

1

Becoming Political: Local Environments and Political Socialization

Approaching the town of Dundalk, Maryland, on the I-695 bridge over the Patapsco River inlet to the Chesapeake Bay is truly a breathtaking experience. Eastbound I-695 winds its way through southern Baltimore County, passing through relatively open, rural land before descending toward the river. But as one drives up to the mid-point of the bridge, the horizon suddenly drops away to reveal the vast superstructure of the Bethlehem Steel works at Sparrow's Point on the right, along with associated chemical and manufacturing plants on both sides of the highway. Belching smokestacks, gigantic warehouses, and vast marine shipping terminals dominate the view. A large number of hulking, dingy brick buildings with shattered windows, spray-painted with graffiti, have long since been abandoned. A sign in the middle of the bridge warns, "This Area Is Subject to Dense Smoke."

Behind this imposing view of what can only be described as industrial sprawl sits the town of Dundalk, compressed on jagged pieces of land east of Baltimore, where inlets slice into the bay like miniature fjords. Its streets are lined with 1940s and 1950s era cottages and row houses—two and three bedrooms—some with water access and boats docked in the rear. Some of these homes are clearly showing their age, but the residents are proud and try to keep the lawns neatly trimmed. If it were not for some late-model cars on the streets, one would almost guess that the bridge traversed a time warp,

taking travelers back to 1955. Except that in 1955, the town was doing far better than it is today. Dundalk has suffered along with the rest of the Rust Belt economies of the Northeast. At its peak, the Bethlehem Steel plant employed 38,000 workers; now that number has dropped to 4,000.

Growing up in Dundalk, young men soon learn that for the most part their destiny lies in a few working-class options: the DAP caulk and chemical factory, Sparrow's Point (the Bethlehem Steel mill), the docks in Baltimore, or low-paying jobs in the service sector. Military service is an alternative for the more adventurous, and military recruiters have what is virtually a permanent station in Patapsco High School, where recruitment posters plaster the school walls. Predictably, Patapsco High also has one of the strongest industrial arts programs in the area. Girls have more educational ambitions than boys, realizing that because male-dominated factory work generally is not an option, they will have to go to a community college to get the training to do office work, perhaps as a bookkeeper, bank clerk, or administrative assistant. Others seek advanced training in cosmetology. Rather few go on to a four-year college, although the numbers are growing as the realities of the post-industrial economy set in.

A place as distinctive as Dundalk also breeds a distinctive politics. The population is working-class white, hostile to diversity, baffled by sustained immigration in the wake of September 11, pro-union, pro-death penalty, not highly confident that it has a voice in government, generally unsure of the value of its opinions, and Democrat by identification but not strongly loyal to either party. A Republican represented the area in Congress through the 1980s and 1990s, usually winning the vote of the "Dundalk Democrats" by a comfortable margin. Voting is an irregular act, a habit acquired slowly, although most residents will be regular voters by middle age. The people here are entirely educable and can be mobilized, but whether they get to the polls is contingent on the closeness of the contest and whether anyone reminds them.

Contrast this setting with that of Churchill High School in the Washington suburb of Potomac, Maryland. Churchill sits among homes that sell for hundreds of thousands of dollars on a winding stretch of a thickly wooded residential lane. Students from some of the metro area's wealthiest families go to school here, and the parking lot, with its Land Rovers, Mercedes-Benz convertibles, and BMW sedans, proves it. Here, an American-made sport utility vehicle would be considered low end. Churchill students are so serious about academic performance that it is hard to field a competitive sports team, and the football team typically maintains a los-

ing record, sometimes going for seasons without a victory. The school shows some diversity in that it has a substantial Asian American population, but very few African American or Hispanic students attend.

In Potomac, students are politically socialized both inside and outside of school. They hear about politics from their white-collar professional parents, and they bring newspaper articles to school that are relevant to the subjects being studied. These teens ask such challenging questions that some teachers are forced to transfer because they cannot keep up with them. There are few discipline problems, and the students are polite. But these teens also are under a lot of pressure. This was the only school where we saw students carrying expensive “white-out” pens to correct any mistakes that they made while doing class work. More kids are hospitalized for depression and more attempt suicide in Potomac than elsewhere in the area. While parents are highly supportive of the teachers, they are incredibly meddlesome; calling, for example, to harass teachers about any unacceptable grades their children receive.

These kids grow up to see government as highly responsive to what few demands their parents make. Candidates ply their neighborhoods during fund-raisers, knowing that the residents have deep pockets. Churchill High students consider the police merely a minor irritant, out to bust their parties and arrest their friends for drinking and drug use. One female student mentioned speed bumps as the most salient local issue in her neighborhood. Students pick up their political orientation and attitudes, a mix of liberal and conservative, from their parents. Many students see their tax money as being wasted on programs that do not work, but their attitudes about diversity and immigration are ambivalent. Immigration is not a prominent issue for the super rich. Churchill students express their opinions on virtually any topic, but their views usually are not deeply seated in a hurtful personal experience of threat or injustice. The political socialization experience in Potomac produces both Republicans and Democrats of a fiscally conservative and socially liberal stripe. Most Potomac teens will become regular voters when they settle down after college and postgraduate school.

A world away from Churchill High is Southern High School, which is within walking distance of Baltimore’s touristy Inner Harbor. From the school’s front steps, students can look down on marinas crowded with sailboats, but inside the school, built in the early 1970s to serve a predominantly black and impoverished population, the halls are dark. The brick walls are gray; the floors are of brown brick tile. There are few windows,

and those in the classrooms that do have them do not open. From three to six full-time Baltimore police officers patrol the halls; others are called in from street patrol if needed.

When our two-person research team entered the classrooms at Southern High, the students greeted us with stares and gaping mouths, astonished that anyone had come to visit them. After looking us over (one of the team that visited the school that day is white, the other Asian American), one boy observed that we certainly had “come a long way from outside District 1”—a reference to the police precinct in which the school and his home are located. When we informed him that we were from College Park, just forty miles away, he returned a blank stare. When we told him that it was near Washington, it became clear that he did not know where the nation’s capital was either. He asked then whether College Park was “where the Terps play,” referring to the University of Maryland’s basketball team, usually one of the best in the nation. We found out later that in his fourteen years of life he had never left the Baltimore city limits. This is truly an insular and isolated population.

The students who showed up were amazed to see us because that year Southern High had the worst reputation for gang violence of any school in the city. There were certain stairwells that the teachers warned us not to go to, certainly not alone. African American youth from the Cherry Hill and East Baltimore neighborhoods had used Southern High as a staging ground for turf wars through much of the preceding fall, and the fighting and disruption in the school had been so bad that seventy-five students were kicked out, most of them permanently. One teacher was seriously injured when some students slammed his hand in a door; several of his fingers had to be amputated. Some teachers quit, and others were forced out by school administrators. Most of the remaining teachers were close to retirement age, and several in the social studies department were counting the days. The Baltimore City school system has a difficult time keeping young teachers. The older teachers, most of whom are white, remain only because they are so vested in the system that another jurisdiction cannot offer them comparable compensation. They are nice people, but few are highly motivated.

But who can blame them? Truancy is a serious problem. In any given day, 30 percent of the students fail to attend class, and 70 percent of the students are chronic truants. Of 700 students who begin in ninth grade, only 120 to 150 earn a diploma. Teachers have adjusted their expectations accordingly, and they readily admitted that students did not have to come

to class every day to keep up. There are a few working-class white students in the school, but most of the white youth from south Baltimore now attend magnet schools or private schools.

The black students we talked to in class were surprised by our presence because the white people they encounter typically shun them or fear them. They were not at all accustomed to having white people ask their opinions. And they did have opinions. Their views were most intense on issues relating to diversity and to local law enforcement and the court system. They shared many personal stories about ways in which they had been badly treated in stores owned by Asian immigrants. Asian immigrants, regardless of nationality, were broadly characterized by the youth as “Chinese” or “whatever . . .” and deeply resented for their inability or unwillingness to communicate in English when the kids shop in their stores.

These teens pay almost no attention to what is going on in the world apart from issues that directly touch their lives or the lives of their family members. Civic engagement and political participation are completely alien notions to them, yet they were lively when asked to express their views and eager to share their experiences with us. We left surprised not by how bad the kids were but rather by how well they were doing given the obstacles they face. If their participation in class is any indication, very little is standing in the way of their good citizenship other than the fact that no one has come along to tell them that their voice matters, that someone is listening. We concluded that in order to become engaged, these youth simply had to be asked. No one around them, however, was doing any asking.

These are three different high schools in different communities where the experience of growing up could hardly be more different. Each of the twenty-nine places we visited was distinctive in at least a few ways from the ones before it. To be sure, not every feature of the local environments we have studied has an influence on an adolescent’s political life, but we wanted to know which ones did.

Places and Political Socialization

This book is about the local sources of variation in the political socialization of young Americans early in the twenty-first century. Our work takes up many of the classic questions about socialization in an effort to determine what contributes to an adolescent’s development of a wide variety of viewpoints and dispositions germane to his or her civic engagement and

political behavior later in life. Numerous social scientists have indicated that the behavior described by the term “civic engagement” is undergirded by a set of attitudes that demonstrate knowledge about and positive evaluations of government and politics.¹ This book builds on the previous research by examining the sources of those attitudes, not just in the individual characteristics of survey respondents but also in the characteristics of the local environments that shape their experiences during late adolescence.

Surprisingly little research has been done on the role of the local context in the political socialization process.² Where the local context has been examined, the focus has been on adults rather than adolescents.³ Theoretically, our effort will merge two large bodies of research that have been independent of each other: the growing literature on contextual effects and the traditional literature on political socialization, which has its roots in political science and developmental psychology.

Fresh research on the topic of adolescent socialization is needed because previous research cannot necessarily be trusted to explain the attitudes and behavior of later generations, including the one that came of age in the late 1990s and early 2000s. While we believe that the previous body of research provides ample material for hypothesis testing—and we reviewed much of that literature in the course of writing this book—we also have good reasons to believe that the causal relationships are not the same today as they were in 1975 or 1955.

To sum up, our motivation for revisiting the topic of political socialization came in part from the belief that the effects of local context on political socialization had been overlooked and also from the conviction that what was true of previous generations would be less true today, because the nature of the stimuli has changed. For example, news media exposure today cannot mean what it meant thirty years ago, given the way in which news content has changed and media choices have multiplied. The most recent birth cohorts may begin their political lives much later than their parents and grandparents did. If feeling rooted in one’s community is necessary to recognize one’s stake in political life and this feeling does not appear in contemporary adolescents until they reach thirty years of age,

1. Abramson and Aldrich (1982); Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996); Jennings and Niemi (1974, 1981); Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry (1996); Niemi and Junn (1998); Putnam (2000).

2. But see Garcia (1973); Litt (1963); Sanchez-Jankowski (1986).

3. Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995); Huckfeldt (1986).

their participation is going to lag behind that of previous generations, whose life was well established by age twenty-one.⁴

The demographic composition of the nation also has changed considerably in the last fifteen years. Literature from the 1960s and 1970s suggested that white children exhibit more trust than black children and that ethnic background was a good predictor of adolescent political values.⁵ With some of the highest levels of immigration in over a century, we stand at an excellent point in history to retest old hypotheses on new immigrant and second-generation populations. Family structure has undergone a complete revolution in the thirty years since Clarke found that the absence of a father among black children led to increased cynicism about politics.⁶ The relationships between the new generation of youth and the primary agents of socialization—parents, schools, media, and peers—have been altered in many important ways.

People are politically socialized by the information they receive. This information certainly varies over time, but it varies more regularly across space, as communities and their constituent parts structure the content and flow of politically relevant messages in distinctive ways. Within a particular age cohort, socializing messages will be received differently, with greater impact on some than on others depending on the attributes of the individuals themselves and characteristics of the places where they live.⁷

The extensive literature on political socialization has about as many explanatory models as there are articles on the subject, testimony to the complexity of the phenomenon itself. No simple modeling exercise can possibly capture this complexity, but our explanatory framework has several major themes, which are developed in the chapters to come. First, children are raised within a specific structural context, a local social environment, that influences the political attitudes and values that they develop. This environment comprises the forces working at the top of the “funnel of causality” described by Campbell and colleagues in their landmark work, *The American Voter*, including community resources (income, education), diversity (racial and ethnic groups), political engagement (voter turnout), and political leaning (Republican, Democrat, or competitive).⁸ While these

4. Schneider and Stevenson (1999); Deufel (2002).

5. Greenberg (1970); Lyons (1970); Greeley (1975).

6. Clarke (1973).

7. Schuman and Corning (2000, p. 921).

8. Campbell and others (1960, pp. 24–32).

environmental forces might have only a small *direct* impact on an adolescent's political development, their indirect impact could be quite profound.

Social context is an important element of our approach to socialization because it structures the quantity and flow of information. An individual is "embedded within a particular context," which "structures social interaction patterns."⁹ These interactions communicate political information on which the individual bases an attitudinal response. While many locations in which the interactions take place are self-selected—a neighborhood, for instance—there are constraints on the selection itself (income, housing market), and the choice leads to non-self-selected exposure to information. If one's neighbors are mostly Republicans, one is likely to pass by Republican yard signs and to talk with Republican neighbors whether one wants to or not. Work settings often are sources of cross-cutting, non-self-selected information exposure as most people rarely have complete power to determine the views of those around whom they work.¹⁰

We know from volumes of previous work that certain attributes of a person's identity and personal history shape the likelihood that he or she will participate in politics, feel efficacious, and be tolerant of others. The classic survey research in socialization has focused on individual characteristics as causes of the attitudes and behaviors of interest.¹¹ For example, a staple finding of public opinion research from the discipline of political science is that individuals who are more knowledgeable and interested in politics are more likely to participate. Our point is to remind readers that people do not become interested in politics within a vacuum. In technical terms we would say that political knowledge and interest are not exogenous variables—they do not appear in the universe without prior cause. Instead, certain social contexts stimulate interest and mobilize people for political action better than others. A major theme that we pursue is that contextual variables that capture aspects of the individual's political environment have an impact on how much adolescents learn, what opinions they form, and how they express themselves politically.

For example, some previous research suggests that a child who is inclined toward one party but grows up in a social environment dominated by adherents of another party may be more reserved about express-

9. Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995, p. 8).

10. Mutz and Mondak (2001).

11. Campbell and others (1960); Miller and Shanks (1996); Nie, Verba, and Petrocik (1979).

ing his viewpoints than if he were surrounded by like-minded partisans.¹² One might hypothesize then that homogeneous political environments encourage more political discussion than heterogeneous ones because people feel safer talking about politics when they are among those who agree with them.¹³ Heterogeneous social environments, while potentially more stimulating, may ironically retard the political socialization process by squelching discussion and limiting what a person learns through it, leading eventually to depressed political participation.¹⁴

But there also are compelling reasons for believing the opposite—that heterogeneous environments stimulate discussion because controversy fills the air. A consistent series of findings in the political participation literature suggests that competitive, politically diverse environments produce higher turnout in elections than lopsided, one-party settings.¹⁵ Even though individuals may prefer to discuss politics with people who are most like them, they also are more inclined to participate when they think that their vote counts or when an important outcome hangs in the balance.¹⁶ Competitive elections not only stimulate higher interest among voters, they also bring mobilization efforts to life, in the form of voter outreach activities by parties, interest groups, and candidates.¹⁷ What can be surmised from this fascinating mix of research findings is that citizen interest is piqued by political conflict and that competitive political environments generally have a positive effect on political socialization. At the same time, young people are probably no more desirous than adults of having high levels of political conflict among their closest associates or regular discussion partners. A competitive and conflictual environment is positive so long as there remains a safe place for political discussion within one's immediate constellation of associates.

Another theme in our explanatory framework is that the direct impact of structural environmental factors is mediated through family and school relationships, which are more immediate sources of causal influence on an individual's sense of efficacy, political knowledge, nationalistic sentiment, tolerance of diversity, and other dispositions germane to the political socialization process. We do not argue that political behavior and attitudes are

12. Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee (1954, chap. 6).

13. Mutz (2002a).

14. Mutz (2002b).

15. Key (1949).

16. Rosenstone and Hansen (1993).

17. Huckfeldt and Sprague (1992).

completely structurally determined but rather that the range of individual freedom is restricted by the political and social aspects of the nurturing environment in the family and the community.

Setting and Design of This Study

Against this background we set out to collect data on the attitudes of adolescents, bearing in mind the need to gather information about the communities in which they grow up. While previous research provides excellent material for testing hypotheses, we had good reasons for believing that the causal relationships today are not the same as in previous decades. But implicit contrasts and explicit hypothesis tests are two different things. This book focuses mainly on hypothesis testing of cross-sectional data on ninth through twelfth graders surveyed in 1999 and 2000.

The design for our research is based on our general theory that political socialization is not uniform within a society but is shaped by the local political and social circumstances in which individuals find themselves. Our research strategy did not guarantee that we would succeed in finding evidence to support that notion. It was clearly possible that once we controlled for relevant individual traits, social and political environments would have no impact whatsoever. To test for causal influences across communities, we studied twenty-nine distinct schools in twenty-nine different communities within or just outside the Baltimore and Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. The academic community has needed further research on the neighborhood and community influences on political socialization for a long time. Many previous studies were limited by the fact that they did not capture enough variation across neighborhoods and communities; research carried out in one, two, or a few schools of necessity treats community characteristics as a constant, missing whatever causal impact they may have. Other studies simply failed to record neighborhood and community information that could be used to investigate the effects of these variables on attitudes and behavior. Still other studies gathered some limited contextual information, but it has not been sufficiently detailed to be of much explanatory value.

In the spring of 1999 and of 2000, we surveyed 3,060 students in high schools scattered throughout the greater Baltimore-Washington metro area (see figure 1-1). The schools were selected by random sampling of fourteen separate school districts—rural, suburban, and urban—in order to represent the area's public high school population by social, economic,

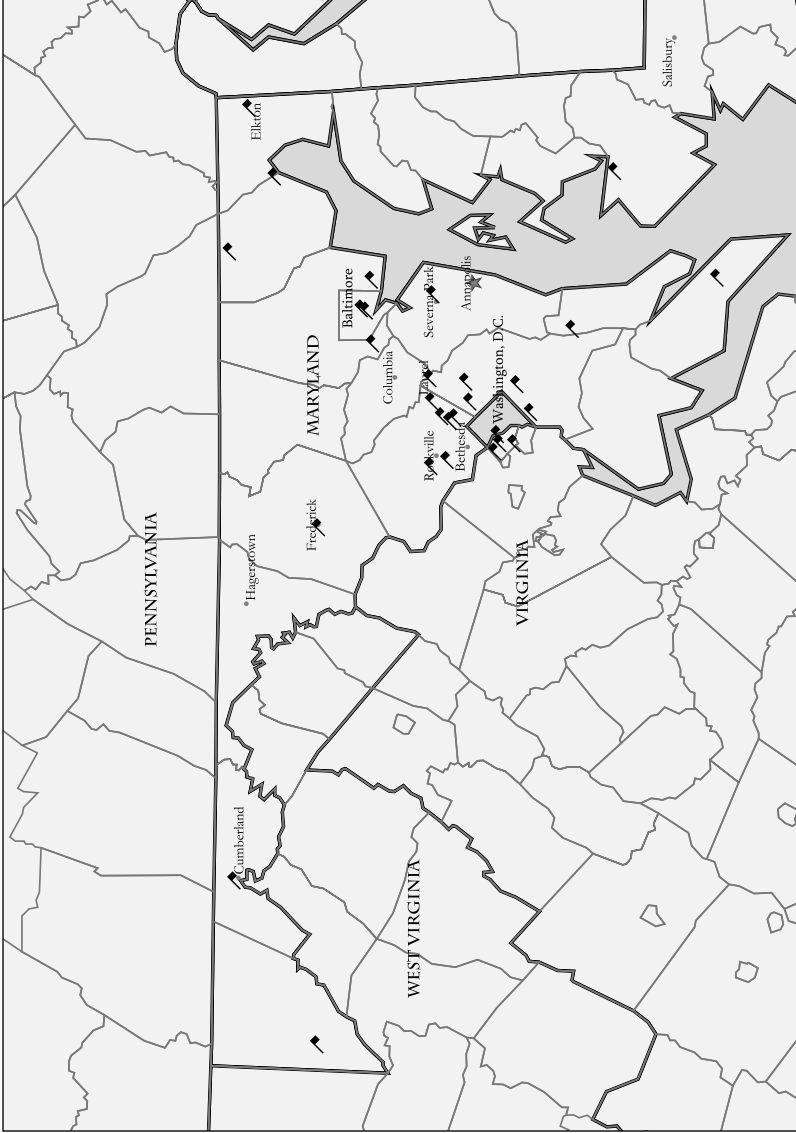
and political characteristics. While the focus of this study was on examining relationships rather than representing a specific population, the classes chosen within schools ensured representation by race of student and academic standing. In spite of the fact that it was not feasible to choose a strict random probability sample of the student population from enrollment lists, the resulting sample was remarkably representative of the underlying population (see appendix A for details on sample selection and representation).

The area's high schools generally track students into two or three groups; "honors" and "standard" tracks were most common, with the standard track less oriented toward preparing students for college. Often more than half of a school's students were in honors courses, with more than one-third of all students aiming at advanced placement (AP) college credit. We typically chose no more than two honors courses at each school, and at least half of each school's subjects came from the standard academic track. In almost all cases, we obtained a representative sample of students of varying grade and achievement levels, although at one school we surveyed only tenth graders—nearly the entire tenth-grade class. We generally sought to survey between 70 and 150 students at each school, depending largely on the school's size. High schools in the metropolitan Washington-Baltimore area range in size from a low of about 500 students to a high of about 3,000.

A small research team of between two and four people traveled to each school, briefed teachers on the purposes and goals of the study, and administered the questionnaire to classes of ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth graders in classes of mixed achievement. The survey research team included two Caucasian males and two Asian American females. Usually the research was carried out in each classroom in teams of two, and the teams were mixed by gender and race.

Schools included four all-black high schools in Prince George's County, Maryland, and inner-city Baltimore, Maryland, and three predominantly black high schools in Prince George's County. The Asian respondents were heavily represented in the five Montgomery County, Maryland, high schools. Maryland has a small Hispanic population, but it was best represented in the Prince George's County schools. Arlington County, Virginia, also contributed many Hispanic respondents. The sites also included two rural schools in areas where immigrant farm labor is widely used but where few immigrants are enrolled in the schools. Two schools situated in extremely affluent areas of Montgomery County, Maryland, also were included in the sample. The resulting sample represents a broad cross-section

Figure 1-1. Location of Participating Schools in the Metro Civic Values Study, 1999–2000



of economic, political, and demographic contexts that should provide sufficient variation to test hypotheses about the effects of social and economic context on the attitudes of both immigrant and native-born youth.¹⁸

Outcomes of the Socialization Process

Political socialization is the process by which new generations are inducted into political culture, learning the knowledge, values, and attitudes that contribute to support of the political system.¹⁹ Through exposure to various socialization agents, citizens develop a relationship with their government and political leaders, although nothing inherent in the process ensures that the relationship will be “healthy” or “good.” Even so, political socialization research as it has been carried out in the United States has always built on an implicit normative foundation. The content of what is transmitted is of critical importance since the goal of socialization is the perpetuation of values consistent with the governance of the nation.²⁰ Hence, in a constitutionally democratic republic, we have judged that it is better to develop attitudes that favor political participation than to develop cynical, nonparticipatory ones. Similarly, being knowledgeable about the system and how it works is viewed as superior to being ignorant of its workings. More generally, successful socialization ought to involve the formation of crystallized, stable opinions on issues.²¹ Respect for the outcomes of the political process also is integral to support of the political system, especially when those outcomes may not be in one’s personal interest. Practices that further the goals of participation, knowledge, opinion holding, and support for the democratic process are judged to be superior to practices that undermine those goals. It is possible then to speak of defective or “bad” socialization just as we speak of effective or “good” socialization.

We stand to gain considerable insight about the potential for civic engagement among individuals and social groups by taking a careful inventory of the forces that contribute to bad socialization. It is clear that political learning and socialization do not end when a person graduates from high school.²² However, there is ample evidence to support the conclusion

18. Comparisons of our sample populations to the school populations by the key characteristic of race or ethnicity with and without sample weights are available from the authors.

19. Almond and Coleman (1960); Almond and Verba (1963); Jennings and Niemi (1974, p. 5).

20. Dennis (1968).

21. Sears and Valentino (1997).

22. Searing, Schwartz, and Lind (1973); Searing, Wright, and Rabinowitz (1976); Markus (1979).

that what is learned during adolescence predicts adult political behavior and opinions.²³ The accumulation of risk factors in a particular population of adolescents may well doom that group to a lifetime of civic inactivity and irrelevance while the absence of those factors frees another group to realize its political potential. Identifying the risk factors that predict non-participation has some policy relevance because it would help to identify individuals and populations that may need compensatory guidance and mentoring. The effects of one or a few of these handicaps can be overcome by more positive environmental forces and interventions, but to achieve that end, the risk factors first must be identified. We address this after first detailing the outcomes we measured.

Political Knowledge

Nothing is more central to democratic theory than the idea of an informed, knowledgeable citizenry. By knowledge, we mean the capacity of citizens to recall facts about what government is and does.²⁴ Our main concern is with *fundamental* knowledge relating to political structures, historically significant developments, and the identities and roles of officeholders in the political system.²⁵ To measure knowledge, we used a seven-item political knowledge test and scored results from 0 to 100 percent (see appendix B). Knowledge of fundamental facts about government and politics is essential for interpreting information in news broadcasts, understanding details about important events and actions taken by public figures, and making inferences from news stories that translate into judgments about whom or what to support or oppose.²⁶

When asked, high school students even as young as ninth graders recognize that political knowledge counts, yet an amazing number of them will fail to acquire much of it by the time they reach adulthood. Consequently, knowledge probably is one of the most variable constructs that we examine and one that is likely to have many causal covariates among individual traits and community characteristics. While there is pretty solid evidence that the level of political knowledge has dropped over time, our focus is on differences in political knowledge across our study population.²⁷

23. Beck and Jennings (1982); Jennings and Markus (1984); Green and Palmquist (1994); Alwin and Krosnick (1991); Plutzer (2002).

24. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1993; 1996).

25. Garramone and Atkin (1986).

26. Miller and Krosnick (2000, p. 312).

27. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996).

Citizens who possess the least political knowledge are those who are least likely to participate in a wide variety of political activities; their needs, therefore, are not expressed to officeholders.²⁸ Adolescence is one of the few periods during the life cycle when there are nearly universal opportunities to collect and absorb political facts and information through coursework in social studies and history. Understanding the sources of variation in the retention and recall of political information is critical because it predicts levels of political interest and participation later in life.

Frequency of Political Discussion

People who know more about politics are much more willing to engage in political discussions. Knowledge and discussion of a subject are reciprocally related: discussion of politics has long been considered both a function of one's level of political knowledge and a means of obtaining additional information.²⁹ But even though political knowledge and frequency of discussion are related, it is worth considering them separately because they may have different causes. Discussion is a social activity, knowledge a measure of what people remember. Our measure of political discussion frequency was a survey question about the number of times students engaged in political discussion with family members or friends in the previous week (see appendix B).

We found that many youth refused to engage in discussions of politics because they failed to see its relevance to their lives. We witnessed the following exchange among ninth graders on the subject of why young people do not take more of an interest:

Sam: Government doesn't directly affect us all the time. Usually you don't realize how government affects your life until later, after high school.

Julie: After a certain age, you learn that you need to vote.

John: Older people have seen more how government affects their lives.

Ryan: Older people need to have something to complain about. Every old person I know is always talking about politics.

The consensus among these ninth graders was that politics is relevant only for older people, that eventually it might become important to them

28. Verba and others (1993b).

29. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996).

to take more of an interest, but that it was not important to them at their age. Just when one reaches this age-relevance threshold was unclear; the students could not agree on when that happened. Age eighteen, however, clearly was not where the bright line was drawn:

Question: Do you consider age eighteen to give you a special status because you can then vote?

John: No, I wouldn't think of this as all that special—not like driving!

On one hand, it seems unreasonable to expect fourteen-year-old freshmen in high school to have developed an adult interest in politics and to have reached a high level of civic engagement. To some extent, these kids are right in saying that politics and government is not as relevant to them as it is to older people. Nor should we expect politicians to be especially concerned about what kids are thinking. What concerns us is that many of these youth never cross that elusive age-relevance threshold when they believe it is time to discuss politics. They will spend their lifetimes as non-participants.

The good news is that some of the youth we surveyed had developed an interest in politics well before they turned eighteen. What forces predict the extent of political talk going on outside the classroom? We will answer this question in the chapters to come, but we anticipate that higher levels of political discussion are likely to be reported among those living in well-educated communities that have more resources to expend on providing access to information. Likewise, it is a good bet that settings that have highly competitive elections stimulate more discussion about politics than those with predictable, one-sided contests. Similarly, communities with higher levels of voter turnout have adult populations with greater levels of knowledge about politics than do those with low turnout. Participation and discussion are linked as closely as discussion and knowledge.

Political Efficacy

A sense of political efficacy is one of the more thoroughly examined concepts in the study of political socialization. Efficacy justifiably attracts attention because it is thought to be central to political participation, a necessary prerequisite to taking an action as simple as voting or as complex as contacting government officials or volunteering for a campaign.³⁰ “Internal” efficacy refers to the perception that one has the necessary resources

30. Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954); Abramson and Aldrich (1982).

and knowledge to have an impact on the political process—the sense that one can perform civic duties adequately or even with a high degree of competence. It could be characterized as one's self-confidence regarding involvement in politics.³¹ A person who is inefficacious feels powerless and in response becomes apathetic and inattentive to political matters.³² Internal efficacy is highly associated with political participation in the form of voting and campaigning, especially among those with lower levels of education.³³ Our measures of internal and external efficacy are detailed in appendix B.

“External” efficacy is the perception that government is responsive to whatever efforts one makes to exercise influence. It is not simply a reflection of what one thinks of incumbent officeholders at a given moment; it reflects a more enduring attitude toward the system.³⁴ Among the youth we surveyed, cynicism rooted in low external efficacy was an abundant commodity:

Tambra: Actions speak louder than words. Most of these politicians are in it for the money, that's all. They say one thing but never do anything.

Eric: I can't believe them when they say things. I'll believe it when I see it. They have to do something.

Chris: Sometimes a candidate comes up with an idea but it comes so late that you think he's just saying it to get reelected. There are all these last-minute antics to draw voters.

These young people, like adults, widely believed that politicians seek office for personal gain, not to serve the public interest—that politicians pander, making empty promises that they never intend to fulfill. Some simply dismissed government as corrupt, period, offering neither evidence nor explanation. Do such young people ever shelve their cynicism and become participants? Perhaps, but someone probably has to activate them. If they are activated even once, it may alter their attitudes about government performance.³⁵ Political involvement gives citizens the opportunity to test the system's responsiveness directly, and they generally conclude from their trials that it works.

31. Almond and Verba (1963).

32. Seeman (1966).

33. Finkel (1985).

34. Iyengar (1980).

35. Finkel (1985).

With political participation on the decline, it is no surprise that aggregate levels of external efficacy have shriveled as well.³⁶ With more people withdrawing from political participation, fewer seize the opportunity to test the system's responsiveness for themselves. Still, there are wide variations in participation levels across neighborhoods and communities, suggesting that underlying efficacy levels vary widely and that the variation may be at least as important as the temporal drop in efficacy that we have observed over several decades.

Tolerance for Immigration-Induced Diversity

In many areas, the social conditions in which adolescents are being raised are very different from the conditions that prevailed in previous generations. That conditions have changed so drastically provides us with an excellent reason for posing questions about tolerance and openness to immigration. The continuing controversy surrounding civil rights for African Americans has generated a wealth of fascinating studies about black-white relations over the last thirty years. Much of that research has construed tolerance for diversity to mean acceptance of African Americans and the civil rights agenda: school desegregation, affirmative action, ending discrimination in housing and employment, and spending on programs favoring blacks.³⁷

Here we ask how tolerance for ethnic diversity and immigration varies among the current generation of native and foreign-born adolescents in a variety of social contexts, some with high levels of immigration, others with little or no immigrant presence. The extent of exposure to diversity varied highly across the locations we visited. One of our primary dependent variables, then, is tolerance for the ethnic diversity resulting from the nation's high immigration levels. We dub this construct "immigration-induced diversity," as opposed to ethnic diversity that may not have immigration at its core. We use a number of survey items to gauge reactions to diversity (see appendix B).

Visits to the high schools in our study area revealed a wide variety of viewpoints, at least some of which seemed to be determined by local context. Some striking examples of anxiety and ambivalence about immigration came from African American students in our inner-city black schools:

36. Lipset and Schneider (1983); Uslaner (2002).

37. Glaser (1994); Kinder and Sanders (1996); Kinder and Sears (1981); Sears, Sidanius, and Bobo (2000); Schuman and Bobo (1988); Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo (1985); Smith (1981a, 1981b); Steeh and Schumann (1992).

Question: Would more immigrants make Baltimore a better place to live?

James: What makes you think another culture would make it better here?

Darryl: It would make it worse, because people would want stuff.

Cedric: Yeah, we fight ourselves right now. If they moved in, we would be fighting them and us.

Aleshea: We have enough problems as it is. They wouldn't want us to move into their country.

Tamelyn: But you can't stop people from moving where they want to move.

Aleshea: You sure can, you can meet them at the border with guns.

Tamelyn: Foreigners aren't wanted around here because they take up jobs and work hard. But people need the competition they bring. People here are just lazy. Bring the immigrants in and give them a run for their money. Everything in life ain't free.

Lanelle: We are already overpopulated. There isn't enough space, they'll take all the jobs, there isn't enough room. They gotta go. Look at [Washington] D.C., it's crowded there.

Cedric: They open up stores in the neighborhood that we would otherwise open up.

Lanelle: How can an immigrant be here for just a few months and they open up a business, but it's hard for a black person to open up a store who's been here for their whole lives?

Tamelyn: Well, maybe we're lazy.

Teya: Black people don't want to do nothing. They're just lazy. They don't want to earn anything themselves, they want it given to them.

Ashata: There's a lot of immigration in my family. My dad and my relatives are from Trinidad and Barbados, and that's not right that we say they shouldn't come here because maybe some Caucasian people say we ought to go back to Africa. You know that's not right.

The African American students who opposed immigration framed their objections primarily in terms of the economic threat that immigration posed, but some also referred to overcrowding and cultural conflict. Those who were more open to immigration mentioned the immigrant ancestry of African Americans and underlined the importance of a free

and open society, where people could move about as they pleased. Notably few of the black youth we encountered argued for diversity in terms of civil rights or on the grounds that there is a right to immigrate.

Among white youth, our field notes indicated the most hostility in areas that were close to but did not necessarily include diverse populations, usually inner-ring suburbs where students associated diversity with the inner-city problems of joblessness, crime, and even sanitation and health. The following exchange from a Baltimore suburban high school is illustrative:

Jacob: I know that immigrants are supposed to bring in new culture and yadda yadda yadda, but I've had enough new culture. They're taking up all the jobs, flippin' burgers and doing construction.

Andrew: They may bring in foreign diseases that we don't have here. We don't need that.

Michael: Immigrants are people so how can you say they will improve things? It'll be neutral, some will improve things, others won't.

Justin: California is nice because it's diverse, but immigration brings other problems. On main streets, it's fine, but you go down a side street and everyone is speaking Spanish. There's a language barrier, and I can't communicate with them. There is also crime associated with immigration. I wouldn't want Catonsville to be like California.

Michael: There are good people and bad people all over.

Jacob: Okay, I would like to amend what I said earlier. Legal immigrants are okay, but there are those illegals who are jumping over fences and using up my welfare money. That I just can't take.

We were struck by the confidence and forcefulness with which these white suburban students expressed their reservations about diversity. There were no tentative pauses in response to the questions we asked. The students pounced immediately, providing evidence that they had considered the issues at some length and had well-formulated opinions. Here the sentiment ranged from keeping immigrants out because they might pose a threat to the prosperity and health of native-born Americans to letting them come in to be evaluated on the basis of individual merit. There certainly was no sentiment, among any of the students who spoke up, favoring a broad right to immigrate.

The views of suburban youth who felt threatened by diversity differed considerably from those of rural youth who had rarely given it much thought or were simply ignorant of the subject. One student from a small-

town high school on the distant metropolitan fringe even approached a member of our research team to ask what the term “immigrants” meant.

Billy: Who cares if immigrants move in? It’s okay.

Joseph: It would give us more ideas on how different people live and different religions and different cultures, but it would cause conflict too.

Billy: It wouldn’t matter, it would be the same.

Some rural youth approached the question of an immigration influx with a mixture of mockery and disbelief at the very suggestion:

Jennifer: Where are they going to move here?! There are more gas stations than stores. There’s nothing for them here.

Sarah: The main reason people come in is because of jobs, and we ain’t got no jobs. Americans are losin’ their jobs.

Ronald: If you look at transportation, the roads here are terrible.

Daniel: There’s not much up here. There’s nutin’ for ’em to do.

Ronald: All we got here is farms and hicks. This is the middle of nowhere. It wouldn’t make much difference.

Rural students were slower to respond to our questions about diversity. It was obvious from the coaxing we had to do that they had never really considered the issue before. They also were more reluctant than the suburban youth to say anything that could be construed as critical of or prejudiced toward racial minorities. Even though they may have harbored prejudiced views, they were far more reluctant to express them, perhaps reflecting a social constraint akin to politeness that was not present in the suburban schools. From these informal discussions we received the distinct impression, to be tested more rigorously later, that proximity to diverse populations influenced adolescent attitudes about immigration-induced diversity.

Nationalism and Chauvinism

Not since the mid-1970s, at the close of the Vietnam War, has there been so much interest in young Americans’ attitudes toward the U.S. political system. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, have renewed interest in patriotism and nationalism and how these sentiments vary across the population. The impetus for research on this subject during the Vietnam War era was to understand the foundations of the antigovernment sentiment

being expressed on university campuses throughout the nation at that time. During this turbulent period, liberal scholars adopted the term “chauvinism” to describe devout loyalty to U.S. government institutions and policies, such as that expressed in the motto “My country, right or wrong.”

As characterized by the previous generation of research, chauvinism is the belief that one’s nation and government are superior to others, a belief closely related to ethnocentrism and nationalism. According to this interpretation, one who is willing to criticize the American political system is not a chauvinist. Chauvinists not only are unlikely to engage in criticism of their own government, they probably are disdainful of those who do. In earlier research, chauvinism was associated with intolerance of political nonconformists (for example, communists, socialists, and campus radicals) who might attack the justice and fairness of American political and economic institutions. Education that inculcated nationalistic sentiment was widely thought to be akin to teaching bigotry—that America is superior to other nations and so are Americans. This sort of favoritism for one’s own political community often is considered to be contrary to the liberal virtues of impartiality and tolerance.³⁸

On the other hand, some modicum of nationalistic sentiment may be necessary to stimulate respect for and trust in the institutions and political processes established by the U.S. Constitution. Arguably, the only way people can understand their responsibilities to their community is through patriotic education: a positive emotional attachment to one’s country is often considered to be a necessary condition for civic engagement.³⁹ Love for one’s country need not lead to bigotry or intolerance. Social psychologists have found that a strong in-group identification (for example, love for one’s nation) does not necessarily accompany hostility to those outside one’s group.⁴⁰ Nor do patriotic individuals become uncritical followers. On the contrary, without patriotic education, many schools fail to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to be critical citizens, and also ignore opportunities to teach the liberal standards of tolerance and objectivity.

With these opposing views firmly in mind, we examine the sources and effects of nationalistic sentiment because we believe that expressions of support for the American political system are associated with other important

38. MacIntyre (1995, p. 225).

39. Damon (2001, p. 135).

40. Brewer (1999).

attitudes toward policy and could be related to a person's level of political awareness and civic engagement.

Among the youth we met, few were willing to think very globally about the American political system, much less offer any criticism of it through comparison with some other institutional design. Students sometimes complained about government performance and about taxes being wasted, and some occasionally asked why our system of government is shaped the way that it is, but none held up an alternative model. Students have a hard time grasping the difference between proportional representation and single-member, winner-take-all election districts, and many teachers themselves are fuzzy on the details. When students ask why there are not more political parties in the United States, few teachers can provide a straightforward explanation. Unlike their parents' generation, these kids do not have protestors in their midst calling for a revolution, and no one is stretching (or attempting to contract) the limits of political speech. With few challenges to the existing political order in the postcommunist era, there just isn't much to be chauvinistic about.

We were interested in whether nationalism is an attitude that fosters or retards the political socialization process. Does nationalism influence efficacy or participation? Does a feeling of national pride generate interest in politics and government? To the extent that nationalism fosters knowledge and participation, it might be something to encourage.

Attitudes toward the Police and the Courts

Maintaining a healthy suspicion of official power is a venerable American tradition that did not begin with the antiwar protests of the 1960s or with the public's reaction to the Watergate scandal. Nor was the public's suspicious reaction to the federal law enforcement actions at Waco and Ruby Ridge in the early 1990s especially out of line with the nation's heritage.⁴¹ The widespread inclination to view police action with distrust predates the nation's founding. The commitment of the founders to protecting the citizenry from overbearing police power was underscored by the passage of the Bill of Rights.

Highly publicized accounts of police misconduct and of negligence of the courts have sparked public furor in the last two decades. The fallout from the 1992 Rodney King beating in Los Angeles was extraordinary,

41. Brewer and Willnat (2001).

demonstrating the damage that police brutality can inflict on police-community relations.⁴² The not-guilty verdicts initially handed down to the policemen who brutalized King further strained relations between Los Angeles and the police; they also caused people to question the fundamental fairness of the court system. The King beating and subsequent police trials provide an infamous instance in which the public eye was quickly and coldly trained on police and courts.⁴³ More recent incidents of police brutality in New York City and reports of police corruption in Los Angeles further eroded the public's trust. African Americans and other minority groups are quick to highlight evidence of police brutality as proof of how the police cannot be trusted to protect everyone and how some communities may even be threatened by police action.

Our measure of attitudes toward police and law enforcement was derived from two survey questions detailed in appendix B. What is curious to us is the extent to which the variation in attitudes toward the police and courts could be predicted by an adolescent's race, neighborhood of residence, and other traits. Adolescents, in general, often are described as "oppositional" vis-à-vis authority, of both parents and others. But while many high school youth may express a general contempt for local law enforcement, that disdain is likely to run much deeper and wider in some communities than in others. African American students in the majority black schools we visited guffawed with laughter at the idea that they might trust the police to protect them. Even their teachers laughed. The following comments were typical and show the extent of opinion formation on this issue, even among the female students, who presumably had less contact with the police than the males:

Latisha: It takes them an hour to go somewhere where someone's been shot in a black neighborhood, but it takes like three minutes for them to respond to a call from a white neighborhood.

Lashonda: My uncle got beat up. The Caucasian police will try to make a black man look bad.

Kedron: The cops will think I'm the criminal when they arrive, and yet I'm the one who called in the first place.

Tiffany: Cops have way too much attitude in the performance of their duties. And the black police are just as bad as the white police.

42. See Tuch and Weitzer (1997).

43. Baldassare (1994).

Robert: The cops target minorities. They pull you over for nothin' and question you just because of the way you look. They harass you for petty things.

Latisha: I've seen them watching a fight from a distance rather than go in and break it up.

Robert: The only ones the cops respect are old people and people with money. Unless you're black with money, then it doesn't count.

These students were almost equally skeptical of securing a fair trial from the local court system:

Robert: The public defenders don't work for you. They're workin' for them. They're paid by them. And they don't care because they get paid even if you're not free.

Juan: [Getting a fair trial] depends on what you did. If you stole a bike, maybe.

Kedron: Yeah, if you kill a cop, forget it. You're finished. A big deal is made of a couple of white kids who dress up in trench coats, but no one talks about an innocent brother who is shot.

Latisha: It takes money—money, and you have to know how to talk to people.

The students in this predominantly black and Hispanic school viewed the police and local court system as stacked against them in about every conceivable way. Their beliefs about the police and the courts were rife with the perception of racial and socioeconomic inequality.

The white suburban youth expressed a much smaller set of complaints—mostly that the police harassed them and had nothing else to do but chase after minor drug and alcohol offenses. Absent from their comments was any sense that the police enforce the law unequally or target certain groups over others on the basis of race or socioeconomic status. They complained about police competence and the fact that police do so little in these relatively crime-free neighborhoods:

Emily: The cops mostly hang out at Dunkin Donuts. They don't want to face any real crime.

Kathleen: There's not much to protect, not much crime to protect us from. They enforce the basic laws around here.

John: At our age, you don't think of the police for protection, you think of them for busting our parties and arresting our friends for drinking and drugs.

Emily: The cops protect you from things that aren't dangerous.

Ann-Marie: I feel bad for cops. There are no easy solutions. They aren't going to get it right every time, but it would be worse without them.

Suburban and small-town youth also were more optimistic about their ability to obtain a fair trial.

Nerissa: I would never get into trouble with the law; that's not my thing. But if I did I'm sure I could get a fair trial.

Question: How sure?

Nerissa: Pretty sure, I guess. But that's different than when you asked if we can trust the police. You know that they are always looking to get after teenagers. Like there's nothing better to do, you know?

There can be little question that there were enormous racial differences in these adolescents' attitudes toward the police. But our interview notes also suggest that their attitudes toward local police and courts were subject to strong contextual influences that can be traced to the ethnic and economic character of their neighborhoods. Because information about police and court misconduct usually is local, we fully expected our survey data to show that attitudes vary across communities.

The Clinton Impeachment

Events are a catalyst for the development of political values, offering "occasions for socialization."⁴⁴ Prominent socializing events can be of two types: some have the effect of stimulating national unity, while others divide the nation, sharpening and even redefining partisanship. Among those that count as unifying are the two world wars, the Persian Gulf war of 1991, and the Oklahoma City bombing; one also could count the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in this category. These events are important because they galvanize the nation to fight against a common enemy for an unquestioned cause. Among examples of events that produce division and sharpen partisanship are the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal, the civil rights protests of the 1960s, the O. J.

44. Beck and Jennings (1991); Sears and Valentino (1997).

Simpson trial, the Los Angeles riots, and the shootings at Columbine High School. In these cases, universal alarm about a major problem soon gave way to policy judgments that were sharply divided. These events are important for political socialization because they deepen cleavages during a time when young people are beginning to understand and remember political events and their outcomes.

Another divisive socializing event was the impeachment of President William Jefferson Clinton. With the major exception of the terrorist attacks, few political events of the millennial generation were as visible as the House impeachment and Senate trial of President Clinton at the close of his second term in 1998. The Clinton impeachment will be remembered because it had all the features of good political theater: sex, intense partisan conflict, good guys versus bad guys—and debate about who the good and bad guys were. Because of its sensational, titillating content, media coverage was round-the-clock, and it was virtually impossible for even the most irregular of television viewers to avoid it.⁴⁵ Yet how adolescents responded to that barrage is likely to vary highly across individual and community characteristics, depending primarily on partisan orientations. Our measure of response to the impeachment process is derived from two survey questions (see appendix B), one tapping reaction to the principal offense itself (lying to the grand jury) and the other asking whether the impeachment process discouraged interest in politics because of the purportedly “trivial” nature of the sexual indiscretions that precipitated it.

At each school site, the most vocal students were highly aware of the impeachment process and generally opposed it. Informal polls of our classrooms indicated 2-to-1 opposition to the impeachment proceedings. The following exchange among ethnic minority students in a predominantly Democratic area was typical:

Darnell: The president’s personal life is no one’s business but his own.

Tamika: He’s doing a good job as president, so who cares if he made a human mistake?

Steven: The whole process is a joke. This is a total distraction away from important matters.

Jorge: It’s nobody’s business. You’re human. It’s your nature to lie.

Darnell: He’s not God.

45. Morris (2002); Rozell and Wilcox (2000); Quirk (2000).

Steven: But he shouldn't have lied about it. He should have been up front from the beginning.

Kedron: It was a waste of money. But he lied under oath and got special treatment. The president shouldn't have gotten special treatment; that wasn't right.

Darnell: The Republicans were just out to get the man.

But we also sensed that the adolescents' views of the impeachment were probably less context dependent than many other attitudes we tapped. Even in schools situated in more heavily Republican neighborhoods, there was substantial sympathy for the president's acquittal, mixed with sarcasm, sexual innuendo, and traditional morality:

Daniel: It probably wasn't worth impeachment, but he's made us the laughing stock of the world.

Mary: He's not fit to be the head of state. He has everyone laughing at us.

Brenda: You have to separate someone's private life from what they do in public. He's still a good president.

Barry: People lie under oath all the time, but when it's the president they make a big deal out of it.

Angel: And what's this thing he has for such large women? (titters of laughter across the room)

Kristin: I think it was disgusting that Monica Lewinsky was so young.

Mary: I think it is a moral issue. The president has to set a good example.

We found that the impeachment was something that the white students very much enjoyed joking about. Many felt that Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky was a comical event and that the impeachment process was excessive hoopla over a trivial matter. A few would occasionally speak of the events leading to the impeachment as a justification for their cynicism: "It just goes to show you that you can't trust our leaders," insisted one suburban white female. Our qualitative notes showed that a clear cultural divide, independent of partisanship, was present between white students from small towns with more blue-collar and service sector employment and white students from affluent suburban areas whose parents were high-achieving professionals. The former took more conservative positions on the impeachment while the latter were willing to join the majority of black inner-city students in dismissing the president's conduct.

Reaction to the Events of September 11, 2001

The destruction of the World Trade Center towers in New York, in which more than 3,000 people died, was the most shocking event to occur on American soil since Pearl Harbor. Its potential as an agent of socialization should not be overlooked. For one thing, the sheer quantity of media coverage following the attack and the subsequent attack on the Pentagon gave adolescents an unprecedented opportunity to learn more about American governing institutions and officeholders.

To examine the reaction to terrorism, we followed up our 1999–2000 research with a second round of surveys in four of our Maryland schools in the fall of 2001 and the spring of 2002, drawing on very similar samples. We compared the before-and-after results from those schools in an effort to draw inferences about the impact of the terrorist incidents on adolescents' attitudes toward government. To begin, we compared before-and-after observations on the amount of political discussion, political knowledge, and news media consumption in these adolescent populations. We then examined variations in the responses to questions about efficacy according to the amount of news broadcasts students watched and the amount of political discussions in which they engaged in the aftermath of the attacks.

Measurement of the Dependent Variables

Six of the dependent variables described above are formulated as principal components scores from sets of survey items, rescaled to range between 0 and 100 in order to ease interpretation in statistical analysis. Briefly, principal components is a statistical method used to take multiple survey items and identify overlap among them as a means of determining whether they are measuring a common theoretical concept (such as attitudes toward equality, or diversity).⁴⁶ In survey research, some variant of principal components or factor analysis is commonly used when researchers are not confident that a single survey question is sufficient to capture a complex theoretical concept. In order to measure internal efficacy, for example, one survey item probably is not satisfactory. Nor would a single question be adequate to capture such complex ideas as “opposition to diversity,” “nationalism,” or many of the other attitudes customarily examined in political socialization research.

46. Kline (1994); Maruyama (1998).

By using principal components, we can identify whether there is a single, more basic or unique variable or “factor,” say, internal efficacy, lying at the intersection of the responses to a number of survey questions. The resulting factor is defined by what the separate measures of internal efficacy have in common, and it can be used to calculate a factor score for each respondent that provides some indication of the respondent’s level of internal efficacy.⁴⁷

The details for the factor analyses are reported in appendix C. In our research the dependent variables formulated within the factor analytic framework are internal political efficacy, external political efficacy, opposition to diversity, nationalistic feeling or chauvinism, negativity toward local police and courts, and support for the Clinton impeachment. The factor analyses and factor loadings for each question from which these latent variables were constructed are reported in appendix C. In addition, two other variables from specific survey items are treated as dependent variables in our analysis: the amount of political discussion in the last week (in number of days) and the students’ scores on the seven-item factual knowledge test, expressed as the percentage of correct answers. The questions on the knowledge test are listed in appendix B.

Elements of the Explanatory Framework

So far we have detailed the outcome variables we were interested in explaining and how we measured them. But what of the explanations themselves? Just how are the participation-enabling and side-taking dimensions of the socialization process conditioned by neighborhood characteristics? Individual choice is not strictly determined by environmental influences, but clearly one’s environment limits the choices one can make.

Social Environment

Parents, teachers, clergy, the media, and children’s peers are themselves a product of local social and political environments, and they reinforce the political values of the community.⁴⁸ The social composition of the community, then, plays a role in predicting what is taught, preached, and otherwise communicated to children.⁴⁹

47. Maruyama (1998, p. 133).

48. Sanchez-Jankowski (1992, p. 88).

49. Jencks and Mayer (1990).

Political efficacy, for example, is conditioned by ecological or neighborhood influences because many elements of an individual's personal (and family) history are tied to the histories of the people (and families) living nearby.⁵⁰ The development of many individual traits and habits is expressly attributable to characteristics of the social environment: for example, for attendance at religious services to register on children's attitudes and behavior, churches and church members must be available to do the socializing.

Again, taking the sense of political efficacy as an example, we should not be surprised to find that efficacy is higher among children when parents and other adults in the community model efficacious behavior through their own involvement in politics. When a clear majority of adults in the community identify with one of the two major parties and when parents and neighbors take an active part in politics, offspring come to the conclusion that involvement is worthwhile. Political involvement by friends and neighbors also increases the amount of political discussion in the home—a valuable instrument for learning political values. A reasonable starting hypothesis is that students should score highly on efficacy indicators in communities where information and participation levels are high and lower in communities that exhibit considerable political apathy. We may find that efficacy levels are higher in smaller rather than larger community settings because individuals are more likely to feel a sense of belonging in small towns than in large cities and congested, transient, and sprawling suburbs. In part, this effect can be traced to the greater stability of the populations in small towns compared with those in suburbs and cities.⁵¹

Our measure of the social environment is based on U.S. Census Bureau information for the zip codes in which the schools are located. Zip codes seem to be an appropriate measure of community context because many of the alternative geographies seem much less optimal. Counties usually are too expansive, particularly in the study area, where living conditions can vary widely within a few miles and getting from one place to another can be complicated. While some adults may have a social network that spreads across a large geographic area because they work at a location far from home, few adolescents interact with peers or other citizens on a truly countywide basis.

50. Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995); Putnam (1966).

51. Steinberger (1981); Finifter and Abramson (1975).

Other units of analysis that might capture context seem either too compact (census blocks and block groups), or again, too diffuse (census-defined places) to capture the effects of local community influence. Census tracts have been widely used as measures of neighborhood context in many sociological studies and perhaps come closest to zip code areas in terms of typical size and population. We decided on zip codes because we found that they came consistently close to capturing the size of the catchment areas of high schools—the zone that encompasses the residences of students served by a school. To be sure, zip codes were not always perfect substitutes for the school's catchment areas. In some cases a catchment area included addresses from several adjacent zip codes, but we were informed by school authorities that the vast majority of students came from within the same zip code in which the school was located. In the four schools with magnet programs that attracted students from outside the immediate vicinity, those students constituted no more than 20 percent of the student body. And in all cases, the magnet programs drew students who were from areas close to the zip code in which the school was located, suggesting that living conditions would be highly similar to those in the zip code of the school.

Political Environment

The political diversity that comes with two locally competitive parties proves to be the optimal setting for political learning. Young people acquire partisan identities by making the connection between the social groups with which they identify and the social groups that undergird the major parties.⁵² In single-party environments, socialization is commonly defective because the opposition party's social groups are rarely observed or well understood. One may comprehend the local social profile of one's own party but have no inkling of whom or what the other one stands for. The presence of members of the opposition party forces young people to reflect on and defend, if only to themselves, their reasons for choosing their party. A mountain of political science evidence points to the competitiveness of the party system as a powerful influence on the level of political activism, heightening the sense that one's vote counts.⁵³ The obvious psychological link between partisan heterogeneity and engagement is through efficacy: if voters believe their vote counts, they feel capable of influencing the election

52. Green, Palmquist, and Schickler (2002).

53. Rosenstone and Hansen (1993); Hill and Leighley (1993); Patterson and Caldeira (1983); Key (1949).

outcome. Competition also produces campaign activities, turning candidates and parties into agents of political socialization. Competitiveness fuels media coverage of especially close contests, creating greater opportunities to learn about politics and government. Citizens also are more likely to discuss closely contested elections than ones in which the winner is a foregone conclusion.

Related to party competition is voters' sense that they are represented at some level of government by officeholders who are like minded—or that with reasonable effort they *could be* represented by such a person. Simply the prospect that Jesse Jackson could be the Democratic Party's presidential nominee led to record levels of black mobilization.⁵⁴ In related research, there is evidence that blacks living in cities that have elected African Americans to prominent political office feel more efficacious and are more attentive to politics than those living in areas where blacks are not among the visible officeholders.⁵⁵ Having minority political representatives, then, is instrumental to minorities' feeling that they can trust the system and count on it to be responsive to them. Empowerment leads to higher efficacy.⁵⁶

The generalization that the political efficacy of minority group members is contingent on their ability to elect at least some representatives of their group to public office may apply to other politicized, but not necessarily racial, identities. There is a similar effect for gender, for example. Women are more likely to talk to others about politics and feel more politically efficacious during election campaigns in which women are on the ballot.⁵⁷ The competitive status of any number of salient identities may act as a stimulus to higher turnout.

Given that the federal system permits substantial autonomy among local units of government in the conduct of elections, it is not difficult to imagine that one could belong to a local political minority while being a member of a national political majority. For example, Republicans may be the dominant partisan group in a community while being in the minority at the statewide or national level. Which partisan context matters most to one's political behavior and attitudes—the local or the national? We would agree with a long line of others that it is one's local political status that counts most and that locality is even more important for adolescents who

54. Tate (1991).

55. Bobo and Gilliam (1990); Browning, Marshall, and Tabb (1984).

56. Bobo and Gilliam (1990, p. 387).

57. Hansen (1997); Sapiro and Conover (1997).

are unlikely to be aware of their position in broader opinion distributions. If one's local minority status in political affairs is acute, it erodes the prospect of finding safe, compatible discussion partners and heightens the prospect that one's minority status will lead to silence, ignorance, and non-participation in regard to politics. Finding no social support for one's views easily translates into the sense that one's voice does not count, diminishing one's sense of efficacy. Citizens living under conditions in which their policy interests are consistently shouted down or defeated feel less efficacious than citizens whose interests dominate.⁵⁸ One might predict that Democrats living in areas of long-standing Republican dominance would exhibit lower efficacy and express fewer opinions than their Republican counterparts, and vice versa. Majority partisans in one-sided political environments are likely to have many congenial discussion partners, whereas minority partisans may assiduously avoid discussions of politics and miss opportunities to learn.

At the same time, we recognize that there is more to the decision to participate in politics than competitive calculations of advantage. Some participate not because they believe that their vote might decide a close election but simply out of a sense of civic obligation and pride, or due to strongly held political convictions.⁵⁹ How else can we explain the turnout of voters in one-party political settings where the election outcome is always known well in advance? General elections in large cities usually are not known for being competitive, and one may question why anyone bothers to show up at all. Because turnout is motivated by forces other than the competitiveness of the contest, we examine the effects of not just local party diversity but also voter turnout. Areas of high voter turnout rooted in a strong sense of civic engagement among adults are likely to have a strong socializing impact on young people, giving them first-hand examples of what participatory behavior looks like and how one gets involved.

Our measures for local political environment could not be drawn from zip code or census data because the Census Bureau does not collect and record political information. Instead, we collected precinct maps for each of our twenty-nine school locations and aggregated precinct data to the catchment area of each high school. For the most part, we did this by hand, although in the late stages we used a GIS (geographic information system)

58. Weissberg (1975); Iyengar (1980).

59. Campbell (2002).

program, a computer program designed for mapping. The procedure we followed was simply to trace in the catchment boundaries over the more granular precinct geographies. We then aggregated the precinct data to calculate measures of political party diversity, turnout, and Democratic and Republican Party bias for the 1996 presidential race, the 1998 gubernatorial race (1997 in Virginia), and the 1998 state legislative contests (see appendix B for measures).

Media Exposure

A series of studies has been made of the impact of news media on adolescent socialization.⁶⁰ News consumption rises steadily as children grow up. Inasmuch as the news media are a primary source of political information for adults, it is not surprising that children who see informational programs on television typically wind up being more knowledgeable about politics and current events than those who do not.⁶¹ Even so, as the number of mass media outlets has multiplied, knowledge about politics and current events has diminished.⁶²

Viewing television news sometimes is thought to increase political knowledge and interest in politics, but it is also usually considered to reinforce existing attitudes.⁶³ We believe that consumption of television news may well lower an adolescent's sense of efficacy given that the broadcast media have a stake in maintaining public doubts about government.⁶⁴ Because people pay more attention to negative information or "bad news" and are less likely to absorb "good news," network television news organizations have a strategic interest in covering negative news: it helps them maintain market share. Exposure to television news also has been previously associated with political malaise.⁶⁵ Some have suggested that it is the media's scandal-obsessed coverage of politics and politicians that contributes most directly to citizens' cynical and passive attitudes about public life.⁶⁶

60. Conway, Stevens, and Smith (1975); Conway and others (1981); Garramone and Atkin (1986).

61. See Zaller (1992) regarding media, politics, and adults. For a discussion of media and the political socialization of children, see Chafee, Ward, and Tipton (1970) and Garramone and Atkin (1986).

62. Zukin (2000).

63. Chafee, Ward, and Tipton (1970); Atkin and Gantz (1978).

64. Fallows (1996); Lipset and Schneider (1983).

65. Berman and Stookey (1980); Robinson (1975, 1976).

66. Bennett (1997); Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995).

No doubt the suggestion that information conveyed through television might diminish political efficacy and discourage participation will strike some as controversial. Such coverage probably contributes to political knowledge, and one might guess that greater political knowledge inexorably yields more efficacious feelings. But what is it that adolescents learn from the mass media? While exposure to some types of information may build their basic knowledge of government—that the president has veto authority, what the role of the chief justice on the Supreme Court is, the date of the next primary election—exposure to television news is likely to increase their knowledge of scandals and the most intractable of government problems, generating a different type of knowledge. Bill Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky may have been newsworthy by most measures, but it was certainly negative and did nothing to reinforce public confidence in the presidency. A steady bombardment of scandal coverage can leave the impression that government problems are insoluble. A regular diet of such information could easily lead one to take a despairing view of the value of citizens' input in government. Our measure of news exposure is a question about the number of days in the previous week in which students watched a news broadcast on television at home.

Family Characteristics and Parental Resources

Early studies of socialization focused on the role of parents as key agents in the transmission of political values to children.⁶⁷ In the 1960s, parents appeared to consistently transfer their party identification to their children, but little else.⁶⁸ Subsequent research has indicated that the transmission of political values from parent to child is strong among highly politicized parents but not among those who are apolitical or inconsistently political.⁶⁹

We believe that parents' most important role in political socialization is that of material and moral provider. This emphasis places the explanatory weight squarely on parental socioeconomic status and religious values. A family's economic resources have been widely understood as influential in shaping a child's educational aspirations and academic achievement after high school. The socioeconomic status of individuals influences their sense of control over the larger environment because others infer from their sta-

67. Hyman (1959).

68. Sears (1975); Jennings and Niemi (1981).

69. Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers (1999); Beck and Jennings (1991).

tus the worth of their contributions to the political system. Uneven evaluations of political efficacy across a population, then, are rooted in social and economic inequality.⁷⁰

Family structure is thought to be related to key socialization variables such as self-efficacy and self-esteem. Children raised in single-parent homes, usually with the father absent, are likely to have lower feelings of efficacy than those raised in two-parent homes, and they are disadvantaged in a myriad of ways that reduce their educational achievement and probability of economic success.⁷¹ Given that children's attitudes toward authority are determined at least partly by their experiences at home, family structure has political implications.⁷² An earlier generation of research suggested that fathers were more responsible for politically socializing their children than mothers, possibly because fathers may have more leisure time to devote to political and community affairs.⁷³ Along with lower self-esteem and educational aspirations, children in single-parent homes develop less confidence in their capacity to influence the political system than those in two-parent homes. Political efficacy is simply an attitudinal subset of a larger sense of self-efficacy formed by parental and other environmental influences.⁷⁴ Since self-efficacy is developed through the experience of accomplishing one's goals or attaining personal mastery of a subject or skill, parents' support and encouragement, along with demands for achievement, are significant.⁷⁵ Inasmuch as political discussion in the home is an instrument for building efficacy, the two-parent home has a distinct advantage over the single-parent home. In two-parent homes, a child is likely to hear more adult discussion on a large number of topics, politics included.

School Experiences

Many early studies found that schools—specifically civics courses—contributed little to students' political awareness or participation.⁷⁶ A more

70. Della Fave (1980; 1986).

71. Clarke (1973); Coleman (1988); McLanahan (1985); McLanahan and Bumpass (1988); McLanahan and Sandefur (1994); Yakibu, Axinn, and Thornton (1999).

72. Easton and Hess (1962); Hess and Torney (1967); Jennings and Niemi (1971); Langton (1969).

73. Jennings and Niemi (1971); Burns, Schlozman, and Verba (1997).

74. Gecas (1989).

75. Bandura (1977).

76. Langton and Jennings (1968); Litt (1963); Jennings and Niemi (1968); but see Hess and Torney (1967).

recent consideration of the effect of schooling suggests that students do gain political knowledge from civics courses but that the gains vary across student subgroups.⁷⁷

In addition to the amount of civics coursework, students' affinity for civics courses is a critical ingredient in the socialization process. Teaching the subject or simply exposing the student to information about government is not enough to generate positive political socialization. Students must acquire a liking for the material in order for the school experience of taking government classes to pay off in greater levels of civic engagement and participation.

Schools transmit information about politics in more ways than through formal coursework in civics. We examine one aspect of the school climate—students' assessments of the way in which they are evaluated by school authorities. School authorities usually are the first nonparent authorities a child confronts, often as early as three or four years of age. Children eventually will evaluate their teachers and administrators as fair or unfair, and they may generalize those evaluations to other authorities, including the government and its officials. The tendency to generalize from one's experience of local authority to higher level officeholders often is described as "diffusion." Diffuse support is the tendency to be supportive of the entire political system based on one's judgments of the fairness of local officials, including teachers and school administrators.⁷⁸

Race, Ethnicity, Immigrant Status, and Gender

A string of prominent studies of racial differences in political socialization have found that black children have a consistently lower sense of efficacy and know less about politics than white children.⁷⁹ There is nothing inherent in being identified as black that causes a lower sense of efficacy; rather it is the myriad of attributes closely associated with growing up as a black person in the United States that contributes to defective socialization. Levels of internal efficacy among African Americans have been shown to be quite high once socioeconomic variables have been held constant, suggesting that it is mainly economic inequality that deprives blacks of the opportunities to build efficacy.⁸⁰ At the same time, feelings of external efficacy

77. Niemi and Junn (1998).

78. Easton and Dennis (1969).

79. Abramson (1972); Clarke (1973); Greenberg (1970); Langton and Jennings (1968); Lyons (1970); Pierce and Carey (1971); Rodgers (1974).

80. Hughes and Demo (1989).

remain low. African Americans often doubt that the system works for them, but many more remain confident that concerted action can make a difference.⁸¹

Perhaps the most notable difference between members of Generation Y and previous generations is the rapid change that they have experienced in the social environment. The unprecedented flows of immigrants from Latin America and Asia have raised questions of multiculturalism, diversity, and tolerance to a degree that was unknown to the protest generation. The nation's ethnic and racial complexion changed dramatically between the 1970s and the end of the century.⁸² Cultural pluralism is at its historical peak, and we have little knowledge about how the experiences of immigrant, second-generation, and native-born children contribute to their political socialization in this new setting.

The interaction of natives and immigrants in impoverished areas raises questions about "downward assimilation," usually conceived of in an economic sense. But downward assimilation also may involve the learning of moral and political values; economic progress, after all, is only one aspect of immigrant adaptation. Because a large proportion of the immigrants arriving since the late 1960s have not been Caucasian, important questions arise about the extent to which they have faced discrimination and how it has shaped their stance toward the U.S. political system. Previous research indicates that some immigrants may learn to identify with native-born minority groups, picking up the social and political values prevalent in existing Hispanic, black, and Asian communities.⁸³ Consequently, they may feel politically inefficacious, alienated from the political system, and cynical about the benefits of participating.⁸⁴ Others who may have acquired a sense of efficacy may express their political demands in racial terms, taking their cue from the black civil rights movement.⁸⁵ Many unanswered questions remain about the way in which heightened levels of ethnic diversity have influenced political socialization.

Sex or gender differences in political learning have been noted by a number of scholars since the 1960s.⁸⁶ A gender gap in political knowledge and interest has persisted for decades, and the female deficit can be traced

81. Shingles (1981); Reese and Brown (1995).

82. Gimpel (1999).

83. Fernandez-Kelly and Schauffler (1996).

84. Cohen and Dawson (1993); Waters (1996).

85. Skerry (1993).

86. Hess and Torney (1967, chap. 8); Hahn (1998).

to their different information-seeking behavior, founded on the different socialization of the sexes.⁸⁷ The gender gap in political knowledge has closed over the years, but women still are widely viewed as properly occupying nonpolitical roles in society, a legacy from earlier times when women were prohibited from voting or holding office altogether. Gender role socialization steers girls away from conflict and toward consensual issues where rules to regulate competitive interaction are less important.⁸⁸ As a result, women wind up less interested in politics than men, affecting their propensity, for example, to engage in discussions of politics, enroll in social studies courses, and watch news broadcasts. Women remain more likely to be in social settings where there is less political information and work in jobs that are less affected by political issues.⁸⁹

Direction and Plan of the Book

Political socialization, as we understand it, is a learning process largely linked to the experiences of adolescence and young adulthood. Socialization has two fundamental components that are not totally independent of each other: a participation-enabling component and a side-taking component that involves the formation of attitudes. Participation is enabled most directly through discussion, knowledge, and efficacy. It also can be facilitated by the crystallization of opinions on divisive issues that adolescents learn to care about.

Our research is founded on the notion that socialization experiences vary among subgroups of the adolescent population: blacks, females, children with immigrant parents, the affluent, those living in large cities, those living in single-parent homes, Democrats, the nonreligious, and so forth. We have highlighted these subgroup differences with survey data and then done our best to explain them through the understanding we have developed from our field investigations and observations as well as from what others have written. By the end of the book, our understanding of the political socialization process still may be incomplete, but we have made some progress and charted some new directions.⁹⁰

87. Hansen (1997); Jennings and Niemi (1968); Burns, Schlozman, and Verba (1997).

88. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996, p. 206).

89. Atkin (1978); Delli Carpini and Keeter (1991; 1996); Garramone and Atkin (1986); Burns, Schlozman, and Verba (1997).

90. In deliberating among ourselves about the outline for the book, we pondered several organizing schemata for the presentation of our results. One obvious choice was to move from dependent vari-

To examine our theory that context counts, we begin in chapter 2 with a study of how attitudes are shaped by the social and political context in which individuals live, measured at the community level. These causal factors are the most remote from the individual attitudes being explained, but ultimately they structure the interpersonal interactions that drive the communication of information in the socialization process. We try to understand the meaning and significance of urban, suburban, and rural differences as well as differences within these three subgroups. We also examine the effects of living in an ethnically and politically diverse rather than homogeneous community.

In chapter 3 we consider the effects of race and immigration status on adolescent political socialization. Race and ethnicity structure the interactions of individuals within their environments, which in turn determine exposure to alternative cultural values, influence the nature of peer relationships, and play a major role in the development of a wide range of political attitudes. While we believed that the influence of race and ethnicity would be strongest on attitudes toward tolerance of diversity, we also had reasons to expect that racial heterogeneity would explain efficacy, knowledge, and even nationalism. To avoid confounding racial and socioeconomic effects, we controlled for the socioeconomic status of families. In this chapter we also pause to consider the effects of family structure on political socialization.

Chapter 4 considers the explicitly political foundations of attitudes toward diversity, political efficacy, political knowledge, and the other outcomes we have mentioned. Political partisans and ideologues are made, not born, and it is worth spending some time simply to giving a thorough description of the way various population subgroups label themselves, including those that do not identify with a party or political ideology. The remainder of the chapter examines the effects of partisan identification, controlling for socioeconomic status. We consider the interaction of individual partisanship and the partisan composition of neighborhoods on attitudes.

able to dependent variable, chapter by chapter. But the disadvantage of that approach is that it makes the explanatory framework very repetitive and formulaic. Most of the same causal factors for efficacy, nationalism, tolerance for diversity, and so on would be recited in each chapter and only the statistical results would vary. Instead, we opted to place more weight on the independent variables, organizing the manuscript according to the explanations and processes behind the acquisition of dispositions toward politics and governing institutions. This way of writing the book places more emphasis on theory-driven explanations for the outcomes of interest.

In chapter 5 we examine the family's contribution to the socialization process, focusing on one key carrier of intergenerational influence: religious teaching. Parents are the most important factor in shaping the religious commitments of children. Religion, in turn, is an important teacher of moral virtues such as self-sacrifice and altruism, and religious participation is a widely recognized means of building social capital. As in chapters 3 and 4, we control for socioeconomic status because high income can compensate for a multitude of deficits in a child's background, counteracting forces that otherwise guarantee deficient socialization.

Chapter 6 examines the impact of several school-related variables. First among them is simple exposure to the civics curriculum. Students who have had more civics instruction often are thought to be better informed and more opinionated than those who have had less. We also consider whether students had developed an appreciation for the subject matter of government since exposure to required coursework still may leave them disdainful of government and politics. Students must develop a liking for the subject matter in order for formal instruction to have its desired impact.

A third school-related variable is students' educational aspirations, an indicator of whether they intend to go on to a four-year college after graduating from high school. Finally, we evaluate the extent to which students trust their teachers and school administrators to evaluate them fairly. Students who do not develop trust in school authorities are slow to develop trust in and respect for other governing authorities.

In chapter 7 we address the effects of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, on the attitudes of adolescents from a small subset of the schools visited in 1999 that we revisited in the fall of 2001. Contextual effects are not only geographic but temporal. Socialization can be linked to events that trigger greater-than-ordinary information flows. Knowing that the terrorist attacks stimulated greater public attention to mass media, we were particularly interested in knowing whether the youth surveyed in 2001 scored higher on measures of political knowledge, efficacy, and nationalism than those surveyed in 1999.

In chapter 8 we consider relationships among our dependent variables and evaluate the experiences and attitudes that shape intentions to vote. We also consider the implications of our findings for public policy discussions. We argue that the focus on ways to enhance formal education is of critical importance from a policy standpoint but that other means for

inculcating positive socializing messages have been ignored. The effects of additional years of schooling on participation levels are undeniable, but a prescription for more formal schooling will never be filled by the legions of students who do not go beyond high school. Realizing that improving the educational experience is only a single tool with limited reach, we search elsewhere for compensatory strategies to promote civic engagement among those who otherwise appear destined for nonparticipation.