

From Consensus to Conflict:
A Categorization of American State Political Culture

by

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Major: Political Science

Under the Supervision of Professor John R. Hibbing

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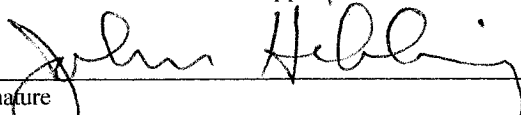
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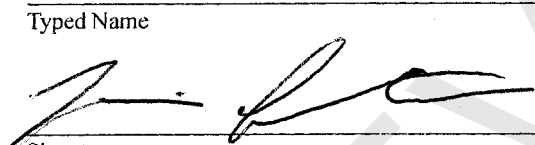
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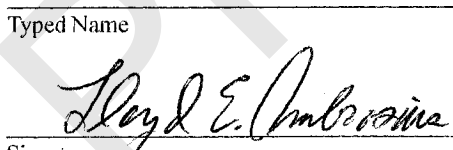
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From Consensus to Conflict:
A Categorization of American State Political Culture

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University of Nebraska, 2004

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The primary goal of this dissertation is to develop a more precise understanding of political culture by combining existing views of political culture into a composite measure of political culture, particularly American state political culture. The main research question is what is an accurate definition of political culture? The central hypothesis is *measurements of state ideology, religion, civic culture, style of representation, and ethnic/minority diversity are statistically correlated at the .05 level*. A combination of ideology, religion, and state minority diversity variables can be used to give a clearer picture pertaining to what comprises political culture that also allows researchers to distinguish state political cultures from one another. *The secondary hypothesis is that state ideological diversity, state religious diversity, and ethnic/minority diversity can be combined at the .05 level into a Consensus to Conflict scale*.

My conclusions are that 1) the study of political culture benefits the field of political science by adding context to our discussions of state politics; 2) the Consensus to Conflict political culture can be used to examine differences

between states and within states; 3) the field of political science needs to consider better research instruments for measuring political culture in future research; 4) any attempt at conceptualizing political culture faces fundamental challenges; and 5) problems that may result from American state political culture need to be addressed further either through practical application of reforms or through the continued research of attitudes and political culture to measure changes in the American public's perceptions prior to any possible negative consequences that could result from problems inherent in American state political culture.

PREVIEW

Chapter 1: Introduction: What is Political Culture?

The Politics of Words

The challenge facing the discipline of political science, not unlike many fields of study, is a debate over words and their definitions. One group of researchers may work under the assumption and practice of using a particular set of definitions for the problem(s) they are researching. Unfortunately, another group of researchers, using different definitions and data, can come up with a distinct yet still plausible explanation for the same problem. The nature of social sciences and the politics of definitions seem to dictate that this is the pattern for researchers to follow. Researchers attempt to take the accumulated information over the years and produce material unique unto itself. However, the material produced rarely (1) pieces the various explanations of a problem into a single study and (2) produces research that is consistent and useful in explaining a problem that researchers have been examining for a number of years; Almond (1988) discusses the problem as “separate tables,” Pye (1990) called it a “tendency toward fragmentation” (4), and Finifter (1991), in a review of Almond, explains the process as being “discontinuous, noncumulative, and divisive (991).” In other words, researchers celebrate the uniqueness of their own work rather than create a needed consistency throughout the field of study; Lakatos’ criteria of a progressive research program, one that predicts novel facts and reduction of theoretical claims to mathematics, is not being met in the field of political science, especially in regards to political culture. Researchers continue to talk past each

other and miss important discussions concerning past research, generating disorganized theories of political culture. Although a majority of researchers are able to quantify their arguments, a variety of theories exist regarding political culture that are not parsimonious with each other and an overall understanding of the nature of political culture, therefore, is lacking in the field of political science.

In this dissertation, I set forth to accomplish these objectives – a culmination of ideas to produce a strong theoretical concept that can also be measured mathematically. The main research questions focus on what is political culture and how do we measure political culture. Over the years, political culture has taken on a number of forms but rarely, if ever, has there been a common definition for political culture. Political culture is a combination of factors that are inclusive of previous studies linking state differences with ideology (Pye 1962; Monroe 1981; Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993), religious diversity (Johnson 1976; Breault 1989), civic culture (Bellah, et al, 1996; Putnam 2000), and geographic/migration patterns (Elazar 1966; Garreau 1981; Fischer 1989) as well as state ethnic diversity (Hero and Tolbert 1996a).

The primary goal of this dissertation, therefore, is to develop a more precise understanding of political culture by combining existing views of political culture into a composite measure of political culture, particularly American state political culture. The main research question is what is an accurate definition of political culture? In the past, researchers have explained political culture by using single variables such as ideology (Pye 1962; Monroe 1981), civic culture

(Almond and Verba 1963; Putnam 1993), and geographic/migration patterns (Elazar 1966; Garreau 1981; Fischer 1989). The “impressionistic” nature of political culture studies had an “implied more than demonstrated” comparison of states (Erikson, Wright, McIver 1987: 798). The problem focuses on a definition of political culture; “political culture”, as a term, is a combination of “politics” and “culture.” Culture is defined as “the shared ideals, values, and beliefs people use to interpret experience and generate behavior” (Haviland 2000: 382). As Americans, our shared ideals are encompassed in our institutions and policies that these institutions produce for societal harmony; the *political* side of political culture is captured in the shared experiences of government and laws created and carried out by these governments. Explained further later, this is why states serve as a viable form of analysis for looking at political culture. Each state has developed unique sets of characteristics, whether in their governmental institutions or the policies that they produce, which allow for easy comparison and observation of culture.

The central hypothesis is *measurements of state ideology, religion, civic culture, style of representation, and ethnic/minority diversity are statistically correlated at the .05 level*. A combination of ideology, religion, and state minority diversity variables can be used to give a clearer picture pertaining to what comprises political culture that also allows researchers to distinguish state political cultures from one another. *The secondary hypothesis is that state*

ideological diversity, state religious diversity, and ethnic/minority diversity can be combined at the .05 level into a Consensus to Conflict scale.

Ideology and civic culture are easier to understand in the realm of political science as “political” variables; these ideas are contained in the basic premises of government action (or inaction). Styles of representation give us an idea of how people in power react to citizens and the power structure within a state. State diversity is a way of measuring the differences within a population and state’s ability to adapt or change their culture to meet the needs of the people.

Measurements of religious diversity allow us to understand differences and similarities between states based on long standing traditions. Minority diversity within a state’s population should have a huge impact on policies and government action or inaction; the ability of government to respond to different groups can vastly affect the distribution of resources as well as the views of different groups toward government, especially when government fails to respond to citizen demands.

Political culture has been used to explain state differences in policy (Johnson 1976; Wirt 1980; Erikson, Wright, McIver 1987) as well as a variable used to explain the viability of democracy and government structures (Almond and Verba 1963; Jackman 1987; Inglehart 1988, 1990; Jackman and Miller 1996). Within the latter focus of study, arguments have surfaced and developed two camps of competing thought. In the one camp (Almond and Verba 1963; Wildavsky 1987; Putnam 1993; Swank 1996), culture is an analytically useful

concept that can be used to explain the development of democracy and institutions that foster democracy. In the other camp (Jackman 1987; Jackman and Miller 1996; Tarrow 1996), institutions are the causal variable and the definitional problems of political culture reduce it to a “blunt analytical instrument” (Jackman 1987: 422).

First of all, the debate over the viability of political culture as an analytical variable will be addressed in relationship to American state governments. The Consensus to Conflict scale alone is nothing when it does not have a solid theoretical background. Many of the criticisms of culture, and political culture, center around the central problem already outlined regarding this variable – mainly that there is no consistent definition in regards to the term “culture” or “political culture.” Next, previous studies will be assessed and the positive and negative aspects of prior research will be compared to create a unified concept of political culture. This provides a basis for developing the Consensus to Conflict scale; each of the previous studies lacks a component that is central to the idea of political culture. Finally, I intend to use the *political* side of political culture - the area of politics where people interact; in particular, institutions represent common and shared “ideals, values, and beliefs” and policies are products of these interactions. In political culture terms, policies are “reflected behavior.” The Consensus to Conflict political culture scale explains why states have structured their governments in certain ways and establishes how states make policy decisions, especially in the areas of education and crime policy.

Political Culture as an Analytical Variable

It is important to address the issue of “origins” of culture and political culture to the field of study because some of the main criticisms of using culture and political culture as analytical variables are based on the idea that these variables lack scientific merit, i.e., they cannot be accurately measured by researchers. This has been the claim, however, against all types of behavioral research over the years. “The ambition to discover universal and enduring laws like Boyle’s law has been frustrated by the realization that human behavior is too sensitive to the fluctuations of culture and the circumstances of history to yield permanently enduring findings” (Pye 1990: 4). These same claims can be made for all of the social sciences as well as problems that researchers have pointed out involved with survey research (Popkin 1991; Zaller 1992). Therefore, it is important to keep these considerations in mind when examining any social or behavioral variables; the study of social behaviors and human thought are difficult to capture beyond a single point in time.

On the origins of culture, the fields of anthropology and archeology have formulated many theories concerning how culture was originally developed, the transformation into different cultures, and the transmission of values down to further generations. One of the more thorough discussions of research related to the beginnings of culture is T. Wynn and W.C. McGrew’s “An Ape’s View of the Oldowan” (1989). Their overall conclusion is a question of whether we can ever solve this mystery of the origin of culture. Much like political scientists

discussing the origins of first government, the reasons or procedures behind the origins of culture give rise to much debate. Is culture related to a genetic propensity in human beings (Rindos 1986)? I would subscribe more to what Binford (1972) describes as the origins of culture:

“Culture is not a univariate phenomenon, nor is its functioning to be understood or measured in terms of a single variable – the spatial-temporal transmission of ideas. On the contrary, culture is multivariate, and its operation is to be understood in terms of many causally related variables which may function independently or in varying combinations” (199).

I would agree with Binford in part and disagree with Binford as well. First, the genetic arguments relating to culture appear to be flawed with respect to ethnically diverse regions in the world today, although, there is something inexplicable about human beings, which allows them to have culture, possibly genetics. One of the few ways to measure differences between human beings is through their ethnic diversity. I intend to use ethnic minority diversity within a state as a measurement of differences between states. Is this a biological variable?

Genetics may account for differences between human beings and other species but the differences between humans on a biological level does not seem to influence group behavior as a whole. Otherwise, there would be little chance of national identity. However, the discussion could continue further into the biological necessity of culture as a way of humans organizing to protect “life and rights” (Elazar 1994: 10). This last argument, again, reconnects the origins of culture to that of the origins of government. Biology, if taking into account the

diversity within a population, may hold some key to understanding the origins of culture. Like Binford, I see it as only one of the variables needed to explain the origins of culture. Unlike Binford, I have no clear stance as to the nature of ethnic minority diversity as it pertains to biology. Based on recent research in genetics (Shriver, et al, 2003), the findings suggest a link between ancestry and degree of skin pigmentation. Since U.S. Census data, however, does not account for ancestry based on genetics, and ethnicity is labeled simply as African-American with no direct trace to country of origin, I will base my findings on the common U.S. standard of ethnic minority diversity as a function of self-measurement.

Environmental functionalism has also been used as an explanation for the origins of culture (Rindos 1986: 315). People's customs, beliefs, and behaviors have been based, in part, on the physical environment in which they are located. The state of Colorado, for example, started out as a mining community and has transformed over time into a state economy based on recreation (Elazar 1994: 18). Immigration patterns into the United States, however, do not follow a strict geographical relationship. If geography is the strict determination of cultural origin, migration patterns should flow in accordance with geographic similarities. On the other hand, it may be possible to say that geography has some importance to the survival of cultural values. Herting, Grusky, and Rompaey (1997) point out regional and state heterogeneity within the United States in reference to mobility of the United States public; Americans are more apt to move within their state or

region due to similarities and affinity toward the characteristics of that state and/or region (284).

Without any pure methodological measurements, the exact nature of how culture came into existence is left to theoretical arguments. Culture must be measured by studying the patterns that exist; “the aspects of culture and cultural values which form the core elements of culture are less amenable to change and tend to retain their distinctiveness” (Mace and Pagel 1994: 558). The distinctive and traceable patterns of culture can be observed through differences in human interaction. Cultural descent, the passing of values through horizontal or vertical transmission, allows cultures to share common elements (Mace and Pagel 1994: 551). Some shared characteristics of culture that can be studied include areas of economic, social, and political similarities (Haviland 2000: 382). Therefore, political culture exists as a measurement of culture within a society. Unfortunately, this does not solve the problem of political culture as an analytical variable.

Herbert Werlin (1990) outlined the major reasons against using political culture as an analytical variable. Werlin states that political culture studies use of political culture are problematic because 1) discontinuity of cultures exists throughout the world, the “ability of people to drop quickly or add cultural attributes” (250), allowing for no consistency in culture to measure; 2) the definition of political culture ignores the political realities over cultural values, namely that “while leaders are guided by societies, they also can manipulate

them” (250); and 3) the causation of political culture has created “catch all explanations” (251).

I would disagree with Werlin on some of his points. Regarding the “discontinuity” of cultures throughout the world, it is difficult to believe that no cultural values, especially political, are retained from generation to generation. I would agree with Werlin that the changes in Germany from a Nazi dictatorship to a democratic republic were dramatic but, so too, was the second World War that precipitated such changes. Likewise, many of the changes throughout the world in government order do not necessarily change the views of the citizens toward government; Iraqis have been quoted as saying the current attempts at government have been just as corrupt as Saddam Hussein’s regime (Oppel 2003: 1). The addition or loss of some cultural values can be expected in every society but the core beliefs are difficult to change. What Werlin may be observing as a loss of “culture” may only be aspects of society that the citizens do not value as highly as other aspects of their culture. Ideology, religion, ethnic identity, civic culture, and views toward representation may remain the same over time.

It is the views of representation that may hold the key, additionally, to what Werlin critiques as the definition of political culture. Although leaders have some control over society, some authors have pointed out the propensity for citizens to avoid politics due to the conflict involved in politics (Mansbridge 1983; Eliasoph 1998; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002). In political culture terms, Eckstein calls this citizen’s “cultural predispositions to politics” (Werlin and

Eckstein 1990: 255). In other words, some states in the United States are more inclined to accept politics (as it is presented in their state) while other states end up with negative citizen reaction to politics. As shown in Chapter 2, states where the people have allowed the decision-makers, elected officials, to control politics give rise to representation that is elite. Over time, these state residents have developed an idea that politics is best left to those who know what they are doing (a sentiment that is echoed in Mansbridge 1983; Eliasoph 1998; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002).

In regards to Werlin's third point, that the causation of political culture has created "catch all explanations" (Werlin 1990: 251), I would concur. This is the precise reason for examining the definition and causal factors of political culture in this dissertation. Kincaid (1982) may argue that the "modern" definition of political culture took effect with Sidney and Beatrice Webb's *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization* (1936); it is more intensive, for the purposes of political science as a field of study, to look at the "modern" definition of political culture taking place in Gabriel A. Almond's "Comparative Political System" (1956). There are several reasons for this important distinction. First, Almond's definition of political culture, "every political system is embedded in a particular pattern of orientations to political action" (396), has been incorporated in some form or another over the years. Secondly, the modern era of political science has been marked by the addition of scientific methods as a means for measuring and

understanding the world around us. Namely, the field of political science began to address the “science” within our field of study.

The basic definition of political culture, therefore, needs to take into account political factors related to culture; political culture must empirically measure observable political variables that take into account 1) regional variation; 2) biological concerns; and 3) shared political values. As previously pointed out, the variables associated with political culture have been extensively measured in the past. The variables used in this dissertation for political culture are a combination of state ideology (political value), religious diversity (regional variation and political values), state civic culture (political value), state style of representation (regional variation), and state ethnic minority diversity (biological concerns). As discussed below in the theoretical overview of political culture, each of these variables provides an important aspect that is often ignored when examining American state political culture.

Admittedly, there is always the possibility of measurement error in any type of research. A strong theoretical basis and use of multiple variables, however, should help illustrate a concept such as political culture. Due to the continued and academically accepted use of the variables measuring ideology (for a comprehensive view see Berry, et al, 1998), religion ((Johnson 1976; Breault 1989), civic culture (for a comprehensive view see Paxton 1999), styles of representation (for a comprehensive view of Elazar’s political culture see Lieske 1993), and ethnic minority diversity (a newer entry to the literature on political

culture, see Hero and Tolbert 1996), measurement reliability is met and validity is further explained in the theoretical section below. Although there is still some debate over how these variables are measured, Table 4 demonstrates that most of the measurements used here are correlated and the discussion under “A New Theory” will detail why the measurements for these variables fit into the rubric of political culture.

Theoretical concepts of Political Culture

For decades, political scientists have struggled with the question of what is or is not political culture. In some circles of literature, political culture became defined as another term for ideology (Pye 1962; Monroe 1981; Erikson, Wright, McIver 1993). Political culture, in their view, *is* ideology - nothing more, nothing less¹. Recent explanations of state policy (Erikson, Wright, and McIver 1993) view state level ideology as the “magic” variable, seemingly explaining all reasons as to why state policy exists. Erikson, Wright, and McIver use the Downs model where “voter preferences can be arranged on a single ideological continuum, from the political left to the political right, with citizens voting for the candidate closest to their own position on the ideological spectrum” to explain state policy (Erikson, Wright, McIver 1993: 2).

This view of ideology does not lend itself to a dynamic interpretation of what citizens actually choose in government; ideology can be more than just the left-right continuum. However, the American view of ideology is based on a

conservative, liberal, and moderate continuum; I continue to use this definition of ideology because it allows for more comparability to previous studies that examine American state ideology. One reason why ideology alone, defined by the American view of the liberal-conservative continuum, does not adequately capture an overall understanding of citizen preferences is because it does not take into account other cultural variables that socially connect individuals to community; adding the variables of religious diversity, social capital, style of representation, and minority diversity will strengthen our understanding of why people make decisions within states.

The result of defining ideology as the *only* variable able to predict state government is that state ideology steers the functions and deliberations of government and policy *without* having any other interactive variables accounting for differences in state governments (Page 1995: 443). “Indigenous ‘state’ effects, which we attribute to state-to-state differences in political culture, account for far more of the interstate variance of partisanship and ideology than does interstate variation in the demographic compositions of state populations” (Erikson, Wright, McIver 1993: 71). In other words, can ideology alone, under the Erikson, Wright, and McIver definition, explain the differences that exist between states? It may be able to provide some explanation for differences between states but even Erikson, Wright, and McIver observe that the variation in

¹ It is important to note that Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993) do not refer to political culture as ideology. They go as far as to say that variance in state ideology is explained by a state’s political culture (72).

ideology is attributable to political culture, not just demographic characteristics in a state. I contend that ideology is a part of political culture and that one demographic variable, the presence of minority diversity, is also a key to understanding that differences that exist between states.

It is also important to note the differences between interstate mean ideological differences and intrastate ideological differences. Can political culture be both an individual level assumption and community attitude toward government? For the purposes of this dissertation, these ideas are not mutually exclusive but compatible in that they take into account *both* views of political culture for a more comprehensive view. Although ideology is an individually held assumption (intrastate), we can use state level means (interstate comparisons) to understand what a commonly held state ideology is based on aggregate survey research (relying on Erikson, Wright, and McIver's research as described in *Data and Methods* section later). The reason for explaining this variation in ideology is due to the limitations of data and research. Intrastate variation in ideology is important to the concept of political culture; differences exist within states as well as between states. To account for both interstate and intrastate variation, the standard deviation of self-reported ideology from the Senate National Election Study (SNES) was used.

Although Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993) spend an entire chapter comparing political ideology to Elazar's political culture, there is no recognition given to the civic culture/social capital approach and any relationship minority

diversity has on a state's ideological mean.² However, they recognize religion as an important part of state public opinion but their measurement of religion is limited to Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish adherents. They recognize that "knowing a person's state, therefore, does add to our ability to forecast a person's partisanship or ideology beyond what we know from the person's demographic characteristics alone or even beyond what we know from the person's demographics and region together" (Erikson, Wright, McIver 1993: 51-52).

Ideology plays an important *part* in understanding political culture but it does not take into account the other factors within a state that help researchers understand state differences; Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993) cannot find a pattern to "conservative versus liberal cultures" (71) because they do not consider minority diversity as a whole, how representational style impacts ideology, or the role that civic culture/social capital plays in state differences.

For these reasons, the political ideology explanation lacks adequate explanatory power that is necessary to utilize across states in examining differences in political structures and state policies. Building on Erikson, Wright, and McIver, ideology allows us to understand part of why states enact certain policies, but I contend that ideology does not present the entire picture of political culture. Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993) cannot account for "the political context within each state" (62) that has an impact on state ideology. The authors present a limited explanation for geographical differences, referring to differences

² Erikson, Wright, and McIver (1993) use black population as a variable and find no relationship (70).

between the northern and southern states. In addition, Putnam's findings on crime, especially the numbers of murders per capita, indicates that social capital has, at the minimum, some impact on state problems and policy evaluation (Putnam 2000: 308), something that Erikson, Wright, and McIver do not even address in their work. Based on Erikson, Wright, and McIver's (1993) findings, it is safe to say that American state political culture is more than just ideologically based but should include ideology as part of American state political culture.

Another approach used to explain what political culture entails often centers around the civic engagement of citizens. Almond and Verba's work *The Civic Culture* (1963), subsequent follow-ups (1980), and recent manifestations of civic culture (Putnam 1993; Bellah, et al 1996; Putnam 2000) have demonstrated a component of participation and civic involvement as the proverbial glue that binds society. Political culture, under this guise, is reliant on citizen views of participation and how or why people become involved in organizations. Putnam, in particular, states the need for social capital in society with "hard evidence that our schools and neighborhoods don't work so well when community bonds slacken, that our economy, our democracy, and even our health and happiness depend on adequate stocks of social capital" (2000: 27 - 28).

The decline in social capital, however, may be intertwined with other state level indicators.³ Conversely, Ladd (1999) indicates that social capital is increasing while Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002), along with other authors (Eliasoph 1998; Peel 1998; Mutz and Mondak 2001), clearly indicate that social

capital may cause more problems than it will solve. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) point out many of the negative aspects of groups such as their ability to close out voices of discussion (185), further a malaise with how real politics works (186 – 187), and “does little if anything to promote the kind of political capital that is truly needed in the United States” (189). Putnam (2000: 362) even acknowledges, just as I will demonstrate in Chapter 2, that the “dark side” of social capital is that social capital may be at odds with diversity; “some groups are overtly anti-democratic” (Putnam 2000: 340) becomes an understatement when I consider how entire populations have more social capital but little diversity; both religious and ethnic/racial diversity likely have a lot to do with levels of social capital. “Diversity is reality, but it brings people into conflict with one another and people do not like conflict” (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002: 205 – 206). The title of this dissertation aims directly at classification of states along these lines. States with low diversity have consensus whereas states with high diversity are in conflict. This will be further discussed under “A New Theory of Political Culture.”

Putnam addresses regional variation in *Making Democracy Work* (1993), examining differences in social capital/civic engagement between northern and southern Italy. Putnam fails to ask one major question in *Bowling Alone* (2000) that would address some of the main concerns he had in *Making Democracy Work*: why are some citizens in certain American states better at civic engagement while citizens in other American states lack the desire to participate?

³ As Putnam (2000: 346 – 347) points out, states vary greatly in their levels of social capital.

Putnam devotes Chapters 17 - 21 to tables comparing states on a social capital index. Putnam attributes these differences between the states to migration patterns and even gives some credence to Daniel Elazar's state political culture measurements (Putnam 2000: 294). Unfortunately, Putnam ends his discussion on this issue theorizing whether social capital is an effect or a cause "of contemporary social circumstance" (ibid) although a large amount of Putnam's *Making Democracy Work* (1993) was devoted to the historical patterns that gave rise to social capital in Italy. This begs the question as to why the United States is not examined in a similar fashion to find out the importance of historical patterns in state level social capital? Granted, Putnam's main focus is on America as a community but the inclusion of differences between states in Chapters 17 – 21 produces questions. In other words, there is a noticeable difference between states with some having higher levels of social capital. Is there a discernable pattern that can be studied to understand why some states have higher social capital than other states?

Additional questions can be asked along these lines. Does social capital have any connection to public policies within states having high social capital that would foster more participation? Also, what connection does civic involvement have to political ideology, if any? Although the supporters of the civic culture view demonstrate a need for better involvement by citizens, there is not enough of a demonstrated pattern of "what works" to help researchers understand what makes a decent civic culture flourish in society. Putnam, like Erikson, Wright,