



# Public Opinion and Political Action

## Chapter Outline

### The American People

### How Americans Learn About Politics: Political Socialization

### Measuring Public Opinion and Political Information

### What Americans Value: Political Ideologies

### How Americans Participate in Politics

### Understanding Public Opinion and Political Action

## Summary

One of the biggest issues of the 2000 presidential race revolved around income tax cuts. George W. Bush made his plan to cut taxes for everyone the centerpiece of his campaign. This proposal tapped straight into the fundamental issue of the scope of government. Bush's plan was based on the premise that the federal budget surplus was due to taxes being higher than necessary for the government to carry out its functions. On the other side, Al Gore saw much to criticize in the Bush plan. He decided to

strongly attack the Bush's proposal by pointing out that a big percentage of the benefits would go to the wealthiest Americans—a point he made repeatedly in the presidential debates.

Both Bush and Gore, however, faced the usual problem of getting the public to take notice of their stands. Throughout the campaign, Harvard University's Vanishing Voter project regularly asked a random sample of the public the following question: "Do you happen to know whether Bush favors or opposes a large cut in personal income taxes?"



At the beginning of October 2000, 45 percent of respondents said that he favored a cut, 12 percent said he did not, and 43 percent admitted that they did not know. Public knowledge about the most publicized issue of the campaign was not impressive.

Public opinion polling has become a major growth industry in recent years. Each of the national evening news broadcasts and almost every major newspaper now commissions their own regular polls. Polls

are great investments for the media because they provide a timely story that can be billed as exclusive. If there is nothing new in their findings, journalists can always fall back on one sure pattern: the lack of public attention to politics. Whether it's George W. Bush's tax-cut plan, the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform bill, or the question of American military involvement in Kosovo, the safest expectation that a public opinion analyst can make is

that many people will be unaware of the policy issue.

In a democracy, the people are expected to guide public policy. But do people pay enough attention to public affairs to fulfill their duty as citizens? As we shall see in this chapter, there is much reason to be concerned about the level of political information among the American public. This is particularly the case for complex issues that involve the scope of government.

It is common for politicians and columnists to intone the words “the American people . . .” and then claim their view as that of the citizenry. Yet it would be hard to find a statement about the American people—who they are and what they believe—that is either 100 percent right or 100 percent wrong. The American people are wondrously diverse. There are about 281 million Americans, forming a mosaic of racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. America was founded on the principle of tolerating diversity and individualism, and it remains one of the most diverse countries in the world today. Most Americans view this diversity as one of the most appealing aspects of their society.

### public opinion

The distribution of the population's beliefs about politics and policy issues.

The study of American **public opinion** aims to understand the distribution of the population's belief about politics and policy issues. Because there are many groups with a great variety of opinions in the United States, this is an especially complex task. This is not to say that public opinion would be easy to study even if America were a more homogeneous society; as you will see, measuring public opinion involves painstaking interviewing procedures and careful wording of questions. Further complicating the task is the fact that people are often not well informed about the issues. The least informed are also the least likely to participate in the political process, a phenomenon that creates imbalances in who takes part in political action.

For American government to work efficiently and effectively, the diversity of the American public and its opinions must be faithfully channeled through the political process. This chapter reveals just how difficult a task this is.

## The American People

### demography

The science of human population changes.

### census

A valuable tool for understanding demographic changes. The Constitution requires that the government conduct an “actual enumeration” of the population every 10 years.

One way of looking at the American public is through **demography**—the science of human population changes. The most valuable tool for understanding demographic changes in America is the **census**. The U.S. Constitution requires that the government conduct an “actual enumeration” of the population every 10 years. The first census was conducted in 1790.

The Census Bureau tries to conduct the most accurate count of the population humanly feasible. It isn't an easy job, even with the allocation of billions of federal dollars to the task. After the 1990 census was completed, the Bureau estimated that 5 million people were not counted. Furthermore, they found that members of minority groups were disproportionately undercounted, as they were apparently more suspicious of government

Responding to criticisms that many minority groups had been undercounted in the previous census, the Census Bureau launched special advertising campaigns to improve cooperation rates in these communities in 2000. Here you can see a poster in Detroit targeted at the large number of Iraqi immigrants in the city.



and thus less willing to cooperate with census workers. In order to correct for such an undercount in 2000, the Clinton Administration approved a plan to scientifically estimate the characteristics of those people who failed to respond to the census forms and follow-up visits from census workers, and then incorporate this information into the official count. Conservatives maintain that such a procedure would be subject to manipulation, less accurate than a traditional head count, and unconstitutional. In the 1999 case of *Department of Commerce v. U.S. House of Representatives*, the Supreme Court ruled that sampling could not be used to determine the number of congressional districts each state is entitled to. However, the Court left the door open for the use of sampling procedures to adjust the count for other purposes, such as the allocation of federal grants to states. In the end, the Bush Administration decided not to do this.

Getting a question included on the census form is a highly competitive enterprise, as groups of all different kinds seek to be counted.<sup>1</sup> Once a group can establish its numbers, it can then ask for federal aid in proportion to its size. In 1990, advocates for the disabled won out when the census added a question designed to count people who have difficulty taking care of themselves or getting where they need to go. The census also responded to complaints that the homeless were being left out of the count by sending out 15,000 workers one night to count them—the final tally came to 228,621.

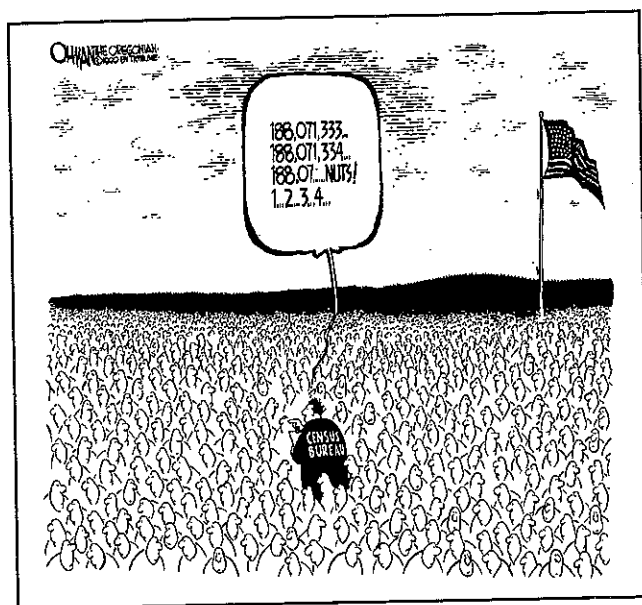
Changes in the U.S. population, as reflected in these census figures, impact our culture and political system in numerous ways, which will be examined in the next few sections.

## The Immigrant Society

The United States has always been a nation of immigrants. As Lyndon B. Johnson said, America is “not merely a nation but a nation of nations.” All Americans except Native Americans are either descended from immigrants or are immigrants themselves. Today, federal law allows up to 900,000 new immigrants to be legally admitted to the country every year. This is equivalent to adding a city with the population of Washington, D.C., every year. And in recent years, illegal immigrants have outnumbered legal immigrants.

There have been three great waves of immigration to the United States.

- Prior to the late nineteenth century, northwestern Europeans (English, Irish, Germans, and Scandinavians) constituted the first wave of immigration.



- During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, southern and eastern Europeans (Italians, Jews, Poles, Russians, and others) made up the second wave. Most of these passed through Ellis Island in New York (now a popular museum) as their first stop in the new world.
- In recent decades, a third wave of immigrants has consisted of Hispanics (from Cuba, Central America, and Mexico) and Asians (from Vietnam, Korea, the Philippines, and elsewhere). The 1980s saw the second largest number of immigrants of any decade in American history, and these groups are continuing to immigrate in large numbers.

Immigrants bring with them their aspirations, as well as their own political beliefs. For example, Cubans in Miami, who nearly constitute a majority of the city's population, first came to America to escape Fidel Castro's Marxist regime and have brought their anti-Communist sentiments with them. Similarly, the Vietnamese came to America after a Communist takeover there. Cubans and Vietnamese are just two recent examples of the many types of immigrants who have come to America over the years to flee an oppressive government. Other examples from previous periods of heavy immigration include the Irish in the first wave and the Russians in the second. Throughout American history, such groups have fostered a great appreciation for individualism in American public policy by their wish to be free of governmental control.

**melting pot**

The mixing of cultures, ideas, and peoples that has changed the American nation. The United States, with its history of immigration, has often been called a melting pot.

**minority majority**

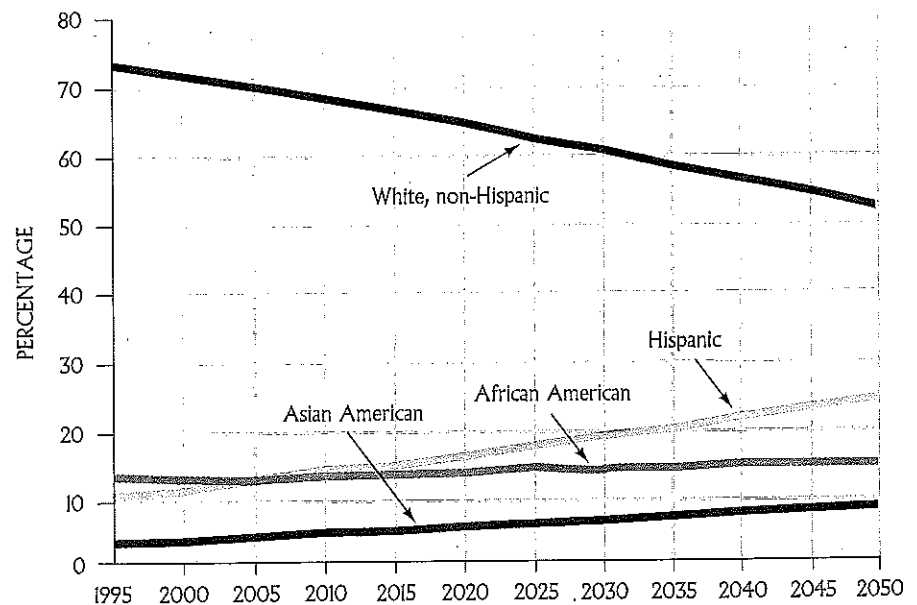
The emergence of a non-Caucasian majority, as compared with a white, generally Anglo-Saxon majority. It is predicted that by about 2060, Hispanic Americans, African Americans, and Asian Americans together will outnumber white Americans.

**The American Melting Pot**

With its long history of immigration, the United States has often been called a **melting pot**. This phrase refers to a mixture of cultures, ideas, and peoples. As the third wave of immigration continues, policymakers have begun to speak of a new **minority majority**, meaning that America will eventually cease to have a white, generally Anglo-Saxon majority. The 2000 census data found an all-time low in the percentage of non-Hispanic White Americans—just over 71 percent of the population. African Americans made up 12 percent of the population, Hispanics 12 percent, Asians 4 percent, and Native Americans slightly less than 1 percent. Between 1980 and 1990, minority populations grew at a much faster rate than the white population. As you can see in Figure 6.1, the

**Figure 6.1 The Coming Minority Majority**

Based on the basis of current birth rates and immigration rates, the Census Bureau estimates that the demographics of the country should change as shown in the accompanying graph. Extend the lines a bit beyond the year 2050, and it is clear that the minority groups will soon be in the majority nationwide. Of course, should rates of birth and immigration change, so will these estimates. But already there are 65 congressional districts with a minority majority, about 85 percent of which are represented in the House by an African American, a Hispanic, or an Asian American. These numbers are bound to increase as we move into the twenty-first century.



Census Bureau estimates that by the middle of the twenty-first century, Whites will represent only 52 percent of the population.

Until recently, the largest minority group in the country has been the African-American population. One in eight Americans is a descendent of these reluctant immigrants: Africans who were brought to America by force as slaves. As in Chapter 5, a legacy of racism and discrimination has left a higher proportion of the African-American population economically and politically disadvantaged than the white population. About 27 percent of African Americans currently live below the poverty line, compared to about 11 percent of Whites.

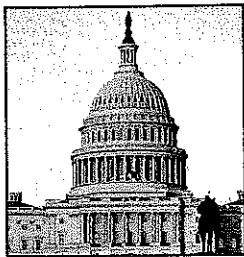
Despite this economic disadvantage, African Americans have recently been exercising a good deal of political power. African Americans have been elected as mayors of many of the country's biggest cities, including Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago. In 1989, Douglas Wilder of Virginia became the nation's first elected African-American governor, and in 1992, Carol Moseley-Braun of Illinois became the first African-American woman to be elected to the U.S. Senate. The number of African-American elected officials has increased by over 500 percent since 1970.<sup>27</sup>

The familiar problems of African Americans sometimes obscure the problems of other minority groups, such as Hispanics (composed largely of Mexicans, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans). The 2000 Census reported that for the first time the Hispanic population outnumbered the African-American population. Like African Americans, Hispanics are concentrated in cities. Hispanics are rapidly gaining power in the Southwest, and cities such as San Antonio and Denver have elected mayors of Hispanic heritage. In recent years, the state legislatures of New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, California, and Connecticut all had at least 5 percent Hispanic representation.

An issue of particular concern to the Hispanic community is what to do about the problem of illegal immigration. The Simpson-Mazzoli Act, named after its congressional sponsors, requires that employers document the citizenship of their employees. Whether people are born in Canton, Ohio, or Canton, China, they must prove that they are either U.S. citizens or legal immigrants in order to work. Civil and criminal penalties can be assessed against employers who knowingly employ undocumented immigrants. This law has raised concern among leaders of immigrant groups, who worry that employers may simply decline to hire members of such groups rather than take any chances. There has been little evidence of this so far, however. In fact, many believe that the provisions of the Simpson-Mazzoli Act have proved to be inadequate in stopping illegal immigration from Mexico. One proposed solution that has been very controversial in recent years involves denying all benefits from government programs to people who cannot prove that they are legal residents of the United States (see "You Are the Policymaker: Should Illegal Immigrants Receive Benefits from Government Programs?").



Just outside of San Diego, the problem of illegal immigration from Mexico has taken a dangerous turn. Seeking to make their way around a freeway checkpoint, immigrants sometimes attempt to cross the busy San Diego freeway. After a number of people had been hit by cars, authorities posted signs like these to warn motorists to look out for people crossing the freeway.



## You Are the Policymaker

### Should Illegal Immigrants Receive Benefits from Government Programs?

Americans have traditionally welcomed immigrants with open arms. However, some immigrants have recently become less welcome: those who are in the country illegally. In states such as Texas and California, where many illegal immigrants from south of the border reside, there is concern that providing public services to these people is seriously draining state resources. This became the topic of heated debate when Californians voted on Proposition 187 in 1994. Labeled by its proponents as the “save our state initiative,” this measure sought to cut illegal immigrants off from public services, such as the right of their children to attend public schools, and medical assistance for people with low incomes. According to its advocates, not only would Proposition 187 save the state treasury, but it would also cut down on the number of illegal immigrants—many of whom, they argued, had come mostly to take advantage of the free goods offered in America.

Opponents replied that although illegal immigration is surely a problem, the idea of cutting off public services could easily do more harm than good. They pointed out the risks to public health of denying illegal immigrants basic health care, such as immunizations that help control communicable diseases. And by throwing the children of illegal immigrants out of school, they argued that many would inevitably turn to crime with nothing to do all day. Besides, though they may be here illegally, these immigrants have to pay sales taxes on everything they buy and pay rent—a portion of which indirectly goes to the state when their landlords pay their property taxes. Given that they contribute to the tax base that pays for public services, opponents of Proposition 187 argued that they should in all fairness be entitled to make use of them.

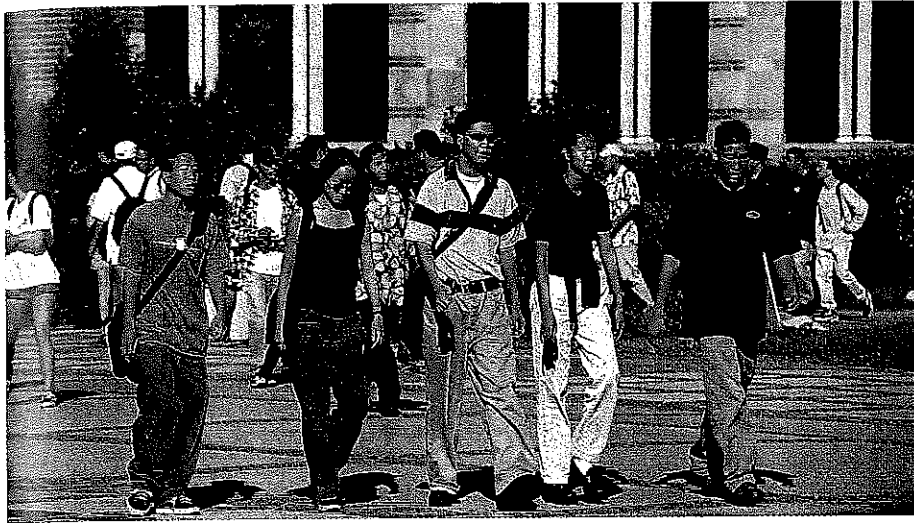
The proponents of Proposition 187 won at the ballot box. However, so far

they have lost in their attempts to get the measure enforced. The courts have consistently ruled that the proposition violated the rights of illegal immigrants as well as national laws concerning eligibility for federally funded benefits. Overall, the proposition was held to be an unconstitutional state scheme to regulate immigration.

Although the courts have held that states cannot deny public services to illegal aliens, in some cases it may be possible for the federal laws to do so. The 1996 Republican Party platform stated that “Illegal aliens should not receive public benefits other than emergency aid, and those who become parents while illegally in the United States should not be qualified to claim benefits for their offspring.” What do you think? Would you support the sort of national laws that the Republicans proposed? What do you think would be the likely consequences if such laws were passed on the national level?

Unlike Hispanics who have come to America to escape poverty, the recent influx of Asians has been driven by a new class of professional workers looking for greater opportunity. Asians who have come to America since the 1965 Immigration Act<sup>3</sup> opened the gate to them make up the most highly skilled immigrant group in American history, as Ronald Takaki documents.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Asian Americans have often been called the superachievers of the minority majority. This is especially true in the case of educational attainment—42 percent of Asian Americans over the age of 25 hold a college degree, almost twice the national average. As a result, their median family income has already surpassed that of non-Hispanic Whites. Although still a very small minority group, Asian Americans have had some notable political successes. In 1996, Gary Locke (a Chinese American) was elected governor of Washington and in 2000 Norman Mineta (a Japanese American) was appointed to be secretary of transportation.

Whereas Asian Americans are the best off of America’s minority groups, by far the worst off is the one indigenous minority, known today as Native Americans. Before Europeans arrived in America, 12 to 15 million Native Americans lived here. War and disease reduced their numbers to a mere 210,000 by 1910. About 1.8 million Americans currently list themselves as being of Native American heritage. Statistics show that they are the least healthy, the poorest, and the least educated group in the American melting pot. Only



Asian Americans have been labeled as the “superachievers” of the coming minority majority due to their high levels of educational achievement and income. The proportion of Asian-American students currently exceeds 40 percent at some campuses of the University of California.

a handful of Native Americans have found wealth; even fewer have found power. Some tribes have discovered oil or other minerals on their land and have used these resources successfully. Most Native Americans, though, remain economically and politically disadvantaged in American society. The 1990 census found that in the Dakotas, site of the largest Sioux reservations, over half the Native Americans lived below the poverty line.

Americans live in an increasingly multicultural and multilingual society. Yet, regardless of ethnic background most Americans share a common **political culture**—an overall set of values widely shared within a society. For example, there is much agreement among ethnic groups about what truly makes an American, as shown in Table 6.1. Minority groups have assimilated many basic American values, such as the principle of treating all equally. Yet, not all observers view this recent wave of immigration without concern. Ellis Cose has written that “racial animosity has proven to be both an enduring American phenomenon and an invaluable political tool.” Because America has entered a period of rapid ethnic change, Cose predicts immigration will be a magnet for conflict and hostility.”<sup>5</sup>

The emergence of the minority majority is just one of several major demographic changes that have altered the face of American politics. In addition, the population has been moving and aging.

#### political culture

An overall set of values widely shared within a society.

**Table 6.1 What Makes Someone an American?**

A field poll of California asked a representative sample about different characteristics that many people think makes someone an American. Here you can see how different racial groups in California responded.

CHARACTERISTIC	ANGLOS	AFRICAN AMERICANS	HISPANICS	ASIANS
Treating all equally	88	94	81	92
Trying to get ahead	77	68	64	58
Speaking English	77	83	66	71
Voting	77	72	68	70
Speaking up for the country	52	60	52	42
Believing in God	37	63	50	37

Source: “American Identity and the Politics of Ethnic Change” by Jack Citrin, Beth A. Reingold, and Donald P. Green from *Journal of Politics*, 52:4, pp. 424–454. Copyright © 1990 by the University of Texas Press. All rights reserved.



## The Regional Shift

For most of American history, the most populous states have been concentrated in the states north of the Mason-Dixon line and east of the Mississippi River. As you can see in Figure 6.2, though, over the last 60 years, much of America's population growth has been centered in the West and South. In particular, the populations of Florida, California, and Texas have grown rapidly as people moved to the Sunbelt. From 1990 to 2000, the rate of population growth was 24 percent in Florida, 14 percent in California, and 23 percent in Texas. In contrast, population growth in the Northeast was a scant 5 percent.

Demographic changes are associated with political changes. States gain or lose congressional representation as their population changes, and thus power shifts as well. This **reapportionment** process occurs once a decade, after every census. After each census, the 435 seats in the House of Representatives are reallocated to the states on the basis of population changes. Thus, as California has grown throughout this century, its representation in the House has increased from just 7 in 1900 to 53 as of 2002. New York, on the other hand, has lost about one-third of its delegation over the last 50 years.

### reapportionment

The process of reallocating seats in the House of Representatives every 10 years on the basis of the results of the census.

## The Graying of America

One of the three megastates, Florida, has grown in large part as a result of its attractiveness to senior citizens. Nationwide, the fastest growing age group in America is composed of citizens over 65. Not only are people living longer as a result of medical advances, but the birthrate has dropped substantially. About 60 percent of adult Americans living today grew up in families of four or more children. If the current "baby bust" continues, this figure will eventually be cut to 30 percent.<sup>6</sup>

By the year 2010, as the post-World War II baby boom generation reaches senior citizen status, there will be just two working Americans for every person over the age of 65, which will put tremendous pressure on the Social Security system. Begun under the New Deal, Social Security is exceeded only by national defense as America's most costly public policy. The current group of older Americans and those soon to follow can lay claim to roughly \$5 trillion guaranteed by Social Security. They also hold title to roughly \$1 trillion in public and private pension plans. There is a political message in these numbers: People who have been promised benefits expect to collect them, especially benefits for which they have made monthly contributions. Thus both political parties have long treated Social Security benefits as sacrosanct.

As the population has aged, new political interests have mobilized. Once discounted as no longer productive, the elderly now claim "gray power."<sup>7</sup> In Florida, the state's senior citizens typically vote against referenda for school taxes, much to the dismay of younger parents. They have also managed to secure tax breaks and service benefits for older people from the Florida legislature. Senior citizens have thus discovered an old political dictum: There is strength in numbers. A growing and potent group, the elderly have one advantage that no other group has—everyone can anticipate eventually reaching senior citizen status.

### Why does it matter?

America is changing demographically. What difference does it make that there will probably be a minority majority in your lifetime? How may demographic changes likely impact policy? For example, how will an increase in the number of elderly citizens affect programs like Social Security and Medicare? In what ways might demographic changes alter your own interaction with government?

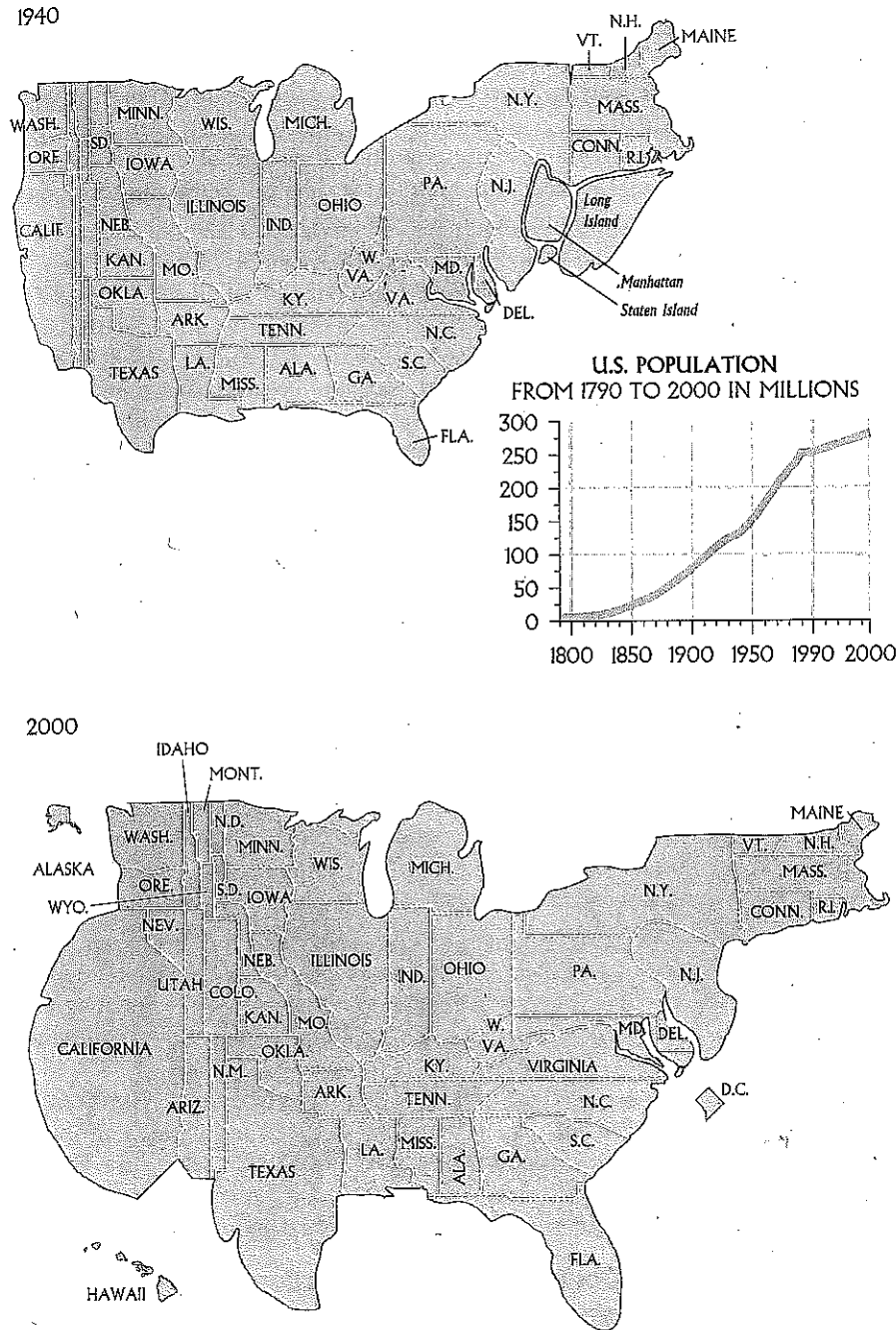
### political socialization

According to Richard Dawson, "the process through which an individual acquires his [or her] particular political orientations—his [or her] knowledge, feelings, and evaluations regarding his [or her] political world."

## How Americans Learn About Politics: Political Socialization

As the most experienced segment of the population, the elderly have undergone the most **political socialization**. Political socialization is "the process through which an individual acquires his or her particular political orientations—his or her knowledge, feelings, and evaluations regarding his or her political world."<sup>8</sup> As people become more socialized with age, their political orientations grow firmer. It should not be surprising

**Figure 6.2 Shifting Population**



These maps paint a population portrait of the United States over the last six decades. The states are drawn to scale on the basis of population. In 1940, the most populous states were concentrated east of the Mississippi River. New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois stand out. By 2000 the national population picture—and the map—had changed considerably. Today the country's 281 million citizens are scattered more widely, and though large concentrations of population still dominate the East, there has been huge growth on the West Coast, in Texas, and in Florida.

*Source:* The 1940 map was the work of the National Opinion Research Center, University of Denver, as printed in John Gunther's 1946 book *Inside U.S.A.*

that governments aim their socialization efforts largely at the young, not the elderly. Authoritarian regimes are particularly concerned with indoctrinating their citizens at an early age. For example, youth groups in the former Soviet Union were organized into the Komsomols, the Young Communist League. Membership in these groups was helpful in gaining admission to college and entering certain occupations. In the Komsomols, Soviet youths were taught their government's view of the advantages of communism (though apparently not well enough to keep the system going). In contrast, socialization is a much more subtle process in the United States.

## The Process of Political Socialization

Only a small portion of Americans' political learning is formal. Civics or government classes in high school teach citizens some of the nuts and bolts of government—how many senators each state has, what presidents do, and so on. But such formal socialization is only the tip of the iceberg. Americans do most of their political learning without teachers or classes.

Informal learning is really much more important than formal, in-class learning about politics. Most informal socialization is almost accidental. Few parents sit down with their children and say, "Johnny, let us tell you why we're Republicans." Words like *pick up*, *absorb*, and *acquire* perhaps best describe the informal side of socialization. The family, the media, and the schools all serve as important agents of socialization.

**The Family.** The family's role in socialization is central because of its monopoly on two crucial resources in the early years: time and emotional commitment. The powerful influence of the family is not easily undermined. Most students in an American government class like to think of themselves as independent thinkers, especially when it comes to politics. Yet one can predict how the majority of young people will vote simply by knowing the political leanings of their parents. Table 6.2 shows how well people's party identification corresponds with that of their parents.

As children approach adult status, though, some degree of adolescent rebellion against parents and their beliefs often takes place. Witnessing the outpouring of youthful rebellion in the late 1960s and early 1970s, many people thought a generation gap was opening up. Radical youth supposedly condemned their backward-thinking parents. Though such a gap did exist in a few families, the overall evidence for it was slim. Eight years after Jennings and Niemi first interviewed a sample of high school seniors and their parents in the mid-1960s, they still found far more agreement than disagreement across the generational divide. Moving out of the family nest and into adulthood, the offspring did become somewhat less like their parents politically, however.<sup>9</sup> Other socialization agents had apparently exerted influence in the intervening years.

**The Mass Media.** The mass media are "the new parent" according to many observers. Average grade-school youngsters spend more time each week watching television than they spend at school. And television now displaces parents as the chief source of information as children get older.

Unfortunately, today's generation of young adults is significantly less likely to watch television news and read newspapers than their elders. A recent study attributed the relative lack of political knowledge of the youth of the 1990s to their media consumption, or more appropriately, to their lack of it.<sup>10</sup> In 1965, Gallup found virtually no difference between age categories in frequency of following politics through the

**Table 6.2 How Party Identification is Passed Down From One Generation to the Next**

The National Election Study has often asked respondents whether their parents thought of themselves as Democrats, Independents, or Republicans when they were growing up. In the most recent available data, 87 percent of those who could identify the partisanship of both parents reported that their parents agreed on partisan choice. In the following data, you can see how these respondents have generally followed in their parents' footsteps politically.

	DEMOCRAT	INDEPENDENT	REPUBLICAN	TOTAL
Both Parents Democrats	59	29	13	100%
Both Parents Independents	17	67	16	100%
Both Parents Republicans	12	29	59	100%

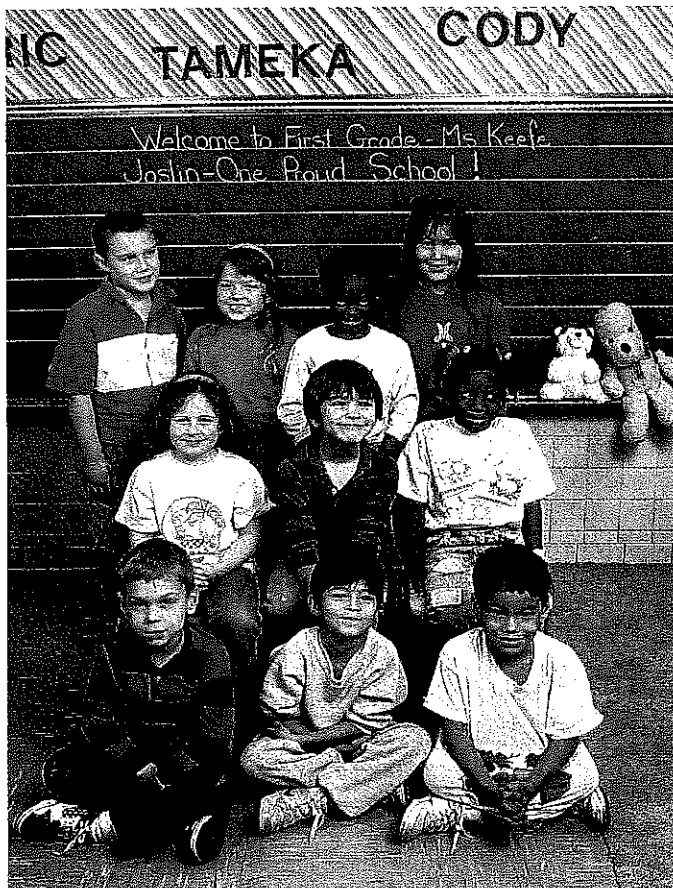
Source: Authors' analysis of 1992 National Election Study data.

media. By the 1990s, a considerable gap had opened up, though, with older people paying the most attention to the news and young adults the least. If you have ever turned on the TV news and wondered why all the commercials seem to be for Geritol, laxatives, or denture cream, now you know why.

**School.** Political socialization is as important to a government as it is to an individual. This is one reason why governments (including America's) often use schools to promote loyalty to the country and support for its basic values. In most American schools, the day begins with the Pledge of Allegiance. During the 1988 presidential campaign, George Bush argued that teachers should be required to lead students in the Pledge. His opponent, Michael Dukakis, had vetoed a bill to require this in Massachusetts, claiming that it was unconstitutional. Underlying Bush's argument was the assumption that proper socialization in the schools was crucial to the American political system—a position that Dukakis disagreed with more in terms of means than in ends.

Governments throughout the world use schools to attempt to raise children committed to the basic values of the system. For years, American children have been successfully educated about the virtues of capitalism and democracy. In the hands of an unscrupulous government, though, educational socialization can sometimes be a dangerous tool. For example, in Nazi Germany, textbooks were used to justify murderous policies. Consider the following example from a Nazi-era math book:

*If a mental patient costs 4 Reichsmarks a day in maintenance, a cripple 5.50, and a criminal 3.50, and about 50,000 of these people are in our institutions, how much does it cost our state at a daily rate of 4 Reichsmarks—and how many marriage loans of 1,000 Reichsmarks per couple could have been given out instead?<sup>11</sup>*



These children—the faces of the coming minority majority population—suggest the unique problem of American political socialization: transforming people of diverse cultural backgrounds and beliefs into participating American citizens.

One can only imagine how the constant exposure, in schools, to this kind of thinking warped the minds of some young people growing up in Nazi Germany.

Both authoritarian and democratic governments care that students learn the positive features of their political system because it helps ensure that youth will grow up to be supportive citizens. David Easton and Jack Dennis have argued that “those children who begin to develop positive feelings toward the political authorities will grow into adults who will be less easily disenchanting with the system than those children who early acquire negative, hostile sentiments.”<sup>12</sup> Of course, this is not always the case. Well-socialized youths of the 1960s led the opposition to the American regime and the war in Vietnam. It could be argued, however, that even these protestors had been positively shaped by the socialization process, for the goal of most activists was to make the system more democratically responsive rather than to change American government radically.

Today, education is often the issue that people cite as the most important to them, and there is no doubt that educational policy matters a great deal. Most American schools are public schools, financed by the government. Their textbooks are often chosen by the local and state boards, and teachers are certified by the state government. Schooling is perhaps the most obvious intrusion of the government into Americans’ socialization. Education exerts a profound influence on a variety of political attitudes and behavior. Better-educated citizens are more likely to vote in elections, they exhibit more knowledge about politics and public policy, and they are more tolerant of opposing (even radical) opinions.

The payoffs of schooling extend beyond better jobs and better pay. Educated citizens also more closely approximate the model of a democratic citizen. A formal civics course may not make much difference, but the whole context of education does. As Albert Einstein once said, “Schools need not preach political doctrine to defend democracy. If they shape men and women capable of critical thought and trained in social attitudes, that is all that is necessary.”

## Political Learning Over a Lifetime

Political learning does not, of course, end when one reaches 18, or even when one graduates from college. Politics is a lifelong activity. Because America is an aging society, it is important to consider the effects of growing older on political learning and behavior.

Aging increases political participation, as well as strength of party attachment. Young adults (those 18 through 25) lack experience with politics. Because political behavior is to some degree learned behavior, there is some learning yet to do. Political participation rises steadily with age until the infirmities of old age make it harder to participate, as can be seen in the data presented in Figure 6.3. Similarly, strength of party identification also increases as one grows older and often develops a pattern for usually voting for one party or another.

Politics, like most other things, is thus a learned behavior. Americans learn to vote, to pick a political party, and to evaluate political events in the world around them. One of the products of all this learning is what is known as public opinion.

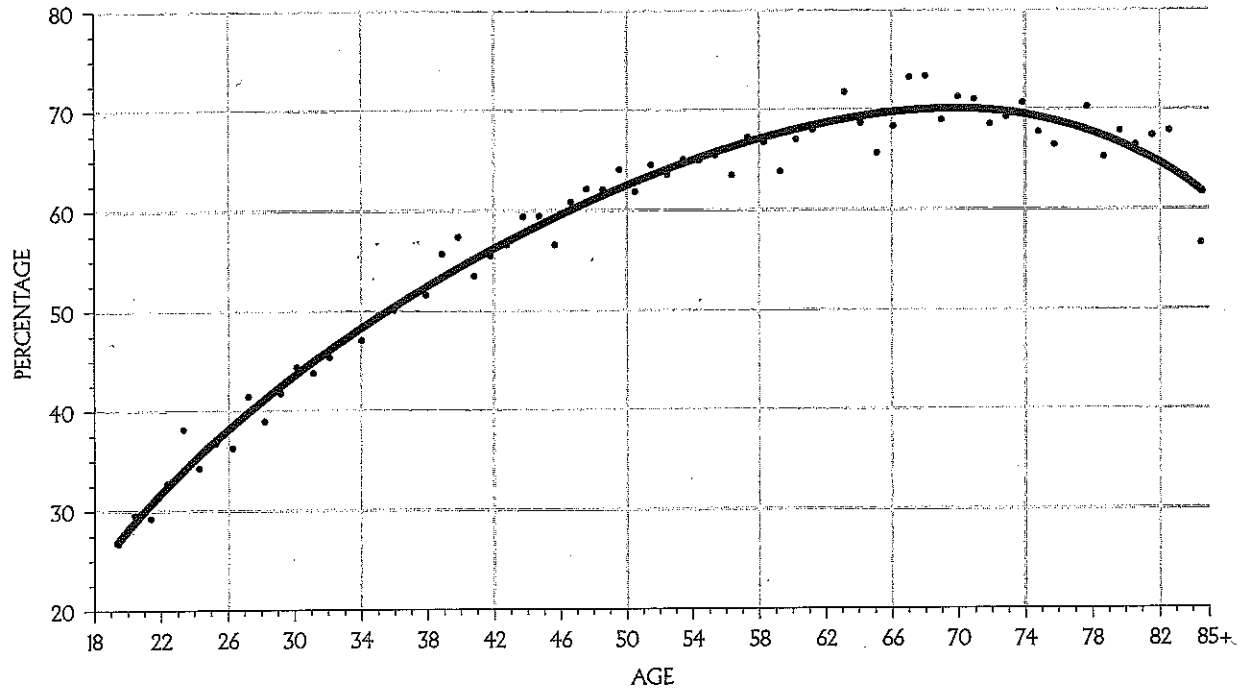


## Measuring Public Opinion and Political Information

Before examining the role that public opinion plays in American politics, it is essential to learn about the science of public opinion measurement. How do we really know the approximate answers to questions such as what percentage of young people favor abortion rights, how many African Americans supported Clinton’s reelection

**Figure 6.3 Turnout by Age, 2000**

This graph shows how turnout in the 2000 presidential election was related to age.



Source: Authors' analysis of 2000 Census Bureau Data.

tion, or what percentage of the public favored impeaching Clinton because of the Lewinsky scandal? Polls provide these answers, but there is much skepticism about polls. Many people wonder how this can be done by only interviewing 1,000 or 1,500 people around the country. This section provides an explanation of how polling works, which will hopefully enable you to become a well-informed consumer of polls.

## How Polls Are Conducted

Public opinion polling is a relatively new science. It was first developed by a young man named George Gallup, who initially did some polling for his mother-in-law, a longshot candidate for secretary of state in Iowa in 1932. With the Democratic landslide of that year, she won a stunning victory, thereby further stimulating Gallup's interest in politics. From that little acorn the mighty oak of public opinion polling has grown. The firm that Gallup founded spread throughout the democratic world, and in some languages, *Gallup* is actually the word used for an opinion poll.<sup>13</sup>

It would be prohibitively expensive and time consuming to ask every citizen his or her opinion on a whole range of issues. Instead, polls rely on a **sample** of the population—a relatively small proportion of people who are chosen to represent the whole. Herbert Asher draws an analogy to a blood test to illustrate the principle of sampling.<sup>14</sup> Your doctor does not need to drain a gallon of blood from you to determine whether you have mononucleosis, AIDS, or any other disease. Rather, a small sample of blood will reveal its properties.

In public opinion polling, a sample of about 1,000 to 1,500 people can accurately represent the “universe” of potential voters. The key to the accuracy of opinion

### sample

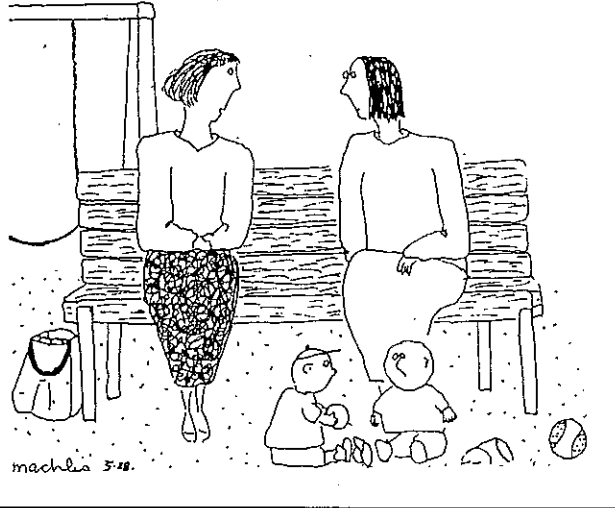
A relatively small proportion of people who are chosen in a survey so as to be representative of the whole.

## QUALITY TIME

Gail Machlis

I know I'd be completely devastated  
if he grew up and registered  
for another political  
party.

© 1999 Chronicle Features

**random sampling**

The key technique employed by sophisticated survey researchers, which operates on the principle that everyone should have an equal probability of being selected for the sample.

**sampling error**

The level of confidence in the findings of a public opinion poll. The more people interviewed, the more confident one can be of the results.

polls is the technique of **random sampling**, which operates on the principle that everyone should have an equal probability of being selected as part of the sample. Your chance of being asked to be in the poll should therefore be as good as that of anyone else—rich or poor, African American or White, young or old, male or female. If the sample is randomly drawn, about 12 percent of those interviewed will be African American, slightly over 50 percent female, and so forth, matching the population as a whole.

Remember that the science of polling involves estimation; a sample can represent the population with only a certain degree of confidence. The level of confidence is known as the **sampling error**, which depends on the size of the sample. The more people interviewed in a poll, the more confident one can be of the results. A typical poll of about 1,500 to 2,000 respondents has a sampling error of  $\pm 3$  percent. What this means is that 95 percent of the time the poll results are within 3 percent of what the entire population thinks. If 60 percent of the sample say they approve of the job the president is doing, one can be pretty certain that the true figure is between 57 and 63 percent.

In order to obtain results that will usually be within sampling error, researchers must follow proper sampling techniques. In perhaps the most infamous survey ever, a 1936 *Literary Digest* poll underestimated the vote for President Franklin Roosevelt by 19 percent, erroneously predicting a big victory for Republican Alf Landon. The well-established magazine suddenly became a laughingstock and soon went out of business. Although the number of responses the magazine obtained for its poll was a staggering 2,376,000, its polling methods were badly flawed. Trying to reach as many people as possible, the magazine drew names from the biggest lists they could find: telephone books and motor vehicle records. In the midst of the Great Depression, the people on these lists were above the average income level (only 40 percent of the public had telephones then; fewer still owned cars) and were more likely to vote



Republican. The moral of the story is this: Accurate representation, not the number of responses, is the most important feature of a public opinion survey. Indeed, as polling techniques have advanced over the last 50 years, typical sample sizes have been getting smaller, not larger.

The newest computer and telephone technology has made surveying less expensive and more commonplace. Until recently, pollsters needed a national network of interviewers to traipse door-to-door in their localities with a clipboard of questions. Now most polling is done on the telephone with samples selected through **random-digit dialing**. Calls are placed to phone numbers within randomly chosen exchanges (for example, 512-471-xxxx) around the country. In this manner, both listed and unlisted numbers are reached at a cost of about one-fifth that of person-to-person interviewing. There are a couple of disadvantages, however. Seven percent of the population does not have a phone, and people are somewhat less willing to participate over the telephone than in person—it is easier to hang up than to slam the door in someone's face. These are small trade-offs for political candidates running for minor offices, for whom telephone polls are the only affordable method of gauging public opinion.

From its modest beginning with George Gallup's 1932 polls for his mother-in-law in Iowa, polling has become a big business. Public opinion polling is one of those American innovations, like soft drinks and fast food restaurants, that has spread throughout the world. From Manhattan to Moscow, from Tulsa to Tokyo, people want to know what other people think.

#### random digit dialing

A technique used by pollsters to place telephone calls randomly to both listed and unlisted numbers when conducting a survey.

## The Role of Polls in American Democracy

Polls help political candidates detect public preferences. Supporters of polling insist that it is a tool for democracy. With it, they say, policymakers can keep in touch with changing opinions on the issues. No longer do politicians have to wait until the next election to see whether the public approves or disapproves of the government's course. If the poll results suddenly turn, then government officials can make corresponding midcourse corrections. Indeed, it was George Gallup's fondest hope that polling could contribute to the democratic process by providing a way for public desires to be heard at times other than elections.

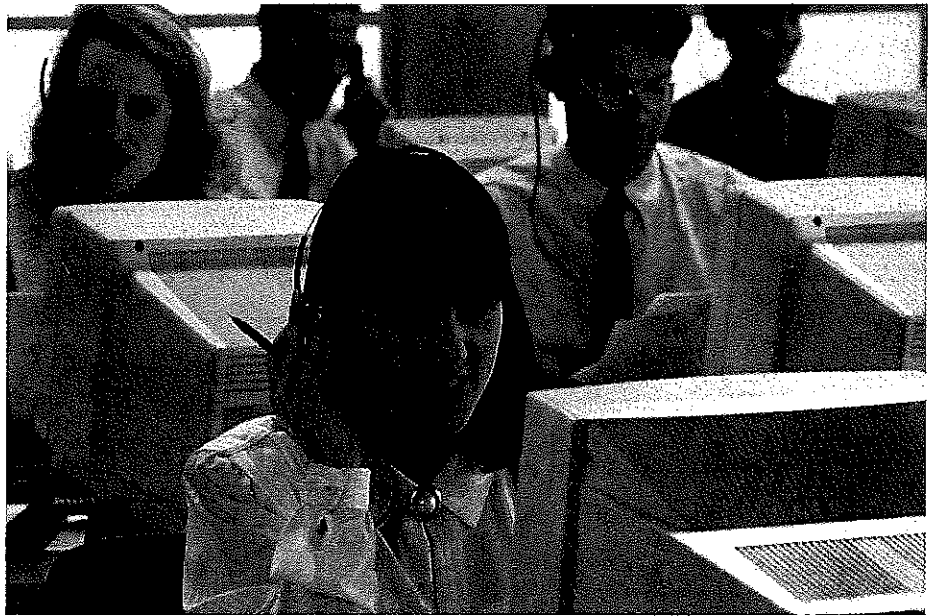
Critics of polling, by contrast, think it makes politicians more concerned with following than leading. Polls might have told the constitutional convention delegates that the Constitution was unpopular or might have told President Thomas Jefferson that people did not want the Louisiana Purchase. Certainly they would have told William Seward not to buy Alaska, a transaction known widely at the time as "Seward's Folly." Polls may thus discourage bold leadership, like that of Winston Churchill, who once said,

*Nothing is more dangerous than to live in the temperamental atmosphere of a Gallup poll, always taking one's pulse and taking one's temperature. . . . There is only one duty, only one safe course, and that is to try to be right and not to fear to do or say what you believe.<sup>15</sup>*

Recent research by Jacobs and Shapiro argues that the common perception of politicians like Bill Clinton pandering to the results of public opinion polls may be mistaken. Their examination of major policy debates in the 1990s finds that political leaders "track public opinion not to make policy but rather to determine how to craft their public presentations and win public support for the policies they and their supporters favor."<sup>16</sup> Staff members in both the White House and the Congress repeatedly remarked that their purpose in conducting polls was not to set policies, but rather the keywords and phrases with which to "sell" policies. Thus, rather than using polls to identify centrist approaches that will have the broadest popular appeal, Jacobs and Shapiro argue that elites use them to formulate strategies that enable them to avoid compromising on what they want to do.



Public opinion polls these days are mostly done over the telephone. Interviewers, most of whom are young people (and frequently college students), sit in front of computer terminals and read the questions that appear on the screen to randomly chosen individuals who they have reached on the phone. They then enter the appropriate coded responses directly into the computer database. Such efficient procedures make it possible for analysts to get survey results very quickly.



Polls can also weaken democracy by distorting the election process. They are often accused of creating a *bandwagon effect*. The wagon carrying the band was the centerpiece of nineteenth-century political parades, and enthusiastic supporters would literally jump on it. Today, the term refers to voters who support a candidate merely because they see that others are doing so. Although only 2 percent of people in a recent CBS/*New York Times* poll said that poll results had influenced them, 26 percent said they thought others had been influenced (showing that Americans feel "It's always the other person who's susceptible"). Beyond this, polls play to the media's interest in who's ahead in the race. The issues of recent presidential campaigns have sometimes been drowned out by a steady flood of poll results.

#### exit polls

Public opinion surveys used by major media pollsters to predict electoral winners with speed and precision.

Probably the most widely criticized type of poll is the election-day *exit poll*. For this type of poll, voting places are randomly selected around the country. Workers are then sent to these places and told to ask every tenth person how they voted. The results are accumulated toward the end of the day, enabling the television networks to project the outcomes of all but very close races before the polls even close. In the presidential elections of 1980, 1984, 1988, and 1996, the networks declared a national winner while millions on the West Coast still had hours to vote. Critics have charged that this practice discourages many people from voting and thereby affects the outcome of some state and local races. Although many voters in the Western states have been outraged by this practice, careful analysis of survey data shows that few voters have actually been influenced by exit-poll results.<sup>17</sup>

In 2000, the exit polls received much of the blame for the media's inaccurate calls of the Florida result on election night. But contrary to common perception, the exit polls deserve only a portion of the blame for the networks' election night fiasco. Because the Florida exit poll showed a small advantage for Gore, the networks could not have called the election based on this information alone. Inaccurate reports and estimates of the actual votes threw off the network prognostications most. The early call for Gore was apparently largely caused by underestimating the size of the absentee vote, which favored Bush. In addition, there was also a serious mistake in the early reporting of the vote in Duval County. Amazingly, the Voter News Service had entered in 95 percent for Gore in this Republican county, which naturally threw off their projection. Then, near the end of the counting on election night, they estimated that there were only about 180,000 votes left when

there were actually twice as many left. Hence, they prematurely gave the state (and the presidency) to Bush, not realizing how much of a chance there was for Gore to close the gap.

Perhaps the most pervasive criticism of polling is that by altering the wording of a question, pollsters can usually get the results they want. Sometimes subtle changes in question wording can produce dramatic differences. For example, a month before the start of the Gulf War, the percentage of the public who thought we should go to war was 18 percentage points higher in the ABC/*Washington Post* poll than in the CBS/*New York Times* poll. The former poll asked whether the United States should go to war “at some point after January 15 or not,” a relatively vague question; in contrast, the latter poll offered an alternative to war, asking whether the “U.S. should start military actions against Iraq, or should the U.S. wait longer to see if the trade embargo and other economic sanctions work.”<sup>18</sup> It is therefore important to evaluate carefully how questions are posed when reading public opinion data.

Polling sounds scientific with its talk of random samples and sampling error; it is easy to take results for solid fact. But being an informed consumer of polls requires more than just a nuts-and-bolts knowledge of how they are conducted. You should think about whether the questions are fair and unbiased before making too much of the results. The good—or the harm—that polls do depends on how well the data are collected and how thoughtfully the data are interpreted.

## What Polls Reveal About Americans’ Political Information

Abraham Lincoln spoke stirring of the inherent wisdom of the American people: “You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can not fool all of the people all of the time.” Obviously, Lincoln recognized the complexity of public opinion.

Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton had very different views about the wisdom of common people. Jefferson trusted people’s good sense and believed that education would enable them to take the tasks of citizenship ever more seriously. Toward that end, he founded the University of Virginia. Hamilton held a contrasting view. His infamous words “Your people, sir, are a great beast” do not reflect confidence in people’s capacity for self-government.

If there had been polling data in the early days of the American republic, Hamilton would probably have delighted in throwing some of the results in Jefferson’s face. If public opinion analysts agree about anything, it is that the level of public knowledge about politics is dismally low. As discussed, this is particularly true for young people, but the overall levels of political knowledge are not particularly encouraging either. For example, in the 2000 National Election Study conducted by the University of Michigan, a random sample was asked to identify the position held by some prominent political leaders. The results were as follows:

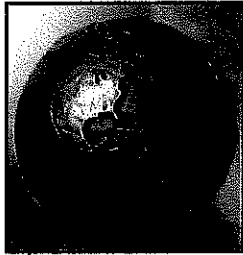
- 51 percent knew Janet Reno was attorney general of the United States
- 30 percent knew Tony Blair was prime minister of the United Kingdom
- 9 percent knew William Rehnquist was chief justice of the Supreme Court
- 7 percent knew that Trent Lott was the Republican leader in the U.S. Senate

With all the results taken into account, the study found that less than half of the population could identify three of these four leaders.

No amount of Jeffersonian faith in the wisdom of the common people can erase the fact that Americans are not well informed about politics. Polls have regularly found that less than half the public can name their representative in the House, much less say how he or she generally votes. Asking most people to explain their opinion on

### Why does it matter?

Does the average American lack the political knowledge required to be a citizen of true democracy? How much political knowledge is enough? Do your family and friends know enough? Do you? How might politics be different if more people were better informed?



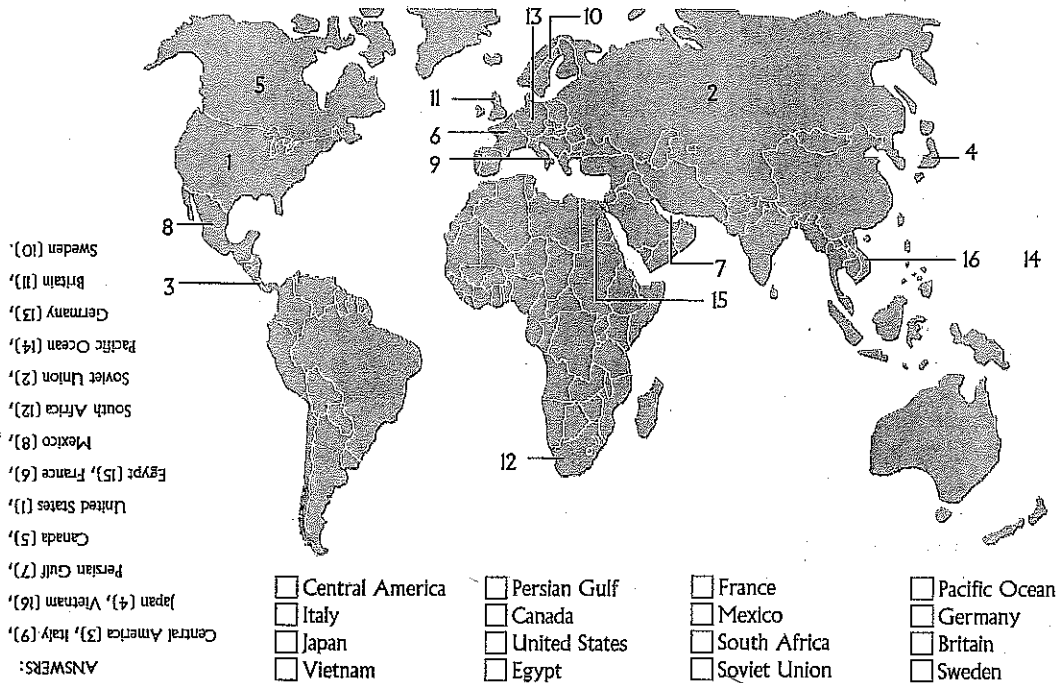
# America in Perspective

## Citizens Show Little Knowledge of Geography

In a major cross-national study, over 12,000 people in 10 nations were asked to identify 16 places on the following world map. The average citizen in the United States could identify barely more than half. Believe it or not, 14 percent of Americans

could not even find their own country on the map. Despite years of fighting in Vietnam, 68 percent could not locate this Southeast Asian country. Such lack of basic geographic knowledge is quite common throughout the world. Here is the average score for each of the 10 countries in which the test was administered:

COUNTRY	AVERAGE SCORE
Sweden	11.6
West Germany	11.2
Japan	9.7
France	9.3
Canada	9.2
United States	8.6
Great Britain	8.5
Italy	7.6
Mexico	7.4
Soviet Union	7.4



Correct answers are upside down at left.

Source: Warren E. Leary, "Two Superpowers' Citizens Do Badly in Geography." Copyright © November 9, 1989, *The New York Times*.

whether trade policy toward China should be liberalized, the proposed "Star Wars" missile defense system, or whether the strategic oil reserve should be tapped when gasoline prices skyrocket often elicits blank looks. When trouble flares in a far-off country, polls regularly find that people have no idea where that country is. In fact, surveys show that citizens around the globe lack a basic awareness of the world around them (see "America in Perspective: Citizens Show Little Knowledge of Geography.")

As Lance Bennett points out, these findings provide "a source of almost bitter humor in light of what the polls tell us about public information on other subjects."<sup>19</sup> He notes that more people know their astrological sign (76 percent) than know the name of their representative in the House. Slogans from TV commercials are better recognized than

famous political figures. Few people knew President Bush's stand on the capital gains tax, but 75 percent of the public could name the vegetable he did not like (broccoli).

How can Americans, who live in the most information-rich society in the world, be so ill-informed about politics? Some blame the schools. E. D. Hirsch, Jr. criticizes schools for a failure to teach "cultural literacy."<sup>20</sup> People, he says, often lack the basic contextual knowledge—for example, where Africa is, what the Vietnam War was about, and so forth—necessary to understand and use the information they receive from the news media or from listening to political candidates. Indeed, it has been found that increased levels of education over the last four decades have scarcely raised public knowledge about politics.<sup>21</sup> Despite the apparent glut of information provided by the media, Americans do not remember much about what they are exposed to through the media. (Of course, there are many critics who say that the media fail to provide much meaningful information, a topic that will be discussed in Chapter 7.)

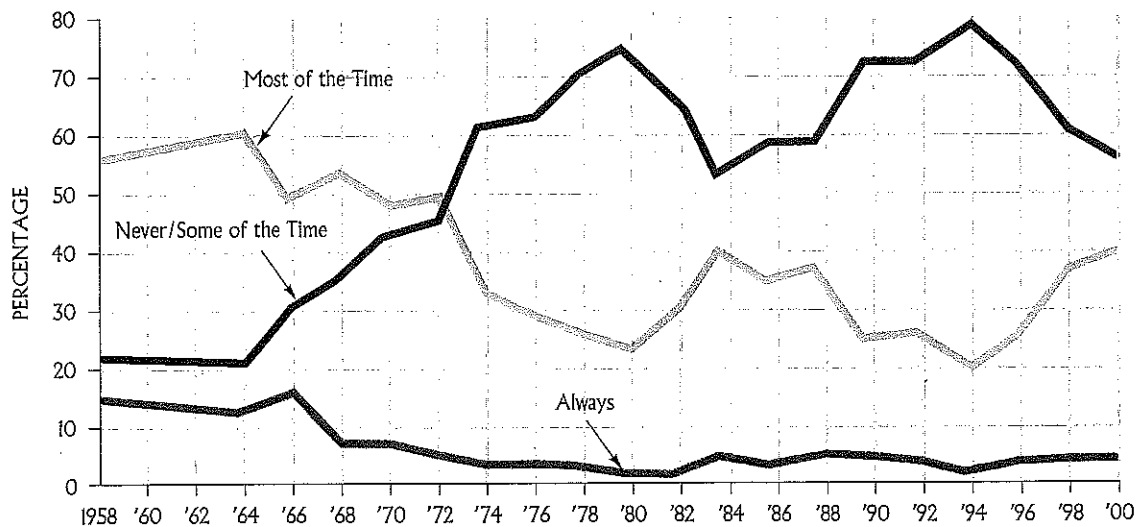
The "paradox of mass politics," says Russell Neuman, is that the American political system works as well as it does given the disconcerting lack of public knowledge about politics.<sup>22</sup> Part of the reason for this phenomenon is that people may not know the ins and outs of policy questions or the actors on the political stage, but they know what basic values they want upheld.

## The Decline of Trust in Government

Sadly, the American public has become increasingly dissatisfied with government over the last four decades, as you can see in Figure 6.4. In the late 1950s and early 1960s about three quarters of Americans said that they trusted the government in Washington to do the right thing always or mostly. Following the 1964 election, however, researchers started to see a precipitous drop in public trust in government. First Vietnam and then Watergate shook the people's confidence in the federal government. The economic troubles of the Carter years and the Iran hostage crisis helped continue the slide; by 1980, only a quarter of the public thought the government could be trusted most of the time or always. During the Reagan years, public cynicism abated a

**Figure 6.4 The Decline of Trust in Government**

This graph shows how people have responded over time to the following question: How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right—just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time.



Source: Authors' analysis of 1958–2000 American National Election Study data.

bit, but by 1994, trust in government had plummeted again to another all-time low. Since 1994, trust in government has improved somewhat, but it seems unlikely that we will see trust return to the optimistic levels of the Kennedy years any time soon.

Some analysts have noted that a healthy dose of public cynicism helps to keep politicians on their toes. Others, however, note that a democracy is based on the consent of the governed and that a lack of public trust in the government is a reflection of their belief that the system is not serving them well. When people feel that government is not working according to the values they subscribe to, the sleeping giant of public opinion may be stirred to action. Examining these values is thus of great importance.

## What Americans Value: Political Ideologies

### political ideology

A coherent set of beliefs about politics, public policy, and public purpose. It helps give meaning to political events, personalities, and policies. See also **liberalism** and **conservatism**.

A coherent set of values and beliefs about public policy is a **political ideology**. Liberal ideology, for example, supports a wide scope for the central government, often involving policies that aim to promote equality. Conservative ideology, in contrast, supports a less active scope of government that gives freer reign to the private sector. Table 6.3 attempts to summarize some of the key differences between liberals and conservatives.

## Who Are the Liberals and Conservatives?

Overall, more Americans consistently choose the ideological label of **conservative** over **liberal**. Combining data from the 1996 and 1998 National Election Studies (in order to have more cases to analyze), we found that of those who labeled themselves, 42 per-

**Table 6.3 How to Tell a Liberal From a Conservative**

*Liberal and conservative*—these labels are thrown around in American politics as though everyone knows what they mean. Here are some of the political beliefs likely to be preferred by liberals and conservatives. This table, to be sure, is oversimplified.

	LIBERALS	CONSERVATIVES
<b>FOREIGN POLICY:</b>		
Military spending	Believe we should spend less	Believe we should maintain peace through strength
Use of force	Less willing to commit troops to action, such as in the Persian Gulf War	More likely to support military intervention around the world
<b>SOCIAL POLICY:</b>		
Abortion	Support "freedom of choice"	Support "right to life"
Prayer in schools	Are opposed	Are supportive
Affirmative action	Favor	Oppose
<b>ECONOMIC POLICY:</b>		
Scope of government	View government as a regulator in the public interest	Favor free-market solutions
Taxes	Want to tax the rich more	Want to keep taxes low
Spending	Want to spend more on the poor	Want to keep spending low
<b>CRIME:</b>		
How to cut crime	Believe we should solve the problems that cause crime	Believe we should stop "coddling criminals"
Defendants' rights	Believe we should guard them carefully	Believe we should stop letting criminals hide behind laws

cent were conservatives, 34 percent were moderates, and just 25 percent were liberals. The predominance of conservative thinking in America is one of the most important reasons for the relatively restrained scope of government activities compared to most European nations.

Yet, there are some groups that are more liberal than others, and thus would generally like to see the government do more. Among people under the age of 30, there are just as many liberals as conservatives (see Table 6.4). The younger the individual, the less likely that person is to be a conservative. The fact that younger people are also less likely to vote, therefore means that conservatives are overrepresented at the polls.

In general, groups with political clout tend to be more conservative than groups whose members have often been shut out from the halls of political power. This is because excluded groups have often looked to the government to rectify the inequalities they have faced. For example, African Americans benefited from government activism in the form of the major civil rights bills of the 1960s to bring them into the mainstream of American life. Many African-American leaders currently place a high priority on retaining social welfare and affirmative action programs in order to assist their progress. It should come as little surprise then that African Americans are more liberal than the national average. Similarly, Hispanics also are less conservative than Whites, and if this pattern continues into the twenty-first century the influx of many more Hispanics into the electorate will move the country in a slightly liberal direction.

Women are not a minority group, making up about 54 percent of the population, but they have nevertheless been politically and economically disadvantaged. Compared to men, women are more likely to support spending on social services and to oppose the higher levels of military spending, which conservatives typically advocate. It is these issues concerning the priorities of government rather than the issue of abortion—on which men and women actually differ very little—that leads women to be significantly less conservative than men. This ideological difference between men

**Table 6.4 The Political Ideology of Various Demographic Groups**

The following table shows the percentage of liberals, moderates, and conservatives among each demographic group. Those who said they didn't usually think of themselves in these terms, or didn't know, are excluded. (Numbers may not always add up to 100 due to rounding.)

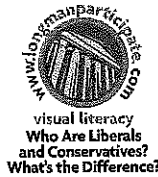
	LIBERAL	MODERATE	CONSERVATIVE
Women	27	36	37
Men	22	30	47
18-29	34	32	34
30-44	25	34	41
45-64	23	31	46
65+	16	38	47
White	24	33	43
African-American	31	37	32
Hispanic	27	37	36
lower third in family income	25	37	38
middle third in family income	26	37	37
upper third in family income	24	28	49
Protestant	18	34	49
Catholic	25	35	41
Jewish	63	20	18
No religion	39	36	25

Source: Authors' analysis of 1996 and 1998 American National Election Study data combined.

**gender gap**

A term that refers to the regular pattern by which women are more likely to support Democratic candidates.

Women tend to be significantly less conservative than men and are more likely to support spending on social services and to oppose higher levels of military spending.



and women has led to the **gender gap**, which refers to the regular pattern by which women are more likely to support Democratic candidates. Bill Clinton carried the women's vote while Bob Dole was preferred among men in 1996, making Clinton the first president who can be said to be elected via the support of only one gender. In 2000, exit polls showed that women were about 12 percent more likely to support Al Gore than men.

The gender gap is a relatively new predictor of ideological positions, dating back only to 1980, when Ronald Reagan was first elected. A much more traditional source of division between liberals and conservatives has been financial status, or what is often known as social class. But as you can see in Table 6.4, the relationship between family income and ideology is now relatively weak. As a result, social class has become much less predictive of political behavior than it used to be.<sup>23</sup>

The role of religion in influencing political ideology has also changed greatly in recent years. Catholics and Jews, as minority groups who struggled for equality, have long been more liberal than Protestants. Today, Jews remain by far the most liberal demographic group in the country.<sup>24</sup> However, the ideological gap between Catholics and Protestants is now smaller than the gender gap. Ideology is now determined more by religiosity—that is, the degree to which religion is important in one's life—than by religious denomination. What is known as the new Christian Right consists of Catholics and Protestants who consider themselves fundamentalists or “born again.” The influx of new policy issues dealing with matters of morality and traditional family values has recently tied this aspect of religious beliefs to political ideology. Those who identify themselves as “born again” Christians are currently the most conservative demographic group. On the other hand, people who say they have no religious affiliation (roughly one-tenth of the population) are more liberal than conservative.

Just as some people are very much guided by their religious beliefs whereas others are not, the same is true for political ideology. It would probably be a mistake to assume that when conservative candidates do better than they have in the past that this necessarily means people want more conservative policies, for not everyone thinks in ideological terms.

## Do People Think in Ideological Terms?

The authors of the classic study *The American Voter* first examined how much people rely on ideology to guide their political thinking.<sup>25</sup> They divided the public into four groups, according to ideological sophistication. Their portrait of the American electorate was not flattering. Only 12 percent of the people showed evidence of thinking in ideological terms and thus were classified as *ideologues*. These people could connect their opinions and beliefs with broad policy positions taken by parties or candidates. They might say, for example, that they liked the Democrats because they were more liberal or the Republicans because they favored a smaller government. Forty-two percent of Americans were classified as *group benefits* voters. These people thought of politics mainly in terms of the groups they liked or disliked; for example, “Republicans support small business owners like me” or “Democrats are the party of the working person.” Twenty-four percent of the population were *nature of the times* voters. Their handle on politics was limited to whether the times seemed good or bad to them; they might vaguely link the party in power with the country's fortune or misfortune. Finally, 22 percent of the voters were devoid of any ideological or issue content in their political evaluations. They were called the *no issue content* group. Most of them simply voted routinely for a party or judged the candidates solely by their personalities. Overall, at least during the 1950s, Americans seemed to care little about the differences between liberal and conservative politics.

There has been much debate about whether this portrayal accurately characterizes the public today. Nie, Verba, and Petrocik took a look at the changing American voter from 1956 to 1972 and argued that voters were more sophisticated in the 1970s

than in the 1950s.<sup>26</sup> Others, though, have concluded that people only seemed more informed and ideological because the wording of the questions had changed.<sup>27</sup> If the exact same methods are used to update the analysis of *The American Voter* through more recent elections, one finds some increase in the proportion of ideologues, but not much. The last time these methods were employed was in 1988, and then just 18 percent were classified as ideologues, as compared to 12 percent in 1956. Given that George Bush continually labeled his 1988 opponent Michael Dukakis as “that liberal Governor from the most liberal state in the country,” it is striking how few people actually evaluated the parties and candidates in ideological terms.

These findings do not mean that the vast majority of the population does not have a political ideology. Rather, for most people the terms *liberal* and *conservative* are just not as important as they are for the political elite such as politicians, activists, journalists, and the like. Relatively few people have ideologies that organize their political beliefs as clearly as shown in Table 6.3. Thus, the authors of *The American Voter* concluded that to speak of election results as indicating a movement of the public either left (to more liberal policies) or right (to more conservative policies) is not justified because most voters do not think in such terms. Furthermore, those who do are actually the least likely to shift from one election to the next.

*The American Voter* argued persuasively that Republican Dwight Eisenhower’s two election victories did not represent a shift in the conservative direction during the 1950s. In the 1980s, the issue of whether public opinion had undergone a major rightward change was once again raised in the wake of the victories of Ronald Reagan, who campaigned vigorously against intrusive government.

## Has There Been a Turn Toward Conservatism?

Ronald Reagan was clearly the most conservative president since the New Deal. During his eight years as president, he pressed ahead with a thoroughly conservative agenda that included:

- Reduced levels of government spending on domestic programs such as welfare and federal aid to education
- Increased defense spending, and support for foreign political movements that claimed to be fighting communism
- A 25 percent across-the-board reduction in federal income tax rates
- Support for a conservative social agenda, including prayer in schools, stronger law enforcement, and antiabortion legislation

With Reagan’s landslide reelection victory in 1984, some political observers felt that a conservative wildfire had swept the country. Numerous Democratic leaders warned party members not to be left out on a liberal limb. “Don’t be the party of more taxing and spending,” they cautioned fellow Democrats. In 1992, Bill Clinton followed this advice, saying that his vision for government was “not tax and spend, but invest, educate, innovate, a partnership between government and business.”<sup>28</sup>

Despite Reagan’s victories throughout the 1980s, scholarly analyses included the common theme that people liked Reagan but not his policies. With the exception of a rise in support for military spending during the 1980 campaign, public opinion specialists were unable to document any shift toward conservative attitudes during the 1980s. As Ferguson and Rogers concluded, “If American public opinion drifted anywhere over Reagan’s first term, it was toward the left, not the right, just the opposite of the turn in public policy.”<sup>29</sup> Asked to assess Reagan’s time in office, the 1988 electorate was evenly split on the wisdom of defense increases, and was generally unaware and unsupportive of domestic cuts.<sup>30</sup>

If so many people disagreed with Reagan, why was he such a popular president, and why was George Bush able to run successfully on his record in 1988? The answer is simply that many swing voters, those whom *The American Voter* classified as *nature of the*





times voters, care more about results than ideology.<sup>31</sup> The 1980 election was more about voting Carter out of office than voting Reagan into it. In 1984 and 1988, the Republicans had a record of relative peace and prosperity on their side, which was the key to victories for Reagan and Bush. With the economic downturn in 1992, these same swing voters decided that it was time for a change and propelled Bill Clinton into the White House.

Clinton's time in the White House marked a return to largely centrist policies. His major success has been to eliminate the budget deficit without cutting social programs. He did increase taxes somewhat in his first yearly budget, but not by nearly as much as most liberals would have liked. Clinton's only real venture into advocating liberal programs was a complex scheme to eventually guarantee health care coverage to all Americans. This ambitious proposal proved to be the biggest policy failure of his presidency, and never really got off the ground in Congress—due in part to strong opposition from many political activists concerned with health care policy (see Chapter 19 for further details).

## How Americans Participate in Politics

In politics, as in many other aspects of life, the squeaky wheel gets the grease. The way citizens “squeak” in politics is to participate. Americans have many avenues of political participation open to them.

- Mrs. Jones of Iowa City goes to a neighbor's living room to attend her local precinct's presidential caucus.
- Demonstrators against abortion protest at the Supreme Court on the anniversary of the *Roe v. Wade* decision.
- Parents in Alabama file a lawsuit to oppose textbooks that, in their opinion, promote “secular humanism.”
- Mr. Smith, a Social Security recipient, writes to his senator to express his concern about a possible cut in his cost-of-living benefits.
- Over 100 million people vote in a presidential election.

All these activities are types of political participation. **Political participation** encompasses the many activities in which citizens engage to influence the selection of political leaders or the policies they pursue.<sup>32</sup> Participation can be overt or subtle. The mass protests throughout Eastern Europe in the Fall of 1989 represented an avalanche of political participation, yet quietly writing a letter to your congressperson also represents political participation. Political participation can be violent or peaceful, organized or individual, casual or consuming.

Generally, the United States has a culture that values political participation. Citizens express pride in their nation: 87 percent say they are very proud to be Americans.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, just 51 percent of adult Americans voted in the presidential election of 2000, and only 36 percent turned out for the 1998 midterm elections. At the local level, the situation is even worse, with elections for city council and school board often drawing less than 10 percent of the eligible voters. (For more on voter turnout and why it is so low, see Chapter 10.)

### Conventional Participation

Although the line is hard to draw, political scientists generally distinguish between two broad types of participation: conventional and unconventional. Conventional participation includes many widely accepted modes of influencing government—voting, trying to persuade others, ringing doorbells for a petition, running for office, and so on. In contrast, unconventional participation includes activities that are often dramatic, such as protesting, civil disobedience, and even violence.

For a few, politics is their lifeblood; they run for office, work regularly in politics, and live for the next election. The number of Americans for whom political

#### political participation

All the activities used by citizens to influence the selection of political leaders or the policies they pursue. The most common, but not the only, means of political participation in a democracy is voting. Other means include protest and civil disobedience.



There are many ways of participating in politics beyond voting. One conventional form of participating is to sign a petition concerning a political issue. Here, some New York residents are shown signing a petition demanding stricter control of water pollution.

activity is an important part of their everyday life is minuscule; they number at most in the tens of thousands. To these people, policy questions are as familiar as slogans on TV commercials are to the average citizen. They are the political elites—activists, party leaders, interest group leaders, judges, members of Congress, and other public officials. (Part 3 of this book will discuss the political elite in detail.)

Millions take part in political activities beyond simply voting. In two comprehensive studies of American political participation conducted by Sidney Verba and his colleagues, samples of Americans were asked in 1967 and 1987 about their role in various kinds of political activities.<sup>34</sup> Included were voting, working in campaigns, contacting government officials, and working on local community issues. Voting was the only aspect of political participation that a majority of the population reported engaging in, but also the only political activity for which there is evidence of a decline in participation in recent years. Substantial increases in participation were found on the dimensions of giving money to candidates and contacting public officials, and small increases are evident for all the other activities. Thus, although the decline of voter turnout is a development Americans should rightly be concerned about (see Chapter 10), a broader look at political participation reveals some positive developments for participatory democracy.

### Protest as Participation

From the Boston Tea Party to burning draft cards, to demonstrating against abortion, Americans have engaged in countless political protests. **Protest** is a form of political participation designed to achieve policy change through dramatic and unconventional tactics. The media's willingness to cover the unusual can make protests worthwhile, drawing attention to a point of view that many Americans might otherwise never encounter. For example, when an 89-year-old woman decided to try to walk across the country to draw attention to the need for campaign finance reform, she put this issue onto the front page of newspapers most everywhere she traveled (see "Making a Difference: Granny D and Her Walk for Campaign Finance Reform"). Using much more flamboyant means, the AIDS activist group appropriately called "ACT-UP" interrupts political gatherings to draw attention to the need for AIDS research. In fact, protests today are often orches-

#### protest

A form of political participation designed to achieve policy change through dramatic and unconventional tactics.



## Making a Difference

### Granny D and Her Walk for Campaign Finance Reform

Doris Haddock was tired of hearing in the media that people didn't really care about campaign finance reform. She cared deeply about this issue, and she thought the majority of Americans agreed with her. On her web site ([www.grannyd.com](http://www.grannyd.com)) she announced that: "My goal is to convince Congress that We, The People, do care about Campaign Finance Reform."

At the beginning of 1999, this New Hampshire woman resolved to do something unusual that would draw the attention of the media and the politicians to her cause. On New Year's Day she traveled to the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Calif. to begin a cross-country walk to Washington, D.C. to protest how political campaigns are financed. Her web site announced that, "I shall travel as a pilgrim, seeking not your money, but food,

shelter, and signatures on my petition. My petition will read: "We the people of the United States of America request our congress to enact with all due speed meaningful campaign finance reform."

Doris Haddock was hardly the first person to traverse the country on behalf of a cause, but she was a most unlikely candidate for such a task. What made her pilgrimage remarkable was the fact that Doris Haddock was then 89 years old and a great-grandmother. She figured the media could hardly ignore such a story, and she was right.

Moving at a pace of 10 miles per day, Granny D—the nickname Mrs. Haddock assumed for publicity purposes—soon encountered desert heat and wind that would discourage most young and healthy people from continuing. Near the California-Arizona border she became so exhausted and run down by dehydration and pneumonia that she required hospi-

talization. Many of her family and friends felt it was too risky for her to continue. But Granny D was soon back on the road with a support team and equipment provided by Common Cause, a public interest group that has long urged campaign finance reform.

In February 2000, Granny D finally made it all the way to Washington, D.C., accompanied by 2,200 fellow walkers as she approached the Capitol. Along the way, she had publicized her cause through numerous media interviews and met with various members of Congress in their local offices. Tens of thousands of ordinary citizens had come out to see her, sign her petition, and sometimes walk along with her for a while. The National Association of Secretaries of State issued a resolution commending her "for showing that one person can make a difference."

#### civil disobedience

A form of political participation that reflects a conscious decision to break a law believed to be immoral and to suffer the consequences.

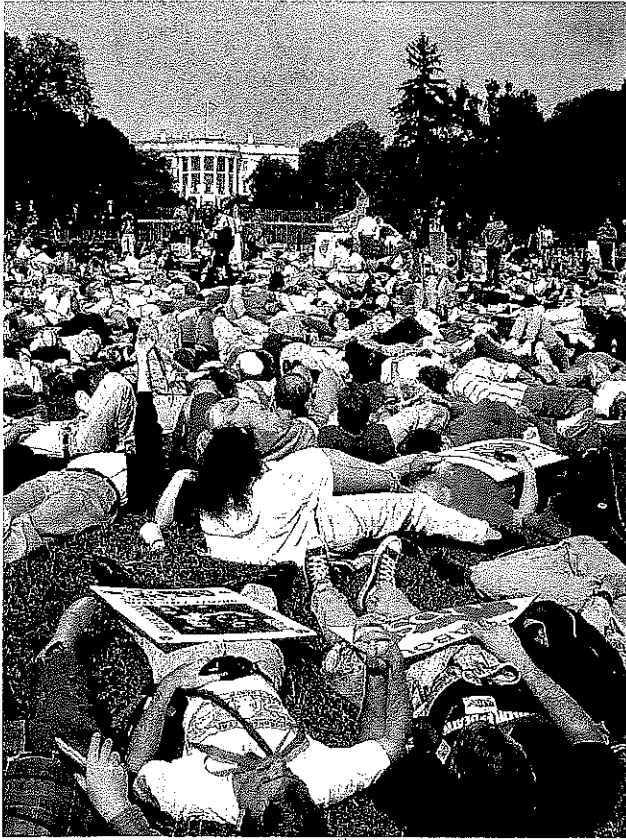
trated to provide television cameras with vivid images. Demonstration coordinators steer participants to prearranged staging areas and provide facilities for press coverage.

Throughout American history, individuals and groups have sometimes used **civil disobedience** as a form of protest; that is, they have consciously broken a law that they thought was unjust. In the 1840s, Henry David Thoreau refused to pay his taxes as a protest against the Mexican War and went to jail; he stayed only overnight because his friend Ralph Waldo Emerson paid the taxes. Influenced by India's Mahatma Gandhi, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. won a Nobel Peace Prize for his civil disobedience against segregationist laws in the 1950s and 1960s. His "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" is a classic defense of civil disobedience.<sup>35</sup>

Sometimes political participation can be violent. The history of violence in American politics is a long one—not surprising, perhaps, for a nation born in rebellion. The turbulent 1960s included many outbreaks of violence. African-American neighborhoods in American cities were torn by riots. College campuses were sometimes turned into battle zones as protestors against the Vietnam War fought police and National Guard units. At a number of campuses, demonstrations turned violent; students were killed at Kent State and Jackson State in 1970. Although supported by few people, violence has been a means of pressuring the government to change its policies throughout American history.

### Class, Inequality, and Participation

The rates of political participation are unequal among Americans. Virtually every study of political participation has come to the conclusion that "citizens of higher social economic status participate more in politics. This generalization . . . holds true



Unconventional protest techniques are the trademark of ACT-UP, an AIDS awareness protest group. Here, members of the group are lying down near the White House, defying police orders to disperse. Members of ACT-UP believe that such dramatic protests are necessary to keep the issue of AIDS in the public eye.



Perhaps the best-known image of American political violence from the late-1960s to early-1970s period: A student lies dead on the Kent State campus, one of four killed when members of the Ohio National Guard opened fire on anti-Vietnam War demonstrators.

whether one uses level of education, income, or occupation as the measure of social status."<sup>36</sup> Figure 6.5 presents recent evidence on this score. Note that not only are people with higher incomes more likely to donate money to campaigns, but also to participate in other ways that do not even require financial resources. Theorists who believe that America is ruled by a small, wealthy elite make much of this fact to support their view.

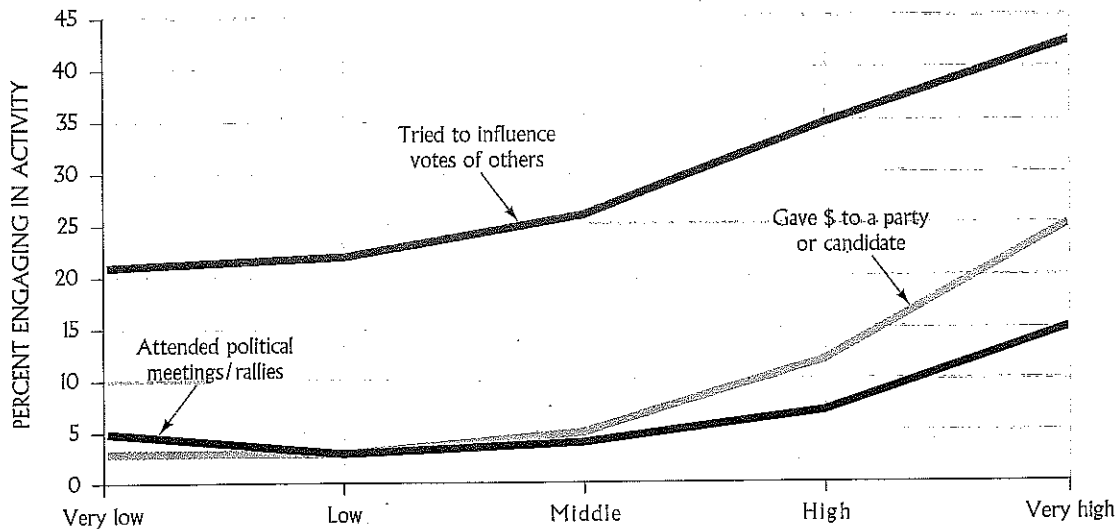
The participation differences between African Americans and Hispanics and the national average are no longer enormous, however. For African Americans, participation in 1996 was a mere 4 percentage points below the national average; for Hispanic

Nonviolent civil disobedience was one of the most effective techniques of the civil rights movement in the American South. Young African Americans sat at “Whites only” lunch counters to protest segregation. Photos such as this drew national attention to the injustice of racial discrimination.



**Figure 6.5 Political Participation by Family Income**

The following graph shows, by their income status, the percentage of the adult population who said they participated in various forms of political activity.



Source: Authors' analysis of 1996 National Election Study data.

**Why does it matter?**

Is inequality in political participation a problem? How so? How would politics be different if people of all age, ethnic, and income groups participated equally? Do you participate in politics? If not, why?

citizens it was 10 percent. One reason for this smaller-than-expected participation gap is that minorities have a group consciousness that gives them an extra incentive to vote. In fact, when African Americans, Hispanics, and Whites of equal income and education are compared, the minorities participate more in politics.<sup>37</sup> In other words, a poor Hispanic or African American is more likely to participate than a poor White. In general, lower rates of political participation among these minority groups are linked with lower socioeconomic status.

People who believe in the promise of democracy should definitely be concerned with the inequalities of political participation in America. Those who participate are easy to listen to; nonparticipants are easy to ignore. Just as the makers of denture cream do not worry too much about people with healthy teeth, many politicians don't concern themselves much with the views of groups with low participation rates, such as the young and people with low incomes. [Who gets what in politics therefore depends in part on who participates]



## How You Can Make a Difference

Whether it's campaign finance reform, or any other issue you feel strongly about, there are ways that you, too, can make a difference. First, if you have not done so already, immerse yourself in the issues. Learn the ins and outs of existing laws pertaining to the issue you are concerned about. If the issue is campaign finance, learn about the role of political action committees (PACs), campaign finance laws, and soft money. Similarly, develop a basic understanding of the corrective legislation that has been proposed to deal with these problems, such as the McCain-Feingold bill. For information on these topics, including lists of books, federal resources, interest groups, etc., go

to <http://campaignfinance.homestead.com> or go to [www.commoncause.org](http://www.commoncause.org) for an amazing amount of easily understood and well-organized information on campaign finance reform.

Another thing to do is to join an interest group that represents your position on the issue, and if you can't find one, start your own!

Find out where your congressperson and senators stand on the issue. Write, call, or e-mail their offices informing them of your position and asking them to support or introduce appropriate legislation. Keep up the letter writing campaign until your representative promises results.

If feasible, organize an event to garner media exposure for your views. An

effective event can be anything from a classic protest march to something more original like a mock auction of congressional votes, a controversial art exhibit on special interests, or in the case of Granny D, a walk across the country. Be creative, but stay within the bounds of the law unless you are willing to pay the consequences.

Volunteer your time to help support candidates who promise to legislate for the issue you hold dear. If you live in a state that allows public initiatives, start or get involved with a group to place an initiative on the ballot.

On Election Day, send a clear signal by voting for those who support what you favor.

## Understanding Public Opinion and Political Action

In 1989, people protested for democracy throughout much of the communist world. Many said they wanted their political system to be just like America's, even though they had only a vague idea of how American democracy works. As this chapter has shown, there are many limits on the role Americans play in their political system. The average person is not very well informed about political issues, including the crucial issue of the scope of government.

### Public Attitudes Toward the Scope of Government

Central to the ideology of the Republican Party is the belief that the scope of American government has become too wide-ranging. According to Ronald Reagan, probably the most admired Republican in recent history, government was not the solution to society's problems—it was the problem. He called for the government to “get off the backs of the American people.”

Reagan's rhetoric about an overly intrusive government was reminiscent of the 1964 presidential campaign rhetoric of Barry Goldwater, who lost to Lyndon Johnson in a landslide. Indeed, Reagan first made his mark in politics by giving a televised speech on behalf of the embattled Goldwater campaign. Although the rhetoric was much the same when Ronald Reagan was first elected president in 1980, public opinion about the scope of government had changed dramatically. In 1964, only 30 percent of the population thought the government was getting too powerful; by 1980, this figure had risen to 50 percent.

For much of the population, however, questions about the scope of government have consistently elicited no opinion at all. Indeed, when this question was last asked

in the 2000 National Election Study, 42 percent of those interviewed said they had not thought about the question (among those under 25 years of age, this figure was 60 percent). The question of government power is a complex one, but as *Government in America* will continue to emphasize, it is one of the key controversies in American politics today. Once again, it seems that the public is not nearly so concerned with political issues as would be ideal in a democratic society.

Nor does public opinion on different aspects of the same issue exhibit much consistency. Thus, although more people today think the government is too active, a plurality has consistently called for more spending on such programs as education, health care, aid to big cities, protecting the environment, and fighting crime. Many political scientists have looked at these contradictory findings and concluded that Americans are ideological conservatives but operational liberals—meaning that they oppose the idea of big government in principle but favor it in practice. The fact that public opinion is often contradictory in this respect contributes to policy gridlock because it is hard for politicians to know which aspect of the public's attitudes to respond to.

### Democracy, Public Opinion, and Political Action

Remember, though, that American democracy is representative rather than direct. As *The American Voter* stated many years ago, "The public's explicit task is to decide not what government shall do but rather who shall decide what government shall do."<sup>38</sup> When individuals under communist rule protested for democracy, what they wanted most was the right to have a say in choosing their leaders. Americans can—and often do—take for granted the opportunity to replace their leaders at the next election. Protest is thus directed at making the government listen to specific demands, not overthrowing it. In this sense, it can be said that American citizens have become well socialized to democracy.

If the public's task in democracy is to choose who is to lead, we must still ask whether it can do so wisely. If people know little about where candidates stand on issues, how can they make rational choices? Most choose performance criteria over policy criteria. As Morris Fiorina has written, citizens typically have one hard bit of data to go on: "They know what life has been like during the incumbent's administration. They need not know the precise economic or foreign policies of the incumbent administration in order to see or feel the results of those policies."<sup>39</sup> Thus, even if they are only voting according to the nature of the times, their voices are clearly being heard—holding public officials accountable for their actions.

### Summary

American society is amazingly varied. The ethnic makeup of America is changing to a minority majority. Americans are moving toward warmer parts of the country and growing older as a society. All these changes have policy consequences. One way of understanding the American people is through demography—the science of population changes. Demography, it is often said, is destiny.

Another way to understand the American people is through examination of public opinion in the United States. What Americans believe—and what they believe they know—is public opinion, the distribution of people's beliefs about politics and policy issues. Polling is one important way of studying public opinion; polls give us a fairly accurate gauge of public opinion on issues, products, and personalities. On the positive side for democracy, polls help keep political leaders in touch with the feelings of their constituents. On the negative side, polls may lead politicians "play to the crowds" instead of providing leadership.

Polls have revealed again and again that the average American has a low level of political knowledge. Far more Americans know their astrological sign than know the

names of their representatives in Congress. Ideological thinking is not widespread in the American public, nor are people necessarily consistent in their attitudes. Often they are conservative in principle but liberal in practice; that is, they are against big government but favor more spending on a wide variety of programs.

Acting on one's opinions is political participation. Although Americans live in a participatory culture, their actual level of participation is less than spectacular. In this country, participation is a class-biased activity; certain groups participate more than others. Those who suffer the most inequality sometimes resort to protest as a form of participation. Perhaps the best indicator of how well socialized Americans are to democracy is that protest typically is aimed at getting the attention of the government, not overthrowing it.

## Career Profile

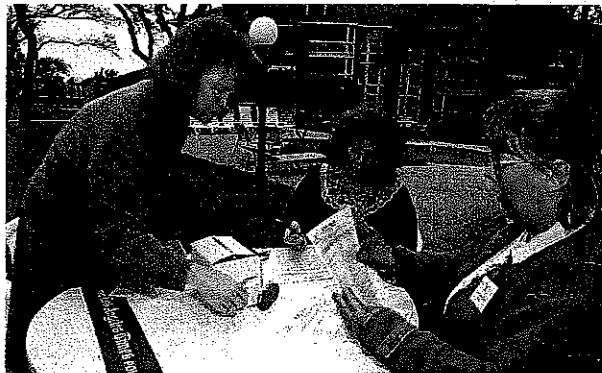
**Position:** Project Director

**Employer:** Hamilton Beattie and Staff, a political polling firm

**Salary Range:** \$38,000-\$58,000

**Benefits:** health, 401k, profit sharing

**Qualifications:** bachelor's degree in politics, statistics, sociology or history, and an interest in and knowledge of politics and political campaigns. Attention to detail a must. Knowledge of survey research techniques also needed. A master's degree in political science, statistics, political campaigning, or similar field is helpful but not required.



### Real People on the Job: Maggie Ryner

Maggie Ryner is a project director at Hamilton Beattie and Staff, one of the oldest political polling firms in the United States. Since 1964, HB&S has conducted over 10,000 surveys for over 400 political campaigns in all 50

states and 22 different countries. Their clients include political parties, candidates, the media, interest groups, and major corporations. Their polls have helped elect U.S. senators, U.S. congressmen and women, governors, and state legislators. Past clients include U.S. Representative Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill, David Wu, Bella Abzug, and Claude Pepper; U.S. Senators Lloyd Bentsen, Bob Graham, and John Glenn; and Governors Bruce Babbitt and Martha Layne Collins.

Maggie's job at HB&S involves designing and constructing polling questionnaires, supervising the administration of surveys (including the computer programming and data analysis), and overseeing quality control. She also coordinates focus groups. In addition to working with domestic clients, she is responsible for coordinating field services with international clients in Eastern Europe and Scandinavia. She has also traveled to many Caribbean nations, where she's conducted research operations on the ground, work that involved coordinating personal interviews, cross-tabulating data, and sending the results back to the analysts in Washington, D.C.

If you would like to work for a political polling firm, make sure you agree with the party positions or ideology of the firm's clients. There are firms that only work for Democrats or for Republicans. To make yourself marketable to a polling firm, you should have some knowledge of politics and campaigns, preferably hands-on experience. Volunteer for a campaign. Election years are a great time to get this experience since every campaign needs extra hands. Campaign experience looks good on your résumé when you go job hunting and it allows you to meet the players on the field before you get up to bat. Additionally, there are some good graduate programs in campaigning, public opinion, and statistical methodology.



## Key Terms

public opinion	political socialization	liberalism
demography	sample	conservatism
census	random sampling	gender gap
melting pot	sampling error	political participation
minority majority	random-digit dialing	protest
political culture	exit poll	civil disobedience
reapportionment	political ideology	

## For Further Reading

Asher, Herbert. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1998. A highly readable introduction to the perils and possibilities of polling and surveys.

Campbell, Angus, et al. *The American Voter*. New York: Wiley, 1960. The classic study of the American voter, based on data from the 1950s.

Conway, M. Margaret. *Political Participation*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2000. A good review of the literature on political participation.

Delli Carpini, Michael X., and Scott Keeter. *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996. The best study of the state of political knowledge in the electorate.

DeSipio, Louis. *Counting on the Latino Vote*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996. An examination of the current state of Latino public opinion, and how more Latinos could be politically mobilized in the future.

Jacobs, Lawrence R., and Robert Y. Shapiro. *Politicians Don't Pander*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. Contrary to popular notions that politicians hold their fingers to the wind and try to follow the polls, Jacobs and Shapiro argue that politicians use polls to figure out how to best persuade the public to support their preferred policies.

Jennings, M. Kent, and Richard G. Niemi. *Generations and Politics: A Panel Study of Young Adults and Their Parents*.

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981. A highly influential study of the class of 1965, their parents, and how both generations changed over the course of eight years.

Nie, Norman H., Jane Junn, and Kenneth Stehlik-Barry. *Education and Democratic Citizenship in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. An in-depth investigation of the role of education in fostering political tolerance and participation.

Page, Benjamin I., and Robert Y. Shapiro. *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. The authors argue that the public, as a whole, responds in a reasonable fashion to changing political circumstances and information.

Tate, Katherine. *From Protest to Politics: The New Black Voters in American Elections*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994. An excellent examination of public opinion and participation among the African-American community.

Verba, Sidney, and Norman H. Nie. *Participation in America*. New York: Harper & Row, 1972. A landmark study of American political participation.

Verba, Sidney, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995. A worthy update and extension to *Participation in America*.

## Internet Resources

[www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)

The census is the best source of information on America's demography. Go to the list of topics to find out the range of materials that are available.

[www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com)

The Gallup poll regularly posts reports about their political surveys at this site.

[www.census.gov/statab/www/](http://www.census.gov/statab/www/)

The *Statistical Abstract of the United States* contains a wealth of demographic and political information and is available in Adobe Acrobat format off the Internet.

[www.demographics.com/publications/ad/index.htm](http://www.demographics.com/publications/ad/index.htm)

*American Demographics* magazine publishes many interesting stories summarizing how America's population is currently changing.

## Notes

1. See Margo Anderson, *The American Census: A Social History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988).
2. See *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1999* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000), 298.
3. On the details of the 1965 Immigration Act and its unintended consequences, see Steven M. Gillon, *That's Not What We Meant to Do: Reform and Its Unintended Consequences in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Norton, 2000), chap. 4.