

- Politics
  - What are politics?
    - Defined
    - Ultimately – politics R completely subjective – re: eye of beholder
  - Politics are shaped by “political culture”
    - Defined
    - Not - political behavior
    - Political culture = varies
    - Linked to history, religion, & shared views
    - Influences activity of political institutions
    - Awareness = useful
  - Politics also shaped by “political socialization”
    - Attitudes passed from one generation to next
    - Begins at early age
    - Key period = middle school
    - Children learn from many sources
    - Danger = proselytization
    - Doesn't stop when school end
    - Adult attitudes shaped by many forces
  - Political culture also always evolving
    - Short-term & long-term
  - Political culture = what unites people

- Elections only if divisions w/in reasonable bounds
  - Danger = language of politics
  - Problem = low-information voters
  - Another problem: minority cultures/subcultures ignored
- Is America different?
- NOTE: comparative approach
  - American Exceptionalism
    - Alexis de Tocqueville's *On Democracy in America*
    - Tocqueville's four factors for uniqueness
  - US built on 19<sup>th</sup> Century Liberal Ideals
  - The American Creed
    - It = defines elements of American identity
    - Elements:
    - Creed NOT universal
    - Most Americans accept
  - Conflicts w/in Creed = basis of competing political ideologies
  - American Political Ideologies
    - Dominant ideologies = “liberalism” and “conservatism”
    - 1) Economics
    - 2) Social issues
    - 3) Foreign Policy
  - The Darkside of American Politics

- Freedom of ignorance
- Intolerance/pressure to conform
- Distrust
- Paranoia & Conspiracy

- Public Opinion

- In Republic - officials must be aware of & respond to pub op
- Politicians use in two general senses
  - “Opinions of the people“
  - How viewed by pundits?
- Framers' view
  - Linked to Republic design & serving public interest
  - Framers also recognized:
  - Solutions built into Constitutional system:
    - House vs. Senate & POTUS
    - Right of expression – but NO say in decisions
    - Separation of power negates
- Impact of Public Opinion
  - Majority influences gov't decision making
    - Expressed through electoral process
    - Influences policy when expressed forcefully
    - YET, can't influence specific policies
    - Irony = tyranny of minority

- Political opinion linked to political participation
  - Citizen involvement
  - Politicians aware public sentiment
  - DOES make a difference
  
- Gov't actively attempts to shape public opinion
  - Communication = two-way street
  - Politicians obligated to inform citizenry
  - Public debates among leaders helpful
  - “Educating” public = difficult
  - Result = politicians prefer shortcuts
    - Slogans; talking points
    - Discrediting opponents' arguments
    - Emotional appeals, incomplete disclosure of facts, deception
    - Danger = distortion triggers reaction
  
- How to Measure Public Opinion
  - Public opinion polls
  - Focus groups
  - Technology
  - Old-fashioned methods