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Diversity and fragmentation in the USA....

- The USA is diverse in its landscape, its climate, its economy and its people.
- It has been termed a 'hyphenated society': African-Americans, Irish-Americans, Japanese-Americans, Native-Americans.
- There is the 'conservative south' and the 'liberal' Northeast and west coast.

United States of America?

- The 'American dream' was based upon the ideals of opportunity for all, personal liberty and equality before the law.
- There is also the idea of 'one nation under God', a country which has a sense of common identity based upon religious faith.
- Does US society embody these ideals today?
- Do you have any direct experiences of the USA - i.e. visits?

Diversity and fragmentation in modern US political life

- Break into four groups to look at and discuss the following area (report back to class) ...
- Socio-economic differences. What are they?.
- Religious differences. 'How does religion impact on US life and politics?'
- Ethnic differences. What are the ethnic diversities in the US and do they matter?
- Regional differences, What are regional the differences and do they matter?

Dominant ideology in the USA

- What do we mean by the term ideology?
- Try and come up with a brief definition of the term ideology?
- List all the different ideologies you can think of. How are they different?

Dominant ideology in the US

- “It has been our fate as a nation, not to have ideologies but to be one” – Hofstadter
- What does Hofstadter mean by this?
- Is he correct?
- Make a list of all the possible dominant ideologies in the USA you can think of.
- Try and choose one which is *the* dominant ideology in the USA.

Dominant ideology in the USA...

- “So powerful is the dominant ideology in this country that existing economic and political arrangements frequently appear not merely as the best possible arrangements, but as the only possible ones” – Katznelson and Kesselman
- What is the argument here? How is it a criticism of the USA’s political system?
- Make a list of what you think the “existing economic and political arrangements” are in the USA.

Dominant ideology in the USA.....

- Using that list brainstorm what possible *alternative* “economic and political arrangements” there could be (think of other countries).
- Would it possible for these alternative arrangements to come about? Katznelson and Kesselman are saying that the existing dominant ideology rules out radical changes. Is this true? If so, is it necessarily a bad thing?

Dominant ideology in the USA

- Think back to the possible dominant ideologies in the USA which we have listed.
- Which *should* be the single dominant ideology?
- Work in pairs, each pair to prepare an argument in favour of one of the dominant ideologies being the most important.

Voting behaviour.....

- Re-create the figures in table 2.21 on the 2008 election as a series of bar charts which show the percentages of who supported Kerry or Bush.

Factors explaining voting behaviour...

- Party affiliation. In most elections the winning party gained the highest level of votes from its own identifiers, but don't forget the independents! What was the case in 2008?
- Gender. What is the ‘gender gap?’ Why do women tend to favour the Democrats?
- Race. Most African-Americans have been solid Democratic supporters since the 1960s. The Hispanic vote is evenly split between the Republicans and Democrats.

Factors explaining voting behaviour

- Religion. Protestants have tended to vote Republican whilst Catholics and Jews have tended to vote Democrat. Was this the case in 2008? What does Barone (2002) mean by 'two nations of different faiths'?
- Wealth. What is the 'wealth gap'? How important has it been in recent elections?

Factors explaining voting behaviour...

- Region. The Northeast has become the new heartland of the Democratic party whereas the South is now the Republican party heartland.
- Policies. This can depend on the state of the economy (Clinton's 1992 campaign slogan, 'It's the economy stupid!'). In 2008 Obama also focused upon the economy and spread a message of hope and change with his powerful catch-phrase: 'Yes, we can!'

A further thought.....

- "Recent research has shown that citizens often vote *retrospectively*; or they decide to vote for party A rather than party B by judging an incumbent's past performance – usually in terms of whether the party's period in office has increased the voters real income" – McKay.

Why Obama won

- Produce a plan/ imindmap that explains why Obama won in the 2008 presidential election.

The electoral college

- An indirect method of electing the president, created by the founding fathers.
- 'winner takes all' within the states, with the amount of votes being the same as congressional seats.
- www.270towin.com

Produce a table

- On one side explain the different criticisms of the electoral college system
- On the other side of the table list the strengths of the system.
- Finally, underneath, suggest some alternatives.

Split ticket voting

- This is where voters divide their party loyalties in different elections (voting Republican for President and Democrat for Senate).
- Split ticket voting has been on the rise since the 1950s (compare the elections of 1952 and 1980).
- What has caused this increase in split ticket voting?
- Make a list of all the possible consequences of split-ticket voting for US politics. Then divide these into positive/negative consequences.

Other electoral trends

- What do the following terms mean?
- Coattails effect
- Mid-term
- Support for incumbents

- Why are there fewer competitive elections in House elections?
- What trends do we see in mid term elections?

Abstention in US elections.....

- In preparation for class discussion each student to bring in two articles on abstention in US elections which looks at causes and/or consequences of abstention.
- Explain your articles to the person next to you.
- Do the articles offer different viewpoints on the question of voting abstention?
- Draw up some 'summary points' of the articles to present to the class.

Does voting matter?

"Most observers agree that when citizens fail to participate in the democratic process, the system can lack legitimacy. This in turn can have serious longer-term consequences for the constitutional order" – McKay

Should it matter in a liberal democracy if people decide not to vote?

Voter abstention in the USA

- Brainstorm all the possible reasons why US citizens might choose not to vote.
- Are initiatives such as Rock the Vote (US rock bands encouraging young people to vote) part of the solution? Brainstorm other possible ideas/ initiatives to get more US citizens to vote.

Class debate

- Non-voting in the USA: does it matter?
- One team to argue that it does matter.
- One team to argue that it does not matter.

Exam question

- “Explain the reasons for such low turnouts in US elections”
- Plan your answer individually
- Prepare to feedback your plan to the whole class when we plan the answer collectively.