



# Political Participation

Public Opinion

Political Polling

# Introduction

- ◆ Public Opinion Basics
- ◆ The Face of American Values
- ◆ Issues of Political Socialization
- ◆ Public Opinion Polls
- ◆ Political participation

# A Few Basic Terms

## ◆ Public Opinion

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

## ◆ Demographics

- We can use these characteristics of the population to generalize about public opinion.

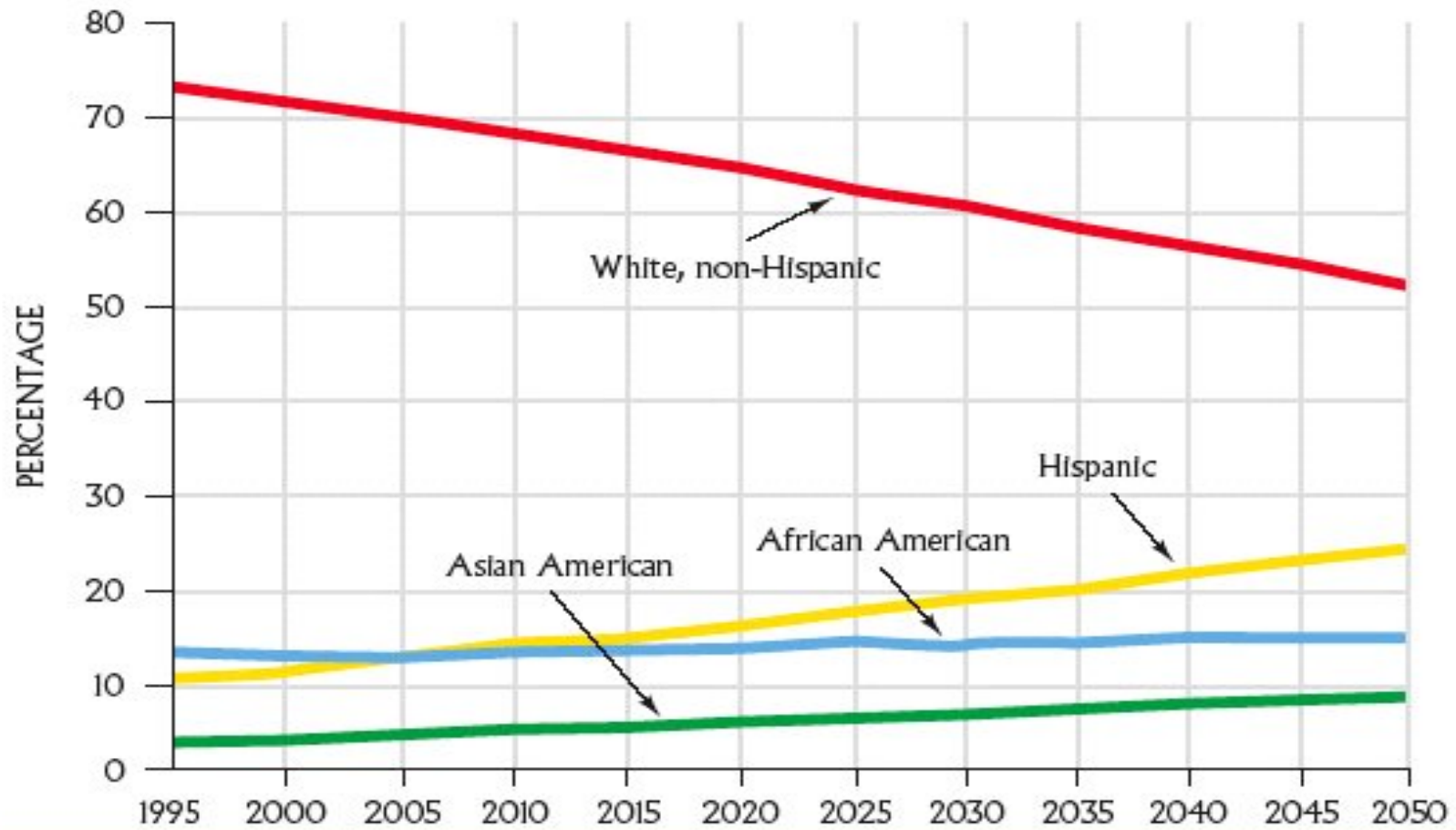
## ◆ Census

- A valuable tool for understanding population changes
- Required every 10 years by the Constitution

# A Changing America

- ◆ Regional shift in population center from east to west
  - This changes congressional makeup due to:
    - ◆ Reapportionment: the process of reallocating seats in the House of Representatives every 10 years on the basis of the results of the census.
- ◆ America is getting older
- ◆ We are an immigration society
  - Melting Pot: The mixing of cultures, ideas and peoples that has changed the American nation.
  - Minorities are becoming the majority
  - Influences which policies lawmakers address

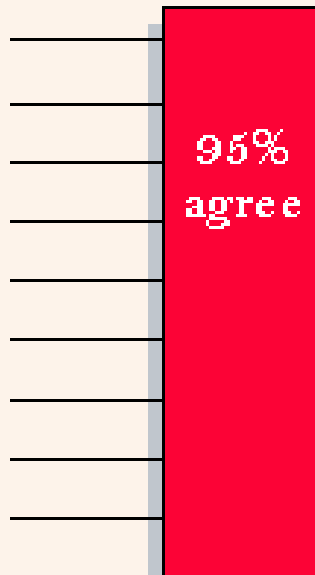
# Minority-Majority



# American Values

- ◆ Regional changes, aging, and immigration mean that American society values diversity
  - This diverse set of preferences must congeal for citizens to get along
- ◆ What brings us together? Political Culture:
  - An overall set of values widely shared within a society.

Equality of opportunity



"Our society should do whatever is necessary to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed"

Liberty



"I believe in free speech for all no matter what their views might be"

Democracy



"Public officials should be chosen by majority vote"

The average African American is **"just as well off"** as the average white person in terms of ...

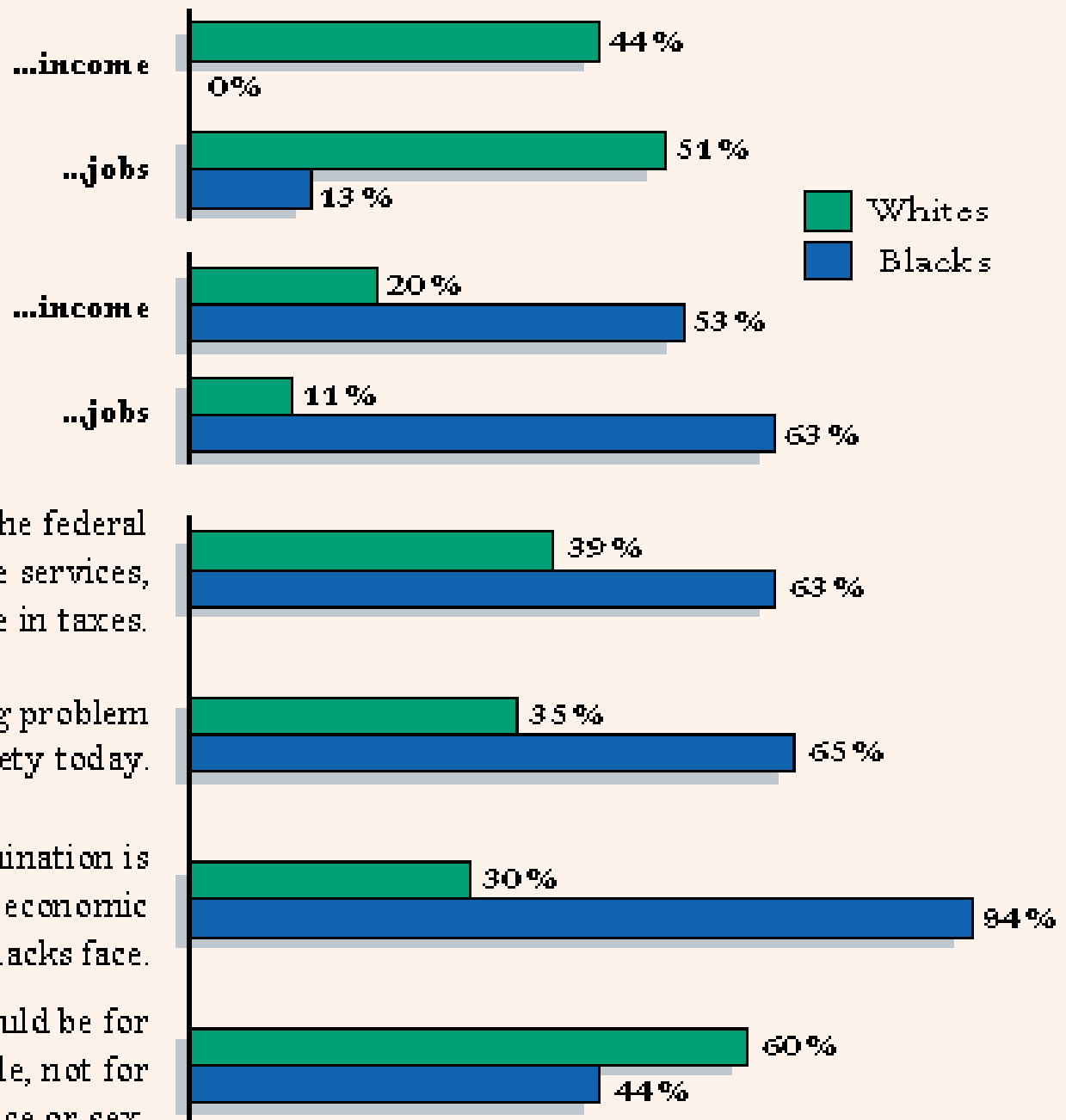
The average African American is **"a lot worse off"** than the average white person in terms of ...

I would rather have the federal government provide more services, even if it costs more in taxes.

Racism is a big problem in our society today.

Past and present discrimination is the major reason for the economic and social ills blacks face.

Affirmative action should be for low-income people, not for persons of a specific race or sex.





# Political Socialization

## ◆ Political Socialization:

- “The process through which an individual acquires [their] particular political orientation”

◆ Political socialization is how a diverse group of people, from different backgrounds, and with different interests find middle ground and “get along”

# The Political Socialization Process

## ◆ What socializes us into politics?

- Family

- ◆ Your first introduction to politics

- School

- ◆ Shapes how you view government

- Media

- ◆ Informs and educates

## ◆ All three work together, in different ways, to socialize us into political process

# Family

- ◆ Political leanings of children often mirror their parent's leanings
  - Parents are your first teachers
  - If they are Republican, so are you
    - ◆ The Michigan Model of voting behavior—*The American Voter*

# School

- ◆ School used by government to socialize the young into the political culture
  - Create positive view of government and the United States
    - ◆ Pledge of Allegiance
  - Educate about the basics of American government, history, etc.
    - ◆ Civics courses, credit required to graduate high school

# Education (K-12)

- ◆ Promotes common set of civic values
- ◆ K-12 supports authoritarian values
  - Discipline
  - Obedience
  - Conformity



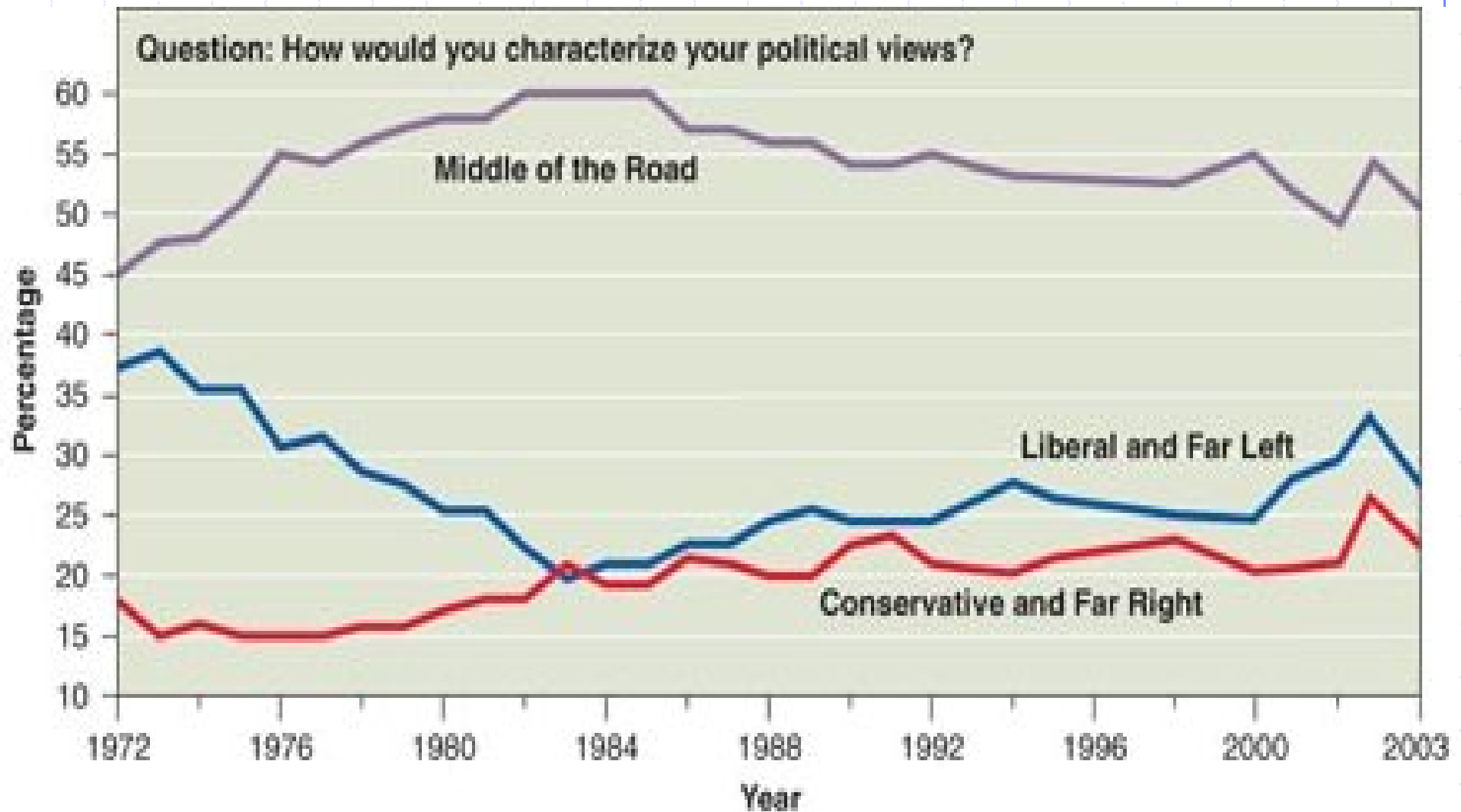
# Education (College)

◆ College promotes democratic values

- Free Speech
- Forum for Ideas
- Tolerance
- Promotes political participation
  - ◆ Knowledge of the System
  - ◆ Knowledge about Issues
  - ◆ Knowledge about Candidates



# The Ideological Self-Identification of First-Year College Students



# Media

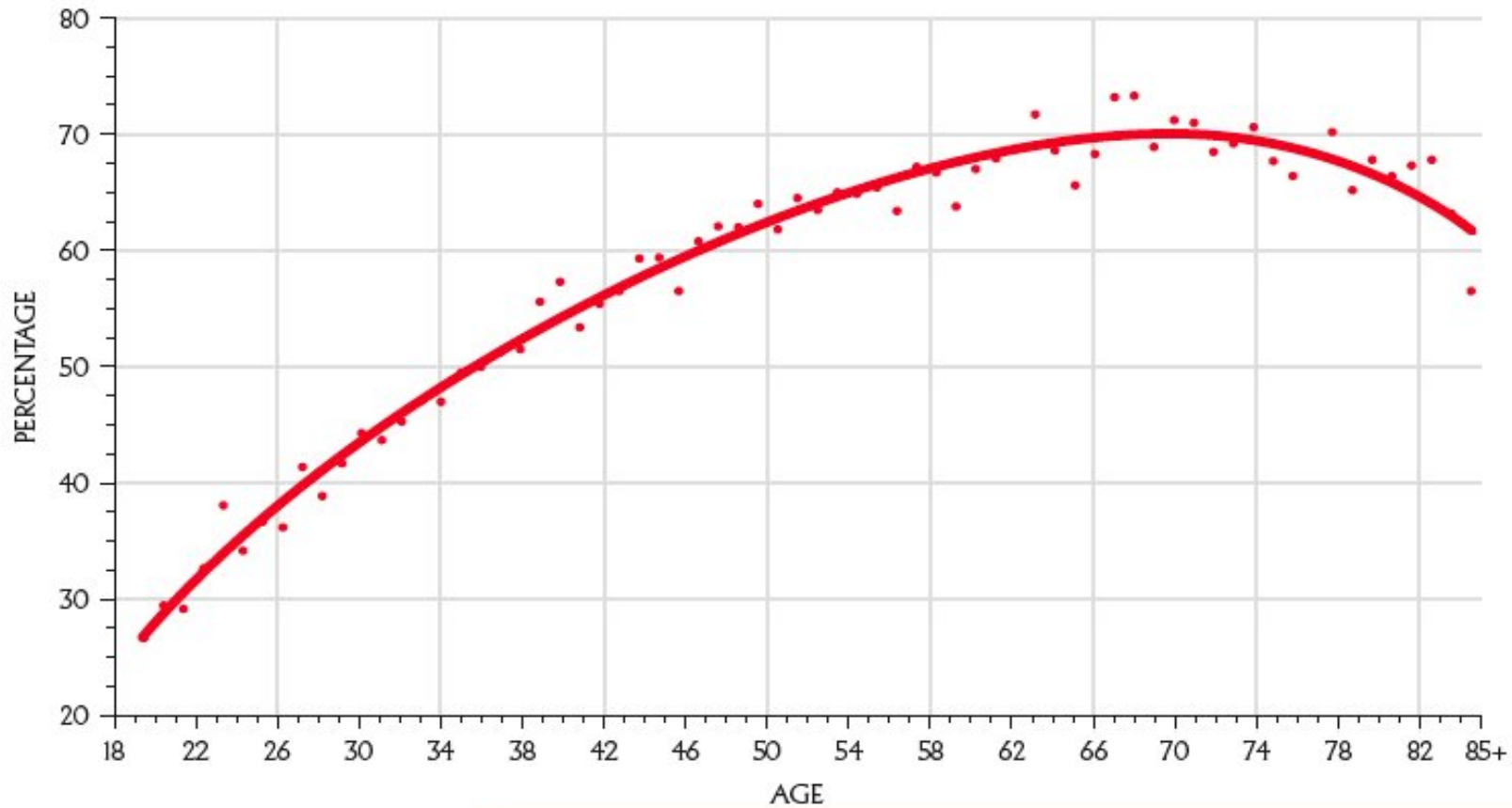
- ◆ The Mass Media also influence our views
  - Political news
    - ◆ Media affect what we think is important, i.e., what issues we think about
  - Entertainment television
    - ◆ Promote or dispel stereotypes
    - ◆ Satirize, yet inform
      - The Daily Show, South Park
  - Commercials
    - ◆ Consumer-driven society



# Political Socialization

- ◆ Political learning is a lifelong process:
  - Political orientation solidifies in late adolescence
  - Yet, we tend to become more involved in politics as we age
  - Why?
    - ◆ Generation gap in TV news viewing, as young people watch less news than older folks do
      - More information means more likely to participate
      - Older you get, the more stake you have in your community

# Turnout Increases with Age



Source: Authors' analysis of 2000 Census Bureau data.

# How well are we socialized?

◆ Generally? Pretty well.

◆ Specifically...?

- Changing family means less time to discuss or engage in political discussion
- People do not have a firm grasp of government and politics
- Media entertains more than it educates

# Public Opinion

- ◆ Politicians should know what the public wants in a democracy
- ◆ After all, the policymaking process begins with public concern about an issue
- ◆ How are politicians to know public opinion?
  - Letters, e-mail, and phone calls
  - Media attention
  - Public opinion polls

# Measuring Public Opinion

## ◆ How Polls Are Conducted

- Sample: a small proportion of people who are chosen in a survey to be representative of the whole
- 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
  - ◆ <http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm>

# Measuring Public Opinion

## ◆ The Role of Polls in American Democracy

- Polls help politicians figure out public preferences.
- It may increase responsiveness or representation; it may be good for democracy.
- Everyone uses polls
  - ◆ Presidential polling has increased by president
  - ◆ Members of Congress all use polls
  - ◆ Political parties and interest groups, too

# Problems with Polls

- ◆ Question wording makes a difference: different words elicit different responses
- ◆ Question ordering affects responses
- ◆ Polls may encourage capricious responsiveness to public concerns by politicians
- ◆ Polls, yet, are highly reliable (within a margin of error)

# Problem Polls

- ◆ Exit Polls: polls of people as they leave the voting booth; used to predict election day winners.
  - Exit polls help networks call races before all votes have been cast
  - Most criticized of all polls
    - ◆ East v. west criticism
    - ◆ Races called too early, e.g., 2000 presidential election



# Polls and Political Information

## ◆ What Polls Reveal About Americans' Political Information

- Americans don't know much about politics.
- Americans may know their basic beliefs, but not how that affects policies of the government.
  - ◆ Opinions are often contradictory
- Nevertheless, the collective public is "rational."

# Why We Form Political Opinions

- ◆ Personal Benefits
- ◆ Political Knowledge
- ◆ Cues from Leaders or Opinion Makers



# American's Political Knowledge

	Percentage Unable to Identify
<b>Number of senators</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Representative in the House</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Who has the power to declare war?</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Chief justice of the United States</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Source of the phrase "government of the people, by the people, for the people"</b>	<b>78</b>

Sources: "A Nation That is in the Dark" *San Diego Union-Tribune* (November 3, 2002): E3; John Wilkens, "America Faces a Crisis of Apathy," *San Diego Union-Tribune* (November 3, 2002): E3

# Personal Benefits

- ◆ Most Americans more “I” centered
- ◆ Attitudes on moral issues are often based on underlying values.
- ◆ If faced with policies that do not
  - Affect us personally
  - Are not moral in nature...Then we have difficulty forming an opinion.
- ◆ Foreign policy is such an example.

# Political Knowledge

- ◆ Political knowledge and political participation have a reciprocal relationship.
- ◆ High literacy rate
- ◆ Level of knowledge about history and politics low
  - Hurts American's understanding of current political events
- ◆ Geographically illiterate

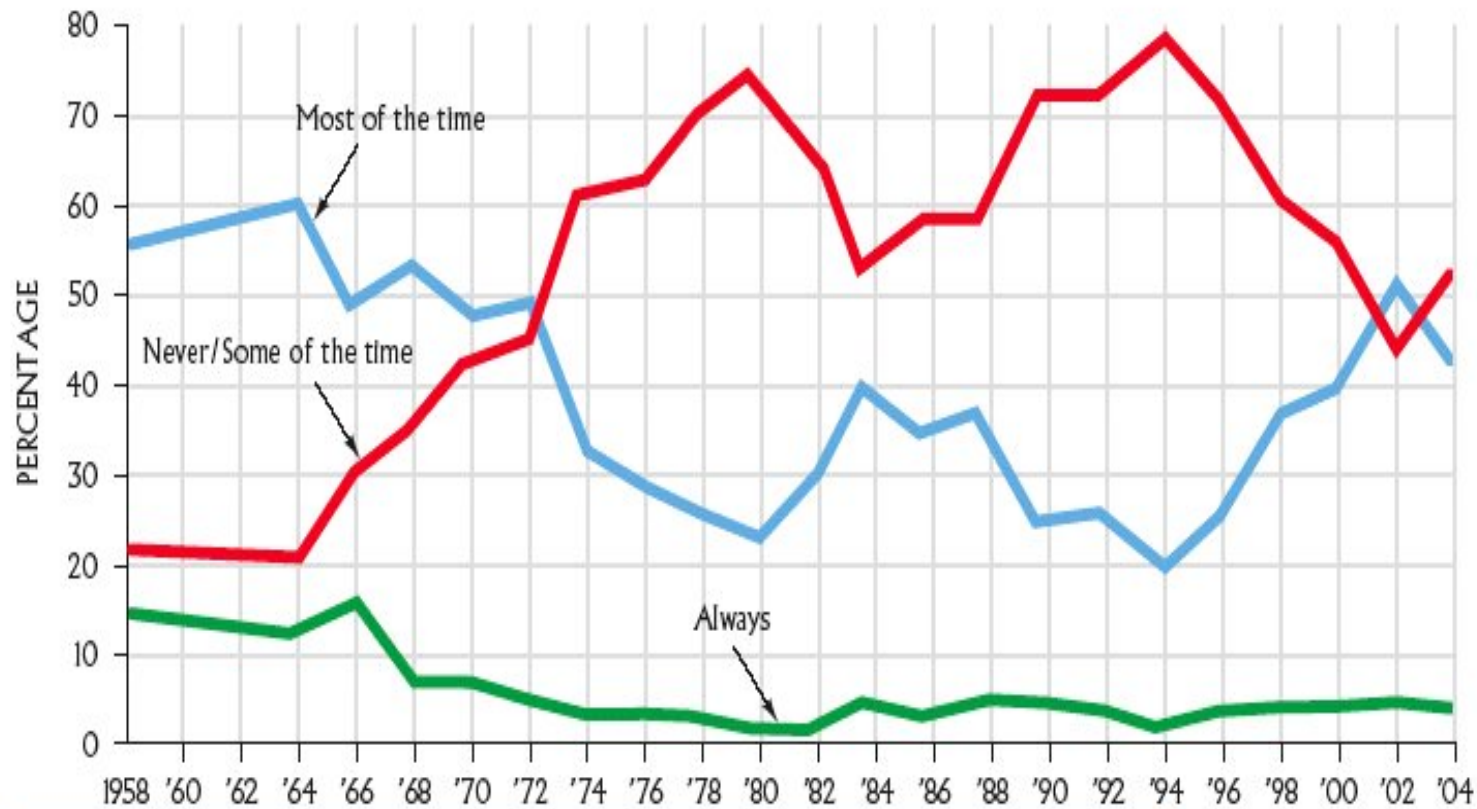
# Cues from Leaders

- ◆ Low levels of knowledge can lead to rapid opinion shifts on issues.
- ◆ Political leaders may move these shifts.
  - President is in an important position to mold public opinion
  - But who is truly leading, public or the president?

# Collective Public Opinion

- ◆ Collective public opinion tends to be stable
- ◆ Over time, it may “trend” but it is predictable
- ◆ Example: Declining trust in government
  - Only about 25% of the public trust the government most of the time or always.
  - Trust in government ticked up after 9/11, but down again.

# Decline of Trust in Government



Source: Authors' analysis of 1958–2004 American National Election Study data.



# Political Ideology

◆ Another example of collective rationality is Ideology

◆ Political Ideology:

- A coherent set of beliefs about politics, public policy, and public purpose.

◆ Who Are the Liberals and Conservatives?

- Currently about 36% conservative, 24% liberal, 39% moderate (2009 ABC/Washington Post)
- These numbers change over time
  - ◆ More liberals in 1964
  - ◆ More conservatives in 1980

# Two Ideologies

	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 Iraq 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

# What Americans Value: Political Ideologies

- ◆ Do People Think in Ideological Terms?
  - Ideologues: think in ideological terms - 12% of the population
  - Group Benefits: rely on party labels - 42% of the population
  - Nature of the Times: current times are good or bad - 24% of the population
  - No issue content: based on personalities - 22% of the population

# What Americans Value: Political Ideologies

- ◆ Has There Been a Turn Toward Conservatism?
  - Ronald Reagan was most conservative president since the New Deal.
  - People liked Reagan, but not his policies.
  - *Nature of the Times* voters swing the elections.
  - Clinton couldn't pass the universal health care policy.

# Public Opinion and Environmental Policy

- ◆ Environmental policy is a political issue that pits “public” goods (clean air, etc.) against other private concerns (commodity costs and profits).
- ◆ There are more groups and more people getting involved in protecting the environment.
  - But it is rarely a top issue; rarely “salient” to the public
  - Policies will be controversial & expensive.

# Public Opinion and Environmental Policy

- ◆ If controversial, not salient:
  - Environmental policy is rarely on the agenda
- ◆ If not on the agenda, then
  - the environment is rarely addressed by Congress or implemented by the bureaucracy
- ◆ Change on environmental policy, therefore, is slow and arduous

# Climate Change

- ◆ 65 percent support government regulation of greenhouse gases
- ◆ But only 55 would if it means \$25/month increase in “energy expenses”
  - Trade-off: 83 percent prioritize economy, not the protecting the environment right now
- ◆ 52 percent support “cap and trade”
- ◆ Policy change likely?
  - Bill passed in House, has presidential support, but no Senate action yet
  - Rarely newsworthy, 10<sup>th</sup> at one percent

# Public Opinion and Economic Policy

- ◆ The economy is the most salient issue in American politics
- ◆ Therefore,
  - Politicians jump to address it when it sours
  - Campaigns and elections often hinge on economic prosperity.
- ◆ In other words, the economy easily reaches agenda status to which Congress and the president respond quickly





# The Good and Bad of Polling



◆ Random Sampling

◆ Margin of Error

◆ Non-random methods of drawing a sample or HOW NOT TO DO A POLL

- Convenience sample
- Voluntary response sample

# How to Draw a Random Sample

- ◆ *A simple random sample* gives all members of the population an equal chance to be drawn into the sample.
  - Draw names out of a hat, a really big hat
  - Label every case in the population with a number, then draw some random numbers
  - In a telephone poll, random digit dialing uses a random number generator to get even those with unlisted numbers.

# What Determines the “Margin of Error” of a Poll?

- ◆ If we have drawn a truly random sample:

$$\hat{p} = p + \textit{RandomError } r$$

Sample Proportion = Population Proportion + Random Error

# What Determines the “Margin of Error” of a Poll?

- ◆ The margin of error is calculated by:

$$\hat{p} \pm 2 \frac{\sqrt{(\hat{p})(1 - \hat{p})}}{\sqrt{N}}$$

# What Determines the “Margin of Error” of a Poll?

- ◆ In a poll of 505 likely voters, the Field Poll found 55% support for the question.

$$0.55 \pm 2 \frac{\sqrt{(0.55)(1-0.55)}}{\sqrt{505}}$$

$$0.55 \pm 0.044$$

# What Determines the “Margin of Error” of a Poll?

- ◆ The margin of error for this poll was plus or minus 4.4 percentage points.
- ◆ This means that if we took many samples using the Field Poll’s methods, 95% of the samples would yield a statistic within plus or minus 4.4 percentage points of the true population parameter.

# Nonrandom methods of drawing a sample (Note: These are **Bad!**)

- ◆ A *voluntary response sample* includes the members of the population who voice their desire to be included in the sample.
  - 1936 “Literary Digest Poll” mailed 10 million ballots to magazine readers to voluntarily participate in their Presidential election survey. 2 million surveys came back, predicting that FDR would lose 43%-57%.
    - ◆ FDR won, 61%-39%.



# Nonrandom methods of drawing a sample (Note: These are **Bad!**)

- ◆ *A convenience sample* studies the segment of the population that is easiest for the researcher to reach.
  - Polls only of people who have telephones. (Less of a problem than it used to be).
  - Studies by college students of their dormmates.
  - Internet polls at [www.foxnews.com](http://www.foxnews.com) or [www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org)

# Example: Internet Polls

- ◆ Some internet polls ask the opinions of those who have logged on to:
  - [www.foxnews.com](http://www.foxnews.com)
  - [www.uclabruins.com](http://www.uclabruins.com)
  - [www.peetscoffee.com](http://www.peetscoffee.com)
  - [www.pabst.com](http://www.pabst.com)
  - [www.sfgate.com](http://www.sfgate.com)
  - [www.rogain.com](http://www.rogain.com)
- ◆ More professional internet polls advertise with banners on a variety of web sites to recruit people into their sample.

# Example: Internet Polls

- ◆ “Knowledge Networks” is an internet-administered survey that recruited its sample by using random digit dialing.
  - To give those without an internet connection the chance to participate, they offered a free “Web TV” console to participants.
  - Those in the 50,000 person sample are given the chance to participate in polls about subjects like hard liquor or politics.

# Surveys of a Sub-Population

- ◆ Many researchers do not want to generalize to the population of “all Americans.”
  - They begin by defining the population that they want to study, such as “likely voters,” “Asian-Americans voters,” or “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered California adults.”

# Surveys of a Sub-Population

- ◆ Option #1. Take a random sample of the entire population, ask the respondent if he or she fits into the category, and then continue the interview if you find a match
- ◆ Option #2. Begin with a list that approximates the entire subpopulation (registered voters with Asian surnames) and then take a random sample.

# What's Important?

- ◆ The basics, so that we can measure public opinion
- ◆ American values, which makes political socialization central to a functioning democracy
- ◆ Polls
- ◆ Ideology

# Summary

- ◆ Public opinion is important in a democracy
- ◆ Polls help measure public opinion
- ◆ Ideology is a broad measure of public opinion
- ◆ Participation in politics varies by age group, class, education, and by means of participation