





Public Opinion & Political Action

Key Terms

- Public opinion = the distribution of the population's beliefs about politics and policy issues
- Demography = science of population changes
- Census = "actual enumeration" of the population; Constitution requires the gov't to conduct it every 10 years. It is a very valuable tool for understanding demographic changes in American society.
- www.census.gov

An Immigrant Society

Many waves of immigration:

- Mid-1800s ~ northern Europeans (English, Irish, Germans, & Scandinavians)
- Late 1800s & early 1900s ~ southern & eastern Europeans (Italians, Russians, Poles, Jews, etc.)
- Since the 1960s ~ Hispanics (Cuba, Central America, and Mexico) and Asians (Vietnam, Korea, China, the Philippines, etc.)





Ongoing Debate over Immigration Policy

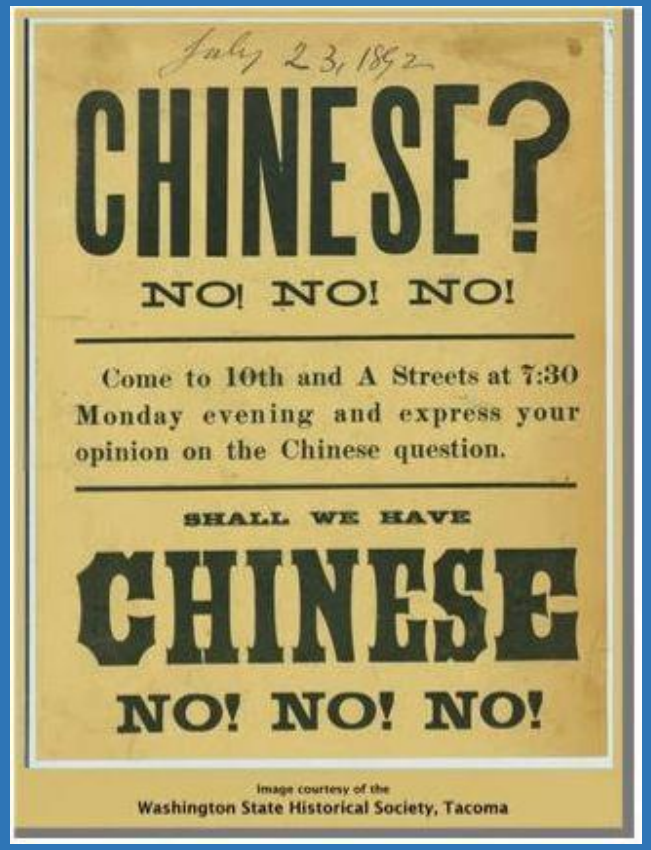
History:

- Discrimination against new immigrant groups
- Irish, Italians, Chinese & other Asian groups
- Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)
- Nativism (1920s) & Modern-day nativism
- Immigration debate today



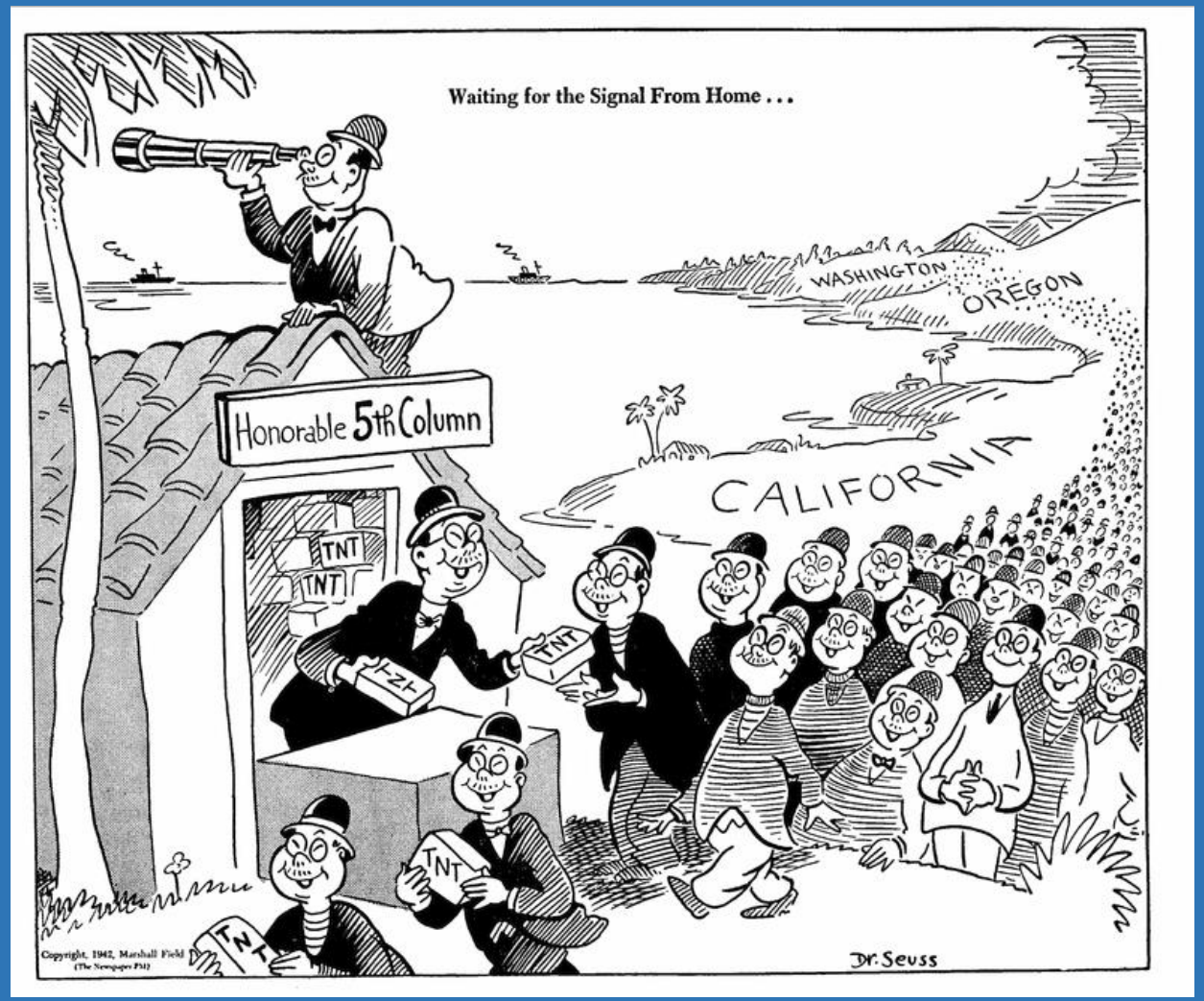


More Discrimination



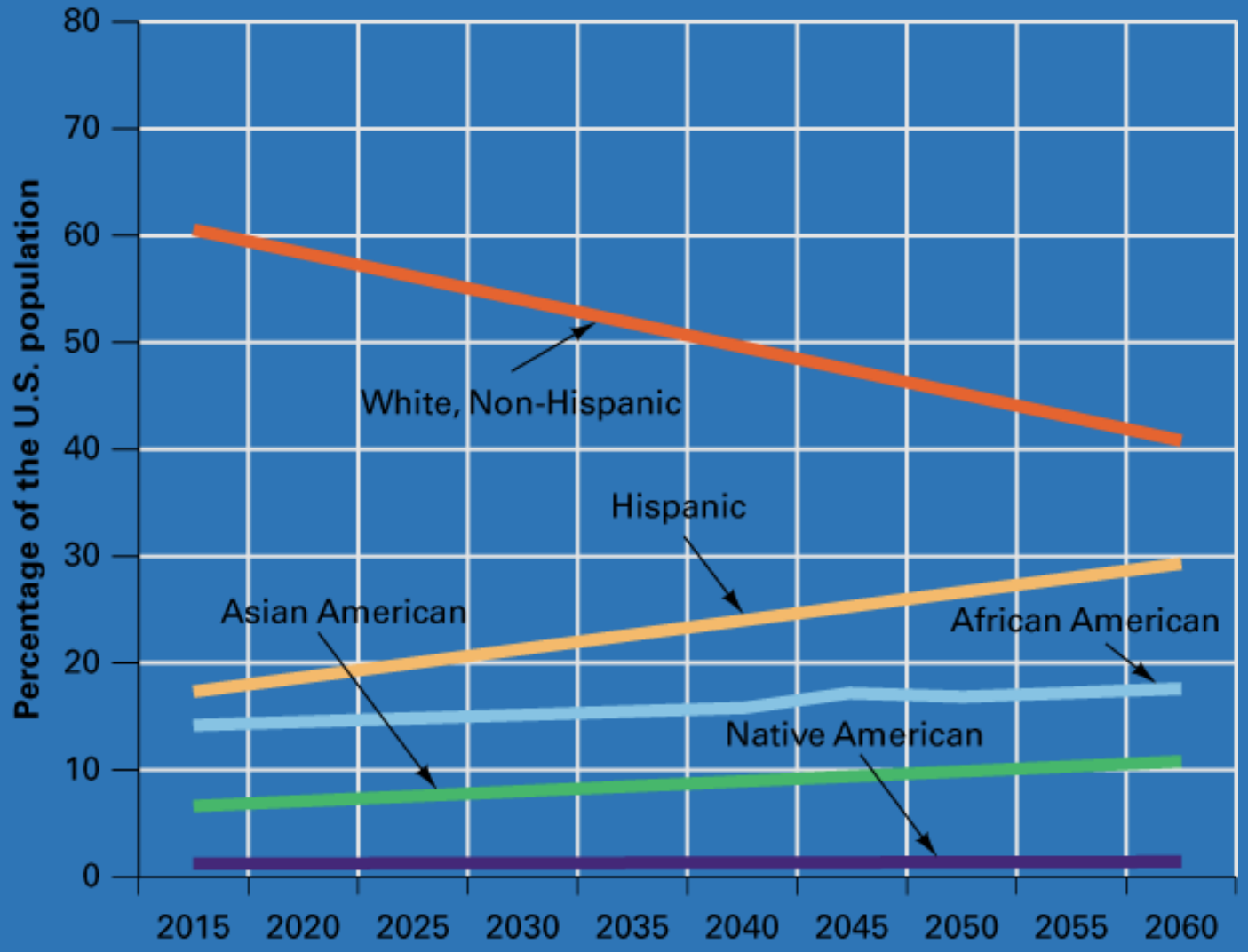






Minority Majority

- The Hispanic population is growing rapidly—especially in the SW United States.



Political Impacts

- Hispanic vote is becoming a huge voting block
- Might have the power to swing elections
- Hispanics are becoming more political active
- Recently, they have tended to vote more for the Democrats
- Might impact whether states are Blue or Red
- http://www.salon.com/2016/01/31/turning_texas_blue_3_trends_could_undo_the_20_years_of_republican_rule_texas_has_endured_since_the_days_of_ann_richards/

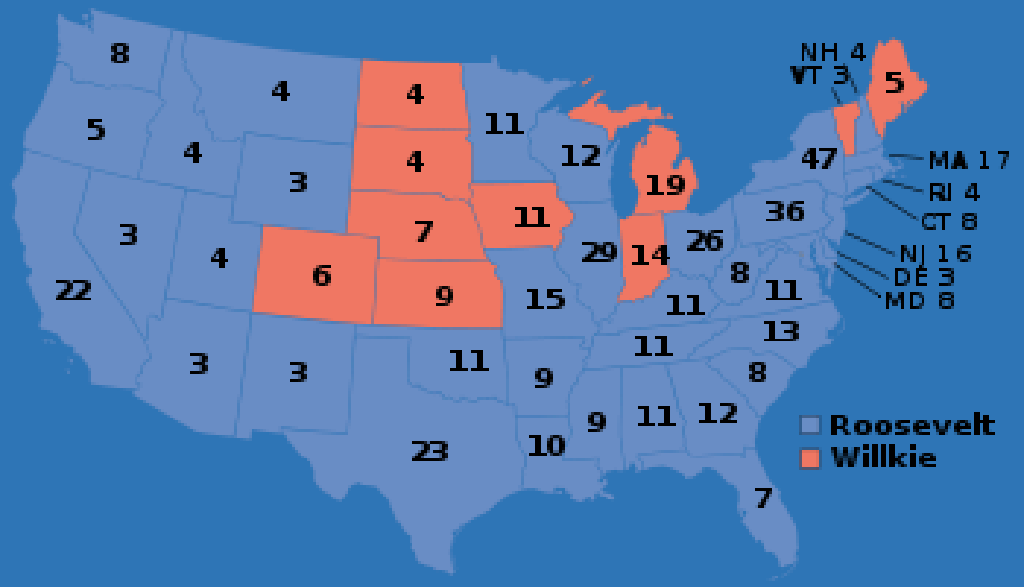


Regional Shifts

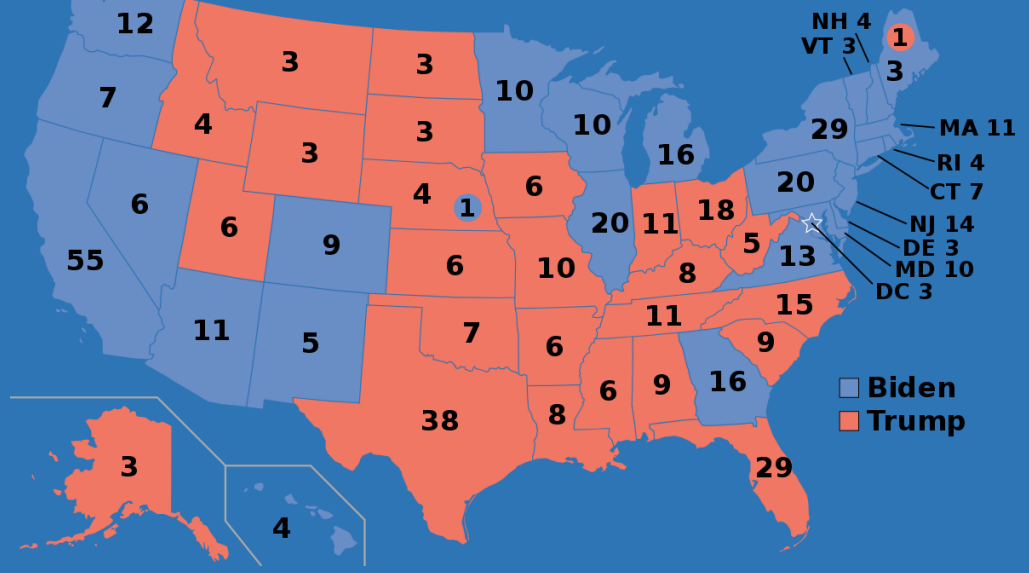
- For much of American history, the Northeast was where most of the populous was
- Since WWII—Shifted to the West and the South (Sunbelt Migration)
- California, Arizona, Texas, & Florida
- Reapportionment ~ rebalancing of the 435 seats in the House of Rep's done after each census
- https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2021/dec/2020-apportionment-map.html
- Impact on the Electoral College Map

Comparing Then & Now

1940 Presidential Election



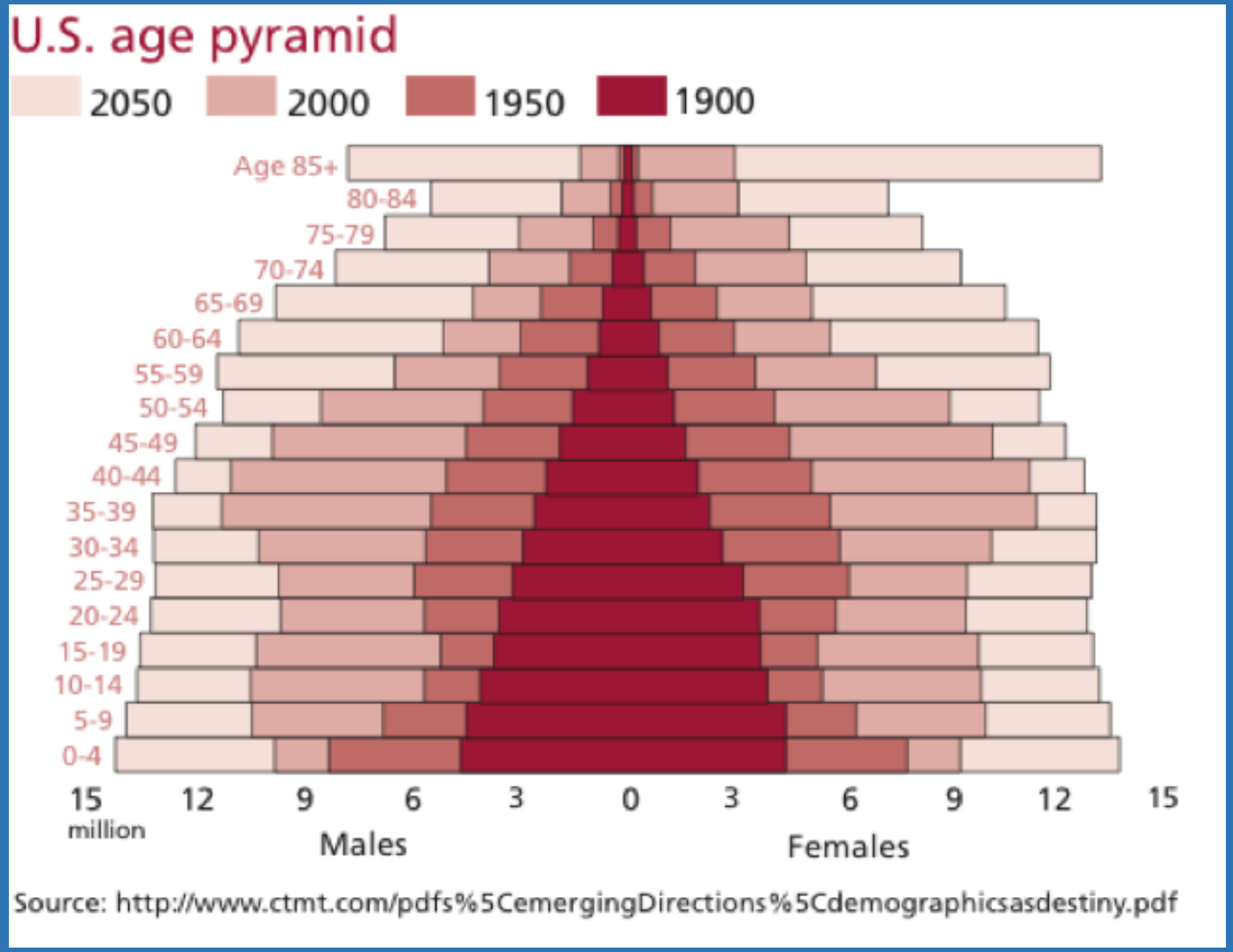
2020 Presidential Election



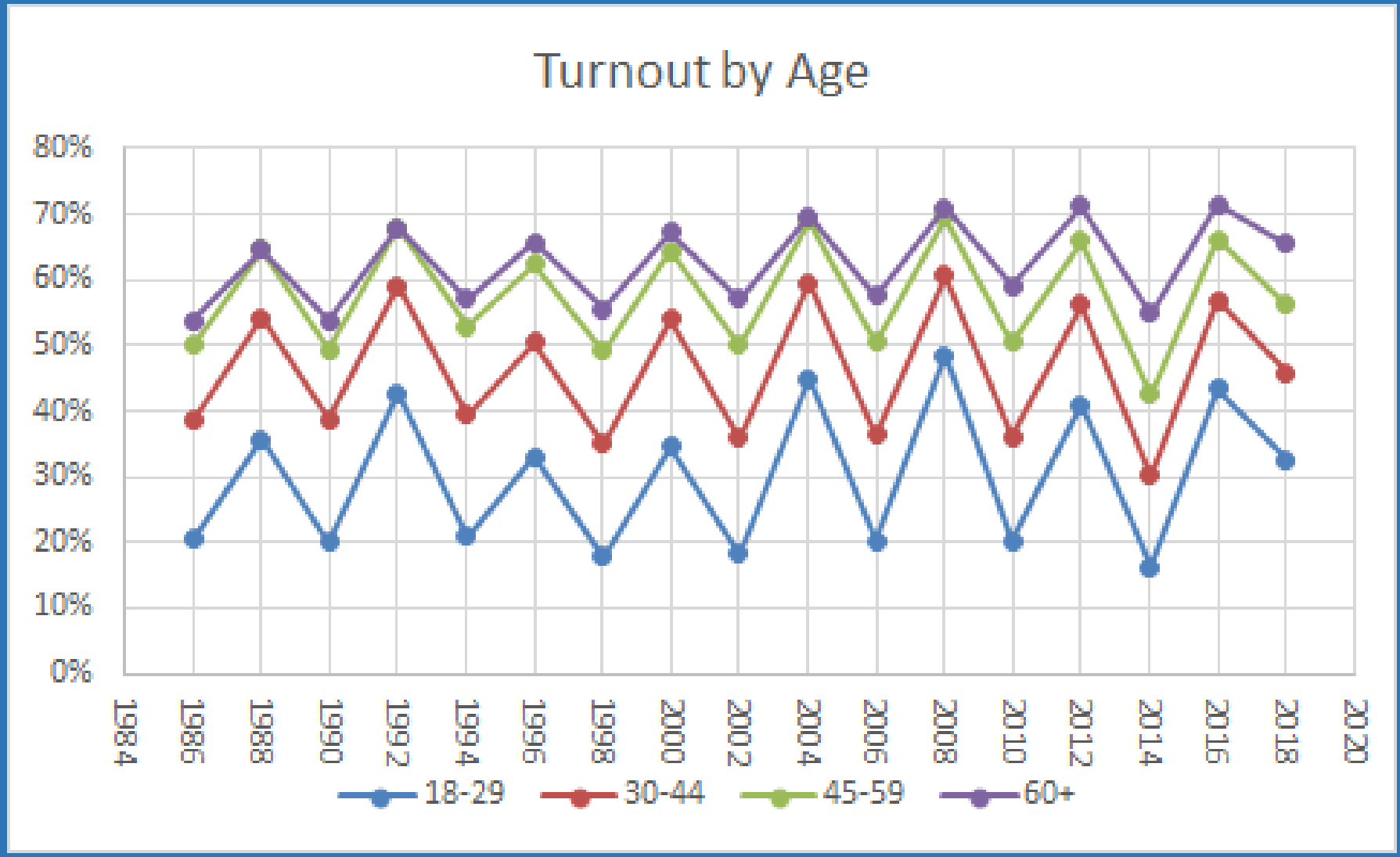
Age

- Americans are living longer
- People today are having less children
- Result = the Graying of America
- And the growth of GRAY POWER!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hXS1VPtAVgY



Age ~ Older you are the more likely you are to vote!



Process of Political Socialization

Over our lifetime, we are all impacted by certain things that shape our view of the world/politics:

- Family
- Mass media
- Schooling
- Community
- Profession

Measuring Public Opinion

With 330+ million people in the US, how can we really know what they are thinking?

- Scientific polling ~ George Gallup (1932)
- Sample ~ small portion of the people who are chosen in a survey
- Random sampling ~ everyone should have an equal probability of being selected
- Try to be reflective of the public
- Sampling error ~ level of confidence in the poll
- http://www.gallup.com/home.aspx

Polling as a Tool

- Gauge opinion during and between elections
- In the age of polling do politicians really lead?
- Are they pandering to a majority of the public?
- Is there a bandwagon effect?
- Use of “exit polls” to predict the outcome of elections
- Wording of polls matter!
- Affordable Care Act vs. Obamacare
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sx2scvIFGjE

What do polls reveal about Americans?

- Voters are generally uninformed
- They lack basic knowledge of how the American system works
- They often do not know who their political leaders are
- They do NOT trust government and their political leaders

Decline of Trust in Government (1958-2012)

https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/06/06/public-trust-in-government-1958-2022/

Where do people stand politically?

2021 Gallup Poll:

- 36% ~ Conservative
- 37% ~ Moderate
- 25% ~ Liberal
- https://news.gallup.com/poll/388988/political-ideology-steady-conservatives-moderates-tie.aspx

Types of Involvement

Conventional participation:

- Voting
- Writing e-mails, letters, making phone calls
- Volunteering on a campaign
- Running for political office

Unconventional participation:

- Public protest
- Civil disobedience
- https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/06/23/good-trouble-how-john-lewis-fuses-new-and-old-tactics-to-teach-about-civil-disobedience/
- Violence



What determines whether someone will participate in the political system?

- Their socio-economic status!
- By far the biggest factor