

American Government

[!WARNING] These notes are not complete, but they should accurately reflect the professors slides for each class. There might be missing information so make sure you're keeping your own notes on the side as well. If there's anything wrong or you think something should change, hit me up in class, I sit closest to the projector.

[!NOTE] I didn't decide I'd take notes until halfway through the first class so some stuff might be missing.

Concepts of Democracy

- Govt. rules in the interests of the people, even the people that don't participate in politics, rather than having a govt. rule in the interests of the govt. leaders own interests
- Acquisition of power by leaders via competitive elections. Elected leaders then represent the people's interest in govt. This is representative democracy
- Problem - representative democracy may not be representative enough
- Majority of people elected are white males
- Long terms in office may mean that they lose touch with their constituents.
- It is generally agreed among people in America, that the govt. rules on behalf of the masses.

Aristotle's view of Democracy - Direct Democracy

Democracy exists when everyone participates in the decision making - no law is made unless everyone agrees on it. People vote on every single decision, called direct democracy since everything is voted upon directly by the people.

Direct democracy - this could become a reality in the U.S. now if we have an electronic direct democracy - everyone vote electronically

Problems:

- Us has a population of 320 million, hard to vote on every single law
- Direct democracy: Impractical in a country as large as the US
- People make unwise decisions, better to elect a person who has knowledge of the subject who can rule on our behalf

This type of democracy works best in the following types of situations:

- 5th century B.C. Greek city states
- New England town meeting
- Community control in a self-governing neighborhood
- Citizen participation in formulating local programs

Switzerland comes the closest to this form of democracy with its national referenda. If a 100k citizens petition the govt. for a vote on a certain law, the law will be put on a national vote. Not great because this means there is an average of 30 votes a year for different laws and each vote has a low voter turnout. Also, each referenda costs about \$3 million dollars.

Democratic Centralism

View of democracy that is not most often supported in communist countries - former Soviet Union, Vietnam, Cuba, North Korea

Characteristics:

- Everyone has equal input to the decision making process, equal chance to influence decision making process.
- Party leader makes up their mind, and their decision reigns supreme.

In theory, this is democratic in that the people have a chance to influence leaders in their decisions.

Problems:

- People in these countries are afraid to express their true opinion for fear of imprisonment and being labeled as a dissident.
- Government claims it is ruling on behalf of the people, but in reality it is just rules the way it wants to.
- Govt. that rule through force, they don't have the true interests of the people at heart when they make their decision. They are not democratic in the way that Marx (the creator of democratic centralism) envisioned.

How is power distributed in a democracy?

- Majoritarian Politics (parliamentary systems)
- Leaders constrained to follow the wishes of the party in majority very closely. Not true for the US. but is true in Britain.
- In majoritarian politics the leader is bound to follow the wishes of the party in majority. He is not allowed to rule the way he wants to, he can only rule the way the party want him to.
- The leader merely just institutionalizes the will of the majority party.
- B. Presidential Politics

- Legislature is semi-independent from the President and vice versa. They are each elected separately.

Elitism

Under elitist theory, the leader is tied to the will of the people. but he may not have the same socio/economic, ethnic or gender as the majority of the people. He does not have to represent their wishes, he is not bound to represent their wishes.

Rule by an identifiable groups of people who possess a disproportionate share of political power.

In US. White, Protestant, ivy league college educated, upper class males - WASPM

Midterm Question

[!DANGER] What is an elite? Discuss the four theories of elitism. In your opinion, which one is applicable to the US?

Theories of Elitism

- Marxist:
- Elites are those people who control the means to production in an economy. Those who have the most economic power; Bill gates, Steve Jobs, etc...
- C Wright Mills:
- Power elite is composed of corporate leaders, generals, and politicians.
- Max Weber: (read way burr (he's german (apparently...)))
- Elites are the bureaucrats - people who got their job through expertise and specialized competence.
- Pluralist view:
- No single elite has a monopoly on power, hence must bargain and compromise - this view seems to be the most plausible

Why elite rule is preferable to mass democracy

1. Direct democracy could lead to mass rule, *tyranny of the majority*
 - Minority rights would get trampled and this would violate the US. democratic rule that everyone has the right to life liberty and happiness. If we have mob rule, the mob might decide to take this right away from someone.
2. Mob rule is highly unstable and is threatening to democratic values.

3. The “irony of democracy” is that elites not the masses are committed to democratic values. This is ironic because a democracy is supposed to be in the favor of the masses yet if the masses rule, democratic values have the problem of being distorted.

The ‘irony of democracy’ is that the elites must govern wisely if government ‘by the people’ is to be maintained.

Problems with Elite Rule

Repression - When the elites fear that their position is in jeopardy they may **over-react and be overly repressive**. This usually happens in times when there is massive upheaval. - **Past examples of elite repression** - WWII Japanese in America even though they were American citizens were rounded up and put in detention camps. - 1950’s senator McCarthy launched a “Red scare” and anyone who was suspected of being a communist lost their jobs, had their phones tapped, had their mail read, etc. - Patriot Act - Greatly restricting a suspect’s Constitutional rights. For example, you can be detained indefinitely without access to a lawyer or even informed of your charges. The government can bug your phone, read your e-mail and computer activity, etc...

Midterm Essay Question 2

What are all the characteristics of American Political Culture as discussed in the lecture and in the textbook? Compare these characteristics with the characteristics of another nation discussed in the American Political Culture.

Political Culture Definition

Distinctive and patterned way of thinking about how political and economic life ought to be carried out.

Political scientists determine a nation’s political culture through conducting polls, inference from books, speeches, etc.

Political Socialization Definition

Being taught how to behave in a social environment

Influences of Political Socialization

- Parents: age 0-5
- School: age 5-12

- Peers-Media: age 12-18
- College-Professors: age 18-26

Dominant Beliefs in American Political Culture

One of the main reason why the US. is able to allow such a large immigration of people, have so many religions, and races without huge social conglice is because every American shares in the same basic American ideology and culture. They all share the same belief in upholding the American Creed.

The six basic beliefs that make up American Creed:

Liberty

The belief in liberty is the belief that everyone should be free to do what they want as long as they don't harm other people. Freedom of speech, freedom of the press. However studies have shown that although almost all American believe in the liberties should be enjoyed by all when you allow people to have the liberty to engage in activity that they don't like, then people want to take away this liberty.

Example: freedom of speech O.K. except when it comes to letting the KKK have freedom of speech. ACLU's goal is to ensure that everyone has a right to enjoy their freedoms.

Elites are often more adherent to the beliefs in liberty for all more than the general populace.

Equality

Everyone should be treated equally before the law and have equal opportunity not equality of condition - which means that everyone is given a job, house, etc.

Everyone should be furnished with free basic education so that they have the opportunity to succeed.

This is why many people come to the US. - equality of opportunity for education, employment, advancement, etc.

People are not treated equally in the US. If you are female, or non white, chances are that it will be harder for you get ahead - get a good job, get a good education. But the chances of succeeding in the U.S. if you are a non-white are fat freater than succeeding in most other countries.

Think of South Africa, or even Japan where people are discriminated against on a daily basis.

Affirmative Action's purpose is to try to give disadvantaged people equality of opportunity.

Americans' view of equality is very different from Europeans' view. Americans talk about "equality of opportunity" - everyone should have an equal opportunity to be successful. The government should ensure that people are not discriminated against in their pursuit of their "American Dream".

Europeans talk about "equality of condition" - the basic conditions of life (housing, medical care, income) should be equally available for all and indeed the government will provide these basic conditions for everyone.

Individualism

Stress is on the individual rather than the collective. Americans are the rugged individualist. The person who is admired is the person who can take care of himself who doesn't rely on anyone for support.

In Europe, one way to ensure egalitarianism, is for the govt. to ensure low cost welfare, housing, etc. This living off the govt. is held in great disdain in America. A person living off welfare is looked down upon in America, as being weak and not able to help themselves. This is not so much the case in Europe.

Democracy and the rule of law

Americans support the principles of the Constitution and the government it is set up much more than most people in other countries support their government systems. Most Americans believe that the system is just and the best system around. They may not like the leaders but they feel that the basic foundations of our government are sound.

These 4 components are what makes up the American creed and what enables many different types of Americans to coexist with one another in relative peace.

What is unique in American beliefs is this creed is the scope - almost all Americans believe in the American Creed, and the intensity of this belief - Americans believe in the American Creed strongly.

Civic Duty

The belief that Americans should take community affairs seriously and help when they can.

This belief has decreased dramatically since the '60's mainly due to the growing distrust of govt. which really started with Watergate in the 1970's.

Property

The right to own private property.

Characteristics of America

US is the world's lone Superpower: Military, Politically and Economically we are the most powerful country that the world has ever known in the history of the world.

The US spends more money on military than any other nation in the world. We spend more money per year on our military than the fourteen top highest spending nations in the world combined.

The US has over 800 military bases in 70 countries and on every continent except Antarctica.

There are over 6k military bases in the US.

3rd largest military in terms of soldiers (China and India each who have a population of over 1 billion - have more soldiers than the US).

Biggest space program in the world.

Largest nuclear arsenal in terms of deliverable weapons.

Only nation to bomb a country with nukes twice.

US has never pledged not to use nuclear weapons first in any combat.

The value of the weapons that we sell to other nations is the largest in the world.

We look and act like a big powerful, war-loving aggressive nation to many people/countries of the world. We look like an empire that is keep on world domination, (similar to the Roman Empire, the Spanish Empire, and the British Empire).

Population of 320M people

High population growth rate (primarily due to the influx of immigrants)

.92% a year as compared to other industrial nations

- France .5%
- Japan 0%
- Britain .4%

High number of immigrations to the US. US. is a nation of immigrants - very few original Americans unless you are Native American, you are an immigrant. High number of blacks and hispanics, and an increasingly high number of Asians. More Vietnamese in the area of S. California alone than anywhere else in the world except for Vietnam.

America is a highly urban society with 76% of the population living in cities with a population over 2500.

American white population is growing older. Whites seem to have

Economy

- Largest economy in the world (GNP about \$17 trillion)
- World's largest importer of goods
- 2nd largest exporter of goods (Germany #1)
- US has a huge trade deficit (largest in the world)
- Have the highest standard of living for a largest country its size.
- The US. is the most economically powerful country in the history of the world.
- Largest foreign debt in the world.
- Largest national debt \$18 trillion

Social Structure

- Class structure is basically middle class. Most Americans are middle class and hold white collar jobs.
- America does have its share of very wealthy and very poor and it seems that members of the very poor class is increasing due to the economic recession. Working class or lower middle class people are losing their jobs and have to move out onto the streets.
- Poverty is not equally distributed - it seems to be more prevalent among blacks, hispanics, females with children, people living in the South and/or rural or inner city areas, and the elderly.
- 12% of the US population lives below the poverty line.
- America is not as class conscious as other societies and we are not as race conscious either. There has never been a significant and prolonged social disturbance on behalf of races or classes. Also there are no political parties associated with a specific class or race. This is not the case with other nations.

England's class consciousness problems

- Reasons why class and to a lesser extent race is not as important in America as in other countries - because of the belief in social mobility - through hard work and effort you can be anything - we have no aristocracy, or landed privileged class.
- America is more religious than many other industrialized countries but this religion does not divide the nation. Until recently there were no political

parties associated with a specific religion. Now the Republican party has become associated with Evangelical Christians

- 52% Protestant
- 24% Roman Catholic
- 2% Mormon
- 1% Jewish
- 1% Muslim
- 20% Other (or None)

The Constitution

[!NOTE] Please read the constitution and the declaration of independence located in the back of your book - be familiar with the content of the articles and the amendments to the constitution - especially the first 10 amendments. ##### Links to them in google drive (maybe)

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- Creates a new form of government
 - The US Constitution is the oldest living Constitution in the world
 - Much copied by other countries
 - Slavery was not abolished at the time the constitution was written.
 - Truly is the law of the land - no government officials are “above” the Constitution - all must obey the Constitution and the laws of The United States.
 - The passage of the Patriot Act in the last few months of 2001, violates some of the guarantees of the Constitution and the first ten amendments of the Constitution (notably prohibition from unreasonable searches and seizures - 4th amendment)

Timeline of Revolutionary America and the Buildup to the Creation of the Constitution

1776 - Declaration of Independence

Some of the beliefs expressed in the declaration of independence justifying independence:

- British politicians were corrupt

- Specific complaints against King George III - no taxation without representation
- A government is a government by consent **NOT** a government by prerogative
- **Government by Consent:** The people must have the consent of the people - be elected by the people in order to rule
- **Government by Prerogative:** Rulers are the rulers simply because they have royal blood - they inherited the position
- All governments should have a written constitution which specifically grants powers to the government and spells out what the government may legitimately do.

John Locke's philosophy

- "A government must have a constitution that grants its citizens natural and inalienable rights that the government cannot infringe upon."
- "Legislative power should be superior to executive power."

1776-1781 - Revolutionary War, The Battle at Yorktown final battle

Major reasons for Patriots' victory

- Guerilla warfare
- Cold winters
- Help of France
- Shipbuilding
 - Majority of the timber the British used came from the colonies.

1777 - Articles of Confederation written

1781 - Articles of Confederation ratified and adopted as the government of the US.

1783 - Treaty of Paris (negotiated primarily by Ben Franklin and John Jay) England surrenders the thirteen colonies to the US.

1787 - Philadelphia Constitutional Convention meets to try to rewrite the Articles of Confederation

1791 - Bill of Rights - the first ten amendments to the Constitution are added which guarantee basic liberties (freedom of speech, press, religion)

Who write the constitution?

55 delegates coming from all thirteen states except for Rhode Island.

Some of the more familiar delegates were:

- Benjamin Franklin
- Alexander Hamilton
- James Madison
- George Washington

Some of the delegates who were **not** at the Constitutional Convention (and their absence would cause problems later) were:

- Thomas Jefferson (in Paris)
- Patrick Henry (refused to attend)
- John Adams
- Samuel Adams

Most of the delegates had former government experience and were fairly “well-off” and not the typical American citizen.

I’m legit so tired writing all of this down...

Midterm Essay Question #2

[!DANGER] As discussed in the lecture and in the textbook, what were all the problems with the Articles of Confederation? How would the Constitution address these problems?

Reasons why the Constitution had to be written because the Articles of Confederation were viewed to be *too weak*.

- Congress could not raise taxes, why is this a problem?
- Government has no money to spend on an army or infrastructure.
- **Solution:** “ok nvm we can actually raise taxes now.”
- Congress couldn’t regulate commerce.
- No unified trade policy.
- **Solution:** “ok nvm we can actually regulate trade now.”
- Sovereignty retained by the states.
- Unable to pass nation-wide legislation.
- **Solution:** “ok nvm we have more power than the states now.”
- One vote in Congress for each state.
- Lower population states got the same votes as higher populations.
- **Solution:** More population = more representation. House of Representatives is now based on population.
- 9 out of 13 states needed to vote for a national
- Very few national laws passed.
- **Solution:** (next class)