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Citizen Beliefs and Public Opinion Polls

"Without common ideas, there is no common action, and without common action men still exist, but a social body does not. Thus in order that there be society, and all the more, that this society prosper, it is necessary that all the minds of the citizens always be brought together and held together by some principle ideas."

—Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* 1835

Essential Question: How do demographics, political culture, and dynamic social change shape citizen beliefs about government, and how are those beliefs measured?

Citizen beliefs include a range of opinions that help guide political actions and shape public policy. Some views amount to a clear consensus. For example, nearly everyone agrees children should be educated and that the government should punish violent criminals. However, Americans also disagree on aspects related to those issues. For example, exactly what topics should children learn? What is the appropriate punishment for premeditated murder? Policymakers try to answer these questions in a society of diverse and constantly shifting views. The framers built processes into the Constitution so that different interpretations of the core values Americans share can be debated and shaped into policy that represents the divergent views of Americans. The most effective way to reach consensus on these issues is for citizens to put forth and debate their ideas in a civil and respectful way.

Core Values and Attitudes

Citizens' attitudes toward government and toward one another are influenced by the way citizens interpret core American values. American citizens, coming from a range of backgrounds and experiences, have widely different views of how government ought to govern. Even when citizens generally agree on the basic premise of a governing value, they often disagree on how public officials should address it, how to define the terms of the debate, and how government should fund it. For example, most citizens believe that government should

provide an economic safety net for citizens, some kind of welfare system that will help those unfortunate people who have lost their jobs, fallen to ill health, or found themselves without shelter. Yet citizens differ greatly on what defines "poor," at what point the government should reach out and help people, and what type of help that recipients should be given.

In a similar way, nearly all Americans oppose murder, and all want to correctly identify the killer before punishment is administered. In other words, we agree that murder should be criminal and all defendants should receive a fair trial. But we differ noticeably on how government might prosecute the accused and what punishment a guilty defendant will receive.

You'll notice an "either or," or maybe even a linear spectrum, to the ideological views outlined above. From the perspective of some citizens, the threshold below which people will qualify for welfare is lower than what others may define. Many of these same people favor hard punishment for criminals. People at this end of the spectrum are usually known as **conservative**.

In contrast, other groups may want government to provide welfare to people at a higher, though still impoverished, income level. These same people may desire leniency from the government on punishments. People at this other end of the spectrum are usually known as **liberal**. (See pages 353–355 for more on the political spectrum.)

Relying on this linear scale to discuss citizens' views oversimplifies the array of viewpoints, but the scale can be useful for discussion. No matter where on the scale people's views might lie, Americans also have strongly held common views that form the country's *political culture*—the set of attitudes that shape political behavior. The cornerstones of this political culture are individualism, equal opportunity, free enterprise, and the rule of law.

Individualism

From the days of self-reliant colonists and rugged settlers in the West to today's competitive entrepreneurs, **individualism**—a belief in the fundamental worth and importance of the individual—has been a value of American social and political life. It is rooted in the Enlightenment philosophy that helped shape American government—the "inalienable rights" of individuals precede government; they are not bestowed by government. Individual liberties are enshrined in and protected by the Bill of Rights. Individualism is the value that encourages people to pursue their own best interest.

Individualism, however, is in tension with other social values Americans share, such as respect for the common good and protection of the public interest. Alexis de Tocqueville warned about the dangers of individualism in his treatise on the early United States. He wrote that individualism "disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friends." If everyone sought only his or her best interest, society as a whole would become fractured.

The principle of *enlightened* self-interest, the belief that one's own interests are best served when the good of the group is also considered, balances the

drive of individualism with the realities of social life. American individualism seeks the freedom to fulfill one's own promise while also enjoying the benefits and protections of living in society.

Different interpretations of individualism create a spectrum of views between self-centered individualism, which places the individual's interest above the group's interest and wants little interference from the government, to enlightened self-interest, which sacrifices some individual freedom for the greater good and expects the government to help promote the public good.

Equality of Opportunity

Thomas Jefferson included the line "all men are created equal" in the Declaration of Independence. The purpose of the line was not to suggest that every person was an absolute equal to every other in ability or character, or any other subjective measure. Rather, the purpose of the line was to emphasize the equal rights of people to pursue life, liberty, and happiness. Yet not until the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868 was there a national constitutional demand for the state governments to guarantee the equal protection of citizens. In the Progressive Era (1890–1920), as government began to act to make things fair and to protect citizens from the harmful effects of industrialization and unfair business practices, President Theodore Roosevelt spoke of practical equality for all and declared, "[E]very man will have a fair chance to make of himself all that in him lies; to reach the highest point to which his capacities . . . can carry him." He also pointed out the practical result that would enhance our nation, "[E]quality of opportunity means that the commonwealth will get from every citizen the highest service of which he is capable."

The equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment (in bold) guarantees that people in similar conditions in every state will be treated equally under the law.

> All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; **nor shall any State** deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor **deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.**

Unequal treatment, however, was not limited to the states. The federal government also had discriminatory practices at one time. The federal government provided remedies to redress these and state laws that resulted in unequal treatment. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, for example, prohibits employment discrimination based on race, sex, national origin, color and religion. In the 1960s, Congress created an agency to combat discrimination in hiring or firing of employees. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission investigates complaints of discrimination in job termination or refusal to hire, based on race, sex, and other Title VII criteria.

Citizens who debate the practical side of equality of opportunity may ask, "Doesn't every person born these days have the same chance at greatness and wealth in America if he or she makes the right decisions?" Others will agree that the occasional rags-to-riches story is impressive but not always possible without some level of government support for advancement. Still others will argue that it is fine for the government to step in and, by law and policy, influence or redirect the natural forces of society and the market. Despite these different viewpoints, however, nearly all agree that equality of opportunity is a shared value.

Free Enterprise

Most colonists came to America for economic reasons: jobs, opportunity, or a greater distance from a government that might inhibit economic success. The same year the colonists declared independence, Scottish economist and philosopher Adam Smith wrote *The Wealth of Nations*, an examination of government's role in the economy. Smith posited that the state (meaning government in general) should be primarily concerned with protecting its people from invasion and with maintaining law and order and should only intervene in the natural flow of human economic interaction to protect the people. Businesses and merchants would succeed or fail based on their decisions and those of the consumer. Government should take a *laissez-faire* ("let it be") approach, and an "invisible hand"—guided by the interactions of producers and consumers—would regulate over time. This approach to the economy is called **free enterprise**. Those who adhere to this approach are known as free-market advocates.

Smith would no doubt take issue with today's government-required overtime pay and limits on factory emissions. But times have changed. Today, even most strict free-market advocates believe in a minimum wage and some controls to keep the air we breathe clean.

Through the Progressive Era (1890–1920) and New Deal (1933–1937), the state and federal governments began to regulate industry, minimum wage, child labor, and fairness in the workplace. Labor unions organized to press companies and the government to address their concerns. Free-market advocates challenged those plans and suggested that the invisible hand of supply, demand, and independent citizen decisions should work things out.

In the last 100 years, while free enterprise is still a driving ideal, government involvement in the marketplace has increased to protect workers or guarantee economic successes overall. The U.S. Supreme Court, too, has shaped much law that governs corporations and how they act, as well as legal expectations and freedoms in the workplace. But each time government debates a new business or economic regulation, strong voices on both sides suggest a move in one direction or the other.

Conservatives tend to want government to stay out of the way and want fewer burdensome regulations on businesses. For these reasons, small businesses owners and corporate leaders tend to vote with the Republican Party. Republican President Donald Trump issued a number of executive

orders rolling back regulation on business, and in 2017, the Republican-dominated Congress passed a tax bill that greatly reduced corporate taxes. In contrast, liberals tend to see government regulation as necessary to assure fairness and safety, and labor union leaders and hourly workers tend to side with the Democratic Party. The Republican-backed tax law of 2017 passed without a single Democratic vote.

Rule of Law

Every four years, the newly elected (or reelected) president is required to make the following promise before taking office: "I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my Ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States." In fact it is the Constitution itself that spells out this requirement (Article II, Section 1, Clause 8). This oath assures that even the president, the highest office holder in the land, must obey and protect the laws of the nation. **Rule of law**—the principle of a government that establishes laws that apply equally to all members of society and prevents the rule and whims of leaders who see themselves as above the law—was a cornerstone of Enlightenment political thought. John Adams cited Enlightenment philosophers when pointing to the British injustices leading to the Revolution: "They [the philosophers] define a republic to be a government of laws, and not of men."

The rule of law assures stability and certainty. In many foreign governments today, whatever dictator happens to be in charge will make most decisions in the government, regardless of prior policy, including when and even if there will be elections. In contrast, the U.S. Constitution dictates a presidential election every four years under the rule of law, and thus the United States has never missed an election and has never had a serious problem with the transfer of power.

At times, however, government officials disregard the rule of law for personal gain, corruption, or power. Fortunately, there are systems in place to address or reverse such disregard for law. Public records of government spending, regular auditing of the public purse, independent law enforcement, a free press, and public opinion all preserve the rule of law.

Sometimes the law is not followed for the sake of leniency. A traffic cop might let a young motorist go without a speeding ticket because the infraction was small. A president might provide a new interpretation for how the government treats immigrants brought as young children into the United States illegally versus adults who entered the United States illegally. Our laws are written in language that has evolving meaning and interpretation.

Limited Government

American individuality and the story of the nation's birth after a battle with an over-reaching government have ingrained in citizens a desire to have a **limited government**—one kept under control by law and by checks and balances and the separation of powers. The Constitution is filled with as many devices and designs to prevent government action as to empower it. The Bill of Rights is

nothing more than a list of rights the national government cannot take away. Citizens of all political viewpoints agree that none should suffer from the heavy hand of government.

Both parties have embraced the idea of a limited government. The Democrats for nearly a century represented the party of limited government. After a transformation through the Progressive Era and New Deal and a tipping point with President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society (1964–1965), Democrats became more accepting of liberal government action for the greater good. Republicans, once the party that used the federal government to free the slaves, to build railroads, and to create state colleges, now desire less government involvement in business and other matters.

Limited government is key to civil liberties, another arena in which public opinion is divided. Limited government is at issue when people grapple with such questions as "When can government come into your home? When can it regulate affairs related to church and morality?" among others.

Political Ideologies

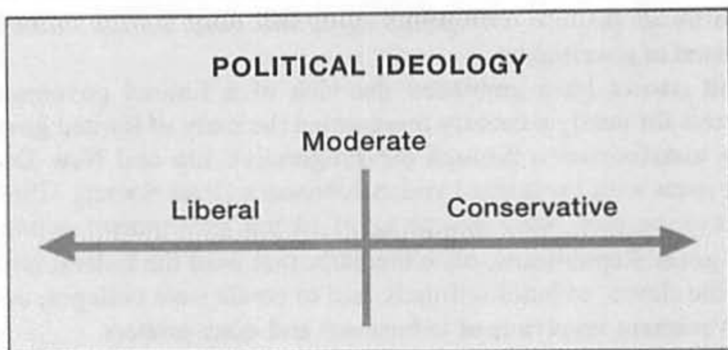
People take positions on public issues and develop a political viewpoint on how government should act in line with their ideology. An **ideology** is a comprehensive and mutually consistent set of ideas. When there are two or more sides to an issue, voters tend to fall into different camps, either a conservative or a liberal ideology or philosophy. However, this diverse nation has a variety of ideologies that overlap one another. (You will read more about political ideologies in Chapter 11.)

Regardless of ideology, for example, most Americans agree that the government should regulate dangerous industries, educate children at public expense, and protect free speech, at least to a degree. Everyone wants a strong economy and national security. These are **valence issues**—concerns or policies that are viewed in the same way by people with a variety of ideologies. When political candidates debate valence issues, "the dialogue can be like a debate between the nearly identical Tweedledee and Tweedledum," says congressional elections expert Paul Herrnson.

Wedge issues, in contrast, sharply divide the public. These include the issues of abortion and the 2003 invasion and later occupation of Iraq. The more divisive issues tend to hold a high **saliency**, or importance, to an individual or a group. For senior citizens, for example, questions about reform of the Social Security system hold high saliency. For people eighteen to twenty years old, the relative lack of job opportunities may have high saliency, since their unemployment rate is higher than that of older age groups.

The Liberal-Conservative Spectrum

Political scientists use the terms *liberal* and *conservative*, as well as "left" and "right," to label each end of an ideological spectrum. Most Americans are **moderate** and never fall fully into one camp or the other. Many others may think conservatively on some issues and have liberal beliefs on others.



The two major political parties—Democrats and Republicans—tend to embody the liberal and the conservative ideology, respectively. Yet labeling the two parties as liberal or conservative is an oversimplification. Some self-described conservatives want nothing to do with the Republican Party, and many Democrats dislike the "liberal" label.

The meaning of the terms *liberal* and *conservative* has changed over history. In early America, a "liberal" government was one that did little. Thomas Jefferson believed in a high degree of liberty, declaring that a government that governs best is one that governs least. With this statement, Jefferson described the government's liberal approach toward the people, allowing citizen freedom, a free flow of ideas, free markets, fewer laws, and fewer restrictions. This understanding of the word continued into the late nineteenth century.

In the Progressive Era, the federal government expanded its activity, going outside the confines of traditional government. In the 1930s, Democratic President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) proposed a "liberal" plan for emergency legislation. His New Deal agenda was new and revolutionary. The government took on new responsibilities in ways it never had. The government acted in a liberal way, less constrained by tradition or limitations that guided earlier governments. Since the 1930s, the term *liberal* has usually meant being open to allowing the government to flexibly expand beyond established constraints.

The term *conservative* describes those who believe in following tradition and having reverence for authority. Modern-day conservatives often invoke Jefferson and argue that government should do less and thus allow people more freedom. Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater, the 1964 Republican presidential nominee, embraced the conservative label and published a book, *The Conscience of a Conservative*, in 1960. He and much of his party believed that Roosevelt's party had unwisely altered the role of government. Goldwater and his party wanted less economic regulation and more responsibility on the citizenry. Many conservatives call themselves "fiscal conservatives" because they want to see less taxation and less government spending overall.

Since FDR's presidency and Goldwater's nomination, these political terms have further evolved, and now it is difficult to know exactly what they mean. Roosevelt would likely not support some of the more liberal goals of the Democratic Party today, and Goldwater, in retirement, supported Democratic President Bill Clinton's initiatives to open the door for members of the LGBT community in the military. Additionally, an array of cultural and social issues that came to the forefront in the 1960s and 1970s changed the dynamic between those who consider themselves conservative and those who consider themselves liberal, and thus also changed the meaning of the terms.

Traditional Christian voters, family values groups, and others who oppose abortion and same-sex marriage and support prayer in school have adopted the conservative label and have aligned themselves with the Republican Party. However, policies that restrict abortion, censor controversial material in books or magazines, or seek to more tightly define marriage actually require more, not less, law and regulation. For supporters of these policies, then, the conservative label is not necessarily accurate. People who believe in more regulation on industry, stronger gun control, and the value of diversity are generally seen as liberal. But when government acts to establish these goals, Jefferson might say, it is not necessarily acting liberally in relation to the rights of the people.

Off the Line

If you have trouble finding the precise line between liberal and conservative, you are not alone. Cleavages, or gaps, in public opinion make understanding where the public stands on issues even more difficult. Few people, even regular party members, agree with every conservative or every liberal idea. Many people simply do not fall on the linear continuum diagrammed on page 354 but rather align themselves with one of several other notable political philosophies: **libertarian, populist**, or **progressive**.

Libertarians Libertarian voters generally oppose government intervention or regulation. As their name suggests, they have a high regard for civil liberties, those rights outlined in the Bill of Rights. They oppose censorship, want lower taxes, and dislike government-imposed morality. Though a small Libertarian Party exists, more citizens claim the libertarian (small "l") label than formally belong to the party. Libertarian-minded citizens can be found in both the Republican and Democratic parties. In short, libertarians are conservative on fiscal or economic issues, such as government spending or raising the minimum wage, while they tend to be liberal on moral or social issues. Most libertarians are pro-choice on abortion and support the equal treatment of LGBT persons. As Nick Gillespie and Matt Welch write of libertarians in their book, *Declaration of Independents*, "We believe that you should be able to think what you want, live where you want, trade for what you want, eat what you want, smoke what you want, and wed whom you want."

Populists Populists have a very different profile. They generally attend a Protestant church and follow fundamental Christian ideas: love thy neighbor, contribute to charity, and follow a strict moral code. More populists can be found in the South and Midwest than along each American coast. They tend to come from working-class families.

Many saw Donald Trump as a populist candidate. Although Trump promised as a candidate to "Make America Great Again" for the hard-working middle class and to "drain the swamp" of Washington insiders, many believe his 2017 tax plan and other polices in his agenda may in fact have helped the rich at the expense of poor.

Progressives The Progressive Movement emerged in cities from roots in the Republican Party. It peaked in the United States in the early 1900s when reformers challenged government corruption that ran counter to the values of equality, individualism, democracy, and advancement. At that time, the Republican Party split into its two wings: conservative and progressive. Progressives criticized traditional political establishments that concentrated too much power in one place, such as government and business. Modern progressives are aligned with labor unions. They believe in workers' rights over corporate rights, and they believe the wealthier classes should pay a much larger percentage of taxes than they currently do.

With some variation, about 40 to 50 percent of America consider themselves moderate, nearly 30 percent consider themselves conservative, and about 20 percent consider themselves liberal. A poll that asks voters if they are "moderate," "conservative," or "liberal" have starkly different responses from one that asks if respondents are "Democrat," "Republican," or "independent."

A 2016 Pew Research survey found that 32 percent claimed to be Democrats, 32 percent called themselves Republicans, and 34 percent considered themselves independent. In answering a parallel question, only 34 percent considered themselves "strongly partisan." Many people's views fall between these ideologies and between the two major political parties

Cultural Factors, Political Socialization, and Attitudes

If you try to pinpoint yourself with an X on the ideological spectrum shown on page 354, where would you fall? Would you be on the continuum at all, or would you fall into one of the other ideologies you read about? If you are not sure, think of someone you know, maybe a parent or good friend, and decide where that person might fall. Just how did you or the person you chose arrive at that point on the continuum? What influences or factors caused you, or anyone, to think about politics and policy in particular ways?

Political socialization is the process by which one develops political beliefs. The process begins as soon as one is old enough to start forming opinions on public matters, and it never really ends. Attending college, getting married, purchasing a home, and having children can have an enormous impact on one's thinking. Even career politicians whose positions are well

Source: *Getty Images*
Family is a key influence in shaping political development.

known modify or switch somewhat due to an evolving world with countless circumstances. Every constituent and political participant is affected by a variety of influences that assist in political development.

Family

Family has long been regarded as the biggest influence on one's political socialization. As children begin to inquire about world events or local issues, parents begin to explain these. Most moms or dads have some degree of opinion that will likely influence their children. At the dinner table, families discuss "kitchen table politics," considering events currently happening and what impact they might have on the family.

Children can differ from their parents in political opinions. Teenagers who strongly differ from their parents in nonpolitical ways may find themselves adopting far different political views as well. Moms and dads may differ from each other. Younger voters vote less frequently than older voters and, not surprisingly, have less consistent views. Citizens aged 18–24 are not solidly aligned with their parents in great numbers, yet those who hold strong opinions do not veer far from their parents. Studies show that among high school seniors, only about 10 percent identified with the party opposite one or both of their parents.

The children's magazine *Weekly Reader* conducted an unscientific poll on presidential elections from 1956 through 2008. Responding children generally answered as one or both of their parents would have, and thus the massive sample became reflective of the parent population at large. The *Weekly Reader* presidential poll failed to accurately predict the outcome just one time in its history.

How do these children differ from their elders once they reach adulthood or after they have voted in a few elections? About 50 percent of adults reject or

misperceive their mothers' and fathers' **party identification.** Most who differ from their parents proclaim political independence instead of aligning with the opposite party.

School and College

Both teachers and peer groups can have a large impact on student beliefs. In school, topics come up in classes that may allow a teacher to influence students politically, intentionally or not. There is no solid evidence that the K–12 experience makes one more conservative or liberal.

College campuses are places where professional scholars and students can discuss new ideas and explore revolutionary theories. Colleges have more flexible rules than the average high school. College deans and professors encourage a free flow of ideas in classroom discussion. Nonetheless business, economics, and engineering majors tend to be Republican while students majoring in English and humanities tend to be Democrats.

From the 1950s to the early 1980s, fewer high school graduates attended college than do so today. In fact, in 1968 only about 13 percent of Americans had a four-year college degree. In 2012, more than 33 percent of Americans aged 24–29 had attended college and earned a degree. Because such large numbers of people attend college and because so many post-college forces impact one's beliefs, it is not possible to say that people with an undergraduate degree tend to adhere to one particular ideology.

Graduate school, however, is a different story. When researchers examine voters with advanced degrees—people with master's and doctoral degrees—they find they more frequently vote Democratic and hold more liberal attitudes, although the highest percentage (46.1%) consider themselves moderate, according to a 2007 study by academics Neil Gross and Solon Simmons.

Peers

Race and ethnic heritage are other factors that play a major role in determining one's outlook on the world and how one votes. African Americans have closely aligned with the Democratic Party since 1932 and even more strongly since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Hispanics, in recent years, have cast more Democratic than Republican votes, usually by 55 to 65 percent. Asian Americans vote more often with the conservative Republican Party, though exit polls in 2016 showed Asian American support for Hillary Clinton. New American citizens or voters with strong ties to a foreign country will consider their votes in the context of their culture or how an issue might affect the relationship between the United States and their country of origin.

Media

As they have spread to so many aspects of daily life, the media have a significant influence on political socialization. In fact, young people spend so much time in front of a screen—on their computers, phones, and other digital devices—that they spend less time with their family members, and for this

reason the influence of the family on political socialization may be weakening somewhat. Young people are exposed to a great deal of political information and opinion through their exposure to media. Engaging with that content helps young people form their political identity. They follow politicians they admire and join groups that plan citizen events. As in face-to-face experiences, peer influence is strong in social media, and through online discussions with their friends and family, young people develop their viewpoints.

Media are also influential in political socialization because of the way they depict politics and politicians through both news coverage and fictional television shows that are politically oriented. Even nonpolitical figures in the media—fictional characters with a strong sense of individualism, for example, or real-life people whose acts of bravery or self-sacrifice (or cowardice and greed, on the other side of the coin)—both reflect and help shape political and social views. (For more on the media as a linkage institution, see Chapter 16.)

Social Environments

A person's social environments beyond family and schools also influence political socialization. Two types of environments are especially important: religious institutions and civic institutions.

Religious Institutions Churches and other places of worship influence individuals' political thought. The National Election Study estimates that 33 percent of Americans attend church on a weekly or near-weekly basis. Churches are more ideological and convey a more coherent philosophy than does a typical school. There are so many different churches, religions, and sects in this nation that there is no way to say how religion in general influences where the average voter lies on the political spectrum. However, people who attend church are more likely than those who don't to vote or participate in politics in other ways.

Specific religious affiliations, though, can be directly tied to a political stance. Fundamentalists and Evangelical Christians have a strong political presence in the South and somewhat in the Midwest. Fundamentalists believe in a literal interpretation of the Holy Bible. Evangelicals promote the Christian faith. Both tend to take conservative positions and vote Republican. Catholics have traditionally voted with the Democratic Party, though their vote is less attached to Democratic candidates today than it was in earlier years. Jews make up a small part of the national electorate and tend to vote for Democrats.

Civic Institutions If you are a Girl Scout, Boy Scout, an athlete on a neighborhood team, or a volunteer at a hospital, you are part of a civic institution. Civic institutions make up civil society—the nongovernmental, non-business, and voluntary sector of social life. Some civic institutions—such as groups with extreme political views—bring only like-minded people together, while other civic institutions bring together people from a variety of backgrounds and viewpoints and help them learn how to bridge or work around their differences. Both types influence political socialization: one reinforces already held beliefs while the other socializes a person to accept diversity.

Location

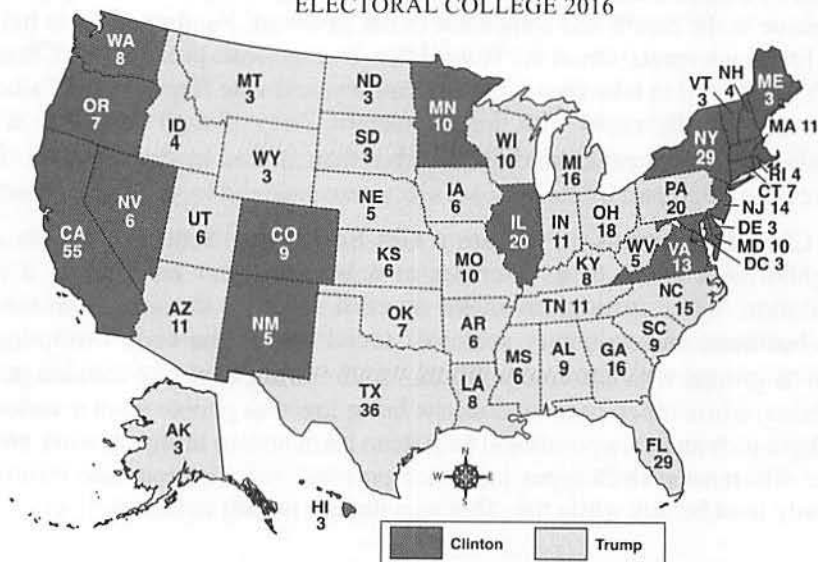
Geographic location plays a key role in the way people think or approach certain issues. For example, for a century after the Civil War, the most identifiable Democratic region was the South. The party went through a long- term metamorphosis that shifted that affiliation (see page 468). A close look at Electoral College results from a recent election will give you some indication where the two parties, and thus the two ideologies, are strong or weak. The candidate with the most votes in each state received the electoral votes for that state.

THINK AS A POLITICAL SCIENTIST: *ANALYZE AND INTERPRET VISUAL INFORMATION*

When you analyze visual information, begin by identifying the topic. In certain visuals, you may also need to identify the perspective. Political cartoons, for example, will always convey the cartoonists' point of view. Maps, on the other hand, tend to be informational. Understanding the information in a map requires understanding the map's key. The key includes visual symbols—colors, bars, and icons, for example—and an explanation of what they represent on the map. Analyzing information on a political map requires explaining how the elements of the map illustrate or relate to political principles, institutions, processes, and behavior.

Once you can explain those ideas, you can then take a closer look to interpret the information. When you interpret a political map, you explain the *implications* of the map's information in relation to political principles, institutions, processes, and behaviors. Identifying trends and patterns will often help you see those implications.

ELECTORAL COLLEGE 2016



Practice: Complete the following tasks.

1. Identify the topic of the map on the previous page.
2. Explain how the elements of the map relate to the political principles, institutions, processes, and behaviors you have been reading about in this chapter.
3. Explain the implications of this information by looking for patterns and trends. For example, are there any meaningful clusters of states? Based on what you know about the main regions of the United States (West, Midwest, South, Northeast), do you see any patterns? If so, how might you explain them?

In the Northeast, Democrats dominate and more liberal policies prevail: higher tax rates, for example, fund more services, such as public transportation. Vermont and Massachusetts were among the first states to legalize civil unions and same-sex marriage. New York has followed. Democrats dominate the congressional delegations from New England, New York, and New Jersey. California and other western states also lean Democratic with liberal philosophies, having a strong concern for the environment and a tolerance for diverse lifestyles.

The South is more influenced by conservative Christian values than are the Northeast and West. Southern states contain higher percentages of gun ownership than in other regions and are less friendly to organized labor. The South is more religious than other parts of the country. Church attendance is higher, and voters are decidedly more Protestant. Roughly 76 percent of the South is Protestant versus 49 percent for the remainder of the nation. There is also a high concern for issues related to farming and agriculture.

Republicans have enjoyed southern majorities in the last several national elections, but there are still many southern voters who remain Democrat, reflecting generations of party loyalty and the growth of southern cities. The working-class southerner may side with the Democratic Party on economic issues such as worker pay and employee benefits, but these same working-class voters want tighter immigration enforcement, and they tend to vote with traditional values in mind.

Shifting Influences on Political Socialization

Culture and demographics are fairly stable influences on political socialization. Changes, however, can also have an influence on political socialization. These changes can be in society as a whole as a result of dynamic social change brought on by major political or social events, and they can also be within a person as an individual grows and changes through the lifecycle.

Influence of Major Political Events

"Where were you when you heard that President Kennedy had been shot?" is a question most people of school age or older in 1963 can answer without a second thought. Such an event has a lasting impact on a person's absorption of political culture. Kennedy's assassination was one of an unfortunate number of assassinations during the 1960s: presidential candidate Robert Kennedy, brother of the slain President Kennedy; civil rights leaders Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr. were also gunned down. The same decade became known for protests—of racial segregation and discrimination and also of the United States involvement in the conflict in Vietnam and the draft that forced young men to defend the United States. Mass protests—marches on Washington and around the country—were a feature of the political culture of the time and influenced the political socialization of both participants and observers as an active democracy engaged members of society over life and death matters. Challenging the government became a political norm, and people tended to feel they had the power to bring about social changes through their actions.

In contrast, those who endured the economic hardships of the Great Depression (1929–1939) lived in an era in which many people had a favorable attitude toward government involvement in social life. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal put people back to work by creating government jobs related to infrastructure (roads, canals, railroads) and even the arts. Social Security provided support for seniors and lifted many members of that age group out of poverty. These events influenced political socialization—in this case advancing trust in the government and support for the role of government in providing a social safety net.

Each generation has its own political events that bring about dynamic social change. As the Depression waned, the United States became involved in World War II. The war brought the nation together against fascism, creating a sense of united purpose and a belief in the reliability of the government. Women entered the workforce to help industrial output of needed war materials and in so doing redefined the role of women in society and helped shape political attitudes about gender.

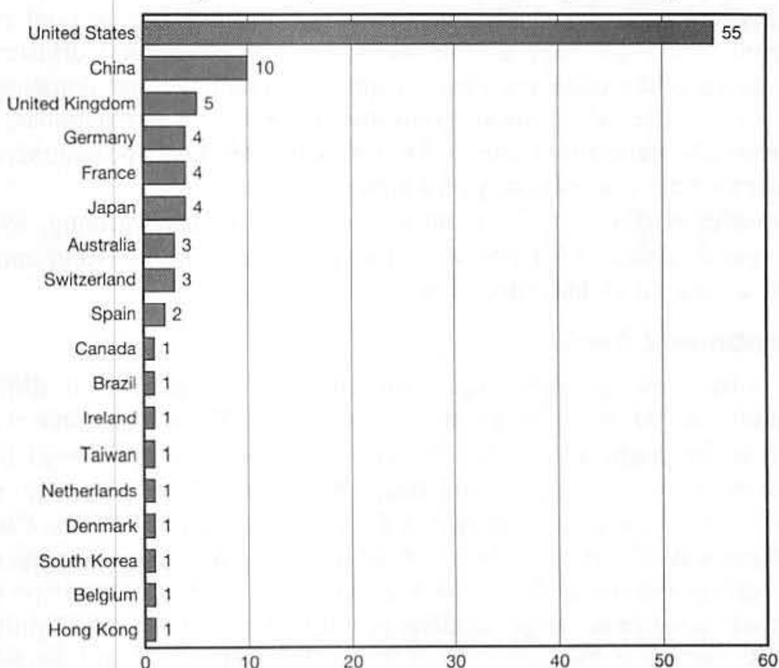
Influence of Globalization

Globalization is the process of an ever-expanding and increasingly interactive world economy. However, globalization has an impact beyond the economy. The political culture of the United States has both influenced and been influenced by the values of other countries as a result of globalization.

U.S. Influence on Other Countries The United States is the dominant economic power affecting globalization, with U.S. businesses and products spread throughout the world. For example, American film, television, commercials, streaming content, music, and video games are popular throughout the world. These products reflect American values, such as individualism and equality of opportunity, and consumers in foreign countries, even those

with political cultures very different from that of the United States, can be influenced by these values. That influence may heighten tension between the American values and local values. For example, in countries where women do not have social or legal equality, American movies and television shows portraying women as equals clash with local values. In some places, that clash has led to the weakening of certain cultural values and the adoption of more Western values. In other cases, however, that clash has led to a strengthening of local cultures that do not want to see their cultural ideals become subsumed into a dominant world culture.

In general, however, U.S. influence in the world is seen as "democratizing." The more people in other countries are exposed to the United States political culture, the more they may wish to have a democratic political culture themselves.



Source: *Bloomberg and PwC analysis*

As you analyze and interpret this graph, consider its possible limitations. What other information might help put these figures into perspective?

Influence of Other Countries on the United States Although most of the globalization influence flows from the United States to other countries, through globalization and the immigration it encourages, the United States also is exposed to values from other parts of the world. The nation's diversity has increased as a result of globalization. Professionals and other workers from all parts of the world bring their political and cultural ideas with them, and as they engage with American society, they exert influence. People from Asian countries, for example, tend to put the needs of the community above

individual needs. For this reason, these cultures are called collectivistic, while the culture of the United States is called individualistic. Collectivistic values have had an influence on American culture, especially in the workplace, where collaboration, a collectivistic ideal, has been shown to lead to better results than those of individuals working in isolation.

Global Identification Globalization has also created a political culture in which people think beyond national borders for their identity. For example, the European Union (EU) is a group of sovereign European nations that function as an economic and political unit, somewhat like the early confederation of states under the Articles of Confederation. Many people within the EU, while not abandoning their national identity, also feel a political and cultural kinship with other members of the Union.

The global reach of news coverage can also foster a sense of global citizenship. Just as TV images of Bull Connor's violence against peaceful protesters in Birmingham, Alabama, awakened support for the civil rights movement (see page 309), so can news coverage of natural disasters or humanitarian crises engender global support—volunteers and donations of money—from a sense of shared humanity. A number of international, non-governmental organizations, such as Doctors without Borders, provide services wherever they are needed, many on a volunteer basis.

Pressures on the world's resources, especially global warming, remind people that they share their fate with other people around the world and can promote a sense of global citizenship.

Generational Effects

Many polls show the differing voting patterns for people in different generations. In the past few presidential elections, Democrats have won a majority of the younger vote. The 2016 CNN exit poll shows Hillary Clinton won voters under 45 years old, and Trump won those 45 and older. Clinton's share of younger voters was larger than Trump's share of older voters. Clinton won 56 percent of voters age 18 to 24, while Trump took only 34 percent of that age group. For those 65 years of age and over, Trump won 52–45 percent.

Yet when we examine generations as voting blocs, we examine millions of people who come from all parts of the United States, each influenced not only by their age but also by additional demographic characteristics discussed earlier in this chapter. In fact, there is more variation in political attitudes within a given generation or age bloc than between generations. As you have seen, notable events can have different effects on liberal- or conservative-leaning citizens. Citizens in different generations can learn different lessons from the same events.

The impressionable-age hypothesis posits that most persons forge most of their political attitudes during the critical period between ages 14 and 24. Political and perhaps personal events occurring at age 18 are about three times as likely to impact partisan voting preferences as similar events occurring at age 40.

Political scientists, psychologists, and pollsters typically place Americans into four generational categories to measure attitudes and compare where they might stand on a political continuum. They include from youngest to oldest: **Millennials, Generation X, Baby Boomers**, and the **Silent Generation**. Different authorities define the cutoffs at slightly different years. The Silent Generation, those born before 1945, are senior citizens born during the Great Depression or as late as the aftermath of World War II. Baby Boomers (those born between 1946–1964) lived during an era of economic prosperity after World War II and through the turbulent 1960s. Generation X includes those Americans born after the Baby Boomers (between about 1962–1982), and Millennials came of voting age at or after the new millennium. A look at two of the age groups on this timeline will show the role of generational effects on political socialization.

Millennials This under-35 population tends to be more accepting of interracial and same-sex marriage, legalization of marijuana, and second chances in the criminal justice system than their elders. They are also more ethnically and racially diverse than previous generations. About 12 percent of millennials are first generation Americans. They tend to be tech-centered, generally supportive of government action to solve problems, and highly educated. They have a high level of social connectedness and great opportunities for news consumption. By any measure, they are more liberal than previous generations. Gallup researcher Jeffrey Jones says that Millennials will remain more liberal and the United States will become more liberal as this group ages.

On Foreign Policy As Millennials began reading their news online, they encountered a world characterized by a complex distribution of power, a network of state and non-state actors shaping the foreign policy process and international relations. Millenials' frequent interactions with people not exactly like them and at great distances have led them to be more willing to promote cooperation over the use of force in foreign policy compared with other generations. Although they are hopeful about the future of the country, only about 70 percent of Millenials regard themselves as patriotic, a lower percentage than older Americans.

The two seminal events in Millennials' formative years were the September 11, 2001 attacks orchestrated by al-Qaeda (see pages 27–28) and the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq that followed. Two schools of thought prevail in how Millennials view the 9/11 attacks. One is that the attack on U.S. soil calls for aggressive homeland security and counterterrorism measures. Another is that the event should serve as a wake-up call that the United States should be less involved and present in the Middle East. Some studies report that 53 percent of Millennials believe the United States provoked the attacks.

The U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military attacks on Afghanistan following 9/11 and the 2003 Iraq invasion and subsequent occupation have also helped shape Millennials' views. Afghanistan eventually surpassed Vietnam as America's longest military conflict, and the chief premise for invading Iraq, a search for weapons of mass destruction, turned up empty. This younger

generation will likely compare future conflicts to the war in Iraq, predisposing this cohort to be more reluctant to intervene or use military force than older generations. A 2014 study by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs found that almost 50 percent of Millennials say the United States should stay out of world affairs, the largest percentage since the Council began the survey in 1974.

Economic Views Millennials tend to follow a similar "stay out" mindset in regard to social questions and some economic questions, yet their lines separating government from the economy are not easy to draw. They are business friendly but not opposed to regulation. They want citizens to earn their way. But they want to protect the consumer, the environment, and society at large. Their coming of age in a post-Earth Day world has caused them to see the reasons to protect the environment including recycling and other measures. They often acknowledge government waste and are disgusted by it, but they believe in a higher degree of regulation than do conservatives. Nearly four out of five Millennials believe Americans should adopt a sustainable lifestyle by conserving energy and consuming fewer goods.

Millennials are more conservative on free trade and in allowing citizens more control over their Social Security retirement savings. They are not big supporters of labor unions because labor unions do not hold the sway or respect they once had, and Millennials see unions as part of the problem. They also believe in a meritocracy, with 48 percent saying that government programs for the poor undermine initiative and responsibility, while 29 percent disagree with that statement.

Many in this generation became politically aware around the time of the Great Recession (2007–2012). Studies show that growing up in an economic recession can greatly shape attitudes toward government redistribution of wealth—welfare and Social Security. Nearly 70 percent of Millennials accept the idea of government intervention in a failing economy, 10 percent more than the next older cohort. Pessimistic views formed during a sudden economic downturn tend to be long-lasting. Such experiences could increase the chances these citizens vote for a Democratic presidential candidate by 15 percent.

Voting Though Millennials' views are somewhat nuanced, their voting habits on Election Day are not. The Pew Research Center found in a 2016 study that 55 percent of 18- to 35-year-olds identified as Democrats or leaning Democrat, and 27 percent called themselves "liberal Democrats." More than two out of three young Americans has a progressive tilt on energy, climate change, government efforts to assist people and the economy, and fighting inequality. In the 2016 presidential election, Millennials favored the Democratic Party by 43 percent, while only 26 percent of that group favored the Republican Party. About 10 percent of Millennials voted for someone other than Trump or Clinton, while those 40 and older voted for minor candidates only about 4 percent of the time.

Silent Generation On the opposite end of the age spectrum, senior citizens are defined as those over 65 years old. The Silent Generation and Baby Boomers overlap in this age group, but we focus here on the older generation.

Unique times and political events shaped this generation's thinking. They are the last group to remember the era before the 1960s counterculture movement and before the Vietnam War. They grew up hating communism, and many of them supported America's nine-year involvement in Southeast Asia until the U.S. departure from the region in the mid-1970s. American prosperity, patriotism, and a Christian-Judeo moral code were foremost in shaping their views during their impressionable years.

On Foreign Policy After World War II, the Russians (Soviets at the time) replaced the Axis powers as the new enemy, and the United States stood up to totalitarianism and the Soviet annexation of or influence on vulnerable nations. The Vietnam War was one of the final major efforts that placed large numbers of American GIs on the battlefield to defeat communism. The basic motives behind the Vietnam mission were stopping the spread of communism while assuring democracy and freedoms in those friendly nations that were susceptible to communist takeover. As the mission in Vietnam proved to be a failure and as a rising number of Americans disagreed with U.S. involvement, many of those over 35 years old, especially blue collar workers and those in rural communities, differed from the Baby Boomers. They had trusted and supported their government on the way into Vietnam, and they refrained from criticizing their government as failure became imminent. They were more forgiving of their government in the aftermath of the conflict.

On Social Issues The same generation gave religious values high priority and opposed the cultural changes that came during the 1960s and 1970s. Racial integration led to more interracial marriage and societal acceptance of racial equality, but that acceptance came more slowly to those who grew up under segregated societies in the South and the North. The women's movement changed the traditional roles of the family and eventually legalized abortion. Casual drug use and a counterculture movement caused many who had come of age in the 1950s and early 1960s to question the order of things, yet many of those who started voting in the 1970s stood with the old guard, influenced by their parents' choices. Many still held conservative beliefs and questioned changing American values.

As Molly Ball of *The Atlantic* explained while on the campaign trail in 2016, this cohort "has fought through the culture wars, has watched God and prayer leave the public square, and has watched immigration infiltrate U.S. society and culture." The same group today wants government to be tougher on criminal defendants and terror suspects than do younger groups, they more often oppose gay marriage, and they are bewildered that states are legalizing marijuana. A 2016 PRRI-Brookings survey showed that a majority of those over 65 believe America's "culture and way of life" have changed for the worse.

Voting Seniors are the most reliable voters. Consistently, the retired and elderly show up to vote in the highest percentages. According to a 2015 study by the U.S. Census Bureau, in the 2014 midterm elections, 59 percent of those over 65 voted. National averages in most midterm elections average around 38 percent. In fact, this senior midterm measure beats most voting blocs even in presidential election years. The 55–64 year old group turned out in large numbers in the 2016 presidential election, about 66 percent, but still somewhat lower than their elders whose turnout was about 71 percent.

Seniors have flocked to the Republican Party from the Democratic Party, a consistent trend that began in 2006 and held true on election night in 2016. From 1992 until 2006, they had been a primarily Democratic voting group. At that time, many survivors of the New Deal Coalition—that massive coalition of Americans who voted for Franklin Roosevelt and Democrats after him—still cast Democrat ballots. But since then, many from the Silent Generation have died and their Cold War culture warriors have replaced them.

The shift of this generation is due in part to the shift in policy positions by each of the major parties. The Democratic Party, though redefined as "liberal" economically in the New Deal era, still held somewhat conservative views and dominated in the South into the 1970s and 1980s. As the party took on more liberal social views, supporting the right to abortion, same-sex marriage, and affirmative action, followers of Roosevelt and their children have shifted to the Republican Party.

Lifecycle Effects

Just as each generation experiences dynamic social changes, people experience change as they move through the life cycle. **Lifecycle effects** include the variety of physical, social, and psychological changes that people go through as they age. These can affect political socialization in several ways. For one, they can shift focus to issues that are important at different age levels. For example, many college-age students are concerned about the accumulation of student debt and the challenges in finding a job that provides both a good income and health insurance benefits. In part because of these concerns, many Millennials were drawn to the candidacy of U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) in the Democratic presidential primaries in 2016 because he called for a free education at public colleges and an expansion of Medicare—the health insurance program for seniors managed by the government—to include everyone.

When people in this group move into the next stage of life, which often involves marriage and family, their priorities might shift to other issues related to a stable or growing economy and to schools their children might attend. At this point, a second lifecycle effect also becomes apparent. The

demands of adult responsibility and raising children may limit the amount of active political participation people in this stage of the lifecycle can manage. They may be less able to volunteer in election efforts or to participate in demonstrations.

Just as young adults focus on the issues that matter at their life stage, seniors are worried about things that matter most as they age. The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), the powerful interest group that directly represents more than 40 million seniors, lists among its major issues on its website: Social Security, health issues, Medicare, retirement, and consumer protection. Retirees who have paid into the Social Security system start collecting their benefits, and trips to the doctor become necessary and more expensive. According to a 2016 AARP study, 81 percent of seniors think prescription drug prices are too expensive and 87 percent say they support a tax credit to help families afford caregivers. Scammers and con artists prey on vulnerable targets living in their golden years and make the work of consumer protection agencies especially important.

By the time they become seniors, people have had a full life to forge their political attitudes and to practice political habits—consuming news, interacting with government on a local level, and developing the habit of voting. They have likely already registered to vote and are familiar with voting routines, and they don't have to schedule voting around work.

Measuring Public Opinion

Mining the views of Americans has become a keen interest of political scientists and a major industry in this age of data. Candidates running for office need to know their chances of winning and which groups support them. Once elected, members of Congress want to know how their constituents regard proposed bills and how they view different types of government spending. These elected officials can determine public opinion by reading letters or emails, holding a town hall meeting, or conducting a survey in their districts while news services rely on polls to see where the public stands on important issues.

Polling is the most reliable way to assess public opinion. It entails posing well developed, objective questions to a small, random group of people to find out what a much larger group thinks. Public opinion polling, developed in the early to mid-twentieth century, now follows a sophisticated methodology.

Since the polling industry began in the mid-1930s, the field of measuring Americans' views has become increasingly sophisticated. Many universities have established polling centers, and major television networks and large newspapers have created their own polling departments.

POLLING ORGANIZATIONS
Gallup
Harris Interactive
Pew Research Center
Rasmussen Reports
Quinnipiac University

Types of Polling

Pollsters use different kinds of polls to gather information. **Benchmark polls** are often the first type of poll used in an election, often before a potential candidate has declared his or her intentions. Benchmark polls are used to gather general information about people's views and concerns. **Tracking polls** ask people the same or similar questions over time to "track" the path of public opinion. These are used heavily during election season to show how public opinion changes or to assess a candidate's strength. Candidates also use tracking polls to shape their campaigns. **Entrance polls** and **exit polls** are conducted outside a polling place on Election Day to predict the outcome of the election later in the news day, to gain insight into the thoughts and behaviors of voters, or to identify and analyze how different voting demographics actually voted.

Focus groups are small groups of citizens—10 to 40 people—gathered to hold conversations about issues or candidates. Though less scientific than many types of polls, focus groups allow for deeper insight into a topic. Pollsters can ask follow-up questions and examine body language and intensity that would be missed in a simple automated questionnaire over the phone. For example, Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney began wearing jeans more often when campaigning in the 2012 election after focus groups responded more positively to him in jeans than in formal clothes.

Polls regularly ask about presidential approval. **Approval ratings** are gauged by pollsters asking whether the respondent approves, yes or no, of the president's job performance. Presidents usually begin their term with a fairly high approval as the people and the press get to know them during the so-called "honeymoon period," typically the first 100 days after their inauguration.

According to Gallup, presidents since Harry Truman left office averaging 45 to 49 percent approval over their term of office. Some of the highest presidential approval ratings came when the nation prospered economically or when the country found itself in an international standoff and rallied around the president. The two highest recorded presidential approval ratings came after al-Qaeda attacked the United States in September 2001, when President

George W. Bush scored 90 percent approval, and when his father, President George H. W. Bush, received 89 percent approval after leading a military coalition to oust Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein from Kuwait in 1991.

Of the 12 presidents before 2017, 6 averaged an approval rating of about 47 percent and 6 averaged about 60 percent. According to *RealClearPolitics,* President Donald Trump's job approval average at the end of his first full year was 39 percent.

Respondents are also often asked: "Is the nation on the right track or wrong track?" That question is commonly asked to determine Americans' satisfaction with government leaders. A positive right-track response usually means incumbents will fare well in their re-election campaigns, while a high wrong-track response will make incumbents uncomfortable at election time. The generic party ballot simply asks respondents if they will be voting for "Republicans" or "Democrats" during an upcoming election without mentioning candidates' names. Analyzing responses to these questions together serves as a relative measure of citizen support for each party.

Methodology

Pollsters take great pains to ensure their measurements are legitimate. They do so by constructing questionnaires with properly worded and appropriately ordered questions and selecting a representative sample after which they analyze the data and draw the appropriate conclusions.

Pollsters phrase survey questions so as not to skew the results. The wording should be objective and not emotionally charged. Poll results on highly emotional issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, and affirmative action can be distorted depending on the wording. On foreign aid, imagine how the following two questions would bring noticeably different results: "Should the U.S. provide foreign aid to other nations?" and "Should the U.S. give foreign aid to other nations leading to a tax increase? "

Question order can also affect the results. In a 2002 poll on President George W. Bush's performance, for example, researchers asked the same questions but in a different sequence to two different groups. When people were asked first about the performance of the president and then the direction of the country, the president fared better. If respondents were asked about the state of the country first, which many said was bad, then the president's approval dropped by 6 percent.

How a question is framed also affects responses. *Framing* a question means posing it in a way that emphasizes a certain perspective. For example, researchers found that respondents had widely varying views on whether abortion should be legal depending on how the question was framed. Only 28 percent of Americans believe abortion should be legal under all circumstances, while many more supported abortion when the question was framed with a certain condition emphasized, as the chart on the next page shows.

BY THE NUMBERS WHEN SHOULD ABORTION BE LEGAL?	
When a woman's life is endangered	84%
When a woman's physical health is endangered	81%
When the pregnancy was caused by rape or incest	78%
When the woman's mental health is endangered	64%
When there is evidence the baby may be physically or mentally impaired	53%
When the woman or family cannot afford to raise the child	34%

Source: *R. Michael Alvarez and John Brehm, Hard Choices, Easy Answers, 2002. © Princeton University Press*

What do the numbers show? How does wording the question differently affect opinions? How do people differ on the legality of abortion? What factors in the question make the policy more or less favorable?

Sampling Techniques Which people are polled is just as important as the question's nature and wording. The pollster takes a **representative sample**, a group of people meant to represent the large group in question, known as the **universe**. A representative sample needs to have about 1,500 respondents, whether it is a sample of all U.S. adults or the population of a single state.

Pollsters must obtain a **random sample**. That is, every single member of the universe must have an equal chance of selection into the sample. A reporter or marketer standing on a street corner asking questions to passersby may determine some indication of public opinion, but this system is not random, because the person collecting the data may have biased who was included in the sample by approaching only those people who look "safe" or who otherwise look like they might be more willing to participate in the study. Since the 1980s, pollsters have used telephones as the primary contact for surveys, though there are concerns with this method. For example, roughly 30 percent of the populace has an unlisted number either by choice or because of mobility. To make telephone polling more reliable and efficient, pollsters use **random-digit dialing**. A computer randomly calls possible numbers in a given area until enough people respond to establish a representative sample.

Though technology has advanced, reaching voters has become more challenging. Landline use is dropping. In other measures, about 95 percent of American adults own a cell phone and a majority of homes have a wireless-only operation. More than 70 percent of all adults aged 25 to 34 years old use cell phones only and do not have landlines.

Pollsters are trying to combat this phenomenon in a few ways. One is mixing their broadly dialed, automated random phone surveys with more actual human interviewers. Federal law prohibits pre-recorded interactive surveys to cell phones. The Pew Research Center requires that 75 percent of their samples are cell phone participants.

Once the pollster has enough respondents, he or she checks to see if the demographics in the sample are reflective of those of the universe. If disproportionately more women than men answer the phone and take the poll, the pollster will remove some female respondents from the sample in order to make it proportional. If a congressional district contains roughly 25 percent African Americans, the sample needs to mirror that. Manipulating the sample to compensate for this is known as **weighting** or **stratification**—that is, making sure demographic groups are properly represented in a sample.

Sampling Error Even the most cautious survey with appropriate sampling techniques cannot guarantee absolute precision. The only way to know what everyone thinks is to ask everyone and assure they are entirely honest, both of which are impossible. Every poll has a **margin of error**. The sample size and the margin of error have an inverse relationship. That is, as the sample gets larger, the margin of error decreases. The way to determine this **sampling error**, the difference between poll results, is to measure the results in two or more polls. For example, the same basic poll with two similar samples revealed that 55 percent of the first sample opposed a particular congressional bill, while 58 percent of the second sample opposed the law. This poll has a sampling error of 3 percent. A margin of error of plus-or-minus 4 percent or less is usually considered satisfactory.

The simplest yet most perplexing problem in public opinion polling is the presence of non-attitudes. Many people do not have strong opinions on the issues of the day, or they are uninformed or simply concerned about their privacy. Just over half of eligible voters actually cast votes in presidential elections. Matters of extreme importance to journalists and policymakers may be unimportant to average citizens, so while poll results measure the views of average citizens on these matters, they don't show the relative importance of the matters to citizens. In a similar way, matters important to citizens may not be of interest to journalists, so polls may not reflect what is really on the minds of voters.

Another phenomenon affecting poll results is the high frequency of uninformed citizens responding. Political scientist Herb Asher explains a poll asking about the repeal of the Public Affairs Act. In reality, no such act or repeal effort existed, but fully 43 percent of those questioned had an opinion of the nonexistent law. Pollsters often ask screening questions to establish a respondent's knowledge or to ensure they are registered voters, such as "Do you plan to vote in the November election?" Such a question, however, does not eliminate the problem entirely. In fact, more than 90 percent of people answering phone surveys claim they will vote while far fewer do. Discerning polls may even ask if the respondent knows when the upcoming Election Day is to increase the chances that the respondent is a bona fide voter.

How the interviewer contacts and interacts with the respondent and how the respondent views the interviewer can also impact a poll. The difference between mailed questionnaires and telephone interviews are stark. People are more honest or frank with the anonymity of a paper questionnaire than a live

telephone call. Some studies show women and men answering differently to male or female callers. Eighty-four percent of females agreed to a woman's right to choose an abortion when interviewed by females, while only 64 percent gave a pro-choice response to a male caller. Race, or perceived race, can matter as well. Asher claims that African Americans are more critical of the political and criminal justice system to black interviewers while more supportive or positive to white interviewers. White respondents are less likely to reveal attitudes of racial hostility when interviewed by blacks than by whites.

Still other problems exist because not everyone conducting a poll represents an objective journalist or an academic. Fundraising under the guise of polling has cheapened polling's reputation. Political parties and candidates use phone and mail surveys to assess where their followers stand and then ask for a donation. Also, **push polling** via telephone has become a common practice. This is basically a telephone poll with an ulterior motive. Rather than a series of neutral questions meant to determine public opinion on a candidate, the caller, or more commonly a tape-recorded voice, offers positive points about the candidate or negative points about the opponent, attempting to "push" the receiver one way or the other. Sometimes the voice takes an almost sinister tone. The call may end with a request for a vote on Election Day or a negative impression of the other candidate.

Internet polling can be problematic due to self-selection, administration, and the nature of people who go online. When directed toward an Internet poll, only those strongly motivated will participate. With some online polls, there's no limit to how many times one can take it. Internet users also tend to be younger, better educated, more affluent, white, and suburban and do not represent a genuine cross section of society.

Evaluating Claims Based on Public Opinion Data

As participants in democracy either at or approaching voting age, you will be surrounded by public opinion polls and the claims based on them. Knowing how to evaluate the quality and credibility of those claims will help you make informed decisions.

Public Opinion as a Source of Political Influence

Polls lend themselves to "horse race" news coverage in which elections are reported as if the most important aspect was which candidate is in the lead, not who is better qualified or more principled. That kind of media coverage can translate into significant political influence as well.

Influence on Elections For example, early in the Republican primary season in 2016, the first debate among the party's candidates was being planned. There were 17 candidates vying for the nomination. How could a reasonable debate be carried out with so many people on stage? The host of the debate, Fox News, made a decision to limit the number of participants to 10. Fox would choose from the 17 candidates those who registered in the top 10

percent in an average of five national polls as the debate grew near. If anyone in the top ten failed to earn at least a 5 percent ranking in the polls, that person would be eliminated from the debate. National polling, then, influenced whose voice would be heard at the televised debate and whose would be silenced. Candidates with the highest poll ratings also receive more media coverage than those with low ratings.

National polling also exerts influence on elections through the **bandwagon effect**—a shift of support to a candidate or position holding the lead in public opinion polls and therefore believed to be endorsed by many people. The more popular a candidate or position, the more likely increasing numbers of people will "hop on the bandwagon" and add their support. People like to back a winning candidate. For this reason, most media outlets do not report the findings from their statewide Election Day exit polls until polls have closed in that state. If people who have not yet voted learn that Candidate A is way ahead in votes, they may not bother going to the polls if they either supported Candidate A (that candidate will win anyway) or supported a rival who was behind (that candidate has no chance of winning).

The bandwagon effect is also partly responsible for the direct link between a candidate's rank in national polls and the ability to raise campaign funds. The higher the national ratings, the more campaign contributions a candidate can elicit. The larger a candidate's war chest—the funds used to pay for a campaign—the more ads a candidate can buy and the larger the staff a candidate can maintain. Both greatly influence the outcome of an election.

Influence on Policy Debate Scientific polling also exerts an influence on government policy and decision-making, although its effects are less clear than on elections. The three branches of the government tend to respond to public opinion polling in somewhat different ways, if at all.

The legislative branch is sometimes responsive to public opinion polls, especially the House of Representatives in which lawmakers face reelection every two years. Many try to represent their constituencies and to keep them satisfied with their performance to encourage fundraising and subsequent votes, so taking constituent views seriously pays off. Senators, with longer terms, do not seem as sensitive to pressure from public opinion.

The executive branch has sometimes been influenced by public opinion and at other times has tried to use the power of the "bully pulpit" to shift public opinion. A president usually enjoys high approval ratings in the first year of office and tries to use that popularity as a "mandate" to advance his or her agenda as quickly as possible.

The judicial branch may be influenced by public opinion, even though justices are appointed for life and are not at the mercy of the ballot box. Different studies have drawn varying conclusions about why. However, many have concluded that when the general mood of the nation is liberal, the Court will hand down more liberal rulings. When the general mood of the nation is conservative, the Court will issue more conservative rulings.

Reliability and Veracity of Public Opinion Data

One way to gauge the accuracy of a pre-election poll is to measure "candidate error"—the percentage point difference in the poll's estimate and the candidate's actual share of the vote after the election. Candidate error has gradually declined as polling techniques became more sophisticated. But in the last few years, what has been a consistently improving science and practice, with the occasional setback, has had some less-than-stellar predictions.

For example, Gallup predicted Mitt Romney as the winner of the 2012 presidential election with 50 percent of the vote and President Obama at 49 percent, the separation of one point. In reality, Obama won nationally by nearly four points. This failure led to Gallup's eventual decision to no longer predict presidential election outcomes, the so-called horse-race polls, but to stick to its vast polling of issues and views in other areas of public policy. Gallup wasn't the only firm that had an erroneous prediction outside the margin of error in 2012.

In the waning days of the 2016 presidential election, polls projected that Hillary Clinton would defeat Donald Trump. Election forecasters, those that aggregate polls and other data to make bold predictions, put Clinton's chances at 70 to 99 percent. The final round of polling by most major firms had Clinton winning by anywhere from 1 to 7 percentage points in the national vote. Once the vote was counted, Clinton won the popular vote by only 2 points but lost the Electoral College vote.

Several factors may explain why polls may be inaccurate and unreliable. One factor relates to the psychology of the respondents. Another factor relates to undecided voters and when they finally make up their minds.

Social-Desirability Bias The psychology behind these recent poll misreads and errors is at least in part explained by *social desirability bias*. That is, respondents and declared voters may tell the pollster what they think the pollster wants to hear.

Social desirability bias affects the predictions of voter turnout. Respondents may give the interviewer the impression that they will indeed vote, because they do not want to be seen as shirking a responsibility, but often on Election Day they do not vote. In a recent estimate, when asked their likelihood of voting on a scale of 1 to 9, U. S. citizens tend to say 8 or 9, yet only about 60 percent of eligible voters cast ballots.

Social desirability bias can fool pollsters beyond inflated turnout. Voters do not want to be perceived negatively, so they may give the interviewers a socially acceptable response, or what they perceive as the acceptable response, and yet act or vote in a different way. This phenomenon was noticeable in the 1982 California governor's race. The election included a popular candidate, Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley, who would have been the state's first African American governor. Bradley led strongly in the polls throughout the campaign but lost on Election Day. Most experts attributed the discrepancy to interviewees' falsely claiming they supported Bradley only later to vote

for a white candidate. These poll participants did not want to appear bigoted or *against* the black candidate. In what has become known as the Bradley effect, later African American candidates have also underperformed against their consistently inflated poll predictions.

Pundits in 2017 encouraged speculation as public opinion polls shifted in the special U.S. Senate election in Alabama. Republican candidate Roy Moore, the favorite for weeks, was suddenly losing to Democrat Doug Jones, in some polls, after Moore was alleged to have committed sexual assault or aggressions toward several women when they were teenagers. Skeptics of the new polls pointed out that voters might not willingly admit on the phone that they were going to vote for this accused candidate. In fact, one famous political pundit, Nate Silver, pointed out that in polls using robocalls, or automated pre-recorded polls, Moore was ahead, and in polls using live interviews, Jones was ahead. Jones won in the close contest.

Undecideds Breaking Late According to exit polling and research after the election, a likely explanation for Trump's surprise win was that a larger than usual share of undecided voters "broke" (made their final decision) late and broke for Trump. Nate Cohn of the *New York Times* explains how likely voters who said they were voting for a third party candidate mostly did so. But 26 percent of those voters turned to Trump and only 11 switched to Clinton. Pollsters theorize that a disproportionate number of so-called "shy Trump voters" turned away the opportunity to be counted altogether. Perhaps the same anti-establishment, anti-media attitude that drew them to the outsider candidate also turned them away from pollsters, a phenomenon known as *non-response bias*.

Opinions in Social Media The willingness of people to take part in polls is declining. About 37 percent of randomly called citizens would participate in a telephone poll in 1997. Today, pollsters get about a 10 percent response rate for live callers, and about 1 percent participation with robocalls. But as Kristin Soltis Anderson, author of *The Selfie Vote*, points out, "The good news is, at the same time people are less likely to pick up the phone and tell you what they think, we are more able to capture the opinions and behaviors that people give off passively." We can take the public's pulse from available platforms widely used by a large swath of the general public. Examining what is said on social media and in the Google toolbar, what Anderson calls the "modern-day confessional," can tell us a lot about public opinion.

However, though blogs and the Twitter-verse constitute a massive sample, the people active on social media may have very different views from those who are not active on social media. A 2015 study found that people who discuss politics on Twitter tend to be overwhelmingly male, urban, and extreme in their ideological views. Another problem that makes this endeavor less-than-scientific is that researchers use computer programs to gauge the Internet's dialogue, but cannot easily discern sarcasm and unique language. And overly vocal people can go onto the Internet repetitively and be tabulated multiple times, dominating the conversation disproportionately.

Biased Pollsters and Data vs. Fact Reputable pollsters seek ways to avoid bias in sampling techniques and the wording of their questions. However, many polls are funded by special interest groups who want the poll results to tip a certain way. They then use those results to move their agendas forward, claiming that the data generated by their polls represented fact. "The numbers don't lie," they might say.

Unless you know about the organization doing the polling, the methods it used, the wording of the questions, and the context of the poll, you will not be able to evaluate a poll's veracity, or truthfulness. You have already read about how push polls slant their questions to produce certain outcomes. Political Action Committees (PACs), special interest groups, and partisan organizations all have a vested interest in getting a response from a poll that supports their cause. To help journalists evaluate the reliability and veracity of polls, the National Council on Public Polls (NCPP) provides 20 questions journalists should ask and answer before reporting on a poll. You can find that list on the NCPP website. The checklist below provides some of the key questions to ask about any poll.

QUESTIONS FOR EVALUATING CLAIMS BASED ON PUBLIC OPINION POLLS	
1. Who conducted the poll, and who paid for it?	If it was done by a reputable polling organization, it is probably mainly accurate; if it is done (or paid for) by a special interest, you need to consider possible bias.
2. What methodology did the pollsters use?	Reliable polls are often released with a report that explains how the results were obtained: the sampling methods, whether or not the results are weighted, and the margin of error.
3. What were the exact questions, and in what order were they presented?	As you read, the wording and ordering of questions can have a significant impact on the poll results.
4. How were the results obtained?	People tend to be more honest in mailed polls than when interacting with an interviewer because of social desirability bias.
5. In what context was the poll taken?	The date information is collected can be a factor in poll results. For example, if a statewide poll was taken in the days following a barrage of media ads for a certain candidate, the poll results may inflate the candidate's actual popularity.
6. Whose opinion might be missing from the poll?	Good polls need to make an accommodation for people who refused to participate in the poll in order to provide a fair sample.
7. How do the poll results compare with other poll results?	If the results of a poll match up with other polls taken under the same circumstances and at the same time, chances are good the poll is reliable.

REFLECT ON THE ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Essential Question: How do political culture, demographics, and dynamic social and personal change shape citizen beliefs about government, and how are those beliefs measured? On separate paper, complete a chart like the one below to gather details to answer that question.

Political Culture	Demographics	Social and Personal Change	Measuring Public Opinion

KEY TERMS AND NAMES

Citizen Beliefs
Baby Boomers/365
conservative/349
free enterprise/351
Generation X/365
globalization/362
ideology/353
individualism/349
liberal/349
libertarian/355
lifecycle effects/368
limited government/352
Millennials/365
moderate/353
party identification/358
political socialization/356
populist/356
progressive/356
rule of law/352
saliency/353
Silent Generation/365
valence issues/353
wedge issues/353

Polling
approval rating/370
bandwagon effect/375
benchmark polls/370
entrance polls/370
exit polls/370
focus group/370
margin of error/373
push polling/374
random-digit dialing/372
random sample/372
representative sample/372
sampling error/373
stratification/373
tracking polls/370
universe/372
weighting/373

MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

Questions 1 and 2 refer to the passage below.

> Must the citizen, ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience, then? It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right. . . . . Law never made men a whit more just; and, by means of their respect for it, even the well-disposed are daily made the agents of injustice. A common and natural result of an undue respect for law is, that you may see a file of soldiers, colonel, captain, corporal, privates . . . marching in admirable order over hill and dale to the wars, against their wills, ay, against their common sense and consciences, which makes it very steep marching indeed, and produces a palpitation of the heart. They have no doubt that it is a damnable business in which they are concerned; they are all peaceably inclined.
>
> —Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," 1849

1. Which of the following perspectives reflects Thoreau's beliefs based on this passage?

(A) War is immoral.

(B) Law is less important than an individual's beliefs.

(C) Soldiers fight against their wills.

(D) Legislators are not to be trusted.

2. Which American cultural value does Thoreau highlight in this passage?

(A) Rule of law

(B) Individualism

(C) Free enterprise

(D) Equality of opportunity

3. Which of these federal officers are most influenced by public opinion polling?

(A) Senators

(B) Cabinet secretaries

(C) Federal judges

(D) Representatives in the House

4. Which of the following is necessary for a public opinion poll to be valid?

   (A) The poll must use objective, open-ended questions.
   (B) Equal numbers of people from different demographics need to be polled.
   (C) The poll must be conducted by a responsible news organization.
   (D) The poll must have a low margin of error.

5. Millennials' political socialization was colored by the 9/11/2001 attacks by al-Qaeda terrorists, showing most clearly which effect on the formation of political views?

   (A) The generational effect
   (B) The lifecycle effect
   (C) The effect of social media
   (D) The effect of globalization

6. Which of the following is an accurate comparison of Millennials and members of the Silent Generation?

	MILLENNIALS	SILENT GENERATION
(A)	Favor tough punishments for criminals	Favor lenient punishments for criminals
(B)	Generally oppose same-sex marriage	Generally support same-sex marriage
(C)	Tend to believe the United States should stay out of foreign countries	Tend to see the United States as a world guardian of freedom and democracy
(D)	Tend to be Republicans	Tend to be Democrats

Questions 7 and 8 refer to the passage below.

> So-called "Push polls" are not polls at all. They are a form of political telemarketing whose intent is not to measure public opinion but to manipulate—"push"—voters away from one candidate and toward the opposing candidate. Such polls defame selected candidates by spreading false or misleading information about them. The intent is to disseminate campaign propaganda under the guise of conducting a legitimate public opinion poll.
>
> —American Association for Public Opinion Research, "Condemned Survey Practices," 2017

7. Which of the following questions is most likely to appear on a push poll?

(A) Do you approve of increasing the military budget?

(B) Do you approve of raising property taxes slightly to help fund schools?

(C) Do you approve of the waste of money on failing social service agencies under the current governor?

(D) Do you approve of rolling back environmental regulations to encourage business investment?

8. Based on the text, with which of the following statements would the authors most likely agree?

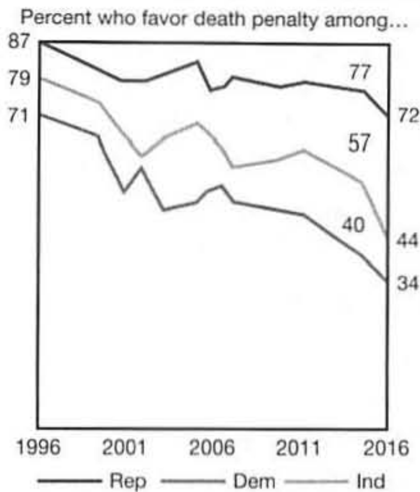
(A) As long as all sides use push polling equally, the effect should be minimal.

(B) Despite its problems, push polling gives pollsters a fair sense of public opinion.

(C) The government should provide campaign funding and regulate campaign practices.

(D) Telemarketing disguised as research has decreased response rates and harmed public opinion polling.

Questions 9 and 10 refer to the graphic below.



9. Which of the following best describes a trend in the graph?
   (A) More Democrats than Republicans support the death penalty.
   (B) Support for the death penalty among Republicans, Democrats, and independents has dropped.
   (C) Democratic support for the death penalty has gradually risen.
   (D) More independents than Republicans support the death penalty.

10. Which of the following is an accurate conclusion based on the trends in the line graph above and your knowledge of political attitudes?
    (A) Young people are more likely to support the death penalty than older people.
    (B) Well educated people are more likely to support the death penalty than people with a high school diploma only.
    (C) Activism against the death penalty has failed to influence public opinion.
    (D) Conservatives tend to support the death penalty more than liberals.

FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

1. "Consider the motives of the media reporting on the polls. Conservative and liberal media outlets are more likely to report on polls more favorable to their candidates or portray outlier polls as the true state of the race. And even nonpartisan media outlets know that 'New Poll Shows Race Hasn't Changed' isn't a great headline. Additionally, a media company that sponsors a poll is probably going to want to hype up their own findings."

—Harry Enton, 13 Tips for Reading General Election Polls Like a Pro, 9/2/2016, fivethirtyeight.com

After reading the tip above, respond to A, B, and C below:

(A) Describe the behavior the author recommends consumers demonstrate in response to polls.

(B) In the context of the scenario, explain how the behavior described in part A affects elections.

(C) In the context of the scenario, explain how the interactions between media and voters affect government.

2. Use the line graphs on the next page to answer the questions below.

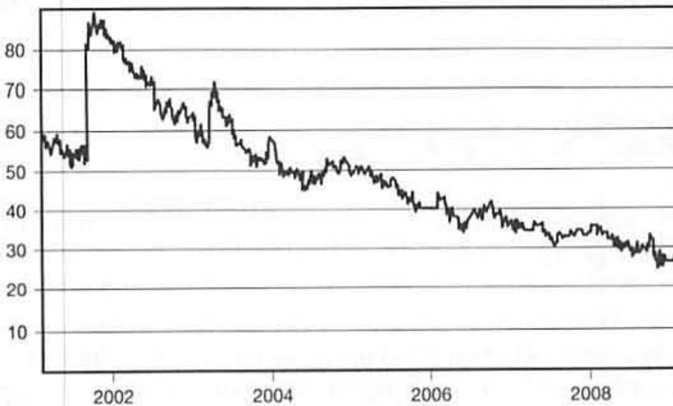
(A) Identify the information conveyed in the graphs.

(B) Describe a similarity or difference in public opinion of job approval for President Obama and President George W. Bush.

(C) Explain why presidential approval ratings can fluctuate, and draw a conclusion about when President Bush would have had his best chance of moving his agenda forward.

3. In the mid-1970s, California resident Allan Bakke, a white, 35-year old man, applied to the University of California-Davis medical school. The school's affirmative action policy set aside 16 of the 100 spots exclusively for qualified minority applicants. The medical school denied Bakke's admission while it accepted minorities with lower grade point averages (GPAs) and test scores. Bakke alleged the state university violated both the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the Constitution in rejecting his application based on his race while accepting applicants of a minority status with lower GPAs and test scores.

In the decision of *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978), the U.S. Supreme Court held in a unique 5:4 ruling, that the university had violated the 1964 statute, but that using race as a criterion in higher education admissions was constitutionally permissible. The Court



did not declare the practice of affirmative action unconstitutional but did declare that overly strict racial guidelines violate the Constitution.

(A) Identify the constitutional clause relevant to both *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978) and *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). (See page 305.)

(B) Explain how the ruling differed in the *Bakke* and *Brown* cases.

(C) Describe an action students who oppose the *Bakke* ruling can take to limit its impact.

4. Develop an argument that explains whether public opinion polling during an election has a positive or negative effect on American political life.

   In your essay you must:

   - Articulate a defensible claim or thesis that responds to the prompt and establishes a line of reasoning
   - Support your claim with at least TWO pieces of accurate and relevant information
     - At least ONE piece of evidence must come from one of the following foundational documents:
       - The First Amendment of the Constitution
       - Articles I and II of the Constitution
     - Use a second piece from another foundational document from the list above or your study of political beliefs and public opinion polling
   - Use reasoning to explain why your evidence supports your claim/thesis
   - Respond to an opposing or alternative perspective using refutation, concession, or rebuttal

WRITING: *USE REBUTTAL*

When you address an opposing or alternative perspective, you can refute it by showing logically why it is not as sound a perspective as yours, you can concede a point (usually a minor one), giving credit to an opposing view where credit is due, or you can use rebuttal. Not everyone agrees on the differences between refutation and rebuttal, but many see the difference this way: to refute means to use facts, evidence, and logic to successfully disprove an opposing or alternative view; to rebut means to offer a counterargument, even if you can't necessarily prove it with facts. Both, however, share the meaning of countering an opposing view. To rebut effectively, you need to carefully think through opposing or alternative views so you can clearly see why you disagree with them and then make your best assertion about what is wrong with them.