Chapter 4
Political Socialization and Public Opinion

Focus Questions

Q1  *What does it mean to say that America is the only country in the world to be based on a creed?*

A1  Americans uphold fundamental beliefs in liberty, equality, individualism, the rule of law, popular sovereignty, laissez-faire economics, and egalitarianism, which are the basis of our political culture. These ideals serve as the unifying force for our society and guide the conduct of government. While virtually all Americans believe these tenets should be supported by our government, the avenues to facilitate and achieve these values are the fodder for numerous political debates. For example, to achieve absolute equality is to deny an appeal to individualism. This question is a bit misleading because the United States of America is not the only country based upon principles. Numerous countries incorporate religious or non-secular tenets within their governmental institutions that shape laws and guide behaviors. Yet, the Framers sought to form a society governed according to ideals that promote life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness rather than those based upon religious scripture. Of course, many of these values are expounded in religious teachings. Basically, the American Creed should be seen as a “civic religion” whereby republican principles provide a basis for our society and system of government. As Americans, these are the values we cherish and seek to promote through public policies.

Q2  *Where do American individuals get their opinions about politics, and what are the forces that shape those opinions?*

A2  We begin to form our values very early in life through learning, imitation, and modeling the behaviors of those individuals we interact with on a daily basis. Subsequently, these individuals, including parents, teachers, and later in life, co-workers, have a significant influence on our worldview. Thus, individuals and organizations are referred to as agents of socialization because they provide the process in which our political views are formed. Agents of socialization are divided into two groups: primary and secondary. Primary groups comprise those individuals with whom one has face-to-face, regular, and frequent contact, including family, friends, peers, and teachers. These groups are comprised of people from similar backgrounds and thus homogenous. Secondary groups include professional organizations, schools, and religious institutions that are bureaucratic in nature and heterogeneous. These groups are large and therefore do not facilitate daily, face-to-face contact but still play a significant role in forming political attitudes. In addition, the media (radio, television, the Internet) plays a significant role in shaping political attitudes. This will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

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Q3  How well informed is public opinion, and how quickly and frequently does it change?

A3  While scholars debate the merits of an informed public, the political knowledge of the public may be best described as unsophisticated and therefore public opinion is determined by peer groups, membership in organizations, and religious affiliations. Consequently, an individual is more likely to incorporate the beliefs of family members and choose to associate with those people who share similar beliefs and opinions. Furthermore, organizations both shape and reinforce political opinions because an individual is attracted to the organization’s stance on an issue or belief and this is reinforced through the support provided by the organization’s membership.

In terms of general knowledge, the American public is most familiar with governmental processes and institutions but lacks detailed knowledge of specific policies, historical events, and the names of political leaders. The public’s ability to assess the state of politics without detailed political knowledge has been substantiated by survey data. These surveys have found that aggregate public opinion is inconsistent and slow to change. Usually, a shift in public opinion results after a significant event such as the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Also, public opinion is contradictory. For example, individuals overwhelmingly oppose burning the American flag but also support the right to free political speech. Thus, understanding the specifics of a given policy area may provide a better understanding as to why an individual may express inconsistent opinions. The literature concerning these inconsistent views has suggested that even when they are brought to the attention of the respondents, about 50 percent did not change their answers. Yet, other studies maintain the respondents are largely misinformed and will use the new information to re-evaluate their previous answers.

Q4  Do Americans support or oppose abortion, or is the distribution of opinion more complicated than that?

A4  The American public’s support for legalized abortion has largely fluctuated between 55 and 62 percent. In fact, public opinion has remained fairly stable concerning the legalization of this medical procedure. However, this is dependent upon the circumstances surrounding the medical procedure, an individual’s religious affiliation and, most importantly, the term of pregnancy. For instance, an individual is more likely to support the procedure if the life of the mother is in danger or if the woman requesting an abortion was the victim of rape or incest. Yet an individual who self-identifies as an Evangelical Christian or Catholic is more likely to oppose abortion under any circumstance. Surveys suggest 25 percent of Americans support unlimited abortion or abortion on demand while 20 percent believe abortion should always be illegal. Moreover, as the term of the pregnancy progresses, fewer Americans believe the procedure should be conducted. The recent 2007 Supreme Court ruling upheld Congress’s ban on partial-birth abortion. In the aggregate, most Americans believe abortion should be legal with restrictions.
Q5  What does it mean to be liberal or conservative, libertarian or populist, [or] to be green in America today?

A5  An ideology is a comprehensive system of political beliefs about the nature of people and society and provides a political perspective or organized collection of ideas about the best way to live and the institutional arrangements for the society.

Conservatism: Promotes the idea that people need the direction and structure tradition or religion provides. Conservatism upholds traditional economics and social frameworks: free market system; strong measures against crime; strong need for government to promote national security; strong government role in upholding moral values.

Liberalism: A political perspective that has as its goal changing society through government intervention to promote fairness and to protect individual rights. Liberalism is concerned with promoting economic and political equality. Liberals favor tighter government regulations on business; a strong government role in providing public services (education, healthcare); progressive taxes to promote social welfare programs; and a strong government role in protecting minority groups from discrimination.

Libertarianism: A political perspective that strongly supports individualism and capitalism, favors the limitation of government involvement in all areas of life, and stresses the importance of private property. Libertarians believe in a free market system, limited government in all operations of society except national defense, and tolerance on social issues.

Populism: A perspective that emphasizes majority rule and power in the hands of the "little person" in an effort to counterbalance large institutional concentrations of power, both public and private. Populists favor: majority rule and empowerment of the common people; a government role in promoting traditional morality; and government intervention to ensure economic equality.

Greens are individuals who place environmental concerns above free-market economic policies. As a political party, the Green Party has sponsored numerous candidates with diverse political platforms.
Chapter Outline

I. Political Information in America
   The crux of this chapter involves how individuals are socialized within American culture and who shapes these beliefs and attitudes that influence how one views politics. As Alexis de Tocqueville observed very early in our country’s history, Americans uphold fundamental tenets of liberty, democracy, individualism, popular sovereignty, equality, economic freedom, and the rule of law as the basis for our political culture. However, the exact function of government to achieve these principles is debatable. Four predominant American ideologies—liberalism, libertarianism, conservatism, and populism—advocate differing views on the scope, function, and size of government to advance these principles.
   A. Political scientists offer three concepts—political culture, political socialization, and public opinion—to investigate how Americans comprehend political and public life.
      1. **Political culture** refers to a set of common rituals, stories, symbols, and habits that Americans share.
      2. **Political socialization** is the basic view of political and social order that is formed early in life and reinforced (taught) through agents of socialization.
      3. **Public opinion** or the distribution of the (aggregate) polity’s beliefs and expressions about politics and public policies.

II. Political Culture: Defining the American Creed
   A. Americans uphold fundamental beliefs in liberty, equality, individualism, the rule of law, popular sovereignty, laissez-faire economics, and egalitarianism, which are the basis of our political culture.
   B. While virtually all Americans believe these tenets should be supported by our government, the avenues to facilitate and achieve the aforementioned values differ.
   C. The first governing document—the Declaration of Independence—illustrates the aspiration of the Founders to establish a system of government via a written Constitution to promote these values.

III. Political Socialization: Where Our Ideas about Politics Come From
   A. Basic views of political and social order are common to every society.
      1. As Fred Greenstein asserts, the way one learns about our political culture is by acquiring knowledge about politics through a process known as political socialization.
      2. Thus, agents of socialization are the persons and organizations that carry out the socialization process.
         a. **Primary groups** are groups the individual has frequent, almost daily, face-to-face contact with, including family, peers, and co-workers.
            1) Parents and caregivers are the predominant influence on political views and subsequent party affiliations of their children.
            2) For example, if both parents are Democrats, the probability that the child will self-identify with the Democratic Party is high.
b. **Secondary groups** include religious and professional organizations, unions, and ethnic groupings that form to achieve common goals but do not accommodate the daily, face-to-face interaction that primary groups afford.

c. The media is an agent of political socialization as radio, television, and the Internet disseminate large amounts of political information.
   1) Given the 24-hour news cycle, political coverage provides instantaneous access to political events.
   2) The role of the media will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

d. Transformative events or changes within an individual’s life beginning in early adulthood that alter one’s political views:
   1) marriage
   2) children
   3) occupational changes
   4) historical events.

e. Finally, political leadership has a strong influence on one’s opinion of government.
   1) How effectively a president or governmental institution handles a particular crisis or event legitimizes the necessity for government.
   2) Conversely, if political leaders and institutions fail to address the needs of the polity, faith in government deteriorates.

**IV. The Nature of Public Opinion in the United States**

A. While primary and secondary groups have a significant impact on how individuals view the political and social order, social group characteristics, including socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity race, and regional differences also affect the socializing process.

B. In effect, measuring elite and mass beliefs and concerns about politics and governmental policies includes a wide range of social group characteristics.

C. History of Public Opinion Polling
   1. Informal polling has been used and reported in newspapers since the beginning of the two-party system in 1824.
   2. The national publication called the *Literacy Digest* began conducting public opinion polling concerning the very competitive 1916 presidential election between Democrat Woodrow Wilson and Republican Evans Hughes and continued to measure the public’s view regarding subsequent national elections.
   3. In 1936, 20 million surveys were distributed based upon names gathered from automobile registration lists, telephone directories, and various magazine subscription lists to measure public attitudes toward the two presidential candidates, Democrat Franklin Roosevelt and Republican Alf Landon.
   4. The response to the surveys suggested Landon would be the winner of the 1936 presidential election.
5. However, the election results provided one the greatest presidential election landslides since the victory of James Monroe in 1820.
   a. Roosevelt buried Landon by gaining 523 Electoral College votes to Landon’s eight.
   b. The survey was inaccurate because the Literary Digest oversampled the wealthy who were more apt to own cars, have telephones, and subscribe to magazines.

D. The inaccuracy of the Literary Digest’s 1936 presidential polling has led pollsters, notably George Gallup, Louis Harris, and Elmo Roper, to conduct “scientific polling” whereby (respondent) samples are randomly selected by variables including age, race, income, ethnicity, and gender in order to attain a cross-section of Americans to an end of attaining more reliable polling results.

1. There are different types of polling and survey designs used to measure public opinion:
   a. A benchmark poll is used by a candidate to “test the waters” to see how he or she is viewed by the public.
   b. A preference poll provides a list of candidates and asks the respondents to indicate which candidate they prefer.
   c. Opinion surveys are very commonly used by media services, campaigns, and interest groups to ascertain the public’s views concerning a particular issue or area of public policy.
   d. A focus group provides selected individuals the opportunity to directly express their thoughts and reactions to a candidate, area of public policy, campaign, or issue.
      1) While not technically considered polling, this type of Q&A allows the surveyor to gain a plethora of knowledge.
      2) Also, focus groups may provide the facilitator an opportunity to refine and reformulate a campaign message because new concerns may be expressed by the respondents.
   e. Tracking polls provide up to the minute information on a particular race and the candidates may construct, refine, or reiterate a political position based on these findings to appeal to changing public attitudes.
   f. Exit polling is taken after an individual votes:
      1) used by news agencies to call elections
      2) indicates voter preferences of actual and not potential voters.

2. Citizens are skeptical of polling data and there is reason to support this suspicion:
   a. Polling can be manipulated to indicate support for an issue or candidate.
   b. A technique known as “push-polling” actually disseminates biased information about a candidate, campaign, or issue under the guise of polling.
   c. Polling and survey designs are subject to innate limitations and deficiencies.

E. There are differences in socialization due to socio-economic status, race, ethnicity,
and gender.

1. Socio-economic status (class)
   a. Lower-class children are less efficacious than children from middle- or upper-class backgrounds.
   b. Lower-class children are less likely to be exposed to information about politics.
   c. Lower-class children tend to have a lower quality of education.

2. Race
   a. African Americans and Caucasiars prioritize political issues differently.
      1) Blacks are more supportive of spending on social programs.
      2) Whites tend to support increased spending on the military and are less supportive of affirmative action programs.
   b. A majority of blacks (66 percent) feel the government’s response to those who were abandoned during Hurricane Katrina would have been quicker if they had been predominantly white instead of mostly black.

3. Ethnicity
   a. While both minority groups, African Americans and Latinos/Latinas have differing views on social justice.
      1) 75 percent of blacks claim to have been victims of discrimination.
      2) 33 percent of Hispanics have expressed being victims of discrimination.
   b. Also, they differ over the proper role of government.
      1) Blacks are much more supportive of legalized abortion than Hispanics.
      2) Hispanics are more supportive of free-work policies than blacks.
      3) Blacks are more likely to self-identify with the Democratic Party due to its traditional support for increased spending on social programs.

4. Gender (differences in issue saliency)
   a. Women are more supportive than men on issues such as:
      1) gun control;
      2) increased spending for social welfare programs;
      3) rehabilitation rather than incarceration;
      4) legalized abortion with restrictions.
   b. Men are more supportive than women on issue concerning:
      1) increased spending on defense programs;
      2) laissez-faire economic policies;
      3) law and order issues;
      4) increased implementation of the death penalty;
      5) the Iraq War and international military involvement.

F. Properties of Public Opinion
   1. Differences between “Elites” and the Mass Public
      a. Elites are:
1) 10 percent of the population;
2) highly informed on the issues, “opinion leaders”;
3) well-educated;
4) occupy positions of influence within business and the community;
5) economically located in the upper-middle-class and upper-class.

b. Members of the mass public are primarily:
1) less educated;
2) less knowledgeable about political issues;
3) ideologically inconsistent;
4) more likely to be located in the middle and lower economic classes;
5) more likely to take voting cues from elites.

2. How Detailed is Public Opinion?
   a. In terms of general knowledge, the American public is most familiar with governmental processes and institutions but lacks detailed knowledge of specific policies, historical events, and the names of political leaders.
   b. The public’s ability to assess the state of politics without detailed political knowledge has been substantiated by survey data.
   c. These surveys have found that aggregate public opinion is inconsistent and slow to change.
   d. Individuals use heuristics (cues or voting shortcuts) which enable them to reduce the cost of attaining detailed information when voting (see Chapter 8).

3. General Principles versus Real Choices
   a. Often individual views on specific policy are inconsistent with the fundamental characteristics of our democratic society such as those comprising the American Creed (liberty, equality, fairness, etc.).
   b. As the research of Prothro and Grigg illustrate, when these inconsistencies are recognized 82 percent of the respondents “modified their opinions on concrete issues to make them more consistent with their endorsement of general democratic values.”
   c. In turn, their research may indicate many voters are simply misinformed or ignorant of these contradictory beliefs.

G. The Ambivalence of Public Opinion
1. The public is ambivalent about certain policy issues and the effectiveness of government. Yet, one must remember that this uncertainty is often measured in the aggregate and does not indicate individual preferences.
2. Regarding legalized abortion, a majority of Americans support the medical procedure with some restrictions.
3. Moreover, measuring the public’s trust in government has fluctuated given events and the institutional performances in response to these occurrences. As of May 2007 public opinion, as measured by the PEW Research Center, is as follows:
   a. The Supreme Court had the highest approval rating: 67 percent.
b. The president (George W. Bush) had an approval rating of 35 percent.
c. Congress had a low approval rating: 22 percent.
d. 45 percent believe government acted in the interest of “all people.”
e. Trust in government is currently low at 32 percent.

V. Political Ideology and the Coherence of Public Opinion

A. Political ideology is a comprehensive system of political beliefs about the nature of people and society and provides a political perspective or organized collection of ideas about the best way to live and the institutional arrangements for the society.

1. In his 1964 publication, The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics, Philip Converse’s findings suggest 50 percent of non-elites understood ideological differences and about 90 percent held “non-attitudes” or inconsistent views (remember the Socialist who was against government programs) regarding political issues between the years 1956 and 1960.

2. However, contemporary political attitudes suggest 55 percent of the public self-identifies as either liberal or conservative.

3. In 2004, the distribution of ideological identification within the United States was:
   a. 23 percent Liberal;
   b. 32 percent Conservative;
   c. 26 percent Moderate;
   d. 20 percent Don’t Know.

B. There are four predominant American ideologies.

1. Conservatism: Promotes the idea that people need the direction and structure tradition or religion provides.
   a. Conservatism upholds traditional economics and social frameworks: Free market system; strong measures against crime; strong need for government to promote national security; strong government role in upholding moral values.
   b. Conservatives agree with Libertarian laissez-faire views.
   c. Also, Conservatives concur with Populist emphasis on traditional values.

2. Liberalism: A political perspective that has as its goal changing society through government intervention to promote fairness and to protect individual rights.
   a. Liberalism is concerned with promoting economic and political equality.
   b. Liberals favor tighter government regulations on business; strong government role in providing public services (education, healthcare); progressive taxes to promote social welfare programs, strong government role in protecting minority groups from discrimination.
   c. Liberals agree with Populist support for a strong government role in assisting common people.
   d. In addition, Liberals concur with Libertarian tolerance on social issues.

3. Libertarianism: A political perspective that strongly supports individualism and capitalism, favors the limitation of government involvement in all areas of life, and stresses the importance of private property.

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a. Libertarians believe in a free market system, limited government role in all operations of society except national defense, and tolerance on social issues.

b. Libertarians concur with Conservative laissez-faire views and Liberal tolerance on social issues.

4. Populism: A perspective that emphasizes majority rule and power in the hands of the "little person" in an effort to counterbalance large institutional concentrations of public and private power.

a. Populists favor: majority rule and empowerment of the common people; government role in promoting traditional morality; and government intervention to ensure economic equality.

b. Populists agree with Liberalism's support for a strong government role in assisting common people.

c. In addition, Populists concur with Conservative views on traditional values.

VI. Conclusion

A. Political socialization is the process where societal norms and values are transmitted from one generation to another.

B. Within every society primary (family, peers) and secondary (organizations) groups shape political attitudes that provide a basis for how the public views the role of government.

C. Four political ideologies or coherent set of ideas regarding the role of government predominate American political thought: Liberalism, Libertarianism, Conservatism, and Populism.

D. Yet, the public is largely uninformed about specific policy issues and relies upon the leadership the political, economic, and educational elite (about 10 percent of the U.S. population) provides.

E. Consequently, to understand American public opinion, one must remember:

1. Americans’ political opinions are based upon very little political information.
2. There are inconsistencies between the fundamental principles citizens uphold and the actual public policies promoted.
3. Americans are ambivalent about the role of the government in regard to certain policy issues such as welfare programs, abortion, and government spending.
Lecture Suggestions

Theory/Philosophical Focus: Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America

I. Tocqueville and American Values
   A. Alexis de Tocqueville, a French sociologist and political scientist, arrived in the United States in May 1831 to assess the benefits and weaknesses of American democracy.
   B. In the seminal work, Democracy in America, Tocqueville provides a critique of American society and the system of mechanisms, or casual patterns of behavior, within a young democracy.
   C. Within the text, Tocqueville identifies equality of condition, as “the fundamental fact from which all others [mechanisms] seem to be derived” (Tocqueville, 1956, p. 26).
   D. Yet, he stipulates certain mechanisms, specifically equality, decentralized power, and public political participation are essential parts of American democracy.

II. Equality
   A. Tocqueville observed the general equality of condition permeates the public arena and forces cooperation among inhabitants regardless of individual endeavors.
      1. First, equality of condition leads man to commercial and industrial occupations because man is free to pursue economic ventures to obtain wealth.
      2. Second, equality of condition prevents an aristocracy and promotes political efficacy. Within America, "the sovereignty of the people … is recognized by the customs and proclaimed by the laws" diminishing tyranny and promoting democracy (p. 55).
      3. Yet Tocqueville suggests that equality of condition may lead to the negative consequence of a tyranny of the majority. American democracy serves the interests of the greatest number of people but provides safeguards against tyranny resulting from an uneducated, passionate mass which incrementally could be fatal to liberty.
   B. Tocqueville points to equality as the “distinguishing characteristic of the age [1800s]” and the basis for the U.S. Constitution (p. 190).
   C. The institutional design of equality can be seen in all aspects of American government. As a result, an inherent pursuit of commerce consumes the passions of Americans producing a vibrant, national economy, and furthers the civic virtue of industry.
   D. Therefore, equality of condition permits any person, regardless of socio-economic class, to participate in governmental actions and deliberations. Moreover, every citizen is responsible for his/her own actions and is free to introduce personal opinions into the public discourse.
   E. Tocqueville promotes the potentiality of American equality to "open a thousand new paths to fortune and lead adventurers to wealth and power" sustaining the success of American democracy (p. 28).
III. Decentralized Power
   A. Tocqueville offers a second mechanism found in American democracy, specifically, the decentralization of power, diminishing the likelihood of a tyranny by the majority.
   B. He stresses the advantage of power being dispersed among various state governments and a central government as vital to the success of democracy.
      1. Citing the New England township, Tocqueville illustrates that the “social Power … is constantly changing hands because it is subordinate to the power of the People” and is dispersed among many different individuals (pp. 62–64).
      2. Therefore, if one does not approve of the public official's performance while in office, he/she may challenge that official directly or simply not support the individual in the proceeding election.
   C. Patriotism, or the love of community, through the “collective strength of the people” challenges the absolute “authority of government” and protects the general welfare of the community (p. 66).

IV. Political and Public Associations
   A. Tocqueville identifies a third mechanism, political and public associations as a means to promote stability within a democracy.
   B. He defines an association as “the public assent which a number of individuals give to certain doctrines … which they contract to promote in a certain manner the spread of those doctrines” (p. 95).
   C. The act of association, or the power of meeting, inspires increased activity to further influence the public discourse regarding political activities.
   D. Politically, “the partisans of an opinion unite in political bodies [parties] … and choose delegates to represent them in a central assembly” (p. 97).
      1. Thus, civil society relies upon the "moral power" of citizens forming political parties to further common virtue.
      2. According to Tocqueville, without the collective organization of political parties, anarchy and disorganization would follow, allowing one prominent interest to dominate the political arena.
   E. Publicly, Tocqueville also observes the benefit of certain shared activities such as schools, religion, family, and social organizations in a democratic society to perpetuate civic values.
      1. He warns “if individuals cannot create an artificial and temporary substitute for [titled organizations of the old world] there will be no permanent protection against the most galling tyranny … by a small faction, or by a single individual” (p. 97).
      2. Furthermore, Tocqueville believes that the “right of association is as inalienable as the right of personal liberty” (p. 98). Thus, a citizen's ability to freely association with others who share his/her opinion promotes an avenue of discourse for a “common undertaking” (p. 100).
      3. In turn, a common motive or passion establishes stability within the United States.

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4. Yet, Tocqueville warns the reader of the possibility of one organization, newspapers, conforming public opinion and suppressing public discourse (this is considered in Chapter 5).

V. Conclusion
A. *Democracy in America* provides a compelling critique illustrating the strengths and weaknesses of American society.
B. Tocqueville ascertains that while people retain different self-interests in American society there are similarities concerning ethnicity, respect for law, spirit of liberty and religion, independence, and the general welfare of the country.
C. Specifically, Tocqueville distinguishes three components of American society, equality of condition, decentralized power, and associations that advance democracy.
D. Consequently, Tocqueville views these mechanisms as beneficial to promote the potentiality of American equality to “open a thousand new paths to fortune and lead adventurers to wealth and power” sustaining the success of American democracy (p. 28).

Behavioral Focus: Explanations for the Gender Gap

I. Introduction
To understand the relationship between gender and politics, one must explore the social and institutional constraints that limit women’s involvement in politics.

A. The gender gap refers to the aggregate differences between men and women who aspire to hold public office.
   1. differences in political socialization;
   2. biological differences;
   3. institutional explanations.
B. Also, men and women place different levels of importance on specific policy issues. This is known as the *Salience Hypothesis*.

II. Social and Institutional Explanations of the Gender Gap
A. Socialization
   1. In their article, *Entering the Arena? Gender and the Decision to Run for Office*, Lawless and Fox examine why women who “share the same personal credentials and professional characteristics as men” are less ambitious to run for public office. The authors incorporate data from the Citizens Political Ambition Study to conduct an elite survey of 1,969 men and 1,796 women to further research as to why there is a gender gap.
      a. From the respondents’ answers, the authors conclude “that women are less likely than men to receive a political source’s encouragement to run for office,” while women were less likely “to consider themselves qualified to run for public office” even though, on paper, they are more qualified than their male counterparts.
b. Therefore, to further understand “where the women are not,” we need to understand the importance of “perceived” roles and responsibilities of men and women in American society.

c. In effect, women “self-assess” that they are not qualified to run which suggests cultural factors associated with how women are socialized explain the gender gap and the lack of women who aspire to attain positions in government.

d. According to Lawless and Fox, the following are a few “cultural constraints” placed on women, which may explain why women are less likely to run for public office:

1) Women are less likely to talk politics with their parents than men.
2) Women are less likely to be unmarried than men.
3) Women are seen as more apt to be responsible for childcare.
4) Women are less likely to be encouraged by their parents to pursue a career in politics.
5) Women professionals identify a male culture (“masculinized ethos”), which is inherently biased and does not encourage women to run for public office.
6) Women hold themselves to a higher standard than men when determining if they decide to run for office.
7) Women are less likely to think they will win if they run for public office.

2. In his article, *Women’s Representation in National Legislatures: Developed and Developing Countries*, Richard Matland supports Lawless and Fox’s findings through his research of developing countries and former communist countries.

a. He concludes that men are socialized in “virtually all cultures” to view politics as a “legitimate sphere for them to act in” which is perpetuated and leads to greater political efficacy and increased “political knowledge” and experience; conversely, women internalize that they are less efficacious and do not aspire to be candidates for public office.

b. Therefore, in the “recruitment process” countries with single-member congressional districts are more likely to have male candidates given the pool of “eligibles” will not include many women.

B. Institutional Factors

1. Structural impediments that have limited women’s accessibility to participate in politics and attain public office.

a. Radical feminists, such as Catherine MacKinnon and Susan Moller Okin, point to the “gendered” structure of society that perpetuates women’s roles as caregivers which limits the role of women in American politics.

1) Okin’s critique of American society follows the radical feminist tradition that American society has been formed according to a male perspective and gender must be seen as a socially constructed concept.
2) Therefore, it should come as no surprise that men occupy positions of power and are paid more than women; consequently, the locus of control has always been dominated by men, to perpetuate male power and delineate women’s role as exclusively subservient and functional to the system.

b. Also, the incumbency factor excludes women from obtaining public office.

1) As of 2006, House retention rates approaching 87 percent with the Senate just a bit lower at 85 percent, the incumbency advantage has limited the chances of women to be recruited and advance a successful campaign in single-member congressional districts.

2) Yet, as Barbara Burrell has found in her article, Sex and Money: the Financing of Women’s and Men’s Campaign for the U.S. House of Representatives, 1972-92, women are as likely as men to solicit financial support and raise equal amounts of campaign funds as their male counterparts for primary and general elections.

3) Other factors impede women from serving in Congress.
   a) While women are equally able to win primaries and elections, women face more difficult primary competitions as incumbents, as challengers, and as candidates in congressional open seats.
   b) Women who are incumbents attract a greater number of women challengers in their own party and in the opposing party.
   c) There is evidence that female Republican candidates are more apt to gain their party’s nomination in primary elections despite the fact that the conservative base still views women as “more liberal” than male candidates.
   d) Nevertheless, women still face an uphill battle in elections in which they challenge an incumbent male.

III. Gender Differences Regarding Salient Political Issues

A. To understand the effects of gender in political science, women studies scholars have suggested that there are differences between men and women regarding “salient” election issues.

1. In effect, one needs to explore the “gender gap” or the differences in voting choices between men and women based upon partisanship and issue priorities which shape the American electorate. However, the impetus for the gender gap in American politics is debatable.

a. In their article, The Changing Politics of American Men: Understanding the Sources of the Gender Gap, Kaufmann and Petrocik expound that the gender gap occurred due to LBJ’s support for expanded governmental welfare programs in the 1964 presidential election. Subsequently, the salient issues of “guns versus butter” prompted more conservative,
Southern, male voters to support the Republican Party’s pro-defense platform of Barry Goldwater.

b. Kathleen Frankovic disputes the findings of the aforementioned authors in her article, *Sex and Politics: New Alignments, Old Issues*, instead she ascertains that younger women (ages 18–24) increasingly supported expanding social programs and were therefore more likely to support Democratic Party candidates beginning in the 1980 election as a result of Reagan’s prioritizing foreign policy issues over “other programs” during his successful bid for the presidency in 1980.

2. While the advent of the gender gap provides for contentious academic debates, one must admit that men and women have different attitudes regarding salient policy issues.

3. In general, men are more likely to promote conservative issues, such as defense and economic issues, as candidates and support these issues as voters; while women are more likely to support candidates who favor increased domestic spending on education, environmental, and social programs.

B. Furthermore, data from GSS and NES support the hypothesis that

1. age
2. marital status
3. religiosity
4. socio-economic status
5. geographical location

affects ideological and political party identification. For example:

a. Women below the age of 29 tend to be more liberal and are more likely to vote for Democratic candidates.

b. Women over the age of 60 years old tend to be more conservative and vote in greater numbers for Republican candidates.

c. Women living in large, urban areas are more likely to support Democratic candidates than women in rural areas.

d. The marriage gap: Single women are less likely to vote than married women because they see substantive policies not affecting them; while married women tend to be more conservative and support Republican candidates in slightly greater numbers.

e. Women who attend church regularly are more likely to support the Republican platform which stresses traditional, family values.

f. Women who have achieved a higher degree of education are slightly more ideologically conservative and tend to vote for Republican candidates.

g. Women in higher income brackets are more likely to support Republican candidates due to economic policies that favor tax cuts and limited spending.
Projects, Exercises, and Activities

1. As a paper assignment, have the students access the website www.uspolitics.org and click on “IDEALOG”. First, read the first section of the program explaining political ideologies. Next, have them take the survey by clicking on the answer that best represents their opinion. Finally, after the program tallies the results, write a two-page paper explaining to which ideological category they belong. Lastly, were the results surprising? If so, why? Or, why not?

2. Access the website: http://www.migrationpolicy.org/ and look at the changes in the foreign born populations of the 50 states. Click the link “MPI Data Hub.” Which states have the largest concentration of foreign born residents? What are some reasons for the influx of immigrants into these states? What policies are being implemented due to increased immigration? How may the changing state demographics alter the American political landscape?

3. Ask students to compose a list of five beliefs about government, authority figures, and specific policy issues. In groups of three to four, ask students to share how they developed these beliefs. Do they share these ideas with primary or secondary groups? Ask students to consider the commonalities and differences in their answers.

4. Assign students the Lawless and Fox (2012) article (http://www.american.edu/spa/wpi/upload/2012-Men-Rule-Report-web.pdf) as additional reading. Once students are prepared, help them to design a set of questions to explore, through interviews, key conclusions made by Lawless and Fox. Ask students to administer these interviews and report back their findings to the entire class. After you have compiled the findings of the entire class, discuss the similarities and the differences between their findings and those of the article. This exercises opens up space to talk about the differences between your informal survey and more rigorous research design.

Additional Resources

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Supplemental Readings


Websites
**Migration Policy Institute**
This site is operated by the non-partisan, not-for-profit think tank dedicated to research concerning global migration.

**CNN Politics**
CNN website dedicated to providing news and features concerning politics.

**Fair Organization**
Homepage of Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting which is a media watchdogs agency.

**U.S. Census**
Statistics regarding American population demographics. Also, provides future economic trends and projections.

**U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service**
Data and statistics available for federal governmental agencies.

**Gallup Polls**
Information and data from numerous surveys conducted by Gallup polling measuring
public opinion.

**American National Election Studies**
This is the main Web page for the American National Election Studies; it provides a plethora of polling data relevant to American presidential and mid-term election cycles. This is excellent for up-to-date empirics on the condition of the American electorate that will help inform your in-class presentations.

**Pew Research Center**
This is the main Web page for the Pew Research Center a non-partisan public opinion analysis organization that sponsors and studies polls dealing with a plethora of issue including American national politics.

**Annenberg Public Policy Center**
This is the main Web page of the Annenberg Public Policy Center which sponsors national election surveys and provides public analysis of them especially regarding policy issues.

**Real Clear Politics**
This site examines polls to develop generalizable statements about the American polity at any given time. It is routinely updated and serves as a center for poll-on-polls data that is often discussed by the larger political media.