

Public Opinion

US Government POS 2041

Ch. 5

For Discussion

- Does political advertisement manipulate public opinion about issues & candidates? Is it any different from advertising a consumer product?
- If political attitudes are the result of manipulation, does it make a mockery of free elections? Does it contradict our democracy?

Group Exercise & Discussion...

Instructions:

- Mark each statement according to whether you agree (A) or disagree (D)
- When completed discuss your answers with your group & ask which ones reflect a) Liberal views, b) Conservative views or c) neither

Definition

- **Public opinion: Values, Beliefs, Attitudes, Opinions**
- Public opinion = reflect values & citizens' attitudes about political issues, leaders, events
- Public opinion has become the ultimate standard against which the conduct of contemporary governments is measured

Difference between...

- Values & beliefs on one hand
- vs.
- Opinions & attitudes on the other hand?

- Values/beliefs represent deep rooted goals, aspirations & orientations toward politics
 - Eg. Liberty, equality, democracy
- Attitude is a specific view on particular issue, personality or event
 - Views on abortion, gun laws, etc.

Is public opinion always right?

- Americans tend to share common political values, yet divided on role of gov & on issues such as affirmative action, abortion, gay marriage, school prayers

Fundamental Values

- We are sharply divided on a range of issues;
 - race
 - gender
 - sexuality
 - same sex marriage
- Yet we share common values around certain areas:
 - Liberty
 - Equality of Opportunity
 - All people should have the freedom to experience their fullest potential
 - Yet not everyone supports affirmative action
 - Democracy
- System of rule which permits citizens to play significant role in how they are governed; election process

Forms of Disagreement

- We may share common values, but we don't always agree on what & how some of these values should be achieved
- Opinions differ on issues of income, education, employment, how different groups view socio-economic programs
- Social security, unemployment, welfare, health care

Political Socialization

1. What do you understand by the term socialization?
2. Political socialization?

Political Socialization

- How are your political values formed ?
 - Individual attitudes are shaped by underlying;
 - values
 - beliefs
 - political dogmas/values
 - life experiences
 - Hence different socialization processes, experiences help to;
 - shape our personal outlooks
 - how we see others &
 - how we behave

Agencies of Socialization

- Families
- Schools
- Social groups
- Gender gap
- More recently religious organizations
- Political & economic conditions

Influences on Political Values

Family

- Primary source of shaping political values
- Does not mean that every member shares the same political beliefs/ vote for the same ideologies

How many of you grew up in a family/friends which discussed politics?

What did you discuss?

Discussion of figure 6:2 page 212, Ginsberg

Social Groups Pg 212 of text

Discusses significance in differences & reasons behind perception...

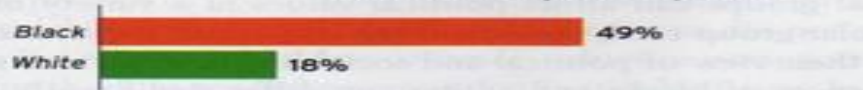
- class
- race
- gender
- professional interests
- personal & group experiences, etc.

FIGURE 6.2 ★
Agreement among Blacks and Whites

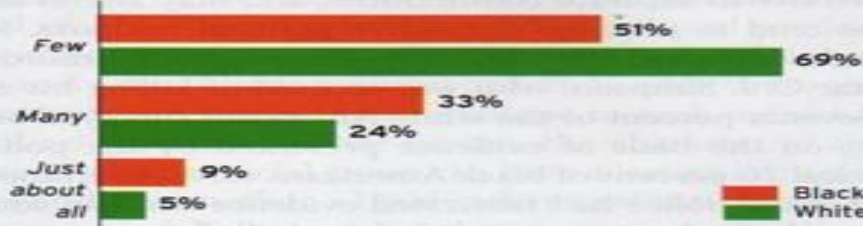
In the United States, blacks and whites do not perceive race relations in precisely the same way. How, according to the data in this figure, do blacks and whites differ in their views on race relations? Which group is more likely to think that race relations are improving? What factors help to explain these differences in perception?

RACE RELATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

Racism is a very serious problem.



Percentages who think only a few white people dislike blacks, many white people dislike blacks, or just about all white people dislike blacks.



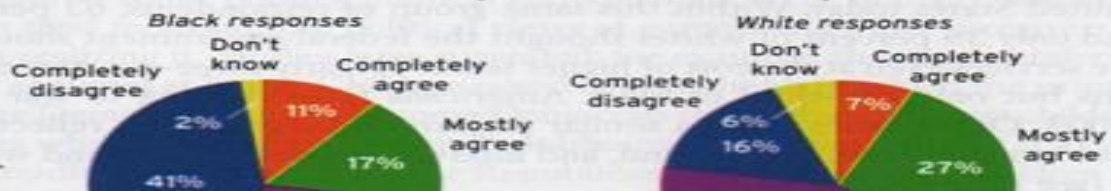
EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Do black children have as good a chance as white children to get a good education?



TREATMENT BLACKS RECEIVE

Discrimination against blacks is rare today.



Gallup Aug 2014

Trust in the police

- 59% of white Americans trust in police compared to,
- 37% blacks

Impact of religious orientations on political beliefs

- Religious beliefs
- Institutions, &
- Teachings

- Examples of how your religious beliefs guide your pol beliefs, decisions

Role of education

- How many of you have parents with college education?
- How has it shaped their/ your views on politics, etc.

Political factors/conditions

- Exposure & orientation to political conditions & environment
- Eg. Widespread opposition to Vietnam war
- Similar conditions re: Iraq war
- What about threats/persecution based on pol beliefs?
- Examples from Latin America: Cuba, Chile, Nicaragua? Eastern Europe
- Do you think it existed in the US?

From Political Values to Ideology

Political Ideology

- Defined as a cohesive set of beliefs that forms a general philosophy about the role of government .
- Underlying set of principles, orientations, ideas & beliefs which form one's philosophy of government

Dominant Political ideologies in US

Distinctions are not always clear cut

Liberal ideology:

- Holds equality as a core value
- Support extensive governmental intervention in economy
- Support social reforms
- Active federal involvement in social services
- Concern for environment, consumers
- Support efforts/rights to: minority, poor, women's rights

Conservative

- Hold liberty as core value
- Support socio-economic status quo
- Resist government involvement in economy-
laissez faire
- Resist large governments
- Sees as threat to citizen's freedom

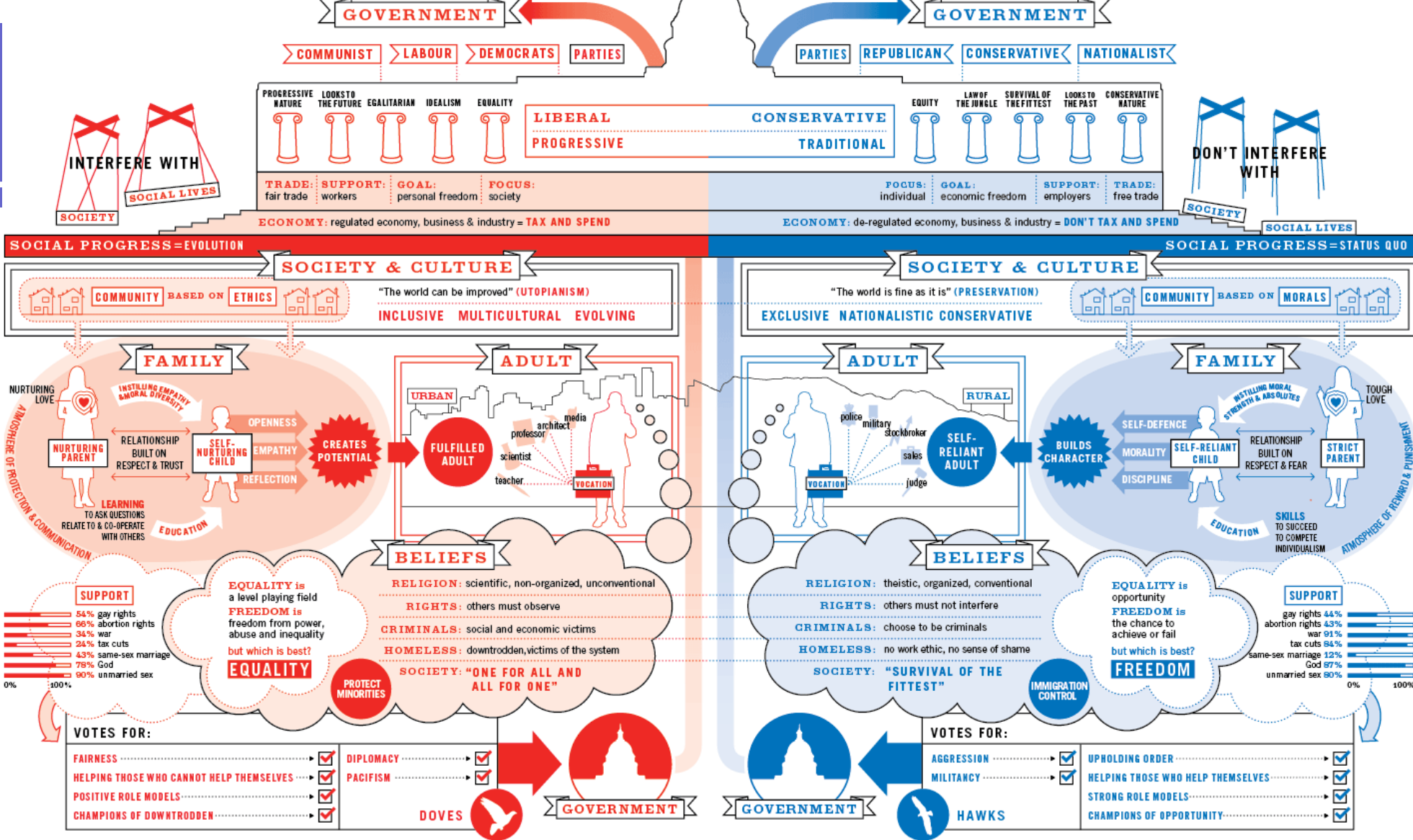
Compare Liberal & conservative house leaders

Nanci Pelosi, Democratic House Minority leader

- Supports abortion rights
- Opposes prayers in public schools
- Supports affirmative action
- Favors expanded health coverage for all Americans
- Wants to end Iraq war
- Increased funding for education
- Increase of minimum wage
- (We the People, Welch, et. al. p219)

Republican House Leader: Conservative John Boehner

- Wants to trim size of federal gov
- Wants to transfer more power to state & local gov
- Reduced regulation for business
- Opposes gay rights
- Does not support abortions
- Harsher treatment of criminals
- Opposes affirmative action
- Favors tax cuts
- Supports increased military spending
- (We the People. Welch, et. al. p 220)



CREATIVE CREDIT

David McCandless & Stefanie Posavec // v1.0 // Oct 09
 InformationIsBeautiful.net / ItsBeenReal.co.uk

INEVITABLE CAPITALIST AGENDA
 from the new infographic book of visual explora
 The Visual Miscellaneum

Study of Concept Mapping

Can you state 3 differences between the Left & Right

- 1
- 2
- 3

How We Form Political Opinions

Relationship between Political ideology & Political view

- Ideology does not always shape the opinion
- Individual may not always link political issues to their own ideologies
- Person's knowledge of politics & outside forces, not always consistent

shifting ideology fig. 6:3 Ginsberg

Political Knowledge

- How much political knowledge is necessary to act as an effective citizen?
- Are your actions/choices consistent with your political views?
 - Eg. voting

Poor political knowledge = Political inequality

- Having undefined views may mean that your opinions are easily influenced by the opinions of others
- Studies show that our knowledge of politics is poor
- What are some of the reasons? How do you decide to vote?
- Those with education, income, employment & interest in affecting gov tend to be more involved in politics
- Can lead to political inequality?

Influence of Gov, Private Group, Media

- Constant exposure to a market place of ideas
- Some group, agency, individuals trying to shape & influence our political opinions
- Political ideas are usually promoted by an organized group, which comes from 3 sources:
 - **Gov**
 - **Private Group**
 - **Media**
- These are often competing forces in their attempts to change individuals' beliefs

Discuss examples

Government & the Shaping of political Opinions

- As much as Gov tries to influence citizens' beliefs, its efforts are limited
- Gov uses polls & media effectively to shape public opinion
- Not always successful: Nixon's strategy to gain public support for Vietnam war was exposed by CBS
- Clinton's media info on cuts to Medicaid helped to defeat Republican budget

Private Groups: the shaping of political opinions

- Interest Groups & those with resources:
Right to life, Amendment 2 on defining Marriage
- Swift Boat ads against John Kerry
- SNL satire on Palin during 2008 election

Media: shaping of political opinions

- Media has great influence over our opinions
- Bias & special interests in how media interprets & reports
- Eg. After 911 Bush's anti terrorists efforts were praised, but after 2003 media's criticism of his Iraq war

Measuring Public Opinion p. 234-235

- Polling was introduced as a result of the size / geography of the country & the size of the population
- Sampling Techniques & Bias
- Random polling = less bias
- Selection Bias = the sample size is not representative sample/under represents
- Sample Size (450-1500 = +/- 3%)
- Survey design: may reflect measurement error= faulty questions
- Push Polling: questions lead the respondents
- Illusion of Saliency: Polls which convey that something is important, but it's not

Key Terms

- Public opinion
- Political ideology
- Gender gap
- Liberal
- Conservative
- Push polling
- Exit poll
- Selection Bias
- Illusion of saliency
- Bandwagon Effect