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POLITICAL CULTURE AND DEMOCRACY

ARIEL MALKA

In April 2008, during his primary campaign, then-Senator Barack Obama made a remark that stirred controversy. Characterizing the mind-set of economically strained small-town Americans, he stated that “they cling to guns or religion or antipathy toward people who aren’t like them or anti-immigrant sentiment or anti-trade sentiment as a way to explain their frustrations” (Fowler, 2008, para. 6). Although he combined these characteristics with the disjunctive conjunction *or*, Mr. Obama listed attributes of a cultural stereotype that is familiar to many followers of U.S. politics. There is a type of person, in this framework, who is religious, rural, parochial, antihomosexual, nationalistic, xenophobic, and gun loving. This type of person is involved in a bitter political conflict with the type of person who is secular, urbane, elitist, unfavorable toward guns, prohomosexual, globally minded, and pro-immigration (see Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2006, Chapter 1).

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Culture Reexamined: Broadening Our Understanding of Social and Evolutionary Influences,

A. B. Cohen (Editor)

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These contrasting bundles of attributes are evocative of what is called a *cultural difference*, and they are at the center of what commentators, journalists, and opportunistic political actors sometimes call the *culture war*. This culture war framework may be a good one for describing contemporary U.S. political elites (e.g., Poole & Rosenthal, 2007), but it is inadequate for describing the contemporary U.S. general public (e.g., Fiorina et al., 2006). Some researchers have noted that whatever degree of political cultural conflict does exist in the public occurs in the context of a powerful cultural mind-set that is favorable to democratic governance. In this mind-set, Americans whom one might consider misguided, naive, stupid, elitist, out of touch, or even repugnant still deserve political and civil rights, as long as they obey the law. Americans who would deny such rights to their opponents are generally constrained by strong norms against even expressing such a wish, much less acting on it. Others have noted that this conflict is one in which most Americans possess some of the attributes of each side and are, therefore, either uninvolved or involved in an inconsistent way depending on what happens to be psychologically salient for them. This situation of largely nonoverlapping identities and preferences may temper the political conflict in a way that has favorable implications for democracy.

This chapter has two goals. The first is to briefly review post-World War II empirical scholarship on the concept of political culture and its implications for democratic functioning. The second is to briefly review evidence bearing on the nature of the so-called culture war in the United States, which is sometimes described as a threat to American democracy. Comprehensive overviews of these two topics are impossible in a book chapter. Rather, I describe some of the major scholarly ideas about these topics and the empirical evidence associated with these ideas. In so doing, I use as an organizing framework the classic notion that democratic governance requires a mass cultural orientation favorable to sustaining a balance of "consensus and cleavage" (Almond & Verba, 1963, p. 489; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954, p. 318).

I draw two conclusions from these reviews. The first is that successful democratic functioning does indeed appear to be facilitated by a mass cultural orientation that balances competitive political activity with a general trust in, and tolerance of, one's social surroundings. The second conclusion is that what exists of the American cultural conflict described earlier has taken form gradually since the 1970s and has been brought about by a downward dissemination of elite political discourse that has only reached (and has therefore only affected) Americans who pay relatively close attention to politics. Most Americans, therefore, have not aligned their various identities and preferences into conformity with one of the two culture war prototypes.

NATIONAL POLITICAL CULTURES AND DEMOCRACY

Psychologists who study *culture* often define it along the following lines: (a) It refers to a system of behaviors, values, and norms, along with the physical and institutional environmental characteristics that both derive from and reinforce these psychological elements; (b) it is constructed through interactions among individuals; and (c) it is intergenerationally transmitted (e.g., A. B. Cohen, 2009; Fiske, 2002; Triandis, 2007). This is an expansive definition that captures a wide range of psychological elements and their reciprocal impacts with the social and physical environment. It is therefore quite useful for describing social variation across groups of people. However, if one's goal is to gauge whether a group's culture explains some other group attribute, this definition leaves little that is "not-culture" for culture to explain (e.g., Elkins & Simeon, 1979). For example, if a nation's culture includes the practices, institutions, and physical concomitants of democracy (e.g., men and women casting ballots that are legitimately counted, journalists criticizing the leadership without getting arrested and tortured), then how can a nation's culture be said to cause democracy? The nation's culture, defined this way, must be said to *include* democracy.

Whether such an expansive definition is problematic depends on the theoretical goals of the scholarship. The primary goal of much political culture research has been to evaluate whether national political culture has an impact on democratic institutional functioning. If one were to adopt the expansive definition of culture, then this question really asks whether some elements of culture (belief systems or attitude clusters) have an impact on other elements of culture (democratic institutions). Many scholars of political culture have, in part for this reason, defined political culture more narrowly—as a "syndrome of attitudes" that is rooted in a group's historical circumstances but that is still malleable (Inglehart, 1988, p. 1214; see also McClosky & Zaller, 1984, pp. 16–17). *Attitudes* here refers broadly to mass belief systems, encompassing attitudes in the narrower social psychological sense (e.g., Eagly & Chaiken, 1998), values, and beliefs. Conceptualized as something distinct from actual democratic structures and practices, a society's political culture may be said to influence (or not influence) these structures and practices. I therefore use this definition.

Finally, the question of which social groups should be regarded as the "bearers of the culture" (Elkins & Simeon, 1979, p. 130) also depends on the goals of one's analysis. Some social units that are commonly studied as the bearers of political culture are political or regional subunits within nations (e.g., Erikson, McIver, & Wright, 1987), nations (e.g., Almond & Verba, 1963), and larger cultural zones consisting of multiple nations (e.g., Huntington, 1996). I limit the current discussion to the survey-based empirical inquiry into the mass (i.e., nonelite) political cultures of nations (but see Pye, 1991).

The Civic Culture

An early and influential survey study of national political cultures and democracy was reported in Almond and Verba's (1963) *The Civic Culture*. Almond and Verba proposed that there is a specific type of mass belief system that is conducive to democratic institutional functioning. Measuring mass beliefs in the United States, Britain, Germany, Italy, and Mexico, they found that citizens of the two English-speaking countries were more likely to possess a configuration of attitudes that these authors argued were favorable to democracy, including pride in their political systems, expectation of equal and consistent treatment by their governments, and a sense of subjective competence in their ability to influence government.

Weaknesses of this conceptual framework have been discussed by various authors (e.g., Elkins & Simeon, 1979; Jackman & Miller, 1996; Muller & Seligson, 1994; Reisinger, 1995). For example, some attitudinal differences between the societies with strong versus weak civic cultures were accounted for by structural differences (e.g., average education) between these societies (Elkins & Simeon, 1979). Also, causal direction between culture and institutions is uncertain (Muller & Seligson, 1994). A key example here is that some of the putatively causal cultural attributes (e.g., expectation of fair treatment by government) are perhaps more appropriately considered informant reports of actual political institutions, supposedly the dependent variable in the conceptual framework.

Notwithstanding these limitations, scholars of democracy have continued to explore the idea that "the evolution and persistence of mass based democracy requires the emergence of certain supportive habits and attitudes among the general public" (Inglehart, 1988, p. 1204). Such habits and attitudes, in this view, are not mere epiphenomena of economically deterministic processes (Marx, 1859/1977); rather, they independently influence institutional functioning (e.g., Banfield, 1958; Fukuyama, 1996; Harrison & Huntington, 2000; Inglehart, 1988; Putnam, 1993; Weber, 1905/2002). In this section, I argue that evidence has been consistent with the notion that democratic institutions are most likely to be maintained (and to emerge in the first place) when the population possesses a mass cultural orientation that balances political competition with a social mind-set that includes interpersonal trust and tolerance.

Limited-Intensity Political Conflict

That democratic governments must strike a balance between forceful leadership and responsiveness to citizens is an old idea. So is the classic civics textbook view of what type of citizen democratic governments require

to function effectively: one who is politically aware, involved, and active. Textbook democracy requires that citizens hold their governments accountable, and citizens cannot do this if they do not know or care about what is going on politically.

So it came as a troubling surprise when modern survey methods revealed that citizens, on average, are not that interested in or knowledgeable about politics (e.g., Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Converse, 1964; McClosky, 1964). Various explanations of how, and if, democracies still function well despite this fact have been debated. Some have focused on citizens' effective use of heuristics that do not require a lot of information or effort (e.g., Lupia & McCubbins, 1998; Popkin, 1991; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991). Others have noted methodological limitations of using free-report political descriptions (e.g., Marcus, Tabb, & Sullivan, 1974) and failing to account for random error in self-reported political attitudes (e.g., Achen, 1975; Ansolabehere, Rodden, & Snyder, 2008) when trying to infer levels of political interest, engagement, and sophistication among citizens. Others have argued that error in individual opinion is often random, rendering aggregate opinion and its fluctuation meaningful (e.g., Page & Shapiro, 1992). Still others have argued that democracy primarily works for attentive and knowledgeable (and usually wealthy) citizens (e.g., Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; see also Abramowitz, 2010; Bartels, 2010; Berinsky, 2002). An extreme extension of this reasoning is that contemporary democracy really serves to maintain and enhance the privileges of a lucky and well-organized minority.

Almond and Verba (1963), however, argued that although citizen engagement is crucial to democracy, the very limits to such engagement that are so often decried may also be crucial to democracy. For example, the combination of perceived political competence and sporadic actual political activity among citizens may allow elites to exercise decisive leadership, but to do so with the constraining fear that acting out of line will awaken segments of the public to exercise their "reserve of influence" (p. 481). Elite awareness of the innumerable "sleeping dogs" in the population may constrain their activity in a beneficial way (see also Stimson, 2004).

Almond and Verba (1963) also noted that the commitment to political preferences that does exist in democracies is "tempered in intensity by its subordination to a more general, overarching set of social values" (p. 490), including social trust and tolerance. A culture that is conducive to democracy, they argued, is one in which political conflict occurs in a context of general support for the democratic system, general trust in one's social surroundings, and general tolerance of different kinds of people. McClosky (1964) echoed this sentiment, noting that the "principles and practices of an 'open society' strongly reinforce tolerance for variety, contingency and ambiguity in matters of belief and conscience," often leading citizens to "ignore, tolerate, or play

down differences" (p. 378). To McClosky, such a cultural mind-set makes up for the lack of universal endorsement of certain elements of democracy (e.g., due process and freedom of speech in certain situations). Several other scholars have stressed the importance for democracy of balancing political activity with tolerance and trust (e.g., Gibson, 1998; Lipset, 1960; Putnam, 1993; Warren, 1999). It may be helpful, in this regard, when the dimensions of conflict within a society are somewhat independent of one another, that is, when much of the political competition does not occur between two highly differentiated opponents who differ with each other on everything (e.g., Berelson et al., 1954; Coser, 1956; Dahl, 1961; Lipset, 1963). Relatively independent dimensions of conflict may facilitate trust and tolerance of those with whom one disagrees on a particular issue; these very individuals may be one's allies on a different political matter or one's friends because of other, politically irrelevant common interests.

Evidence Consistent With the Limited-Intensity Conflict View

Indeed, evidence has been consistent with the view that the cultural characteristics of limited-intensity political conflict are conducive to democratic functioning. Inglehart (2003) measured, using international surveys from the mid-1990s through the early 2000s, nations' mean levels of tolerance, interpersonal trust, political activism, life satisfaction, and "postmaterialist" values (i.e., concerns about freedom and participation exceeding concerns about survival and order; see Inglehart & Abramson, 1999). At the national level, these components of a self-expressive value syndrome were highly correlated with one another. Certain nations appear to have political cultures that balance political activism and participatory orientation, on the one hand, with a tolerance of those one opposes (or even hates), a trust that people in general are not going to harm one even if they have political power, and a sense that life is pretty good overall, on the other (cf. Jackman & Miller, 1996; Muller & Seligson, 1994). This self-expressive value syndrome possessed a staggering .83 correlation with quality of democratic functioning between 1981 and 2000, as measured by Freedom House (<http://www.freedomhouse.org>). Needless to say, one sees very few correlations of this magnitude in the social sciences, especially between measures as distinct as an aggregated mass belief cluster and an institutional characteristic of nations.

But does this cultural syndrome cause democracy, does democracy cause this cultural syndrome, or do other national characteristics—most notably level of socioeconomic development—cause both? The nature of the relation between socioeconomic development and democratic functioning has long been the subject of scholarly analysis, much of it guided by modernization theory (e.g., Boix & Stokes, 2003; Bollen & Jackman, 1985; Burkhart & Lewis-Beck,

1994; Dahl, 1973; Gibson, 2001; Huntington, 1991; Inglehart, 1997; Lerner, 1958; Lipset, 1960; North, Wallis, & Weingast, 2009; Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, & Limongi, 2000; Przeworski & Limongi, 1997). The evidence suggests that countries with higher levels of socioeconomic development are more likely to be democracies and that high socioeconomic development has been associated with transition from authoritarian governance to democratic governance as well as sustenance of democratic governance (see Diamond, 2008, pp. 94–105).

In line with this evidence, Welzel, Inglehart, and Klingemann (2003) argued that socioeconomic development causes greater democracy at the national level. Moreover, they argued that this relation is mediated by a cultural orientation that is favorable to balancing political activity and liberty aspirations with trust and tolerance. They labeled this cultural orientation *mass emancipative values* and measured it as a composite of tolerance of diversity, inclination to civic protest, liberty aspirations, interpersonal trust, life satisfaction, and low religiosity.

Welzel et al. (2003) characterized the two main causal influences in their model as follows. Scarcity of material and social resources leads people to downward-adjust their higher order emancipative strivings, and improvement in resources leads such higher order strivings to become operative (Maslow, 1988). Then, when a nation has a high mass cultural level of emancipative values, this provides an incentive for *elite integrity*, referring to relatively low levels of corruption and relatively strong adherence to the rule of law (cf. O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986). In this view, a mass belief system centering on the balance of trust and tolerance with activity and self-expression makes "authoritarian rule increasingly ineffective and costly" (p. 348) for elites. Moreover, it provides an incentive for opportunistic politicians to become supporters of democracy. Thus, via elite integrity, the mass emancipative values of nations cause those nations to become or to remain democratic.

Analyzing data from 73 nations representing 80% of the world's population, Welzel et al. (2003) found that, controlling for democratic tradition up until 1995, socioeconomic resources in the early 1990s had a strong effect on emancipative values measured in the mid-1990s. In this same model, with pre-1995 democratic tradition and early-1990s socioeconomic resources held constant, mid-1990s emancipative values had a strong impact on effective democracy in the late 1990s that was mediated by elite integrity. Thus, countries with relatively strong levels of a cultural orientation favorable to balancing cleavage and consensus in the mid-1990s were relatively likely to become more democratic (and relatively unlikely to become less democratic) from the mid to the late 1990s, for reasons extending beyond their material resources.

To be sure, socioeconomic development seems to affect democracy through various structural mechanisms that do not require culture as part of the explanation (e.g., Diamond, 2008; Muller, 1988; Muller & Seligson, 1994). Among these structural characteristics is economic inequality, whose complex role in democratization is the subject of debate (e.g., Freeman & Quinn, 2012; Houle, 2009). Moreover, other cultural characteristics—for example, degree of ethnic fractiousness, aspects of prior colonial experience, and degree of Protestantism—may affect democratization at certain historical junctures (Bollen & Jackman, 1985; Muller & Seligson, 1994). Also, regardless of these national characteristics, the timing and nature of democratic change are influenced by a wide range of factors, including foreign interference and aid, global economic structures, and a great variety of unpredictable events (Diamond, 2008, Chapters 4–7). However, mass value change would appear to in part account for why gains in resources tend to make countries more democratic. This observation led Inglehart and Welzel (2005) to predict that China’s rapid development will produce democracy, via mass emancipative values, within 2 decades of 2005 (see also Diamond, 2008, Chapter 10).

From Individual Responses to Mass Cultural Characteristics

It is worth highlighting that political culture researchers such as Welzel and Inglehart refer to an aggregation of individuals’ attitudes as a *mass cultural orientation*. Indeed, empirical evidence seems to provide strong justification for doing so. National mean levels of such attitudes, though influenced by socioeconomic development, are also predicted by historical societal attributes (e.g., Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Putnam, Leonardi, Nanetti, & Pavoncello, 1983), suggesting that there is “a durable cultural component underlying these responses” (Inglehart, 1988, p. 1207). Furthermore, these national mean levels of attitudes (an “aggregated mass characteristic”) have enormous correlations with “genuine system characteristics” such as level of democracy and socioeconomic development (Welzel et al., 2003, p. 353; see also Inglehart & Baker, 2000). In one analysis, for example, national income–education correlated .91 with mass emancipative values, which dwarfed the average within-nation (between-person) correlation of .29 (Welzel et al., 2003). It is quite clear that “nations tend to create distinguished ‘central tendencies’ among their citizens’ prevailing values” (Welzel et al., 2003, p. 351), mass tendencies that should be viewed as meaningful, socially transmitted cultural attributes of nations.

There is, of course, meaningful within-nation variability in these belief systems (e.g., Napier & Jost, 2008). Individuals within nations have great varieties of experiences for a great variety of reasons, including differential

social treatment and differential genetic makeup. A nation's mean level of various mass characteristics is, however, an indicator of an important national cultural characteristic with which citizens are faced and within which they act. As Welzel et al. (2003) noted, each individual in a nation has an infinitesimal and essentially meaningless influence on the nation's mean level of a cultural attribute. However, the national mean level of a cultural attribute provides a part of the context in which the individual acts, and one that is strongly linked to the way the nation is governed and how much wealth it generates.

Generalizability Across Historical Contexts

One should not, however, take for granted that the influence of culture on democracy generalizes across cultural-historical contexts. It might be the case that certain cultural values only influence democratization under some cultural-historical circumstances but not under others. To put it another way, a Cultural-Historical Context \times Mass Values interaction may exist in the prediction of change in democracy. One might interpret evidence reported by Muller and Seligson (1994) along these lines.

Muller and Seligson (1994) challenged the thesis that cultural attitudes cause democracy, using a sample of 27 predominantly European, North American, and Latin American nations. They reported findings that nations' civic cultural attitudes between 1981 and 1986 did not predict democracy level between 1981 and 1990 when controlling for democracy level between 1972 and 1980 and other nation-level covariates. Muller and Seligson's index of civic culture consisted of life satisfaction, trust, and opposition to revolutionary change. Notably, this index did not include indicators of valuing political activity or indicators of tolerance, and it may therefore have fallen short of capturing the cultural balance between consensus and cleavage emphasized here (indeed, Muller and Seligson did not intend to measure a construct based on the present conceptualization). Interestingly, when these scholars added national support for gradual reform (1981-1986), this mass attitude had a significant positive effect on change in democracy. Such a mass attitude would seem to reflect a valuing of political activity (reform) being performed in a tempered, socially sensitive way (gradualism). Nonetheless, that certain types of cultural variables did not predict change in democracy from the 1970s to the 1980s (Muller & Seligson, 1994) but did predict change in democracy from pre-1995 to post-1995 (Welzel et al., 2003) suggests that particular mass beliefs may have a greater influence on democratization under some circumstances than under other circumstances (see also Bollen & Jackman, 1985, for a study examining predictors of democratic change in the 1960s).

Overt Support for Democracy

It is also interesting to note that the value syndrome favoring the combination of political competition and trust and tolerance appears to be a stronger predictor of democratic institutional functioning than is overt support for democracy itself (Inglehart, 2003; see also McClosky, 1964). There now exists globally widespread overt support for democracy that both transcends cultural zones (e.g., Diamond, 2008) and appears to be rooted in a fairly accurate understanding of what democracy entails (e.g., Dalton, Shin, & Jou, 2007). However, such overt support is not enough for democratizing and for sustaining democracy, and if one wants to predict a country's democratization path, it seems that one would be better served by knowledge of the nation's tolerance, trust, and political activity than by knowledge of the nation's overt support for democracy. An interesting exception in this regard is Latin America, whose countries, with some exceptions, combine democratic institutions and overt support for democracy with low levels of trust (e.g., Lagos, 1997).

Finally, it is important to consider the distinction between overt support for democracy and the type of cultural orientation described earlier when reflecting on the political upheavals in Muslim Middle Eastern and North African countries that took form in early 2011 (referred to as the *Arab Spring*). Some have argued that Islam is not conducive to various aspects of progress, including democratization (Huntington, 1996). More convincing, however, is the view expressed by Diamond (2008) that any cultural inclination against democracy that Middle Eastern and North African Muslim societies now possess is the product of recent cultural circumstances rather than an enduring incompatibility of their religion with democracy. After all, one would not have to look hard in the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Koran, or any other piece of scripture to find prescriptions that are decidedly contrary to democratic values. Moreover, Muslim societies were far more progressive than were Christian societies through much of Islam's history. Muslim societies possess about the same level of overt democratic support as do non-Muslim societies (Diamond, 2008; Inglehart, 2003). The findings described earlier, however, would seem to suggest that the likelihood of democracy taking hold in these societies will in part depend on the adoption of a cultural orientation favoring the balance of consensus and cleavage. In particular, a cultural shift toward greater tolerance of disliked groups (e.g., minorities, homosexuals) may be necessary to provide an incentive for elite behavior conducive to democratization (see Inglehart, 2003, p. 54). Of course, though, economic factors, foreign influence, and ethnic fractiousness may be at least as important for determining democratic progress.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE AMERICAN CULTURE WAR

I have reviewed arguments and evidence that political cultures are favorable to democratic functioning when they are conducive to limited-intensity political conflict. The ultimate causal root of this cultural orientation is often (though certainly not always) socioeconomic development, which seems to bring about a mass value system that combines political expression with a broad social orientation encompassing tolerance and trust. Democracy appears to be more likely to come about, and more likely to be sustained, when the society's members possess this mass value configuration.

Various scholars of democracy have argued that nonoverlapping social and political cleavages play a strong role in producing limited-intensity conflict (e.g., Berelson et al., 1954; Coser, 1956; Dahl, 1961; Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Lowi, 1979; Truman, 1951), which essentially means that political and social conflicts will not be dangerous to the extent that (a) the conflicts occur along many different lines (e.g., abortion stance, social welfare spending stance, religiosity, religious affiliation, region, social class, race, views of military action) and (b) these dimensions of conflict are not so highly correlated that most citizens find themselves aligned with one or the other camp on every dimension. Baldassarri and Gelman (2008) summarized these perspectives in the following way: "Intrasocial conflict is sustainable as long as there are multiple and nonoverlapping lines of disagreement" (p. 409).

The discourse of the culture war in the United States often implies that the dimensions of political and social variation are strongly overlapping and possess an essential conceptual connection (Fiorina et al., 2006; Seyle & Newman, 2006). This notion of strong overlap does appear to characterize contemporary U.S. political elites (e.g., Layman, Carsey, & Horowitz, 2006; Poole & Rosenthal, 2007), who have indeed become more polarized since the 1970s. However, the claim that the U.S. general public is polarized is a more controversial one (Abramowitz, 2010; Fiorina et al., 2006). Whether or not one finds evidence of polarization in U.S. public opinion depends, not surprisingly, on what indicators of polarization one considers (e.g., Hetherington, 2009; Levendusky, 2009).

Evidence Against Polarization

The most straightforward way to conceptualize polarization is as increased extremity of issue stances. Polarization occurs when the distributions of issue stances change over time such that more of the population moves from the middle to one of the extreme positions. On the basis of this standard, the U.S. public has generally not become more polarized (DiMaggio, Evans, & Bryson, 1996; Evans, 2003; Fiorina et al., 2006).

However, the type of polarization of interest here does not require increased issue extremity; rather, it involves multiple dimensions of conflict—including issue stances, political identities, social identities, and so forth—becoming aligned so that the population increasingly comes to resemble one of two highly differentiated political cultural groups. When one examines the intercorrelations of issue stances over time (e.g., conservative vs. liberal view on abortion correlating with conservative vs. liberal view on government health insurance), one finds only slight increases in interissue polarization (Baldassarri & Gelman, 2008). Moreover, various demographic characteristics have not become more strongly correlated with political attitudes (DiMaggio et al., 1996; Evans, 2003). Catholics and mainline Protestants have become more evenly balanced in their partisan allegiances over the past few decades (Putnam & Campbell, 2010). In many respects, then, the view of Americans as having come to possess one of two stereotypical bundles of cultural attributes is inaccurate.

Evidence for Polarization

Is it conservative to oppose the legality of abortion? It may surprise some followers of U.S. politics to learn that the answer to this question would depend on the point in time at which it was asked (Stimson, 2004). Both partisan identification (as Republican vs. Democratic) and ideological identification (as conservative vs. liberal) have become increasingly correlated with issue attitudes since the 1970s (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2006; Bafumi & Shapiro, 2009; Levendusky, 2009; Stoker & Jennings, 2008), especially cultural attitudes about issues such as abortion and gay rights (Baldassarri & Gelman, 2008). Cultural attitudes, in fact, possessed little to no relation with party identification and ideological identification in the early 1970s.

In this respect, Americans have, on average, moved more toward one of two opposing cultural prototypes during the past 4 decades—for example, conservative–Republican identifiers who oppose abortion or liberal–Democratic identifiers who support it. Some have referred to this process as *sorting* (Fiorina et al., 2006; Levendusky, 2009); because the parties have taken more distinct stands on various issues, people now have a better sense of which partisan and ideological group their preferences place them in. However, note that longitudinal findings have been consistent with both partisan identification (Layman & Carsey, 2002) and ideological identification (Malka & Lelkes, 2010, Study 1) causally influencing issue attitudes. Moreover, experimental evidence has suggested that both partisan cues (Bullock, 2011; G. L. Cohen, 2003; Goren, Federico, & Kittilson, 2009) and ideological cues (Malka & Lelkes, 2010, Study 2) can influence the political positions adopted by partisan and ideological identifiers. Regarding the

changing link between partisan and ideological identification, Levendusky (2009) found that Americans have been more likely to adjust their ideological identifications and substantive political attitudes to match their partisan identifications than vice versa. Thus, the increased associations between political identities (partisan and ideological) and issue stances may not simply reflect people having a better idea of what party or ideological group their fixed issue stances place them in. Rather, these identities may actually have an impact on people's substantive stances when issues are discursively framed in partisan or ideological terms.

Not only have Americans become more inclined to organize their issue attitudes in partisan and ideological terms, but they have also become more inclined to base their political alignments on certain demographic characteristics, particularly in the religious realm. Since World War II, White evangelical Protestants have become lopsidedly Republican, whereas Black Protestants have become almost uniformly Democratic (e.g., Putnam & Campbell, 2010). Religiosity—defined as level of religious commitment, regardless of one's religious affiliation—appears to have become increasingly correlated with voting Republican (Fiorina et al., 2006; Putnam & Campbell, 2010) and conservative self-identification (Malik, Lelkes, Srivastava, Cohen, & Miller, 2012) in the early 1990s. Whether the U.S. electorate has become more polarized along class lines is a subject of debate (Abramowitz, 2010; McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal, 2006). In some respects, then, the view of increased mass U.S. polarization in recent decades is a reasonable, though often exaggerated, one.

Whose Culture War

With respect to some political and social dimensions, Americans appear to have become more likely to resemble one of the two culture war prototypes; with respect to other dimensions, they have not. Even though Americans have become more likely to bundle certain attributes together (e.g., liberal identification and cultural progressivism), the degree to which the population is split into two opposing camps is, however, not close to that suggested in much of the culture war discourse (Fiorina et al., 2006). For example, estimates from 2004 national data suggested that only about 12% of the population identify as conservative, identify as Republican, and oppose abortion (Baldassarri & Gelman, 2008). Close to 90% of Democrats in this survey either did not self-identify as liberal or had a nonliberal view on abortion, affirmative action, or health care (Baldassarri & Gelman, 2008). In a combined set of representative U.S. samples from 1996 to 2008, religiosity (a composite of religious attendance and importance) had only very small correlations with conservative positions on social welfare, the environment, and defense, and religiosity

had correlations indistinguishable from zero with conservative positions on racial policy, immigration, and gun control (Malka et al., 2012). Religiosity has been shown to correlate with liberal positions on both the death penalty (Carroll, 2004; Malka et al., 2012) and torture of terrorism suspects (Malka & Soto, 2011). The stereotypical ideologically aligned teams described early in this chapter would appear to have small memberships, even if they have become a bit larger during the past few decades.

Although across-the-board ideological alignment is not widespread in the U.S. general public, it does characterize a subset of the U.S. general public. As political scientists have long known, being aligned across multiple political dimensions is something that occurs only among people who are high in a family of indicators converging on the construct of political engagement. Typically, the only people who are aligned with one of the two ideological prototypes are those who are high in objective political knowledge, subjective political interest, political activism, inclination to vote, and related constructs (e.g., Abramowitz, 2010; Converse, 1964; Baldassarri & Gelman, 2008; Jacoby, 1995; Judd & Krosnick, 1989; Sniderman et al., 1991; Stimson, 1975; Zaller, 1992). A dispositional tendency to be opinionated may enhance the effects of political engagement on ideological alignment (Federico & Schneider, 2007). Being politically engaged is also associated with a greater likelihood of translating one's personality characteristics into political leanings (Federico & Goren, 2009; Federico, Hunt, & Ergun, 2009) and greater likelihood of translating one's religiosity into political conservatism (Malka et al., 2012).

That only those who are most politically engaged possess multiple characteristics of one of the culture war prototypes suggests that there are limits to the naturalness of these group memberships (cf. Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008). Instead, these groups exist as they do largely because of political discourse—the way in which politics, including the prevailing alignments, are discussed in the news media and, consequently, informal political communication.

Elite-Driven Dissemination of Culture War Rhetoric

As discussed earlier, political elites have become more polarized since the 1970s (Layman et al., 2006; Levendusky, 2009; Poole & Rosenthal, 2007; Rohde, 1991). The necessity of assembling a broad political coalition has led Republican elites to emphasize the *conservatism* of traditional moral stances, a term whose previous political implication had to do primarily with social welfare and scope of government stance (Adams, 1997; Stimson, 2004). Culturally traditional Democratic officeholders have seen their numbers dwindle, and liberal Republicans are no longer in office. The strategic statements made by political actors, conveyed and commented on by the news media, have

increasingly emphasized linkages between cultural traditionalism and free market ideology and between cultural progressivism and an economically interventionist federal government (e.g., Hunter, 1991). The term *liberal* has become associated with a rejection of traditional American values and lax morality (Ellis & Stimson, 2009; Stimson, 2004). Also, since the 1960s, the parties have taken distinct stands on civil rights and have superimposed these positions over their social welfare divide (Carmines & Stimson, 1989). I contend that exposure to these messages that disparate political characteristics go together, and motivation to act consistently with these messages, is what makes people who are politically engaged more likely to resemble one of the culture war prototypes.

What evidence suggests that discursive messages are what drive the enhanced ideological alignment of those who are politically engaged? In a comprehensive analysis, Baldassarri and Gelman (2008) examined patterns of change in interissue correlations, partisan identity-issue correlations, and ideological identity-issue correlations among representative samples of Americans between 1972 and 2004. In one part of their analysis, these scholars gauged differences in the temporal changes across different subgroups of Americans. Their results indicated that increases in mass ideological alignment over this time period of elite-generated polarizing discourse were primarily confined to those Americans with relatively strong political engagement (see also Abramowitz, 2010). Americans who were interested in politics displayed greater increases in all three types of ideological alignment described earlier than did Americans who were uninterested in politics. Moreover, wealthy Americans displayed greater increases in all three types of ideological alignment than did low-income Americans. These findings dovetail with those demonstrating that political engagement is associated with greater application of motivated reasoning to support one's partisan-ideological group (Taber & Lodge, 2006).

The findings presented in this section suggest that Americans, on average, do not resemble one of the two culture war prototypes. During the past 4 decades, as discourse has conveyed the message of a more polarized political elite, Americans have, on average, become more likely to align some (but not other) social and political characteristics in accordance with the culture war framework. Finally, the politically engaged Americans, those with the motivation and the resources to devote time to following politics, are those who have shown the greatest increases in ideological alignment. Thus, it appears that messages from discourse since the 1970s have made the attentive public more ideologically aligned with one of the two culture war prototypes, but this enhanced conflict is balanced by the presence of a large number of Americans who possess a set of identities and beliefs that do not conform to one of these prototypes.

CONCLUSION

For only a limited segment of human history have people within societies regularly settled their political conflicts and transferred power without violence or direct threats thereof. Although it falls short of its ideals in a variety of ways, contemporary liberal democracy provides the best mechanism for doing so. The inner workings of governance in democracies are largely an elite phenomenon. However, evidence has suggested that the mass belief systems of general publics may not just be an incidental by-product of historical, institutional, and economic circumstances; rather, they may causally influence the degree to which a society is governed through democratic institutions. In both democratic and nondemocratic governments, elites are concerned about and attentive to mass opinion. Mass opinion is a key part of the context in which elites act, making some actions more rewarding and others more costly. A cultural orientation that balances trust and tolerance with political competition seems to be conducive to democratic institutional functioning because of the system of incentives that it places on elites.

For democracy to work, people must tolerate and support the rights of their opponents. They must trust that their opponents will tolerate them and support their rights. Such a situation is one of political competition, to be sure, but a competition that is tempered in intensity by other social considerations. According to various scholars, such limited-intensity political conflict is more likely, or only possible, when a sufficient degree of independence exists between the various lines of conflict in society. Few Americans display the entire pattern of opinions listed by Mr. Obama in the quotation in the opening paragraph of this chapter, and few Americans match the opposite ideological prototype. Americans can expect that if they disagree with their compatriots (even heatedly) on one issue, they will not necessarily disagree with these fellow citizens on any of a number of other matters, and they are hardly less likely to share other important characteristics with these people that can be a basis for friendship and mutual respect (cf. Jost et al., 2008). This state of affairs is better characterized by Mr. Obama's oft-quoted speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, in which he noted that characteristics such as being religious and having gay friends do not uniquely characterize red and blue states, respectively.

I conclude this chapter with a few points that may be worthy of consideration in research on political culture and the U.S. culture war. First, regarding the study of the mass beliefs that may be conducive to democracy, it may prove important to treat as separate constructs the various components of such a mass belief system. Tolerance is not the same thing as trust, and both of these are quite conceptually distinct from political activity. In fact, the combination of these two categories of attributes may be what can influence democratic

functioning. To be sure, the various components of the mass cultural orientation described here are correlated with one another at the national level. Nonetheless, it would be worthwhile in some analyses to treat these different responses as indicators of separate nation-level constructs (e.g., Elkins & Simeon, 1979; Muller & Seligson, 1994) and to parse each of the bivariate relations among them (e.g., the trust-tolerance relation, the life satisfaction-political expression relation). Some of these relations may be accounted for by common origins in socioeconomic development, inequality, or some other nation-level structural or institutional variable. Also, these nation-level cultural attributes may have causal influences on one another. Treating these national culture dimensions as separate constructs is necessary for uncovering the processes that link them. For example, national life satisfaction may be an outcome of national cultural factors pertaining to autonomous self-expression (e.g., Fischer & Boer, 2011), and some cultural dimensions may be outcomes, rather than causes, of democracy (Muller & Seligson, 1994). Treating the cultural beliefs as separate constructs is also necessary for exploring the interesting possibility that some mass beliefs are conducive to democratization at some times but not at other times.

Next, the relation between the two types of societal characteristics discussed here, nonoverlapping identities and the balance of cleavage and consensus, would seem to be a worthy topic of investigation. Both of these national characteristics should, theoretically, be conducive to democracy, but their relation with one another may be quite complex. Nonoverlapping identities might be expected to produce a trusting and tolerant national culture. For example, ethnic fractiousness of nations seems to negatively influence democratic functioning (Muller & Seligson, 1994), perhaps because a relatively weak association between political position and ethnicity is favorable for democracy. But what influence does a democratic culture have on overlap between identities? It is likely that valuing of political self-expression may cause people to align with a political cultural prototype presented in discourse. Indeed, it is indisputable that politically engaged Americans, who are the most likely to vote and influence public affairs, are relatively likely to match one of the two opposing culture war prototypes. It is crucial to note in this regard, however, that although political engagement is associated with this form of polarization, it is also associated with relatively strong endorsement of fundamental democratic values, such as free speech and due process (e.g., McClosky, 1964; McClosky & Zaller, 1984). As Abramowitz (2010) pointed out, it is the polarized segment of the U.S. public "whose beliefs and behaviors most closely reflect the ideals of responsible democratic citizenship" (pp. 4-5). Regardless, when examining cross-nationally the interplay between mass value characteristics of nations and overlapping versus nonoverlapping lines of conflict, it is clearly necessary to gauge the latter with respect to social

identities and political positions that are salient in specific societies. For example, the associations between evangelical Protestantism and attitude toward abortion and between partisan identity and attitudes about guns are salient in the United States, but not in most other countries. The link between nonoverlapping identities and values conducive to democracy is one that should be addressed directly, in a manner that takes into account the identities that are especially salient to political conflict in each nation studied.

Finally, research should explore the possibility that the values of limited-intensity political conflict have a potential dark side. The mass beliefs that appear favorable to democracy involve trust and tolerance of one's opponents. Societies, however, are characterized by inequality in opportunity and material conditions, much of it the result of entrenched structural conditions. Also, all societies contain ideas and values that justify these aspects of the system as fair, natural, inevitable, and appropriate. It would seem natural for people who are economically disadvantaged to support urgent and radical change and to reject such system-justifying ideas, given the desperate circumstances in which they often find themselves, but research conducted within the framework of system justification theory has documented reasons why they might not (e.g., Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Jost & Hunyady, 2005). Viewing all political opponents as respectable and worthy of trust and tolerance may reflect a Pollyannaish but comforting mind-set that ultimately perpetuates unequal social arrangements. Thus, the mass beliefs that promote democracy may, at the same time, serve to justify the unequal distribution of wealth and life chances within nations. This may not be the case, and indeed the mass beliefs conducive to democracy may have a positive influence, or no influence at all, on material equality. The unsettling possibility that some mass beliefs both promote democratic stability and justify systemically inequitable arrangements is, however, one that should be evaluated empirically.

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