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Culture Determines Politics — Just Look at This

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What will determine the outcome of the 2008 elections? My interest is less in the politics than in the worldview issues revealed in the political process. As for the politicians — they care about the votes.

Wednesday's edition of *USA Today* contained two blockbuster reports on the link between family structure, fertility, and political decisions. The bottom line of both reports is this — the rates of marriage and childbearing in a congressional district almost invariably reveal the district's politics.

In its front page report, "[Marriage Gap Could Sway Elections](#)," the paper argued that the "wedding band could be crucial in this fall's congressional elections." Why?

"House districts held by Republicans are full of married people. Democratic districts are stacked with people who have never married."

More:

Republicans control 49 of the 50 districts with the highest rates of married people.

Democrats represent all 50 districts that have the highest rates of adults who have never married.

The political tug-of-war is between people who are married and those who have never been.

The "never married" group covers a variety of groups who form the Democratic base: young people, those who marry late in life, single parents, gays, and heterosexuals who live together.

This is an incredibly important angle on today's political context. Marital status is revealed to be one of the most significant factors in the political equation. Married couples and unmarried persons vote in different generalized patterns — a fact also revealed in the 2004 presidential vote.

In the second report, "['Fertility Gap' Helps Explain Political Divide](#)," the paper argues that fertility rates also point to partisan identification.

As reporter Dennis Cauchon sets out the case:

Republican House members overwhelmingly come from districts that have high percentages of married people and lots of children, according to a USA TODAY analysis of 2005 Census Bureau data released last month.

GOP Congress members represent 39.2 million children younger than 18, about 7 million more than Democrats.

Republicans average 7,000 more children per district.

Many Democrats represent areas that have many single people and relatively few children. Democratic districts that have large numbers of children tend to be predominantly Hispanic or, to a lesser extent, African-American.

This "fertility gap" is crucial to understanding the differences between liberals and conservatives, says Arthur Brooks, a professor of public administration at Syracuse University. These childbearing patterns shape divisions over issues such as welfare, education and child tax credits, he says.

More:

Marriage and parenthood define what's different about Democratic and Republican districts even more clearly than race, income, education or geography, USA TODAY's analysis of Census data found.

For example, Republicans represent seven of the 50 districts that have the highest concentrations of blacks. Both parties are well represented among affluent and well-educated districts.

Democrats control only one of the 50 districts with the highest marriage rates.

In the words of Democratic pollster Anna Greenberg, "The biggest gaps in American politics are religion, race and marital status."

G. K. Chesterton once explained that the government often looks to be a more important institution than the family, but that this is a lie. As he argued, looking at the rise of the industrial age: "In those conditions, the family seemed the frailest

thing in the world, and the state the strongest thing in the world. But it is not really so. It is not so, when we take the life of man over large areas of time or space.”

In other words, the family is primary and the state is secondary. When it comes to voting patterns, those who are married and have children vote differently, in general terms, from those who are unmarried and have no children. After all, married persons have something precious to protect, and by their entry into the sacred covenant of marriage they have entered a deeply conservative institution — the institution that conserves trust, fidelity, and mutuality.

To an even greater extent perhaps, those who are married and have children find that their political, social, and cultural horizons are decisively transformed by the experience of parenthood. Virtually by definition, parents have a concern that the culture should be a healthy place for the nurture of children. Beyond this, the horizon of time is longer for parents, who must think in terms of the world their children and grandchildren will inherit.

Once again, culture is revealed to be determinative of politics — not vice versa. From a Christian worldview perspective, there is something very reassuring here. The realities of marriage and rearing children make a decisive difference in our lives. Now, even the politicians must take note of this fact.

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