Trust in Government

The Puzzle: Americans have paradoxical views of government:

- Since the American Revolution and the Founding, Americans have been reluctant to embrace or empower “big government.”
- Americans nevertheless appreciate the services that government provides, particularly in times of crisis.

Government Trust: Neither Left or Right

Liberals are more apt to trust the government to promote the public good through social programs and government regulation of business …

… but are more circumspect about expanding government power in the areas of defense, police powers, and social regulation.
Conservatives are more likely to advocate increasing government influence in the areas of defense, police powers, and social regulation … … but are loath to expand government’s role in promoting social welfare spending and government regulation.

Government Trust: Neither Left or Right

The Decline in Trust in Government

- Americans’ trust in government has declined throughout the second half of the 20th century, particularly since the 1960s.
- After September 11, 2001, levels of public trust in government seemed to rebound, but with rising deficits, corporate scandals, and the Iraq war, the level of trust seems again to be declining.

PERCENTAGE RESPONDING “MOST OF THE TIME”

Source: The National Election Studies, 1958-2004

FIGURE 1.2 Trust in Government, 1958-2004
The Decline in Political Efficacy

Perhaps part of the reason that Americans trust government less is that their sense of political efficacy has declined. Americans increasingly feel that government doesn’t adequately represent their interests.

political efficacy: the belief that citizens can influence government and politics

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- What do you trust the government to do well?
- Do you think the government represents your interests adequately?
- Is it our duty to trust the government or is it the obligation of politicians to earn our trust?

Political Culture

- The military draft in the United States was abolished in 1973. Some people believe that everyone ought to perform at least one year of mandatory public service, either in the military or in community service. Do you agree?
- What benefits do you see to mandatory public service? What problems? If there were mandatory service, should it be required of both men and women? Which would you choose: military service or community service?
Are American Citizens Knowledgeable?

**Citizenship:** informed and active membership in a political community

1. **Knowledge of government**
   Do you know the “rules of the game” in American politics?

2. **Knowledge of politics**
   Do you know the “stakes” of political conflicts?

3. **Knowledge of democratic principles**
   Do you know how a democracy is supposed to work?

Where do you get your news and information about politics? Do you…
- read a newspaper daily?
- watch broadcast or cable television news?
- get your news from the Internet?

**Politics & Popular Culture**

Surveys reveal that Americans, particularly those aged from 18 to 29, increasingly get political news from popular culture sources like *The Daily Show* or *Saturday Night Live*.

By the same token, comedy monologues from late night talk shows such as *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* and *The Late Show with David Letterman* also serve as an important source of political information for many people.
Politics & Popular Culture

How do you think the increased reliance on these pop culture sources affects citizens’ political knowledge?

What are the negative consequences? Are there any positive consequences?

Politics & Popular Culture

Americans tend to be poorly informed about politics and government.

Do you think there might be a connection between declines in trust, efficacy, or sources of political information, and Americans’ lack of knowledge about politics?

Government: Forms and Limits

Government:

the institutions and procedures through which a territory and its people are ruled.
Chapter 1

Types of Governments

**Autocracies**: governments controlled by one person – a monarch or a dictator

**Oligarchies**: governments in which a small group – landowners, military officers, or wealthy merchants – control most of the government decisions

**Democracies**: governments in which citizens play a significant part in the governmental process

Types of Governments & Inclusiveness

Governments can be categorized in ascending levels of inclusiveness.

- **Autocracy**
- **Oligarchy**
- **Democracy**

Low Inclusiveness  High Inclusiveness

Types of Government: Recognition of Limits

Governments can also be categorized in descending levels of the limits they recognize on their own authority.

- **Totalitarian**
- **Authoritarian**
- **Constitutional**

Few Limits  Broad Limits
Chapter 1

Types of Government: Recognition of Limits

Totalitarian governments: governments that recognize few or no limits on their authority and which seek to absorb or eliminate potential challengers to their authority

Authoritarian governments: governments that recognize no formal limits on their authority but are, often reluctantly, constrained by the power of other social institutions

Constitutional governments: governments that recognize and often codify effective limits on their authority

American Political Culture

Consensus Values in American Politics

- Liberty
- Equality
- Democracy

Liberty

Liberty: Historically, Americans have valued both personal freedom and economic freedom.

- The concept of limited government is key to Americans’ conception of liberty.
- Given its roots in the theories of John Locke, American liberty has a strong economic component with a broad American consensus in favor of free market capitalism.
Equality: Americans have a long-standing commitment to the "self-evident" ideal that "all men are created equal."

This translates to a commitment to equal opportunity (though not results) in the economic sphere and political equality like the concept of "one person, one vote."

Democracy: Americans’ commitment to democracy is marked by three principles:

- Popular sovereignty: Political authority rests ultimately with the people
- Majority rule: Government decisions follow majority preferences
- Minority rights: Some minority interests must be protected even in the face of majority sentiment

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- How well does America live up to its ideals of liberty, equality, and democracy?
- What are the greatest threats to these ideals at the beginning of the 21st century?
- To what extent are these broadly shared political values accomplished facts? To what extent are they ideals for which we must continually strive?
Throughout U.S. history, Americans have
- supported strong government.
- been suspicious of strong government.
- moved from suspicion of government to enthusiastic support for government.
- moved from a belief in no government to a belief in strong government.

Government run by a few people is called
- autocracy.
- totalitarianism.
- pluralism.
- oligarchy.

A student council is an example of:
- direct democracy.
- representative democracy.
- limited democracy.
- an oligarchy.
Review Questions

The U.S. definition of liberty refers to
a) personal freedom only.
b) economic liberty only.
c) personal and economic freedom.
d) political and religious freedom.