

# **Study Outline**

## **Chapter 5: Public Opinion**

- I. Introduction
  - A. Lincoln and the Gettysburg address "of the people, by the people, for the people."
    - 1. Yet the federal government's budget is not balanced
    - 2. Yet the people have opposed busing
    - 3. Yet the ERA was not ratified
    - 4. Yet most Americans opposed Clinton's impeachment
    - 5. Yet most Americans favor term limits for Congress
  - B. Why government policy and public opinion may appear to be at odds
    - 1. Government not intended to do "what the people want"
      - a. Framers of Constitution aimed for substantive goals
      - b. Popular rule was only one of several means toward these goals.
      - c. Large nations feature many "publics" with many "opinions."
        - 1. Framers hoped no single opinion would dominate
        - 2. Reasonable policies can command support of many factions
    - 2. Limits on effectiveness of opinion polling; difficult to know public opinion
    - 3. Government may give more weight to political elites who may think differently
  - II. What is Public Opinion?
    - A. Influences and limitations
      - 1. Public ignorance: Monetary Control Bill ruse, poor name recognition of leaders
      - 2. Importance of wording of questions, affects answers
      - 3. Questions may focus one side of an issue at the expense of another (benefits / costs)
      - 4. Instability of public opinion
      - 5. Public has more important things to think about; need clear-cut political choices
      - 6. Specific attitudes less important than political culture
  - III. The origins of political attitudes
    - A. The role of the family
      - 1. Child absorbs party identification of family but becomes more independent with age
      - 2. Much continuity between generations
      - 3. Declining ability to pass on identification
      - 4. Younger voters exhibit less partisanship; more likely to be independent
      - 5. Meaning of partisanship unclear in most families; less influence on policy preferences
      - 6. Few families pass on clear ideologies
    - B. Religion
      - 1. Religious traditions affect families
        - a. Catholic families somewhat more liberal
        - b. Protestant families more conservative
        - c. Jewish families decidedly more liberal
      - 2. Two theories on differences
        - a. Social status of religious group
        - b. Content of religion's tradition
    - C. The gender gap
      - 1. A "problem" that has existed for a long time for both parties
        - a. Men and women both identified with the Democratic Party at about the same levels in the 1950s
        - b. By the 1990's men identified more with the Republican party while women continued to support the Democrats at earlier levels
      - 2. Possible explanations for the "gap"
        - a. Attitudes about size of government, gun control, spending programs for the poor, and gay rights
        - b. The conservative policy positions of men are increasingly matched by their party loyalty
        - c. Presence of Democratic female candidates may also have an impact
    - D. Schooling and information
      - 1. College education has liberalizing effect; longer in college, more liberal

- 2. Effect extends beyond end of college
  - 3. Cause of this liberalization?
    - a. Personal traits: temperament, family, intelligence
    - b. Exposure to information on politics
    - c. Liberalism of professors
  - 4. Effect growing as more go to college
  - 5. Increasing conservatism since 1960s?
    - a. Yes (legalizing marijuana)
    - b. No (school busing)
- IV. Cleavages in public opinion
- A. Social class: less important in United States than in Europe
    - 1. More important in 1950s on unemployment, education, housing programs
    - 2. Less important in 1960s on poverty, health insurance, Vietnam, jobs
    - 3. Why the change?
      - a. Education: occupation depends more on schooling
      - b. Noneconomic issues now define liberal and conservative
  - B. Race and ethnicity
    - 1. Social class becoming less clear-cut source of political cleavage
    - 2. Impact of race and ethnicity is less clear
      - a. Some clear difference in opinion (party identification, O.J. Simpson, criminal justice system, affirmative action)
      - b. Some similarities (quotas, getting tough on crime, abortion, etc.)
      - c. Evidence that the gap in opinions is narrowing
      - d. Further complication: gaps between the opinions of younger and older blacks
    - 3. Big opinion gap between black leaders and black people generally
      - a. Still differences of opinions between blacks and whites on social issues; opinions similar on others
      - b. Evidence that black-white differences are narrowing
    - 4. Few studies of the opinions of over 30 million Latinos
      - a. California study of Latinos and Asian Americans
      - b. Latinos identified themselves as Democrats / Asian Americans identified themselves as Republicans
      - c. Latinos were somewhat more liberal than Anglo whites and Asian Americans, but less liberal than blacks
      - d. Diversity within ethnic groups and limitations of such studies
  - C. Region
    - 1. Southerners more conservative than northerners on military and civil rights issues but difference fading overall
    - 2. Southern lifestyle different
    - 3. Lessening attachment to Democratic party
- V. Political ideology
- A. Consistent attitudes
    - 1. Ideology: patterned set of political beliefs about who ought to rule, their principles and policies
    - 2. Most citizens display little ideology; moderates dominate
    - 3. Yet most citizens may have strong political predispositions
    - 4. "Consistency" criterion somewhat arbitrary
    - 5. Some believe ideology increased in 1960s
    - 6. Others argue that poll questions were merely worded differently in 1960s
  - B. What do *liberalism* and *conservatism* mean?
    - 1. Liberal and conservative labels have complex history
      - a. Europe during French Revolution: conservative = church, state authority
      - b. Roosevelt and New Deal: activism = liberalism
      - c. Conservative reaction to activism (Goldwater): free market, states' rights, economic choice
      - d. Today's imprecise and changing meanings
  - C. Various categories
    - 1. Three useful categories emerge from studies
      - a. Economic policy: liberals favor jobs for all, subsidized medical care and education, taxation of rich
      - b. Civil rights: liberals prefer desegregation, equal opportunity, etc.

- c. Public and political conduct: liberals tolerant of demonstrations, favor legalization of marijuana, and so on
  - D. Analyzing consistency: people can mix categories
    - 1. Pure liberals: liberal on both economic and personal conduct issues
    - 2. Pure conservatives: conservative on both economic and personal conduct issues
    - 3. Libertarians: conservative on economic issues, liberal on personal conduct issues
    - 4. Populists: liberal on economic issues, conservative on personal conduct issues
  - E. Political elites
    - 1. Definition: those who have a disproportionate amount of some valued resource
    - 2. Elites, or activists, display greater ideological consistency
      - a. More information than most people
      - b. Peers reinforce consistency and greater difference of opinion than one finds among average voters
  - F. Is there a "new class"?
    - 1. Definition: those who are advantaged by the power, resources, and growth of government (not business)
    - 2. Two explanations of well-off individuals who are liberals
      - a. Their direct benefits from government
      - b. Liberal ideology infusing postgraduate education
    - 3. Traditional middle class: four years of college, suburban, church affiliated, pro-business, conservative on social issues, Republican
    - 4. Liberal middle class: postgraduate education, urban, critical of business, liberal on social issues, Democratic
    - 5. Emergence of new class creates strain in Democratic party
- VI. Political elites, public opinion, and public policy
- A. Elites influence public opinion in three ways
    - 1. Raise and form political issues
    - 2. State norms by which to settle issues, defining policy options
    - 3. Elite views shape mass views
  - B. Limits to elite influence on the public
    - 1. Elites do not define problems
    - 2. Many elites exist; hence many elite opinions