

Government 30

Lecture 5

Principles of Politics: Social Capital & Cooperation

February 15, 2006

Announcements

1. Office hours tomorrow from 2-4.
2. No class Monday – University holiday
3. New TF joining us – Eric Lomazoff.
4. All sections scheduled for this week will meet this week.

Continuation of Logic of Politics

LAST TIME ON GOV 30...

1. Collective action
2. Cable TV Dilemma, lobbying groups, etc.
3. Public/Common Goods & Non-Excludability

Federalists' Solution (Hamilton, #9) *Consolidation, not Confederation*

1. Federalists argue that only a national Union can overcome these problems.
2. Hamilton argues for all powers necessary for the national government to perform this function
 - general argument (#23): "the means ought to be proportioned to the end" (p. 153)
 - taxation (#35)
 - national defense (#30)
3. So for Federalists, coercive central authority is solution to the collective action problem: need a national authority that compels states to contribute.

Solutions to the Collective Action Dilemma

1. Coercion
 - nation-state
 - in a way, Iraq and Kuwait in 1990-1991
2. One willing provider
 - e.g., Jeff really needs cable TV; is willing to pay for everyone else to free-ride
 - U.S. in NATO

Selective Incentives as Solutions

3. Provide something that is divisible among members, so you can reward contributions
 - AARP
 - labor unions
 - Me and Trout Unlimited



Problem #1:

Politics Complicates the Solution

Government “public goods” (e.g., the lighthouse, roads) are not simply provided, but instead...

- must be agreed upon in their details
- will be subject to lobbying from those who expect to gain privately from their provision (road builders, universities, defense contractors).
- must be administered

Problem #2:

Solutions Are Expensive, & Not Always Successful

1. Will one willing provider emerge? Probably not for large groups.
2. Selective incentives are expensive.
3. Coercion not always efficient, even if political problems are minimal.

Implication: May need to look elsewhere -- solidary incentives, “social capital,”

Solidary Benefits and Social Capital

Free-rider problem can be overcome if cooperation is valuable to people b/c they bring them into greater and closer contact w/ others.

1. Example: “Race for the Cure” participants who aren’t breast cancer survivors or patients.
2. Often depends upon networks and norms of trust and cooperation.
 - I’ll cooperate more if I’m benefiting those I know
 - I’ll cooperate more if those who know me ask me to do so

Social Capital

Definition: "Features of social organization...that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Putnam, in K&S, p. 50).

1. **Networks** -- sets of face-to-face relationships that connect person to person, organization to organization [i.e., NOT the Internet]
2. **Norms** -- informal rules for behavior (e.g., "do unto others as you would have do unto you.")
3. **Trust** -- belief that another person will act in a way consistent (or not inconsistent) w/ my interests.

The Power of Social Capital

1. Civil Rights Movement overcomes collective action problems in part through dense networks of African-American churches
2. Feminist & women's suffrage movements also relied upon networks (literary societies, churches, auxiliary clubs)
3. East Asian economies (e.g., *keiretsu* in Japan) rely on dense social networks
4. Increased civic engagement improves economic and social outcomes at community level.

The Problem of Social Capital

Putnam: "Bowling Alone." We bowl as much as ever, but individually or w/ friends, not in leagues.

1. Networks less dense than they used to be -- e.g., fewer people @ PTA meetings.
2. Norms have declined -- picking up trash in public places ("tragedy of the commons" worse than before)
3. Trust less common
 - trust in government
 - trust in fellow citizens (esp. neighbors)

Questions

Skeptical

#1. Is all this just nostalgia?

#2. Can't social capital be used for bad ends? (Putnam admits this much.) In other words, is your social capital my conspiracy theory?

Public Policy

#1. What public policies encourage civic engagement, and what don't?

#2. Do markets interfere w/ civic engagement? If so, what to do?
