

## UNIT II (B) LECTURE POLITICAL BELIEFS AND BEHAVIORS

### I. What is Meant by the Phrase “Public Opinion?”

The pooled judgment or attitude of the public in regard to a specific issue. Public opinion is generally determined by polling and/or surveying public opinion using statistical tools.

To poll/survey public opinion properly, several conditions must be met:

- A random sample must be drawn.
- Questions must be comprehensible.
- Questions must be asked fairly, without use of load language.
- Answer categories must be well worded.
- Sampling error must be taken into account in a close call.

### II. Where does the Public’s Opinion Come From?

From One’s Family?

- In recent years there has been a declining ability to pass on party identification
  - Younger voters today tend to more independent minded
  - Clear political ideologies are passed on in only a few families.
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- Political ideology is defined as a comprehensive set of political, economic, and social views or ideas concerned with the form and role of government

From One’s Religious Upbringing?

- The Catholic religious upbringing does tend to leave one leaning toward more liberal economic views
- The Protestant religious upbringing does tend to leave one leaning toward more conservative economic and social views
- The Jewish religious upbringing does tend to leave one leaning toward more liberal economic and social views

From One’s Gender?

- Men have become increasingly Republican since the mid 1960’s
- Women have continued to identify themselves more with the Democratic Party at approximately the same rate
- Men and women thus differ on size of government, gun control, social programs, and gay rights

From One’s Schooling?

- College education has liberalizing effect
- Effect extends long beyond college
- Effect is growing as more and more go to college

### III. Where Do We Especially See Signs of what’s called “Cleavages in Public Opinion”?

- We see cleavages when it comes to “occupation.” Today occupation has a weaker association with political opinions than it did in the 1950’s. The traditional gap – manual workers were more liberal than business or professional persons in their attitude toward the economy and social welfare – has narrowed.
- We also see cleavages when it comes to “*race and ethnicity*.” Although racial differences in political attitudes persist, there is some evidence that those differences may be narrowing between African Americans and whites. An ever-increasing higher percentage

- of African Americans are identifying themselves as Republicans (particularly in terms of the gay rights issue).
- We also see cleavages when it comes to “*region*”. The South is the least liberal of the four regions, with the Midwest somewhat more liberal and the East and West most liberal. The South became, and long remained, part of the Democratic coalition because southerners were fairly liberal on economic issues. However the rise of racial and social issues (with which white southerners are quite conservative) ended the region’s strong attachment to the Democratic Party. This has already changed the region’s partisan representation in the Congress and is likely to have significant implications for future presidential elections.

### III. What Exactly do the Terms Liberal and Conservative Mean?

- See handout or <http://www.studentnewsdaily.com/other/conservative-vs-liberal-beliefs/>
- History of liberals and conservatives in US
  - It’s a complex history
  - Early 1980’s, liberals supported personal, economic liberty; conservatives wanted to restore the power of the state, church, and aristocracy
  - In 1940’s, FDR began to change that definition so liberalism began to mean support for an activist government
  - Republicans reacted (especially under Goldwater and Reagan) by favoring free market, state’s rights, and individual choice in economics
  - Today’s meanings are imprecise and changing
- TODAY:
  - On Economic Policy: Liberals favor jobs for all, subsidized medical care and education, increased taxation of the rich
  - On Civil Rights – Liberals favor strong federal action to desegregate schools; create hiring opportunities for minorities; and strict enforcement of civil rights law
  - On Public and Political Conduct – Liberals are tolerant of protest demonstrations, favor legalization of marijuana, emphasize protecting the rights of the accused, and respond to crime by seeking to eliminate its causes
- As of 1994
  - Pure Liberals (liberal on both economic and personal conduct = 17% of pop.
  - Pure Conservatives (conservative on both economic and personal conduct = 28% of pop.
  - Libertarians (conservative on economic issues, liberal on personal conduct = 21% of pop.
  - Populists (liberal on economic issues, conservative on personal conduct = 24% of pop)