

## **Writing Topic 2 and Discussion Focus Questions: How different are Americans when it comes to their political ideology, and to what extent do our major political parties represent fundamental differences among Americans?**

This week's readings and class meetings focus on world views that organize power within a society. Our first block of materials explores some well-known political thinkers' views about the best way to organize societies to advance the common good (i.e., Hobbes, Locke, and the Founders). We will take a closer look at the core assumptions of "liberalism," which is the worldview that most influenced America's founders and the development of democracy across the advanced industrial democracies. Our second set of material looks at the leading contenders to liberalism, asking among other questions: what other ideologies have proved durable in motivating the hearts and minds of people in recent decades?

The discussion seminar on Monday will examine America's core political ideologies today, asking why it is that Americans feel so polarized when they agree on so much in principle. I am particularly interested in making sure that you leave that session able to answer three questions: To what extent do the two dominant political parties differ and agree when it comes to the main components of America's political ideology? To what extent does America reflect one or more of the major ideologies that we have discussed during the week? Have America's parties grown so apart that one or both of them now represent an ideology that is entirely distinct from the liberal tradition or truly a threat to members of the other major political party?

***Focus questions to prepare for our discussion session:*** Recall that you will need to write an analytical essay during the first unit of the course, and you will have the option of writing a second discussion-topic essay during the last course unit. Since you will select the specific weeks when you submit your essay, many of you will not write on this week's reading and discussion session. Nevertheless, the discussion material is covered on exams, and you are expected to come to class on Monday having completed the week's readings and prepared to fully participate in our discussion.

As you prepare for this week's seminars and our Monday session, please consider the following questions:

- What is a "political ideology," and why do ideologies matter?
- What are the traditional meanings of "liberalism" and "conservatism"? When Americans use these terms to refer to the "left" and "right" of our political system, in what ways are the meaning of these terms different than what they traditionally meant? In what sense are all Americans *classical* liberals?
- Pew data suggests that many Americans do not neatly fit into two or three ideological categories. What do Pew's researchers see as the main splits in how Americans ideologically sort out? In what group, do your views about government, society, politics, and policy put you if you fit neatly into one category?
- What are the basic assumptions that *liberalism* makes about what motivates people? To what extent are market capitalism and liberal democratic governance extensions of the same set of ideas? How do "classical liberals" and "neoliberals" differ from what Americans typically are talking about when they say someone is liberal? What set of beliefs does classical conservatism refer to?
- What are the core ideals that make liberal democracy different from other major belief systems? Where did these ideals come from? Does a society have to be "Western" in order to strongly adhere to these values?
- How has liberalism evolved as it has taken root in American politics? What are the fundamental differences among American "conservatives," "libertarians," "liberals,"

and "populists" (these terms also were addressed in one of your readings last week on types of anger in American society)? Which of these ideological categories, if any of them, best captures your own political beliefs? Are your beliefs on these dimensions of American liberal thought different from those of your other family members? Your close friends? Elites you come across as you interact with religious, college, media, or other organizations where you may regularly be talking about or receiving information on politics?

- What are the main challengers to liberalism in the world today? Be able to explain the basic tenets of traditional conservatism, socialism, communism, and nationalism/fascism (be able to describe the distinguishing assumptions of each type of ideology in a sentence or so and carefully review the chart on page 78 that summarizes each theory vis-à-vis the others).
- Why does Jonathan Haidt think that our main political differences have as much to do with the way our brains work as it does with meaningful splits on policy?
- Looking at the issues that drive politics today in the Democratic and Republican parties, can either party claim to be ideologically pure? Does either or both have policy positions today that seem at odds with what American liberals and conservatives have typically believed? Which ideologies do both parties draw from? Which ideologies do neither draw from?
- What evidence is there to suggest that America's political parties are more polarized than they used to be? How does that translate into what Americans think about people who don't belong to their party? Where does the inter-party animosity come from?

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**Writing topic and directions:** You need to write one paper during Unit 1. This topic is one of several options.

If you **choose** to write on this week's topic, your paper should be at least 1,500 words long. It will be **due by e-mail and in hard copy by the time noted in the course schedule.**

**To be considered as having been submitted on time, do the following:**

- (1) Email your paper as a PDF or MS Word or RTF attached document (if you send the document as an e-mail message, in pages format, or as a link to a cloud server document or drive—such as Google Docs/Drive—the paper will not be accepted until it submitted in one of the acceptable formats and late penalties will apply).
- (2) Send the email and attachment to: [msetzler@highpoint.edu](mailto:msetzler@highpoint.edu). Include a short note explaining what the attachment is.
- (3) Make sure the message's subject line is: PSC1010 paper 1
- (4) Submit a hard copy of the paper at the start of class. Ideally, your paper will be stapled, but at a minimum, it should be paperclipped. Use double-spacing, and number your pages.

**The writing prompt is:**

*Is there a single political ideology to which most Americans adhere despite the differences between our nation's two major political parties? Is there any reason to believe that America's partisans now see the world so differently that it no longer makes sense to talk about a shared American ideology? What are the main ideological divisions within the two major parties?*

**Before you begin writing**, carefully review the grading assessment criteria for this assignment (the grading rubric for essay grading in lower division courses is on the course website, under the “Student Resources” tab). You also should review carefully the handouts on the course website addressing citation expectations as well as the syllabus policies on “Academic dishonesty” and “Using artificial intelligence assistants, including ChatGPT and similar technologies.” The paper's citations and bibliography must carefully follow one of three formats most used in the social sciences: University of Chicago, the APA, or the APSA. For your convenience, my website provides a handout with many formatting examples using the APSA style. You need to use page-specific citations so that your instructor can quickly verify your interpretation of cited material. Without exception, instances of plagiarism (see the syllabus statement) will be reported and punished according to university policy.

Keep in mind as you answer this question that the main purpose of this assignment is for you to make a reasoned, well-defended (by the readings and specific evidence wherever possible) argument that engages class concepts and materials. **For you to do well on the paper, it needs to be clear that you have carefully reviewed the relevant assignment from the full week’s reading on this topic** (i.e., not just the readings for the discussion day). Please **do not use any outside readings or other sources unless you specifically have cleared doing so** (i.e., you may not use the internet, unassigned authors, or any other student's work, to help you write the paper).