

American Political Culture

US Government POS 2041

Ch. 1

Introduction: perception of gov

We'll examine the following themes

- Relationship between Gov & its Citizens and between Citizens & Gov
- What Americans think about Gov
- Citizenship: Knowledge & Participation
- Government itself
- Thinking Critically about American Political Culture

Relationship with our Gov is kind of dysfunctional

- At some levels we turn to gov for security & protection
- During disasters we demand & get help & services- Katrina, Wall Street rescue pkg, Unemployment, social welfare, etc.
- On the other hand we don't want gov in our lives
- We think we pay too much taxes

How we view our Gov tends to fall into 2 camps

- Some complain that Gov is an institution which does things to us
 - Impedes my efforts to make profits
 - Takes too much taxes
- Gov is an institution which protects us
 - But we expect good roads
 - Security & protection
 - Garbage collections
 - Farmers expect subsidies

Question

- Does it matter if people don't trust the government?
- Does it reduce the effectiveness of gov?
- Does it matter if you don't vote?
 - * ...eg., less than 16% of eligible voters voted in Orlando Mayor's election in April 2012.

Presence of gov in our lives

- Post 911 large numbers of Americans approved Fed. Gov's initiatives to introduce extraordinary security measures to protect us. We wanted Gov's action & we got action.
- Now many are concerned with civil liberties of people who were arrested with slim evidence that they committed any crimes
- Overall Americans have a healthy suspicion of Gov & politicians, Federal and State

Trust in gov is low

- Unwilling to allow too much power to Gov
- We saw increased Gov powers into the financial sectors after 1929 depression
- Gov active in farm, home mortgage & finances
- Since then there are gov's policies which reach into every aspect of our social & economic lives

Trust

- Today it is the largest employer & controls one of the largest militaries & provides a wide array of social & economic services
- We rely on gov for a wide range of goods & services

- Example of how dependent we are on these services
- Whites distrust gov more than any other ethnic group. Why?

Political Efficacy

- Ability to influence/affect gov
- The sense that we can affect politics is declining
- Americans do not believe that gov listens

What are some of the consequences of this view?

- Discuss the question

What are some of the consequences of this view?

- Apathy
- Cynicism
- Loss of confidence that gov can resolve our problems
- Self-fulfilling prophecy
- Leads to inaction and a sense of resignation
- Does this help/undermine our democracy?

Popular Culture: Role of comedy

- Are these good sources of political info.
- What is the difference between legit news & entertainment?
- Is entertainment a legit source for informing Americans about politics?

3 Distinction Migration Patterns

1. Moralistic Pol Culture
2. Individualistic Pol Culture
3. Traditionalist Pol Culture

Refer to chart 1-2 on p.13

Moralistic

- Politics is a means by which society becomes a “Good” & “Just” society
- Migration guided by those seeking religious freedom
- Settled in New England, Pacific Northwest
- Role of government to address social problems

Individualistic

- People view government as an extension of the marketplace
- Members of society to be allowed to attain their individual goals
- Politics is seen as any other business- to further the individual pursuits

- Competition to provide goods & services
- Migration came from England, Germany, Scotland, Ireland
- Settled in Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania

Traditionalistic

- Role of Govt is to preserve status quo
- Elites have much influence in govt & political participation
- Ordinary persons not really involved

Changes

- May be historically accurate
- No longer
- New immigration patterns from Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia is changing the face of pol culture of America
- Also blurring the divisions between these pol cultures

States & Local Govt employ the most Americans

- Education
- Law Enforcement
- Healthcare
- Transportation
- Environment

So why do we pay so much more attention the Federal Govt?

Laboratories of democracy

- States more so than localities have the ability to experiment with policies
- Past 3-4 decades – Devolution of powers to the states
- In areas of abortion, gun control, education
- However, economic recession of 2008-2009 slowed that down considerably
- States became more dependent on Central govt.

Forms of Government (p 10/24)

- **Autocracy** – form of gov in which a single individual (king, queen, dictator) rules
- **Oligarchy** – form of gov in which small group of elite (financial/military) controls decision process
- **Democracy** – system of rule that permits citizens to play a significant part in the process of gov, often thru election of public officials
- **Constitutional Gov** – system of gov which has effective limits placed on its powers
- **Authoritarian Gov** – does not recognize limitations on its powers, (formal/informal