

# Public Opinion and Political Action

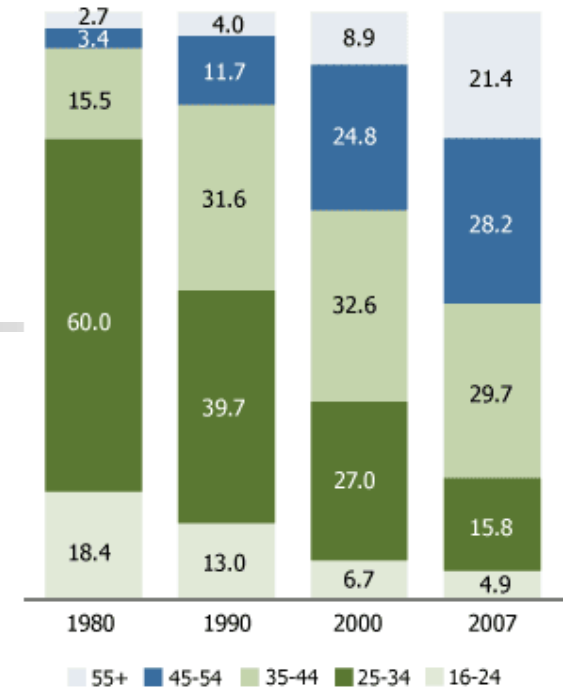


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## Chapter 6

# Introduction

- Some Basics:
- Demography
  - The science of population changes.
- Census
  - A valuable tool for understanding population changes- required every 10 years.
  - 2010 Census (1:35):
  - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hf1f2MhKLmg>



# The American People

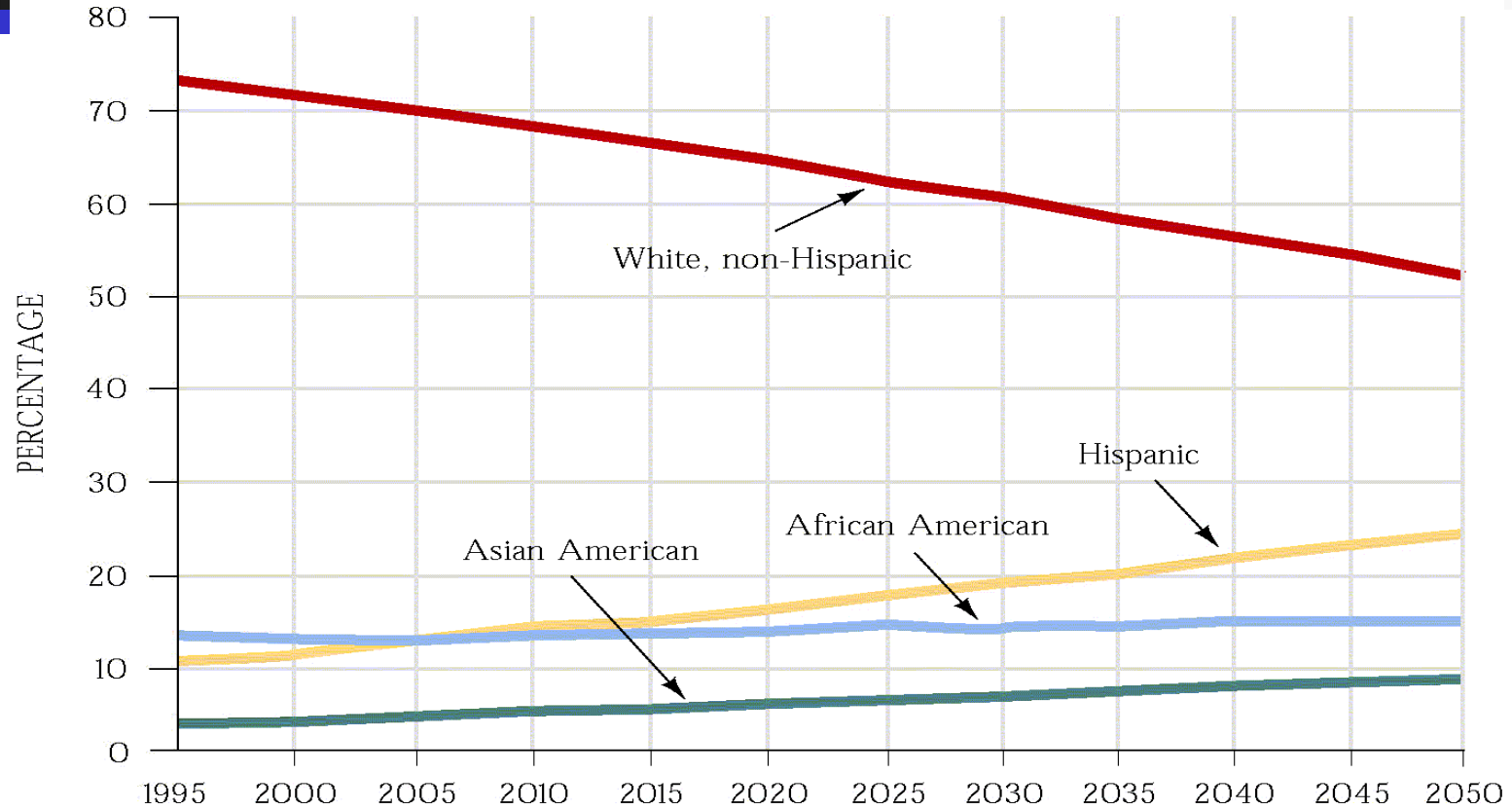


Figure 6.1

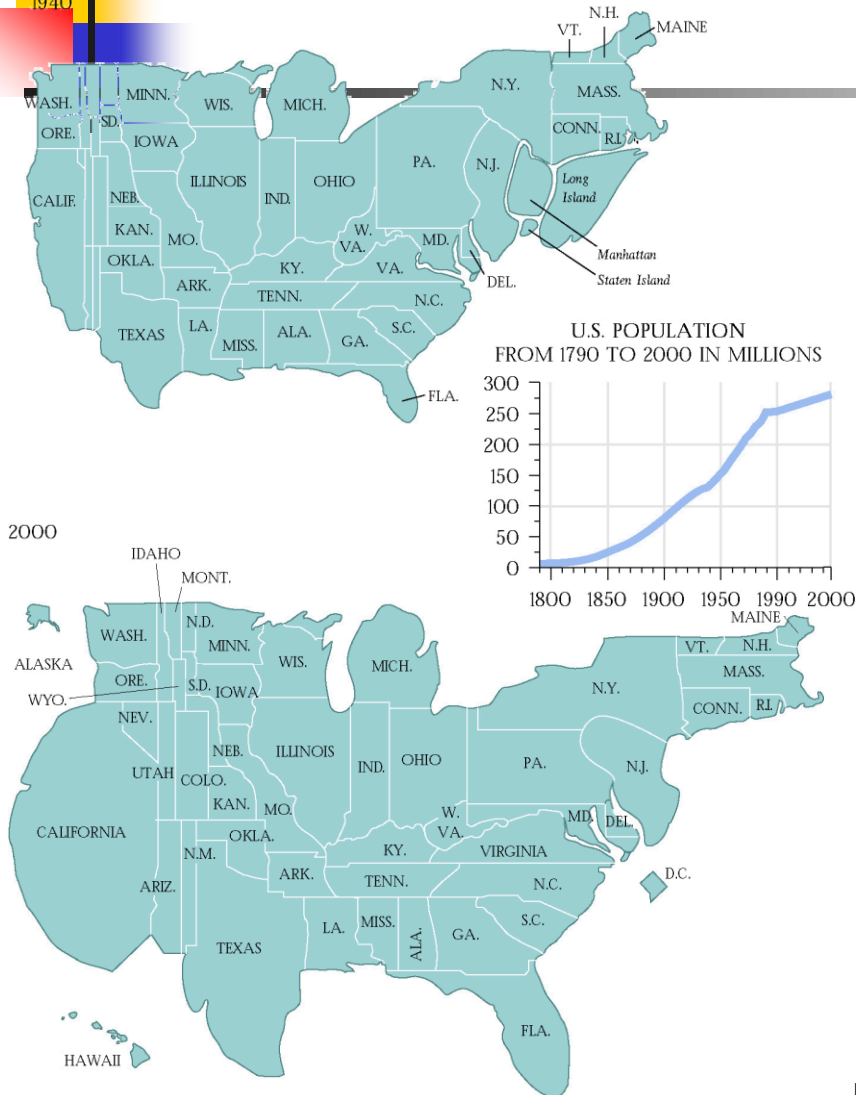
# The American People

- Political Culture: An overall set of values widely shared within a society.



Which party will benefit from the minority majority?

# The American People



- The Regional Shift
  - Reapportionment: The process of reallocating seats in the House of Representatives every 10 years on the basis of the results of the census.
  - Redistricting is done by state legislatures.

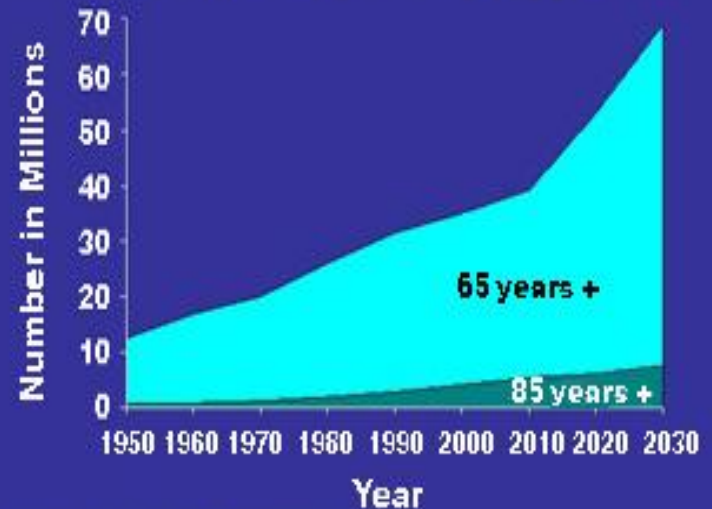
Figure 6.2

# The American People



- The Graying of America
  - Fastest growing group is over 65
  - Potential drain on Social Security by 2020 Why?
  - “Gray Power”
  - One advantage that no other group has- we are all going to get older

## The Graying of America: 65+ Population 1950–2030



Source: Health, United States, 1990, U.S. Bureau of the Census

# About Politics: Political Socialization



- Political Socialization:  
the process through which an individual acquires his or her political orientation
- The Process of Political Socialization
  - The Family
    - Time & emotional commitment
    - Political leanings of children often mirror their parent's leanings

# How Americans Learn About Politics: Political Socialization

- The Process of Political Socialization
  - The Mass Media
    - Generation gap in TV news viewing
  - School / Education
    - Used by government to socialize the young into the culture and government







# Demographics and Voter Turnout

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- The following increase the chance that someone will vote:
  - Higher income
  - Older
  - Well educated
  - White (sort of)
  - Northerner
  - Union member
  - Government employee

# Measuring Public Opinion and Political Information

- How Polls Are Conducted

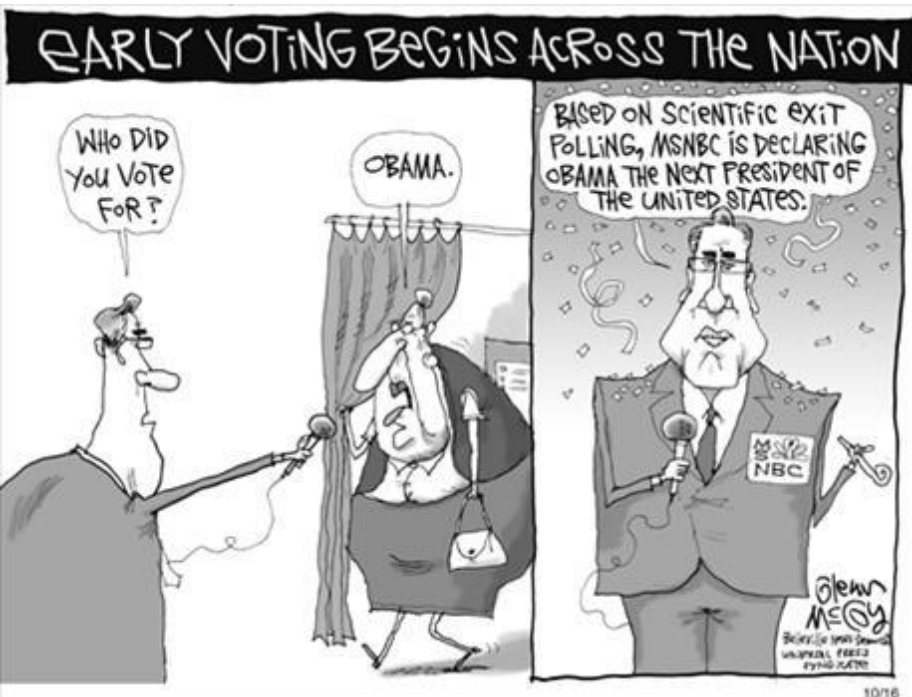


- Random Sampling: The key technique employed by sophisticated survey researchers; operates on the principle that everyone should have an equal probability of being selected for the sample
- Representative Sample: Draws from all groups
- Sample size 1500
- Sampling Error: The level of confidence in the findings of a public opinion poll,  $\pm 3\%$

# Measuring Public Opinion and Political Information

- Role of Polls in American Democracy

- Help politicians figure out public preferences.
- Exit Polls- used by the media to predict election day winners.
- Wording of question makes a difference.
- Polls reflect the policy agenda—problems the people inside and outside of government believe must be addressed.



# Measuring Public Opinion and Political Information

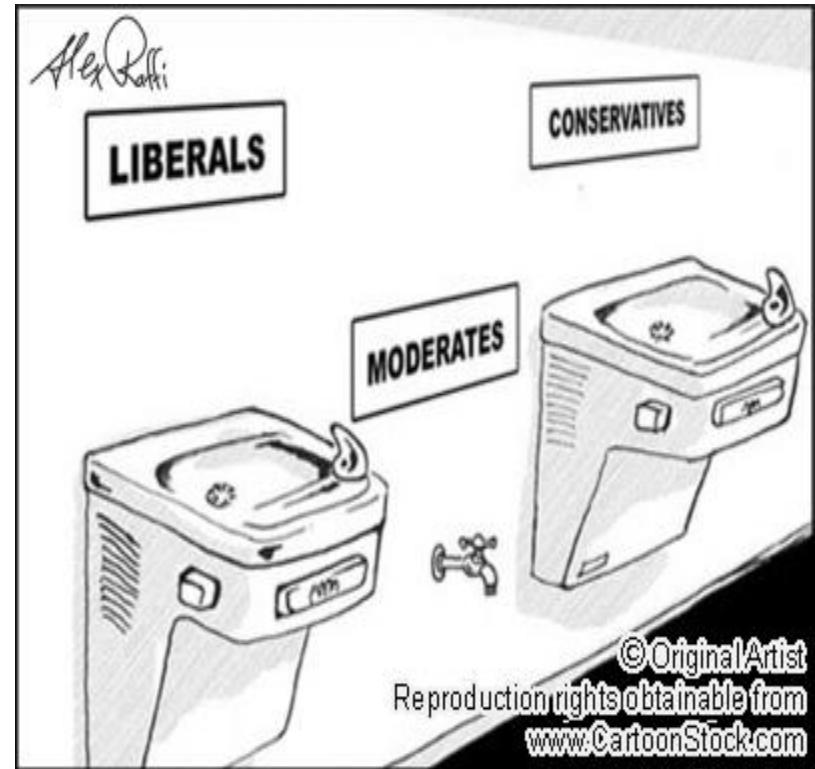


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- What Polls Reveal About Americans' Political Information
  - Americans don't know much about politics.
  - Americans may know their basic beliefs, but not how that affects policies of the government.
- The Decline of Trust in Government
  - Now only about 25% of the public trust the government most of the time or always.

# What Americans Value: Political Ideologies

- Political Ideology:
  - A coherent set of beliefs about politics, public policy, and public purpose.





# Demographics and Ideology

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- The Republican Party Coalition
  - Rural voters/farmers
  - White males
  - Business owners
  - Conservative Christians
  - College Educated



# Demographics and Ideology

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- Democratic Coalition
- Urban dwellers
- Union members
- Hispanics and African Americans
- High School Diploma
- Advanced Degree



# The Gender Gap

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- Women vote for the Democratic candidates at higher rates than Republican candidates.



# What Americans Value: Political Ideologies

## A few examples:

### ■ Liberals:

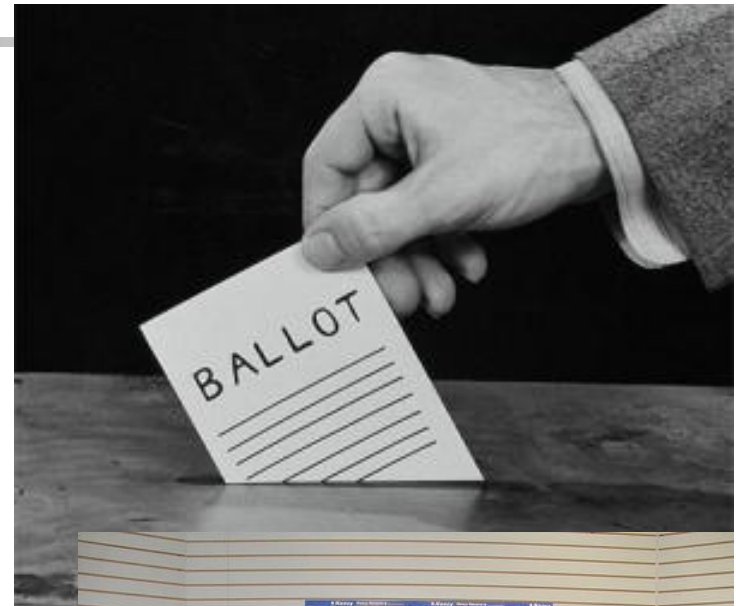
- More domestic spending
- Pro-choice
- Favor affirmative action
- Favor progressive taxation
- Pro gay marriage

### ■ Conservatives:

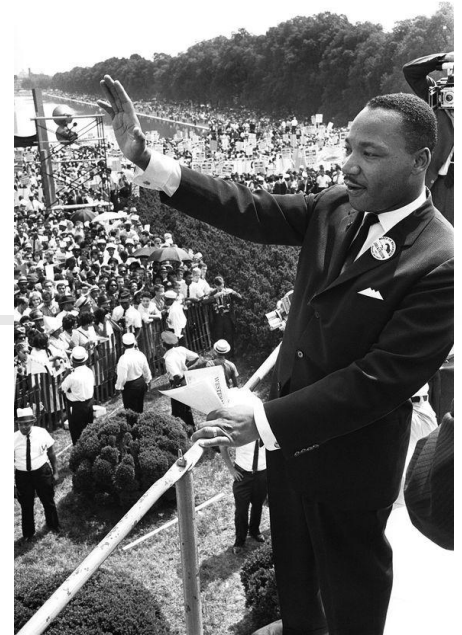
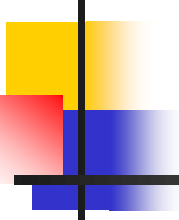
- More military spending
- Pro-life
- Oppose affirmative action
- Keep taxes low
- Support traditional marriage

# How Americans Participate in Politics

- Political Participation:
  - All the activities used by citizens to influence the selection of political leaders or the policies they pursue.
- Conventional Participation
  - Voting in elections
  - Working in campaigns / running for office
  - Contacting elected officials



# How Americans Participate in Politics



## ■ Protest as Participation

- Protest: A form of political participation designed to achieve policy changes through dramatic and unconventional tactics.
- Civil disobedience: A form of political participation that reflects a conscious decision to break a law believed to be immoral and to suffer the consequences.

# How Americans Participate in Politics

## ■ Class, Inequality, and Participation

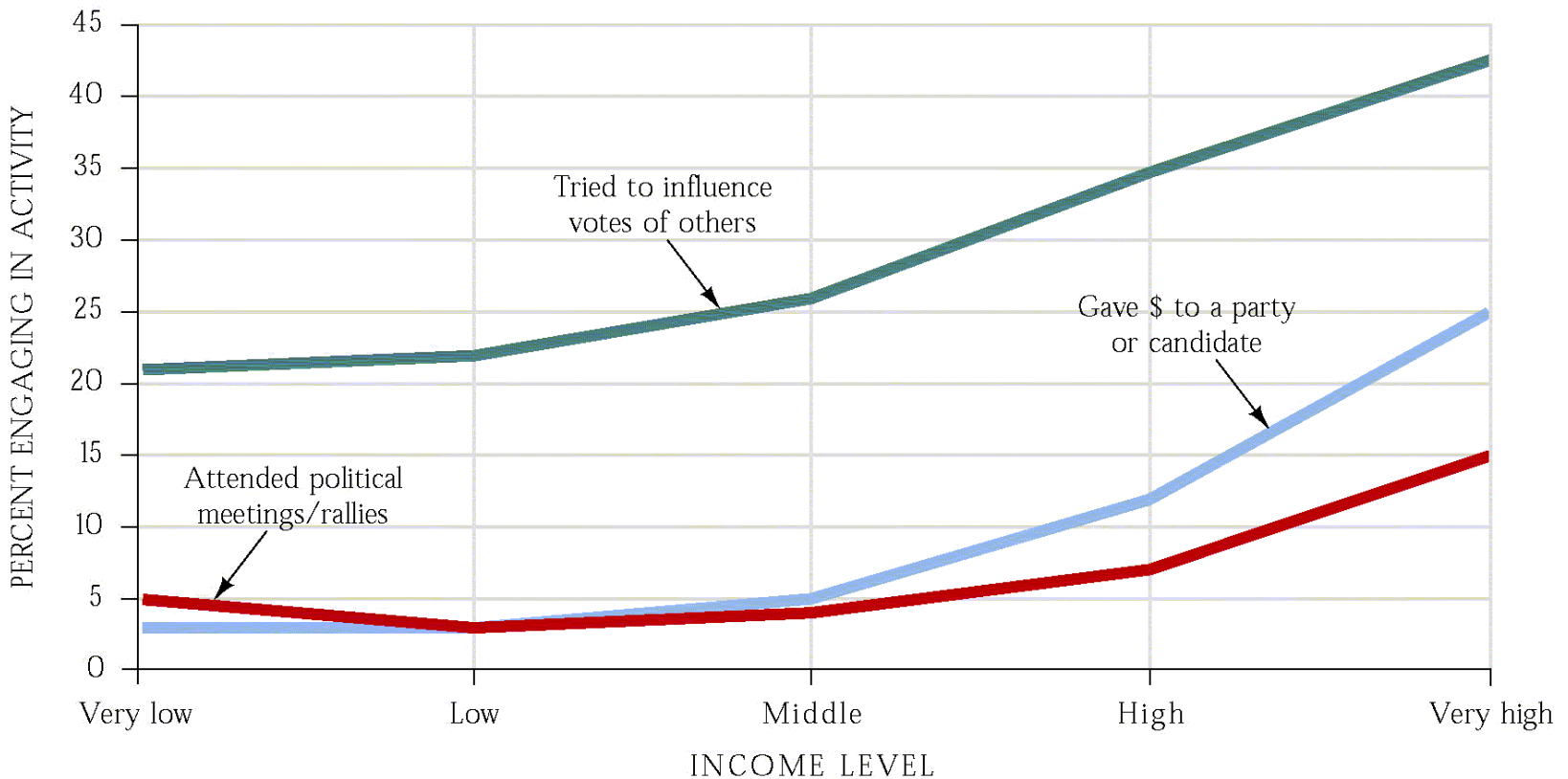


Figure 6.5