

American Political Culture and Socialization

- Define American *political culture* [national character] and *socialization* [process by which children learn values, beliefs about political culture]
- Agents of Socialization and Elements of American Political Culture > #1 agent is the family
- Political Ideology Defined and provide characteristics of each: Conservatism, Liberalism, Libertarianism
- *Political Efficacy* – the extent to which citizens believe they can understand and influence government

Linkage Institutions

- Elections, Political Parties, Interest Groups, the Media
- Explain several ways in which each of the institutions above connect citizens to government

Interest Groups

- *Federalist 10* and factions > remedy = large republic to preserve liberty but allow factions; modern day pluralist theory
- Constitutional Basis for Interest Groups rooted in the 1st Amendment (freedom of assembly especially)
- Economic Interest Groups (ex: U.S. Chamber of Commerce) v. Public Interest Groups (Common Cause)
- Identify several liberal interest groups (ex: ACUL, NARL, NAACP) and conservative interest groups (NRA, Chamber of Commerce)
- Interest Groups Activities and How IGs Influence Government: Congress, White House, Federal Bureaucracy, Courts, etc.
- Financing Campaigns: hard money, soft money, PAC's, 527's, 501(c)'s, Super PACs [see Campaign Finance Guide Handout]
- Lobbying Disclosure Act (1995), Campaign Finance Reform Act a.k.a. McCain-Feingold (2002)
- The Supreme Court and Campaign Finance Reform: *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976), *Citizens United v. FEC* (2010)

Political Parties

- Describe the two party system in the US > history of parties, forces for moderation but periods of party polarization
- Differences between political parties and interest group > biggest differences: parties nominate candidates for office, run the government
- Roles of American Political Parties: identify ways parties connect citizens to government
- Coalitions of the two Main Parties: identify key constituency groups in the Democratic Party (ex: African Americans, Hispanics, Jews, social liberals, women, unions, young people) and GOP (ex: business community, white males, white southerners, social conservatives, evangelical Christians, pro-gun rights)
- *Dealignment* (trend in which increasing numbers of independent voters do not identify with either party): Reasons for the decline of party affiliation and effects on campaigns,
- Third (Minor) Parties: Obstacles and Successes
- *Party polarization* - two parties more ideologically pure; Fewer moderates in either party; consequences of polarization?

Elections and Campaigns

- Trend Towards Candidate Centered Campaigns and “Personality Politics”
- Majority v. Plurality Elections, Winner-Take-All & Proportional Representation, Single Member Districts
- Steps in the Process of Presidential Selection: Primaries (Open and Closed, “Front-loading”), Caucuses, Party Conventions (pledged v. “superdelegates,”) the General Election (the fight for the middle)
- Staggered Terms (President, Senate, House): Rationale
- The Electoral College: how it works, pro's and con's of reform
- Election Reforms (1960s, 70s): “Super Delegates”
- Presidential Election Process: Primaries (closed, open), Caucuses, and the General Election
- How the Electoral College works, why it's controversial, possible reforms
- The role of new technology in campaigns (internet, email, blogs, etc.)
- Importance of midterm elections (particularly 1994 (GOP), 2006 (Dems), 2010 (GOP))

Public Opinion and Voter Behavior

- Factors shaping public opinion: polls, media (changes in press and broadcast media), internet,
- Public Opinion Polls Types (straw polls, telephone polls, tracking polls, exit polls, internet polls, push polls), Purposes, and Limitations (ex: Question Biases, Sampling Error)
- Trends in Voter Turnout: What demographic groups tend to vote? Who doesn't vote?
- Demographic Groups and They Tend to Vote (ex: African Americans, white males, single women, young people)
- Constitutional requirements for voting (original document and amendments), expanding eligibility over time
- Factors affecting voting behavior: level of education, age, socioeconomic status, residence, ethnicity, education
- Factors affecting voting decisions: income, occupation, education, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, family, party affiliation, perception of candidates and policies, feeling of efficacy
- Barriers to voting: Institutional (voter registration, Tuesday Election Day, number of elections, residency requirements, citizenship requirements, absentee ballots, felons, etc.) and Demographic (socioeconomic status, race, age, education, etc.)
- Recent "Swing" Voters: Reagan Democrats, Soccer Moms, NASCAR Dads, Catholics
- Forms of Political Participation: voting, working campaigns, contacting government officials, contributing money, join interest groups, attend protest rallies, litigation

The Media

- Media and Influence on Political Preferences: to what extent does the media shape public opinion
- Three Roles of the Media = Gatekeeper (Agenda Setting), Scorekeeper (Horse Race Journalism) and Watchdog
- Current Trends in the Media: narrowcasting, framing, proliferation of digital media (internet and social media), decline in traditional journalism (newspapers, news magazines),
- Influence of Social Media on Politics and Campaigns: Facebook, Twitter, blogs, email, websites
- Attempts to Regulate the Media: FCC, Supreme Court, Congress, Citizens
- Criticism of the Media: Profit Motive, Sensationalism, Homogenization of the News, Media Bias, Smash mouth media, slow death of investigative journalism

Key Review Handouts

- The Roles of American Political Parties
- Campaign Finance Guide
- Linkage Institutions