsibility. The answer isn't simply if a system provides more autonomy, nor that centralization is the equivalent to indoctrination. Rather, its difference lies between whether the education system can create sufficient space for their citizens having a national identity that allows them to critically interpret the political conditions that produced it.

The United Arab Emirates and Syria present the challenges and possibilities in differing political contexts. Within the UAE, centralized education functions as a tool to produce a cohesive national identity in a young state, strengthening the determined important values from the state such as Emirati values and national development. However, in Syria a centralized education systems concept of political socialization, in this context, becomes closely tied with regime legitimacy, showing how common curriculums state goal can change from cultivating national cohesion to reproducing political, regime authority. The United States demonstrates to us a different structure: a decentralized system develops national identity to become less uniform, but also develops a space for political disagreements and competing interpretations. Therefore, the question simply isn't if education should be decentralized or centralized. It is rather if the structure allows citizens to remain only as a product of the political system that educated them, or rather if they can become capable of reshaping and examining it. Thus, this is where the transition from institutional compliance to critical consciousness becomes imperative to understanding if education proposes true significance in producing a cohesive citizen, an autonomous citizen, or the perplexing possibility of both.

4.2 United Arab Emirates: Centralized Education System

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) gives us a relevant example of how a country can cultivate a centrally coordinated education system that functions as a mechanism of state building, especially with relevance to the country's very recent formation and its strong focus on a shared national identity. Within the UAE, the government directly presents education as an instrument instead of simply an academic institution. It's established within the Ministry of Education's 2026 Education Charter as “a unified national vision for education” (Ministry of Education, 2026) clearly outlining national identity to be a part of the three central pillars, alongside belonging, loyalty and honor to the Arabic language, Islamic values and Emirati values. The charter furthermore details that these central principles must be systematically implemented into the curricula and influence all educational practices, showing just how significant national identity is embedded into the formal structure of education within the UAE (Ministry of Education, 2026). Similarly, the UAE's Centennial 2071 plan states that “happy and cohesive society” and “excellent education” are a part of the central pillars for a countries long term development, connecting education to emirati values, innovation, social cohesion, ethics and preparation for the future generation (UAE Government, 2026). Therefore, education works together as a process of creating human capital and developing civic and cultural traits that are deemed necessary for the continuation of the nation. Moreover, this association between both is further demonstrated by Saldana Martin's thesis analysis of political socialization within the UAE, identifying education as an instrument where the formation of political attitudes are built (Saldana Martin, 2014). Her research shows that the UAEs government is intentionally designing university curricula and schools to avoid controversial political topics, whilst also finding that personal interactions between teachers and students show alternating political perspectives (Saldana Martin, 2014, pp 120). This collected evidence provides a significant perspective to such research since it shows that even with a centralized education framework, it does not guarantee shared political consciousness; instead, the same existing educational institutions where the government attempts to shape political identity, exposes that students can have their own perspectives and are capable of developing critical

thought. The UAE demonstrates its complexity and strengths of a centralized education system as a state building tool: Even if a state controls a certain narrative of national identity, the educated citizens still withhold the capacity to challenge and interpret their own political identity for themselves, challenging the state that seeks to cultivate it.

4.3 United States: Decentralized Education System

Contrastingly, with the UAE's centralized education system, the United States works through a significantly more decentralized system where the responsibility of education becomes entirely towards the local governments and individual states. The US Department of Education states explicitly that within the communities within the states, they establish schools, curricula, and the requirements for graduating and enrollment – presenting how the federal government has no influence or control over education compared to the UAE's government (US Department of Education, nd). This decentralization develops a unique relationship between political socialization and education, where national identity is not affected simply from a uniform, shared curriculum but developed through multiple local, state and institutional education environments. Researcher Lee H Ehman's review on American political socialization supports this difference, where he found that schools contribute substantially to the transmission of political knowledge, whereas the control over political participation and attitudes is much less consistent (Ehman, 1980). Particularly, Ehman classifies all these different factors: classroom, teachers, student participation, and peer to peer relationships as factors that contribute to political socialization within American schooling, instead of contributing to the school curriculum itself as the single source of political influence (Ehman, 1980, pp 99). His research indicates that schooling is critical for acquiring political awareness and knowledge, however its effect over political participation and attitudes is significantly weaker and more dependent on factors outside the curriculum. Therefore, the American case shows how political socialization occurs without a centralized, singular curriculum – but instead political identity emerges through multiple factors from teachers, peers, other social institutions and the students' environment (Ehman, 1980, pp 99). This demonstrates how the United States is a beneficial contrast to the UAE, since decentralization limits states authority to apply a uniform understanding of national identity to citizens within a state, whilst simultaneously creating diverse political narratives, developed from when citizens are educated.

4.4 Syria: Education during conflict

Syria's case provides a significant case when analyzing how education during conflict can change the relationship between it with state authority and political socialization. Before the Syrian conflict, the state's education curriculum was highly centralized within the former Assad regime – with the Ministry of Education governing educational policy, curricula and learning outcomes between both private and public schools. Researcher Mohammed Musad argues that the centralized control within the state's education system allowed the regime to hold political control over the broader part of the regime's border system, having textbooks portray the Assad history as foundational to Syria's national legitimacy and development (Masud, 2018, pp 83). Though, the outbreak of conflict that occurred in 2011 dismantled

this centralized model. Education within Syria suffered immense social and physical disruption, where approximately 2 million Syrian children were estimated to be left out of school in 2015 – as well as 7,000 schools and educational institutions being destroyed as well (UNICEF, nd). As well during this time, education changed into a social weapon for politicians and political actors: Masud reports that rebel groups attempted to create their own school curricula and write their own textbooks to challenge Assad's authority (Masud, 2018, pp 85-86). This shows us how education during conflict can become a battle where competing political claims to authority and identities are reconstructed – with the Syrian government constantly fighting with different rebel groups, it allows the state government to control the historical narrative of how the conflict will be presented for the next generation, and demonstrates just how important education reform and attempted domination within the Syrian government is in protecting the internal regime. The Syrian Ministry of Education's 2022 discussion paper similarly portrays education as a necessity in reconstructing the country after war and conflict, further contending how democratic communication and practice, global/national citizenship, and higher order thinking is essential foundation for education transformation (Syrian Arab Republic Ministry of Education, 2022). Thus, Syria presents how the instability of institutional compliance changes when authority compliance becomes contested; that education that was formerly a highly centralized tool of political socialization becomes fragmented between competing political actors, raising concerns of how conflict can strengthen critical consciousness and autonomy, or weaken it from the disjointed education framework that's necessary allowing for social cohesion between citizens.

4.5 Comparative Analysis

All three case studies each present that centralized systems and decentralized systems both create differing outcomes – but rather develop an environment where individuals can develop political consciousness. Interestingly, the US and the UAE both suggest that traditional education holds a more limited role in directly influencing an individual's political beliefs and attitudes than typically assumed. Saldana Martin's research on the UAE describes how controversial political topics tend to be given little attention within traditional education, where a big influence on students' political beliefs are developed from external interactions outside of school (Saladana Martin, 2014). Comparatively, Ehman's research on the US presents that although school plays a significant role in influencing students' political attitudes and participation, its effect is less significant than external factors that happen outside of the classroom - like friends, family, news etc (Ehman, 1980). Both systems present how education does not directly affect individual autonomy, but rather provides individuals with the intellectual tools and fundamental knowledge that can be used to develop political consciousness independently. This is a significant finding since it disputes the assumption that state driven education, whether decentralized or centralized, should decrease autonomy. If traditional education does not fully control what an individual believes, education therefore provides flexibility for citizens to go through experiences and contradictions outside the curriculum, producing political consciousness independent from the state's goal.

However, Syria presents a different case, where education is more influenced by political authority, as a centralized system. During conflict, competing political authorities used education as a tool of

indoctrination to political propaganda, limiting individual autonomy and political narratives. Therefore, education became a contested tool where political actors continuously tried to manipulate it. Yet even in this instance, the effort of monopolizing political consciousness should not be confused with the ability to properly achieve it. Consequently, this comparison indicates how the question is not simply if education should be decentralized or centralized, rather if the intellectual knowledge that's obtained, from any system, can be transformed into individual political judgement. This flexibility proves the possibility of autonomy being developed by traditional state education.

5.5.1 Application of Dialectical Cycle of State Education to Individual Autonomy

Applying it to the paper's proposed model: The Dialectical Cycle of State Education to Individual Autonomy, all three case studies would begin with all citizens entering stage 1: The 'Necessary Evil'. Individuals conform and enter the education system – where their goal is to acquire knowledge like language, civic values, history, and all intellectual foundations necessary within each society. This builds onto stage 2: The Banking Phase, where students will memorize and reproduce knowledge – working within the system. As demonstrated by the UAE and US, this acquisition of knowledge does not directly influence an individual's political beliefs. Rather, the knowledge obtained gives a basis for the individual's later experience outside the classroom. That's when students will use their gained knowledge to deal with stage 3: Encountering Contradiction, where a citizen possibly encounters an opposing political narrative, that leads them to stage 4: Critically Re-evaluating. At this stage, the individual starts using the obtained intellectual tools from their formal education, towards challenging the assumptions that originated from that existing knowledge. With the case of Syria, it presents how the influence of political domination within education can significantly decrease individual autonomy and critical consciousness. However, that attempt in manipulating consciousness is still not guaranteed compliance. Finally, the fifth stage: Becoming the Autonomous Thinker, emerges after an individual properly challenges and comes to an independent conclusion – achieving critical consciousness and individual autonomy.

V. DISCUSSION

5.1 Paradox of Political Autonomy

The relationship between individual autonomy and political socialization proposes a philosophical paradox: if every citizen is influenced by external institutions, political and cultural narratives before developing the ability to evaluate independently, does autonomy even exist? All three case studies show us how no person builds their political identity in isolation. Before a citizen can challenge a political belief, they must first have the knowledge and language to first comprehend them. In that context, it proves that individuals are inherently influenced before they can decide to reject or accept. Therefore, autonomy should not exist away from these influences, it should instead be bridged together as a part of being able to examine those beliefs and come to the conclusion of whether they deserve to be kept.

Education is paradoxical. Education socializes you and provides existing knowledge that are necessary for developing self autonomy, but at the same time it is that choice of whether what knowledge is exposed to the citizen simultaneously constrains and shapes the citizen to whatever authority controls that exposure. Between each case study, from the UAE, USA and Syria, education presents different forms of political knowledge and different conceptions of reality. However, this does not universally determine what all citizens believe. The knowledge that is first presented to a citizen of what an existing political structure looks like, can later become the mechanism that produces them to challenge it. History is taught to understand the past and present, but the knowledge of that history can be taught to question how it's portrayed. Language can perpetuate a political narrative, but it can also critique it. Education can inform a citizen how to understand authority and simultaneously give them the tools to question if the authority is legit.

Furthermore, this does not mean that education directly produces autonomy. If institutions present little room for reflection, attack challenged questions or provide narrow ideas can limit autonomy for the individual. Therefore, the argument is not if education influences a citizen, because it objectively does always. Rather the focus should be if the citizen is limited by the knowledge they study, or do they become competent individuals who can return, evaluate and synthesize those ideas? Within this tense relationship between autonomy and political socialization where the two concepts become interlinked instead of opposites.

5.2 Does Cohesion exist with limited autonomy?

Political autonomy also challenges another question: if citizens can reject or question existing knowledge they learn, how does a society maintain any form of cohesion? Having political disagreements isn't inherently harmful. Having the capacity to challenge existing beliefs is crucial for autonomy and prevents national identity turning into passive conformity. In contrast, the United States presents how contested political discourse produces deeper conflict within the country itself. The ongoing divide between the MAGA v Liberal political agenda involves vastly different definitions of democracy, political authority and national identity. In Eric J Weiner's opinion article over the effects on the MAGA agenda on liberal democracy in America, Weiner argues as MAGA discourse is framing democracy as an obstacle towards true political authority rather than something that is fundamental to the American political structure (Weiner, 2024, pp 115-116). Weiner contrasts with former president Ronald Reagan's famous quote where he blamed that "democracy was the problem", whilst the government develops into a political tool in which power is exercised (Weiner, 2024, pp 116). This produces a distinct problem for societal cohesion. It's normal for citizens to disagree over political beliefs, but when groups create competing perspectives of legitimacy of the system itself, aggression and political division increases significantly – making cohesion harder to contain. Moreover, education is also significant in this conflict, as arguments over what knowledge should and should not be taught in schools, and the meaning of being an American for national identity. Weiner explains how constant disputes over education to policing certain knowledge becomes a part in a broader political project (Weiner, 2024, pp 117). This also challenges the theoretical theories around nationalism, specifically Gellner's argument that modern civilizations must share a

standardized culture within the nation (Gellner, 1983). Even though the United States possesses the qualities that Gellner associates with modern nations, American national identity isn't a simple shared version that everyone accepts universally. Rather, the definition of America becomes a topic of contested political conflict. Different groups all argue over not just policy, but what version of history is legitimate, which groups values should be protected and what the political future of the nation should be. This builds tension with autonomy. The freedom to express, develop and defend your political identity can limit shared national identity, and possibly the legitimacy of a nation's politics likewise. However, autonomy is a double edged sword. The same freedoms that allow a person to reject, attack and dismantle existing national identity also allows citizens to defend it. Therefore, political autonomy does not directly destroy cohesion.

Additionally, Syria demonstrates a different result when autonomy is highly restricted and political autonomy is limited during conflict. Under ISIS, education was a heavily politicized tool used to dominate the system itself. ISIS rejected existing Iraqi and Syrian education and deemed it corrupted by Western influence. They produced their own textbooks and attempted to create new foundations of authority and knowledge (Arvisais & Guidere, 2020, pp 8). Moreover, they also got rid of subjects like philosophy, law and political science from universities under ISIS's control (Arvisais & Guidere, 2020, pp 8). The Syrian case illustrates how political conflict created by autonomy does not define it as a failure to social cohesion. Americans may face a divide over political legitimacy and national identity, but citizens still have the freedom to challenge and openly contest these beliefs, being able to politically defend institutions that are important to them. Contrastingly, Syria doesn't have that reality. Because of contested autonomy, political conflict becomes singularly decided by whoever possesses authority to define the nation instead (Masud, 2018). Thus, autonomy may limit unanimity, but a system completely devoid of it does not produce societal cohesion.

VI. COUNTERARGUMENTS AND LIMITATIONS

6.1 The Problem with the Socratic Framework

If what constructs the citizen is education, in which it first establishes what they are expected to know, then the more critical question is whether the citizen is allowed to question what they are taught. The Socratic framework gives us a beneficial foundation for analyzing this distinction. Socratic education essentially assumes that education should reject the idea that only knowing and memorizing the education is the same as understanding it. Under this, students must challenge established conclusions, examine assumptions, and develop and support their own understanding with reason. This framework is relevant to present research since it acknowledges the fact that developing critical consciousnesses is not determined solely on the state's educational authority, whether it's decentralized or centralized. Both structures have the tools to create citizens with a curriculum that emphasizes on memorization, reproduction and acquisition of traditional knowledge. However, the underlying issue is not simply who holds authority over education, but rather the educational structure where knowledge is transferred. But, this structure isn't solely an unintended flaw. It's intentional – every state has an institutional advantage in developing

citizens who share values, knowledge and political understandings to protect state legitimacy and societal cohesion. A state possessing an internationally recognized education structure reinforces this advantage by giving states standardized institutions, where political legitimacy and modernity can be presented. The resulting consequence however is when states begin to overlook the importance of critical inquiry; a certain level of conformity is a political function within education. Therefore, the real difficulty does not become eradicating conformity, instead its determining whether a state's pursuit of creating a cohesive citizen, results in the creation of a compliant one. The Socratic framework highlights this limitation when distinguishing between a citizen who simply memorizes existing knowledge and a citizen who critically analyzes, questions and challenges existing knowledge. Contending this paper's dialectical cycle, the acquisition of shared knowledge is foundationally important for citizens to participate within the political community, but education shouldn't just end at reproduction of that knowledge. Using the same intellectual tools that allowed the citizen to participate and understand, they must utilize those tools to question and critically inquire. Therefore, autonomy is not developed from dismantling or escaping the education system, rather developing the individual's capacity to engage with the system that produced the learner.

6.2 Limitations with The Dialectical Cycle of State Education to Individual Autonomy

The main limitation of the proposed model is that the bridge between institutional compliance to individual autonomy is not assumed to occur automatically. The model, although it argues that it provides an individual language, knowledge and intellectual tools imperative for critical evaluation, the acquisition of these concepts does not guarantee they will question the existing system. Individuals may be successful throughout the educational institution, and even identify contradictions but not develop the motivation to challenge that. Likewise, the model's stage 3, Encountering Contradiction, is contingent on the assumption that the individual will be exposed to a gap in the knowledge – possibly not equally accessible across different educational and political environments. Hence, the Dialectical Cycle does not claim that knowledge universally creates critical consciousness or that every citizen has the capacity to achieve autonomy. Instead, the model should be viewed as a pathway where autonomy may develop when individuals encounter institutional limitations and possess the capability to critically evaluate.

VII. SYNTHESIS

This paper discussed the relationship between state driven education and individual autonomy as simply control v freedom. Comparing the three case studies: The United Arab Emirates, The United States, and Syria illustrated that neither decentralized nor centralized education systems alone decides if a citizen becomes a conformist or autonomous. Undoubtedly, education socializes individuals and provides cultural, political and intellectual basis through which individuals understand society, however this does not guarantee total control over what a citizen believes. As presented through the case studies, the knowledge that is initially presented to the individual to the political system also develops the intellectual tools that allow them to question it. Hence, The Dialectical Cycle of State Education to Individual Autonomy suggests that to achieve autonomy you don't need to escape the institutions that shape you, but

instead can create autonomy and critical consciousness through conforming and critically re-evaluating the knowledge the institution first introduced you to.

Nevertheless, the model isn't universally applied. Going from institutional compliance to consciousness is determined by the individual encountering a contradiction and having the capability to challenge it. Thus, future research can expand on this structure and examine what in particular allows an individual to successfully achieve each stage universally. Furthermore, more comparative research with different political systems can test whether this cycle can work within different political environments and levels of state authority. Ultimately, education is not politically neutral, or that autonomy can occur without socialization. The real problem was never if citizens were indoctrinated by the system. The problem was if the citizen could then question what had made them. Every single political system aims to educate its citizens, but the true measure of education is if they possess the capacity of determining what to do with it.

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