

THE AMERICAN POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

- I. The 2008 election proved that race, gender, age and religious affiliation were important factors; do race, gender and religion matter in American politics? YES!
 - a. ETHNOCENTRISM- selective perception based on background, attitudes and biases; is very common
- II. A LAND OF DIVERSITY
 - a. U.S. is different than most all other countries in that we have a very diverse background and have been more open to accepting people from around the world
 - b. Many people want to come here because of the land of opportunity and the promise of religious, political and economic freedom
 - c. Many characteristics differentiate us from each other
 - d. POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION – process by which parents and others teach children about political values, beliefs and attitudes
 - e. DEMOGRAPHY- study of population characteristics
 - f. POLITICAL PREDISPOSITIONS- predictive political behavior based on values, beliefs and attitudes
 - g. REINFORCING CLEAVAGES –social and economic differences reinforce the beliefs, attitudes and values; make political conflict more polarized
 - h. CROSS-CUTTING CLEAVAGES- social and economic differences actually pull people in different directions; religion and wealth; people have multiple allegiances
 - i. GEOGRAPHY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY
 - i. Geographic isolation from the major world powers early on helps explain American politics
 - ii. Two oceans have isolated the U.S. and prevented many attacks on our soil as compared to Poland;

might have changed the Constitution; buffer from foreign attack.

1. Tocqueville believed that the US had no great wars after the War of 1812 due to 2 oceans between the US and other developed countries.
- iii. Geographic size (large) allows the population to move outward which diffuses religion, social class and national origin
- iv. U.S. had a MANIFEST DESTINY to spread from Atlantic to Pacific
- v. Abundant natural resources
- vi. All this have fostered a belief that the U.S. is different from the world; AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM
- vii. Geography also helps explain our diversity
- j. REGIONAL DIFFERENCES
 - i. Geography in the U.S. does NOT define an ethnic or religious division
 - ii. The most distinct regional section in the U.S. is the South, but it is becoming less distinct
 - iii. Until the '70s the "solid South" voted Democratic; the political alignment has changed to where the African Americans are overwhelmingly Democratic and the South is Republican
 - iv. Sun Belt is growing more rapidly than any other area of the country; more Republican
- k. STATE AND LOCAL IDENTITY
 - i. People have a local identity and a state identity; New Hampshire and Iowa
 - ii. California stands out; 1 out of 8 live there
- l. WHERE WE LIVE
 - i. 4/5 live in urban areas; URBANIZATION during the early 20th century

- ii. Movement to the suburbs for many reasons; “white flight”
 - iii. As people have moved from the cities, problems have become more difficult; review table 5-2 on page 123
- III. WHO WE ARE; define ourselves outside the geography
 - a. RACE AND ETHNICITY- RACE – personal characteristics determined by genetic inheritance; ETHNICITY- social division based on national origin, religion and language; many times within the same race
 - i. Most race and ethnic issues in the U.S. focus on African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans and Hispanics
 - ii. IDENTITY POLITICS- favoring political candidates because of demographics such as gender, race, ethnicity and religion
 - b. NATIVE AMERICANS
 - i. Important in certain regions and states like NM, SD, OK
 - ii. Average rate of poverty of 26%; higher than African Americans and Hispanics; persistent problem
 - c. AFRICAN AMERICANS
 - i. Came against their will versus other immigrants
 - ii. 13th Amendment ended slavery in the 1860s
 - iii. More vulnerable economically than white population
 - iv. Median net worth of African Americans is less than 1/10 of whites
 - v. Disproportionate education versus whites
 - vi. African American population younger (31) than whites (37.8); higher unemployment
 - vii. Have had little political power until after WWII; came to see Democrats as the party of civil rights; have become much more important politically

- viii. Review figure 5-2 on median net worth of households by race on page 126
- ix. Review the success of Obama on page 127

d. HISPANICS

- i. Common language but different countries in Latin America based on heritage
- ii. Disproportionately Democrat voting bloc
- iii. Liberal domestic agenda; health care, crime reduction, drug control
- iv. Both major parties are cultivating Hispanic candidates

e. ASIAN AMERICANS

- i. Significant differences in culture, language and political experience
- ii. Differences in sub-groups
- iii. Have done relatively well in economic and educational areas; income well above the median

f. THE TIES OF ETHNICITY

- i. Except Native Americans and descendants of slaves, all are immigrants
- ii. 2 major waves; 17.3MM in 1900-24 and second is now
- iii. Pose political and social challenges

g. RELIGION

- i. Source of violence worldwide, especially when dealing with sovereignty or territorial disputes
- ii. Jews have been target of religious discrimination and persecution
- iii. We were founded on religious freedom and liberty; no national church in Constitution; Federalist #51
- iv. Religion is VERY important in American politics

- v. Religion is a catalyst for political change; Black southern churches; MLK
- vi. FUNDAMENTALISTS; conservative Christians, have been a strong conservative political force recently
- vii. Americans tend to take their religion more seriously than other parts of the world
- viii. Certain religions are concentrated in a few states; Utah, Rhode Island is mostly Catholic
- ix. Recently Protestants voted more Republican while Catholics and Jews voted more Democratic
- x. Religion is a CROSS-CUTTING CLEAVAGE in American politics

h. GENDER

- i. For most of U.S. history, politics has been men's business
- ii. 19th Amendment in 1920 granted suffrage to women
- iii. Women have chosen to work within established party lines and will not cross-over if they do not conform to their ideology; Sarah Palin
- iv. Few women in the higher branches of government; Congress or White House; state legislatures are much higher percentage
- v. EMILY has aggressively promoted female candidates
- vi. There is some GENDER GAP (primarily voting Democratic) in female voting
- vii. Women's movement seeks equal opportunity, education, jobs and respect in male-dominated system; more compassionate and against guns, death penalty
- viii. Women in US have tended to vote less often than their European counterparts.
- ix. Work on family issues

- x. Serious income inequalities
- i. SEXUAL ORIENTATION
 - i. Precise number of LGBTQ is unclear; 10% or possibly lower
 - ii. Backlash against LGBTQ in 1996 was the passage of the Defense of Marriage Act
 - iii. Political agenda includes fighting discrimination; “don’t ask, don’t tell”; hate crimes, eliminating restrictions and adding benefits
 - iv. “Civil union” status; intensively divisive issue; Conservative groups versus liberal groups; courts have been drawn in- Supreme Court is crucial
 - v. 2015 Obergefell v. Hodges; legalizes same sex marriage
- j. FAMILY STRUCTURE
 - i. Over past ½ century, no real typical American family
 - ii. Marriage no longer essential to define family
 - iii. Now marrying is coming later in life
 - iv. Birthrates have been falling for decades
 - v. Divorce has doubled since 1950
- k. EDUCATION
 - i. Differences in education affect economic well-being and political participation
 - ii. One of the most important variables in predicting political participation
 - iii. Most Americans are educated in public institutions; high school and college
- l. WEALTH AND INCOME
 - i. U.S. is a wealthy nation, but the unequal distribution of wealth creates political challenges
 - ii. Wealth can create aristocracy and Jefferson sought to break up PRIMOGENITURE – eldest son inheritance

- iii. Economic differences lead to conflict; Federalist #10;
- iv. The definition of poverty itself can be political
- v. Income is related to participation in politics; the people in the most need tend to be the least involved politically
- vi. In the U.S., greater wealth and higher income is associated with the Republicans; lower taxes

m. OCCUPATION

- i. GDP rose, adjusted for inflation from 1960-2007 over 460%
- ii. Move from agricultural to industrial nation
- iii. Now we are in “postindustrial” page 139
- iv. White-collar sector has grown significantly over past ½ century
- v. Men hold most blue-collar jobs while women face the “glass ceiling”

n. SOCIAL CLASS

- i. While the U.S. does not have distinct social classes (bourgeoisie and proletariat like Marx), we do have social classes deemed SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS (SES) based on occupation, income and education
- ii. Most believe they are in the middle-class; highly subjective;
- iii. People define themselves as middle-class because of the American dream of upward mobility

o. AGE

- i. Review figure 5-9 on page 141; we are the “graying of America”
- ii. Older adults are more politically aware than younger adults making them a strong political force; AARP

- iii. LIFESTYLE EFFECTS; earlier on in adult age, more conservative; as they need more services become more liberal
- iv. GENERATIONAL EFFECTS; lived through an experience that made them more politically aware; Great Depression or WWII; baby boomers in the Vietnam War

IV. UNITY IN A LAND OF DIVERSITY

- a. Strong sense of national unity through the diversity is remarkable
- b. Economic and social mobility has unified much of U.S.
- c. Known as the “melting pot”
- d. Education and age are especially important predictors of citizen engagement and participation