

# Political Culture

by

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# Political Culture

- Political culture is the **norms** and **values** of a people, including **ideas on how the political system should work**; political culture varies from nation to nation
- A nation's political culture arises from:
  - History
  - Economy
  - Religion
  - Folkways
- Nation's political culture may endure for centuries

# Political Culture and Public Opinion

- Both look at attitudes toward politics
  - **Culture** focuses on **basic, general values**
  - **Opinion** focuses on **current leaders and policies**
- Both use surveys, but with different questions;
  - studies of political culture seek **qualitative** and **quantitative data**
- Political culture is relatively **stable** during good times
- Public **opinion**, if stable, **can become political culture**



# Political Socialization

- **Political socialization** – process by which we acquire our lifelong political values and orientations
- Agents of socialization
  - Family
  - School
  - Peer Groups
  - Mass Media
  - Government
- Which do these agents of political socialization influence more: political culture OR public opinion?

# Participation in America

- Many Americans do not participate in politics
  - Roughly 50% vote in national elections, fewer in state elections
- “**Sleeping dogs**” theory is that Americans pay little attention to politics until aroused by scandal, war, or economic disasters
  - THEN they vote politicians out
- **Rule of anticipated reactions** means politicians always try to predict how public will react to policies, and behave accordingly
- Americans are also prouder of their system than foreigners are of theirs, thus greater faith in democracy



# Civil Society

- The concept of “**civil society**” is closely related to political culture
- A vibrant and developed civil society is the bedrock of democracy
  - Without a civil society, democracy may not take root

## CIVIC CULTURE

- Almond and Verba discerned three general political cultures:
  - **Participant** – people understand that they are citizens and pay attention to politics
  - **Subject** – people still understand that they are citizens and pay attention to politics, but they do so more passively
  - **Parochial** – many people do not much care that they are citizens of a nation
- Every country is a varied mixture of all three of these ideal types

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# The Decay of Political Culture

- Cynicism has been growing in developed countries in recent decades; turnout has declined across the globe
- “Culture wars” polarize electorate into two seemingly different countries
- American tendency to form associations, which help stabilize our politics is declining; some argue we are just joining new ones, not traditional ones
- Perhaps, as citizens become more educated, they are more willing to criticize society and government, possibly improving democracy



# Political Subcultures

- Subcultures – a minority culture within the *mainstream* culture
- Elite and Mass Subcultures
  - Every country has subcultures with differing takes on political culture
  - Elites are better educated, wealthier, more participatory
  - The uneducated and poor lack knowledge and confidence; they have lower political efficacy
  - The wealthy and better educated know how to look after their interests better politically

# Minority Subcultures

- Groups with a different language who dislike being ruled by the dominant culture constitute subcultures
- Where subcultures are very distinct, the country itself may be threatened
- Oftentimes, these groups are marginalized
  - Should seek to integrate subcultures into the political system?