

Why Similar Interests Produce Different Partisan Loyalties: Institutional Experience and Political Learning in the United States

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A theoretical and synthetic account of how repeated encounters with public institutions shape political learning, trust, legitimacy, and durable partisan attachment.

PUZZLE

Why do citizens with similar interests and backgrounds develop different partisan loyalties, and why does dissatisfaction with representation not reliably produce electoral punishment?

CORE ARGUMENT

Routine interactions with welfare agencies, law enforcement, schools, health systems, and regulatory bodies teach citizens whom government serves and whether authority feels responsive, burdensome, or coercive.

MECHANISM

Institutional touchpoints create political predispositions; identity shapes interpretation, information environments shape attribution, and party coalitions mobilize the resulting trust or distrust.

CONTRIBUTION

The framework moves the primary site of political learning from elections to everyday governance and connects policy-feedback reasoning to durable partisan attachment under weak electoral accountability.

IMPLICATION

Administrative design affects democratic responsiveness, not just service delivery. Legible and empowering institutions may foster participation, while opaque or punitive systems can deepen distrust and unequal representation.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The paper synthesizes existing research rather than presenting original data. Causal sequencing remains unresolved, institutional contexts vary, and cumulative experience is difficult to measure; longitudinal or experimental work would be needed to test the framework directly.

PORTFOLIO NOTE

Completed theoretical and synthetic paper. It presents a framework and literature-based argument, not an original-data empirical study.