

Public Opinion and Political Action

6



Jason Reed/Reuters

6.1

Identify demographic trends and their likely impact on American politics.

The American People

- ▣ The Immigrant Society
- ▣ The American Melting Pot
- ▣ The Regional Shift
- ▣ The Graying of America

NASCAR and Census advertising

6.1



Jason Smith/Getty Images for NASCAR

The Immigrant Society

□ A nation of nations

- 1 million legal immigrants/year
- 500,000 illegal immigrants/year
- 11% of residents foreign-born

□ Waves of immigration

- Northwest Europe (English, Irish, Scottish, Germans, Scandinavians)
- Southern and Eastern Europe (Italians, Jews, Poles, Russians)
- Hispanics (Cuba, Central America, Mexico)
- Asians (Vietnam, Korea, the Philippines, India)

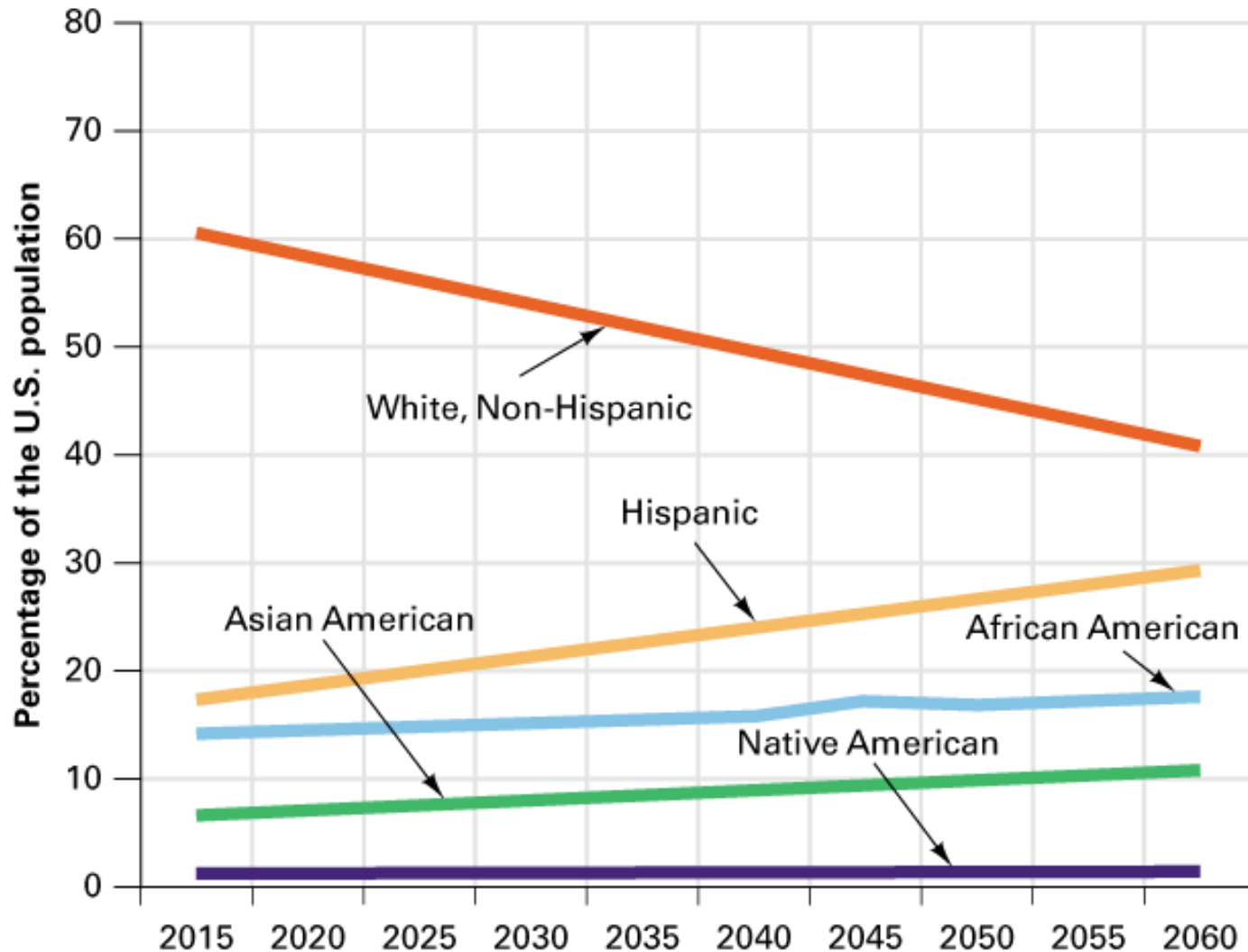
The Immigrant Society

▣ Restrictions on immigration

- Open door policy
- Criminals, prostitutes, lunatics, diseased (1875)
- Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)
- Johnson-Reid Immigration Act (1924)
- Hart-Celler Immigration and Nationality Act (1965)

The American Melting Pot

- ▣ Minority majority
 - Hispanic population growing rapidly

FIGURE 6.1 The coming minority majority

The American Melting Pot

- ▣ Reluctant immigrants
 - 17% of population
 - 27% still live in poverty
 - Political power increasing

- ▣ Simpson-Mazzoli Act (1986)

Border fence

6.1



Matt York/AP Images

The American Melting Pot

▣ Political culture and assimilation



Courtesy of Marty Wattenberg

The Regional Shift

- ▣ Northeast most populous
- ▣ West and South growing since WWII
 - Sun Belt migration
 - Arizona, Texas, Florida
 - Political power of these areas increasing
- ▣ Reapportionment
 - Once each decade, after census

The Graying of America

- Over-65 fastest growing age group
- People living longer
- Fertility rate lower
- Implications for Social Security
 - Ratio changing
 - Politically-sensitive

6.1 What kind of regional population shift is America experiencing?

- a. From Northeast to Southwest
- b. From Northwest to Southeast
- c. From Southwest to Northeast
- d. From Midwest to Northeast

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Warm-Up Activity

- Define “Public Opinion” in your own words.
- Make a list of political symbols in our society and where they are most often seen.
- What factors have influenced your political opinion?

6.2

Outline how various forms of socialization shape political opinions.

How Americans Learn About Politics: Political Socialization

- ▣ The Process of Political Socialization
- ▣ Political Learning over a Lifetime

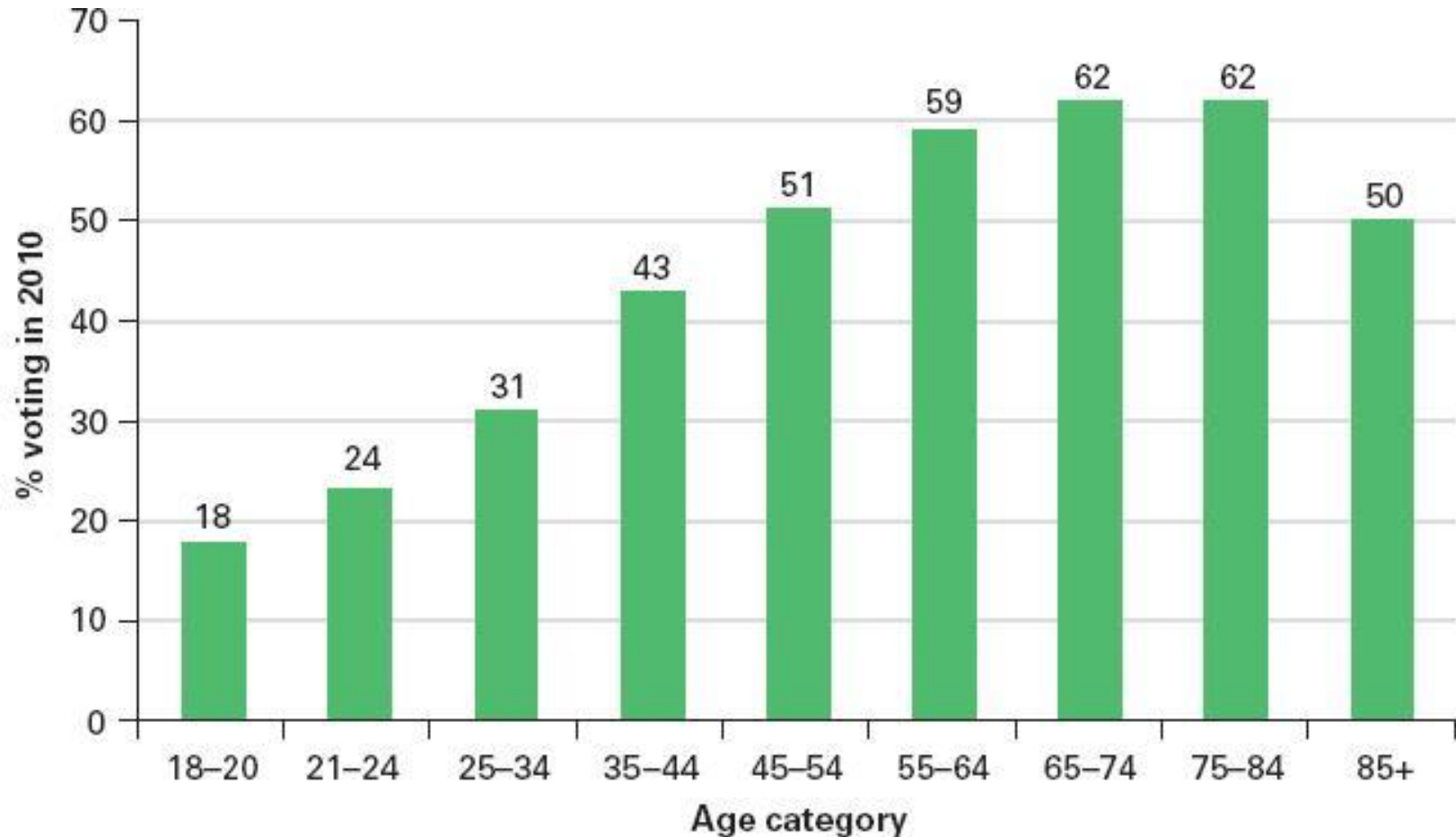
The Process of Political Socialization

- ▣ The Family
 - Central role
 - Time and emotional commitment
- ▣ The Mass Media
 - The new parents (and teachers)
 - Age gap in following politics
- ▣ School
 - Forming civic virtue

Political Learning over a Lifetime

- ▣ Increasing participation with age
- ▣ Party identification strengthens
- ▣ Political behaviour is learned

FIGURE 6.2 Turnout increases with age



6.2 What is the most important agent of political socialization in the U.S.?

- a. Government
- b. Family
- c. School
- d. Profession

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Discuss w/ a Partner

1. Do you think American citizens are well-informed?
Why or why not?
2. What are ways in which lack of information can be successfully dealt with?
3. Should Americans be concerned with this situation?
4. What proposals might be developed to remedy this situation?

6.3

Explain how polls are conducted and what can be learned from them about American public opinion.

“How to Read a Poll” Video

Measuring Public Opinion and Political Information

- ▣ How Polls Are Conducted
- ▣ The Role of Polls in American Democracy
- ▣ What Polls Reveal About Americans' Political Information
- ▣ The Decline of Trust in Government

How Polls Are Conducted

- ▣ Sample
- ▣ Random sample
- ▣ Sampling error
- ▣ Random digit dialling
 - Cell phones
- ▣ Internet polling

The Roll of Polls in American Democracy

- Polling as a tool for democracy: pros and cons
 - Gauge opinion between elections
 - Following rather than leading
 - Pandering or shaping?
 - Bandwagon effect
- Exit polls
 - Affect election results
- Question wording

Exit Polls



Chris Fitzgerald/Candidate Photos/The Image Works

What Polls Reveal About Americans' Political Information

- ▣ Americans are uninformed
 - Jeffersonian faith in wisdom of common people unfounded
 - Young people most uninformed
- ▣ Who is responsible for the ill-informed electorate?
 - Is it the schools' fault?
 - Is it the media's fault?
- ▣ Paradox of mass politics

FIGURE 6.3 Many Americans show little knowledge of world geography



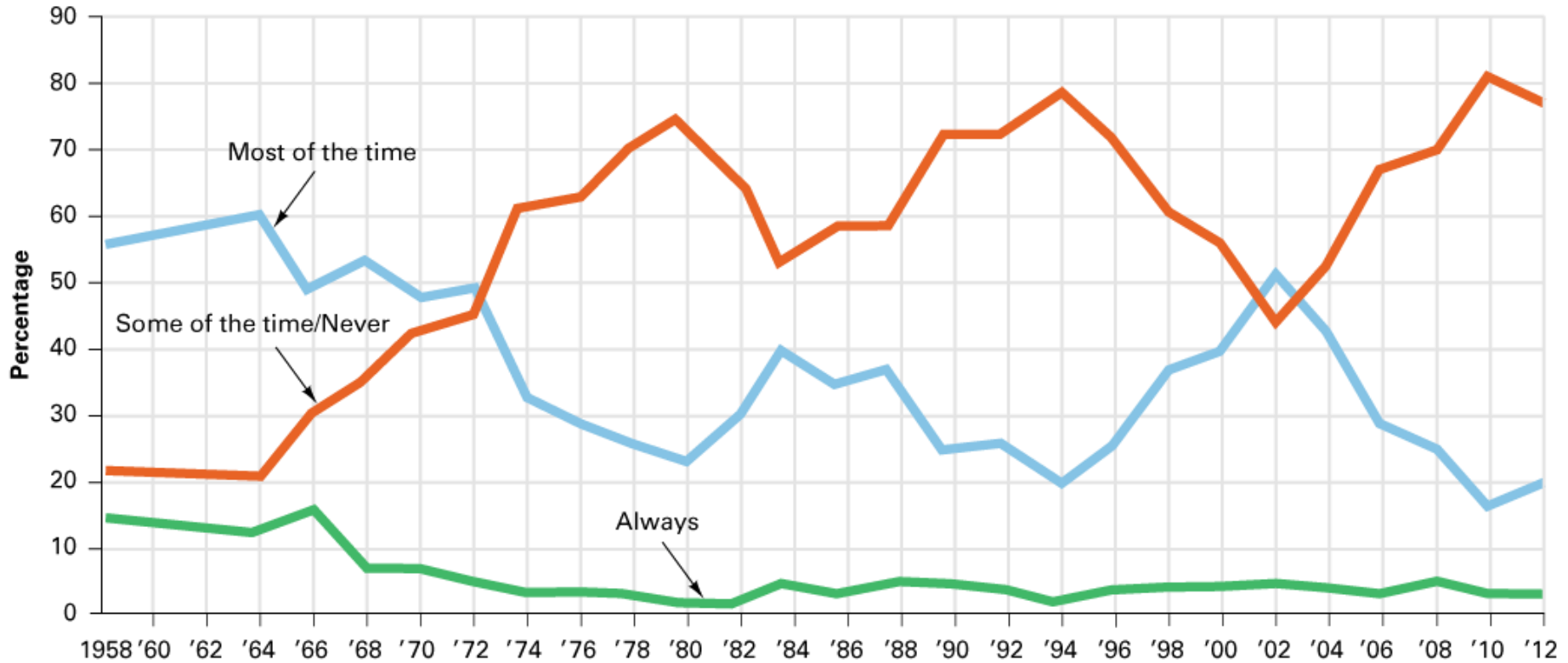
Correct answers are upside down at left.

The Decline of Trust in Government

- ▣ The great slide
 - Vietnam War
 - Watergate
 - Economy/hostage crisis

- ▣ Is public cynicism good?
 - Negative effect on programs for poor

FIGURE 6.4 The Decline of trust in government, 1958–2012



6.3 What is the problem with exit polls?

- a. They are usually inaccurate
- b. They don't poll every voter
- c. They influence election results
- d. None of the above

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HW Activity – Political Attitude Quiz

- Access the following website:
 - 1st Period: <https://www.idealogy.com/en/quiz/205289e7e>
 - 2nd Period: <https://www.idealogy.com/en/quiz/2051e9f99>
 - 3rd Period: <https://www.idealogy.com/en/quiz/2050755fb>
 - 6th Period: <https://www.idealogy.com/en/quiz/2049d7b94>
- Complete all 3 steps
- Your results will be anonymous and will automatically be sent to my account and we will review them in class on **Wednesday.**

Make sure to use Chrome, Safari or Firefox browsers

Poll Analysis Activity

1. Access one of the following polling websites:
 - a. *Huffington Post* <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/news/pollster/>
 - b. *New York Times*
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/n/newyorktimes-poll-watch/index.html>
 - c. *Gallup* <http://www.gallup.com/home.aspx>

2. Choose a poll and identify the following on a separate sheet of paper:
 - a. Title of the poll
 - b. Target Population
 - c. Results
 - d. Analysis of poll accuracy

Warm-Up Activity

Lets take a look at the results of our class' political attitude quiz.

Political Attitude Class Results

1. Where do the majority of our class members lie on the political matrix?
2. Can you identify trends within the responses to different types questions? If so, what trends do you see?

6.4

Assess the influence of political ideology on Americans' political thinking and behavior.

What Americans Value: Political Ideologies

- ▣ Who Are the Liberals and Conservatives?
- ▣ Do People Think in Ideological Terms?
- ▣ What is a Liberal and what is a Conservative? VIDEO

TABLE 6.1 How to tell a liberal from a conservative

TABLE 6.1 HOW TO TELL A LIBERAL FROM A CONSERVATIVE

Liberal and *conservative*—these labels are thrown around in American politics as though everyone knows what they mean. Here are some of the political beliefs likely to be preferred by liberals and conservatives. This table, to be sure, is oversimplified.

	Liberals	Conservatives
Foreign Policy		
Military spending	Believe we should spend less	Believe we should maintain peace through strength
Use of force	Less willing to commit troops to action, such as the war in Iraq	More likely to support military intervention around the world
Social Policy		
Abortion	Support “freedom of choice”	Support “right to life”
Prayer in schools	Are opposed	Are supportive
Affirmative action	Favor	Oppose
Economic Policy		
Scope of government	View government as a regulator in the public interest	Favor free-market solutions
Taxes	Want to tax the rich more	Want to keep taxes low
Spending	Want to spend more on the poor	Want to keep spending low
Crime		
How to cut crime	Believe we should solve the problems that cause crime	Believe we should stop “coddling criminals”
Defendants’ rights	Believe we should guard them carefully	Believe we should stop letting criminals hide behind laws

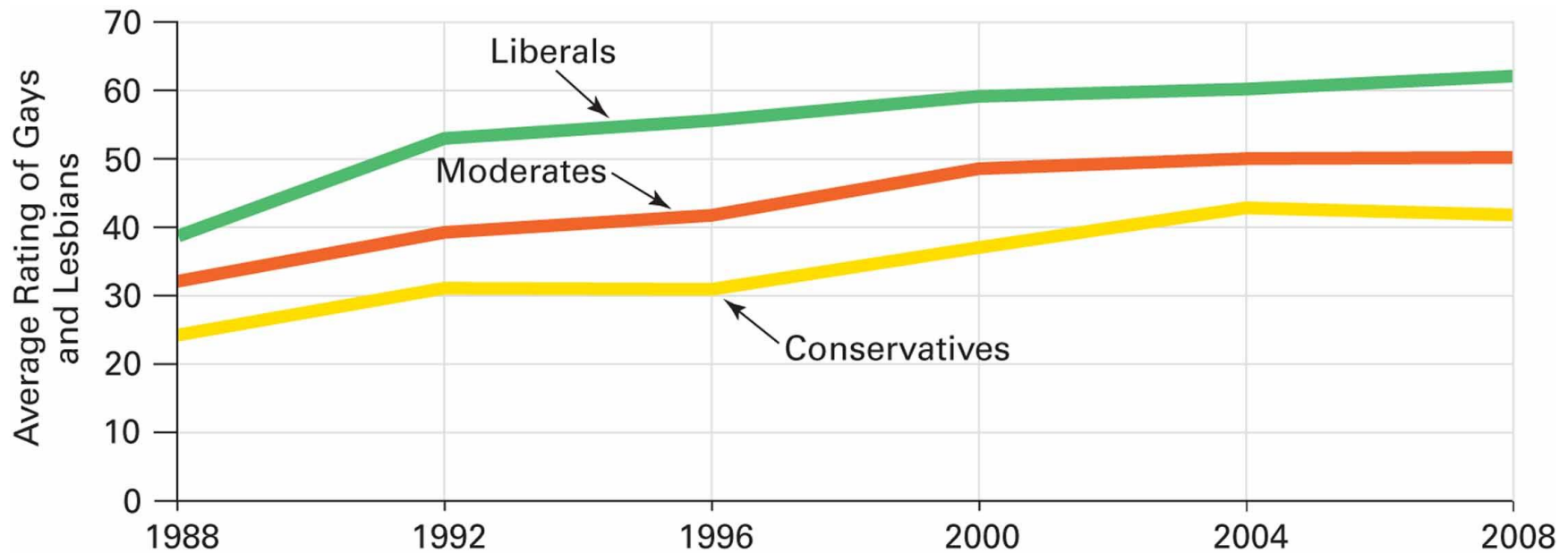
Who Are the Liberals and Conservatives?

- ▣ Moderates dominate
 - Younger people less conservative
 - Minorities less conservative
 - Wealthy more conservative
 - Gender gap
 - Religious more conservative

Do People Think in Ideological Terms?

- ▣ Types of voters
 - Ideologues
 - Group benefits
 - Nature of the times
 - No issue content
- ▣ Ideology of limited importance

FIGURE 6.5 Changing attitudes toward gays and lesbians



6.5

Classify forms of political participation into two broad types.

How Americans Participate in Politics

- ▣ Conventional Participation
- ▣ Protest as Participation
- ▣ Class, Inequality, and Participation

Conventional Participation

- ▣ Conventional participation
 - Voting
 - Running for office
 - Collecting signatures for a petition

- ▣ Unconventional participation
 - Protesting
 - Civil disobedience
 - Violence

Protest as Participation

- ▣ Drawing attention
 - Protests attract the media
 - Rare
- ▣ Civil disobedience
- ▣ Violence

Lunch counter sit-in

6.5



Bettmann/Corbis

Kent State

6.5



John Filo/Premium Archive/Getty Images

Class, Inequality, and Participation

- Higher socio-economic status = higher participation rates
 - Minorities vote at nearly equal levels as the majority
- What are the policy implications of lower political participation?

6.5 What is the most common form of political participation?

- a. Voting
- b. Writing to elected officials
- c. Working on campaigns
- d. Protesting

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Discussion Questions

6.5

Find a partner and answer the following discussion questions. Write your responses down in your notes to share with the class.

1. Why do we say that Americans are ideological conservatives but operational liberals?
2. What role does political ideology play in public opinion?
3. Would it be better or worse for the public interest if Americans were more ideologically consistent?

6.6

Analyze how public opinion about the scope of government guides political behavior.

Understanding Public Opinion and Political Action

- Public Attitudes Toward the Scope of Government
- Democracy, Public Opinion, and Political Action

Public Attitudes Toward the Scope of Government

- ▣ Should government do more or less?
 - In peacetime, most Americans say "less"
- ▣ But public opinion is complex and inconsistent
 - Ideological conservatives
 - Operational liberals
 - Policy gridlock

Democracy, Public Opinion, and Political Action

- ▣ Representative democracy
 - Decide who governs
- ▣ Is public fit to choose its leaders?
 - Yes and no

6.6 Do a majority of Americans favor more or less government?

- a. More
- b. Less
- c. About the same as we have currently
- d. It is unclear what the public wants

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