

Chapter 4

Political Culture and Ideology

Key Chapter Questions

1. What are the dominant values of the American political culture? Also, what does political scientist Robert Putnam mean by “social capital”? Finally, how and why are U.S. citizens more satisfied with their democracy than are the citizens of other countries?
2. In what ways have our political values been affected by historical developments and by economic and technological growth?
3. What are the key philosophical assumptions of liberalism, conservatism, socialism, environmentalism, and libertarianism?
4. Why are Americans not deeply ideological?
5. What is the nature of the relationship between ideology and tolerance?
6. What role did ideology play in the 2000 elections?

Chapter Outline

- I. Introduction/The American political culture
 - A. Putnam’s concept of “social capital”—loss of social trust
 1. Explains declining level of trust and confidence in political institutions
 2. Not all political scientists agree with Putnam’s assessment of declining social capital
 3. Political culture—underlying beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, and patterns of behavior people have toward government and politics.
 - a. Involves political participation, rights, and liberties, views of politicians/government
 - b. How we participate does make a difference to political culture
 - B. Shared values
 1. The values and beliefs of the American political culture are grounded in classical liberalism – philosophical tradition stresses the importance of the individual and of freedom, equality, private property, limited government, and popular consent
 2. Liberty – most revered value in American political culture
 3. Equality
 - a. Americans have always believed in social equality
 - b. Equality also refers to political equality, the idea that every individual has a right to equal protection under the law and equal voting power; while political equality is a goal, it has not always been a reality
 - c. Equality encompasses the idea of equal opportunity, especially with regard to improving economic status
 4. Individualism/Power to the people
 - a. Under our system of government, individuals have both rights and responsibilities
 - b. Concern for preserving individual freedom of choice and what limits, if any, to place on individual choice generate intense political conflict
 - c. Americans have faith in the common sense of the ordinary person; sometimes anti-intellectual
 5. Democratic consensus
 - a. Americans have democratic consensus (essential to maintaining democracy) on the following principles:
 1. Majority rule
 2. Two-party system and regular elections

3. Popular sovereignty
 - b. Americans differ over what certain constitutional provisions require or over the precise meaning of the framers' original intentions; Americans honor many of these rights more in the abstract than in particular situations
 6. Justice and the rule of law – Government is based on a body of law applied equally and by just procedures; Americans believe strongly in the principle of fairness
 - a. Policies/laws should follow rules of generality, prospectivity, publicity, authority, due process
 7. Nationalism, optimism, and idealism – Despite our dissatisfactions, a remarkable belief persists that our nation is better, stronger, and more virtuous than other nations
 - C. The American Dream
 1. The American Dream is a complex set of ideas about the economy and its relation to individuals
 2. The essence of the American Dream can be found in our endorsement of capitalism
 3. Right to private property is essential
 4. The conflict in values between a competitive economy and an egalitarian society carries over into our politics
 - D. Political and economic change
 1. The industrial transformation
 - a. Major consequence of the new order was a high degree of inequality in the distribution of wealth and income
 - b. As disparities of income grew, so did disparities in political resources
 - c. The growth of monopolies prompted passage of antitrust legislation, and unsafe work conditions led to regulation of the workplace
 - d. Americans came to believe that government could and should promote the general welfare by doing more to regulate the workings of business
 2. The Great Depression and New Deal
 - a. Americans turned to government to improve conditions for the jobless and homeless; with FDR's New Deal, the idea that government should use its powers and resources to ensure equal opportunity and social justice became accepted
 - b. Most people today support a semi-regulated or mixed free enterprise system
 - c. President Franklin Roosevelt's "Second Bill of Rights" called for economic security and independence
 - d. Civil and voting rights legislation and the War on Poverty defined the ideological and political fights of the last half of the twentieth century
 - e. Free enterprise is no longer unbridled; mixed free enterprise system
 - f. Note Gore's promise of universal health care vs. Bush's stress on private charities in 2000
- II. Ideology and attitudes about the role of government (note roles of family, schools, media, workplace)
- A. Liberalism/Contemporary Liberals
 1. Refers to a belief in the positive uses of government to bring about justice and equality of opportunity
 2. Believe in possibility of progress, better future, equality of opportunity, minimum income level
 3. Liberals charge that conservatives act in self-interest, concerned with rich; Liberals concerned government should take care of weak (see Truman quote)
 4. Liberal view holds all people equal; wish to lessen impact of great inequalities of wealth
 5. Criticisms of liberalism
 - a. Too much reliance on governmental solutions, higher taxes, and bureaucrats
 - b. Forgets that government has to be limited
 - c. When government grows too big, it tends to start dictating us
 - d. Too many governmental controls and too much taxation undermine the self-help ethic
 - e. Welfare and regulatory state pushed by liberals will destroy true equality of economic opportunities
 - f. In recent elections, GOP made liberalism a villain; Clinton fought back; Bush portrayed Gore in 2000 as an advocate of big government

- g. Dionne refuted that big government is over; Americans don't want "bad" government
 - h. Preoccupation now with budget surpluses; national government works in context of budget constraints and desire for lower taxes
- B. Conservatism
1. Cardinal attributes of contemporary conservatism (see Wills insert on anti-government hostility)
 - a. Private property rights and belief in free enterprise
 - b. Keep government small except in the area of national defense
 - c. Government needs to ensure order; more pessimistic about human nature
 - d. Preference for the status quo and desire change only in moderation
 2. Traditional conservatives (human needs cared for by families/charities)
 - a. Emphatically pro-business (oppose higher taxes; market provides services)
 - b. Favor dispersing power broadly to avoid concentration of power at the national level
 - c. Subordinate economic and social equality to liberty and freedom
 - d. Government social activism has been expensive and counterproductive
 - e. In 2000 campaign, Bush built upon churches in providing aid to needy but also tried to avoid hostility to all government assistance ("compassionate conservatism")
 3. Social Conservatives or "New Right" (favors organized prayer in schools, anti-abortion, etc.)
 - a. Emerged in the 1980s with its defining characteristic being a strong desire to impose various social controls
 - b. Embodies the Christian Coalition of the 1990s (founded by Pat Robertson)
 - c. Former senator Rudman: a mistake for GOP to have close association with Coalition
 - a. Too many zealots, homophobes, bigots, etc.
 - b. Robertson urged Coalition members to vote for George W. Bush in 2000 S.C./Michigan primaries
 4. Criticisms of conservatism
 - a. Critics saw hostility to government as counterproductive and inconsistent
 - b. Critics argue that conservatives have a selective opposition to government
 - c. Critics point out that government deficits grew during the 1980s when conservatives were in control
 - d. Criticized for insensitivity to the social needs of the homeless and mentally ill
 - e. Conservatives place too much faith in our market economy
 - f. Criticized for failure to acknowledge and endorse policies that deal with racism and sexism
 - g. Selection application of government by both liberals/conservatives reveals inconsistency
- C. Socialism
1. An economic and governmental system based on public ownership of the means of production and exchange; note that Russia and former republics abandoned communism and moved toward free markets;
 2. American socialists favor a greatly expanded role for the government, favor stepped-up efforts toward greater equality in property rights; would cut defense spending
- D. Environmentalism (ideology that has taken root in democracies in recent decades)
1. "Green movement" in parts of Europe; U.S. Green party stresses social justice, diversity, etc.
 2. U.S. Green party website—stresses good agriculture, energy efficiency, integrity of nature
 3. Ralph Nader was Green party presidential candidate in 2000--won 3 percent of vote
- E. Libertarianism
1. An ideology that cherishes individual liberty and insists on a sharply limited government
 2. Preaches opposition to government and just about all its programs
 3. Opposes all government regulation (See Harry Browne, 2000 platform)
- F. A word of caution
1. Political labels have different meanings across national boundaries as well as over time
 2. Ideological terms or labels can be confusing
 3. Ideology both causes events and is affected by them
 4. Today, antigovernment sentiment in recent presidential elections linked to Vietnam, Watergate, and allegations of sexual misconduct by political leaders

- III. Ideology and the American people
 - A. Distribution of ideology
 - 1. There are more conservatives than liberals
 - 2. There are few extreme conservatives or extreme liberals (in 2000, only 2 percent viewed themselves as extreme conservatives, only 1 percent extreme liberals); many more votes in middle;
 - 3. In 2000, both major parties target centrist or moderate voters (party ideological wings do exist)
 - B. Ideological views
 - 1. Provides a lens through which to view politics
 - 2. Most Americans do not organize their attitudes systematically
 - 3. Low consistency among various attitudes and opinions
 - C. Policy-making
 - 1. Characterized more by coalitions than by fixed alignments that pit one set of ideologies against another set
 - 2. American politics marked more by moderation, pragmatism, and accommodation
 - 3. Has been shift to strongly partisan/ideological voting in House
 - a. Ideology in Congress due to GOP gains in the South; other southern democrats more liberal
 - b. Liberal Democrats now hold many seats in parts of nation where moderate Republicans were once successful

- IV. Ideology and tolerance
 - A. Differences in liberals' and conservatives' responses to questions of civil rights and civil liberties (conservatives believe U.S. has become too permissive)
 - B. Both liberals and conservatives can be intolerant
 - 1. Liberals perhaps more concerned for rights of accused, due process; conservatives stress victims of crime over rights of the accused
 - 2. Liberals generally accept nonconformity in conduct/opinion as part of freedom
 - 3. Ideologies have consequences (stir groups, reinforce party lines, create policy conflicts)