Introduction to the American Political Process

Public Opinion

Public Opinion

17.20

	Spending on Welfare Programs	Spending on Assistance to the Poor
Increased	24%	44%
Kept Same	19%	33%
Decreased	57%	22%

2000 NES

	Spending on Welfare Programs	Spending on Assistance to the Poor
Increased	17%	52%
Kept Same	44%	39%
Decreased	40%	9%
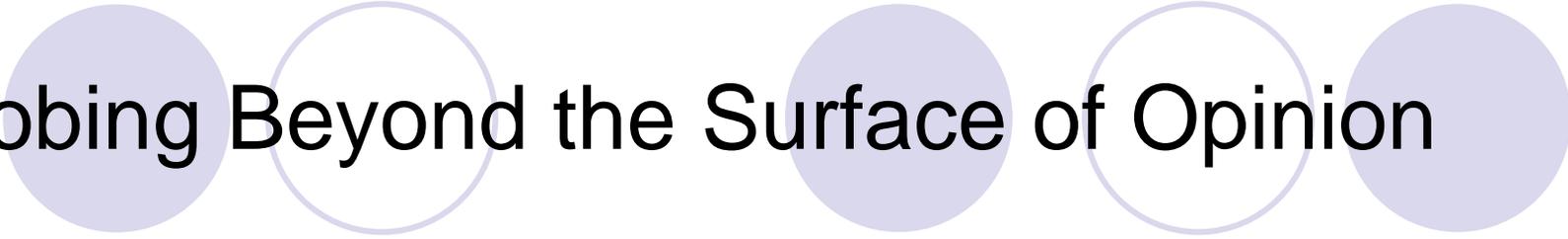
Probing Beyond the Surface of Opinion

- Issue Salience and Strength
- The "Mushiness Index"
- Ginsberg

Is Democracy in Trouble?

- What Do We Expect from Citizens?
- Public Opinion Constrains Politicians
  - John F. Harris, Washington Post, on Clinton:

    "It is true that no previous president read public opinion surveys with the same hypnotic intensity. And no predecessor has integrated his pollster so thoroughly into the policymaking operation of his White House"
  - True?
- Political Participation

Case Study: The Politics of Abortion

- ## Question Wording Effects
  - Cues:
    - "If a woman wants to have an abortion and her doctor agrees to it, should she be allowed to have an abortion or not?" 63% Yes.
    - "Please tell me whether or not it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a legal abortion if she wants it for any reason." 36% Yes
  - Hard vs. Soft Reasons

Case Study: The Politics of Abortion

- **Strength of Opinion**
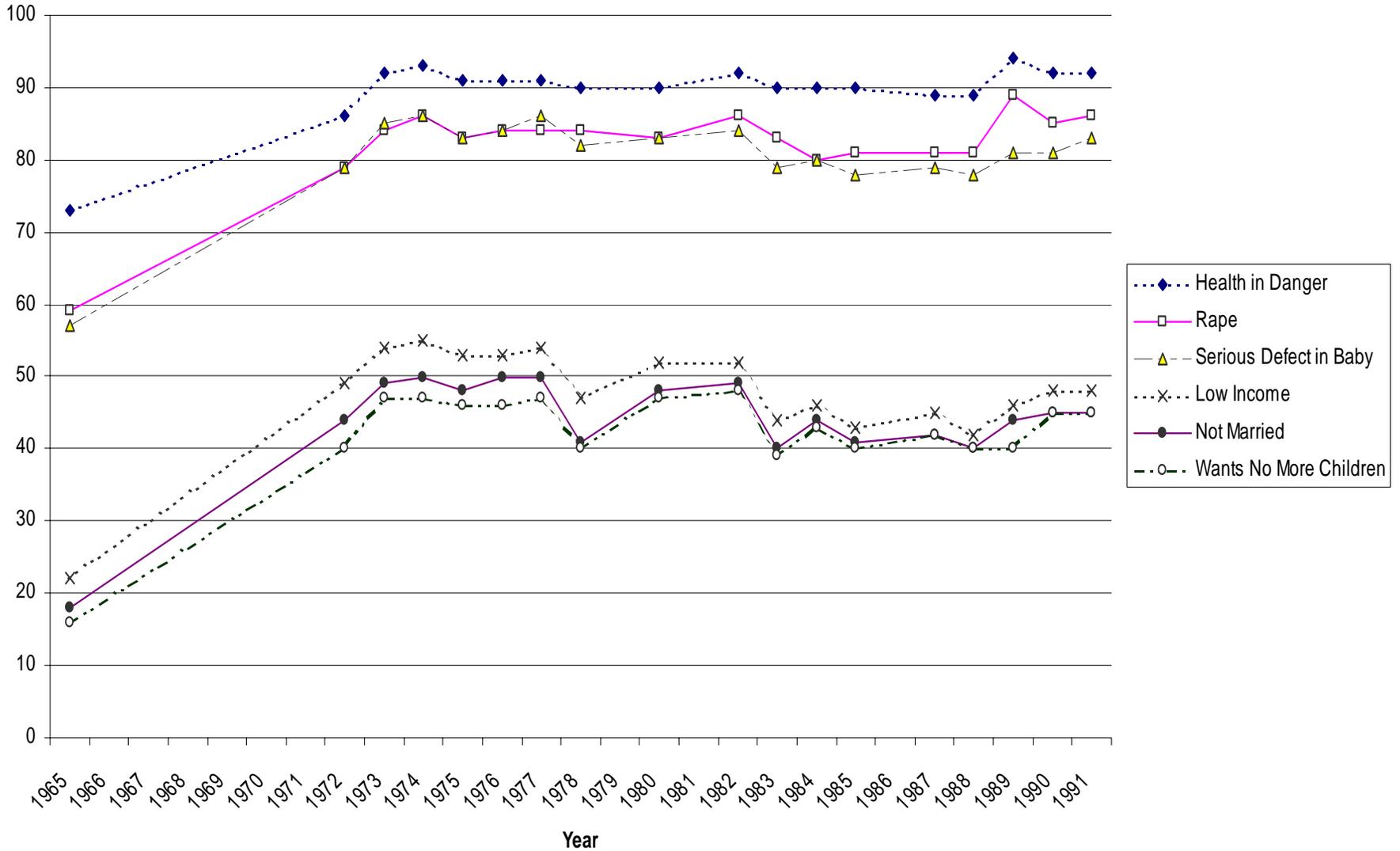 - Overturn Roe v. Wade? (July 1989)
    - Yes: 32%; No: 62%
  - Strong Feelings?
    - Among "Yes": 41%
    - Among "No": 17%

Abortion Opinion: 1965-1991

Legend:
- Health in Danger
- Rape
- Serious Defect in Baby
- Low Income
- Not Married
- Wants No More Children

Year

Case Study: Gay Marriage

CNN/USA Today Poll: nationwide adult sample:

"Do you think marriages between homosexuals should or should not be recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages?"

	Should be Valid	Should Not be Valid
3/04	33	61
2/16-17/04	32	64
2/6-8/04	36	59
12/03	31	65
10/03	35	61
6/03	39	55
1/00	34	62
2/99	35	62
3/96	27	68

Case Study: Gay Marriage

Pew Center for the People and the Press:

Do you favor or oppose allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally?

	Favor	Oppose
3/04	32	59
2/04	30	63
11/03	30	62
10/03	32	59
7/03	38	53
3/01	35	57
6/96	27	65

Gay Marriage: Annenberg School Poll, UPenn; adults nationwide

Would you favor or oppose an amendment to the U.S. constitution saying that NO state can allow two men to marry each other or two women to marry each other?

	Favor	Oppose
All	41	48
18-29	30	58
65+	49	40
West	36	56
South	48	43
Rep	57	35
Dem	34	57

Would you favor or oppose a law in your state that would allow gays and lesbians to marry a partner of the same sex?

	Favor	Oppose
All	30	64
18-29	41	52
65+	12	81

Gay Marriage: Annenberg School Poll, UPenn; Feb 18-22, 2004, n=1149 RV

Do you favor or oppose allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally?

|	Favor	Oppose
All	28	65
Would not vote for a candidate who disagrees with you	6	34

The Structure of Public Opinion

- What structures public opinions?
  - Ideology?
    - Zaller – top of the head
    - People do not have a single "true attitude" on an issue
    - More fractured view
  - Look to multiple bases of structure -- considerations

Kinder's Model
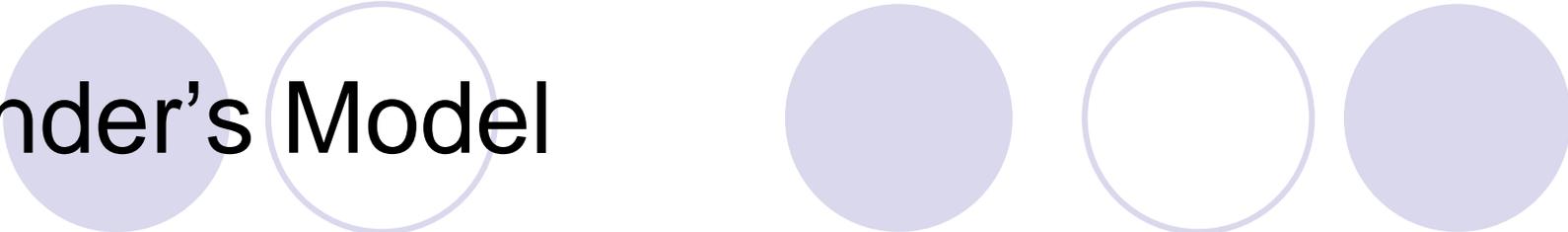
- What determines individual opinion?
  - Material Interests
  - Sympathies and resentments toward social groups
 - Commitment to political principles and values
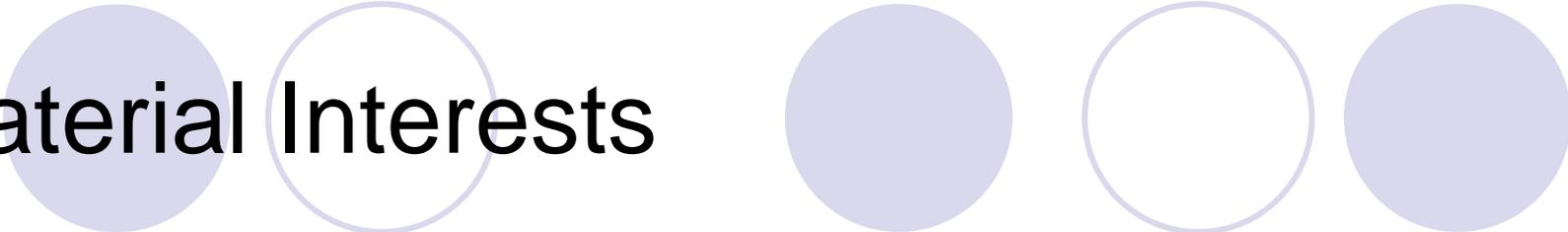
Material Interests

- Self-interest
  - Hobbs, Smith, Madison
  - Importance taken as a given, but…
- Research shows that self-interest does not matter
  - Draft
  - Women's issues
  - School desegregation
  - Gun control laws

Self Interest vs. Symbolic Politics

- Vote Choice
  - Individual's personal economic situation does not determine the vote
  - Perception of national economic situation is important
    - Importance of mediated reality
   - Ex: 1992 Election

Social Groups
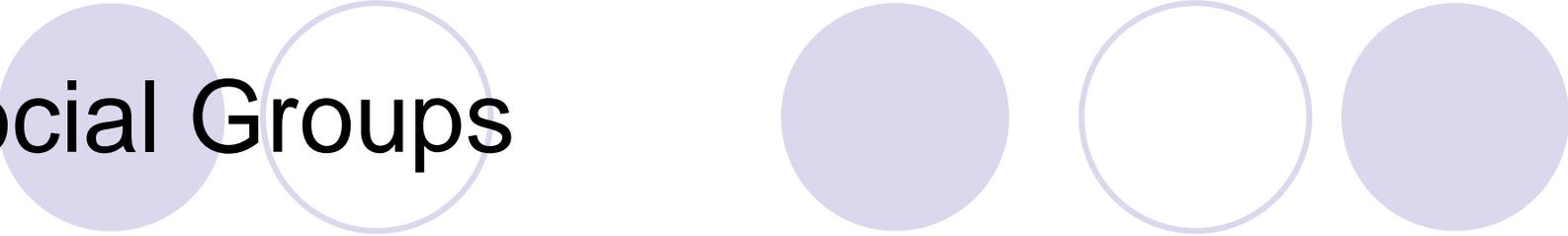
- <u>Ingroup</u>: Group membership provides guide for political thinking
  - Group utility heuristic?
  - Contextual cues?
  - Example: Race (more next week)
    - Support Admission Quotas?
      - Black: 70%
      - White: 23%
    - Increase Spending on Schools:
      - Black: 81%
      - White: 61%
    - Trust Government?
      - Black: 25%
      - White: 44%

Social Groups (continued)
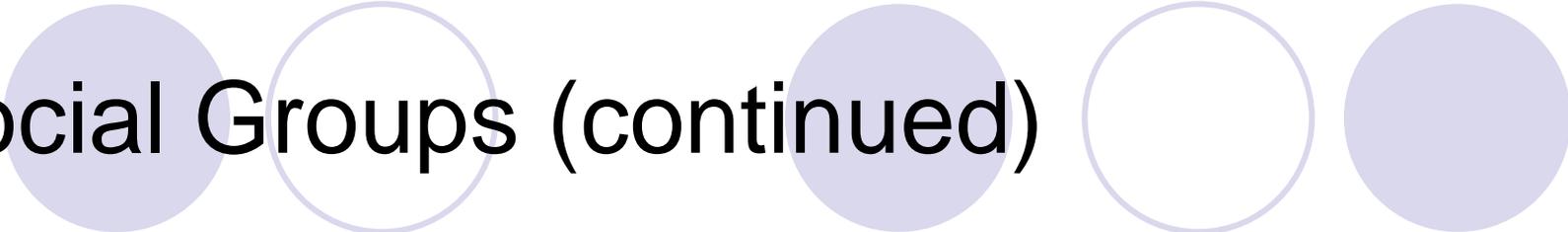
- <u>Outgroup</u>: resentment of groups, general and specific

  - Organize political thinking around visible social groupings.

  - Example: WWII

Roper, August 1939
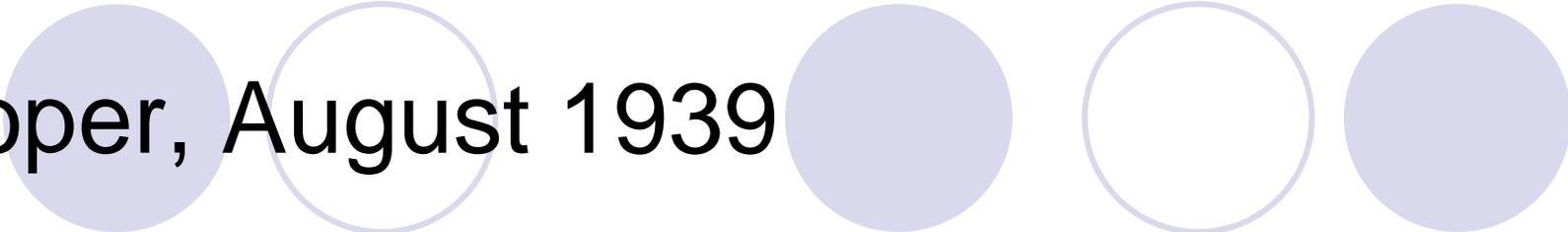
Of the people now in the U.S. who were born in foreign countries, which nationality would you say has made the best citizens? Which the worst?

Best:

Germans:	13%
English:	10%
Irish:	6%
Scandinavians:	5%
Swedes:	4%

Worst:

Italians:	22%
Jews:	6%
Germans:	4%
Sicilians:	3%
Japanese:	2% (6% on the pacific coast)

Effect of Ethnocentrism on Support for War

Italians Worst: -0.05 (0.01)**
Germans Worst: -0.04 (0.02)*
Germans Best: 0.00 (0.01)
English Best: -0.08 (0.01)**
Restrict Rights of Jews in America:†   0.03 (0.01)**

**=p<.01 *=p<.01

† Question Wording:

In the United States the Jews have the same standing as any other people, and they should be treated in all ways exactly as any other Americans

Jews are in some ways distinct from other Americans but they make respected and useful citizens so long as they don't try to mingle socially where they are not wanted

Jews have somewhat different business methods and therefore some measures should be Taken to prevent Jews from getting too much power in the business world

We should make it a policy to deport Jews from this country to some new homeland as fast as it can be done without inhumanity

Political Principles
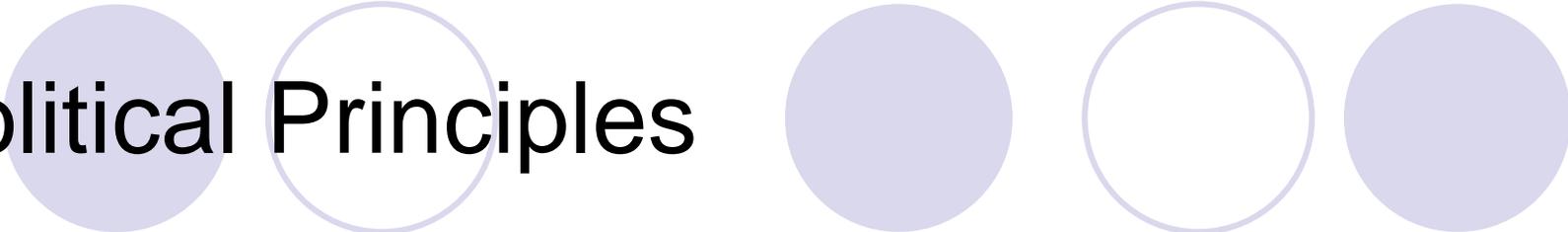
- Values and culture
  - American political traditions
  - Ranking of specific values
  - Conflicting values