

Chapter 5

The American Political Landscape

Key Chapter Questions

1. What is the importance of geography, sectionalism, state and local identity, and the kinds of places in which we live vis-à-vis the American political landscape?
2. Why is America considered a "land of diversity"? What is the relationship of this diversity to the conduct of American politics?
3. What accounts for American unity in the midst of diversity?
4. What was the significance of California's Proposition 187 involving the restriction of public services to illegal immigrants.
5. Why is family structure important to the American political landscape?
6. Why and how have differences in sexual orientation become more politically important in recent years?
7. What is the difference between the "salad bowl" and "melting pot" concepts?

Chapter Outline

- I. Introduction/A land of diversity
 - A. FAIR, an anti-immigration group, attacked immigrants during Iowa caucus (Storm Lake, Iowa)
 1. Elected officials strongly criticized Storm Lake Ad
 2. California's 1994 Proposition 187 tried to restrict public services to illegal immigrants
 3. Concept of ethnocentrism—selective perceptions based on background, attitudes, biases
 - B. Political socialization is the process by which parents and others teach children about the values, beliefs, and attitudes of a political culture
 1. Reinforcing cleavages – political conflict becomes more intense and there is greater polarization in society; note demographics and political predisposition terms
 2. Cross-cutting cleavages – instances where differences do not reinforce each other
 3. American diversity has generally been the cross-cutting type, lessening political conflict because individuals have multiple allegiances
 4. Note sidebar over census sampling and 1999 Supreme Court ruling on "actual counting"
 - C. Socioeconomic differences – Not central to the form and structure of American politics
 - D. Not so in other areas such as Northern Ireland; but Americans historically excluded minorities
 - E. Geography and national identity
 1. The United States is a geographically large and historically isolated country
 2. The large land mass of United States fostered the perspective that the United States had a manifest destiny to be a continental nation reaching from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans
 3. The United States is a land of abundant natural resources
 4. Geographic differences produce different regional economic concerns, which in turn influence politics
 5. Sectional differences in the United States are primarily geographic
 - F. Sectional differences
 1. The South remains the most distinct section
 - a. The most important difference between the North and South regions was the southern institution of slavery
 - b. The South is becoming less distinct today
 - c. The Democratic "solid South" was a fixture of American politics for more than a century;

since 1968 that has changed dramatically; In 2000, Bush won all 11 southern states, and Republicans made gains in both governorships and state legislatures of the South in 2000

2. The New England Puritan spirit is a significant sectional difference
 3. The West has developed an identity of individualism, hostility to government intervention, and belief in self-sufficiency
 4. The sun belt/frost belt sectional division – sun belt states have gained 17 seats in the U.S. Congress after 1990 census; sun belt states have experienced greater economic growth as well
- G. State and local identity
1. States have distinctive political cultures which affect public opinion and policy outcomes in each state
 2. More than “one out of eight Americans is a Californian”; state had 54 electoral votes in 2000

II. Where we live

- A. Americans live in four kinds of places: central cities, suburbs, small communities, rural areas
1. Most Americans live in central cities/suburbs—or “metropolitan areas” to Census Bureau
 2. Movement of population since the 1950s has been to the suburb
 3. Reasons people move to the suburbs
 - a. Better housing
 - b. New transportation systems
 - c. Desire for clean air and safer streets
 - d. White flight
 4. Effect of migration to the suburbs
 - a. American cities have become increasingly poor, increasingly African American, and increasingly Democratic
 - b. Suburbs vary in relative affluence

III. Who we are

- A. Race and ethnicity
1. Distinction between race and ethnicity
 - a. Race is defined as a grouping of human beings with common characteristics presumed to be transmitted genetically
 - b. Ethnicity is a social division based on national origin, religion, and language, often within the same race, and includes a sense of attachment to that group
 2. Census Bureau estimates
 - a. Native Americans just under 1 percent
 - b. 13 percent of population are African Americans (more than 34 million)
 - c. 10 percent of population are American Hispanics (28 million)—fastest growing ethnic group
 - d. Just under 4 percent of population are Asian American
 - e. Census Bureau projects that by the year 2050, whites will decline to just under three quarters of the population
 3. African Americans
 - a. Until 1900, more than 90 percent of all African Americans lived in the South; by end of twentieth century, the figure was 54 percent
 - b. In economic terms, African Americans are much worse off than whites in the United States; only one-tenth of whites’ net wealth; still, 21 percent of households had earnings over \$50,000 (half that of whites); \$30,000 median income compared to \$49,000 for whites
 - c. About 15 percent graduate from college, compared to 25 percent of whites
 - d. African Americans see the Democrats as the party of civil rights
 - e. Evidence of growing African American political power is reflected in the dramatic increase in the number of African American state legislators; also increased voter participation
 4. Asian Americans
 - a. Includes persons of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Filipino origin, as well as persons from the Pacific Islands
 - b. Nine million Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders reside in the United States, primarily

in the western states

- c. The number of Asian Americans grew during the 1970s and 1980s, largely as a result of Southeast Asian immigration

5. Hispanics/Latinos

- a. Hispanic is term used by government/media, where “Chicano” is used by group leaders
- b. Latinos are not a monolithic group, and while they share a common linguistic heritage, they often differ from one another, depending on the country they emigrated from
- c. A recent study of Latinos found differences among Latinos of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban descent in partisanship, ideology, and rates of participation, but widespread support for a liberal domestic agenda
- d. The divisions among Latinos are politically important because of the tendency of the groups to settle in different areas (almost 11 million Hispanics live in California and nearly two-thirds of Cuban immigrants live in Florida)
- e. Latinos have won election to U.S. Senate; several Hispanic cabinet members

6. Asian Americans (10.6 million living mainly in Hawaii, California, Washington)

- a. Significant differences in culture/language/political experience
- b. More than three out of every five have graduated from college
- c. Now one of four of all foreign-born citizens living in U.S. (note Gary Locke)

7. The ties of ethnicity

- a. The largest number of immigrants came between 1900 and 1924, when 17.3 million people relocated to the United States
- b. From 1991 to 1997, there were 6.9 million immigrants, primarily from Latin America and from Asian countries
- c. The foreign-born proportion of the U.S. population increased during the 1980s to 26 million in 1998, the largest number of foreign-born in U.S. history
- d. Politically important ethnic groups in the United States include Irish Americans, Italian Americans, German Americans, Polish Americans, Hispanics, and Greek Americans
- e. People of English, Scottish, and Welsh background make up the largest ethnic group in the United States

B. Gender

1. For most of U.S. history, politics, and government were men's business
2. Women's vote/Women in Politics
 - a. Women typically have divided their vote between the two parties
 - b. In the past 20 years, women have voted at nearly the same rate as men, with the result that the female vote has outnumbered the male vote; Recently, women have been more likely to vote for Democratic presidential candidates than men; they are more likely to oppose violence
3. The numbers of women elected to public office have been low; after 2000, there were three female governors, 9 U.S. senators, and 58 in House (see EMILY's List and Wish List sidebar)
4. The women's movement in American politics encompasses a comprehensive agenda
5. A gender gap exists in public opinion and voting, and "gender issues" are becoming increasingly important; includes women's rights, gun control, sexual harrassment, abortion, etc.
6. Serious inequalities between men and women in income; about 64 percent more women than men work at or below the minimum wage; women earn on average about 80 cents for every dollar earned by men; earnings gap increases with age; wage discrimination is between 89-98 cents on every dollar

V. Sexual Orientation

- A. Differences in sexual orientation have become more important in recent years; Movement can be traced back to 1969 and NYC police raid on Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village; Estimates are that 2.8 percent of men, 1.4 percent of women see themselves as homosexual or bisexual.
- B. In 2000, Vermont became first state to grant gay marriages “civil status”
- C. Military's “Don't Ask, Don't Tell”; Human Rights Campaign fights against gay discrimination;
- D. Conservatives—banned same-sex marriages in statewide initiatives;
- E. Supreme Court upheld right of Boy Scouts of America to bar gays from leadership positions

- VI. Family Structure
- A. “Traditional family” has changed due to “cohabitation,” high divorce rate, women working
 - B. About half of all marriages end in divorce; only one-sixth now see women’s place to be at home
 - C. Religion (a shared identity)
 - 1. Absence of an official American church – Religious conflict can become especially strong if there is one predominant faith, which is why the framers of our Constitution did not sanction a national church in the United States
 - 2. Religion can be an important catalyst for social change; Politics also—Joe Lieberman in 2000
 - 3. Increase in political activity among fundamentalist Christians in recent years
 - 4. A defining characteristic of religion in the United States is the tremendous variety of denominations (half Protestant, Catholics have largest single membership, Jews 2 percent of population; followers of Islam number more than 500,000)
 - 5. In recent presidential elections, majority of Protestants voted Republican, while majorities of Catholics and Jews voted Democratic (latter highest rate of turnout at 85 percent in 1996)
 - 6. Clustering of populations by religions (Protestants in South, Catholics in Northeast, etc.)
 - 7. Jews most prosperous and best educated—more than 46% graduated from college
 - 8. About 66% of Jews vote Democratic; many southern Protestants are Democrats as well
 - C. Wealth and income
 - 1. Distinction between wealth and income
 - a. Wealth encompasses the things of economic value you possess
 - b. Income is how much money you make from your job or investments
 - c. Education the way to achieve economic/social mobility; wealthier are better educated
 - 2. Aside from race, income is the most important factor in explaining views on issues, partisanship, and ideology
 - a. Most rich people are Republicans, and most poor people are Democrats
 - 3. The distribution of income within a society can have important consequences for democratic stability—Madison’s “factions”
 - 4. Income has been rising in the United States (Northeast most prosperous)
 - 5. The definition of poverty is itself political (poverty level in 1999: \$17,184)
 - 6. Increasing inequality between rich and poor during last two decades—could cause political unrest
 - 7. Close to 22 percent of the poor are children under 18 years of age
 - 8. Both African Americans and Hispanics are nearly three times as poor than whites
 - D. Occupation
 - 1. The United States is a post-industrial society (GDP rose by more than 565% from 1929-1998)
 - 2. Changing dynamics of the American labor (Bell’s post-industrial society where *knowledge* is key)
 - a. Growth in the white-collar society
 - b. Decline in agriculture and manufacturing—only 2 percent work on farms
 - c. Governments produce more than one-sixth of gross domestic product
 - 3. Women and racial minorities have distinct occupational patterns
 - a. Women less likely than men to work in blue-collar jobs; 30 percent are clerical workers
 - b. Women encounter “glass ceiling” as barrier to advancement
 - E. Social class (SES – socioeconomic status based on occupation, income, and education)
 - 1. Class divisions in the United States are less defined and less important to politics
 - 2. Most Americans see themselves as “middle class” (subjective), not working class
 - F. Age (people over 65 less than 13 percent of population, but account for 31% of medical expenses)
 - 1. Americans are living longer and fewer babies are being born proportionate to the population
 - 2. As a group, older Americans have a political agenda (70 percent over 65 vote)
 - 3. Political assets that make the "gray lobby" politically powerful
 - a. Voting record (Gore championed social security in 2000-got majority of voters over 60)
 - b. Disposable income (poverty rate has dropped from 35% to 10% in 1997)
 - c. Discretionary time
 - d. A clear focus on issues
 - e. Effective organization

4. Life-cycle effects
 - a. As people become middle-aged, they become more politically conservative, less mobile, and more likely to participate in politics
 - b. As people age further and rely more on the government for services, they tend to grow more liberal
5. Generational effects arise when a particular generation has had experiences that make it politically distinct (Great Depression, Vietnam War)
- G. Education (vast majority of Americans are educated in public schools)
 1. Linked to citizenship and civic virtue
 2. The number of years of school completed varies greatly in the United States
 3. Americans are becoming more educated; but just over half have not gone to college
 4. Compared to persons in other industrialized democracies, Americans and Canadians are more likely to go to college
 5. African-Americans and Hispanics have lower levels of education—24%, nearly half, did not finish high school; proportion of whites who are college graduates is more than double

VII. Unity in a land of diversity

- A. See John Gunther's paragraph
 1. Complexity but interlocking
 2. The "rival magnets of homogeneity and diversity"
- B. Original melting pot theory vs. salad bowl
 1. Unifying effect of the American Dream
 2. A shared sense of national unity and identity
 3. Minority groups assimilated; but melting pot idea obliterates important differences
 4. Salad bowl idea proposed instead—distinguish "tomatoes from the cabbage"
- C. Divisive issues reinforce our differences
 1. Still a unity of commitment of democratic values and processes
 2. Ethnic divisions pose challenges, yet public has accepted diversity norm
 3. Still seeking balance between uniqueness of ethnic groups vs. the need for assimilation and shared identity