

To be a politician

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Subject: Final examination

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1)Analyze the reasons for the decline of the trust in elected politicians in the USA since the second World War.

**I.-Introduction:**

a) **Attitude toward politics and politicians** : according to the polls, in the last years, most Americans have had the perception that ambitions are the sole inspiration of politicians' lives and politics itself. Indeed, I am not referring to the theory of the ambition or any other concept which implies some good interpretations for ambitions. No. In fact, I am writing about the perception of ambitions as a hedonist calling that emerged from the bottom of primitive desires and not from an organized system of aspirations. Then, the degeneration of the public understanding on politics has turned into an attitude toward politicians and the career itself. In the following pages, this idea will come up many times , becoming almost a trend.

b)**Being elected as a challenging position:** as long as the question refers to elected politicians, it is necessary to state that the sole fact of becoming a public official by election raises a variety of

expectations that are difficult to fulfill. In fact, according to Heifetz's theory, "the higher expectations are, the more disappointed the people become". Then, reality implies that much of the emotions that characterized elections ( at least the final turnout ), represented the point from which the decline of trust is to get started. Even the most popular leader can not fulfill everybody's expectations and that fact, itself, represents a threat to public trust and confidence.

c) ***The confusion*** : leaders who are not authorities and authorities who never become leaders. Indeed, authority ( formal- emerged from office- and informal- emerged from activity and achievements- ) is a position from which leadership may be exercised but it is not the only one. At the same time, not every single person who has authority may be considered leader. Then a confusion can distort the perception of the constituents, bringing them to a wrong conclusion. So, the fact that the electorate demands leadership from the people they voted for and not only authority, embodied a severe difficulty to preserve the public confidence in those elected officials. However, this argument is quite different from the previous one just because earlier I analyzed the important consequences of being elected but in this paragraph the ideas arise from the fact that the most important public achievements may not be provided because of the incapacity to get to mobilize the best

resources of a group. Then leadership is a complex role to be played and not to be assigned by the electorate . Thus, people confer powers and position to ease the exercise of leadership but it becomes so just when the leader provides attention, direction, order and protection to his/her constituents. The absence of leadership may be a good factor to be taken into account at the time one analyzes the decline of public trust in the United States.

## **II.- The problem, its references and dimensions:**

**a) An unexpected dimension:** according to poll analysts, the problem has much broader dimensions than expected. The efficient cause for this spread out is not only the steady downward curve of trust but also some peaks, that represented some intends to recovery that , after a while, led to a new disappointment, forcing a more severe decline. As an example, Reagan's increase in public confidence during his first term turned into a dramatic fall during the second one, accelerating the public dissatisfaction more than ever before. Then, after a short positive period of recovery, the crisis of public faith got worse at the end of Reagan's second term , perhaps causing a severe damage to the expectations of those who decided to give one last opportunity to political establishment and Reagan embodied it.

As a foreigner, it is not easy to perceive this fact at once but the strong confidence the Americans have in their system and its possibilities which comes out almost immediately.

**b)References:** As some authors think ( Yankelovich, Citrin, Miller, Brown, Barrone ), the decline of public trust was caused by many interactive factors and by an important social tendency: Americans, who are very conservative in general issues, become very liberals in particular and private issues. So there is a dichotomy extremely difficult to overcome.

So, a continuous mixture of those behaviors causes intense and different outcomes, which have led to the support to a sort of liberalism ( as values and beliefs that those who consider themselves liberals generally support ) and when it became inefficient and harmful, a shift was made to embrace conservative sector as a measure of political survival.

In fact, from Delano Roosevelt to Jimmy Carter's administration, the same liberal view of the state was applied and the old liberal framework turned into a useful tool to bring many different people together. The strengths of liberalism were the attributes the people were looking for: inclusiveness ( very attractive in times of high distress caused by adaptive problems related to the existing minorities), social justice as a task ( morally sound for those who were in search for stability and social mobility, the new Deal, the welfare), and a positive role for the government ( strong and firm one, an institution that belonged to all those who were making the American dream possible). Therefore, an emerging and powerful America trusted those who appeared to be doing the right things. Also, Nixon and Ford, in spite of being republicans, had no other choice but to

manage the liberal setting of the political and administrative domestic agenda and try to show how conservative they were on foreign affairs.

The problem arises when those liberal policies started to systematically fail and created an immense and inefficient administrative apparatus.

In fact, some perversions of public finances ( inefficiency of government regulations, intense public sector failures, lack of moral authority, non adaptive work ) and the end of the term of a man who was not a political leader at all, Jimmy Carter, called for conservatism, self defense, and efficiency. Not only domestic conservatism but also international. Certainly, not only economical and political factors were important at that time. Also, American electorate demanded strong personality and character from the top rank officials, and especially, required leadership exercised by the President the United States. So, a reversal emerged from the elections: Ronald Reagan, full of determination, personal firmness and a continuous reminiscence of John Wayne's westerns, took the oath and delivered an inaugural speech that increased the level of the national expectations up to the sky.

Reagan made himself ..." the best communicator ever ..." and the conservatism appeared in the economical context for first time. So, an impressive reversal based on personal attributes became

extended to economical policies ( Friedman and Chicago Boys). Times of inspiration and recovered confidence were destroyed by the following weakening process of American economy, the distortion of the state downsizing programs and the Iran-Contras Scandal.

United States had found a leader who embodied their most hidden desires and who was exercising his leadership supported by moral authority. The last factor was severely affected by the scandal and his initial inaction.

The most severe declining was initiated.

During the 80's, impressive shifts in political confidence were made by younger age groups. However, another important data revealed the extension of the damage to public trust affecting important groups: - those who have low income were more confident at the time that upper classes became surprisingly distrustful (income factor); under 40 years expressed positive impression toward the government and those over 40 had a clear attitude (age factor) ; men were more upset at the government than women ( gender factor).

These facts were seriously altered in 1988. By that year, only Republicans, college educated and wealthy people remained positive toward government and elected officials.

However, Bush got elected . Then, the economical crisis led the country to a second reversal of the tendency ( now, upward ): Clinton got elected and preserving his liberal inclination never became

extremist (Also, some of the most important proposals of the conservatism have been taken into account by the President himself - welfare reform, as an example - ) .

Unfortunately , moral authority can not be considered one of his personal attributes. Thus, formal authority is the position from which he is exercising leadership in the current time.

### **III.- Reasons for disillusion : a condensed approach.**

**a)Moral authority loss:** Since we have stated that leadership may be exercised without authority, it is necessary to make clear that moral authority eases its implementation. Scandals as Watergate, Iran-Contras and Whitewater have eroded the public trust because they have made the presidential leadership exclusively dependent on the personal capacities and when there are no such elements , its total absence could be easily felt. The most recent political affair represents a bad signal : Newt Gingrich got elected Speaker of The House even when he admitted that he did not tell the truth ( the most censored action, according to the polls ) before the Ethics Committee. This is an unprecedented damage caused to the political establishment public image and indirectly, to the public confidence which already had been affected by the fact that the President is not perceived as undoubtedly honest and sincere but sympathetic and efficient.

**b) Liberalism failures:** Those who consider themselves progressive ( vast majority of American in the case of domestic and personal issues ) were disappointed by the inefficiency and lack of adaptive capacity it has shown throughout the last decades. Maybe, that is the reason why they turned to Reagan, Bush and then to Clinton ( who appears to be more moderate than he usually was).

**c) The constant interaction of the following elements:**

-the changing level of popularity and style of the current President, that reveal an increasing and expanding negative perception on president's job, charisma, goal achievement, capacities, and focus as well as the instability of the public response. It reinforces a tendency.

-policy discontent, which emerged from the attitude toward the inefficient establishment ( inefficient spending on social programs, etc)

-the discontent caused by the performance of the Federal Government ( arises from the public evaluation of economical performance and it is related to the public trust itself )

As results of the interactions of these three elements there is a sort of differentiation between the system and the President to the extent that exists a clear possibility to coherently trust the president and distrust the system.

3) Why are long established representative democracies increasingly resorting to direct democracy - initiatives, referenda, etc - to resolve



thorny problems ? Is this a welcome development or a regrettable one? Distinguish in your answer between strong and weak party systems.

**I.-Introduction:**

a) Direct Democracy is an ongoing intend to turn the representative system into a more consultative one.

b) Assumptions: as a model of the strong party system I will examine the European Parliamentary system, especially Great Britain’s. Weak party one will be the American check-and- balance presidential system.

c) The decline of trust in politicians and politics affects the credibility and representation of the political system. Direct Democracy is a way to both,mitigate the problem or make it worse.

**II.- Differentiation:**

|                                 | <u>Strong party system</u>  | <u>Weak party system</u>   |
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| Tools and their characteristics | 1)Basically the popular referendum, applicable to major policies and important decisions, on National Level Affairs ( as an example Maastricht ). Previous process to determine its pertinence<br><br>2)Special legal rank in most parliamentary systems.<br><br>3) It represents a more open vehicle to consult people on specific and delicate issues . | 1)The initiative ( which allows petitioners to include proposals on the corresponding ballot)<br><br>2)Popular referendum ( it allows the direct expression of agreement or disagreement on an important public affair or on actions taken by legislative bodies)<br><br>3)The recall ( directed to public official’s performance)<br><br>4)11 States provide the three alternatives, and popular referendum is provided by half |

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|                            |   | <p>of the states</p> <p>5) Consulting not applicable at Federal level affairs</p>   |
| <p>Intentions<br/>Why?</p> | <p>1) To get a clear rejection or support to the major issues and most important policies that involved the top decisions of a Nation</p> <p>2)To get the approval on an ongoing process or the authorization to start one when involving the most important values of the regime</p> <p>3) Since parties are instruments of governance and vehicles for social participation, they usually adopt a specific position on the issue in discussion and call for the vote of their members . Also, politicians are supposed to know what the best is .</p> | <p>1)To directly demonstrate the will and opinions of the constituents</p> <p>2) To bypass the representative process and the power of intermediary institutions (parties, legislatures,etc), proving some evident distrust and trying to insulate the process from them</p> <p>3) More frequent consultation to people and to increase the role of the voter, implying a certain decrease in the role of the conductors.</p> <p>4)To increase the level of turnouts and registrations</p> <p>5)To get rid of the necessary party identification as a way to get to the real point</p> <p>6)To provide some scenarios in which exercise an alternate leadership on the agenda setting process</p> <p>7)Strengthening check and balance system</p> <p>8)Parties as an electoral platform are directly involved in the process itself</p> |

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| <p>Consequences<br/>and Threats<br/>welcome ?</p> | <p>1) The wise way of establishing these new tools of direct democracy ensures the position and role of political parties and preserve themselves as channels of participation even in relevant cases</p> <p>2)The risk of reaching some subsequent level of abuse and so, some distortion of the process is absolutely low.</p> <p>3)The exceptionality of the tools insulates them from populist positions</p> | <p>1)Distortion of the process may be caused by rich individuals or groups that can manipulate the corresponding electorate to defend their interests</p> <p>2)Sometimes the tools become more important than the election of public officials</p> <p>3)Populist intentions may work and so, increase the number of consultations and the correlative abuse ( although it embodies a permanent invitation to participate, levels of turnout, knowledge and ability to translate general issue positions into intended votes on propositions do not intensely work on the voting behavior of less educated, poor and minority voters</p> <p>4)The process weakens, even more, the political parties and their capacities.</p> <p>5)It erodes the base of political leadership.</p> |
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3)What is the impact of professional consultants on the US political system ?

As it is known, politicians and top public official usually hire consulting assistance in the United States. Those consultants are specialized in a variety of fields. Economical, political, financial and managerial consulting are often required as essential factors to be taken into account before deciding on a major issue.

Political Consulting becomes very useful to the following purposes:

- a)Defining and knowing specific target audiences because consultants on this field are usually well trained to do this job.
- b)Organizing the campaign itself, as a measure to preserve some cohesion and consistency of the main strategies of the campaign.
- c)Dealing with the media and creating a niche.
- d)Persuading the identified audience to change its attitudes and behaviors and measuring its responsiveness to certain decisions.

So, political consulting is a tool itself to make the road safer and clearer.

However, a problem might arise from the substitution of the message by the media itself or the substitution of the leader by the consultant. And it is something more common than ever expected.

### **Assessing the impact**

**1)Politics as marketing** : in fact, the abuse of the consulting has led to an increasing marketing process as a new way of politics. So,

campaigns become markets and candidates become products to sell, in spite of the truth and more commonly, despite any moral limit.

Then rules of the markets are applicable: the best offer, the best lie, the desired positioning, the most efficient stand, the most appealing face, etc. According to my point of view, this is what I saw in the last election: the message was not important but the appearance and salience of some of the issues portrayed in x or y way by the media campaign. Also, the lack of ideological content is another collateral effect.

**2)The capacity of the media to influence on the political establishment and on candidacies is absolutely higher, so far.**

Campaigns, even at lower levels, are multimedia events in which many personal contact constraints imposed severe distance between the constituent and the candidate. As consulting is specialized in management of public image and persuasion, the real politics is left behind in order to compete in the electronic age.

**3)The perversion at the top level of the decisionmaking process:**

Presidents' pollsters influence is strong and in some cases determinant. Unfortunately, not only political consulting has increased the level of influence but also witches, palm readers, etc. Why, just because there is a regrettable perversion: what is to do is important but to preserve popularity becomes at least as important as the commitment itself. Then, in the middle of a crisis, irresponsible advice may be the difference between wise decisions and absurd mistakes.

4) Political consulting that is often hired by CEOs and top executives, has gained an increasing importance in the link to business sectors that have a lot of confidence in its capacities and experience, becoming a new interest group.