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American Government: Roots, Context, and Culture



In December 1606, three ships—the *Susan Constant*, the *Godspeed*, and the *Discovery*—set sail from Blackwall, England, to America. These ships held 104 men and boys seeking their fortunes, for the New World was reputed to offer tremendous riches. However, this sorry mix lacked the skills necessary to sustain a colony in the harsh terrain and conditions they were to encounter.

The London Company, a joint stock company that was created to attract much-needed capital to aid British colonization of the New World, financed the colonists. Joint stock companies allowed potential investors to purchase shares of stock in companies anticipating large payoffs for their investments several years down the road. Enthusiasm for this new business model led thousands of English citizens to invest in the London Company. The company was issued the first Virginia Charter in April 1606, legally allowing it to settle a region extending from present-day Cape Fear, North Carolina, to the Long Island Sound. The settlers were under the direction of Sir Thomas Smith, reputed to be one of London's wealthiest financiers, lending further credibility to the venture.

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THE U.S. POPULATION IS CHANGING Above, an artist's rendition of the first English settlement, Jamestown, in what is today Virginia. Below, Manhattan Island, New York City with a view of the Freedom Tower.



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government

The formal vehicle through which policies are made and affairs of state are conducted.

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Although Smith directed the expedition, he chose to remain in England when the ships set sail for the New World. The colonists settled in a swampy area 30 miles from the mouth of the James River, creating Jamestown, Virginia—the first permanent settlement in America—in 1607. Immediately, dismal conditions prevailed. Insufficient numbers of settlers opted to pursue agricultural ventures, and people began to starve. Settlers died of hunger, Indian attacks, lack of proper supplies, and disease.

One major problem with the settlement was a lack of strong leadership. This situation improved with the election of Captain John Smith as the colony's third president. Smith instituted improvements, forcing all colonists to work and attempting to negotiate food trade with local Indians. These efforts succeeded for a short time, but eventually failed, and the harsh winter of 1609–1610 was deemed “The Starving Time.” The conditions reached such dire proportions that a few settlers resorted to cannibalism.

The introduction of tobacco as a cash crop in 1612 improved the economic status of the settlement, but living conditions remained grim. One resident called the area “an unhealthy place, a nest of Rogues, whores, desolute, and rooking persons; a place of intolerable labour, bad usage, and a hard Diet.”¹ While eventually life in the settlement improved, it is important to remember the sacrifices of early colonists and the trials other waves of immigrants faced to be part of the American dream.

In this text, we explore the American political system through a historical lens. This perspective allows us to analyze the ways that ideas and actions of a host of different Americans—from Indians, to colonists, to the Framers of the Constitution and beyond—have affected how our **government**—the formal vehicle through which policies are made and affairs of state are conducted—works. Much has changed since the days of the Jamestown Colony, and the people who live in America today differ greatly from those early settlers. The experiences and values of those settlers, however, continue to influence politics. This chapter explores the political process, placing people at its center.

Roots of American Government: We the People

1.1

Trace the origins of American government.



he Preamble to the U.S. Constitution begins with the phrase “We the People.” But, who are “the People”? In this section, we explore that question by looking at the earliest inhabitants of the Americas, their initial and ongoing interactions with European colonists, and how Americans continually built on the experiences of the past to create a new future.

□ The Earliest Inhabitants of the Americas

By the time the first colonists arrived in what is now known as the United States, indigenous peoples had been living in the area for more than 30,000 years. Most historians and archaeologists believe that these peoples migrated from present-day Russia through the Bering Strait into North America and then dispersed throughout the American continents. Some debate continues, however, about where they first appeared and whether they crossed an ice bridge from Siberia or arrived on boats from across the Pacific.

The indigenous peoples were not a homogeneous group; their cultures, customs, and values varied widely, as did their political systems. The number of these indigenous peoples, who lived in all parts of what is now the United States, is impossible to know for certain. Estimates, however, have ranged as high as 100 million people, a number that quickly diminished as colonists brought with them to the New World a range of diseases to which the indigenous peoples had not been exposed. In addition, warfare with the European settlers as well as within tribes not only killed many American Indians but also disrupted previously established ways of life. Furthermore, the

The Living Constitution

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America. —PREAMBLE

The Preamble to the United States Constitution is little more than a declaration of intent; it carries no legal weight. But, its language has steered American government, politics, institutions, and people for over 200 years. While the language of the Preamble has not changed since the Constitution was written, its meaning in practice has evolved significantly; this is what we mean by a living constitution. For example, the phrases “We the People” and “ourselves” included a much smaller group of citizens in 1787 than they do today. Voting was largely limited to property-owning white males. Indians, slaves, and women could not vote. Today, through the expansion of the right to vote, the phrase “the People” encompasses men and women of all races, ethnic origins, and social and economic statuses. This has changed the demands that Americans place on government, as well as expectations about the role of government in people’s lives.

Many citizens today question how well the U.S. government can deliver on the goals set out in the

Preamble. Few Americans classify the union as “perfect,” and many feel excluded from “Justice” and the “Blessings of Liberty.” Even our leaders do not believe that our domestic situation is particularly tranquil, as evidenced by the continuing debates about the best means to protect America. Still, in appraising how well government functions, it is imperative to look at not only the roots of the political system, but also how it has been reformed over time through amendment, legislation, common usage, and changing social mores.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. How do you think the Framers would respond to the broad interpretation of the Preamble’s intent embraced by many modern political leaders?
2. How have ideas such as promoting “the general Welfare” evolved over time? How has this affected the role and power of American government?

European settlers displaced Indians, repeatedly pushing them westward as they created settlements and, later, colonies.

□ The First Colonists

Colonists journeyed to North America for a variety of reasons. Many wealthy Englishmen and other Europeans left home seeking to enhance their fortunes. With them came a host of laborers who hoped to find their own opportunities for riches. In fact, commerce was the most common initial reason for settlement in North America.

In addition to the English commercial settlements in Virginia, in 1609 the Dutch New Netherlands Company settled along the Hudson and lower Delaware Rivers, calling the area New Netherlands. Later, the Dutch West India Company established trading posts on the Hudson River. Both Fort Orange, in what is now Albany, New York, and New Amsterdam, New York City’s Manhattan Island, were populated not by colonists but by salaried employees. Among those who flocked to New Amsterdam (renamed New York in 1664) were settlers from Finland, Germany, and Sweden. The varied immigrants also included free blacks. This ethnic and racial mix created its own system of cultural inclusiveness that continues to make New York City and its citizenry unique today (see Figure 1.1).

A RELIGIOUS TRADITION TAKES ROOT In 1620, a group of Protestants known as Puritans left Europe aboard the *Mayflower*. Destined for Virginia, they found themselves off course and landed instead in Plymouth, in what is now Massachusetts. These

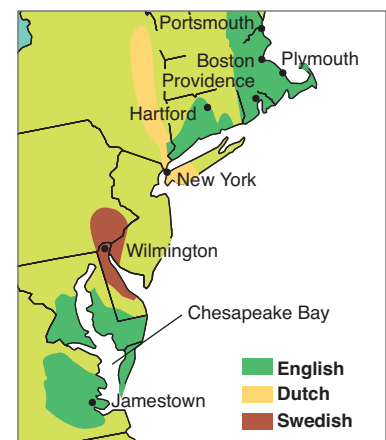


FIGURE 1.1 WHAT DID COLONIAL SETTLEMENT LOOK LIKE BEFORE 1700?

Prior to 1700, pockets of colonial settlement existed along the East Coast of what became the United States, from present-day Virginia to what is now Maine. These settlements were divided among a number of colonial powers, including the English in the Northeast and around the Chesapeake Bay, the Dutch in what is present-day New York, and the Swedes, largely in present-day Delaware.

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monarchy

A form of government in which power is vested in hereditary kings and queens who govern in the interest of all.

totalitarianism

A form of government in which power resides in a leader who rules according to self-interest and without regard for individual rights and liberties.

new settlers differed from those in Virginia and New York, who saw their settlements as commercial ventures. Adhering to Calvinistic beliefs, the Puritans came instead as families bound together by a common belief in the powerful role of religion in their lives. They believed the Old Testament charged them to create “a city on a hill” that would shine as an example of righteousness. To help achieve this goal, they enforced a strict code of authority and obedience, while simultaneously stressing the importance of individualism.

Soon, the ideas at the core of these strict puritanical values faced challenges. In 1631, Roger Williams arrived in Boston, Massachusetts. He preached extreme separation from the Church of England and even questioned the right of Europeans to settle on Indian lands. He believed that the Puritans went too far when they punished settlers who deviated from their strict code of morality, arguing that it was God, not people, who should punish individuals for their moral shortcomings. These “heretical views” prompted local magistrates to banish him from the colony. Williams then helped to establish Providence, a village in present-day Rhode Island that he named for “God’s merciful Providence,” which he believed had allowed his followers a place to settle.

A later challenge to the Puritans’ religious beliefs came from midwife Anne Hutchinson. She began to share her view that the churches established in Massachusetts had lost touch with the Holy Spirit. Many of her followers were women who were attracted to her progressive ideas on the importance of religious tolerance, as well as on the equality and rights of women. Authorities in Massachusetts tried Hutchinson for blasphemy for her views and banished her from the colony. She and her followers eventually settled in Portsmouth, Rhode Island, which became a beacon for those seeking religious toleration and popular—as opposed to religious—sovereignty.

Thomas Hooker, too, soon found himself at odds with the Calvinist Puritans in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Hooker believed they were too narrow-minded; in his view all men should have the right to vote regardless of religious views or property qualifications. He and his supporters thus relocated to Connecticut, where they developed a settlement at Hartford.

Later colonies in the New World were established with religious tolerance in mind. In 1632, King Charles I granted a well-known English Catholic, George Calvert, the first Lord Baltimore, a charter to establish a Catholic colony in the New World. This area eventually became known as Maryland after Mary, the mother of Jesus.

In 1681, King Charles II bestowed upon William Penn a charter giving him sole ownership of a vast area of land just north of Maryland. The king called the land Pennsylvania, or Penn’s Woods. Penn, a Quaker, eventually also purchased the land that is present-day Delaware. In this area, Penn launched what he called “the holy experiment,” attracting other persecuted Europeans, including German Mennonites and Lutherans and French Huguenots. The survival of Penn’s colony is largely attributable to its ethnic and religious diversity.



WHO WAS ANNE HUTCHINSON?

Anne Hutchinson was a midwife and minister who challenged the prevailing thinking of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. She was expelled from the colony and went on to found a new settlement at Portsmouth, Rhode Island.

Types of Government

1.2 Evaluate the different types of governments countries may employ.

Early Greek theorists such as Plato and Aristotle tried to categorize governments by who participates, who governs, and how much authority those who govern enjoy. As Table 1.1 shows, a **monarchy**, the form of government in England from which the colonists fled, is defined by the rule of one hereditary king or queen in the interest of all of his or her subjects. Another form, an aristocracy, is government by the few in the service of the many.

Totalitarianism is a type of government that Aristotle considered rule by “tyranny.” Tyrants rule their countries to benefit themselves. This is the case in North Korea under Kim Jong-Un. In tyrannical or totalitarian systems, the leader exercises unlimited power, and individuals have no personal rights or liberties. Generally, the

TABLE 1.1 HOW DID ARISTOTLE CLASSIFY THE TYPES OF GOVERNMENTS?

Rule by	In Whose Interest	
	Public	Self
One	Monarchy	Tyranny
The Few	Aristocracy	Oligarchy
The Many	Polity	Democracy

SOURCE: Aristotle, *Politics* 3, 7.

rule of these systems tends to be based on a particular religion or orthodoxy, an ideology, or a personality cult organized around a supreme leader.

An **oligarchy** occurs when a few people rule in their own interest. In an oligarchy, wealth, social status, military position, or achievement dictates participation in government. China and Russia are countries that have governments with oligarchic tendencies.

Aristotle called rule of the many for the benefit of all citizens a “polity” and rule of the many to benefit themselves a “democracy.” The term **democracy** derives from the Greek words *demos* (“the people”) and *kratia* (“power” or “authority”) and may apply to any system of government that gives power to the people, either directly, or indirectly through elected representatives. Most governments worldwide are democracies.

❑ Devising a National Government in the American Colonies

American colonists rejected a system with a strong ruler, such as the British monarchy, when they declared their independence. The colonists also feared replicating the landed and titled system of the British aristocracy. They viewed the formation of a republican form of government as far more in keeping with their values.

The Framers wanted to create a political system with the people at the center of power. Due to the vast size of the new nation, **direct democracy** was unworkable. As

oligarchy

A form of government in which the right to participate depends on the possession of wealth, social status, military position, or achievement.

democracy

A system of government that gives power to the people, whether directly or through elected representatives.

direct democracy

A system of government in which members of the polity meet to discuss all policy decisions and then agree to abide by majority rule.



WHAT DOES A MODERN MONARCHY LOOK LIKE?

Here, Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain celebrates her Diamond Jubilee, or sixty years on the throne of Great Britain. She is followed by her presumptive heir, Prince Charles, and his wife, Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall. Behind them are Charles’ sons, Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, accompanied by his wife, Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, and Prince Harry. The British monarch’s powers are largely ceremonial.

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indirect democracy

A system of government that gives citizens the opportunity to vote for representatives who work on their behalf.

republic

A government rooted in the consent of the governed; a representative or indirect democracy.

more and more settlers came to the New World, many town meetings were replaced by a system of **indirect democracy**, in which people vote for representatives who work on their behalf. The ancient Greeks considered representative government undemocratic; they believed that all citizens must have a direct say in their governance. And, in the 1760s, French political philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that true democracy is impossible unless all citizens participate in governmental decision making. Nevertheless, most of the colonies operated according to the principles of indirect democracy.

Many citizens were uncomfortable with the term democracy because it conjured up fears of the people and mob rule. Instead, they preferred the term **republic**, which implied a system of government in which the interests of the people were represented by more educated or wealthier citizens who were responsible to those who elected them. Today, representative democracies are more commonly called republics, and the words democracy and republic often are used interchangeably. Yet, in the United States, we still pledge allegiance to our “republic,” not our democracy.

Functions of American Government

1.3 Explain the functions of American government.

In attempting “to form a more perfect Union,” the Framers, through the Constitution, set forth several key functions of American government, as well as governmental guarantees to the people, which have continuing relevance today. These principal functions of government and the guarantees they provide to citizens permeate our lives. Whether it is your ability to obtain a low-interest student loan, buy a formerly prescription-only drug such as Claritin or Plan B over the counter, or be licensed to drive a car at a particular age, government plays a major role. And, without government-sponsored research, we would not have cell phones, the Internet, four-wheel-drive vehicles, or even Velcro.

□ Establishing Justice

One of the first tasks expected of any government is the creation of a system of laws allowing individuals to abide by a common set of principles. Societies adhering to the rule of law allow for the rational dispensing of justice by acknowledged legal authorities. Thus, the Constitution authorized Congress to create a federal judicial system to dispense justice. The Bill of Rights also entitles people to a trial by jury, to be informed of the charges against them, and to be tried in a courtroom presided over by an impartial judge.

□ Ensuring Domestic Tranquility

As we discuss throughout this text, the role of governments in ensuring domestic tranquility is a subject of much debate and has been since the period of the 1600s and 1700s known as the Enlightenment. In crises, such as the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the federal government, as well as state and local governments, can take extraordinary measures to contain the threat of terrorism from abroad as well as within the United States. The creation of the Department of Homeland Security and the passage of legislation giving the national government nearly unprecedented ability to ferret out potential threats show the degree to which the government takes seriously its charge to preserve domestic tranquility. On a more practical front, local governments have police forces, states have national guards, and the federal government has both the armed services and the ability to call up state militias to quell any threats to order.

□ Providing for the Common Defense

The Framers recognized that a major purpose of government is to provide defense for its citizens against threats of foreign aggression. In fact, in the early years of the republic, many believed that the major function of government was to protect the nation from foreign threats, such as the British invasion of the United States in the War of 1812 and the continued problem of piracy on the high seas. Thus, the Constitution calls for the president to be commander in chief of the armed forces, and Congress has the authority to raise an army. The defense budget continues to be a considerable and often controversial proportion of all federal outlays.

□ Promoting the General Welfare

When the Framers added “promoting the general Welfare” to their list of key governmental functions, they never envisioned how governmental involvement at all levels would expand so tremendously. In fact, promoting the general welfare was more of an ideal than a mandate for the new national government. Over time, though, our notions of what governments should do have expanded along with governmental size. As we discuss throughout this text, however, universal agreement on the scope of what governments should do is absent. For example, part of the debate over health care reform in 2010 centered on whether health care should be a fundamental right guaranteed by the federal government.

□ Securing the Blessings of Liberty

Americans enjoy a wide range of liberties and opportunities to prosper. They are able to criticize the government and to petition it when they disagree with its policies or have a grievance. This freedom to criticize and to petition is perhaps the best way to “secure the Blessings of Liberty.” Though they are on opposite sides of the political spectrum, the Tea Party and Moral Monday movements both demonstrate citizens’ right to protest actions of the government.

political culture

Commonly shared attitudes, beliefs, and core values about how government should operate.

personal liberty

A key characteristic of U.S. democracy. Initially meaning freedom *from* governmental interference, today it includes demands for freedom *to* engage in a variety of practices without governmental interference or discrimination.

American Political Culture and the Basic Tenets of American Democracy

1.4 Describe American political culture, and identify the basic tenets of American democracy.

We can define **political culture** as commonly shared attitudes, beliefs, and core values about how government should operate. American political culture emphasizes the values of liberty and equality; popular consent, majority rule, and popular sovereignty; individualism; and religious faith and freedom.

□ Liberty and Equality

Liberty and equality are the most important characteristics of the American republican form of government. The Framers wrote the Constitution itself to ensure life and liberty. Over the years, however, our concepts of **personal liberty** have changed and evolved from freedom *from* to freedom *to*. The Framers intended Americans to be free from governmental infringements on freedom of religion and speech, from unreasonable searches and seizures, and so on. The addition of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution and its emphasis on due process and on equal protection of the laws, as well as the subsequent passage of laws guaranteeing civil rights and liberties, however, expanded Americans’ concept of liberty to include demands for freedom to work or go to school free from

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political equality

The principle that all citizens are the same in the eyes of the law.

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popular consent

The principle that governments must draw their powers from the consent of the governed.

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majority rule

The central premise of direct democracy in which only policies that collectively garner the support of a majority of voters will be made into law.

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popular sovereignty

The notion that the ultimate authority in society rests with the people.

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natural law

A doctrine that society should be governed by certain ethical principles that are part of nature and, as such, can be understood by reason.

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discrimination. Debates over how much the government should do to guarantee these rights and liberties illustrate the ongoing conflicts in our democratic system.

Another key feature of our democracy is **political equality**, the principle that all citizens are the same in the eyes of the law. Notions of political equality have changed dramatically from the founding era. The U.S. Constitution once regarded a slave as equal to only three-fifths of a white person for purposes of assessing state population. No one then could have imagined that in 2008 and 2012, Barack Obama would be elected president. In both elections, President Obama even won Virginia, which is home to Richmond, the former capital of the Confederate States of America.

□ Popular Consent, Majority Rule, and Popular Sovereignty

Popular consent, the principle that governments must draw their powers from the consent of the governed, is another distinguishing trait of American democracy. Derived from English political philosopher John Locke's social contract theory, the notion of popular consent was central to the Declaration of Independence. Today, a citizen's willingness to vote represents his or her consent to be governed and is thus an essential premise of democracy. Large numbers of nonvoters can threaten the operation and legitimacy of a truly democratic system.

Majority rule, another core political value, means that election of officials and transformation of policies into law will take place only if the majority (normally 50 percent of the total votes cast plus one) of citizens in any political unit support such changes. This principle holds for both voters and their elected representatives. Yet, the American system also stresses preservation of minority rights, as evidenced by myriad protections of individual rights and liberties found in the Bill of Rights.

Popular sovereignty, or the notion that the ultimate authority in society rests with the people, has its basis in **natural law**, a doctrine that certain ethical principles are part of nature and, as such, can be understood by reason. Ultimately, political authority rests with the people, who can create, abolish, or alter their governments. The idea that all governments derive their power from the people is found in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, but the term popular sovereignty did not come into wide use until pre-Civil War debates over slavery. At that time, supporters of popular sovereignty argued that citizens of new states seeking admission to the union should be able to decide whether or not their states would allow slavery within their borders.

□ Individualism

Although many core political tenets focus on protecting the rights of all people, American democracy places heavy importance on the individual, an idea that may be traced back to the Puritans. This emphasis on individualism makes Americans quite different from citizens of other democracies such as Canada, which practices a group approach to governance. Group-focused societies reject the American emphasis on individuals and try to improve the lives of their citizens by making services and rights available on a group or universal basis. In contrast, in the U.S. system, all individuals are deemed rational and fair and endowed, as proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence, "with certain unalienable rights."

□ Religious Faith and Religious Freedom

Religious conflicts in Europe brought many settlers to the New World. Seeking an opportunity to practice their religious faith, men, women, and their families initially settled large sections of the East Coast. However, that faith did not always imply religious tolerance. The clashes that occurred within settlements, as well as colonies, led the Framers to agree universally that notions of religious freedom must form the foundation of the new nation. Religious tolerance, however, has often proved to be more of



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WHY IS RELIGIOUS FREEDOM A TENET OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY?

Many of the first settlers came to the United States to escape religious persecution. While most of these people were Protestants, Catholicism has had a strong tradition in the United States, especially in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic. Here, Pope Francis I holds a general audience in St. Peter's Square, Vatican City.

an ideal than a reality. For example, as the nation waged war in Iraq and Afghanistan and attempted to export democracy, large numbers of Americans considered Islam “a religion that encourages violence” and did not view Islam as having much in common with their own religion.²

The Changing American People

1.5 Analyze the changing characteristics of the American public.

One year after ratification of the U.S. Constitution, fewer than 4 million people lived in the thirteen states. Most of those people shared a single language and a Protestant-Christian heritage, and those who voted were white male property owners. The Constitution mandated that the number of members of the House of Representatives should not exceed one for every 30,000 people and set the size of the first House at sixty-five members.

As the nation grew westward, hundreds of thousands of new immigrants came to America, often in waves, fleeing war or famine or simply in search of a better life. Although the geographic size of the United States has remained stable since the addition of Alaska and Hawaii as states in 1959, the population has grown to well over 300 million inhabitants. As a result of this population growth, most citizens today feel far removed from the national government and their elected representatives (see Figure 1.2).

□ Racial and Ethnic Composition

The American population has changed constantly by the arrival of immigrants from various regions—Western Europeans fleeing religious persecution in the 1600s to early 1700s; slaves brought in chains from Africa in the late 1700s; Chinese laborers arriving to work on the railroads following the Gold Rush in 1848; Irish Catholics escaping the

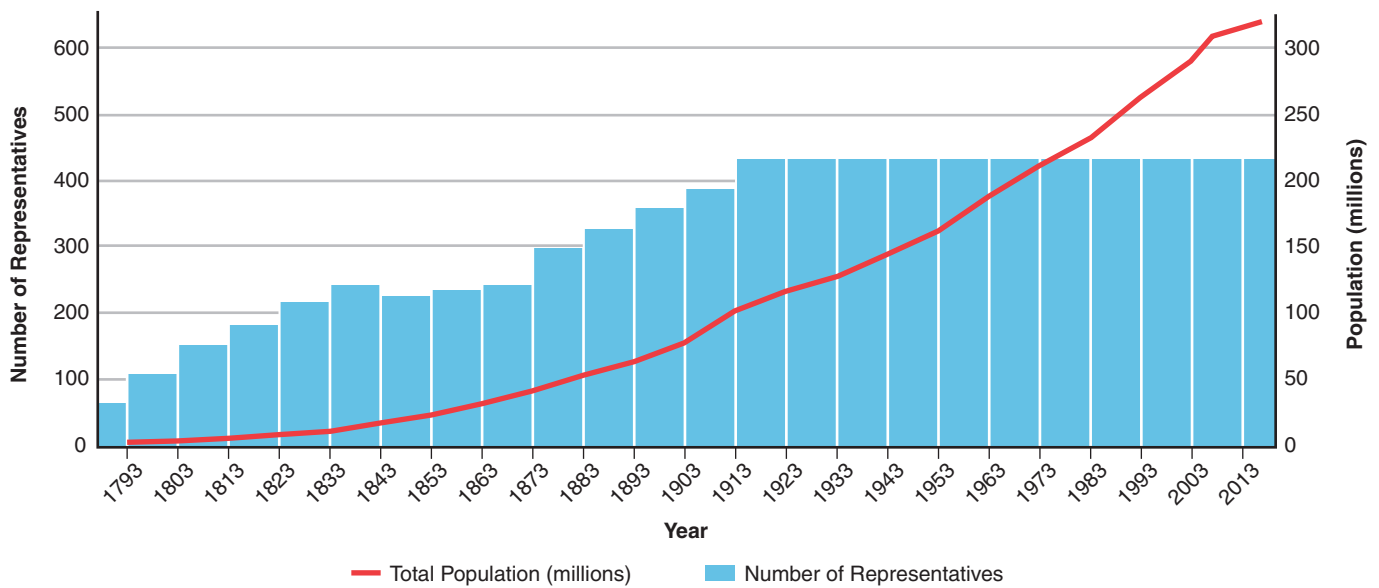


FIGURE 1.2 HOW DOES POPULATION AFFECT REPRESENTATION?

The population of the United States has grown dramatically since the nation’s founding. Larger geographic area, immigration, and living longer have contributed to this trend. The size of the House of Representatives, however, has not kept pace with this expansion.

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau Population Projections, www.census.gov.

potato famine in the 1850s; Northern and Eastern Europeans from the 1880s to 1910s; and, most recently, South and Southeast Asians, Cubans, and Mexicans, among others.

Immigration to the United States peaked in the first decade of the 1900s, when nearly 9 million people, many from Eastern Europe, entered the country. The United States did not see another major wave of immigration until the late 1980s, when nearly 2 million immigrants were admitted in one year. Today, almost 15 percent of Americans can be classified as immigrants, and many of them are Hispanic.* Unlike other groups that have come before, many Hispanics have resisted American cultural assimilation. Language appears to be a particularly difficult and sometimes controversial policy issue. In some sections of the country, Spanish-speaking citizens have necessitated changes in the way governments do business. Many government agencies print official documents in both English and Spanish. This action has raised a debate over whether all Americans should speak English or if the nation should move toward a more bilingual society such as Canada, where English and French are the official languages.

Immigration has led to significant alterations in American racial and ethnic composition. The balance in America has changed dramatically over the past fifty years, with the proportion of Hispanics overtaking African Americans as the second most common racial or ethnic group. The Asian American population, moreover, is now the fastest growing minority group in the United States. This means that the majority of babies born in the United States are now members of a minority group, a fact that will have a significant impact not only on the demographics of the American polity but also on how America “looks.” In a generation, minorities are likely to be the majority in America.

□ Aging

Just as the racial and ethnic composition of the American population is shifting, so, too, is the average age. “For decades, the U.S. was described as a nation of the young because

*In this text, we have made the decision to refer to those of Spanish, Latin American, Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican descent as Hispanic instead of Latino/a. Although this label is not accepted universally by the community it describes, Hispanic is the term used by the U.S. government when reporting federal data. In addition, a 2008 survey sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts found that 36 percent of those who responded preferred the term Hispanic, 21 percent preferred the term Latino, and the remainder had no preference. See www.pewhispanic.org.

Explore Your World

Immigration is a contentious issue in many countries around the world. States struggle to create immigration policies that balance having an open door with protecting their security and political culture. Many states screen their immigrants before allowing them to enter the country, placing them in detention facilities such as those seen below and requiring them to undergo mandatory health and background checks.



Multiple fences and guards limit exit and entry at the Baxter Detention Facility in Port Augusta, Australia. Note, especially, the height of the second fence and the barren terrain.



Female detainees are held in the Willacy Detention Center in Raymondville, Texas, United States. The facility, which was constructed in 2006 by the Department of Homeland Security, can house up to 2,000 suspected illegal immigrants in ten giant tents.



Migrants seeking refuge in Europe are held at this detention center on the island of Lampedusa, located in the Mediterranean Sea between Tunisia and Italy. The center can only be used during the winter months, as warmer weather and calm waters encourages many detainees to attempt to escape and make the trip to the nearby island of Sicily.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. What role does national identity play in the creation of these policies? Do countries have an interest in screening immigrants before they are allowed to enter or remain in a country?
2. How do policies around the world compare to the immigration and detention policies used in the United States, both historically and in modern times?
3. Are screening and detention practices such as those depicted here acceptable in the name of national security? Do they violate basic human rights?

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the number of persons under the age of twenty greatly outnumber[ed] those sixty-five and older,” but this is no longer the case.³ Because of changes in patterns of fertility, life expectancy, and immigration, the nation’s age profile has altered drastically. At the founding of the United States, the average life expectancy was thirty-five years; today, it is nearly eighty years.

An aging population places a host of costly demands on the government. In 2008, the first of the Baby Boomers (the 76.8 million people who were born between 1946 and 1964) reached age sixty-two and qualified for Social Security benefits; in 2011, they reached sixty-five and qualified for Medicare.⁴ An aging America also imposes a great financial burden on working Americans, whose proportion in the population is rapidly declining.

These dramatic changes could potentially pit younger people against older people and result in dramatic cuts in benefits to the elderly and increased taxes for younger workers. Moreover, the elderly often vote against programs favored by younger voters, such as money for new schools and other expenditures they no longer view as significant. At the same time, younger voters are less likely to support issues important to seniors, such as Medicare, Social Security, and prescription drug reform.

□ Religious Beliefs

As we have discussed throughout this chapter, many of the first settlers came to America to pursue their religious beliefs free from governmental intervention. Although these early immigrants were members of a number of different churches, all identified with Christian sects. Moreover, they viewed the Indians’ belief systems, which included multiple gods, to be savage and unholy. Their Christian values still permeate American social and political systems.

While many people still view the United States as a Christian nation, a great number of religious groups—including Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims—have established roots in the country. With this growth have come different political and social demands. For example, evangelical Christians regularly request school boards adopt textbooks with particular viewpoints. Likewise, American Jews continually work to ensure that America’s policies in the Middle East favor Israel, while Muslims demand more support for a Palestinian state.

□ Regional Growth and Expansion

Regional sectionalism emerged almost immediately in the United States. Settlers from the Virginia colony southward largely focused on commerce. Those seeking various forms of religious freedom populated many of the settlements to the North. That search for religious freedom also came with puritanical values, so that New England evolved differently from the South in many aspects of culture.

Sectional differences continued to emerge as the United States developed into a major industrial nation and waves of immigrants with various religious traditions and customs entered the country, often settling in areas where other immigrants from their homeland already lived. For example, thousands of Scandinavians flocked to Minnesota, and many Irish settled in the urban centers of the Northeast, as did many Italians and Jews. All brought with them unique views about numerous issues and varying demands on government, as well as different ideas about the role of government. Subsequent generations have often handed down these political views, and many regional differences continue to affect public opinion today.

One of the most long-standing and dramatic regional differences in the United States is that between the South and the North. During the Constitutional Convention, most Southerners staunchly advocated a weak national government. The Civil War was later fought in part because of basic philosophical differences about government as well as slavery, which many Northerners opposed. As we know from modern political polling, the South continues to lag behind the rest of the nation in supporting civil rights, while still favoring return of power to the states and downsizing the national government.

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The West, too, has always appeared unique compared with the rest of the United States. Populated first by those seeking free land and then by many chasing dreams of gold, the American West has often been characterized as “wild.” Its population today is a study in contrasts. Some people have moved there to avoid city life and have an anti-government bias. Other Westerners are interested in water rights and seek governmental solutions to their problems.

Significant differences in attitude also arise in rural versus urban areas. Those in rural areas are much more conservative than those in large cities.⁵ One need only look at a map of the vote distribution in recent presidential elections to see stark differences in candidate appeal. Democratic candidates carried almost every large city in America; Republicans carried most rural voters as well as most of America’s heartland.⁶ Republicans won the South, the West, and much of the Midwest; Democrats carried the Northeast and West Coast.

□ Family and Family Size

In the past, familial gender roles were clearly defined. Women did housework and men worked in the fields. Large families were imperative; children were a source of cheap farm labor. Industrialization and knowledge of birth control methods, however, began to put a dent in the size of American families by the early 1900s. No longer needing children to work for survival of the household, couples began to limit family size.

In 1949, 49 percent of those polled thought that four or more children constituted the “ideal” family size; today, most Americans believe that no children to two children is “best.” In 1940, nine of ten households were traditional family households. Today, just 69 percent of children under eighteen live with both parents. In fact, over 25 percent of children under eighteen live with just one of their parents; the majority of those with their mother. Moreover, nearly one-third of all households consist of a single person, a trend that reflects, in part, the aging American population and declining marriage rate.⁸

Even the institution of marriage has undergone tremendous change. An increasing number of states have broadened the definition of marriage to include same-sex couples. In 2014, thirty-six states plus the District of Columbia (many of them by federal



WHAT DOES THE TYPICAL AMERICAN FAMILY LOOK LIKE?

As the demographics of American society change over time, the composition of American families has become increasingly heterogeneous. Here, the characters in the sitcom *Modern Family* exemplify the age, ethnic, and sexual diversity in families today, making the “typical American family” difficult to describe.

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political ideology

The coherent set of values and beliefs about the purpose and scope of government held by groups and individuals.

judicial decree) allowed same-sex couples to marry. Litigation over the issue of marriage is ongoing in many states.

These changes in composition of households, lower birthrates, marriage, and the prevalence of single-parent families affect the kinds of demands people place on government. Single-parent families, for example, may be more likely to support government-subsidized day care or after-school programs.

Political Ideology

1.6 Assess the role of political ideology in shaping American politics.

On September 11, 2001, nineteen terrorists, all of Middle Eastern origin and professing to be devout Muslims engaged in a “holy war” against the United States, hijacked four airplanes and eventually killed over 3,000 people. The terrorists’ self-described holy war, or *jihad*, targeted Americans, whom they considered infidels. Earlier, in 1995, a powerful bomb exploded outside the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, killing nearly 170 people, including many children. This terrorist attack was launched not by those associated with radical Islam but by those with an American anti-government brand of neo-Nazism. Its proponents hold the U.S. government in contempt and profess a hatred of Jews and others they believe are “inferior” ethnic groups and races.

These are but two extreme examples of the powerful role of **political ideology**—the coherent set of values and beliefs people hold about the purpose and scope of government—in the actions of individuals.⁹ Ideologies are sets or systems of beliefs that shape the thinking of individuals and how they view the world, especially in regard to issues of “race, nationality, the role and function of government, the relations between men and women, human responsibility for the natural environment, and many other matters.”¹⁰ Observers increasingly have recognized these beliefs as a potent political force. Isaiah Berlin, a noted historian and philosopher, stated that two factors above all others shaped human history in the twentieth century: “one is science and technology; the other is ideological battles—totalitarian tyrannies of both right and left and the explosions of nationalism, racism, and religious bigotry that the most perceptive social thinkers of the nineteenth century failed to predict.”¹¹

It is easier to understand how ideas turn into action when we examine the four functions political scientists attribute to ideologies. These include:

1. *Explanation.* Ideologies can offer reasons why social and political conditions are the way they are, especially in time of crisis. Knowing that Kim Jong-Un rules North Korea as a totalitarian society helps explain, at least in part, why other countries remain concerned by his continued threats to use nuclear force.
2. *Evaluation.* Ideologies can provide standards for evaluating social conditions and political institutions and events. Americans’ belief in the importance of individual ability and personal responsibility helps explain the opposition of some people to the Obama administration’s health care reforms.
3. *Orientation.* Much like a compass, ideologies provide individuals with an orientation toward issues and a position within the world. When many African American women, Oprah Winfrey among them, decided to campaign for Barack Obama and not Hillary Rodham Clinton in the 2008 Democratic presidential primary, their identity as African Americans may have trumped their identity as women.
4. *Political Program.* Ideologies help people make political choices and guide their political actions. Thus, since the Republican Party is identified with a steadfast opposition to abortion, anyone with strong pro-life views would find the party’s stance on this issue a helpful guide in voting.

□ Finding Your Political Ideology

The four functions of ideology discussed above clearly have real-world implications. Religious, philosophical, and cultural beliefs can become cohesive ideologies that create natural groups within society and lead to political conflict. In America, we often hear about conservative, liberal, and moderate political ideologies (see Figure 1.3).

CONSERVATIVES According to William Safire’s *New Political Dictionary*, a **conservative** “is a defender of the status quo who, when change becomes necessary in tested institutions or practices, prefers that it come slowly, and in moderation.”¹² Conservatives tend to believe that limited government is best, especially in terms of regulating the economy. Conservatives favor local and state action over federal intervention, and they emphasize fiscal responsibility, most notably in the form of balanced budgets. Conservatives are also likely to believe that the private sector is better equipped than the government to address domestic problems such as homelessness, poverty, and discrimination.

Since the 1970s, a growing number of **social conservative** voters (many with religious ties to the evangelical or Religious Right) increasingly have affected politics and policies in the United States. Social conservatives believe that moral decay must be stemmed and that government should support and further traditional moral teachings. These voters favor government intervention to regulate sexual and social behavior and have mounted effective efforts to restrict contraceptives, abortion, and same-sex marriage. While a majority of social conservatives are evangelical Protestants, Mormons, and Roman Catholics, some Jews and many Muslims are also social conservatives. Others are not affiliated with a traditional religion.

LIBERALS A **liberal** is one who seeks to use the government to change the political, economic, and social status quo and foster the development of equality and the well-being of individuals.¹³ The meaning of the word “liberal” has changed over time, but in the modern United States, liberals generally value equality over other aspects of shared political culture. They support well-funded government social welfare programs that seek to protect individuals from economic disadvantages or to correct past injustices, and they generally oppose government efforts to regulate private behavior or infringe on civil rights and liberties.

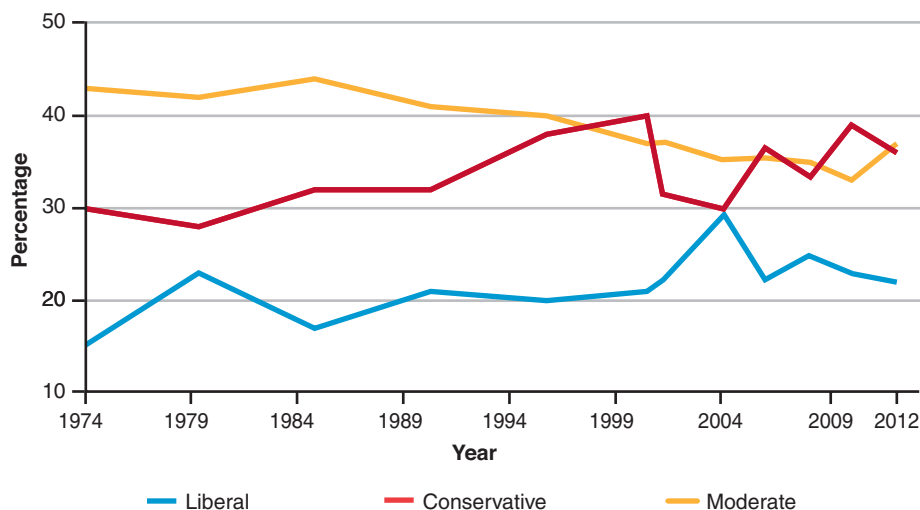


FIGURE 1.3 WHAT ARE AMERICANS’ POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES?

Americans’ political ideologies have shifted dramatically over time. What was once a largely moderate nation has today become much more closely divided between liberals, conservatives, and moderates. These divisions can make governing particularly challenging and lead to gridlock in our political institutions.

SOURCE: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research and Pew Research Center 2012 Values Survey.

conservative

One who favors limited government intervention, particularly in economic affairs.

social conservative

One who believes that the government should support and further traditional moral teachings.

liberal

One who favors greater government intervention, particularly in economic affairs and in the provision of social services.

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Take a Closer Look

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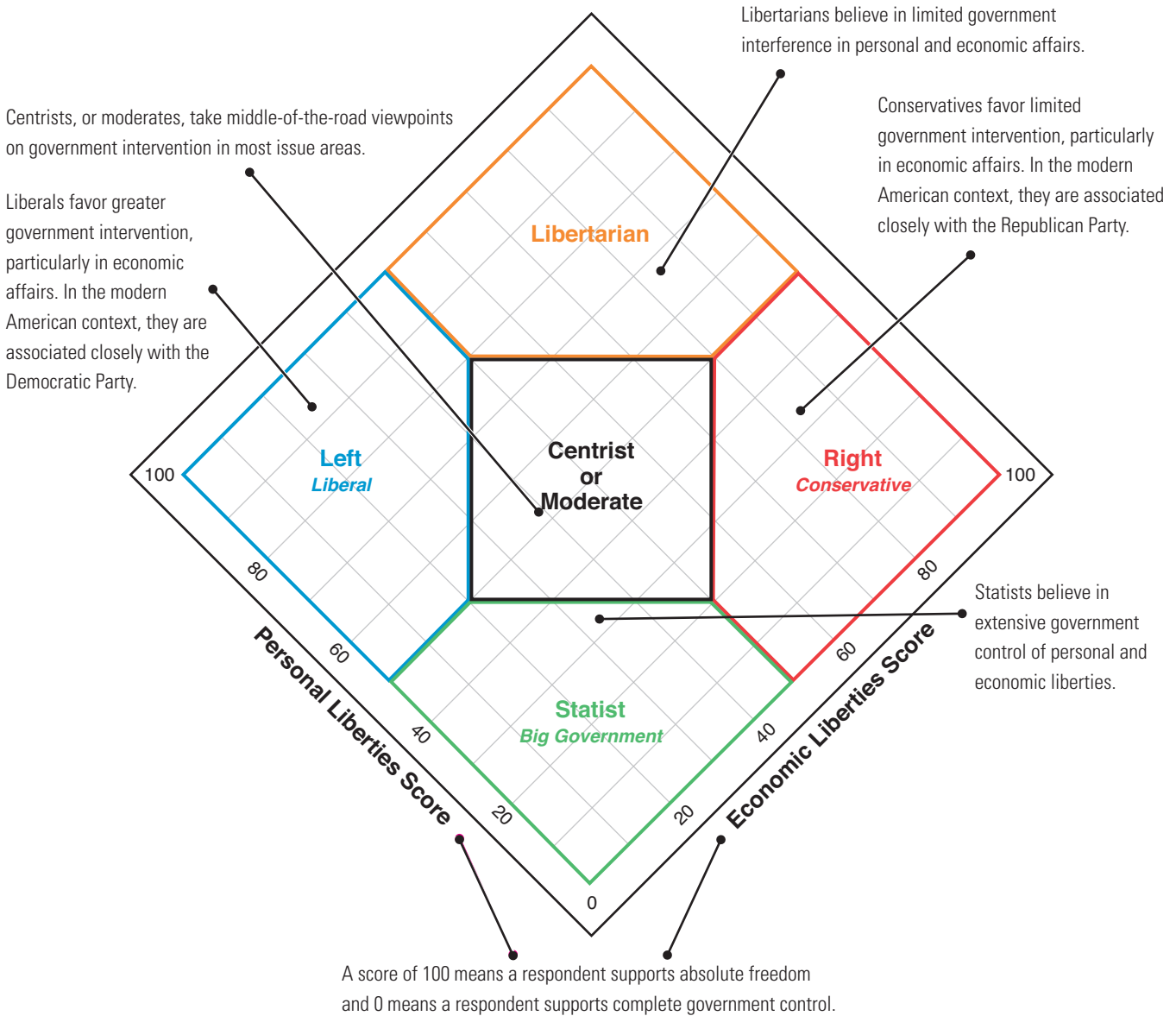
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The Nolan Chart, created by Libertarian Party leader David Nolan, is a political ideology chart that helps to classify citizens' political beliefs on two key dimensions—economic and personal freedom. Out of the intersection of citizens' views toward government intervention in each of these areas, Nolan identified five key political ideologies: left (liberal), centrist or moderate, right (conservative), libertarian, and statist.



SOURCE: Advocates for Self Government.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. How does reducing political ideology to two dimensions—economic and personal freedom—help to simplify our understandings of politics? What information does it leave out?
2. What famous (or notorious) political leaders can you think of to exemplify each of these political ideologies?
3. What is your political ideology? Take an online ideology quiz such as the “World’s Smallest Political Quiz” to determine where you stand.

MODERATES In general, a **moderate** takes a relatively centrist view on most political issues. Aristotle actually favored moderate politics, believing that domination in the center was better than any extremes, whether dealing with issues of wealth, poverty, or the role of government. Approximately 35 percent of the population today consider themselves political moderates.

❑ Problems with Ideological Labels

In a perfect world, liberals would be liberal and conservatives would be conservative. Studies reveal, however, that many people who call themselves conservative actually take fairly liberal positions on many policy issues. In fact, anywhere from 20 percent to 60 percent of people will hold a traditionally conservative view on one issue and a traditionally liberal view on another.¹⁴ People who take conservative stances against “big government,” for example, often support increases in spending for the elderly, education, or health care. It is also not unusual to encounter a person who could be considered a liberal on social issues such as abortion and civil rights but a conservative on economic or pocketbook issues.

Some critics also charge that a simple left-to-right continuum cannot capture the full complexity of most citizens’ political ideologies. They suggest that the ideologies of most are better represented by a spectrum measuring individuals’ viewpoints on government interference in both economic and personal liberties. This spectrum includes not only liberal, conservative, and moderate ideologies but also other perspectives such as **statist** (pro-governmental interference) and **libertarian** (anti-governmental interference).

moderate

A person who takes a relatively centrist or middle-of-the-road view on most political issues.

statist

One who believes in extensive government control of personal and economic liberties.

libertarian

One who believes in limited government interference in personal and economic liberties.

politics

The study of who gets what, when, and how—or how policy decisions are made.

American dream

An American ideal of a happy, successful life, which often includes wealth, a house, a better life for one’s children, and, for some, the opportunity to grow up to be president.

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Toward Reform: People and Politics

1.7 Characterize changes in Americans’ attitudes toward and expectations of government.

As the American population has changed over time, so has the American political process. **Politics** is the study of who gets what, when, and how—the process by which policy decisions are made. The evolving nature of the American citizenry deeply affects this process. Competing demands often lead to political struggles, which create winners and losers within the system. A loser today, however, may be a winner tomorrow in the ever-changing world of politics. The political ideologies of those in control of Congress, the executive and state houses also have a huge impact on who gets what, when, and how.

Nevertheless, American political culture continues to bind citizens together. Many Americans also share the common goal of achieving the **American dream**—an American ideal of a happy and successful life, which often includes wealth, a house, a better life for one’s children, and, for some, the opportunity to grow up to be president. A recent poll revealed that 60 percent of Americans believe they are working towards the American dream, despite weak economic conditions.¹⁵

❑ Redefining Our Expectations

In roughly the first 150 years of our nation’s history, the federal government had few responsibilities, and citizens had few expectations of it beyond national defense, printing money, and collecting tariffs and taxes. The state governments were generally far more powerful than the federal government in matters affecting the everyday lives of Americans.

As the nation and its economy grew in size and complexity, the federal government took on more responsibilities, such as regulating some businesses, providing

poverty relief, and inspecting food. With these new roles come greater demands on government.

Today, many Americans lack faith in the country's institutions (see Figure 1.4). And, a 2012 poll revealed that more than seven in ten Americans think the country is headed in the wrong direction.¹⁶ These concerns make it even easier for citizens to blame the government for all kinds of woes—personal as well as societal—or to fail to credit it for those things it does well. Many Americans, for example, enjoy a remarkably high standard of living, and much of it is due to governmental programs and protections.

Even in the short time between when you get up in the morning and when you leave for classes or work, the government—its rulings or regulations—pervades your life. National or state governments, for example, set the standards for whether you wake up on Eastern, Central, Mountain, or Pacific time. The national government regulates the airwaves and licenses the radio and TV broadcasts you might listen to as you eat and get dressed. States, too, regulate and tax telecommunications. Whether the water you use to brush your teeth contains fluoride is a state or local governmental issue. The federal Food and Drug Administration inspects your breakfast meat and sets standards for the advertising on your cereal box, orange juice bottle, and other food packaging.

The current frustration and dissatisfaction with politics and government may be just another phase, as the changing American body politic seeks to redefine its ideas about and expectations of government and how to reform it. This process is likely to define politics well into the future, but the individualistic nature of the American system will have long-lasting effects on how to accomplish that redefinition. Many Americans say they want less government, but as they get older, they don't want less Social Security. They want lower taxes and better roads, but they don't want to pay road tolls. They want better education for their children, but lower expenditures on schools. They want greater security at airports, but low fares and quick boarding. Some clearly want less for others but not themselves, a demand that puts politicians in the position of nearly always disappointing some voters.

In this text, we present you with the tools needed to understand how our political system has evolved and to understand changes yet to come. Approaching the study of American government and politics with an open mind should help you become a better citizen. We hope that you learn to ask questions, to comprehend how various issues have come to be important, and to see why a particular law was enacted, how it was

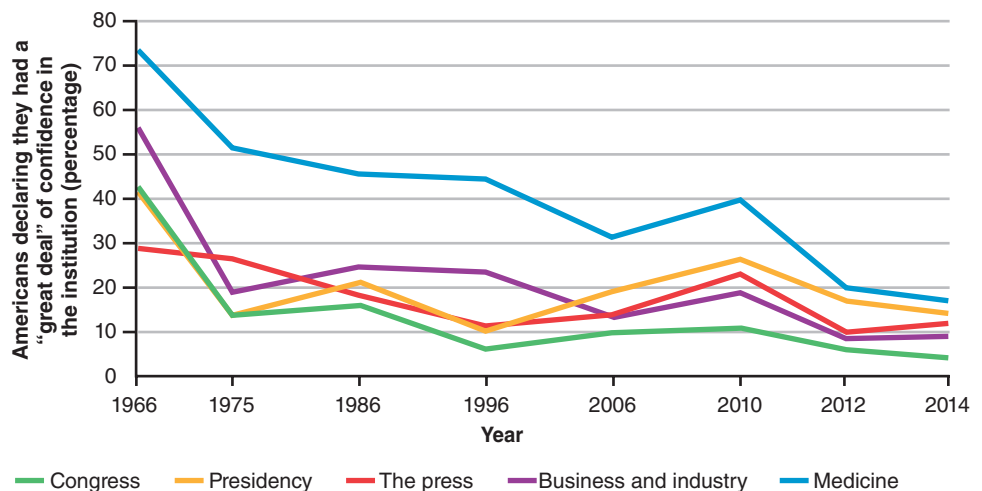


FIGURE 1.4 DO AMERICANS HAVE CONFIDENCE IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS?

The line graph below shows the percentages of Americans declaring they had a “great deal” of confidence in all political institutions, as well as Americans’ record low levels of trust in institutions such as Congress and the press.

SOURCE: *Newsweek* (January 8, 1996):32; *Public Perspective 8* (February/March 1994): 4; Lexis-Nexis RPOLL; *Washington Post* (June 13, 2006): A2; www.pollingreport.com; www.gallup.com/poll/1597/confidence-institutions.aspx.



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WHAT IS THE ROLE OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT?

The most important responsibility of American government is to protect citizens. Thus, despite their disillusionment with the government, citizens in a time of need often turn to political leaders for support. Here, President Barack Obama comforts victims of Superstorm Sandy in New Jersey, just days before the 2012 election.

implemented, and if it needs reform. We further hope that you will learn not to accept at face value everything you see on the TV news, hear on the radio, or read in the newspaper and on the Internet, especially in the blogosphere. Work to understand your government, and use your vote and other forms of participation to help ensure that your government works for you.

We recognize that the discourse of politics has changed dramatically even in the past few years: it is easier than ever before to become informed about the political process and to get involved in campaigns and elections. We also believe that a thorough understanding of the workings of government will allow you to question and think about the political system—the good parts and the bad—and decide for yourself whether possible changes and reforms are advantageous or disadvantageous. Equipped with such an understanding, you likely will become a better informed and more active participant in the political process.

Review the Chapter

Roots of American Government: We the People

1.1 Trace the origins of American government, p. 4.

American government is rooted in the cultures and experiences of early European colonists as well as interactions with the indigenous populations of the New World. The first colonists sought wealth. Later pilgrims came for religious freedom. The colonies set up systems of government that differed widely in terms of form, role, and function. As they developed, they sought more independence from the British monarchy.

Types of Government

1.2 Evaluate the different types of governments countries may employ, p. 6.

Aristotle classifies the types of governments according to who rules, and in whose interest. Types of governments include monarchy, totalitarianism, aristocracy, oligarchy, polity, and democracy. Fears about mob rule and the vast size of the United States led the Framers to create a republican democracy that relies on the role of representatives to filter citizens' viewpoints.

Functions of American Government

1.3 Explain the functions of American government, p. 8.

The functions of American government include establishing justice, ensuring domestic tranquility, providing for the common defense, promoting the general welfare, and securing the blessings of liberty.

American Political Culture and the Basic Tenets of American Democracy

1.4 Describe American political culture, and identify the basic tenets of American democracy, p. 9.

Political culture is a group's commonly shared attitudes, beliefs, and core values about how government should operate. Key tenets of Americans' shared political culture are liberty and equality; popular consent, majority rule and popular sovereignty; individualism; and religious freedom.

The Changing American People

1.5 Analyze the changing characteristics of the American public, p. 11.

Several characteristics of the American electorate can help us understand how the system continues to evolve and change. Among these are changes in size and population, racial and ethnic composition, age, religious beliefs, regional growth and expansion, and family and family size.

Political Ideology

1.6 Assess the role of political ideology in shaping American politics, p. 16.

Ideologies, the belief systems that shape the thinking of individuals and how they view the world, affect people's ideas about government. The major categories of political ideology in America are conservative, liberal, and moderate.

Toward Reform: People and Politics

1.7 Characterize changes in Americans' attitudes toward and expectations of government, p. 19.

Shifts in population have created controversy in the American electorate throughout America's history. Americans have high and often unrealistic expectations of government, yet often fail to appreciate how much their government actually does for them. Americans' failing trust in institutions also explains some of the apathy among the American electorate.

Learn the Terms



Study and **Review** the **Flashcards**

American dream, p. 19
conservative, p. 17
democracy, p. 7

direct democracy, p. 7
government, p. 4
indirect democracy, p. 8

liberal, p. 17
libertarian, p. 19
majority rule, p. 10

moderate, p. 19
monarchy, p. 6
natural law, p. 10
oligarchy, p. 7
personal liberty, p. 9

political culture, p. 9
political equality, p. 10
political ideology, p. 16
politics, p. 19
popular consent, p. 10

popular sovereignty, p. 10
republic, p. 8
social conservative, p. 17
statist, p. 19
totalitarianism, p. 6

Test Yourself



Study and **Review** the **Practice Tests**

1. Before the Pilgrims traveled to the New World on the *Mayflower*, the most common reason for settlement in North America was
 - a. religious freedom.
 - b. fatal diseases in their homeland.
 - c. commerce.
 - d. independence from the crown.
 - e. to create “a city on a hill.”
2. Which of the following settlements was not founded for primarily religious reasons?
 - a. Connecticut
 - b. Portsmouth
 - c. Jamestown
 - d. Massachusetts Bay
 - e. Boston
3. As the population of the New World increased, the town meeting form of government was gradually replaced with an indirect democratic system colonists called a(n)
 - a. direct democracy.
 - b. monarchy.
 - c. oligarchy.
 - d. republic.
 - e. democracy.
4. Which of the following is NOT a function of American government listed in the Preamble?
 - a. Establish justice
 - b. Promote equality
 - c. Provide for the common defense
 - d. Secure the blessings of liberty
 - e. Ensure domestic tranquility
5. Which American ideal, central to the Declaration of Independence, was derived from the social contract theory?
 - a. Majority rule
 - b. Popular consent
 - c. Religious freedom
 - d. Natural law
 - e. Political equality
6. Which of these is a major contributor to American population growth since 1940?
 - a. Longer life expectancy
 - b. Western European immigration
 - c. Industrial growth
 - d. New states added to the United States
 - e. Higher birthrates
7. Which of the following statements best describes recent demographic trends in the United States?
 - a. Population has grown largely in Midwestern and Mid-Atlantic states.
 - b. African Americans have consistently composed the second largest minority group.
 - c. Couples favor having more children than in the mid-twentieth century.
 - d. The average age of Americans has increased.
 - e. More than 50 percent of American children today live with only one parent.
8. According to political scientists, which of the following is NOT considered a function of political ideologies?
 - a. Political program
 - b. Evaluation
 - c. Orientation
 - d. Explanation
 - e. Partisanship
9. Which political ideology is most associated with a limited role of government in personal and economic affairs?
 - a. Liberal
 - b. Conservative
 - c. Moderate
 - d. Libertarian
 - e. Statist
10. For most Americans, the definition of achieving the American Dream includes obtaining
 - a. incredible wealth.
 - b. a job in business.
 - c. a job in government.
 - d. a happy and successful life.
 - e. children.