

One Nation Under God? Values and Faith in the Age of Polarization

Annual Conference of political scientists in the German Association for American Studies

Friday, November 10th – Sunday, November 12th 2017

Convener: Michael Dreyer (Jena), Matthias Enders (Jena), David Sirakov (Kaiserslautern)

Host: Atlantische Akademie Rheinland-Pfalz e.V., Lauterstr. 2, 67657 Kaiserslautern

Venue: PfalzAkademie Lambrecht, Franz-Hartmann-Straße 9, 67466 Lambrecht

Description:

Donald Trump's presidency seems to be based on the simple idea of politics as another "Art of the Deal". His erratic campaigning and turbulent first weeks in office do not offer much insight into his underlying political values. Still, his victory in the 2016 presidential election was, at least in part, made possible with the backing of the Christian coalition, whose policy preferences are a strong derivation of faith-based (Christian) values.

In the current age of intense polarization, both major parties rally support by aligning policy proposals to specific ideological backgrounds. However, ideological battles are not a new phenomenon in American politics. The United States was founded during a period of dividing values. Even in times of unrest and turmoil, republican values, the ideal of virtuous politics, and protestant faith vanquished most political differences. The "American Dream" seemed to roll it all into one catchy phrase. But today, it seems as if no all-encompassing normative idea exists anymore.

The promise of "one United States", as forcefully propagated by President Barack Obama at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, has been challenged by the fortification of numerous distinct "Americas" within the US. In large parts, they are shaped by questions of values and faith rather than class or income. Among other issues, the long and ongoing battles over social issues, America's role in the world and immigration are evidence of this division. Looking at election maps, the red and blue spaces offer proof of this breakup. The coasts and the heartland, urban and rural America, the North and the South, they all stand for specific value sets and even basic symbols of the American civil religion, like the constitution itself, are now part of ideological contests.

This conference wants to address a wide range of questions regarding the role of values and faith in American polity, its policies and politics:

- Is there still an American civil religion unifying the nation?
- What is the role of the "American Dream" in the 21st century?
- What distinct value sets can be identified and how did they develop?
- Who are the agents of value based politics?
- What narratives and frameworks guide value-based discourses?
- How are specific policy fields (foreign policy, social policy, immigration policy, science policy etc.) influenced by faith and values?
- Are the institutions of the American body politic transformed by the rise of many Americas within the US?
- Will these distinct American cultures find common ground again?

These are only sample questions. The conference's organizers invite colleagues from a broad range of backgrounds (political scientists, historians, economists, cultural scientists, etc.) to discuss these issues and submit proposals.

A special PhD workshop will also be part of the conference, providing an overview of current research, regardless of its connection to the conference topic! Therefore, we also invite PhD students researching in the field of American Studies to submit papers, even if they do not fit the general theme of the meeting.

Please send your abstracts (one or two pages; in English or German) to Matthias Enders (m.enders@uni-jena.de) until May 31st 2017.