

American Political Culture

US Government POS 2041

Ch. 1

Who is an American?

brainstorm

- Can we define this?

Who are we as a people?

Who are we:

- Culturally?
- Gender, ethnicity?
- Politically?
- Religions?
- Education?
- Economics?

Very challenging question

- 1790 pop = 3.9 million
- 2015 = 320,090,857 people (U.S. Census Bureau)
- Third most populous country on the planet, behind only China (1.4 billion) & India (1.3 billion)

Some gloomy stats. from *www.drugpolicy.org, etc.*

- US = 5% of world's population
- US consumes 20% of world's resources
- US has 25% of the world's prisoners
- US spends \$40,000,000,000 annually in war on drugs
- 2,323,000 or 1 in every 99 adults behind bars in federal, state & local jails
- At least 1 gun murder every day

Jan. 2014 Yale U study- every hour a child is injured in a gun incident (7391 a year)

Stats cont'd.

- 2/3 of state prison population are blacks & Hispanics
- Their use of drugs is at similar rate to whites
- 200,000+ students lost fed. financial aid due to drug conviction
- 32,000 Americans infected annually with HIV/AIDS Hepatitis C thru sharing of contaminated needles.

- 75% of applicants between 18-24 years fail the military's recruitment process
- 2008 total \$ spent on Education = \$858 bil
- S. Korea has 25 more school days than the US
- US students ranked 31st in Math
- US spend \$15,171 per student, per year. per student compared to \$7,400 among wealthy countries.
- US student debt is \$1.2 trillion

What % of Americans are perceived to be immigrants?

- 13% ?
- 20% ?
- 25% ?
- 30% ?
- 40% ?

- Perception is 39%
- Fact: 13%

Demographic Profile “a collision of histories”

- America is a land of immigrants
- Racially, linguistically and culturally divided
- Diverse religions
- Earliest European settlers in SE/SW were Roman Catholics from France & Spain
- 1798 Congress began restricting immigration & in fact began deporting several groups
- Between 1920-1960 immigration was only open to Mexicans
- In 1965 civil rights movements led to end of nationality restrictions

Immigration & Political Cleavage: Diversity based on national origins

- Anti foreign or nativist sentiments common thru out America history
- Based on economic competition, or perceived threat from those with different culture, religions
- Such sentiments peaks when immigration levels are high
- Mid – 1800's, 1920's, 1990's, early 2000's, 2008-2009
- Despite these resistances, each wave of immigrant has contributed to building America-economically & culturally

Religious Diversity

- American religious profile is changing
- Many groups from Europe- Quakers, French Huguenots, Catholics, British Methodists arrived here in order to escape religious intolerance or persecution
- American independence also saw a separation from the (Anglican Church of England
- Today America still Predominantly Christian although 16% in every American is unaffiliated.

Diversity

- Several groups established communities based on religious groups: NJ, PA., Maryland provided religious freedom for different groups
- Rhode Island was founded by religious dissident Roger Williams
- 6 of the founding states had established state religions
- Religious differences led to violence in 1843 against Catholics
- Led to creation of Catholic run school system which to this day remains an alternative to our public school system

Economic

- Economic disparity plays a role in how much Americans participate in the political process
- Poor Americans not likely to participate
- Those who vote Democratic
- Well-off vote Republicans

Regional Diversity

- Regional differences also play a factor in economic decisions. Eg. Farmers are more likely to support farm subsidy legislations, than city dweller
- The whole N-S conflict was fuelled by economic desire of the South to maintain slavery as a basis of their economic strength

Age demography in diversity

- Age difference is also a factor in political orientation
- Older Americans tend to be involved in politics more
- Push for health care reforms, economic benefits, etc

Diversity & Identity Politics

- While America has always been culturally diverse, politically the diversity was restricted & narrow
- Historically large segments were politically excluded- Women & Slaves, Native Americans
- Women received suffrage 1920
- Native Indians 1948
- Puerto Rico became a territory in 1898

Identity Politics

- 1970's under Nixon adoption of race, gender, ethnic, preference policies contributed the importance of diversity in America politics
- Programs such as **affirmative action policies** introduced what we know as **identity politics**
- **Identity politics** is the organization on the basis of one's sexuality gender, ethnic or racial identity in order to compete for resources & to influence public policies

Cornerstone Values

- **Liberty:** To have personal freedoms & Gov whose powers are limited by laws
- **Equality:** Each individual has the right, and is free to participate in political and social context equally.
- **Democracy:** Maintain political power in the hands of the people
- So while these are seriously held values, their practice could cause conflict.
- Examples:
 - When security concerns overrule personal freedoms

- What is your definition of politics?
- What does political ideology mean to you?
- What factors shape your political ideology?

Politics: how do you define this concept?

- Process to vie and maintain control of gov
- Process of influencing/shaping policies which affect the public.
- Process by which decisions are made regarding a group of people (community)
- Rules designed to regulate group behavior
- Establish leadership positions and competition for such positions

What is the definition of Politics? (13)

- Rules for minimizing conflicts & disputes
- Means by which individuals & groups compete to influence how government acts
- Thru politics citizens relate & learn about each other
- Political participation allows us to pursue our interests/needs but with considerations of the needs of society as a whole

What would you consider a political act?

- Do you consider yourself political?
 - What does it mean to be political?
 - How is it expressed?
 - Do you need a structure, organizations, groups, community?
 - Role of family, education, personal experiences, religious/non-religious beliefs

Ideology

- What are some of the identifiers which determine what that is?
 - What is an ideology?
 - What is a political ideology?
 - What is your political ideology?
 - What factors shape your political ideology?

Ideology

- Political ideology defined:
A cohesive set of beliefs that forms a general philosophy about the role of government (p.147 Ginsberg)
- Highly organized & coherent set of opinions (Welch p110)

Democracy

- Greek word- *dhmokratia*,
- *demos* = the people +
- *kratia* =to be strong, to rule
- “authority of the people”

Democracy (4, 10)

- A system of majority rule
- Government by the people, ruled exercised through elected representatives
- A form of government in which the supreme power is held and exercised by the people or those they elect to represent them
- Gov by the people; form of gov in which the supreme powers rests with & is directly exercised by the people

Democracy cont'd.

- A system where the citizen are considered as the primary source of political power
- A form of gov in which the supreme power rests with the people & is exercised through a system of representation of elected officials, called a representative democracy
- When a group of people collectively agree to hold power of governance

Democrat

- One who supports social & economic equality & direct government interventions in several institutions in order to achieve this equality
- Principles of social equality & respect for the individual within a community
- Democrats generally support progressive positions/changes, some of which include preference for diplomacy over military actions.
- Support welfare programs meant to help the poor, affirmative action, balanced budget and unionized labor

Concept of State & Government

- Differences between these 2 concepts?

- A country has one state which is the basis of the nation
- State has 3 distinct characteristics:
 - **Territorial boundaries beyond their physical borders**
 - **State comprises of institutions/structures equipped with certain powers; eg. Military, courts, education system which receive their powers from an elected bureaucratic body**
 - **State has a monopoly of power over its citizens legitimately given to it by its citizens**

Three Kinds of States

- Republic state
- Absolute Monarchy state
- Constitutional Monarchy state

Government

- An instrument/mechanism which aims at uniting competing/differing interests & which speaks on behalf of the country/national interests
- Usually also describes a group of people or body which holds power vested to it by the citizens, as a result of elections. Is this always true?

- Government then can be removed or dissolved Not easily achieved with a state
- Rules which govern elections belong to the state
- Certain institutions belong to the state, not the Government; e.g, military

The Opposition

- A political party elected to parliament with purpose to oppose the ruling party/ government
- Acts as counter-balance & represents segment of population which may not support the government
- Sort of alternate government in waiting
- Holds the second largest electoral votes or seats in parliament

Western political philosophy

- This discipline of study originated in ancient Greece at a time when different groups began experimenting with different forms of governance:
 - Monarchy
 - Oligarchy
 - Democracy
- The ancient societies of China & India were also experimenting with political structures aimed at introducing political stability

Examples of political philosophies

Libertarianism or Classic Liberalism

- Role of government is to protect its citizens from external invaders and domestic criminals who may violate our rights
- Otherwise let citizens be & lead their lives in abundant liberty
- Associated with late 19th century- Thomas Malthus, David Ricardo and drew from Adam Smith. Modern day proponent include Milton Friedman 17th century John Locke & the 19th century John Stuart Mill
- Libertarians would not likely interfere in the economy; How would they react to Bail out package?
- They would likely disassemble such structures as Social Welfare, Medicaid, Medicare, etc.
- May not believe in common traditions, culture, religious cultures
- May likely support economic class system

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Socialism

- Opposite of Libertarianism
- Believe that citizens have certain inalienable rights: healthcare, food, shelter, work
- The idea that the economy should be run for everyone's good
- Gov should intervene at many levels of society

Modern Liberalism /Social Liberalism

- 17th century John Locke & the 19th century John Stuart Mill
- A blend of libertarianism & socialism
- Emphasizes justice, fairness & freedom for its citizens
- Equitable distribution of goods & services
- Avoidance of social & economic inequalities for its citizens

Conservatism

- Commonly refers to the idea of maintaining things the way they are
 - Resisting change
- Conservatives would likely oppose the above political philosophies
- They value & maintain traditions, institutions but do support change when they perceive a need
- Big on fiscal responsibility, de-regulations

Differences not so clear cut

- Don't confuse these political philosophies with our current political philosophies: Liberal, Democrat & Socialism
- Almost all the systems are some blends, or incorporate some liberal values
- Contain a role for the state in providing certain services such as education & securing individual rights
- Republicans tend to lean more towards libertarianism
- Democrats tend to be flavored more with socialist values

Key terms

- Autocracy
- Authoritarian Gov
- Oligarchy
- Pluralism
- Citizenship
- Democracy/Direct Democracy
- Gov
- Politics
- Political Culture
- Political Efficacy
- Popular Sovereignty
- Liberty
- Laissez-faire capitalism