American Government B

**Unit 6: Political Culture**

**Unit Summary:** This unit explores political culture. It also looks at how values that make up American political culture shape political issue debates and public policy. Americans place a high importance on several key values. These are liberty, equality, opportunity, individualism, and self-determination. Values such as liberty and equality entered the American political dialogue during the colonial era. They are now embedded in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. Individualism and self-determination have been foundations of Americans’ frontier mindset. The idea of independent individuals building new communities has been core to America’s sense of self.

These shared values are cornerstones of American political culture. Political culture holds a group together, but it does not make a group uniform. There are many ways to define each of these values and put them into practice. These debates, however, take place within the boundaries created by political culture. Political culture shapes how we talk about political issues, policy choices, and acceptable political behavior.

The boundaries of political culture are not stationary. We can expect American political culture to continue to change over time.

**Lesson 6 – Iron Triangle**

**Objective 1:** Construct an Iron Triangle to illustrate the relationship between the public, Congress, and the federal government.

**Big Ideas**: When congressional committees, agencies, and interest groups establish relationships, they have created an Iron Triangle. The Iron Triangle has three points: bureaucracy, Congress, and interest groups.

A bureaucratic agency sets policies and regulations that affect the public (interest groups, lobbyists, and corporations).

The congressional committees oversee the bureaucratic agency about how the policies and regulations are applied. When congressional committees enforce policies and regulations, it affects the public.

Because policies and regulations affect the public, the public forms interest groups to lobby their interests.



**Objective 2:** Critique the role of interest groups using an Iron Triangle.

**Big Ideas:** An Iron Triangle is a visual tool to show the relationship between Congress, bureaucracy, and interest groups.

* Congress consists of the legislative branch. This includes congressional committees, subcommittees, and their staff.
* Bureaucracy consists of the executive branch. This includes bureaucratic agencies.
* Interest groups consist of the public, lobbyists, and corporations.



Interest groups influence policies, regulations, and laws. They do this by giving useful, expert information to government officials. This can lead to change that the public finds useful. This can also contribute to situations that are harmful to the public. At times, the interests of lobbyists have more sway over government decision-makers than the interests of the wider public. Many citizens do not support this.

Interest group lobbyists represent corporations, labor unions, or individuals. Lobbyists can also represent agencies in the executive branch. Congress members are elected to represent the interests of their constituents in Congress. Lobbyists represent the interests of their constituents to Congress.

**Example**: The Case of the American Association for Retired Persons

The AARP represents the interests of U.S. senior citizens. One of its goals is to prevent reductions in Social Security and Medicare spending. In service to this goal, lobbyists for the AARP meet with members of Congress. They also meet with officials within the Social Security Administration. They lobby against any cuts in Social Security and Medicare.

In this case, Congress members have two options. They can receive the support of or upset the AARP. Most administrators within the Social Security Administration want to keep their relationship with the AARP. So, they avoid conflict with the AARP.

In cases like these, one might say that interest groups use the Iron Triangle to meet their own interests instead of the interests of the common good. Questions raised and decisions made at the national level rarely please everyone. The challenge rests in the “power in numbers.” If a number of interest groups have influential power while others do not, it can create an imbalance.

**Keywords**:

* **insiderism** – a preference for people who already have experience inside a group or an organization
* **Iron Triangle** – a figurative relationship between Congress, bureaucracy, and interest groups
* **policy capture** – a strong relationship between an interest group and a government agency in which an interest group’s preferred policy becomes the agency’s policy
* **constituents** – members of a community who have selected someone to represent them or to look out for their interests
* **lobbyist** – a person who is paid to work on behalf of a company or industry to promote their interests

**Quick Check**

Question 1: If you constructed an Iron Triangle, which of the following would illustrate the linkage between the public and the federal government?

* a subcommittee’s linkage to bureaucracy
* a congressional committee’s linkage to bureaucracy
* a congressional staff member’s linkage to bureaucracy
* **an interest group’s linkage to bureaucracy**

Question 2: What type of relationship occurs with a policy capture?

* A strong relationship occurs between an interest group and a corporation.
* **A strong relationship occurs between an interest group and a government agency.**
* A strong relationship occurs between a subcommittee and a bureaucratic agency.
* A strong relationship occurs between a congressional committee and staff.

Question 3: How does insiderism affect an Iron Triangle?

* It can make passing legislative policies and regulations difficult.
* **It can make it difficult for outside people to enter the triangle.**
* It can make it difficult for those inside the triangle to leave the triangle.
* It can make it difficult to form relationships within the triangle.

Question 4: Which of the following critiques the role of interest groups within an Iron Triangle?

* Interest groups usually withhold knowledge from key lawmakers in Congress in an attempt to influence legislation.
* Interest groups often refuse to participate in congressional meetings, but might participate in bureaucratic meetings.
* Interest groups work against corporate interests, but do not work against the interests of Congress members.
* **Interest groups can exert influence that benefits the interest group, but might not benefit the interests of the wider public.**

Question 5: How does an interest group use the Iron Triangle to influence Congress?



* Interest groups give funding authority to bureaucratic agencies.
* **Interest groups donate to political campaigns of Congress members.**
* Interest groups create legislation for bureaucratic agencies.
* Interest groups clarify legislation for Congress.

**Lesson 7 – Linkage Institutions**

**Objective 1:** Analyze what is positive and negative about linkage institutions in the American political system.

**Big Ideas**: Linkage institutions connect people to three basic parts of the government:

1. public officials
2. organization and procedures
3. goals and policies

Linkage institutions allow people to influence and stay informed about who is in the government, how the government is structured, and what actions the government takes.

Four important linkage institutions in the U.S. are:

1. elections
2. interest groups
3. political parties
4. the media

**Elections**

Pro: Elections make the government accountable to the people. If people are not happy with their elected official, they have the chance to vote for someone else to replace that official.

Con: Successful candidates in the U.S. often have a lot of free time to campaign. They also tend to have access to money and a well-organized staff. Due to this, candidates tend to be people with wealth and political connections. This makes it hard for many people to run for office.

**Political Parties**

Pro: Political parties give people a chance to take part in politics. They give people a way to join, identify, and work with others who share similar political points of view.

Con: There are only two major political parties in the U.S.: the Democratic Party and Republican Party. These two parties often hold different views on which policies to pursue and how to pursue them. Party competition for power can lead to partisan conflict and division. This makes it hard for the government to act effectively. It can also alienate people politically.

**Interest Groups**

Pro: Interest groups give people with a shared interest the chance to pool resources to better influence the government. When individuals pool their resources including money, labor, and support, they can create an organization with staff and lobbyists designed to influence public officials.

Con: Interest groups exist to advance the shared interest of their members. In so doing, an interest group might focus on a narrow purpose. As a result, the interest group might influence the government to do things that benefit its members but harm the interests of others and even society.

**Media**

Pro: People have many options for staying informed about the government. With different types of media, people are more likely to have access to information. People can also get information from many points of view.

Con: There are many providers in the media that deliver news about the government. Some try to be objective. Others cater to specific interests to attract an audience so they can make money. This can be a problem when people only get their news from sources that reflect their personal interests. By limiting perspectives, they are not able to make fully informed decisions.

**Objective 2:** Research ways linkage institutions address current social and political issues.

**Big Ideas:**

Four important linkage institutions in the U.S. are:

1. elections
2. interest groups
3. political parties
4. the media

Interest groups might use money, information, and other resources to gain influence over different branches of government. Money can be donated as campaign contributions. Interest groups use campaign contributions to influence policies. It also can be spent on ads to create support for or opposition to a policy.

Interest groups use information to persuade public officials to support their goals.

Interest groups also get volunteers for campaigns, ask members to contact public officials, and use lobbyists to develop relationships with government officials.

Interest groups will lobby legislators. Lobbying involves direct contact with legislators to discuss issues. This direct access does not guarantee influence, but it does make it possible.

To gain access, interest groups provide legislators with useful resources. It is vital to note that interest groups can give money to legislators, but only in the form of regulated and limited campaign contributions. Otherwise, it is an illegal bribe.

**Interest Groups, Legislators, and Information**

Legislators must make choices about bills about a wide range of issues. Legislators often turn to interest groups for information about issues. Interest groups might even help legislators write or revise bills.

Legislators often get information and help from interest groups they trust. It is important for interest groups and their lobbyists to develop good relationships with legislators.

Legislators also tend to turn to interest groups that share a similar point of view on an issue.

**Influencing the Bureaucracy and Courts**

Interest groups will sometimes try to develop relationships within the bureaucracy to influence how agencies, bureaus, and departments carry out their duties.

Often these relationships involve a shared interest. Interest groups cannot give bureaucrats money. Interest groups can provide information. They can also lobby the legislature to pass laws that help their goals.

The judicial branch interprets and applies the law. Interest groups might try to influence the courts to make favorable rulings. Interest groups cannot give justices money. That would be an illegal bribe. But they can file lawsuits to challenge laws and policies.

Interest groups can also give information to the courts about cases in the form of amicus briefs. These briefs are short arguments meant to influence the way a court rules in a case.

Interest groups could also get involved in the selection of judges and justices. They might support a candidate for an elected court seat or lobby for a candidate’s selection to a court.

**Objective 3:** Compare and contrast the effectiveness of individual responses and institutional responses to a political issue.

**Big Ideas:** Only government institutions can legally use force. Governments have a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. This makes their responses more concrete, legitimate, and lasting than individual responses.

Institutional responses often lag behind individual responses. Individual responses do not require votes, paperwork or regulatory agencies and can move fast.

Both responses are linked to public opinion. Large-scale individual responses and governmental responses often come after an inciting event that focuses public attention and affects people’s opinions. The media plays a big role in both responses.

**Keywords**:

* **interest group** – a well-organized group of people with a shared identifying interest that attempts to influence the legislative process
* **linkage institution** – a structure or organization that connects the people to the government by providing information or a means for influence and participation
* **amicus** – an impartial advisement on a case
* **brief** – a short document submitted to a court by an outside observer offering information or analysis about a case
* **bureaucrat** – a person who is employed or who works closely with governmental leaders
* **boycott** – a purposeful individual choice to avoid using and supporting companies or industries to bring about some political change
* **inciting event** – a major event that changes public opinion on a given issue, and sparks an individual or institutional response
* **individual response** – an individual or group of individuals responding in some informal way to a political issue, usually intended to pressure government institutions to enact more permanent, formal change through the force of law
* **institutional response** – a response to a political issue by government institutions like legislatures or executive branches that is more permanent, and has the force of the state behind it

**Quick Check**

Question 1: Analyze the impact elections have on citizens. Which statement **best** describes how elections link people to the government?

* Elections allow people to choose between the most qualified individuals for public office.
* Elections allow voters to make laws and policies for the government.
* Elections give everyone an equal chance to run for office and win.
* **Elections hold the government accountable to the people.**

Question 2: Which statement **best** describes a con of interest groups?

* Interest groups use lobbyists in attempt to influence the government and advance their cause.
* Interest groups can be ineffective because of the conflicting interests of their members.
* Interest groups tend to make it difficult for individuals to influence the government.
* **Interest groups might focus on the narrow interests of their members that harm other people and society.**

Question 3: Suppose you conducted research on interest groups, which of the following **best** states how interest groups influence political issues?

* **Interest groups use campaign contributions to influence policies.**
* Interest groups use campaign funds to oversee the executive branch.
* Interest groups give money to legislators to pass favorable laws.
* Interest groups give money to justices to influence judicial decisions.

Question 4: Which of the following is more likely to help a lobbyist influence a legislator?

* The lobbyist has a competing perspective.
* The lobbyist is well-funded.
* **The lobbyist has a good relationship with the legislator.**
* The lobbyist has a reputation for honesty.

Question 5: In comparing an institutional response to an individual response to a political issue, which answer would suggest that an institutional response is best?

* It requires a fast, nimble response.
* If individuals are not responding to an issue.
* **It requires a more permanent response backed by law.**
* If a company that is behaving inappropriately or illegally responds to public outcry.

**Lesson 8 – Political Systems**

**Objective 1:** Analyze the promotion of democratic principles through the effectiveness of different political systems.

**Big Ideas**: The basis behind democratic principles is the belief in specific ideologies that need to exist to form a democratic government. The ways in which these principles are manifested vary from place to place. While a specific set of principles or agreed-upon concepts does not exist universally, the concept includes:

* Citizen participation
* Government accountability
* Government transparency
* Free and fair elections
* Rule of law

Societies can use these principles to form constitutions or a bill of rights.

**Political Systems**

Countries use a wide array of political systems. Many political systems are variations of or have roots in similar systems. These systems establish how the country will run. The most common forms of political systems include:

* Representative democracy
* Monarchy
* Theocracy
* Dictatorship

It is the political system each country utilizes that shapes the government and how the people interact with their government. Depending on the effectiveness of the political system in place, democratic principles can either be promoted or discouraged.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Representative Democracy** | **Monarchy** | **Theocracy** | **Dictatorship** |
| Citizens play large role in government | Royal families keep most power | Religious leaders run political institutions | Dictator holds all the power |
| Citizens can vote, run for office, and speak out against the government | Some allow citizens to vote and have freedom of expression. Some have no elections. | Citizen participation varies a lot | Little to no citizen participation |
| High level of accountability | Medium level of accountability | Low level of accountability | Low level of accountability |
| High Level of transparency | Medium level of transparency | Low level of transparency | Low level of transparency |
| All held to standard of the law | Royal families thought to be above the law | Leaders are more above the law than royal families | Dictators are not held to the law; the law is used against political enemies. |

**Objective 2:** Draw conclusions on the central role of the rule of law in the American political system.

**Big Ideas:** In the U.S., the Constitution is the supreme law of the land. The Framers first set up the concept of the rule of law to create a government for the people. There are four universal principles that support the rule of law:

* 1. Accountability
	2. Just law
	3. Open government
	4. Accessible and impartial justice

Just law is seen in the application of the law despite status. An open government makes laws clear and accessible to the people through direct language in the Constitution. For each of the principles, one of the three branches of government is given the power to uphold the Constitution.

The three separate branches of the U.S. government were set up to ensure that powers of government were evenly distributed. They allow for each of the branches to check the others and create accountability. The branches and their responsibilities are outlined in the Constitution and further support the rule of law in American politics.

The legislative branch makes laws that apply to everyone. These laws are created openly so that the public is informed.

The executive branch is responsible for enforcing the laws. This requires the branch to enforce laws equally. No one is above the law.

The judicial branch is made up of the federal courts. This branch interprets the law. It is the duty of the federal courts to impartially resolve disputes that arise, using the Constitution as a basis for their rulings. Courts have a large role in upholding the rule of law when they hear cases that surround sensitive issues or certain groups.

The rule of law has a central role in this system of government to create protection for the rights of the people in the U.S.. It holds the government to the same standards as the people. Laws apply to all citizens equally.

**Keywords**:

* **democratic principles** – a government system where the people elect leaders and have similar beliefs about the structure and function of government
* **preamble** – the introduction to the Constitution that explains the purpose of the document
* **rule of law** – the idea that all people and institutions are required to follow the law regardless of their status in the society

**Quick Check**

Question 1: Which answer **best** analyzes how a representative democracy promotes the democratic principle of citizen participation?

* A representative democracy requires the government to keep the public informed.
* **A representative democracy allows citizens to speak out against their government.**
* A representative democracy allows for free and fair elections with a multiparty system.
* A representative democracy allows for frequent elections.

Question 2: What **two** political systems provide the least accountability from their governmental leaders with regard to the democratic principle of rule of law?

* dictatorship and monarchy
* theocracy and monarchy
* representative democracy and dictatorship
* **theocracy and dictatorship**

Question 3: Which statement **most** accurately draws a conclusion about why the rule of law is central in the American political system?

* to create fair and impartial rulings
* to create laws for only some people
* to create a strong government
* **to create equity for all people**

Question 4: What is the main concept of the rule of law?

* Laws do not always apply to all citizens.
* Judges can determine if the law applies to certain people.
* People in government are above the law.
* **Laws apply to all citizens equally.**

Question 5: How does the executive branch uphold the concept of the rule of law in American politics?

* by interpreting the laws and resolving disputes
* by making changes to the Constitution
* **by enforcing the law equally**
* by making laws fair for everyone

**Lesson 9 – Socialization**

**Objective 1** Describe the process of political socialization.

**Big Ideas:** Political socialization refers to how individuals attain their political beliefs and values. The key elements of political preferences are the formation of attitudes and the consumption of political information.

A person’s political attitudes reflect how they think about issues and questions related to elections, voting, the operation of government institutions, the economy, and many other public matters. Political information is knowledge that people receive through friends and family, from politicians and reporters, and from teachers and educators.

Socialization starts in childhood. It is at first driven by family values and education. Through adolescence and young adulthood, most people reinforce their existing belief system. They might also change it in either subtle or overt ways. Interactions in community groups, at work, and through media intake drive this process. As people age and access to the world of different opinions and values expands, shifts in viewpoints on specific issues may occur.

Family is one of the key parts of a person’s life that shapes party identification.

Educational experiences also play a part. High school and college experiences often provide a more complex and nuanced view of politics, and shifts in political stances frequently happen during early adulthood.

**Objective 2:** Compare the role of family, school, community, and media in political socialization.

**Big Ideas:**

**Family**

Family habits are the first inflection point in most people’s political socialization.

Children often mimic their parents. This behavior tends to carry on through adolescence where politics are concerned. The influence of family on a person’s political socialization occurs heavily during early childhood and adolescence.

**School**

Most K-12 schools teach citizenship and civic engagement in a way that puts the U.S. and its government in a positive light. School experiences with politics, impact a person’s political socialization most heavily from early childhood through young adulthood.

**Community**

As people age, their bonds with people outside their family strengthen. Peer groups become particularly influential in adolescence. That influence continues across life.

A person’s attitudes and preferences may become affected by their profession or workplace, or by organizations of which they are members. The influence of a person’s job type on their political socialization often shows in older adulthood.

**Media**

Viewers and listeners can curate their own content, absorbing only information that reinforces their existing attitudes. Confirmation bias may result. This can reduce messaging acceptance and prevent attitudes from changing.

More and more artists, writers, and producers are inserting political values into their work, and these messages are being received by the consuming public.

Because music and other media are widely available and free online, people are much more easily exposed to new and different media. In turn, citizens convert this information into attitudes and beliefs, and sometimes even act on them in ways that reference the source material for their viewpoints.

This table lists four stages of life in the left column. Each column is marked with an X to show the stages of life in which it has the strongest impact on a person’s political socialization.



**Objective 3:** Assess which agent of socialization has the most influence in developing one’s political decisions.

**Big Ideas:** The agent of socialization that has the biggest influence on a person’s political opinions is a person’s family or the people they live with. There is a very strong statistical relationship between the party identification of people with the adults who raised them.

The second most important agent of socialization is education. The political opinions learned at home often lean toward one ideology or another. Educational experiences tend to provide positive reinforcement about the U.S. system. Students are usually rewarded for good citizenship and taught concepts like American exceptionalism and the Constitution. Social studies classes are organized around common values that all Americans share.

It is also in education where students find their beliefs and values do not align with that of their peers. Open discussions and curriculum can bring to light many new perspectives. Children, adolescents, and adults might find that their party identification is reinforced with new information. It is also possible that as they grow, they will adopt views that stray from their initial party affiliations that were established during family socialization.

Media is also a large contributor of socialization. Film, television, social media, and the internet can provide a lot of information regarding politics. This vast availability of information can create political value confusion. News that challenges one’s way of thinking about current values can result in a person questioning their first position.

A person’s political beliefs may change as they age. The chart summarizes the key phases of political socialization and identifies the influences.



**Keywords**:

* **attitude** – an organized and consistent way of thinking about political issues
* **political ideology** – a system of beliefs, ideas, or values that serves as the foundation of how a government should function and as a guide for policy initiatives
* **confirmation bias** – the tendency to look for information that supports existing beliefs
* **fairness doctrine** – a twentieth century U.S. law that required radio and tv stations to air public affairs programming that contained a balance of opinions
* **inflection point** – a critical juncture in the socialization process, where attitudes are created or changed
* **agent of socialization –** something that shapes an individual’s political attitudes and values; examples are family, education, and peer group influence
* **Democrat –** the liberal party in American politics; generally favors expanded government programs, a strong social safety net, and laws that help marginalized groups
* **desocialization –** the process of losing previously acquired values and culture
* **Republican –** the conservative party in American politics; generally favors smaller government, a balanced federal budget, and less regulation of businesses
* **resocialization –** the process of acquiring new values and culture

**Quick Check**

Question 1: Which of the following **best** describes the process of political socialization from early childhood to adolescence?

* Political attitudes of adults tend to be more independently minded, transferring those opinions to their children.
* Political attitudes of children and adolescents tend to be the opposite attitudes from the adults who raise them.
* **Political attitudes of adults in the home are the strongest influence, and people tend to have similar attitudes as the adults who raise them.**
* Political attitudes of children and adolescents tend to be more liberal than that of the adults who raise them.

Question 2: Because of new experiences that provide more nuanced political information, many people’s political attitudes shift during which period of life?

* Middle age
* **Early adulthood**
* Later adulthood
* Adolescence

Question 3: When considering socialization that occurs in old age, how does the effect of family compare with the effect of job type?

* Both family and job type are equally important in older adulthood.
* **Job type is more important in older adulthood than family**
* Neither family nor job type is important in older adulthood
* Family is more important in older adulthood than job type

Question 4: How would you assess the role of the adults who raise someone in political socialization?

* It’s not nearly as important as education
* **It’s the most important agent of socialization.**
* It’s one of many agents of equal importance.
* It’s the second most important agent of socialization.

Question 5: How does education act as a socialization agent?

* Educational systems instill personal values in students.
* Educational systems encourage students to take on perspectives of peer groups.
* **Educational systems reward good citizenship and civic virtue.**
* Educational systems provide a strong incentive to please adults.