

the results from the Black Youth Project, a groundbreaking nationwide survey, Cohen focuses on what young black Americans actually experience and think—and underscores the political repercussions. Featuring stories from cities across the country, she reveals that black youth want, in large part, what most Americans want—a good job, a fulfilling life, safety, respect, and equality. But while this generation has much in common with the rest of America, they also believe that equality does not yet exist, at least not in their lives. Many believe that they are treated as second-class citizens. Moreover, for many the future seems bleak when they look at their neighborhoods, their schools, and even their own lives and choices. Through their words, these young people provide a complex and balanced picture of the intersection of opportunity and discrimination in their lives. *Democracy Remixed* provides the insight we need to transform the future of young black Americans and American democracy.”

#### KEY CONCEPT 4.B: POLLING

Scientific polling and its results are key indicators of how public opinion is measured. The results can have profound effects on elections, governmental institutions, and public policy.

The **Big Idea, Methods of Political Analysis**, is reflected by this concept.

### Opinion Polls Measure Public Opinion and Affect Public Policy and Elections

In recent years, polling has increased in scope and importance. Pollsters want to determine what the American public is thinking. The results are widely reported in the media and, in a number of cases, polls themselves are newsworthy. The qualities measured in polls include:

- how intense people are in their beliefs and attitudes;
- the real wants and needs of individuals that can be translated into policy;
- whether public opinion on any given issue is constant or changing; and
- the extent to which the public is polarized or has a consensus on any given issue, for example, issues such as health care and care for veterans reveal the public's polarization or consensus

Using scientific methodology and computer technology, professional pollsters such as Gallup, CNN, and daily newspapers have mastered the art of measuring public opinion. In presidential election years, pollsters aggregate (take the average of) all the tracking polls. When looking at political polls, these pollsters consider

- who conducts the poll: there is a real difference between a candidate who reports polling results and a neutral organization that conducts a poll;
- the sample size: assuring that a random sample was obtained;
- whether clear distinctions have been made regarding the population sample;
- when the poll was conducted;
- the poll methodology;
- the sampling error, which gives the poll statistical validity:  $\pm 3$  percent is usually an acceptable standard; and
- how clearly the questions were worded.



During recent presidential campaigns, CNN and other media outlets took daily tracking polls of both likely voters and those who were eligible to vote. The results differed significantly. In 1996, the increased popularity of the Internet contributed to the proliferation of daily tracking polls. On any given day, one could find as many as a dozen polls broken down nationally and by state, by registered voter, by likely voters, by electoral vote, by popular vote, and taken over a three-day period as well as over a one-day period. The result gave conflicting data. By 2008, polling techniques became so sophisticated that some websites were able to accurately predict both the popular vote and electoral vote margins Barack Obama received. In 2012, a *New York Times* blogger correctly predicted the electoral result using an aggregate of the tracking polls. After the unexpected Donald Trump victory in 2016, polling firms came under fire for how they were predicting the probability of a Hillary Clinton victory. Respected pollsters were giving her a 99 percent chance of winning the presidency. Even though the Real Clear Politics polling aggregate was close in predicting a 1.7 percent margin in the popular vote for Clinton (she actually won by 2.1 percent), most battleground polls in Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin were wrong. Some critics maintained that inflated poll numbers for Clinton drove down overall turnout, especially in the key battleground states that she lost.

Public-opinion polls have become so sophisticated that the use of exit polls in carefully selected precincts can accurately predict the outcome of an election minutes after the polls close. In addition, these polls can give valuable information regarding why people voted the way they did. A serious question has been raised regarding the prediction of elections using exit polls in presidential elections. If the East Coast results are reported right after the polls close, will it influence West Coast voters to stay home? There even have been attempts to legislate restrictions on the use of exit polls.

In the 2000 presidential election, polling organizations also came under fire. The Voter News Service, a conglomerate of the major media organizations pooling their resources to provide exit-poll information, gave inaccurate statistics to the networks regarding the results of the Florida vote. This caused the networks to first call the election for Vice President Gore. Then, when additional information was evaluated, the networks pulled back their initial projections and the state remained in the “too close to call” column until the networks again, based on faulty information, gave the state to George W. Bush in the early hours of the next morning. Based on this, Gore called Bush and conceded the election until it became clear that the real results were so close that a recount of Florida’s votes was required. Voter News Service took responsibility for the questionable methodology used and, along with the networks, implemented new procedures for the 2004 election.

#### **KEY CONCEPT 4.C: POLITICAL PHILOSOPHIES AND POLITICAL PARTY IDEOLOGY**

Different ideologies, some stemming from political parties, others from more traditional philosophies, result in the debate over different social and economic policies. For instance, the Democratic Party and its platform are usually identified as liberal compared to the Republican Party and its platform, which are looked upon as conservative. Besides liberal and conservative philosophies, there is also libertarian philosophy affecting the policy debate.

The **Big Idea, Competing Policy-Making Interests**, is reflected by this concept.

Although considered unimportant by many, party platforms are perhaps a better barometer of party identification than traditional measurements. If you look at the 2012 national party platform of the Democratic and Republican Parties, you can see the effect ideological differences had on voter support.

Even though party positions differ significantly, it is interesting to note that, when actual legislation is proposed, there is very rarely bloc voting on these issues.

Then how do you determine what constitutes a liberal or conservative ideology? Political labels are deceptive. You may be a social liberal or a civil libertarian but be a conservative when it comes to the role of government in regulating business. If you have a single issue like abortion that is most important, it will make very little difference whether a candidate is a Democrat or Republican. In 2014 a widely reported poll asked people to classify themselves as liberal, moderate, or conservative; 42 percent identified themselves as Independent, 31 percent as Democrat, and 25 percent as Republican. In another poll, when asked what it means to be labeled a liberal, people responded in terms of

- accepting change.
- supporting programs that increase spending.
- favoring social programs.
- believing in the rights of all people.

Conservatives who were asked to answer what it means to be conservative responded in terms of

- resisting change forced upon them by the government.
- opposing programs that increase spending except when it comes to defense.
- opposing the government legislating social programs.
- favoring Second Amendment gun rights.

In 2012–2016 the Democratic and Republican parties stressed economic and national security issues. The stands on social issues remained the same as the 2008 platforms. Health care was a major plank of both platforms. The Democrats supported the president's Affordable Care Act, which the Supreme Court affirmed, while the Republicans supported its repeal, calling it Obamacare. The Republican platform accused President Obama of being unable to reduce the unemployment rate to under 8 percent, while the Democrats pointed to the number of jobs that were created since the president took office in 2009. There were also significant differences in the areas of support of labor unions (Democrats supporting them; Republicans critical) and repeal of the so-called Bush-era tax cuts (the Democrats favoring repeal of cuts for those who made more than \$250,000, while Republicans were against repeal).

## **Liberals, Conservatives, and Libertarians Have Different Political Ideologies**

These general areas translate into specific liberal/conservative/libertarian differences when applied to actual issues. For instance, on foreign policy, liberals favor defense cuts. Conservatives, on the other hand, favor government spending on defense over social welfare programs. Libertarians are against intervention in foreign affairs. On social issues liberals favor freedom of choice for abortions, whereas conservatives favor the right to life. Libertarians favor less government-imposed laws dealing with social issues. Liberals and libertarians are opposed to school prayer of any kind; conservatives favor moments of silent prayer. Liberals generally view the government as a means of dealing with the problems facing society, whereas conservatives and libertarians favor a more laissez-faire position. Liberals and libertarians have been more sympathetic to the rights of the accused, and conservatives have been critical of many of the Warren Supreme Court decisions. Yet



when you apply these standards to specific bills, there is a clouding up of which party is liberal and which party is conservative, though most libertarians usually vote Republican.

The term *New Democrat* was applied to President Clinton. Whether this was a public-relations gimmick to make Clinton and the Democrats appear to be more conservative, or whether the traditional New Deal liberalism of the party was being modified, it is still not clear. Serious differences do exist between the parties. Some differences derive from the fact that one party is in power and controls the agenda and the party out of power must fight to keep its own agenda alive. And there are still constituencies that are attracted to the two parties—for instance big business to the Republicans and labor unions to the Democrats.

## **Optional Supreme Court Cases That Illustrate Liberal vs. Conservative Ideology**

### ***Planned Parenthood v Casey* (1992)**

The court's plurality opinion reaffirmed the central holding of *Roe v Wade*, stating that "matters, involving the most intimate and personal choices a person may make in a lifetime, choices central to personal dignity and autonomy, are central to the liberty protected by the Fourteenth Amendment." The court's plurality opinion upheld the constitutional right to have an abortion, and it altered the standard for restrictions on that right, crafting the "undue burden" standard for abortion restrictions. *Planned Parenthood v Casey* differs from *Roe*, however, because under *Roe* the state could not regulate abortions in the first trimester whereas under *Planned Parenthood v Casey* the state can regulate abortions in the first trimester, or any point before the point of viability, and beyond as long as that regulation does not pose an undue burden on a woman's fundamental right to an abortion. Applying this new standard of review, the court upheld four regulations and invalidated the requirement of spousal notification. This case reflected the liberal vs. conservative divide when it comes to the controversial issue of abortion. Liberals wanted the court to uphold *Roe v Wade* and not place any restrictions on a woman's right to have an abortion. Conservatives wanted the court to overturn *Roe v Wade* and favored other restrictions on the right to an abortion.

### ***Obergefell v Hodges* (2015)**

Required all states to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples and to recognize same-sex marriages validly performed in other jurisdictions. This legalized same-sex marriage throughout the United States, its possessions and territories. The court examined the nature of fundamental rights guaranteed to all by the Constitution, the harm done to individuals by delaying the implementation of such rights, and the evolving understanding of discrimination and inequality. Liberals favored this decision, conservatives were against it.

## **Democratic and Republican Parties Have Different Economic Philosophies**

Basic differences between Republicans and Democrats and ideological differences between conservatives and liberals are great when economic issues are raised. Traditionally, Republicans have been identified as the party favoring the rich and big business, whereas the Democrats have been viewed as being sympathetic to labor and the poor. Democrats have accused Republican presidents of having unsuccessful "trickle-down, supply-side" economic policies, resulting in a recessionary trend and higher unemployment. Republicans accuse Democratic presidents of following "tax and spend" programs, causing runaway inflation. The conservative congressional coalition



sides with policies aimed at dramatically reducing the deficit, whereas liberals believe government-sponsored economic stimulus programs result in a strong economy. Political philosophy also changes the public perception and, as a result, how government views traditional government programs. An example of this was the transition and evolution of how government legislated welfare. The social-welfare era began with New Deal relief measures under the Social Security Act. It was the most far-reaching piece of legislation ever passed. Its primary aim was to help one segment of the society—senior citizens. The act established the principle that it was the government's responsibility to aid retirees, even if the aid came from the forced savings of the workforce.

### **Social Welfare Programs Rely on Federal Support**

The "Great Society" programs of Lyndon Johnson provided an even greater reliance on the federal government. Such actions as Medicare, Medicaid, the War on Poverty, and increased civil rights legislation forced the states to rely more heavily on federally funded programs. This also created an era of further cooperation among the many levels of government. The following components describe this creative approach to federalism:

- sharing the costs between the national and state governments for programs that typically would fall under the purview of state control;
- guidelines and rules set down by the federal government in order for the states to reap the benefits of federally funded programs; and
- providing for the dual administration of programs such as Medicaid, which has a shared approach financially as well as administratively.

### **Great Society Programs**

The turning point in the federal era occurred in large part because of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs. Much legislation was passed as a response to the civil rights movement and also because there was a significant Democratic majority in both houses who agreed with Johnson that the government's role should be to develop programs including

- Medicare—covering hospital and medical costs of people 65 years of age and older as well as disabled individuals receiving Social Security.
- the war on poverty extending benefits to the poor.
- the food stamp program—giving food coupons to people determined to be eligible based on income and family size.
- Medicaid (a shared program between the federal and local governments)—covering hospital, doctor, prescription-drug, and nursing-home costs of low-income people.

During the Nixon, Carter, and Ford years, the Great Society programs were sustained and, in some cases, expanded. In 1972 the Equal Opportunity Act provided for legal recourse as a result of job discrimination. In 1972 cost-of-living indexing was attached to Social Security and other welfare programs and, in 1973 a job-training act, Comprehensive Employment Training Administration (CETA), was passed. The first hint that there were problems with Social Security also occurred in 1973 when the Board of Trustees of the Social Security System reported that the system was running a large deficit.

The "Reagan revolution" of the 1980s, with his assurance that there would always be a "safety net" for those people receiving the benefits of the many programs previously described, attempted to cut back the scope of the Great Society programs. He received the cooperation of the Democrats and cut the rate of increase to Old-Age Survivor's Disability Insurance and Medicare. He also succeeded in reducing some of the need assistance programs. However, after 1984 these programs



again began to increase. In addition, special-interest groups such as the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) lobbied effectively against cuts in Social Security and Medicare. During the 1995 congressional term, the Republicans passed a series of bills that would substantially cut Medicare and Medicaid in an effort to prevent their collapse and with the goal of moving toward a balanced budget. President Clinton vetoed these measures. A broader agreement was reached in 1997, however. It also became apparent that for the long-term survival of Social Security, it would require testing and increased costs for senior citizens.

## Optional Reading

### ***American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword,* by Seymour Martin Lipset (1996)**

*From the publisher:*

"American values are quite complex," writes Seymour Martin Lipset, "particularly because of paradoxes within our culture that permit pernicious and beneficial social phenomena to arise simultaneously from the same basic beliefs."

Born out of revolution, the United States has always considered itself an exceptional country of citizens unified by an allegiance to a common set of ideals, individualism, anti-statism, populism, and egalitarianism. This ideology, Professor Lipset observes, defines the limits of political debate in the United States and shapes our society.

*American Exceptionalism* explains why socialism has never taken hold in the United States, why Americans are resistant to absolute quotas as a way to integrate blacks and other minorities, and why American religion and foreign policy have a moralistic, crusading streak.

Government Economic Policy is Based on Different Ideologies and Carried Out by the President, Congress, and Federal Reserve.

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FEDERAL BUDGET REFLECTS COMPETING POLICY PHILOSOPHIES**

### **Quick Constitutional Review: The Basis of the Federal Government's Budgetary Power**

- In Article I, Section 8, Clause 1, the Congress is given the power to "lay and collect taxes, to pay the debts, and provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States."
- Article I also gives the House of Representatives the power to initiate the process of passing all appropriations.
- Article I establishes the power of Congress to impose excise taxes in the form of tariffs.
- However, Article I Section 9 prohibits export taxes.
- Article I directs Congress to impose taxes that are equally apportioned.
- Thus, as a result of the ratification of the Sixteenth Amendment, the income tax is the only direct tax levied.
- Any indirect taxes, such as gasoline, tobacco, and liquor, must be uniform.
- The Supreme Court's decision in *McCulloch v Maryland* (1819) established the principle that states could not tax the federal government.
- Article I gives Congress the power to "borrow money on the credit of the United States."
- Congress can appropriate only money that is budgeted.