

Chapter 1

The Role of Government in Political Socialization

ABSTRACT

This chapter introduces the overarching themes of the book. It looks at theory surrounding political socialization and how the type of government affects the way we learn about politics and government. It suggests that people politically socialized in countries with non-democratic forms of government are less likely to hold democratic values and also be less apt to develop political trust. Additionally, this chapter discusses the data and methods used throughout the book. It also provides a short summary of each of the remaining chapters.

TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

In August 1989, a 19-year-old Hungarian man traveled to East Germany. After waiting an hour in line, he could cross into West Berlin. He recalled standing in West Berlin, staring at the wall, and wondering how long it would stand. He figured it would be at least until the end of the century. Two months later, the wall came down. After the wall fell, he believed that maybe regime change in Hungary was possible as well.

Almost exactly thirty years ago, communism collapsed in Eastern Europe, and the transition to democracy began. While the transformation of the economies from socialist to free-market systems has been more straightforward, democratic consolidation—the period following socialism when society accepts democratic values—has not been as simple. One of the main reasons

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for this is that under socialism, people were not taught about democracy and its principles in an accurate way. Instead, their political socialization focused on communism being the superior form of government, and they received a lot of misinformation. This chapter concentrates on how government type affects a person's political socialization and specifically addresses whether former communist countries are ever capable of having a fully functioning democracy by Western standards.

Aside from providing some of the theoretical basis for this study, this chapter also discusses the data and methods in detail. Descriptive data from the European Social Survey is also used to give an overview of people's feelings about their government and democracy, which helps frame the rest of the book. The final section of this chapter provides a brief summary of each remaining chapter of the book.

GOVERNMENT TYPE AND POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION

The type of government in place when a person is politically socialized affects how they are taught about government and politics in their country and also how they view other government types. If being socialized under a communist government, students will be taught that communism is the superior form of government, and therefore weaknesses of democracy (real or not) will be emphasized. For example, in communist Hungary, secondary school students were required to take courses in scientific socialism and political economics. Whether students bought into these courses or not (many people did not), they still cast doubt on democracy.

There is disagreement over how long the effects of being politically socialized under communism last. Some scholars think it takes multiple generations to fully transition from a communist society to a democratic one (Dalton, 1994; Finkel et al., 2001; Gibson et al., 1992; Klingemann et al., 2006; Minkenberg, 1993; Neundorf, 2010; Powers & Cox, 1997; Rose & Carnaghan, 1995). The thought is that it takes so long because the first generation socialized under democracy will still likely be taught by people who were socialized under communism, and therefore, some of the same ideas will be transmitted.

Other scholars think support for democracy is tied more to the economy than socialization, and therefore will not take as long. These scholars believe that democratic transition will occur faster due to the implementation of a free market economy (Burkhart & Lewis-Beck, 1994; Ekman & Linde, 2005;

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