

Introduction to American Political Culture

Chapter 4, Theme A

Central Question:

- Can US political processes continue given the wide diversity of our society & wide range of opinions contained within it without becoming mired in conflict and dissention?

Most who live here have similar set of attitudes & ideas that lead to shared beliefs about the most important values in the American political system. These values define our political culture. **DO SHEET!**

Values Discussion

Can you find another classmate that has the same values ranked #1 & #14? Discuss.

Can you find another classmate that has your #1 ranked in double digits (10-14)? Discuss.

What commonalities exist in the class? Can you explain why?

Shared Beliefs/Values

- Liberty
- Equality (Egalitarianism)
- Democracy (Popular Sovereignty)
- Civic Duty (Community Service)
- Individual Achievement & Responsibility
- Private Property
- Support for Religion
- Structure of Government (Federalism, Parties)

Rights in conflict

Why are so many of these values in conflict?

How do we, as a country, choose which value prevails?

Do examples!

Shared Beliefs/Values

- **These values create a “foundation of goodwill” and form a political culture**
- **Our Political Culture keeps our government working despite a dramatic decline of trust by the public towards government officials**

Questions About Our Political Culture

1. How do we know that the Americans share these beliefs?
2. If these values are important to us, how can we explain the existence of behaviors that are inconsistent with them?
3. Why has there been so much political conflict in our history if there is agreement among us on certain political values?

Evidence

- What is “Americanism”? How does it reflect our political culture?
- What does it mean to be “Un-American” in our society?

Economics and Political Culture

- Americans see politics and the economy as inextricably linked
 - How do you explain this?
- American values about our economy are similar to politics, but different in some ways, too. Examples?

Differences in Economic Views

- Believe in free enterprise, but there are limits to how much freedom should exist in the marketplace. Discuss examples.
- More willing to tolerate economic inequality than political inequalities. Maintain equality of opportunity, don't care about equality of results. Review differences!
 - Willing to help disadvantaged, but against preferential treatment in workplace like quotas

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE

DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA, vols. 1 & 2

- TRAVELED THROUGH AMERICA IN THE EARLY 1830s. HE OBSERVED THE AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE AND GOVERNMENT IN ACTION
- HE WROTE A BOOK CALLED *Democracy in America* ABOUT THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF OUR FORM OF GOVERNMENT
- HE EMPHASIZED 5 VALUES THAT CONTRIBUTED TO AMERICAN SUCCESS



FIVE VALUES CRITICAL TO AMERICA'S SUCCESS AS A CONSTITUTIONAL REPUBLIC

LIBERTY

FREEDOM FROM ARBITRARY GOVERNMENT CONTROL

EGALITARIANISM

BELIEF IN EQUALITY; NO
PERMANENT CLASS STRUCTURE

INDIVIDUALISM

PEOPLE ARE FREE TO PURSUE
INDIVIDUAL GOALS

POPULISM

APPEAL TO ORDINARY PEOPLE, NO SET
ARISTOCRACY

LAISSEZ-FAIRE

GOVERNMENT IS "HANDS OFF"
WHEN IT COMES TO THE ECONOMY

Tocqueville Quotes Examination

- Looking at the quotes, give one that exemplifies each of the themes from the previous slide or from the list from homework.
- Do you agree with Tocqueville's assessment of these 5 themes? Why or why not?
- Tocqueville was very impressed with many aspects of American democracy, but not all.

Tocqueville's Concerns

- Tyranny of the majority
- Government corruption
- Complacency (herd mentality)
- Individualism outweighing civic responsibility
- The paradox of freedom/liberty with the existence of slavery

Assignment: Due Thursday!

- Read the rest of chapter 4.
- Draw at least 2 graphs (bar graphs work best) that compare the US to 2 other countries as far as a demographic explained in the reading.
- Outline with examples the sources of political culture.

Assign Unit 3 Project

- Discuss group make up
- Detail the choosing of topics
- Outline slide components
- Suggest procedures for compiling information for product
- Go over the time table of when items are due