Chapter 6: Public Opinion and Political Action

1. American People
   1. Public Opinion
      1. The distribution of the population’s beliefs about politics and policy issues.
   2. Demography
      1. The science of population changes.
   3. Census
      1. An “actual enumeration” of the population, which the Constitution requires that the government conduct every 10 years. The census is a valuable tool for understanding demographic changes.
   4. The Immigrant Society
      1. 1 Million legal immigrants every year
      2. 0.5 Million illegal immigrants every year
      3. 27% of California’s population is foreign born
      4. 1% of West Virginia’s population is foreign born
   5. The American Melting Pot
      1. Melting pot
         1. A term used to characterize the United States, with its history of immigration and mixing of cultures, ideas, and people.
      2. Minority majority
         1. The situation, likely to beginning in the mid-twenty-first century, in which the non-Hispanic whites will be the minority in the country. All the minority groups will represent a majority.
      3. Political culture
         1. An overall set of values widely shared within a society
   6. The Regional Shift
      1. Population growth is happening in the south and out west and not in the Midwest or northeast.
      2. Reapportionment
         1. The process of reallocating seats in the House of Representatives every 10 years on the basis of the results of the census.
   7. The Graying of America
      1. Despite the growth, our population is getting older.
      2. In 1960 there was 5.7 workers per retiree
      3. In 2040 there will be 2 workers per retiree
2. How Americans Learn About Politics: Political Socialization
   1. Political socialization
      1. The process though which individuals in a society acquire political attitudes. Views, and knowledge, based on inputs from family, schools, the media and others.
   2. The Process of Political Socialization
      1. The Family
      2. The Mass Media
      3. School
   3. Political Learning over a Lifetime
      1. Politics is a lifelong activity and people’s opinions and positions will change as they develop as a person.
3. Measuring Public Opinion and Political Information
   1. How Polls Are Conducted
      1. Sample
         1. A relatively small proportion of people who are chosen in a survey so as to be representative of the whole.
      2. Random sampling
         1. The key technique employed by survey researchers, which operates on the principle that everyone should have an equal probability of being selected for the sample.
      3. Sampling error
         1. 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.
      4. Random-digit dialing
         1. A technique used by pollsters to place telephone calls randomly to both listed and unlisted numbers when conducting a survey.
   2. The Role of Polls in American Democracy
      1. Polls can tell what the public is feeling about a certain person or issue.
      2. Exit poll
         1. Public opinion survey used by major media pollsters to predict electoral winners with speed and precision.
   3. What Polls Reveal About Americans’ Political Information
      1. Polls reveal Americans opinions outside of the voting booth
      2. Present the chance for public officials to change their positions to appease the public.
   4. The Decline of Trust in the Government
      1. The American public has been continually dissatisfied with the performance of the government.
4. What Americans Value: Political Ideologies
   1. Political ideology
      1. A coherent set of beliefs about politics, public policy, and public purpose, which helps give meaning to political events.
   2. Who Are the Liberals and Conservatives?
      1. 36% conservative
      2. 38% moderate
      3. 26% liberal
      4. Young people tend to be more liberal
      5. Gender gap
         1. The regular pattern in which women are more likely to support Democratic candidates, in part because they tend to be less conservative than men and more likely to support spending on social services and to oppose higher levels of military spending.
   3. Do People Think in Ideological Terms?
      1. 12% are ideologues
      2. 42% are group benefit voters
      3. 22% are voters who expressed no ideological reasoning or political affiliation to support votes.
5. How American Participate in Politics
   1. Political participation
      1. All the activities used by citizens to influence the selection of political leaders or the policies they pursue. The most common means of political participation in a democracy is voting; other means include protest and civil disobedience.
   2. Conventional participation
      1. Voting
      2. Rallies
   3. Protest as Participation
      1. Protest
         1. A form of political participation designed to achieve policy changes through dramatic and unconventional tactics.
      2. Civil disobedience
         1. A form of political participation based on a conscious decision to break a law believed to be unjust and to suffer the consequences.
   4. Class, Inequality, and Participation
      1. Minorities have a collective conscientious that gives them unity when they vote.
      2. Minorities are more likely to vote than whites
6. Understanding Public Opinion and Political Action
   1. Public Attitudes Toward the Scope of Government
      1. The fact that public opinion is often contradictory may contribute to political gridlock because it is hard for politicians to know which aspect of the public’s opinion to follow
   2. Democracy, Public Opinion, and Political Action
      1. Democracy works best when everyone participates and we hold political accountable for their actions.