



FIGURE 3.4 The Relationship Between Democratic Experience and Political Support

Source: Calculated from data on system age from Ted Gurr, *Polity III* dataset; the 1996 democracy rating from the Freedom House; satisfaction with the functioning of democracy is from Hans-Dieter Klingemann, "Mapping Political Support in the 1990s: A Global Analysis," in Pippa Norris, ed. *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Government* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1999), table 2.10.

nations. Political cultures may be consensual or conflictual on issues of public policy and, more fundamentally, on views of legitimate governmental and political arrangements. In a **consensual political culture**, citizens tend to agree on the appropriate means of making political decisions and to agree on the major problems facing the society and how to solve them. In a **conflictual political culture**, the citizens are sharply divided, often on both the legitimacy of the regime and solutions to major problems.

When a country is deeply divided in political attitudes and these differences persist over time, distinctive **political subcultures** may develop. The citizens in these subcultures may have sharply different points of view on at least some critical political matters, such as the boundaries of the nation, the nature of the regime, or the correct ideology. Typically, they affiliate with different political parties and interest groups, read different newspapers, and even have separate social clubs and sporting groups. Thus they are exposed to quite distinctive

patterns of learning about politics. Such organized differences characterize the publics in India, Nigeria, and Russia today.

Where political subcultures coincide with ethnic, national, or religious differences, as in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, and Lebanon, the divisions can be enduring and threatening. The fragmentation of the Soviet empire, the breakup of Yugoslavia, and the impulses toward autonomy and secession among ethnically distinct regions (such as in Scotland or separatist movements in Africa) all reflect the lasting power of language, culture, and historical memory to create and sustain the sense of ethnic and national identity among parts of contemporary states. Samuel Huntington has predicted that the places in the world where the major traditional cultures collide will be major sources of political conflict in the next century.⁹

POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION

Political cultures are sustained or changed as people acquire their attitudes and values. We use the term *socialization* to refer to the way in which political values are formed and the political culture is transmitted from one generation to the next. Most children acquire their basic political orientations and behavior patterns at a relatively early age.¹⁰ Some of these attitudes will evolve and change through life, but others may remain part of the political self throughout life.

At any specific time, an individual's political self will be a combination of several feelings and attitudes. At the deepest level, there are general identifications and beliefs such as nationalism, ethnic or class self-images, religious and ideological commitments, and a fundamental sense of rights and duties in the society. Divisions between ethnic or religious groups often generate such attachments because they are based on such self-images. At an intermediate level, individuals acquire less intense emotional attitudes toward politics and governmental institutions. Finally, there are more immediate views of current events, policies, issues, and personalities. All these attitudes can change, but those in the first group usually were acquired earliest, have been most frequently reinforced, and tend to be the most durable.

Three general points about political socialization and learning need to be emphasized. First, there can be either **direct** or **indirect socialization**. Social-

ization is direct when it involves the explicit communication of information, values, or feelings toward politics. Civics courses in public schools are direct political socialization, as are the efforts of Islamic fundamentalist movements to indoctrinate children in such countries as Iran and Pakistan. Communist political systems also heavily use indoctrination programs. Political socialization is indirect when political views are inadvertently molded by our experiences. Such indirect political socialization may have particular force in a child's early years. For example, the child's relationships to parents, teachers, and friends are likely to affect the adult's posture toward political leaders and fellow citizens in later life. Or, growing up in a time of deprivation and hardship may leave the future adult more concerned about economic well-being.

Second, socialization continues throughout an individual's life. Early family influences can create an individual's initial values, but subsequent life experiences—becoming involved in new social groups and roles, moving from one part of the country to another, shifting up or down the social ladder, becoming a parent, finding or losing a job—may change one's political perspectives. More dramatic experiences, such as immigration to a new country or suffering through an economic depression or a war, can alter even quite basic political attitudes. Such events seem to have their greatest impact on young people just becoming involved in politics, such as first-time voters, but most people are affected to some degree.

Third, patterns of socialization in a society can either be *unifying* or *divisive*. Some events, such as international conflict or the loss of a popular public figure, can affect nearly the entire nation similarly. In contrast, subcultures in a society can have their own distinctive patterns of socialization. Social groups that provide their members with their own newspapers, their own neighborhood groups, and perhaps their own schools can create distinctive subcultural attitudes. Divisive patterns of socialization can lead to civil strife or social hostility within a nation.

AGENTS OF POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION

Individuals in all societies are affected by **agents of political socialization**: institutions and organizations that influence political attitudes. Some, like

civics courses in schools, are direct and deliberate sources of political learning. Others, like play and work groups, are likely to affect political socialization indirectly.

The Family

The direct and indirect influences of the family—the first socialization source that an individual encounters—are powerful and lasting. The family has distinctive influences on attitudes toward authority. Participation in family decision making can increase a child's sense of political competence, providing skills for political interaction and encouraging active participation in the political system as an adult. By the same token, unquestioning obedience to parental decisions may predispose the child to a role as a political subject. The family also shapes future political attitudes by locating the individual in a vast social world; establishing ethnic, linguistic, class, and religious ties, affirming cultural values, and directing occupational and economic aspirations.

The family is also changing in some societies. A revolution in women's resources and expectations in recent decades has profoundly affected the advanced industrial nations. Greater gender equality in education, occupation, and profession has transformed the structure of the family. The lessening of gender differences in self-images, in parental roles, and in relations to the economy and the political system is significantly affecting patterns of political recruitment, political participation, and public policy. A more open family, equality of parenting, and the early exposure of children to child care and preschool group experiences have modified the impact of the family in the socialization process in ways that are still being assessed. Especially in the developing world, the changing role of women may have profound influences in modernizing the society.¹¹

Schools

Schools provide children and adolescents with knowledge about the political world and their role in it and with more concrete information on political institutions and relationships. Schools also transmit the values and attitudes of the society. They can play an important role in shaping attitudes about the unwritten rules of the political game, instilling the values of public duty, and developing informal political

BOX 3.1 Socializing Values

Communist East Germany had a special ceremony for eighth graders that marked their passage to adulthood. The heart of the ceremony was the endorsement of the following four pledges:

- As young citizens of our German Democratic Republic, are you prepared to work and fight loyally for the great and honorable goals of socialism, and to honor the revolutionary inheritance of the people?
- As sons and daughters of the worker-and-peasant state, are you prepared to pursue higher education, to cultivate your mind, to become a master of your trade, to learn permanently, and to use your knowledge to pursue our great humanist ideals?

- As honorable members of the socialist community, are you ready to cooperate as comrades, to respect and support each other, and to always merge the pursuit of your personal happiness with the happiness of all the people?
- As true patriots, are you ready to deepen the friendship with the Soviet Union, to strengthen our brotherhood with socialist countries, to struggle in the spirit of proletarian internationalism, to protect peace and to defend socialism against every imperialist aggression?

relations. Schools can reinforce affection for the political system and provide common symbols, such as the flag and pledge of allegiance, that encourage emotional attachments to the system. When a new nation comes into being, or a revolutionary regime comes to power in an old nation, it usually turns immediately to the schools as a means to supplant "outdated" values and symbols with new ones more congruent with the new ideology.

In some nations educational systems do not provide unifying political socialization but send starkly different messages to different groups. For instance, some Muslim states segregate girls and boys within the school system. Even if educational experiences are intended to be equivalent, such segregation begins to create different experiences and expectations. And often the content of education differs between boys and girls. Perhaps the worst example occurred under the Taliban in Afghanistan, where for several years young girls were prohibited from attending school. Such treatment of young girls severely limits their life changes, and ensures they will have limited roles in society and the economy—which was the intent of the Taliban system. One of the new programs of the post-Taliban government was to reverse this policy, and now young Afghani girls are being included in the education system, and their future life prospects are improving as a result.

Education also affects the political skills and resources of the public. Educated persons are more aware of the impact of government on their lives

and pay more attention to politics. The better-educated have mental skills that improve their ability to interpret and act on new information. They also have more information about political processes and undertake a wider range of political activities. These effects of education appear in studies of political attitudes in many nations.¹²

Religious Institutions

The religions of the world are carriers of cultural and moral values, which often have political implications. The great religious leaders have seen themselves as teachers, and their followers have usually attempted to shape the socialization of children through schooling, preaching, and religious services. In contrast to the pattern in the United States, in most nations there are formal ties between the dominant religion and the government. In these instances, religious values and public policy inevitably overlap. Catholic nations, for instance, are less likely to have liberal abortion policies, just as Islamic governments enforce strict moral codes.

Where the churches systematically teach values that may be at odds with the controlling political system—as in the conflict between Islamic fundamentalists and secular governments in Algeria and Egypt, or in the efforts of American fundamentalists to introduce prayer in the schools—the struggle over socialization can be of the greatest significance in the society. In these nations religious subcultures may oppose the policies of the state, or even the state itself.

The emergence of aggressive religious fundamentalism in recent decades has had a major impact on the society and politics of countries as diverse as the United States, India, Israel, Lebanon, Iran, Pakistan, Algeria, and Nigeria. Such fundamentalism is often a defensive reaction against the spread of scientific views of nature and human behavior, and the libertarian values and attitudes that accompany these views. Fundamentalism usually defines a world in which believers must engage in the great struggle between the forces of spiritual goodness and evil.¹³ While the influence of fundamentalism has been most visible in the Middle East and among Muslim countries, it is important in Christian countries as well. There are both Protestant and Catholic versions of fundamentalism in the United States, Europe, and Latin America. Versions of fundamentalism are also to be found, combined with ethnic and nationalist tendencies, among the Confucian, Buddhist, and Hindu countries of Asia. Broadly speaking, fundamentalism seeks to raise conservative social, moral, and religious issues to the top of the contemporary policy agenda.

Of course, religious institutions of many kinds offer valuable moral and ethical guidance that individuals often need to make choices in complex societies. Religious affiliations are often important sources of partisan preferences and can guide people in making other political choices. Thus even though the frequency of church attendance is declining in many nations, the political relevance of religion continues.

Peer Groups

Peer groups are important social units that shape political attitudes. They include childhood play groups, friendship cliques, school and college fraternities, and small work groups, in which members share relatively equal status and close ties. They can be as varied as a group of Russian mothers who meet regularly at the park, a street gang in Brazil, or a group of Wall Street executives who are members of a social club.

A peer group socializes its members by motivating or pressuring them to conform to the attitudes or behavior accepted by the group. Individuals often adopt the views of their peers because they like or respect them or because they want to be like them. An individual may become interested in politics or at-

tend a political demonstration because close friends do so.¹⁴ In such cases, the individual modifies his or her interests and behavior to reflect those of the group in an effort to be accepted by its members. The international youth culture symbolized by rock music, T-shirts, and blue jeans may have played a major role in the failure of communist officials to mold Soviet and Eastern European youth to the "socialist personality" that was the Marxist-Leninist ideal. Likewise, the "skinheads" groups that have sprouted up among lower-class youth in many Western countries have adopted political views that are based on peer interactions.

Social Class and Gender

Most societies have significant social divisions based on class or occupation. Individuals live in different social worlds defined by their class position. For instance, industrialization created a working class in Britain that was concentrated in particular neighborhoods and developed its own forms of speech, dress, recreation, and entertainment and its own organizations, including trade unions and political parties. Similarly, in many less-developed nations the life experience of the rural peasantry is radically different from urban dwellers. In many instances these social divisions are politically relevant: identifying oneself as a member of the working class or the peasantry leads to distinct political views about what issues are important and which political groups best represent one's interest.

Gender is another important pattern of social and political learning. From birth, nature and society ascribe different patterns of behavior to males and females. Traditionally these social divisions have carried over to politics, defining politics as a male activity and focusing the interests of women on social and family issues. In many less-developed nations these gender roles still exist today. In many industrial nations, however, gender roles are changing.¹⁵ The rise of the women's movement and self-help groups have encouraged women to become active and provided social cues about how women should relate to politics.

Mass Media

Much of the world has become a single audience, exposed to the same information and moved by the

same events. There is virtually no part so remote that its inhabitants lack the means to be informed almost simultaneously about events elsewhere: mass-produced and inexpensive transistor radios are omnipresent, even in Third World villages far removed from political power centers. The mass media—newspapers, radio, television, magazines—play an important part in internationalizing attitudes and values around the globe.

Television, enlisting the senses of both sight and sound, can have a powerful emotional impact on large public audiences. Watching war on television—such as the live broadcasts provided by CNN during the war in Iraq—gives a reality to the news, just as people's feelings were touched by media coverage of Princess Diana's death in 1997. The mass media can also transcend national boundaries and ideological divides. The movements for democracy throughout Eastern Europe were partially created by the image of another way of life that came through the international media. As these democratic revolutions spread in the late 1980s, they fed on the knowledge of the tactics and successes of others, given extra impact through newspapers, television, and radio newly free to report these exciting events. Today the internet is providing a new source of news for those who live in closed societies.

In addition to providing specific and immediate information about political events, the mass media also convey, directly or indirectly, the major values on which a society agrees. The media can portray certain events as symbolizing the nation—for example, national holidays or traditional government activities—and the events take on a specific emotional color. Mass media controlled by an authoritarian government can shape political beliefs. However, citizens eventually will ignore reports that are inconsistent with their personal experiences, and word-of-mouth transmission of inconsistent attitudes is often a powerful antidote to the effectiveness of government-controlled mass media.

Interest Groups

Interest groups, associations, economic groups, and similar organizations also shape political attitudes. Among economic groups, trade unions may have had the most important consequences for politics. In most industrial countries, the rise of trade unions transformed political culture and politics, created new political parties, and ushered in new social benefit programs. Other occupational and professional associations, such as groups of peasants and farmers, manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers, medical societies, and lawyers can

The international press cover emergency summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) called to discuss the Iraqi crisis in March 2003.

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