

Unit 2: Political Beliefs and Public Opinion

Session 1: American Political Culture

- ☐ Democrat
- ☐ Republican
- ☐ Independent

Learning Targets

- Identify demographic trends and their likely impact on American politics
- Identify and explain the political culture in the United States
- Outline how various forms of socialization shape political opinions
- Explain how polls are conducted and what can be learned from them about American Public Opinion
- Assess the influence of political ideology on Americans' political thinking and behavior
- Classify forms of political participation into two broad types
- Analyze how public opinion about the scope of government guides political behavior



Summary of Lecture

- In a democracy, citizens' preference is supposed to guide policy, but the American people are incredibly diverse.
- Because of our rich diversity, our public opinions about issues can vary greatly, and most Americans are not politically literate to the extent we need.
- We will focus on how citizens learn about politics, and the extent to which these opinions are conveyed to government officials through participation.



The American People

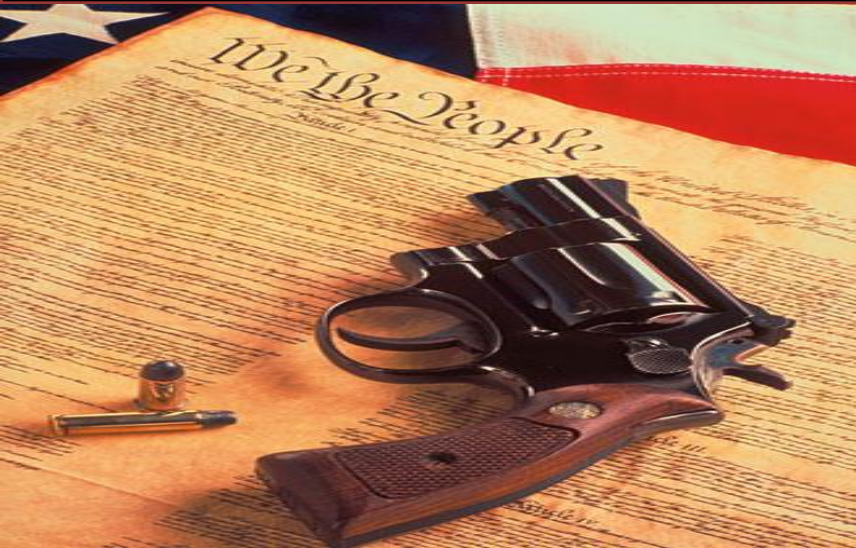


- The United States is a melting pot of cultures, ideas, and peoples. The United States will soon become a minority majority society, where minority groups outnumber the white Europeans.
- Until recently, African Americans were the largest minority group. Although suffering from economic disadvantage, African Americans have gained in political power. Hispanics now outnumber African Americans.
- The **Simpson-Mazzoli Act** requires that employers document the citizenship of their employees to discourage the employment of illegal immigrants, a particular concern to the Hispanic community

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Political Culture

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- **Political culture** is that set of ideas which Americans share widely about who should govern, for what ends, and by what means.
- The existence of a shared political culture does not prevent conflict over such pressures to reconcile conditions with values, or one value with another.
- **Values** are shared ideas about what is good.
- **Beliefs** are shared ideas about what is true.
 - Beliefs often give a **foundation for values**. For instance, the belief that God endowed humankind with rights to life, liberty, and property is a foundation for giving these concepts the status of values in our political culture.

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Political Culture

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Liberty / Freedom

- Basic freedoms such as speech and religion are fundamental parts of the American political culture
- People should be free to lead their lives with minimal government interference



Equality

- **Political Equality**- All adult citizens should have equal voting rights (National Voter ID Question)
- **Legal Equality**- everyone is entitled to equal treatment before the law
- **Equality of Opportunity**- all Americans should have a chance to succeed in life



Individualism

- Respect of the dignity for the individual
- People should be responsible for their own decisions and well-being



Democracy

- Government should be based on the consent of the government
- Majority Rule/Minority Rights
- Citizens have a responsibility to support their local communities



How Americans Learn about Politics



- **Political Socialization-** is the process by which political values are formed and passed from one generation to the next.
- Politics is a lifelong learning process and the behavior of most is impacted by the family which is the central authority throughout our lives
- Governments throughout the world use schools to attempt to raise children committed to the basic values of the system. Education has become a very important public policy issue to most people

Agents of Socialization

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The Family

- The family is the most important agent of political socialization
- Most students think of themselves as independent voters but most will align themselves with the same leanings as their parents
- Almost 70% of all voters will identify with the same party as their parents



Education

- Class elections, students government, social studies class play a key role in teaching students the values of liberty, equality, individualism and democracy
- College graduates have a higher level of political participation than do other American



Social Groups

- Black and white Americans differ on a number of issues, including affirmative action and race relations
- Religious groups differ on a number of issues including same-sex marriage, school prayer and abortion
- Men and women differ on a number of issues, including healthcare reform and support for defense budgets



The Media

- The Mass Media has been referred to as the “new Parent.”
- Along with the internet, mass media is now the chief source of information among those under the age of 30

Government Trust among the People

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☐ Republican
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Table 4.3 Confidence in American Institutions

Institution	1973	2010
Churches	66%	48%
Public schools	58	34
Newspapers	39	25
Labor unions	30	20
Big business	26	19
Congress	42	11
The military	58	76

- Since the 1950's, Americans have become less trusting of their leaders and political institutions.
- The mistrust of government is linked to a corresponding decline in **political efficacy**, the belief that one's political participation matters.

Government Trust among the People

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- Ideological Survey

Political Ideology

- A **political ideology** is a cohesive set of beliefs about politics, public policy and the role of government.
- Although political ideology is important to politicians and activists, studies consistently find that only about 20% of Americans vote along ideological lines.
- A person who identifies themselves as a conservative or democrat varies according to age, race, gender and socioeconomic status.





Ideological Spectrum



- **Liberal (Left-wing)**- political doctrine that takes protecting and enhancing the freedom of the individual to be the central problem of politics.
- **Conservative (right-wing)**: promotes retaining traditional social institutions. Less government and taxes. A person who follows the philosophies of conservatism is referred to as a **traditionalist** or **conservative**.
- **Moderate**: is an individual who is not extreme, partisan or radical. More of a middle of the road voter, who may have some beliefs of both ideologies.
- **Independent**: An Independent is variously defined as a voter who votes for candidates and issues rather than on the basis of a political ideology to partisanship
- **Libertarian**: emphasizes freedom, liberty, and voluntary association without coercion. Libertarians generally advocate a society with a small government compared to most present day societies, or no government whatsoever.



Liberalism



Supports

- Reproductive Rights
- Universal Healthcare Program
- Expanded programs for the poor, minorities and women
- Government Regulation of the Economy
 - Frank Dodd Act
- Political and social Reform
 - Voting Rights Acts
 - Civil Rights Movement
 - Gay Rights including marriage
 - Environmental Rights

Opposes

- Increases in Military Spending
- Committing troops to foreign Wars
- School Prayer





Conservatism



Supports

- Expansion of American Military power
- Less government regulation of business
- School Prayer
- economic philosophy of prudence in government spending and debt.
- Death Penalty
- Free-market solutions to economic problems
 - Supply and demand

Opposes

- Expensive Social and welfare programs
- National Health Care system
 - State issue
- Abortion/Reproductive Rights
 - Birth Control
 - Rape, incest or health of the mother concerns

Is there an ideological Difference?



The Gender Gap



- Journalists have noted that “women” have deserted the Republican party and men have deserted the Democratic Party.
- The **gender gap** is the difference in political views between men and women.
- Since 1980 women have voted at a higher rate than men. This is amplified by the fact women are also a larger proportion of the voting population
- Since 1980, women are more likely to vote in favor of a democratic candidate
 - 2008: 56%
 - 2004: 51%
 - 2000: 51%
 - 1996: 53%

Gender Gap

Table 7.4 Gender Gaps in Partisan Identification, 1992–2008

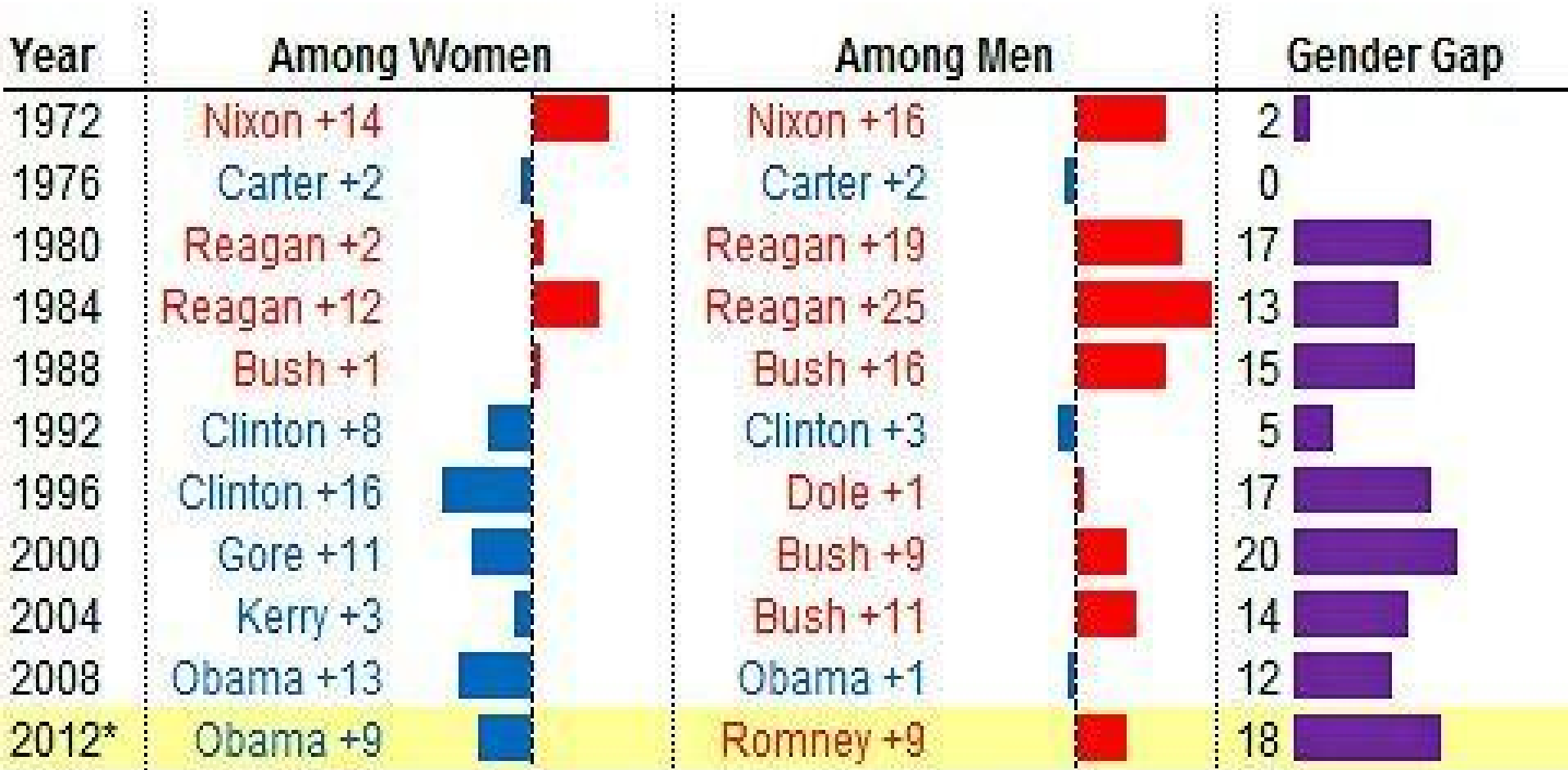
	Men			Women		
	Rep %	Dem %	D-R diff	Rep %	Dem %	D-R diff
All Voters						
2008	43	46	+3	33	56	+22
2004	48	43	–5	40	51	+11
2000	47	42	–5	38	51	+13
1996	49	43	–6	39	53	+14
1992	45	46	+1	40	52	+12

Voters Ages 18–29

2008	38	52	+14	28	63	+35
2004	44	47	+3	36	54	+18
2000	46	44	–2	37	53	+16
1996	50	44	–6	38	55	+17
1992	52	42	–10	42	50	+8

Gender Gap

Gender Gap in Presidential Elections Since 1972



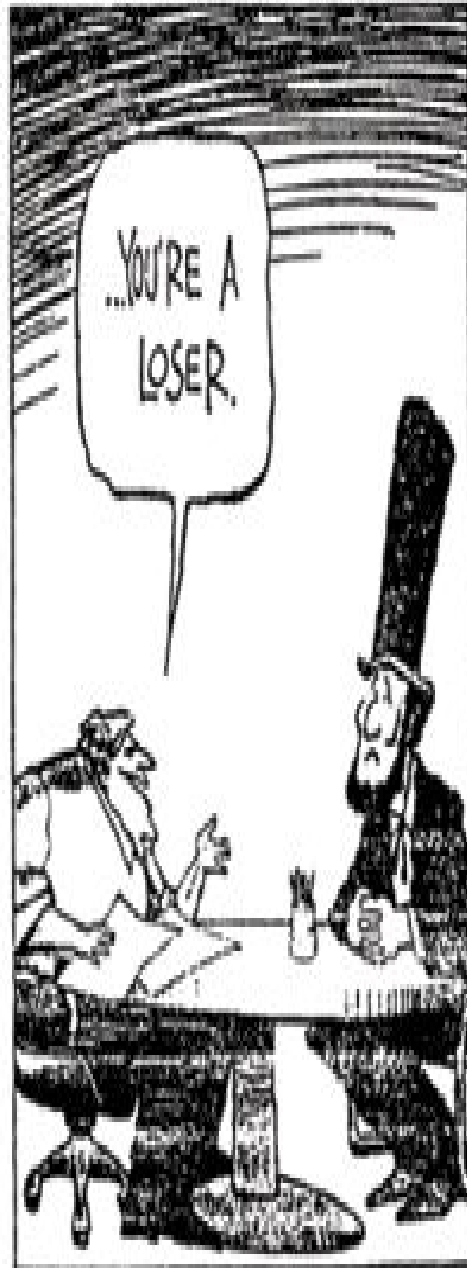
* Projected based on average of recent polls

Public Opinion Polls

- **Public Opinion** refers to how people think or feel about particular things.
- The Founding Fathers believed that more average citizens lacked the time, information, energy or interest on public policy.
- James Madison argued that direct popular opinion was a recipe for disaster.
- Madison looked to the elected representatives “as a defense to the people against their own temporary errors and delusions



Public Opinion



- The study of public opinion aims to understand the distribution of the population's belief about politics and policy issues.
- Demography is the science of human populations.
- The most valuable tool for understanding demographic changes in America is the census, which is an actual enumeration of the population required by the Constitution to be taken every ten years



Polls: Tool For Democracy



Support

1. Supporters argue that polling contributes to the democratic process by providing a way for the public to express its opinions
2. Supporters also point out that polling enables political leaders to understand and implement public preferences on key issues

Critics

1. Critics argue that polls turn leaders into followers.
2. Polls can also be used to manipulate public opinion.
 1. Bandwagon Effect
 2. Bradley Effect

Cautious Tale for Democracy

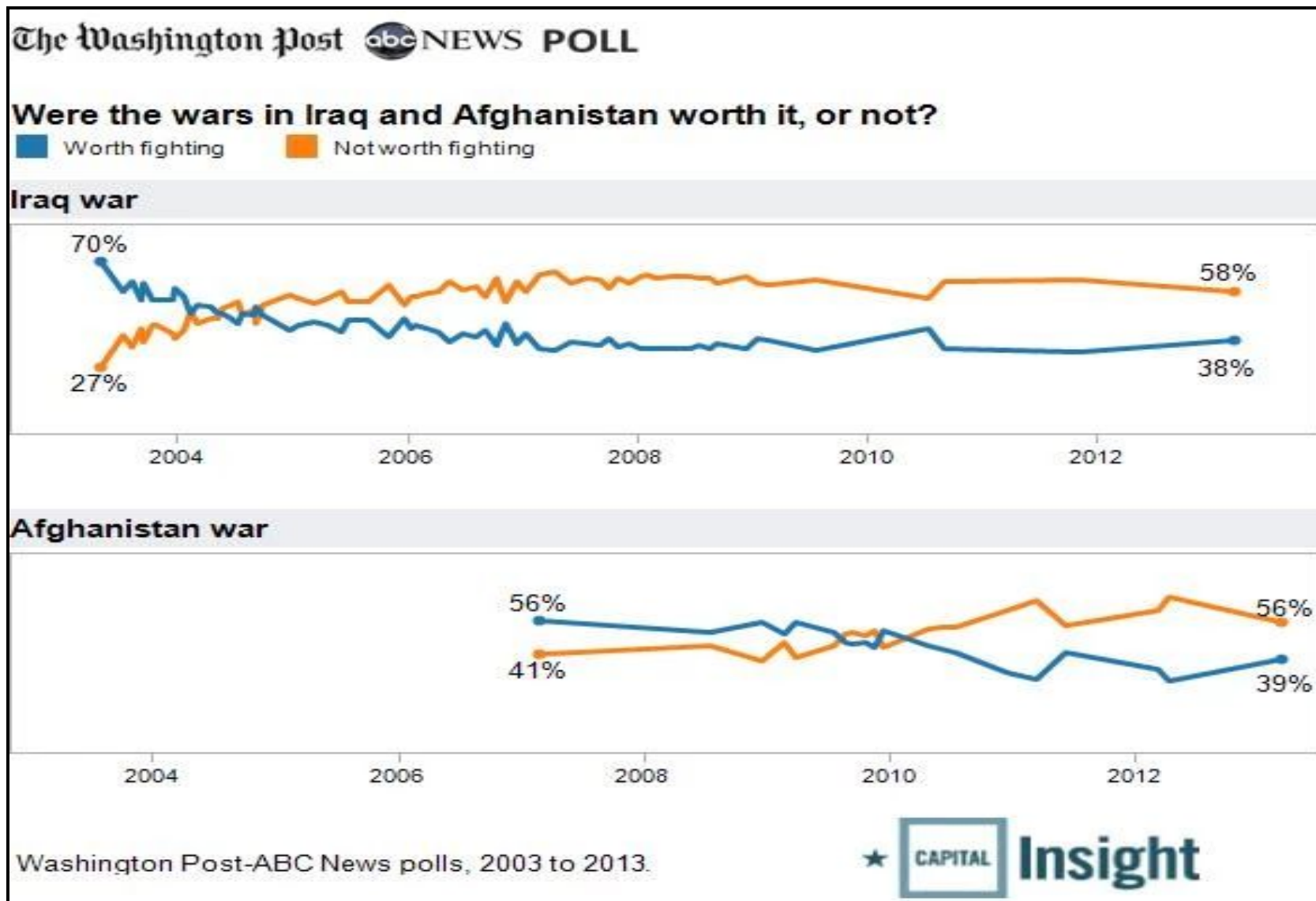
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1. The democratic process is based on an informed society
2. Public opinions polls reveal an alarming lack of public knowledge about the American political system
 - A national poll found that 74% of people could name the 3 stooges but only 42% could name the three branches.



Support for Iraq and Afghanistan



Obamacare v. Affordable Care Act





Steps in Polling

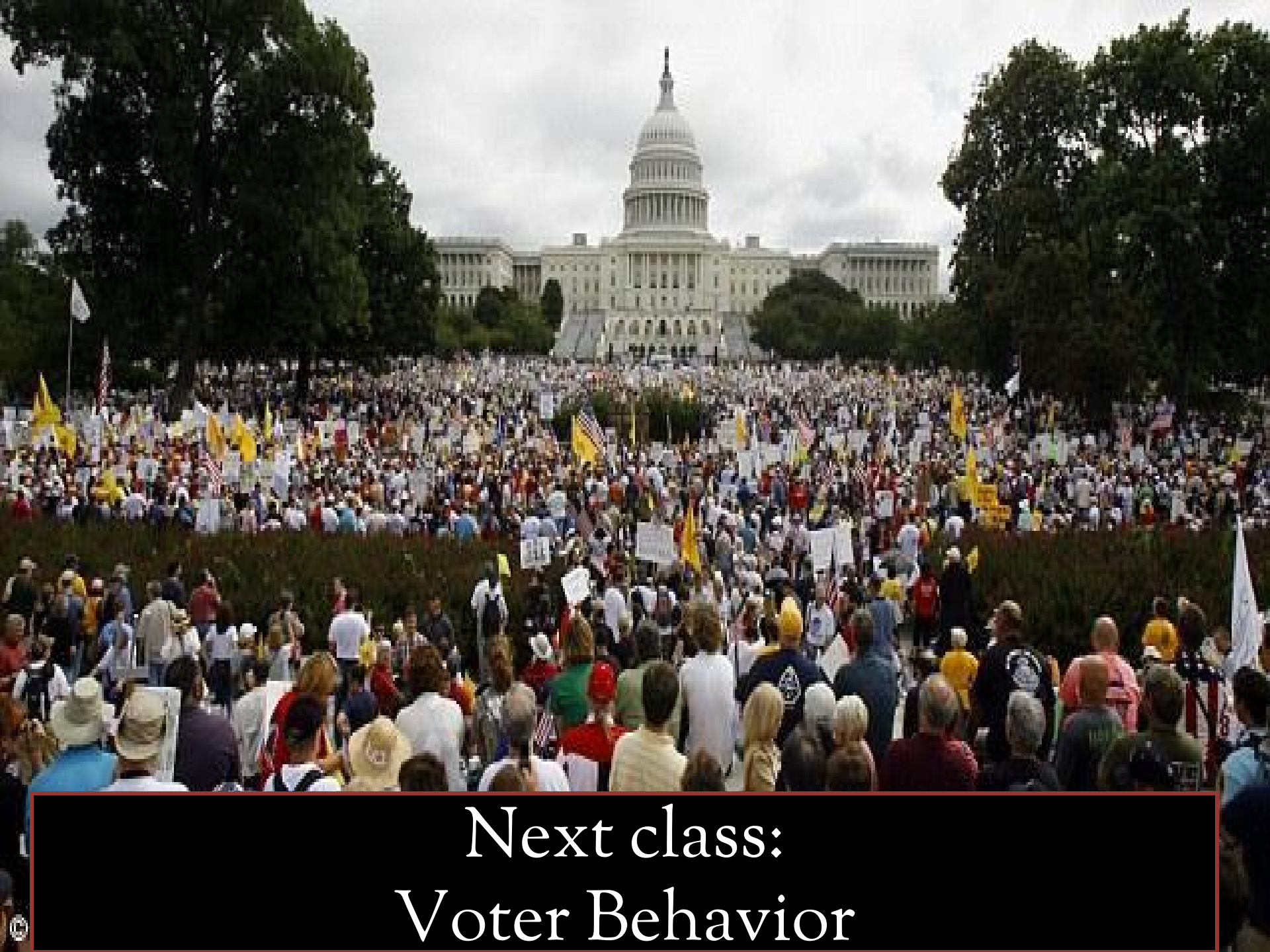


1. Define the universe or population to be surveyed
2. Construct a sample based on a representative slice of the population
3. Construct the questions carefully to avoid bias.
4. Conduct the Poll
5. Analyze the data

Homework

- Students are to create a political poll based on a specific public policy question.
- The poll should include 5 questions on a specific policy.
- Minimum of 20 people to be interviewed. You may work with one other person.
- Do not ask teachers!
- Break the poll results down by gender, race and age (18-30), (31-40), (41-50) (51-60), (60+)

Political Poll Assignment



Next class:
Voter Behavior