Chapter 12
Political Demography

Abstract This chapter describes the field of political demography and the applications of demographic techniques to the political process and to policy setting. The impact of demographics on political activity is described and the uses of demography in the electoral process are discussed. The policy-setting process is reviewed and the relevance of demographic concepts and data for this process is described.

12.1 Introduction

Within the political arena there is a long history of the use of demographic data and, to a lesser extent, demographic concepts and methods. It could be argued that politicians, campaign managers, and political consultants were paying attention to the demographics of voters well before demography had emerged as a distinct discipline. This sometimes superficial application of demographics to politics focused on the voting patterns of various demographic segments within the population. It did not require much in the way of insightful thought to realize that there were likely to be differences in the voting patterns of the rich and the poor, blacks and whites, Northerners and Southerners, and so forth.

Applications of demographic concepts, methods and data have principally occurred in two areas: the electoral process and the development of public policies. In the realm of politics the implications of demographics are ubiquitous. While there is some overlap between politics and policy, most consider them distinct realms of endeavor with their respective goals and practitioners. These two spheres of activity will be discussed separately in this chapter.

While there has always been a correlation between demographic attributes and political behavior, the increasing polarization of the electorate, the growing diversity of the U.S. population, and the intransigence of certain cultural patterns have all served to increase the influence of demographics within the political sphere. In the past many people prided themselves on voting for the man (or the issue) rather than the political party. This meant there was significant crossover by supporters of the two main political parties. The parties might be depicted as overlapping circles

with a certain portion of the ground held in common and distinct realms relegated to each of the parties. There were moderate Republicans who were comfortable with conservative Democrats. These political animals have largely disappeared (particularly on the Republican side) and there is no common ground anymore. While it once could be maintained in referring to the two parties that it was the "same crap, just different piles", that sentiment is hard to support today.

> *There has been a longstanding association between demographics and politics, but the demographic trends of the past few years have served to further segment the electorate along demographic lines.*

A second factor that has made demographics increasingly salient for the political process is the re-emergence and/or re-entrenchment of various regional and cultural perspectives. A quarter century ago, social commentators predicted the homogenization of the U.S. population. Under the influence of mass media, it was assumed that social patterns would converge and that everyone would begin to speak like a mid-western news commentator. Not only has the U.S. population not become homogenized in the successive years, it has in fact become more heterogeneous. Part of this has been driven by the political process itself. The Republican party has pursued a "Southern strategy" since the 1960s that has served to highlight and even exacerbate regional perspectives on politics. Other vested parties have attempted to organize political movements that focused on various cultural subsets of the population such as African-Americans, American Indians, and youth. The reawakening of an appreciation for the cultural heritage of many groups has served to reemphasize their differences with the larger society and influence their political perspectives.

Perhaps the most significant factor supporting a demography-as-destiny perspective has been the growing racial and ethnic diversity of the U.S. population. While re-entrenchment of existing groups has occurred, the more dominant trend is the emergence of new cultural subsets as factors in political behavior. The most significant of these groups is the segment of the population included under the "Hispanic" or "Latino" umbrella. Now accounting for over 15% of the population (and perhaps even more with uncounted aliens included) Hispanics have become an increasingly influential voting bloc. African-Americans remain a significant group of voters and Asian-Americans are the fastest growing racial group today. This diversity is not limited to race and ethnicity, however. Religious affiliation has long been a predictor of voting behavior but, today, the balance has changed dramatically as long-dominant Protestant and Catholic voting blocs have become fragmented, new voting blocs of Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists have emerged, and those with *no* religious affiliation have become the fastest growing "religious" segment.

The interface between demography and politics is so significant that many observers consider demographics to be destiny within the political arena. Our

political orientation is more often than not influenced by our demographic attributes and the demographically defined groups we interact with. While we may think that we make our political choices as independent thinkers, most of our political positions and actions reflect the demographic attributes associated with us. Over the past 20 years or so, the U.S. electorate has become increasingly polarized, with much of this political stratification taking place along demographic dimensions. One only has to look at the distribution of those voting for Obama and Romney, respectively, in 2012 or Obama and McCain in 2008 to see the extent to which demographic attributes served as a predictor of voting behavior. The unexpected electoral college victory of Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election can be clearly attributed to demographically driven voting patterns.

12.2 The Demographics and Politics Interface

There are few aspects of politics that do not have a demographic dimension. The increasing polarization of the American electorate has served to exacerbate differences among voters of different political persuasions and to further differentiate subgroups in terms of demographics. From start to finish in the political process–beginning with *a priori* political orientation and ending with actual voting behavior —is influenced by demographics.

American's political orientation is not easily discerned, especially with so many cross-cutting relationships and varied cultural perspectives. A simple way of looking at political orientation would be to examine membership in the two major political parties. Yet, the majority of the population is "independent" in the sense they are not formally registered with either party (or are part of the segment of voters that identifies with a third party). Even within party membership, there is likely to wide variation in the perspectives of party faithful although, it could be argued, recent years have seen polarization reduce the intra-party variation. Thus, while there used to be some relatively liberal Republicans and relatively conservative Democrats, those political creatures are almost impossible to find today.

In the absence of any clear-cut measure of political orientation some analysts have attempted to develop a typology based on political leaning. Inevitably, these typologies very much reflect demographic differences within the population. An example is the Pew Charitable Trust typology of political leaning highlighted in Exhibit 12.1.

Exhibit 12.1: Determining Political Leaning
The Pew Charitable Trust has a long history of tracking social trends and represents one of the major sources of data on social phenomena. Pew has developed a typology of political orientation or "leaning" that can be used to segment the population into meaningful subgroups reflecting different

political perspectives. In order to develop the typology Pew conducted a national survey using questions that were thought to elicit information that reflected a person's political orientation. Pew divided the national survey's respondents into eight politically engaged groups, along with a ninth group of less engaged Bystanders. The assignment of individuals to one of the eight core typology groups is based primarily on their position on nine scales of social and political values—each of which is determined by responses to two or three survey questions—as well as their party identification. The typology groups were created using cluster analysis to generate scores on all nine scales and sort them into relatively homogeneous groups.

The following "types" were identified and a short description is presented for each:

The Divided Right

- Enterprisers (12% of adult population): Affluent, well-educated, and predominantly white. This classic Republican group is mainly characterized as pro-business, anti-government, anti-social welfare.
- Moralists (15%): Middle-aged, middle-income, predominantly white, religious (more than half are Evangelicals). This core Republican group is also socially intolerant and anti-social welfare, militaristic, anti-big business and anti-big government. Former Democrats drawn to the GOP's religious and cultural conservatism have increased its size substantially since 1987.
- Libertarians (7%): Highly-educated, affluent, predominately white male. This group has Republican lineage but is uncomfortable with today's GOP, particularly its religious right. Pro-business, anti-government, anti-social welfare but highly tolerant, very low on religious faith, cynical about politicians.

The Detached Center

- New Economy Independents (14%): Average income, young to middle aged, mostly female. This group is unanchored in either party. It has many conflicting values: strongly environmentalist but not believers in government regulation; pro-social welfare but not very sympathetic to blacks; inclined to fundamental religious beliefs (highest white Catholic group) but highly tolerant of homosexuals.
- Bystanders (10%): Very young, poorly educated, with low income. This group opts out of the political process or are not eligible to vote (highest Hispanic concentration). Slightly more female than male, its only claimed commitment is to environmentalism.
- The Embittered (6%): Low income, low education, middle-aged. One in five of this group are black, one in three have children under 18. Old ties to Democrats have eroded but the Embittered feel unwelcome in the GOP. They distrust government, politicians, corporations. They are

religious and socially intolerant. They strongly blame discrimination for lack of black progress, but are not strongly in favor of social welfare programs.

The "Not So" Left

- Seculars (7%): Highly educated, sophisticated, affluent, mostly white baby boomers and Generation X. The most socially tolerant group, driven by social issues, it is the only one to embrace the "liberal" label. Very low in religious faith. Highly pro-environment, pro-government, distrusting of business.
- New Democrats (12%): Mostly female, below average income and average education, includes a high proportion of white Catholics (30%) but also many white Evangelical Protestants (19%). Religious but not intolerant, more pro-business than other Democratic groups, they reject discrimination as a major barrier to black progress, are pro-government and environmentalist.
- New Dealers (8%): One of the oldest groups in the typology (three in ten over 65), below average education and low income. Once part of FDR's coalition, beneficiary of government programs, this group is now turned off by politics. Strongly conservative on race and social welfare, strong on religion, moderate on social tolerance, pro-America, distrustful of politicians and business.
- Partisan Poor (9%): Very poor (26% with household income under $20,000 a year), disadvantaged, about one in three in the South. Rooted in New Deal coalition, this group believes more government spending on the poor is needed. More than one-third are non-whites. Very religious and socially conservative.

Source: Pew Charitable Trust (2017).

Demographers are interested in political behavior because of the role that demographics plays in people's actions within the political sphere. From displaying a mild interest in politics to actually participating in the process, one's demographic affiliations influences every step of the way. Demographics can be used to predict who will register to vote, who will actually vote, and what party they will vote for. For this reason proponents of various political factions have relatively clear-cut demographic attributes.

A general profile of the population would provide clues to its political orientation. A population that is top heavy with seniors could be expected to have a different political orientation from a very young population. A racially homogenous population can be expected to have a different political perspective from a population that is diverse in terms of its racial and/or ethnic characteristics. A predominantly urban population can be expected to have a different political

orientation from a suburban or rural population. The well-educated can be expected to display different characteristics from the poorly educated.

Ultimately, there are few demographic attributes that do not have implications for political behavior. Behavior in this sphere is influenced by age, sex, race and ethnicity among the biosocial characteristics. Political actors are also influenced by income and educational levels, region of the country and even religious affiliation.

There are a variety of reasons one may want to generate a profile of the electorate. If one is considering running for office or assisting someone who is, or wants to determine the leaning of the electorate on a particular issue, or is trying to anticipate the outcome of an upcoming election, a profile of the electorate might be worthwhile. Case Study 12.1 presents an example of profiling the electorate.

Case Study 12.1: Profiling the Electorate

An ambitious individual felt called to serve in politics and was encouraged by his peers to run as a candidate in an upcoming election in his hometown. The potential candidate was a 50-year-old white male with a college education and a white-collar job. Before agreeing to run for office he determined that he needed to profile the electorate residing within his district. Given the fact that he was relatively outspoken in his opinions, he felt that he had to be on the same page with the electorate in order to be a viable candidate.

For starters, the would-be candidate would probably want to profile the population of the district in terms of its demographic characteristics. He would want to determine the age distribution, the sex distribution, the racial and ethnic mix of the population, the income and educational levels and the marital status and household structure of the district's population. In many cases, it might be important to determine the religious affiliation of residents.

The profile generated by the campaign's exploratory committee indicated that the district contained a relatively heterogeneous population. It included mostly working-age residents with fewer than average children and seniors. These findings suggested that family issues were not likely to be as important as support for seniors and working-age people. The population was also heterogenous in terms of race and ethnicity, with a significant proportion of African-Americans (although lower than the city average) and an inordinate number of immigrants and refugees. This information was considered very important in that it suggested the presence of some politically active groups (e.g., seniors and working-age people) and some others that were less likely to participate in the electoral process. African-Americans tended to be underrepresented among the voting population, and many immigrants and refugees were not eligible to vote.

Having developed a reasonably complete demographic profile of the district's residents, the potential candidate may actually make a determination that he/she is or is not a good fit for the district. More than one potential candidate has profiled the residents of a district and decided that they would

be unlikely to be electable there. While the demographic profile suggested some challenges in terms of generating agreement as to the issues, there was nothing in the profile that suggested a 50-year-old white male would necessarily meet resistance.

Since the demographic profiles didn't raise any red flags, the potential candidate felt justified in acquiring some other information to inform his/her decision. Only a portion of the area's population is going to be registered to vote and, if this is like most districts, the characteristics of those registered to vote are likely to be different from those who are not registered. Information is available on the rates of registration for different demographic categories, and this information might be used to inform the deliberations concerning this district. In this case, the level of registration for members of various demographic groups generally mirrored their proportion within the population. Not surprisingly, older white residents were somewhat over-represented among registered voters, and younger African-American residents were under-represented.

Other types of information that are typically available from public records are the voting history of residents of the district and their political preferences. The latter might be determined by party registration in states that require that or by the voting history of individual voters. Both of these pieces of information are important—the former due to the fact that those who vote may exhibit a different profile from those who are registered and, for the latter, due to the fact that certain voters may be predisposed to vote for a candidate of a given party regardless of the merits of those running for office. Since this jurisdiction did not require party registration, the research had to rely on the records that tracked voting patterns. In this case, it turned out that political party "preference" as indicated by past voting history did not favor either major party. The would-be candidate concluded that running as a Democrat or as a Republican would not represent an advantage or disadvantage.

Having obtained these data the would-be candidate is in a position to make an informed decision on the prospects of a successful campaign. Additional information might be required and it is likely to necessitate some primary research. For example, the data so far are not likely to indicate voter satisfaction with the incumbent politician, their political philosophy or their stand on various issues that may be relevant to the campaign. Should the potential candidate decide to go down this path it will be necessary to structure any sample used for data collection to reflect the characteristics of registered voters and, even better, those of likely voters. There was little in the information collected to date that might deter the candidate's quest for office so, in this case, it was deemed that no other research was necessary.

In addition to determining the characteristics of the electorate, it is important to identify the patterns of political behavior that characterize a population. A basic question to be answered relates to the level of voting registration for that population. Americans are notorious for not registering to vote, and the number registered is typically only a fraction of the total number of residents. The registration rate provides a clue to the level of political participation characterizing a population. If the district in question is typical, one would find that the level of voter registration differs for the various demographic groups residing in the area. Members of some groups invariably register at higher rates than others, and these differences generally fall along demographic lines.

Similar patterns can be observed for the level of actual participation (i.e., voting) among those who are registered. As demonstrated elsewhere in this chapter, the level of registration may or may not be predictive of voting patterns. There is invariably a drop-off from the number registered to the number actually voting, with the drop-off reflective of a number of factors. One constant, however, is that the attrition rate between registering and voting is greater for some demographic categories than others. While one should not rush to over-generalize, certain patterns have been found to persist over time and space. A number of different factors, of course, influence the attrition rate—from the type of election to the "hot" issues of the day to the attributes of the candidates.

To a certain extent, voter registration and even voting behavior represent "passive" forms of political participation. There are many other forms of political participation that can be tracked. Active participation in the political process might include campaigning for a particular candidate or lobbying for a particular cause. Support for a candidate may simply include a donation or more active participation through campaign support such as canvassing door to door, making phone calls or placing yard signs. As with the other aspects of political participation being discussed, the differences in the level of participation exhibit an association with demographic traits.

One final aspect of participation to be discussed here is policy making, the end result of the political process. This topic is discussed in more detail in the second half of this chapter, but some mention should be made here. Elections have consequences—and some of those consequences involve demographic attributes and processes. The result of elections determines not only who holds political office but the types of policies and programs that are enacted. The question that could be asked concerning the outcome of any election (but particularly those with national implications) is "Who benefits?" While we think of public programs as helping or hurting individuals, they ultimately impact *groups* within the population. Federal programs in particular focus on certain demographic segments of the population—seniors (Medicare, Social Security), school-age children (No Child Left Behind), minority groups (affirmative action initiatives), or poor people (Medicaid, food stamps) among others.

> *The difference between the two major political parties can be increasingly defined in terms of the demographic attributes of their supporters.*

It is not likely that anyone would dispute the fact that Democrats and Republicans today represent quite different approaches to extant social issues. This is important to this discussion in that the constituents for the two parties at the national level are quite different demographically. It is no surprise, then, that Republican policies generally favor white, affluent males at the expense of other groups in society. Democratic policies, on the other hand, are more likely to address the needs to the less affluent and those in various racial and ethnic minority groups. Here one must be careful not to over-generalize since many different factors come into play to influence the nature of legislation that is enacted.

12.3   Demographic Correlates of Political Behavior

In examining the relationship between demographics and political behavior there are two different equally valid approaches that could be taken. On the one hand, one might examine the demographics of a political category. For example, with regard to the two major political parties, an analyst might be interested in how they break down in terms of their demographic characteristics. Conventional wisdom suggests that Democrats and Republicans differ in terms of their demographic attributes, and the facts clearly bear this out.

On the other hand, one might analyze the political attributes of various demographic groups within the population. Considering the different age categories for example, how does political orientation or political participation vary for people of different ages? Do males and females exhibit different preferences and behaviors? What differences are found among various racial and ethnic groups with regard to their political philosophies and voting behavior? Do the better educated display different political preferences than the poorly educated? How does one's income level affect one's political orientation? Many of these questions can be answered, in fact, with the data provided in Exhibits 12.2 and 12.3.

Historically, voters have become more conservative as they aged espousing different social and economic concerns than younger voters. Males and females have different perspectives and different concerns—hence the major gender split in recent presidential elections. Members of different racial and ethnic groups may have different concerns depending on their position within the social structure. Cuban-Americans for example have tended to be relatively conservative and supporters of the Republican party driven to a certain extent by the issue of our

relationship with Cuba. Mexican-Americans on the other hand have tended to be more socially liberal and have tended to vote for Democratic candidates.

Those with differing income levels have historically exhibited different levels of participation and differing perspectives. The least affluent are the least likely to participate in the political process while political participation increases with income. The more affluent tend to be more conservative and have historically supported the Republican party, while more downscale citizens are likely to be less conservative and have historically supported the Democratic party. The relationship between educational level is not as clear-cut as it is for income, although the better educated tend to be more politically active than the poorly educated.

> *The U.S. has become increasingly divided geographically into "red" states and "blue" states that exhibit distinct demographic characteristics.*

The region of the country remains a remarkably important factor in political behavior. The parts of the country that are predominantly "red" (Republican) or particularly "blue" (Democratic) are clearly different geographically. The northeast and the west coast have been consistently Democratic in their orientation for decades while the Midwest and the South tend to be primarily conservative and Republican in their orientation. The "solid South" is, of course, not as "solid" as in the past but for the most part has represented a consistently Republican voting bloc for some time.

One additional relationship to be considered is religious affiliation and participation. While there are some religious groups (e.g., Catholics) that reflect a cross-section of the population, most of the religious groups in the U.S. are stratified along various demographic dimensions. Religious groups that are more progressive in terms of their religious doctrine tend to be more liberal in their political perspectives. On the other hand, religious groups that tend to be more fundamentalist in their orientation are more likely to be more conservative in terms of their political perspective.

Of course, if one is analyzing the political character of a population the total population is not the main concern. The focus is on those that matter—the subset of the population that is registered to vote, likely to vote or actually does vote. Interestingly, the demographic profile may change significantly as one shifts from one category to another. Similarly, there may be differences when other groups are considered—campaign supporters, donors and political activists.

As an example, we might consider the characteristics of registered voters compared to those who actually vote. Exhibit 12.2 presents some basic demographics for these two categories of political participants for the 2014 mid-term election.

Exhibit 12.2: Demographics of Registered Voters and Actual Voters 2014 Mid-Term Election

Attribute	Registered (%)	Voted (%)
Total		
Adults	64.6	43.9
Sex		
Males	62.8	40.8
Females	66.3	43.0
Race/Ethnicity		
Non-Hispanic whites	68.1	45.0
African-Americans	63.4	37.3
Asian-Americans	48.8	19.1
Hispanics	51.3	18.4
Age		
18–24 years	42.2	17.1
25–44 years	60.5	32.5
45–64 years	70.4	49.6
65–74 years	76.3	61.2
75 + years	74.1	56.9
Marital status		
Married	72.1	50.9
Never married	50.8	25.9
Divorced	64.3	40.4
Widowed	69.9	47.7
Income		
<$10,000	51.7	24.5
$10,000–19,999	56.0	30.5
$20,000–39,999	63.0	37.8
$40,000–74,999	70.0	46.1
$75,000+	78.0	54.0

As can be seen less than two-thirds of American adults are even registered to vote. When the demographics of registered voters are considered, we find that women are more likely to be registered than men and that whites are more likely to be registered than any other racial or ethnic group. These figures indicate that registration generally increases with age up until the oldest cohort (75+ years). Less than half of the youngest cohort (18–24 years) was registered in 2014 while all
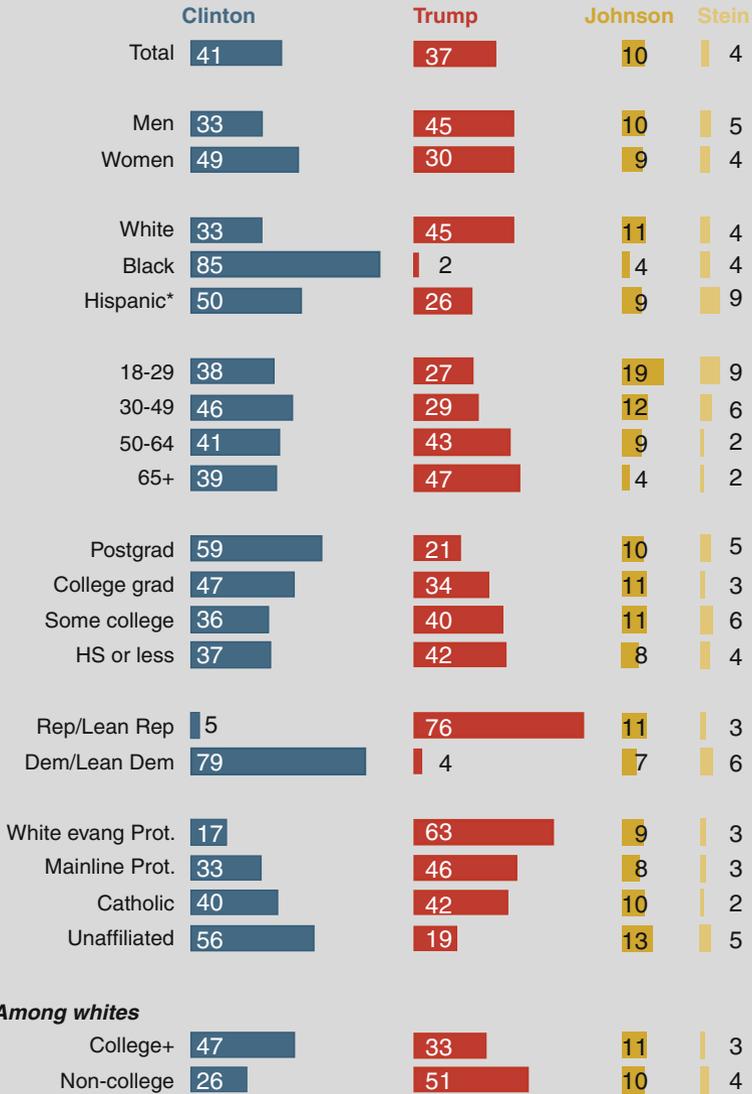
other cohorts reported registration rates of 60% or more. When it comes to marital status the married are most likely to be registered while the never married are the least likely. In terms of income, we find there is a steady increase in the rate of registration from the lowest income group (<$10,000) to the highest income group ($75,000+).

While it is instructive to analyze the association between demographic attributes and voter registration rates, a review of those who actually voted is even more instructive. There was a significant drop-off from the proportions registered to the proportion actually voting, a pattern that was exhibited across the board. However, there were some major disparities in terms of rates between those registered and those voting. As can be seen in Exhibit 12.2 the greatest attrition was found for non-white voters, very young voters, single voters and the least affluent voters. On the other hand, inordinately represented among those who did vote were non-Hispanic whites, those 45 and older, married citizens and those in the highest income bracket.

Although it is not shown in the table, there were some interesting developments related to those who were registered to vote in 2014. The proportion registered exhibited considerable growth among racial and ethnic minorities over previous elections, particularly with the significant increase in Hispanic registration. There was also an increase in young (and of necessity first-time voters) in 2014. There were more female voters registered over the previous period and, although seniors were already registered to vote at a high rate, that proportion grew as well.

While a comparative analysis of registration and voting patterns is worthwhile, an even more interesting picture is generated when the distribution of votes by demographic traits is examined. Exhibit 12.3 display the results from the 2016 presidential election in terms of the demographic patterns associated with voting. As can be seen, Clinton actually received the majority of the votes from each demographic category but one—older white men. While Trump was able to win the election by virtue of the electoral college, the likely future voting patterns are revealed when one examines the breakdown of voting by demographic category.

Exhibit 12.3: 2016 Election Results by Demographic Category

	Clinton	Trump	Johnson	Stein
Total	41	37	10	4
Men	33	45	10	5
Women	49	30	9	4
White	33	45	11	4
Black	85	2	4	4
Hispanic*	50	26	9	9
18-29	38	27	19	9
30-49	46	29	12	6
50-64	41	43	9	2
65+	39	47	4	2
Postgrad	59	21	10	5
College grad	47	34	11	3
Some college	36	40	11	6
HS or less	37	42	8	4
Rep/Lean Rep	5	76	11	3
Dem/Lean Dem	79	4	7	6
White evang Prot.	17	63	9	3
Mainline Prot.	33	46	8	3
Catholic	40	42	10	2
Unaffiliated	56	19	13	5

Among whites

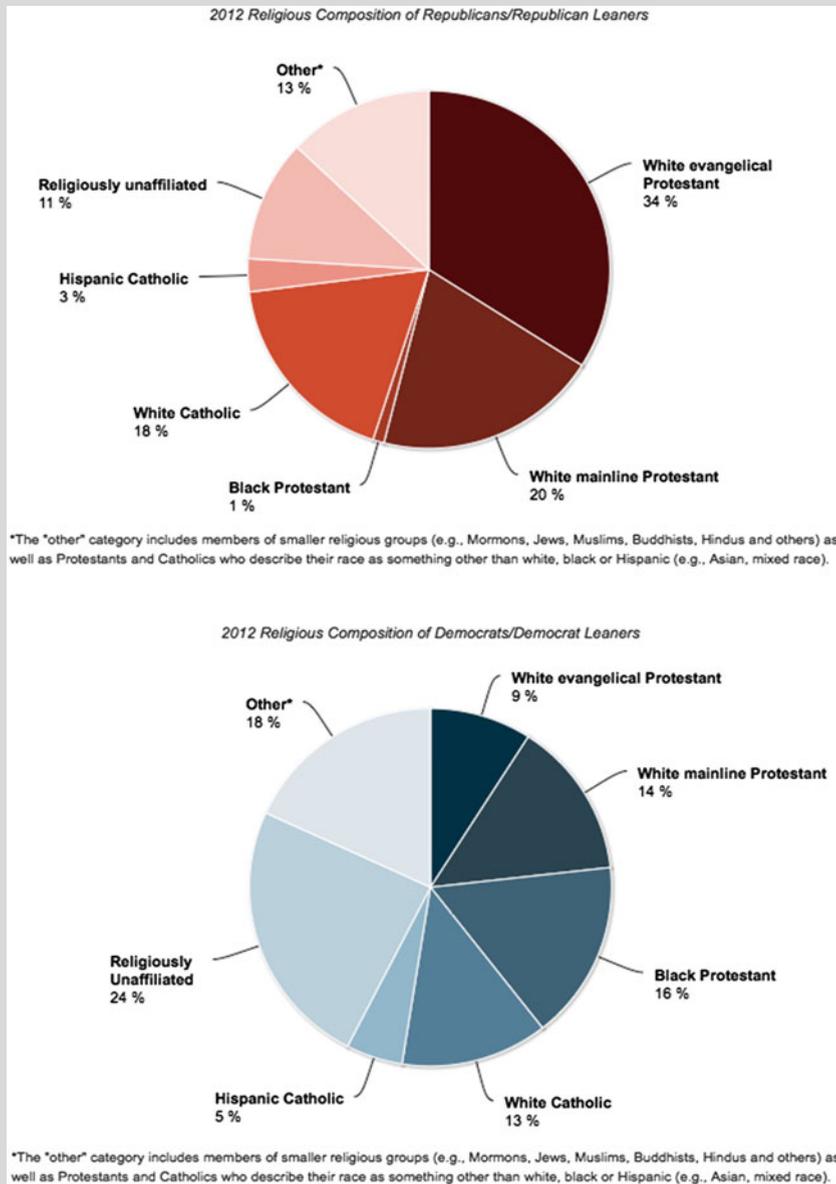|	Clinton	Trump	Johnson	Stein
College+	47	33	11	3
Non-college	26	51	10	4

*Small sample size: N=116.
Notes: Based on registered voters. Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Other/Don't know responses not shown. Q13/13a.
Source: Survey conducted August 9-16, 2016.

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Religious affiliation remains an important consideration when it comes to political behavior in the U.S. as demonstrated by the 2016 presidential election. There is a clear association between demographic attributes and both the level of religiosity and denominational affiliation. Traditionally, the more "religious" segments of society and members of fundamentalist denominations have been more conservative and, hence, more likely to be affiliated with the Republican party. Conversely, the less "religious" and those affiliated with less fundamentalist denominations have tended to be more liberal and more likely to support the Democratic party. This distinction was evident during the 2016 election when white evangelical Christians were among Donald Trump's most ardent supporters. Exhibit 12.4 illustrates the distribution of Republicans and Democrats based on their religious affiliation.

Exhibit 12.4: Religious Affiliation of Republicans/Republican Leaners and Democrats/Democrat Leaners

2012 Religious Composition of Republicans/Republican Leaners

Other*
13 %

White evangelical
Protestant
34 %

Religiously unaffiliated
11 %

Hispanic Catholic
3 %

White Catholic
18 %

Black Protestant
1 %

White mainline Protestant
20 %

*The "other" category includes members of smaller religious groups (e.g., Mormons, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and others) as well as Protestants and Catholics who describe their race as something other than white, black or Hispanic (e.g., Asian, mixed race).

2012 Religious Composition of Democrats/Democrat Leaners

White evangelical Protestant
9 %

Other*
18 %

White mainline Protestant
14 %

Religiously
Unaffiliated
24 %

Black Protestant
16 %

Hispanic Catholic
5 %

White Catholic
13 %

*The "other" category includes members of smaller religious groups (e.g., Mormons, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and others) as well as Protestants and Catholics who describe their race as something other than white, black or Hispanic (e.g., Asian, mixed race).

Source: Pew Research Center

12.4   Demographic Trends and Political Change

It is possible that no other sphere of American society is being as influenced by demographic change as the political arena. While the history of politics in the U.S. is to a certain extent a history of demographic change, it could be argued that the developments of recent years have served to escalate this process. Certainly, over the past 20 years the impact of demographic trends on the voting behavior of Americans has been substantial as the U.S. has experienced an unprecedented level of immigration accompanied by the escalating diversity of the U.S. population, a restructuring of American families and households, and shifting economic fortunes.

Perhaps the most dramatic development that the U.S. continues to experience is the emergence of minority voters. As the older, white population (particularly the baby boomers) continues to dwindle, its stranglehold on the political process has begun to wane. The size of the minority electorate is rapidly increasing and escalated in the run-up to the 2016 presidential election. Minority voter political participation is growing even faster than the population. Indeed, minorities accounted for 15% of the voters in 1988 and 28% in 2012. While participation levels by African-Americans have remained stable, participation on the part of Hispanics has skyrocketed. The proportion of the votes accounted for by Hispanics increased from less than 2% in 1998 to 11% of the total in 2012. While it may appear that the small size of the minority population means it is overwhelmed by the majority at the polls, the concentration of minority group members in certain areas offsets their numerical disadvantage. Exhibit 12.5 describes the potential impact of demographic change on political preferences.

Exhibit 12.5: Does Demographic Change Mean the End of the Republican Party?

It is often said that "demographics is destiny", and that may be the case with American politics if the implications for current trends are examined. Voters who support different parties or exhibit different political orientations (e.g., conservative, liberal, libertarian) have historically exhibited different demographic characteristics. Although there have been major shifts in political orientation by demographic groups (e.g., the shift of Southern white voters from Democrat to Republican after civil rights legislation was passed), the demographic characteristics exhibited by voters that fall along party and philosophical lines have remained consistent over time. In fact, since 2000 these lines have become increasingly rigid as both major political parties (and the Republican Party in particular) have discouraged any dissension from the "party line". Thus, Republican Party supporters have become more rigidly entrenched as have Democratic Party supporters, although to a less extreme level.

Given the demographic profiles of those supporting different political parties and/or political orientations, it might be worthwhile to examine

current demographic trends and their implications for the future electorate. Over the past 15 or 20 years a clear pattern has emerged with regard to voting activity. The Republican Party has become the party of old, white men for all practical purposes. This was the only group that broke heavily for Romney in the 2012 presidential election and Trump in the 2016 election. This support came primarily from working-class whites, those with *some* college education, and upper-income groups (although support here appeared to have eroded).

On the other hand, those supporting the Democratic party in recent years tended to exhibit much more diverse demographic traits. These supporters include women (particularly single women), younger voters, and the well-educated. However, the most significant trend is the increasingly one-sided support for Democrats on the part of racial and ethnic minority groups.

African-Americans were totally in for the Democratic candidate in 2012 and 2016 with near 100% support. Hispanics, the largest non-white racial or ethnic group, voted overwhelmingly for Obama as did Asian-Americans. Jewish voters, usually reliably Democrat in their orientation, continued to provide heavy support.

The segments of the population that now support the Republican Party are declining in number while the groups that are increasingly throwing their support behind the Democrats are increasing in number. Non-Hispanic whites are declining as a proportion of the population, now representing only 63% of the total. By 2050 it is projected that this group will constitute a numerical minority of the population. On the other hand, the African-American population continues to grow, maintaining its 12% share of the population. The Hispanic population is experiencing major growth, now surpassing 15% of the population. Asian-Americans, although small in numbers, are also growing at a relatively high rate. The high proportion of the electorate that was something other than non-Hispanic white in 2012 reflected these demographic trends.

In speculating about the implications of demographic trends for the future political process certain assumptions must be made. First, it is assumed that the native-born non-Hispanic white population will be stable and continue to decline as a proportion of the population. This is a relatively safe assumption; there is little that could happen that could change this. It is also assumed that virtually all racial and ethnic groups (other than non-Hispanic whites) will continue to increase in number and proportion for the foreseeable future. Admittedly, it is not likely that the current rate of immigration can continue indefinitely into the future. In fact, the U.S. has already experienced a reversal

of immigration trends as a result of the recent economic downturn. All things being equal, however, a certain amount of immigration is inevitable, the only question being the volume. It is also assumed that non-white racial and ethnic minority groups will continue to reproduce at a higher rate than the non-Hispanic white population. Fertility rates are lower for non-Hispanic whites than any other racial/ethnic group, and even the existing rate is not likely to add to the population of that group as non-Hispanic white women of childbearing age continue to age out of their fertile years.

Assuming that the current projections hold, it could be argued that the constituency for the Republican Party will steadily decline. The proportion of the population that is white and/or male is expected to decrease with little hope of being replenished. The very wealthy, who have historically supported the more conservative party, while perhaps continuing to increase their wealth, have become a smaller and smaller proportion of the electorate. On the other hand, the typical voter of the future is likely to be black, Hispanic or Asian, young and with increasingly progressive perspectives. Females will continue to grow as a proportion of the population and even older females are less likely to support the Republican Party than their male counterparts. Even seniors appear to be deserting the Republican Party, based on current surveys, as a result of the attacks on Social Security and Medicare by Republican politicians and activists.

In conclusion, it could be argued that, even under the most conservative assumptions, the proportion of the electorate supporting the Republican Party will steadily decline, while the proportion of the electorate supporting the Democratic Party will steadily increase. Democrats are expected to benefit from growing numbers (and proportions) of the groups that are solidly in their camp, increasing voter registration and turnout of Democratic-supporting groups, and the more progressive outlook that is associated with the groups in U.S. society that are currently growing.

A number of other groups have emerged to form some semblance of voting blocs over the past few years. White college graduates have coalesced into a small but influential voting bloc in recent years. The college-educated as a proportion of the electorate is up from previous years. A similar pattern has been observed for unmarried, educated working women. In fact, all three components of this group have been growing—unmarried women, educated women and working women. The proportion of college-age women increased from 8% of the voters in 1970 to 28% in 2003. Both the white college graduates and the emerging bloc of unmarried, educated working women were strong supporters of Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election.

"Millennials" represent an emerging generation that promises to be larger than the baby boom. The term is presented in quotation marks since some argue that the cohort does not really qualify as a distinct social segment. The number of voting

age individuals among this group is expected to increase from 55 million in 2003 to 103 million in 2020. Although young Millennials tend to be among the least likely to participate in the political process, their numbers alone suggest substantial potential impact on future political contests.

In contrast to these growing segments of the electorate, there are a number of groups that are shrinking in importance as a proportion of the electorate. Although one couldn't tell it from the 2016 presidential election, the number of working class white voters is steadily diminishing. The number of white working-class voters is declining in every state, with the share of the vote attributed to working class whites shrinking by at least 17 percentage points in several states. A similar pattern is seen for "faith" voters, voters whose political leanings and voting behavior are influenced by their religious beliefs. There have been declines in membership for all of the major denominations. At the same time, there has been an increase in the proportion of religiously unaffiliated Americans.

The implications of these trends could be significant although speculating on the future impact of demographic changes is fraught with danger. As Exhibit 12.5 indicates, the increasing diversity of the population could spell the end of the Republican party. Yet, the 2016 presidential election results suggest that non-Hispanic whites still continue to dominate the electoral process. In this case, the voter turnout rate for different demographic groups was a critical factor along with the peculiarities of the electoral college. The 2016 election aside, the segments of the population that appear to be growing are more likely to lean Democrat in their political orientation. On the other hand, the segments that tend to be shrinking (especially older non-Hispanic whites) tend to lean Republican.

12.5   Sources of Data for Political Demography

The data available to political demographers is not as plentiful as it is for some other areas of demographic application. Data on the characteristics of the general population, of course, are readily available from the Census Bureau and other federal sources and from state data centers. The Census Bureau collects political data during election years via the Current Population Survey. Data are collected on registration and voting activity based on demographic attributes. Data on voting patterns is not as plentiful, and at the national level the primary source of such data is the Federal Election Commission (FEC). However, FEC data is limited in its usefulness for many purposes in that it focuses on campaign expenditures, political donations and regulatory issues rather than election results.

For other levels of government, state election commissions may be a source of data, but the available information and level of access varies from state to state. Local election commissions typically have some responsibility for providing election results and for maintaining information on registered voters. Typically, the type of information available at the local level would be name, address, age, race,

voting history, political party's primary voted in, and, in state's that require it, the political party of record.

A variety of organizations—public and private—collect data on political affiliation and activity. News organizations typically conduct opinion polls, monitor voter sentiment and often conduct exit interviews at the time of elections to provide immediate feedback on voting patterns. Research institutes associated with universities may compile political data from various sources and often conduct primary research. The Pew Research Center monitors political orientation and voters' perspectives on various topics. A variety of political action groups and advocacy organizations also compile political data and sometimes conduct primary research.

Case Study 12.2: Conducting a Political Poll

The social science research center at a local university wanted to conduct a poll of candidate preferences among the local population leading up to the 2016 presidential election. The intent was to determine local sentiment with regard to the two candidates three months prior to election day. The center had not conducted opinion polls before so was required to start from scratch in developing a polling capability.

The process began by collecting voting information on the local population. Data were acquired from the local election commission that provided insights into the nature of the electorate. Information was available on registration and voting history, allowing the analysts to develop a picture of politically active citizens. Additional information was extracted on the age, sex and race of registered voters. Finally, information on past voting history was compiled, including frequency of voting and the party primary most recently voted in. Party registration was not required so information on formal political party affiliation was not available.

While it would be more effective to directly contact those to be interviewed, telephone numbers were not available for registered voters so it was determined that mail-out survey would be employed. This is admittedly not the most efficient or most effective way to collect data of this type but given the circumstances a mail-out survey was considered the best option.

With a mail-out survey instrument particular care must be taken when developing the survey items since no one will be available to clarify any questions included in the survey. Survey items that have been validated and utilized in previous surveys were used when available. As with any survey instrument care was taken to limit the number and complexity of items to the extent possible.

Survey items were developed that elicited information on political party affiliation, political orientation, likelihood of voting, and the preferred candidate. Five questions were also included related to the respondent's stance on various issues. Standard questions were included to collect basic demographic data. The instrument was pre-tested among center staff and students

and then field pre-tested with a focus group of community residents. Necessary changes were made in the wording of the survey form, the instrument finalized, and survey forms printed.

The final step preparatory to survey administration was the identification of households to which the survey would be mailed. It had been determined based on past experience with such surveys that 1500 surveys should be mailed out with the expectation that 500 surveys would be returned. The sample was drawn from the compiled list of registered voters and stratified to reflect the demographic makeup of the electorate. It was felt that given the size and characteristics of the electorate a response of this size would yield statistically valid results. In order to encourage completion of the survey a dollar bill was included along with a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

The surveys were mailed out and the researchers determined that one month would be the timeframe in which responses would be accepted. Within a month of the mail-out 435 completed surveys had been returned and these provided the basis for data analysis. As anticipated the characteristics of those responding to the survey were somewhat different from the sample that had been carefully designed. Women and senior citizens were over-represented among the respondents, and the data had to be statistically adjusted to assure appropriate representation of various demographic groups.

Once the data were weighted to account for anomalies in the characteristics of respondents the center was able to process the data and analyze the results. The analysis determined that the respondents were more or less evenly split with regard to candidate preference. This split occurred essentially along party lines. There were differences in perspectives on the five issues presented and these too reflected party leaning. Based on the size of the sample, a margin of error of + or − 5% was indicated. The center was able to disseminate the findings from the study with a fairly high level of confidence that the findings were accurate.

12.6 Demography and Public Policy

The interface between demography and public policy is exhibited in myriad ways. In fact, it is difficult to separate population policies and policies related to other areas of society due the impact they have upon each other. The enactment of policies in the healthcare, education, criminal justice and economic arenas, among others, will inevitably have implications for the demographic processes of the society, affecting fertility levels (e.g., through abortion policies), morbidity patterns (e.g., through health insurance coverage), and mortality (e.g., through research funding priorities). Some policies may have a direct impact on demographic

processes, as in the case of now-abolished policies prohibiting the immigration of people infected by AIDS; or they may be more indirect, as in the case of the impact of efforts to allow illegal immigrants in the U.S. access to educational opportunities.

Before focusing on the factors that are influencing population policy, it would be helpful to define the concepts that are being used. A "policy" is may be thought of as a high-level overall plan embracing the general goals and acceptable procedures especially of a governmental body.

A useful definition of public policy has been provided by Longest (2010):

> Public policies are authoritative decisions that are made in the legislative, executive or judicial branches of government. These decisions are intended to direct or influence the actions, behaviors or decisions of others.

This definition, however, is fairly broad and it is helpful to consider the various types of policies that could be enacted. These include:

- **Macro policies**—overarching policies affecting many areas of public policy (usually on part of federal government)
- **Public policies**—policy approaches focusing on a particular issue (usually on the part of government)
- **Organizational policies**—policies affecting behavior within an organization
- **Professional policies**—policies guiding professional behavior

In the U.S., macro-level policies related to any issue are essentially non-existent, and anything that comes close to a population policy is more often than not a derivative of a policy promulgated in healthcare or some other societal arena. Most broad "policies" that are introduced by various levels of government should be considered in the "public policy" category. There are organizational-level and professional-level policies promulgated throughout U.S. society, but these policies more often than not represent a "trickle down" effect from broader public policies.

As an example, the 2012 executive ruling by the Obama administration that health insurance plans must include coverage for contraceptives represents a national "policy" in support of reproductive management. However, the primary impact will not be at the national level but is reflected in the implications this policy has for the organizational and professional policies of organizations that provide health services. Thus, health insurance companies were required to cover the cost of contraceptive services as part of their insurance plans. Further, companies that offer health insurance to their employees were required to include such coverage as a benefit. In both cases, it should be noted, provisions were made for those parties whose religious beliefs prohibit the use of birth control.

Obviously, the U.S. is faced with a number of issues in a variety of arenas. However, only some of these issues rise to the level where they become matters of public policy. Most problems start out as "private" problems, affecting only the individuals involved. However, there are situations when a problem becomes widespread and begins to have societal implications. Thus, the decision on how many children to have is a personal decision made by individuals and couples and,

as such, should not have implications for public policy. However, if these individual decisions result in consequences for society, they may rise to the level of public interest. If, for example, members of a population are having too few babies to replace the population, this becomes a matter of public concern (as it has in many European countries today). On the other hand, if members of the population are having too many babies resulting in an unmanageable population explosion, this too becomes a matter of public concern (as in the case of China and India).

> *The emergence of society-wide problems that require the enactment of public policies are more often than not driven by demographic trends.*

Similar situations can be found with regard to health policies. Referring back to the acquisition of health insurance by individuals in the U.S., this has historically been a personal matter mediated in some cases through the role of employers or government-sponsored health plans. Since the 1980s, however, individuals have faced increasing barriers to the acquisition of health insurance at a time when healthcare costs are skyrocketing. By the end of the twentieth century, tens of millions of Americans were not covered by health insurance. Non-coverage has subsequently been found to be a major contributor to the soaring bankruptcy rate in the U.S. as a result of overwhelming medical bills. Further, tens of thousands of Americans were dying unnecessarily every year simply because they did not have a means to pay for their healthcare. Thus, what was once considered a personal issue had risen to the point of a public policy issue and led to the incorporation of numerous provisions in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010. In the case of both population and healthcare issues, a problem moves from the private sphere to the public when it entails a substantial social or individual difficulty that cannot easily be addressed by the affected parties and cannot be ignored by society.

There are a variety of reasons why effective policy setting does not occur at the national level in the United States. It has already been noted that there is no formal mechanism in place for setting national goals and priorities. In addition, the federalist arrangement under which the U.S. political system operates mitigates against a strong influence on the part of the central government. In fact, about the only option available to the federal government in terms of influencing policy is through the control of federal expenditures. In addition, strong vested interests make it difficult to establish consensus on the acceptable degree of government involvement in various sectors (e.g., education, healthcare), much less on the nature of that involvement.

Population policies, where they exist, tend to be more straightforward and direct with regard to the activities that are to be regulated. These policies typically relate to demographic processes such as fertility and mortality (and their implications for population growth and change) and immigration. There are no U.S. agencies,

however, charged with monitoring and/or controlling population growth, although the U.S. Department of Justice has overall responsibility for immigration policy.

12.7 Examples of Policy Applications

12.7.1 Immigration

The management of immigration is a federal responsibility (although in recent years some states have passed laws that attempted to take some immigration matters into state hands). Laws and regulations within the Department of Justice determine governmental actions with regard to immigration and emigration. Policy aspects of these statutes relate to immigration quotas for various countries, visa requirements, allowed activities by foreign visitors, and so forth. The U.S. immigration laws (and thus the underlying policies) have not been thoroughly revised since the 1980s. Comprehensive immigration reform remains a controversial issue within contemporary politics.

Immigration is an issue that is directly driven by demographics, and significant controversy surrounds the immigration issue. The backlash with regard to immigration (particularly illegal immigration) on the part of certain politicians has created an environment of uncertainty, and demands on the part of some for a wall between the U.S. and Mexico have served to increase the controversy. This is clearly an issue within the province of government policy makers and an updating of federal immigration policies is clearly required.

12.7.2 Fertility

The U.S. has not promulgated any formal policies with regard to fertility, and there is no federal agency charged with addressing issues related to reproduction. Any "policies" that exist that have implications for fertility have an indirect impact. One specific regulation is the allowance of deductions for "dependents" against personal income taxes. And cynics may argue that welfare payments, as meager as they may be, similarly encourage child bearing. In actuality, it could better be argued that existing policies discourage rather than encourage fertility. Thus, limited family leave options, poorly developed early childhood opportunities, and a general weak "safety net" for families could be considered deterrents to child bearing.

The level of fertility, of course, reflects the characteristics of the population at a point in time, and in the U.S. at least policy-makers have been reluctant to legislate fertility. However, there are growing concerns about the population's ability to reproduce itself, an already existing issue in many countries. Currently, the non-Hispanic white population is exhibiting the lowest fertility rates of any racial or

ethnic group. Relatively high fertility rates for other racial and ethnic groups assures that the non-Hispanic white population will be decline proportionately. Trends in the fertility patterns of other racial and ethnic groups should be monitored to determine the extent to which the U.S. population can replace itself in the future.

12.7.3   Healthcare

Perhaps the most clear-cut example of federal influence on healthcare policy is the impact that the introduction of the Medicare and Medicaid programs has had on the nature of the healthcare delivery system. By controlling the financing mechanism, and virtually no other aspect of the process, the federal government has set "policy" with regard to the provision of care. By determining the healthcare procedures that would be covered under the Medicare program, for example, the federal government went a long way toward specifying the types of services that would be provided, since unreimbursed services were less likely to be offered by healthcare providers. Medicare regulations had the spillover effect of influencing the level of reimbursement offered by private health insurers.

Another example of federal efforts to influence the direction of the healthcare system has been the formulation of goals for health promotion developed by the U. S. Public Health Service within the Department of Health and Human Services during the 1980s. The HealthyPeople initiative identified goals for many different aspects of healthcare, from reducing the burden of diseases, improving access to care, and creating a more informed patient population. While there was no mechanism for enforcing the pursuit of the goals outlined in the HealthyPeople program, all federal agencies and any entity receiving funds from the DHHS had to indicate the ways in which they would pursue those goals. The most recent attempt at a major public policy initiative is embodied by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) of 2010. The implications of demographic trends for the Medicare program are discussed in Exhibit 12.6.

12.7.4   Education

In the U.S. education has generally been a function carried out at the local level, with policies set by individual school districts. Over time, however, state governments became increasingly involved in education, supporting state institutions of higher education as well as certain secondary school programs at the local level. In general, educational standards and graduation requirements are set at the state level and, recently, we have seen examples of state legislatures seeking to actually influence the content of courses taught in public schools.

The U.S. Department of Education has also played an increasingly important role in public education. Federal monies are transferred to the respective states (and then to the local school districts) for general support as well as for support of specific programs. In the first decade of the 21st century the No Child Left Behind initiative was established at the federal level and imposed upon the various states. This represented an attempt (although considered misguided by some) to promulgate a national policy related to academic standards. This policy at the federal level was in response to the growing concern over lagging academic achievement within U.S. public schools.

A number of demographically driven issues are affecting the situation with regard to education in the U.S. today. There is ample evidence that U.S. public schools have become resegregated over time. This *de facto* segregation reflects the on-going residential segregation that characterizes many communities along with the migration of more affluent students to private schools. Another demographically related factor driving the process is the increase in the proportion of school children who are members of racial or ethnic minorities. There are already more minority school children than majority students with the proportion of non-Hispanic white students expected to continue to decline. Both resurgent segregation and increasing minority participation in public schools require attention from policy setters within the political sphere.

12.7.5   Criminal Justice

Policing has historically been a local function in the U.S., and the founding fathers discouraged the establishment of a national police force. Indeed, except in unusual circumstances, the military cannot be deployed within the U.S. At the same time, the federal government has over time become much more involved at the state and local levels. Criminal justice "policies" have been promulgated primarily through the allocation of federal funds through the U.S. Department of Justice. There are a variety of programs that support police staffing, training and equipping. After the attacks on the World Trade Center on 9/11 the Department of Homeland Security was established, and this agency has aggressively funded equipment for local police agencies.

The "policies" in place with regard to criminal justice can be determined by the focus of enforcement activities. A prime example of this is the so-called "war on drugs" initiated under President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. In response to a perceived increase in illegal drug use, the Drug Enforcement Agency was established to prosecute drug suppliers and drug users. Despite the mind-boggling amount of money and resources devoted to the war on drugs, most experts agree that the war has been lost. Indeed, this is probably a case study in the emergence of unintended consequences, in that rather than reducing the volume of illegal drug use in the U.S., these efforts have contributed to continued high use by making the drug "industry" so lucrative. It has further been argued that the war on drugs was a smokescreen for a "war on minorities" since it was believed, rightly or wrongly,

that minorities were more likely to be drug users than whites and that this represented a way to counter the civil rights legislation of the 1960s and 1970s. In this regard, the policy has been effective in that our prisons are filled with African-Americans and Hispanics who have been convicted of minor drug crimes.

12.7.6   Housing and Community Development

Housing and community development are functions generally carried out at the local level and, for the most part, by private sector organizations. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development does play a role in initiating federal programs to be administered at the local level and in the allocation of funds for specific needs (e.g., housing for the homeless or people living with AIDS). The federal government has also historically played a role in the development of public housing or subsidized housing. By providing funding to localities, HUD has supported the establishment of public housing projects and subsidized the cost of so-called "Section 8" housing for the indigent. The availability of affordable housing continues to be a national issue as does the rise in homelessness, and the resolution of this issue has been left primarily to local government which has to depend on private sector entities to address these issues. HUD has become increasingly involved in neighborhood redevelopment and provides funds to localities for this purpose, the "policy" here suggesting the importance of preserving existing communities rather than abandoning them.

12.7.7   Transportation

It could be argued that the predominant types of communities, and the distribution of the U.S. population today is a reflection of yesterday's policy decisions, however implicit, with regard to transportation. In the 19th century, long-distance travel in the U.S. was primarily by passenger train. However, in the 20th century air travel became possible but, more importantly, the automobile came to be within the reach of most families. Decisions were made, primarily at the federal level, with regard to allocation of funds for infrastructure development. These decisions directed federal funding away from railroads and toward airports and highways. This process was highlighted by the development of the interstate highways system initiated in the 1950s. This nationwide system of superhighways was justified on the basis of national security in that it allowed the rapid deployment of resources in the case of a military attack. These policies resulted in the U.S. becoming an automobile-centric society, to the detriment of other forms of transportation.

A major consequence of these policy decisions was the emergence of "urban sprawl" as it was now possible to locate residences at some distance from the urban

core. By the 1990s, the U.S. had become a suburban society with more people living in suburbs than urban cores, small towns or rural areas. While the U.S. population continued its prolonged rural-to-urban migration, the bulk of these migrants eventually ended up in suburbs, thanks to transportation policies put in place a half-century earlier.

12.7.8   Economic Development

The economy is the most important sector of U.S. society, and an inordinate amount of energy and resources at the federal level are devoted to monitoring economic trends, encouraging economic development, and regulating interstate commerce. Federal policies have long encouraged private sector development, and the amount of "corporate welfare" that exists continues to be a controversial topic. The U.S. Department of Commerce uses monetary policy to attempt to steer the economy in the right direction, encouraging growth and discouraging inflationary practices. Numerous agencies like the Small Business Administration have been established to support business development, and job training and workforce development are activities supported by the federal government through grants to states and localities.

   Of historical significance is the "war on poverty" initiated in the 1960s when it was realized that a shocking proportion of Americans lived in poverty situations that were generally invisible to the rest of an increasingly affluent society. Policies were promulgated related to poverty amelioration including an expanded welfare program and the introduction of "food stamps" to provide an adequate diet for those living below the poverty level. The Medicaid program was introduced to help address the healthcare issues of impoverished Americans. These policies, accompanied by economic growth, served to moderate the level of poverty in the U.S. for two or three decades. However, in the 1980s the U.S. experienced an upward trend in the number of Americans living in poverty, and this peaked at historic levels during the economic downtown beginning in 2008. Current policies, it could be argued, are not adequate to address the growing number of impoverished Americans and, indeed, it is suggested that the current generation of young Americans will be worse off economically than previous generations.

12.8   Direct and Indirect Policies

Policies can be divided into direct and indirect components as well. Direct policies refer to those legislative efforts designed purposefully to affect, for example, the delivery and quality of health care. Examples would include the funding and research agenda for the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Indirect policies related to healthcare, say, are those whose

basic intent is to affect an outcome within a certain sphere, although in the process the *provision* of healthcare is affected. For example, federal tax reform regulations related to health insurance coverage ostensibly address revenue collection. However, by affecting tax-related issues for employers and individuals these regulations affect patterns of health insurance coverage and ultimately patterns of care. Numerous provisions in the Affordable Care Act have both direct and indirect dimensions. Requirements meant to assure that not-for-profit hospitals are providing adequate community benefits affect not only the not-for-profit hospitals themselves but the communities in which these hospitals operate.

The interaction between policy and demographics can be illustrated through a number of examples. As the U.S. population continues to age (demographic determinant), the prevalence of chronic conditions and incidence of deaths due to heart disease and cancer increase. Policies are in place to ameliorate the conditions and reduce deaths attributable to these causes (health consequence). To the extent that the policies are effective, an increase in life expectancy and a further aging of the population (demographic consequences) are likely to come about. Moreover, policy changes would be required to address the conditions of the new population composition. Programs that focus on lowering the number of unwanted pregnancies (healthcare determinant) can help bring about a reduction in the birth rate and a decline in the total number of births (demographic consequence). The 2012 regulation promulgated by the Obama administration mandating that insurance companies provide contraception coverage as part of their plans is an example of the potential indirect effects of legislation. Again, the consequences of the policy are likely to lead to a refocusing of policy.

12.9   Factors Influencing Policy

12.9.1   Demographic Trends

As noted throughout this book, the United States is currently undergoing unprecedented demographic changes, and these changes have numerous implications for public policy. Demographic change also has implications for population policy which in turn have implications for the needs of the population. Population growth has slowed, and without continued immigration, the population of the nation will decline. At the same time, the population is aging, generating more deaths and producing an age structure that will soon be dominated by those over age 40. The fact that the older age cohorts, particularly the oldest old, are among the fastest growing groups in the U.S. has significant implications for the life circumstances of the population and, by extension, its service needs. Even as the first baby boomers enter retirement, the burden of chronic disease is increasing and placing growing pressure on the Medicare program. (See Exhibit 12.6 for a discussion of the implications of an aging population for Medicare.)

Demographic trends that might engender public policies include the changing age structure of the U.S. population, its increasing racial and ethnic diversity, changing marital status and household characteristics, and evolving healthcare challenges.

The growth rates of racial and ethnic minorities in the United States, particularly those for blacks and Hispanics, far exceed that of the white population. The increasing contribution of immigrants and racial/ethnic minorities to population growth implies that the United States is again becoming a land of diverse cultures and languages. Health behaviors in these populations are different as well. As discussed in Chap. 8, this compositional shift is generating a different demand structure for health services. As noted previously, by the first third decade of the twenty-first century, fully one-third of the population of the United States is expected to be part of a racial or ethnic minority group.

Along with marked changes in the racial/ethnic composition of this country, there have been major shifts in the income structure. The income discrepancy between what can be labeled the "haves" and "have nots" is widening with an increasing proportion of national wealth concentrated at the very top while incomes for the middle and working classes stagnate. Since 1970, the number of persons at or below poverty level has increased substantially, and the economic downtown beginning in 2008 has resulted in record modern poverty levels. There are significant demographic differences between impoverished individuals and the more affluent.

This is particularly true with regard to health status, with the poverty-level population suffering from a higher level of health problems than the non-poverty population. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of health insurance among the poor. The health of children has been somewhat addressed through federal policies encouraging the establishment of children's healthcare programs. Nevertheless, much of the low-income population suffers from a lack of health insurance for other members of the household, exacerbating the challenges they face in obtaining necessary care.

The regional redistribution of the population also has implications for policy setting. Although rates of internal migration have fallen in recent years, the American population remains relatively mobile, with one in six persons moving each year. This mobility rate has an impact on the distribution of population which, in turn, affects the distribution of resources. Each of these flows can have important implications for policy setting. In-migrant, out-migrant, and net migration data with respect to rural to urban, city to suburb, and region-to-region flows are seen as major contributors to changing service needs in areas that are either net exporters or net importers of people.

For example, a migration stream from the Midwest to central Florida may bring not only a large population with demographic characteristics different from the

receiving area (e.g., older or younger), but one with a different set of tastes and preferences. It is often the case that receiving communities do not have the resources required to meet the needs of a growing population, while communities of origination are faced with a "surplus" of resources. This may be the case with rural hospitals, for example, that are faced with a declining patient base but are placed under a lot of pressure to remain open.

Exhibit 12.6: Demographic Implications for the Future of Medicare

The aging of the baby boom generation in the United States is placing strains on the financial sustainability of the Medicare program, the government-funded program that ensures care for those 65 and older. Between 2010 and 2020 the number of Americans over 65 will increase by 14.5 million. Although the senior population is healthier than previous generation, the senior years tend to be characterized by expensive-to-manage chronic disease and the inordinate medical expense involved in treatment during the last months of life. Medicare funding cannot match cost growth as the number of Medicare beneficiaries is increasing much more rapidly than the number of workers. Today, there are 3.9 workers for every beneficiary; by 2030, there will only be about 2.4 workers for every beneficiary. There are concerns that, unless the system is drastically changed, in less than ten years the funds supporting the Medicare program will no longer support the demand for services.

Although obtaining health services, even for seniors, can be considered a personal concern, the establishment of the Medicare program in 1965 moved healthcare for seniors into the policy arena. For decades, however, the program has operated smoothly and stayed under the public policy radar. Today, the growing pressure being placed on Medicare has made the program's viability an increasingly public issue, and policy makers are struggling with the prospect of the program's inability to sustain itself into the future.

Medicare's core program (Part A Hospital Insurance) is funded by the hundreds of millions of employees who will subsequently receive benefits during retirement. When they turn 65, eligible citizens are automatically enrolled in Part A, which pays for inpatient services, continued treatment or rehabilitation in a skilled-nursing facility, and hospice care for the terminally ill. The money paid by employees to the Hospital Insurance Trust Fund is not directly saved for their own personal future health expenses but covers the medical bills of the people who are currently enrolled in Medicare.

Medicare's costs are projected to rise initially because the number of people receiving benefits increases rapidly as the large baby boom generation retires. However, once society has absorbed the retirements of the baby boom generation, Medicare's costs are projected to continue to rise. This growth is fueled by expected increases in the utilization and cost of healthcare, and the

more recent addition of Medicare Part D which covers the use of prescription drugs. In particular, the continued development of new technology is expected to cause per capita healthcare expenditures to continue to grow faster than the economy as a whole. So, while long-term projections of Medicare's costs are subject to demographic and economic uncertainties, they are also subject to an additional layer of uncertainty caused by increases in general healthcare costs and additional benefits.

The ultimate question is: Are burgeoning Medicare costs the result of demographic trends or the function of some other development? While conservative politicians interested in limiting the role of the federal government point to the rapidly increasing senior population as the culprit, thus suggesting no hope for the future solvency of the program, demographic trends may, in fact, not be the explanation. Clearly, there are more seniors today and their numbers will continue to grow. However, today's seniors are relatively healthy and are not expected to consume more health services per capita than previous generations. In reality, the long-term costs of Medicare are primarily driven by the same factors that have caused skyrocketing healthcare costs: increases in the number and intensity of the services provided for health conditions and the increasing costs of these services.

As with many policy-related issues, the apparent explanation for the problem may not be the real explanation. Medicare policies that rely primarily on shifting more costs onto seniors, who are mostly lower-income, are misdirected and, in any case, not sustainable over the long term. Arguably, the source of the problem does not arise from demographics but from failings in the healthcare system that affect all segments of the population. Seniors are simply more visible because of the government-funded aspect of the Medicare program. The Medicare "problem" will be addressed, it is argued, only when the burgeoning costs of healthcare are addressed.

Sources: National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare (2009), Nielson (2009).

12.10   Intended and Unintended Consequences

Regardless of the type of policy implemented or its origin, every policy has both intended and unintended consequences. Intended consequences are obviously those that the policy was meant to bring about. Unintended consequences are circumstances that arise from the implementation of a policy that were unanticipated or anticipated but emerged with different characteristics from those anticipated. Up until the last 20 years, the cancer research policies of the National Institutes of Health, for example, focused almost exclusively on finding a cure for cancer in its various forms. Virtually no resources were devoted to the prevention of cancer or an

understanding of the social and cultural factors that contributed to cancer morbidity. As intended, progress was made in the treatment of known cases of cancer and many lives were ultimately saved or prolonged. At the same time, however, the number of cancer cases within the U.S. population continued to rise and cancer remained the second most common cause of death. Thus, an unintended consequence was the steady rise in the number of cases of cancer due to a lack of aggressive prevention.

An excellent example of the consequences of a policy—both intended and unintended—is embodied by China's one-child policy described in Case Study 12.3.

Case Study 12.3: Unintended Consequences of China's One-Child Policy

The Communist government established in China in the 1950s was faced with the problem of excessive fertility and resulting overpopulation. China's one-child policy was established by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in 1979 to limit communist China's population growth. Although intended as a temporary measure, it remained in place for over 30 years. The policy limited couples to one child, and couples that became pregnant with a subsequent child face fines, pressure to abort, and even forced sterilization. The rule was not universally applied, with citizens living in rural areas and minorities living in China not subject to the law. IUDs, sterilization, and abortion are China's most popular forms of birth control, although the government has begun providing more education and support for alternative birth control methods.

The one-child policy has been successful at reducing population growth in China, with its current population of 1.3 billion reflecting the preclusion of over 300 million births since the policy's enactment. However, the strict enforcement of this policy has had implications for both population characteristics and health status. The one-child policy has led to a preference for male infants, high levels of abortion, child neglect and abandonment, and even female infanticide. The result of such draconian family planning has resulted in the disparate ratio of 114 males for every 100 females among babies from birth through children four years of age. Normally, 105 males are naturally born for every 100 females. Today, there are an estimated 30 million "excess" males in China with as many as 50 million unattached males expected by 2030.

The fact that tens of millions of males do not have partners has led to an epidemic of prostitution in the country. This, in turn, has led to an upsurge in sexually transmitted infections and especially HIV/AIDS. There are predictions that China will have more AIDS cases in a few years than any other region of the world. In 2007, there were reports that in the southwestern Guangxi Autonomous Region of China, officials were forcing pregnant

women without permission to give birth to have abortions and levying steep fines on families violating the law. As a result, riots broke out and some may have been killed, including population control officials.

Now that millions of sibling-less people in China are young adults in or nearing their child-bearing years, a special provision allows millions of couples to have two children legally. If a couple is composed of two people without siblings, then they may have two children of their own, thus preventing too dramatic of a population decrease. Because of the unintended, consequences (and also the relative success of the initiative in reducing population growth) the Chinese government has begun relaxing its restrictions on family size.

Exercise 12.1: Determining Political Orientation
The Pew Research Center, part of the Pew Charitable Trusts, conducts on-going research on political orientation. The data collected by the Center has been used to create a typology of political leanings. They Center continues to collect data by offering an on-line survey that allows individuals to determine where they stand within the typology.

For this exercise, students will access the Center's website (http://www.people-press.org/quiz/political-party-quiz/) in order to complete the survey and determine the category in which they fall with regard to political orientation.

Once students have completed the quiz and been informed of their category, the instructor can compile the results for the class. Note that some students may be reluctant to provide their results and their wishes should be honored in this regard.

Once the results have been compiled the students should be led in discussion of the results. The observed breakdown among the different political orientations will drive much of the discussion but some sample questions include:

- Is there a dominant category or categories of political orientation that characterize the class?
- How does the distribution of students among the various categories compare to the national breakdown and how can the differences be explained?
- What accounts for the differences observed between members of the class when it comes to political orientation?

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Additional Resources

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