

Question of the american political culture politics essay



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The question on American political culture has been one of the most debated topic among scholars and policy makers in political, while there is an clear understanding on what might be the source of differences between United state and other western countries, it has been complicated to understand why Americans govern themselves the way they do. The purpose of this paper is to examine the origin of protest movement such as “ Tea Parties”, “ Birthers” and their involvement on domestic and foreign policies, by looking at individualism, patriotism, and political involvement. With more focus on what Richard R. Lau and Caroline Heldman called “ the role of self-interest and symbolic attitudes”

American political culture emphases on egalitarianism and individualism, there are belief that Americans specifically the elite champion the ideal of autonomy, more than in any other industrial society , for the elites in America they believe governments activities to be harmful and see individual achievement to be more American (Wilson 1997, 483)

According to Almond and Verba (1963) Political culture is “ defined as beliefs, the attitudes, and values which emphasize the function of a particular political system”. Moreover, political culture is made up of cognitive, affective, and evaluative orientations towards the political system” These include skills and knowledge about the operation of the political system, negative and positive emotional feelings towards it, and evaluative judgments about the system. Furthermore, Political culture is a unique and patterned form of political philosophy that consists of attitudes on how governmental, political, and economic life should be carried out (Almond and Verba, 1963). Political cultures create a framework for political change and <https://assignbuster.com/question-of-the-american-political-culture-politics-essay/>

are unique to nations, states, and other groups. A political culture differs from political ideology in that people can disagree on an ideology for example; what government should do, but still share a common political culture. This was demonstrated in US during the health care debate when most republic disagree with Obama plan to provide health care coverage to lower income Americans, for them these are not the role of the federal government to run social services as big as that.

Scholars in political science have come up with different methods that allows us to understand what type of political culture influences American politics, these include, individualism, pluralism, cooperative or competitiveness, hierarchically or egalitarian, whether tradition or reason work as a justification ([http://www. answers. com/topic/political-culture](http://www.answers.com/topic/political-culture))

Looking at individualism in America, Tocqueville describes individualism as a reflective and tranquil sentiment that disposes each citizen to cut himself off from the mass of his fellow men. (Turner, 2008) He argues that American individualists are blind to social structure; more precisely they are blind to the ways that social structure both enables and constrains personal freedom and well-being. This blindness allows individualists to deny both their indebtedness to society and their moral responsibility for structural injustice.. (Brooks 2009). Tocqueville idea of individualism describes a pattern of public withdrawal, so long as government protects the property of individualists and allows them to pursue their private happiness; they will leave public affairs to other men and invest all of their energies in private projects. (Turner 2008) Moreover how individualism contributes to political culture in American politics is still a topic of Study, scholars like Fischer <https://assignbuster.com/question-of-the-american-political-culture-politics-essay/>

explains how America's high economic inequality by America's exceptionally is attributed to individualistic culture. One attributes the inequality and Americans' passivity about it to structural or political forces. In his argument, Fisher quotes Williams who suggested, "The ultimate source of action, meaning, and responsibility is the individual rather than the group. We Americans hold individuals personally responsible for their crimes and do not exact revenge on their kin; we frown on nepotism; we find suicide attacks unfathomable. Such a culture describes the individual "self" as unique and asocial". (Fisher 2008, 364) For evidence that individualism plays a role in American politics, Williams's points to the emphasis in American "law on individual rights"

Tocqueville's (1969: 506-508) argument that equality eventually generates an egoism such that Americans "look after their own needs, they owe no man anything and hardly expect anything from anybody..." Americans are likelier to attribute the outcome-say, a traffic accident-to individual will or traits, while Indians and Saudi Arabians more often attribute them to social demands. (Fischer 365). However there are disagreement among scholars how much individualistic are American compare to other western democratic countries, Fisher pointed to different survey demonstrating that American are not as much individualist as are Europeans, for him most American believe in church and group participation, as he pointed out "And Americans were least likely to defend the individual against national interests; for example, they were among the lowest in endorsing the idea that the individuals should refuse to support their countries when the nation was in the wrong and to say they would be willing to leave the country for better

conditions". With the above arguments one will wonder what exactly constitute American political culture. For Fischer what distinguishes American culture is not individualism but voluntarism. In contrast to societies based on corporate communities into which individuals are born and to which they are organically bound, American society defines groups-with the great exception of racial groups"(Fischer 2008, 368)

Moreover, Scholars have argued on how much power patriotism has in American political culture, and what role does it have in forming protests movements in America. Patriotism is known to be another tool used by scholars to understand and explain American political culture and the formation of different movements, according to Huddy and Khatib Patriotism items are commonly tinged with political ideology in the United States, resulting in greater apparent patriotism among political conservatives than liberals (Ruddy and Khatid 2007, 63). According to oxford dictionary, Patriotism is defined as " the quality of being patriotic; vigorous support for one's country". Huddy and Khatid categorized four different type (scales) of patriotism, including, " symbolic, national pride, uncritical, and constructive" (Huddy and Khatid, 2007) Constructive patriotism is a complex form of patriotism, as a mixing of love of country with political efforts directed at a change in the status quo. In it addition there is another form of patriotism as stated by Huddy and Khatid as " blind patriotism" and it is known to contain the following reverse-worded item: " For the most part, people who protest and demonstrate against U. S. policy are good, upstanding, intelligent people." (Huddy and Khatid 2007, 65) This seems theoretically similar to the following item from the constructive patriotism which believes that: " If you

love America, you should notice its problems and work to correct them.

(Schatz, Staub, and Lavine 1999). as cited in Huddy and Khatid 2007, 65)

National identity is extremely endorsed in the United States which might include the first three categories of patriotism; however, an expected positive link between national identity and political involvement stands in marked contrast to the predicted effects of other forms of patriotism. A strong national identity is expected to increase political involvement. Turner and colleagues' self categorization theory, an offshoot of social identity theory, predicts that individuals with a strong group identity are most likely to conform to group norms (Turner et al. 1987; Terry, Hogg, and White 1999) as cited in (Ruddy and Khatid 2007, 65). Acts of civic participation are viewed by political theorists as central to national identity in democratic countries and constitute what is seen as normative behavior for a "good" citizen (Conover, Searing, and Crewe 2004) as cited in (Ruddy and Khatid 2007, 65) however this has been challenged in past 8 years on civic participation and political involvement as the number of voters in US history has been decreasing up to less than 60 percent of population are the one voting, some link low turnout to complex voting process/culture (cultural or structural). (Brooks 2009) This question on political participation has been the center of discussion among scholars who study American political culture, as they look to how much power individual hold and how far away people believe the Government should be out of their private property. However, one should not limit his search of American political culture only patriotism and individual to explain how American governs themselves. For a fool list that we should look at include what Lipset argue to be American

Exceptionalism values that consist of ; Liberty, Laissez-Faire, Equalitanasism , Populism, Idealism, Openness, and religiosity. (Brooks, 2009)

To understand the origin of protest movement, we will need to go back to Huddy definition of Constructive patriotism “ as a complex, and mixing a love of country with political efforts directed at a change in the status quo”. For Huddy and Khatid American patriots believe that a good citizen who love America should notice its problems and work to correct them, with that spirit, protest movements like the “ Tea parties”, “ Birthers” and even right-wing talk radio are formed, with the believe that they should help prevent problems in their country. Among the mentioned protest movements, the Tea Parties are known to be the most recent vocal group in America, and scholars have been studying these movements’ agendas from the time they gained the media attention. The Tea Party movement is known to have emerged in 2009 through a series of locally and nationally coordinated protests, and is more a conservative political movement,. In 2009 this movement had gatherings and meeting to demonstrate their objection to several Federal laws proposed by Obama administration, including the “ Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008” the “ American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009”, “ Federal Reserve Transparency Act” and “ health care reform bills” (Seleny 2009). These and other protest movements demonstrate how patriotism and individualism strengthen what is known today as American political culture, in otherworld, these two complex concepts explains how American govern themselves, with higher believe in individual freedom of choice, less government interferences in people lives, and more the idea of being an American, the notion of patriotism and how it

is related to the formation of protest movement as well as how is it linked to the idea of individualism.

In short, to understand what is wrong with the way Americans govern themselves, and what is right about it? One should look at their political culture and believes, scholars have pointed to two main concept that were discussed above, they include, individualism and patriotism, these two concepts are known to be the main engine of what is known as American politics, they have been the main root of protest movement like the Tea Party and others movements that base their idea on freedom and equality of opportunity but much more in individualism and the sense of being an American which involves patriotism and love of their country.