

# SECURITY PERCEIVED AS A CULTURAL CONCEPT: THE AMERICAN POLITICAL CULTURE

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*The present paper aims to analyze the political acceptance of the concept of security as it helps understanding the issue of national and global security. Power is the most influential factor that determines the behavior of states in the international system and therefore it is the main enemy concerning global peace and order. It is worth to highlight how strategic culture can improve the perception of security. Each state focuses upon its own interests and this aspect does not guarantee that the other states will cooperate for maintaining peace and world order and this situation is continuously feeding the global insecurity. This study focuses on the concept of political culture of the United States analyzing the relationship between culture and politics within the framework of the political system.*

**Keywords:** security, strategic culture, politics, power, American political culture.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In order to justify the perspective of national security, it is worth to analyze the cultural interaction between nations, following the intercultural communication studies approach.

The communication repository is different from culture to culture and this aspect may lead to serious international issues if the message delivered is not correctly perceived.

The freedom of culture and expression has not only an imperative role in bringing the different nations together but also a

role concerning the security issues as different cultural backgrounds involves different interpretations which can be considered a threat to the national security equilibrium.

## 2. SECURITY AS A CULTURAL CONCEPT

In order to understand the issues of national and global security, an in-depth analysis of the concept of security is required. Power is the most influential factor which determines the behavior of nations in the international system. This situation does not apply only at the

national level, but it also applies at the individual one. Each of us is looking forward to get the power irrespective of the situation, be it an insignificant one.

Some actors on the global stage look for economic power, others are in search for land or even cultural power. This struggle has never ended even though at present it wears a diplomatic mask.

Multifarious theories explain the concept of security as a cultural concept. These theories are divided into two different trends: the realists and the idealists.

On the one hand, the realist theories consider security to be a derivative of power (Desch, 2005:1-3), which means that the nation with enough power has the possibility to acquire security from its dominating position.

On the other hand, the idealist theories perceive security as a consequence of peace, and if a lasting peace is reached then it provides security for all nations (Desch, 2005:1-3).

However, these two different approaches have something in common: namely, both of them perceive war as a major threat for the national security agreeing that a solution that eliminates the possibility of war would eliminate the issue of security from the international system.

According to Lucia Zedner, security is both a state of being and a means to that end (Zedner, 2003: 155-157). She argues that security, as a state of being, can be reflected under objective and subjective conditions.

From an objective condition it takes three forms and the key concept here would be *threat*. The first form is the absolute security condition, which denies any existence of threat; the second form is a neutralization condition, that is, the state is protected from threat and the third one is a condition of avoiding exposure to danger (Zedner, 2003:155-157).

Considering these three different conditions, only the first one does not refer to threat while the others are determined by threat. Thus, security exists only if threat exists. What Lucia Zedner wants to express is that instead of thinking of threats, which requires security control, it can be said that security control requires a threat.

### **3. SECURITY AND POLITICAL CULTURE**

The main purpose of security is focused on states and military conflict. The field of security turned into a highly debatable one among scholars in the post-Cold War era.

One of the objectives of the Cold War was, in fact, the national

security order and this concept fed the desire to develop the discipline of security studies in order to make it relevant to the New World concerns.

National security implies that the state stands as the central subject of security and that the individuals are pieces of the state. The individuals group themselves in communities and communities are brought together by creating cultures through their interactions. All the communities are considered to be a threat to insecure the state since every different cultural environment has the power to affect the politics of that state.

Global security implies that nations are treated as interrelated individuals, namely, one affects the other and they cannot be treated independently. As a result, nations often experience a state of insecurity and an efficient political strategy has always a great impact.

This security disorientation attracts two key concepts: cooperation and conflict (Krausse & Williams, 1996:229-233). These concepts bring together the field of security and the area of political culture. If cooperation is not successful, it leads to conflict.

Security cannot exist in the absence of authority. The fact that a central authority cannot be implemented to prevent global conflicts (Grieco, 1988:497-498) is

one of the major problems for global security. That is why certain strategies are needed for the global order to be maintained.

The previously mentioned situation of insecurity is experienced by the United States, too. It has been made insecure because of the existence of other nations, such as, for instance, Russia. Both superpowers aim at increase their autonomy, the safety of their own nations.

#### 4. STRATEGIC CULTURE

The post-Cold War age is rich in debates on the nature of security. There are three roots which encourage these debates: the dissatisfaction of some scholars with the foundations of the field, a challenge that came into being due to the emergence of a post-Cold War security order and the desire to improve the discipline and to make it relevant to the contemporary concerns (Krausse & Williams, 1996:229).

It is important for us to know how the use of force affects the society, the state and the individual by applying an in-depth analysis of the policies used by different states in order to prevent a global disaster.

At the state level, if a good strategic culture is adopted then the state enjoys homeland security.

The concept of “strategic culture” has been used by many countries, such as: Germany, the United States and Russia. It has also been used by NATO.

Strategic culture started to develop in the 1970s. Many scholars consider that the United States of America failed to predict the Soviet reactions because their strategy based on behavioral prediction was wrong. This failure made the scholars understand that every state has its own perception of the national events. Hence, a new tool of analysis came into being, that is, strategic culture.

Jack Snyder defined strategic culture as “the sum of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of a national strategic community share with regard to nuclear strategy” (quoted in Longhurst, 2000:302). Thus, strategic culture limits behavior choices.

Colin S. Gray defines strategic culture as “referring to modes of thought and action with respect to force, which derives from perception of the national historical experience from aspirations for responsible behavior in national terms” (Gray, 1986:120). Colin Gray highlights the concept of responsible behavior which stands as reference to a rational approach of strategic culture. Another key expression of

Colin Gray is the national historical experience. Every nation has political choices and these preferences are rooted in the national experience of the state.

Culture is highly predominant in over the practice of strategic culture and it might affect a rational approach of the state.

## **5. CONCEPTUALIZING THE POLITICAL CULTURE**

Every nation has a political culture which has the role of a connector between the citizens and government. Political culture is expressed by shared beliefs, values, attitudes and regulations.

Culture itself is central to politics as it offers the context for political insights as well as providing the language for political debates. Thus, it can both unite and divide nations. Political culture can bring nations together by supplying a common language. At the same time, it can divide nations by focusing upon cultural differences and certain interests.

The concept of political culture was first developed by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba in the 1960s. According to them, political culture is “that subset of beliefs and values of a society that relate to the political system” (Almond & Verba, 1963:11-14).

The concept of political culture is used to cover a wide range of political phenomena: “Political culture, roughly conceptualized, is the pattern of distribution of orientations members of a political community have towards politics” (Dawson & Prewitt, 1969: 26).

The analysis of the political culture follows three perspectives of the individual citizen’s relationship to politics: value perspective, psychological factors and cognitive aspects.

Gabriel Almond is the one who introduced the notion of political culture to the study of politics in his essay on *Comparative Political Systems*, published in 1956. According to Almond, Parsons has provided the basis for his approach. He defines political culture as “patterns of orientation to political action” and orientations as “attitudes towards politics” (Almond, 1956:396).

Parsons’ theory uses orientation as a major concept. It is “a structural concept and designates a relatively stable aspect of a system” (Parsons, 1961:337).

The orientation in political culture is relevant due to the relation of the actor (individual / nation) to the object world. How does the actor obtain the orientation that he has? According to Parsons, it is a result of socialization, of internalization of culture (Parsons & Shills, 1951:4-7).

Thus, culture sustains the orientation which guides the political culture.

The key terms of soft power and hard power are helpful for better understand the political actions of the states. Soft power refers to cooperation, the power a country has that comes from its history, diplomacy (Nye, 1990:15). Hard power describes the ability of a state to use both the military and economic means to influence the interests of other states.

The strategy of a country which aims at influencing the behavior of other states needs both hard and soft power.

## **6. AMERICAN POLITICAL CULTURE**

United States of America is a leading superpower of the world, position assumed after the dissolution of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics in 1991. It is not surprising to see why the United States holds a dominant position in the international political system at present. America’s political power is both hard and soft.

The democracy policy is strongly influenced by the political culture of the state. Alexis de Tocqueville claimed that the American democracy was shaped by the ideas promoted in their particular political culture. That is, the values, beliefs and attitudes held by the American

citizens inspired them to involve in solving public issues (de Tocqueville, 1863:68-75).

The American democracy is such a success because citizens acquired a high level of political awareness. Thus, they are willing to cooperate and take an active part in the political life.

Daniel J. Elazar is an important political scientist as well as a pioneer in the political culture studies. He identified four types of political culture. The individualist political culture promotes the liberty and integrity of the individual in society. In a statist culture, individual freedom is lost and served the interests of government and other institution of the state; statist systems have adopted ideologies like communism and fascism.

The civic republican culture suggests a society of community activist citizens, putting the good of the community over themselves. The last one, the traditionalist culture portrays society as being an extended family in which every member performs a role which is assumed, people are bound together by social ties and respect the authority figures (Branson, Vontz & Schechter, 2009:25-40).

Throughout the centuries, United States of America has met three of the four types of political culture. Being a democratic state from the

beginning of time, America has absolutely rejected statism.

At present, I strongly feel that there can be found traces of all three remaining types, all of them working together.

United States promotes individualism, idea supported by the *Declaration of Independence* and the *Bill of Rights*. The American citizens are free to carry on with their own interests. The US government must protect the American citizens' individual rights.

At the same time, traces of republicanism can be found, too, since the American citizens are truly engaged with community issues.

Regarding traditionalism, I can see that the Americans are strongly attached to their religion and wide range of denominations which mark their traditionalist culture.

The history of the United States of America is recent. It covers a period of about 240 years, since the *Declaration of Independence* issued in 1776. Roots of American nationalism can be found back to Great Britain. Liah Greenfeld argues that "the story of this development is a direct continuation of the process begun in England in the sixteenth century" (Greenfeld, 1992:402). Thus, the American nation inherited ideas and values of the English nation. Of course, this heritage has influenced the type of nation that America has become.

The political culture of the United States was founded on American nationalism. Nationalism and political culture go hand in hand. Liah Greenfeld argues that "nationalism is best approached as a type of socio-political ideology representing a set of basic principles which lend themselves to various interpretations and may serve as the foundations of different and contradictory cultural systems" (Greenfeld, 1997:191). Thus, the American nation is fed by an emotional attachment with the idea of nationalism. Under these circumstances, a unique political culture was formed.

The American political culture is strongly attached to its past experiences. The American political culture is focused upon the individual. The Americans are strongly attached to the idea of the individual, human rights, civil liberties, equality, freedom and democracy.

Liah Greenfeld considers that the main quality of the American political culture is its respect for the human rights and the interest of promoting the development of the individual (Greenfeld, 1992:423). And this very quality distinguishes American popular culture from the rest.

## **7. OPINIONS ON SECURITY AS A CULTURAL CONCEPT: THE AMERICAN POLITICAL CULTURE**

**7.1 The Questionnaire.** In order to find out what is the general perception of people living in the present-day Romania and the United States of America on the concepts of security as a cultural concept and American political culture, I suggest the following questionnaire consisting of a set of 11 questions.

**Q1.** What is security as a cultural concept in your opinion?

- a. a cultural weapon owned by a nation which ensures power;
- b. a system which provides national safety and political stability;
- c. a solution to interact safely with other nations in the international political system;
- d. a concrete way through which a state maintains the citizens' right of living in a peaceful environment.

**Q2.** What is your opinion about security as a cultural concept?

- a. security ensures safe intercultural experience;
- b. security is a consequence of peace;
- c. security guarantees the absence of threat in citizens' life;
- d. security eliminates the possibility of war.

**Q3.** What do you think the main ideas and purposes of security - as a cultural concept - should be?

- a. to focus on states and military conflict;
- b. to set out nation's priorities into a geopolitical context;
- c. to bind communities with different cultural environments;
- d. all of the above.

**Q4.** In your opinion, what of the following should be the main objective of the strategy of security in the international political system?

- a. the absence of threat concerning national political values of a state;
- b. the capacity to interpret the state's behavior in order to assure safe communication;
- c. the ability to overcome the possibility of war;
- d. the strength to engage with the most effective strategies in order to maintain national peace.

**Q5.** Do you agree with the fact that ineffective security strategies could become a threat for the nation?

- a. Yes, I fully agree; an ineffective security strategy could lead to a national conflict which may involve military action;
- b. I partially agree; ineffective security strategies reveal the weaknesses in the political system of a particular state, which may be improved from that point;
- c. I disagree; there is no connection between real national threats and ineffective security strategies;
- d. I do not know.

**Q6.** In your opinion, what does political culture stand for?

a concept which can theoretically explain a state's behavior;

b. a subset of beliefs and values of a society that relate to the political system;

c. the role of a state in global politics.

d. all of the above.

**Q7.** What do you think is the main connector between the concept of security and the concept of political culture?

a. both concepts aim at the interaction between citizens and governments;

b. political culture supplies the operating background for security devices;

c. political culture can unite nations by safely supplying interaction;

d. the concept of security is imperative to common political interests.

**Q8.** What do you think are the main attributes of the political culture of the United States of America?

a. it is strongly attached to the democracy ideology;

b. it has the power to influence the behavior of other nations;

c. it is concerned with promoting a civic-individualistic nation;

d. its mission is to spread the freedom worldwide and to end the existing tyranny in the world.

**Q9.** What is your understanding of the political position of the United States in the post-Cold War era?



- a. a new approach with respect to bilateral relations;
- b. a preoccupation with the rise of a global market;
- c. spreading the liberal democracy;
- d. improving global security.

**Q10.** How do you perceive the concept of power?

- a. a cultural device used to achieve a particular aim;
- b. a means through which a nation proves its unique role in the international system;
- c. it inspires authority in global security issues;
- d. a tool to suggest a strong national identity.

**Q11.** Under what circumstances do you believe a state can become more powerful from a global perspective?

- a. rethinking the methodology in the cultural dialogue;
- b. rebuilding strategy in order to be politically compatible with the other players within the framework of the international system;

- c. setting realistic national goals which can be fulfilled as effectively as possible;
- d. contributing to maintain global peace and security, which will increase the nation's prestige.

## **7.2 The Subjects of the Questionnaire.**

The previously presented questionnaire has been distributed to a number of 30 subjects aged between 19 and 55 as follows: 5 subjects being 19 years old and representing 16.6%; 11 subjects being 22 years old and representing 36.6%; 5 subjects being 24 years old and representing 16.6%; 2 subjects being 31 years old and representing 6.6%; 2 subjects being 36 years old and representing 6.6%; 1 subject being 40 years old and representing 3.3%; 3 subjects being 47 years old and representing 10% and 1 subject being 55 years old and representing 3.3%, as it can be seen in Figure1.

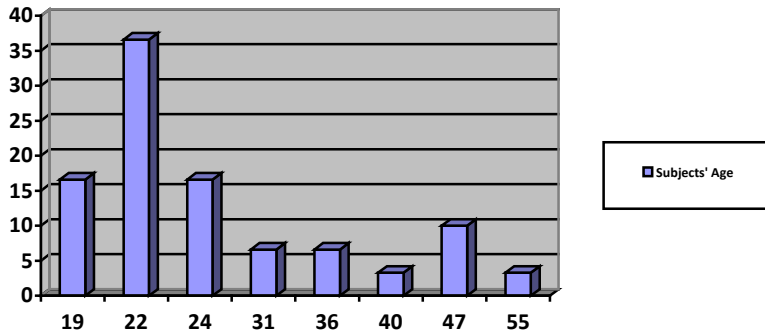


Figure 1. The Subjects' Age

It is worth to mention the sex of subjects and 15 female subjects, the subjects. In order to achieve a balanced result, the sex of the subjects was as follows: 15 male subjects, each category representing 50% as shown in Figure 2.

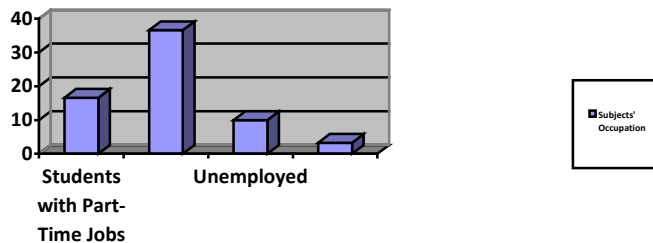


Figure 2. The Subjects' Sex

The subjects' occupation varies from student to unemployed and eventually retired persons. Out of the 30 subjects, 16 are students representing 53.3%, 10 subjects are employed representing 33.3%, 3 subjects are unemployed representing 10% and 1 subject is retired representing 3.3%. It is important to mention that out of the 16 subjects who are students, 5 of them have part-time jobs, which means 16.6% are employed students. The situation is best pictured in Figure 3.

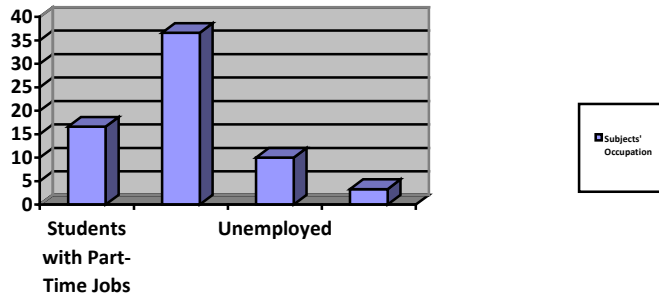


Figure 3. The Subjects' Occupation

Concerning the subjects' level of education, out of 16 students, 11 have already graduated from another higher education institution representing 36.6% while the other 5 are students at present, representing 16.6%. Out of the remaining 14 students, 3 have as their last

education degree the high school representing 10%, 8 students graduated from a secondary school and they stand for 26.6%, 2 subjects had home education representing 6.6% and 1 subject had no education standing for 3.3%. Figure 4 below exemplifies best this situation.

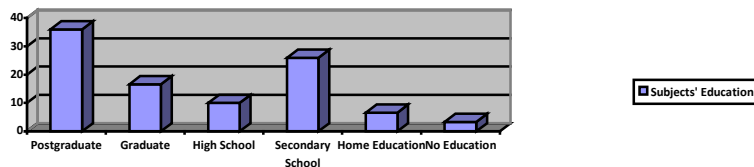


Figure 4. The Subjects' Level of Education

The residence environment splits into 24 subjects coming from the urban environment standing for 80%

and 6 students living in the rural environment representing 20% (see Figure 5 below).

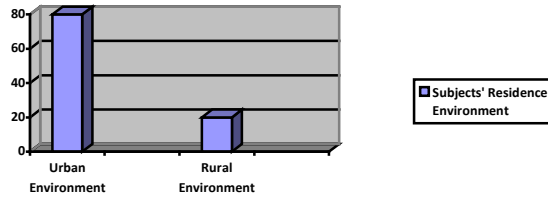


Figure 5. The Subjects' Residence Environment

Regarding the subjects' nationality, 15 subjects have Romanian nationality and 15 subjects have American nationality each category standing for 50%, as Figure 6 shows below:

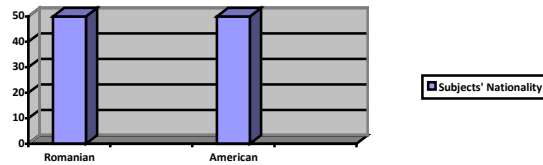


Figure 6. The Subjects' Nationality

Regarding the subjects' religion (see Figure 7), I will split them according to their nationality, as it follows: 17 are Orthodox representing 56.6%, 5 subjects are Roman Catholic representing 16.6%, 4 subjects are Protestant representing 13.3%, 3 are spiritual, but not religious representing 10% and 1 subject has no religion representing 3.3%.

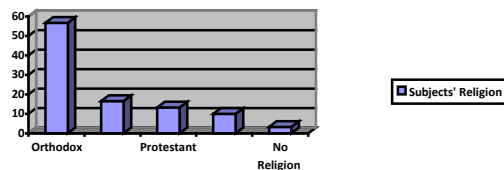


Figure 7. The Subjects' Religion

This study is based on 30 respondents, carefully selected to supply a balanced result. I have chosen an equal number of respondents from both genders and also an equal number of respondents from each geographical area. Given all these facts, it can be noticed that the respondents come from different cultures, thus they meet diversity in their cultural background.

We can say that we deal with the phenomenon of *diversity in unity* due to the various religious backgrounds and nationalities registered in this study based on 30 subjects.

## **8. INTERPRETATION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS**

The present set of eleven questions is centered on the issue of security as a cultural concept and the American political culture.

At the 1<sup>st</sup> question of the questionnaire about what is security as a cultural concept, a number of 12 respondents (40%) have chosen variant a) considering that security is a cultural weapon owned by a nation which ensures power to it, 5 subjects (16.6%) preferred variant b) believing that security is a system which provides national safety and political stability, 10 subjects (33.3%) have been in favor of variant c) standing for a solution to interact safely with other nations in the international political system and only 3 subjects (10%) have chosen variant d), a concrete way through which a state maintains the citizens' right of living in a peaceful environment.

At the second question of the questionnaire concerning the respondents' opinion regarding security as a cultural concept, 7 subjects (23.3%) considered that security ensures safe intercultural experience, 9 respondents (30%) preferred the idea that security is a consequence of peace, 4 respondents (13.3%) decided that security guarantees the absence of threat in citizens' life and the majority of 10 respondents (33.3%) picked up variant d) as the best answer meaning that security eliminates the possibility of war.

Question number three concerns the main ideas and purposes of security. A number of 10 respondents (33.3%) chose variant a) saying that security should focus on states and military conflict. 5 respondents (16.6%) picked variant b) which says that security should set out nation's priorities into a geopolitical context, no respondent agreed with variant c) according to which security should bind communities with different cultural environments. The majority, that is, 15 respondents (50%), agreed with variant d) meaning all of the above.

The fourth question follows the main objective of strategy of security in the international political system. A number of 10 respondents (33.3%) considered variant a) to be more adequate to their perception, meaning that the main objective of security strategy should be the absence of threat concerning the national political values of the state. Answer b) according to which the main objective should be the capacity to interpret state's behavior in order to assure safe communication was preferred only by 2 subjects (6.67%). A number of 4 respondents (13.3%) suggested variant c) meaning the ability to overcome the possibility of war while the majority, 14 respondents (46.6%), has chosen variant d) the strength to engage with the most effective strategies in order to maintain national peace.

Question number five has the most impressive result so far. Asked if they agree with the fact that ineffective security strategies could become a threat for the nation, 26 (86.6%) of the respondents chose variant a) where they fully agreed with the statement because an ineffective security strategy could lead to a national conflict which may involve military action. Only one respondent (3.3%) has chosen variant b) saying that he partially agrees, because ineffective security strategies reveal weaknesses in the political system. No one selected variant c) meaning they would have totally disagreed with the statement and a number of 3 respondents (10%) claimed variant d) saying they do not know.

The sixth question brings into discussion the concept of political culture. Out of 30, 5 respondents representing 16.6% have chosen variant a) a concept which can theoretically explain the behavior of a state, 5 respondents (16.6%) preferred variant b), a subset of beliefs and values of a society that relate to the political system, none of the respondents liked variant c), the role of a state in global politics, and the majority, meaning 20 respondents (66.7%), favored variant d) all of the above.

The seventh question concerns the main connector between the concept of security and the concept of political culture. 7 respondents (23.3%) picked variant a) meaning that both concepts aim at the interaction between citizens and governments, 3 respondents (10%) agreed with variant b) that political culture supplies the operating background for security devices, other 3 respondents (10%) suggested variant c) according to which political culture can unite nations by safely supplying interaction, but the majority, that is, 17 respondents (56.6%), accepted variant d) which states that the concept of security is imperative to common political interests.

At the eighth question, "What do you think are the main attributes of the political culture of the United States of America?", 2 respondents (6.67%)

agreed with variant a), which suggests that the United States is strongly attached to the ideology of democracy, 3 respondents (10%) favored variant b), which says that it has the power to influence the behavior of other nations, none of the subjects picked variant c) saying that the United States is concerned with promoting a civic-individualistic nation and not surprisingly the majority, consisting of 25 respondents (83.3%), has chosen variant d), the political culture of the United States has as its mission the spread of freedom worldwide and the end of the existing tyranny in the world.

The ninth question highlights the subjects' perception of the political position of the United States in the post-Cold War era. 3 respondents (10%) preferred variant a), a new approach with respect to bilateral relations, 7 respondents (23.3%) favored variant b), a preoccupation with the rise of a global market, the majority of 15 respondents (50%) understood that spreading the liberal democracy is the most accurate answer, while the last 5 respondents (16.7%) have chosen variant d) improving global security.

The tenth question presents the subjects' vision on the concept of power. Therefore, 6 respondents (20%) think that it is a cultural device used to achieve a particular aim (variant a), 4 respondents (13.3%) believe that it is a means through which a nation proves its unique role in the international system, the majority of 20 respondents (66.7%) suggested variant c) according to which the concept of power inspires authority in global security issues. None of the respondents picked up variant d), a tool to suggest a strong national identity.

To the eleventh question, none of the respondents agreed with variant a) that states the fact that a state can become more powerful if it rethinks its methodology in its cultural dialogue. A majority of 15 respondents (50%) perceives a solution if the states rebuild the strategy in order to be politically compatible with the other players in the international system according to variant b). 10 of the respondents (33.3%) suggested that variant c) setting realistic national goals which can be fulfilled as effectively as possible is more accurate while 5 of the respondents (16.7%) suggest the state should contribute to maintain global peace and security, which will increase the nation's prestige according to variant d).

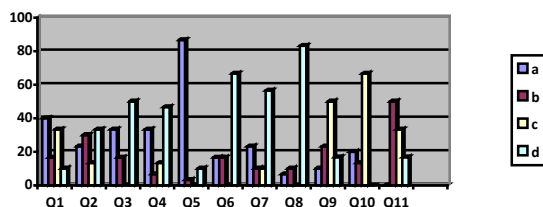


Figure 8. Interpretation of the Data on Security Perceived as a Cultural Concept: The American Political Culture – Questions: 1-11

As it can be seen in the figure above, there have existed six cases representing six answers that have not been chosen by the respondents. The first case refers to the third question, no one picked up variant c) which means that in the general perspective security has no implication on binding communities with different cultural environments.

The second case refers to question number five, there was no answer for variant c). This suggests that there is a connection between real national threats and ineffective security strategies in the general opinion.

The third case can be found in the sixth question, no one liked variant c), meaning that generally political culture is not connected to the role of a state in global politics.

The fourth case refers to the eighth question, variant c), suggesting that the United States of America is not generally perceived as being concerned with promoting a civic-individualistic nation.

The fifth case concerns the tenth question, variant d), meaning that none of the respondents perceives the concept of power as a tool to suggest a strong national identity.

The sixth case can be found in the eleventh question. Asked under what circumstances the subjects believe that a state can become more powerful, none of them selected variant a) rethinking the methodology in their cultural dialogue.

## 9. CONCLUSIONS

Here are the conclusions drawn after the interpretation of the data of the questionnaire on the concepts of security and power as well as on the phenomenon of political culture here being included the cultural dialogue:

1. Security is perceived as a cultural weapon owned by a nation which ensures power to it;
2. Security eliminates the possibility of war;
3. The main purposes of security are to focus on states and military



conflict, to set out the nation's priorities into a geopolitical context and to bind communities with different cultural environments;

4. The main objective of the strategy of security in the international political system is the strength to engage with the most effective strategies in order to maintain national peace;

5. Ineffective security strategies could become a threat for the nation and can evolve into a military conflict;

6. Political culture is a concept which can theoretically explain the behavior of a state, a subset of beliefs and values of a society that relate to the political system standing for the role of a state in global politics;

7. The main connector between the concept of security and the political culture concerns the imperative role of security in common political interests of nations;

8. The political culture of the United States of America has the mission to spread freedom worldwide and to end existing tyranny in the world;

9. The political position of the United States in the post-Cold War era is based on the spread of liberal democracy;

10. The concept of power inspires authority in global security issues;

11. From a global perspective, a state can become more powerful by rebuilding the strategy in order to be

politically compatible with the other players in the international system.

Thus, security is used as a cultural device of one nation and it has an imperative role regarding common political interests shared by nations.

In the post-Cold War era, the United States of America has used its own political culture as a security strategy in order to avoid risk.

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