

UNIT 2: AMERICAN POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES AND BELIEFS

American political beliefs are shaped by founding ideals, core values, linkage institutions (e.g., elections, political parties, interest groups, and the media in all its forms), and the changing demographics of citizens. These beliefs about government, politics, and the individual's role in the political system influence the creation of public policies.

American political culture is comprised of citizens' beliefs about government, including their perceptions, relationships, and interactions relative to one another and to their government. Core beliefs about government center around different interpretations and applications of political values, such as individualism (the focus on individual rights and responsibilities), the rule of law (the notion that the law is supreme over all persons), limited government (the idea that the government's power is enumerated and constrained by constitutional rules), and equality of opportunity.

Citizens learn of and develop attitudes about government through political socialization. Several factors contribute to political socialization including family, schools, peers, and social environments. How much influence these factors have on a person's political beliefs relates in turn to lifecycle effects, dispositions that change with age or membership in a group experiencing the same events at the same time, and generational effects, which involve exposure across ages and groups to the same political information. Both lifecycle and generational effects are fueled by past and present political events.

American political culture, through expressed citizen opinions, influences governmental institutions in the formation, implementation, and evaluation of public policy. For example, how people view the principles of freedom and individualism shape opinions about domestic and economic policy, including the appropriate range and types of such policies. The tension behind citizen beliefs about the appropriate role of government is revealed through policy debates and legislation. Some argue that government should take an active role in promoting social equality and ensuring economic opportunity, while others warn that excessive regulation violates individual freedoms.

Major public policy programs are rooted in ideological trends that span decades. For example, ideology impacts the nature and extent to which the federal government shares powers with state governments and how it regulates the marketplace over time, as evidenced by debates about monetary and fiscal policies. Globalization has had an impact on U.S. political beliefs and public policy. How the government determines the nature and direction of social policy, such as that involving immigration or health-care reform, is also impacted by ideological pressure from the right and left, and foreign policy is influenced by citizens' beliefs about the U.S. government's role on the world stage.

Elections connect citizens with government. The number of eligible voters has expanded over time based on various constitutional provisions, court rulings on voter access and campaign finance, and legislation. The Fifteenth, Nineteenth, Twenty-Fourth, and Twenty-Sixth Amendments, each a response to a specific social/political concern, serve to eliminate political discrimination against people due to a citizen's race, sex, age, and ability to pay a poll tax. Voter turnout is impacted by the various provisions that states implement regarding voter requirements and qualifications that involve issues not addressed in those amendments. Voter turnout varies widely from election to election, and political candidates have taken advantage of technology and campaign finance laws to communicate their platforms more effectively to the voting public. The data regarding voter turnout in the United States provides a foundation for interesting analysis when compared to voter turnout in other democracies, and political scientists periodically study why voter turnout in the U.S. falls below that in other similar republics.

Essential Questions:

- How are American political beliefs formed and how do they evolve over time?
- How do political ideology and core values influence government policy making?
- How effective are the various methods of political participation in shaping public policies?

UNIT 4A: PUBLIC OPINION AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

Citizen beliefs about government are shaped by the intersection of demographics, political culture, and dynamic social change. Public opinion is measured through scientific polling, and the results of public opinion polls influence public policies and institutions. Widely held political ideologies shape policy debates and choices in American policies.

1) Students will be able to:

Explain the relationship between core beliefs of U.S. citizens and attitudes about the role of government

Students will know that:

- a) Different interpretations of core values, including individualism, equality of opportunity, free enterprise, rule of law, and limited government, affect the relationship between citizens and the federal government and the relationships citizens have with one another

2) Students will be able to:

Explain how cultural factors influence political attitudes and socialization

Students will know that:

- a) Family, schools, peers, media, and social environments (including civic and religious organizations) contribute to the development of an individual's political attitudes and values through the process of political socialization
- b) As a result of globalization, U.S. political culture has both influenced and been influenced by the values of other countries
- c) Generational and lifecycle effects also contribute to the political socialization that influences an individual's political attitudes
- d) The relative importance of major political events to the development of individual political attitudes is an example of political socialization

3) Students will be able to:

Describe the elements of a scientific poll

Students will know that:

- a) Public opinion data that can impact elections and policy debates is affected by such scientific polling types and methods as:
 - Type of poll (opinion polls, benchmark or tracking polls, entrance and exit polls)
 - Sampling techniques, identification of respondents, mass survey or focus group, sampling error
 - Type and format of questions

4) Students will be able to:

Explain the quality and credibility of claims based on public opinion data

Students will know that:

- a) The relationship between scientific polling and elections and policy debates is affected by the:
 - Importance of public opinion as a source of political influence in a given election or policy debate
 - Reliability and veracity of public opinion data

5) Students will be able to:

Explain how the ideologies of the two major parties shape policy debates

Students will know that:

- a) The Democratic Party (D or DEM) platforms generally align more closely to liberal ideological positions, and the Republican Party (R or GOP) platforms generally align more closely to conservative ideological positions

6) Students will be able to:

Explain how U.S. political culture (e.g., values, attitudes, and beliefs) influences the formation, goals, and implementation of public policy over time

Students will know that:

- a) Because the U.S. is a democracy with a diverse society, public policies generated at any given time reflect the attitudes and beliefs of citizens who choose to participate in politics at that time
- b) The balancing dynamic of individual liberty and government efforts to promote stability and order has been reflected in policy debates and their outcomes over time

7) Students will be able to:

Describe different political ideologies regarding the role of government in regulating the marketplace

Students will know that:

- a) Liberal ideologies favor more governmental regulation of the marketplace, conservative ideologies favor fewer regulations, and libertarian ideologies favor little or no regulation of the marketplace beyond the protection of property rights and voluntary trade

8) Students will be able to:

Explain how political ideologies vary on the government's role in regulating the marketplace

Students will know that:

- a) Ideological differences on marketplace regulation are based on different theoretical support, including Keynesian and supply-side positions on monetary and fiscal policies promoted by the president, Congress, and the Federal Reserve

9) Students will be able to:

Explain how political ideologies vary on the role of the government in addressing social issues

Students will know that:

- a) Liberal ideologies tend to think that personal privacy – areas of behavior where government should not intrude – extends further than conservative ideologies do (except in arenas involving religious and educational freedom); conservative ideologies favor less government involvement to ensure social and economic equality; and libertarian ideologies disfavor any governmental intervention beyond the protection of private property and individual liberty

10) Students will be able to:

Explain how different ideologies impact policy on social issues

Students will know that:

- a) Policy trends concerning the level of government involvement in social issues reflect the success of conservative or liberal perspectives in political parties