Chapter 11
“The Apple Does Not Fall Far from the Tree”: Parents’ and Children’s Support for Violent Political Activities in Israel

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Introduction

Political participation is a central principle of democratic systems that requires citizens to be actively involved in the political decision-making process, through different channels such as partisan membership and the exercise of the right to vote. Political participation refers to actions taken to influence political decisions. Verba and Nie (1972) claimed that political participation refers to the activities of private citizens aimed more or less directly to influence the selection of governmental choices and actions of private citizens by which they seek to influence or support government and politics. From the point of view of a democratic society, participation is a mechanism to legitimize single political decisions as well as the political system as a whole. Therefore schools, political parties and other institutions are expected to promote positive attitudes in young people to political participation. Willingness to participate, and the forms that this participation takes, emerge during the process of political socialization. Parents, peers, and teachers are the most important socialization agents, who influence the development of a political identity and shape the ways in which adolescents participate in politics (Oswald/Schmid 1998).

Implicit in most of the discussions on political attitudes is the understanding that individuals can engage in one of three competing activities: inaction, institutionalized politics, and protest. While there are different typologies of political participation, all apparently converge into two broad categories: “passive” acts, including exposure to media information, interpersonal discussions, participation in voluntary partisan activities, and voting; and “Active” behavior, namely partisan commitment, working for a political party, and taking part in protests. Others have suggested that political participation can be classified as “within the system” or “out of the system” (Sabucedo/Arce 1991). This classification is similar to that created by Marsh and Kaase (1979). Using Guttman scaling procedures they found two dimensions: protest and conventional political participation. The protest orientation or “out of the system” refers to actions such as signing a petition, attending demonstrations, joining boycotts, occupying buildings, blocking traffic, and
joining strikes. The conventional dimension or “within the system” type of political participation includes reading about politics in the newspaper, discussing politics with friends, working with other people in the community, spending time working for a political party or candidate, and attending a political meeting.

Of all these alternative political activities, the support for violent political participations is the most interesting. In the democratic system, the state is considered as representing the human community and therefore as having a monopoly on the legitimate use of force in a given territory. Adopting attitudes that support the use of force in the political process is always a topic of serious concern as it presents a challenge to the legitimacy of the use of force by the state.

The goal of this study was to explore the process of adolescents’ political socialization to attitudes that support political protest. The central research question was, what is the relationship between parents’ attitudes supporting protest and attitudes that are expressed by the adolescents?

Regarding the relationship between parents’ and adolescent’s political attitudes, traditional “storm and stress” perspectives on adolescents’ development argue that a salient characteristic of the movement from childhood to adolescence is the development of individual autonomy from family influence. As adolescence progresses, individual significant others disappear from family and arise in the peer group (Blos 1979; Davis 1960). According to this perspective, distancing and detachment within the parent-adolescent relationship is inevitable and is thought to be triggered by a combination of hormonal and biological changes, intergenerational conflict, and rapidly changing social expectations experienced by the young. In this framework the expectation is that adolescent political participation is negatively related to parental attitudes. Current empirical evidence suggests that adolescent autonomy emerges within a family context in which the young express admiration for, seek advice from, and experience warm relationships with their parents (Dornbusch 1989; Grotevant 1998). Such relations are regarded as providing foundations of security from which the young explore the social worlds beyond family boundaries. Consequently parents’ authority, which at earlier stages was more unilateral often changes direction to greater mutuality during adolescence. This perspective will predict a positive relationship between parental political attitudes and adolescents’ attitudes to political participation. The very existence of opposite views on the parents’ role in the development of adolescent autonomy should stimulate an interest in understanding the socialization process that occurs within parent and adolescent relationships.