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American Government and Politics Today

2016–2017 Brief Edition

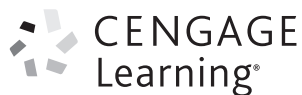
American Government and Politics Today

2016–2017 Brief Edition

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American Government and Politics Today

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Preface

In the 2014 midterm elections, the Republicans maintained their majority in the House and gained a majority in the Senate. Divided government was to continue for at least two more years. Sometimes, bitter partisan politics ensued. As a result, very little legislation was passed and signed into law by President Barack Obama. Not too many months after the November elections, the presidential primary campaigns began. The Republicans saw over a dozen contenders battle each other in debates, in TV interviews, and during other various media events. The Democrats appeared to have a shoo-in candidate in Hillary Clinton. But various scandals surfaced involving how she treated and stored government e-mails during her tenure as Obama's secretary of state. In some Democrats' minds, she was perhaps not the right candidate for their party.

Foreign policy was also a major theme leading up to the 2016 primaries. What should the United States do about the increasing violence in the Middle East? Should American military personnel become involved yet again? Nuclear proliferation was a key topic, too. A bitter dispute erupted over a six-nation deal with Iran concerning its production of bomb-grade nuclear materials.

One thing was and continues to be certain: American politics today will never be without tension, drama, and conflict. Throughout this Brief Edition of *American Government and Politics Today*, you will read about how our government has responded to past issues and how it is responding to current conflicts.

This edition is basically a condensed and updated version of the larger editions of *American Government and Politics Today*. It has been created specifically for those of you who want a text that presents the fundamental components of the American political system while retaining the quality and readability of the larger editions. You will find that this edition is up to date in every respect. The text, figures, tables, and all pedagogical features reflect the latest available data. We have also included coverage of all recently issued laws, regulations, and court decisions that have—or will have—a significant impact on American society and our political system.

Like the larger editions, this volume places a major emphasis on political participation and involvement. This brief, fourteen-chapter text has been heralded by reviewers as the best essentials text for its affordability, conciseness, clarity, and readability.

New to this Edition

Of course, every chapter has been thoroughly revised and updated. But there is more.

New Full-Color Graphics

A major addition is the **eight-page, full-color insert** near the beginning of the book. The insert contains a variety of charts that are referred to in the text:

- **Figure 1: Projected Changes in U.S. Ethnic Distribution**
- **Figure 2: Employment Rates for U.S. Persons Aged 25–54, 1977–2015**
- **Figure 3: Federal Grants to State and Local Governments**
- **Figure 4: Unfunded Mandates**
- **Figure 5: Median Household Income by Ethnicity**
- **Figure 6: Cents Women Earn for Every Dollar Men Earn**
- **Figure 7: The Most Successful Third-Party Presidential Campaigns since 1864**
- **Figure 8: Policies of Selected American Third Parties since 1864**
- **Figure 9: Barack Obama’s Predicted Margin of Victory over Mitt Romney in the 2012 Presidential Elections**
- **Figure 10: Examples of Districting (Gerrymandering—formerly in Chapter 9)**
- **Figure 11: Local, State, and Federal Employment as a Percentage of the U.S. Population**
- **Figure 12: Boundaries of Federal District Courts and U.S. Courts of Appeals**

Also, there are two new full-color pie charts inside the back cover: Federal Government Spending and Federal Government Revenues.

A New Boxed Mini-Feature—InterAct

Every chapter has a new boxed mini-feature entitled **InterAct**. The feature directs students to go to selected Web sites, but unlike boxes or mini-features in previous editions, it encourages students to take one or more actions when they get there.

End-of-Chapter Quizzes

At the request of reviewers, the quiz at the end of each chapter has doubled in size and is more rigorous.

A Key to High Student Interest— Topical Debate-Style Features

Every *At Issue* feature focuses on a controversial topic and concludes with a *For Critical Analysis* question to invite critical thinking. All of these features are new:

- Chapter 1: **Does Our Tax System Promote Excessive Inequality?**
- Chapter 2: **Should the United States Be a Christian Nation?**
- Chapter 3: **Should Recreational Marijuana Be Legal?**

- Chapter 3: **Should States Continue to Raise the Minimum Wage?**
- Chapter 4: **When Can Wearing Religious Garb Be Restricted?**
- Chapter 5: **Should Obama Set Immigration Policy through Executive Action?**
- Chapter 8: **Do Family Dynasties Have Any Place in American Politics?**
- Chapter 10: **Should We Elect the President by Popular Vote?**
- Chapter 10: **Should the President Include Congress in Negotiations?**
- Chapter 11: **Do the Benefits of NSA Snooping Outweigh the Harms?**
- Chapter 13: **Does Entitlement Spending Corrupt Us?**
- Chapter 14: **How Dangerous Is Putin's Russia?**

Making A Difference Features

At the end of every chapter, a feature entitled *Making a Difference* enhances our emphasis on student participation. These features provide newly updated, useful information for active citizenship. We offer tips on how to find information on issues, how to learn about your elected representatives, how to join and participate in advocacy organizations, how to protect your civil rights and liberties, and more.

Other Special Pedagogical Aids

The 2016–2017 Brief Edition of *American Government and Politics Today* retains many of the pedagogical aids and features of the larger editions, including the following:

- **Learning Outcomes**—A section-by-section focus on crucial questions that students should learn to address.
- **Key Terms**—Important terms that are boldfaced and defined in the text when they are first used. These terms are defined in the text margins, listed at the end of the chapter with the page numbers on which they appear, and included in the Glossary at the back of the book.
- **InterAct**—A mini-feature that directs students to selected Web sites and encourages them to take one or more actions when they get there.
- **Chapter Summary**—A point-by-point summary of the chapter text.
- **Test Yourself**—A quiz and an essay question at the very end of each chapter.

Appendices

The Brief Edition of *American Government and Politics Today* includes, as appendices, both the Declaration of Independence (Appendix A) and the U.S. Constitution (Appendix B). The text of the Constitution has been annotated to help you understand the meaning and significance of the various provisions in this important document. Appendix C presents *Federalist Papers* No. 10 and No. 51. These selections are also annotated to help you grasp their importance in understanding the American philosophy of government.

Supplements

The **Instructor Companion Web site** (ISBN: 9781305504677) is an all-in-one multimedia online resource for class preparation, presentation, and testing. Accessible through Cengage.com/login with your faculty account, you will find the following available for download:

- Book-specific Microsoft® **Powerpoint® slides** of lecture outlines, as well as photos, figures, and tables from the text. These presentations make it easy for you to assemble lectures for your course.
- Cognero **Test Bank** (ISBN: 9781305502420): Multiple-choice and essay questions, along with their answers and text references, that are compatible with multiple Learning Management Systems.
- An **Instructor's Manual** that includes learning outcomes, chapter outlines, discussion questions, class activities and project suggestions, tips on integrating media into your class, suggested readings and Web resources, and a section specially designed to help teaching assistants and adjunct professors.

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Any errors, of course, remain our own. We welcome comments from instructors and students alike. Suggestions that we received on previous editions have helped us to improve this text and to adapt it to the changing needs of instructors and students.

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Schmidt has published 12 books and more than 120 journal articles. He is also the recipient of numerous prestigious teaching prizes, including the Amoco Award for Lifetime Career Achievement in Teaching and the Teacher of the Year award. He is a pioneer in the use of Web-based and real-time video courses, as well as a member of the American Political Science Association's section on computers and multimedia. He is on the editorial board of the *Political Science Educator* and is the technology and teaching editor of the *Journal of Political Science Education*.

Schmidt has a political talk show on WOI radio, where he is known as Dr. Politics. The show has been broadcast live from various U.S. and international venues. He is a frequent political commentator for *CNN en Español* and the British Broadcasting Corporation. He is the co-founder of the new Internet magazine InsiderIowa.com.

Schmidt likes to snow ski, ride hunter jumper horses, race sailboats, and scuba dive.

MACK C. SHELLEY II



Mack C. Shelley II is professor of political science and statistics at Iowa State University. After receiving his bachelor's degree from American University in Washington, D.C., he completed graduate studies at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, where he received a master's degree in economics and a Ph.D. in political science. He taught for two years at Mississippi State University before arriving at Iowa State in 1979.

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Koven and Bert E. Swanson); *Redefining Family Policy: Implications for the 21st Century* (with Joyce M. Mercier and Steven Garasky); and *Quality Research in Literacy and Science Education: International Perspectives and Gold Standards* (with Larry Yore and Brian Hand).

His leisure time includes traveling, working with students, and playing with the family dog and cats.

BARBARA A. BARDES



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Bardes has written articles on public opinion and foreign policy, and on women and politics. She has authored *Thinking about Public Policy*; *Declarations of Independence: Women and Political Power in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction*; and *Public Opinion: Measuring the American Mind* (with Robert W. Oldendick).

Bardes's home is located in a very small hamlet in Kentucky called Rabbit Hash, famous for its 150-year-old general store. Her hobbies include traveling, gardening, needlework, and antique collecting.

The Democratic Republic

1



These people are singing the national anthem on the Fourth of July. **Why do we celebrate on the Fourth—and how do we do it?**

The five **Learning Outcomes (LOs)** below are designed to help improve your understanding of this chapter. After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- **LO1** Define the terms *politics, government, order, liberty, authority, and legitimacy*.
 - **LO2** Distinguish the major features of direct democracy and representative democracy.
 - **LO3** Describe majoritarianism, elite theory, and pluralism as theories of how democratic systems work.
 - **LO4** Summarize the conflicts that can occur between the values of liberty and order, and between those of liberty and equality.
 - **LO5** Discuss conservatism, liberalism, and other popular American ideological positions.
- Check your understanding of the material with the Test Yourself section at the end of the chapter.

Politics, for many people, is the “great game,” and it is played for high stakes. After all, the game involves vast sums and the very security of the nation. In the last few years, the stakes have grown higher still. In 2014, the Republican Party won control of the U.S. Senate and did well in state-level contests. The Republicans also retained control of the U.S. House of Representatives, giving them complete control of Congress in 2015 and 2016. With Barack Obama as president, however, the Democrats still held the presidency. Would the two major parties be able to agree on any kind of legislation—or would deadlock and brinkmanship result? Meanwhile, the 2016 presidential elections loomed in the future, with unpredictable consequences.

Politics and Government

LO1: Define the terms *politics, government, order, liberty, authority, and legitimacy.*

What is politics? **Politics** can be understood as the process of resolving conflicts and deciding, as political scientist Harold Lasswell put it in his classic definition, “who gets what, when, and how.”¹ More specifically, politics is the struggle over power or influence within organizations or informal groups that can grant or withhold benefits or privileges.

We can identify many such groups and organizations. In families, all members may meet to decide on values, priorities, and actions. In every community that makes decisions through formal or informal rules, politics exists. For example, when a church decides to construct a new building or hire a new minister, the decision is made politically. Politics can be found in schools, social groups, and any other organized collection of individuals. Of all the organizations that are controlled by political activity, however, the most important is the government.

What is the government? Certainly, it is an **institution**—that is, an ongoing organization that performs certain functions for society and that has a life separate from the lives of the individuals who are part of it at any given moment in time. The **government** can be defined as an institution within which decisions are made that resolve conflicts and allocate benefits and privileges. The government is also the preeminent institution within society because it has the ultimate authority for making these decisions.

Why Is Government Necessary?

Perhaps the best way to assess the need for government is to examine circumstances in which government, as we normally understand it, does not exist. What happens when multiple groups compete with one another for power within a society? There are places around the world where such circumstances exist. A current example is the Middle Eastern nation of Syria, run by the dictator Bashar al-Assad. In 2011, peaceful protesters were killed, which led to an armed rebellion. The government lost control of much of the country, and its forces repeatedly massacred civilians in contested areas. Some rebels were extreme Islamists, and others were more moderate. By 2013, rebels were fighting each other as well as the government. In much of Syria, law and order had broken down completely. By 2015, at least 200,000 people had been killed, and almost half of the country’s people had been driven from their homes.

As the example of Syria shows, one of the original purposes of government is the maintenance of security, or **order**. By keeping the peace, a government protects its people from violence at the hands of private or foreign armies and criminals. If order is not present, it is not possible for the government to provide any of the other benefits that people expect from it. Order is a political value to which we will return later in this chapter.

Limiting Government Power

A complete collapse of order and security, as seen in Syria, actually is an uncommon event. Much more common is the reverse—too much government control. In January 2015, the human rights organization Freedom House judged that fifty-one of the world’s countries were “not free.” These nations contained 36 percent of the world’s population. Such countries may be controlled by individual kings or dictators. Saudi Arabia’s king, Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and North Korea’s Kim Jong-un are

1. Harold Lasswell, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, and How* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith Publisher, 1990). Originally published in 1936.

Politics

The struggle over power or influence within organizations or informal groups that can grant or withhold benefits or privileges.

Institution

An ongoing organization that performs certain functions for society.

Government

The preeminent institution within a society. Government has the ultimate authority to decide how conflicts will be resolved and how benefits and privileges will be allocated.

Order

A state of peace and security. Maintaining order by protecting members of society from violence and criminal activity is the oldest purpose of government.

obvious examples. Alternatively, a political party, such as the Communist Party of China, may monopolize all the levels of power. The military may rule, as in Thailand since 2014.

In all of these examples, the individual or group running the country cannot be removed by legal means. Freedom of speech and the right to a fair trial are typically absent. Dictatorial governments often torture or execute their opponents. Such regimes may also suppress freedom of religion. Revolution, whether violent or nonviolent, is often the only way to change the government.

In short, protection from the violence of domestic criminals or foreign armies is not enough. Citizens also need protection from abuses of power by their own government. To protect the liberties of the people, it is necessary to limit the powers of the government. **Liberty**—the greatest freedom of the individual consistent with the freedom of other individuals—is a second major political value, along with order. We discuss this value in more detail later in this chapter.

Authority and Legitimacy

Every government must have **authority**—that is, the right and power to enforce its decisions. Ultimately, the government's authority rests on its control of the armed forces and the police. Few people in the United States, however, base their day-to-day activities on fear of the government's enforcement powers. Most people, most of the time, obey the law because this is what they have always done. Also, if they did not obey the law, they would face the disapproval of friends and family. Consider an example: Do you avoid injuring your friends or stealing their possessions because you are afraid of the police—or because if you undertook these actions, you no longer would have friends?

Under normal circumstances, the government's authority has broad popular support. People accept the government's right to establish rules and laws. When authority is broadly accepted, we say that it has **legitimacy**. Authority without legitimacy is a recipe for trouble.

Events in several Arab nations since 2011 can serve as an example. The dictators who ruled Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia had been in power for decades. All three dictators had some popular support when they first gained power. None of these nations had a tradition of democracy, and so it was possible for undemocratic rulers to enjoy a degree of legitimacy. After years of oppressive behavior, these regimes slowly lost that legitimacy. The rulers survived only because they were willing to employ violence against any opposition. In Egypt and Tunisia, the end came when soldiers refused to use force against massive demonstrations. Having lost all legitimacy, the rulers of these two countries then lost their authority as well. In Libya, the downfall and death of the dictator Muammar Qaddafi came only after a seven-month civil war. (Unfortunately, Egypt's shaky new democracy collapsed in 2013 when the army seized power.)



Ali Mohammed/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

This Iraqi government soldier is part of a joint effort with Shiite militias to attack the so-called Islamic State, or ISIS. The goal is to regain control of Iraq's Saladin Province. ISIS terrorists have become famous for their brutality. *What might inspire them to act in this way?*

Liberty

The greatest freedom of the individual that is consistent with the freedom of other individuals in the society.

Authority

The right and power of a government or other entity to enforce its decisions and compel obedience.

Legitimacy

Popular acceptance of the right and power of a government or other entity to exercise authority.

Totalitarian Regime

A form of government that controls all aspects of the political, social, and economic life of a nation.

Authoritarianism

A type of regime in which only the government itself is fully controlled by the ruler. Social and economic institutions exist that are not under the government's control.

Democracy

A system of government in which political authority is vested in the people.

Direct Democracy

A system of government in which political decisions are made by the people directly, rather than by their elected representatives.

Legislature

A governmental body primarily responsible for the making of laws.

Initiative

A procedure by which voters can propose a law or a constitutional amendment.

Referendum

An electoral device whereby legislative or constitutional measures are referred by the legislature to the voters for approval or disapproval.

Recall

A procedure allowing the people to vote to dismiss an elected official from office before his or her term has expired.

Democracy and Other Forms of Government

LO2: Distinguish the major features of direct democracy and representative democracy.

The different types of government can be classified according to which person or group of people controls society through the government.

Types of Government

At one extreme is a society governed by a **totalitarian regime**. In such a political system, a small group of leaders or a single individual—a dictator—makes all decisions for the society. Every aspect of political, social, and economic life is controlled by the government. The power of the ruler is total (thus, the term *totalitarianism*). A second type of system is authoritarian government. **Authoritarianism** differs from totalitarianism in that only the government itself is fully controlled by the ruler. Social and economic institutions, such as churches, businesses, and labor unions, exist that are not under the government's control.

Many of our terms for describing the distribution of political power are derived from the ancient Greeks, who were the first Western people to study politics systematically. One form of rule was known as *aristocracy*, literally meaning “rule by the best.” In practice, this meant rule by wealthy members of ancient families. Another term from the Greeks is *theocracy*, which literally means “rule by God” (or the gods). In practice, theocracy means rule by self-appointed religious leaders. Iran is a rare example of a country in which supreme power is in the hands of a religious leader, the Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. One of the most straightforward Greek terms is *oligarchy*, which simply means “rule by a few.”

The Greek term for rule by the people was **democracy**. Within the limits of their culture, some of the Greek city-states operated as democracies. Today, in much of the world, the people will not grant legitimacy to a government unless it is based on democracy.

Direct Democracy as a Model

The Athenian system of government in ancient Greece is usually considered the purest model for **direct democracy** because the citizens of that community debated and voted directly on all laws, even those put forward by the ruling council of the city. The most important feature of Athenian democracy was that the **legislature** was composed of all of the citizens. (Women, resident foreigners, and slaves, however, were excluded because they were not citizens.) This form of government required a high level of participation from every citizen. That participation was seen as benefiting the individual and the city-state. The Athenians believed that although a high level of participation might lead to instability in government, citizens, if informed about the issues, could be trusted to make wise decisions.

Direct democracy also has been practiced at the local level in Switzerland and, in the United States, in New England town meetings. At these town meetings, important decisions—such as levying taxes, hiring city officials, and deciding local ordinances—are made by majority vote. (In recent years, however, turnout for such meetings has declined.) Some states provide a modern adaptation of direct democracy for their citizens. In these states, representative democracy is supplemented by the **initiative** or the **referendum**. Both processes enable the people to vote directly on laws or constitutional amendments. The **recall** process, which is available in many states, allows the people to vote to remove an official from state office before his or her term has expired.

The Dangers of Direct Democracy

Although they were aware of the Athenian model, the framers of the U.S. Constitution were opposed to such a system. Democracy was considered to be dangerous and a source of instability. But in the 1700s and 1800s, the idea of government based on the *consent of the people* gained increasing popularity. Such a government was the main aspiration of the American Revolution in 1775, the French Revolution in 1789, and many subsequent revolutions. At the time of the American Revolution, however, the masses were still considered to be too uneducated to govern themselves, too prone to the influence of demagogues (political leaders who manipulate popular prejudices), and too likely to subordinate minority rights to the tyranny of the majority.

James Madison, while defending the new scheme of government set forth in the U.S. Constitution, warned of the problems inherent in a “pure democracy”:

A common passion or interest will, in almost every case, be felt by a majority of the whole . . . and there is nothing to check the inducements to sacrifice the weaker party or an obnoxious individual. Hence it is that such democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention, and have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths.²

Like other politicians of his time, Madison feared that pure, or direct, democracy would deteriorate into mob rule. What would keep the majority of the people, if given direct decision-making power, from abusing the rights of those in the minority?

A Democratic Republic

The framers of the U.S. Constitution chose to craft a **republic**, meaning a government in which sovereign power rests with the people, rather than with a king or a monarch. A republic is based on **popular sovereignty**. To Americans of the 1700s, the idea of a republic also meant a government based on common beliefs and virtues that would be fostered within small communities. The rulers were to be amateurs—good citizens who would take turns representing their fellow citizens.

The U.S. Constitution created a form of republican government that we now call a **democratic republic**. The people hold the ultimate power over the government through the election process, but all national policy decisions are made by elected officials. For the



AP Images/Toby Talbot

These Woodbury, Vermont, residents cast their ballots after a town meeting to vote on the school budget and sales taxes. *What type of political system does the town meeting best represent?*

Republic

A form of government in which sovereign power rests with the people, rather than with a king or a monarch.

Popular Sovereignty

The concept that ultimate political authority is based on the will of the people.

Democratic Republic

A republic in which representatives elected by the people make and enforce laws and policies.

2. James Madison, in Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, No. 10 (New York: Mentor Books, 1964), p. 81. See Appendix C of this book.

Representative Democracy

A form of government in which representatives elected by the people make and enforce laws and policies, but in which the monarchy may be retained in a ceremonial role.

Universal Suffrage

The right of all adults to vote for their representatives.

Majority Rule

A basic principle of democracy asserting that the greatest number of citizens in any political unit should select officials and determine policies.

Limited Government

A government with powers that are limited either through a written document or through widely shared beliefs.

founders, even this distance between the people and the government was not sufficient. The Constitution made sure that the Senate and the president would not be elected by a direct vote of the people. Senators were chosen by state legislatures, although a later constitutional amendment allowed for the direct election of senators. The founders also established an *electoral college* to choose the president, in the hope—soon frustrated—that such a body would prevent voters from ultimately making the choice.

Despite these limits, the new American system was unique in the amount of power it granted to the ordinary citizen. Over the course of the following two centuries, democratic values became more and more popular, at first in Western nations and then throughout the rest of the world. The spread of democratic principles gave rise to another name for our system of government—**representative democracy**. The term *representative democracy* has almost the same meaning as *democratic republic*, with one exception. Recall that in a republic, not only are the people sovereign, but there is no king. What if a nation develops into a democracy but preserves the monarchy as a largely ceremonial institution? That is exactly what happened in Britain. The British, who have long cherished their kings and queens, found the term *democratic republic* unacceptable. A republic, after all, meant there could be no monarch. The British therefore described their system as a representative democracy instead.

Principles of Democratic Government. All representative democracies rest on the rule of the people as expressed through the election of government officials. In the 1790s in the United States, only free white males were able to vote, and in some states they had to be property owners as well. Women in many states did not receive the right to vote in national elections until 1920, and the right to vote was not secured in all states by African Americans until the 1960s. Today, **universal suffrage** is the rule.

Because everyone's vote counts equally, the only way to make fair decisions is by some form of majority will. But to ensure that **majority rule** does not become oppressive, modern democracies also provide guarantees of minority rights. If political minorities were not protected, the majority might violate the fundamental rights of members of certain groups—especially groups that are unpopular or dissimilar to the majority population, such as racial minorities.

To guarantee the continued existence of a representative democracy, there must be free, competitive elections. Thus, the opposition always has the opportunity to win elective office. For such elections to be totally open, freedom of the press and freedom of speech must be preserved so that opposition candidates can present their criticisms of the government to the people.

Constitutional Democracy. Another key feature of Western representative democracy is that it is based on the principle of **limited government**. Not only is the government dependent on popular sovereignty, but the powers of the government are also clearly limited, either through a written document or through widely shared beliefs. The U.S. Constitution sets down the fundamental structure of the government and the limits to its activities. Such limits are intended to prevent political decisions based on the whims or ambitions of individuals in government rather than on constitutional principles.

What Kind of Democracy Do We Have?

LO3: Describe majoritarianism, elite theory, and pluralism as theories of how democratic systems work.

Political scientists have developed a number of theories about American democracy, including *majoritarianism*, *elite theory*, and *pluralism*. Advocates of these theories use them to describe American democracy either as it actually is or as they believe it should be.

Some scholars argue that none of these three theories, which we discuss next, fully describes the workings of American democracy. These experts say that each theory captures a part of the true reality but that we need all three theories to gain a full understanding of American politics.

Democracy for Everyone

Many people believe that in a democracy, the government ought to do what the majority of the people want. This simple proposition is the heart of majoritarian theory. As a theory of what democracy should be like, **majoritarianism** is popular among both political scientists and ordinary citizens. Many scholars, however, consider majoritarianism to provide a surprisingly poor description of how U.S. democracy actually works. They point to the low level of turnout for elections. Polling data have shown that many Americans are neither particularly interested in politics nor well informed. Few are able to name the persons running for Congress in their districts, and even fewer can discuss the candidates' positions.

Democracy for the Few

If ordinary citizens are not really making policy decisions with their votes, who is? One theory suggests that elites really govern the United States. **Elite theory** holds that society is ruled by a small number of people who exercise power to further their self-interests. American democracy, in other words, is a sham democracy. Few people today believe it is a good idea for the country to be run by a privileged minority. In the past, however, many people believed that it was appropriate for the country to be governed by an elite. Consider the words of Alexander Hamilton, one of the framers of the Constitution:

*All communities divide themselves into the few and the many. The first are the rich and the wellborn, the other the mass of the people. . . . The people are turbulent and changing; they seldom judge or determine right. Give therefore to the first class a distinct, permanent share in the government. They will check the unsteadiness of the second, and as they cannot receive any advantage by a change, they therefore will ever maintain good government.*³

Some versions of elite theory assume that there is a small, cohesive elite class that makes almost all the important decisions for the nation,⁴ whereas others suggest that voters

Majoritarianism
A political theory holding that in a democracy, the government ought to do what the majority of the people want.

Elite Theory
The argument that society is ruled by a small number of people who exercise power to further their self-interests.



The actor **Wilmer Valderrama** promotes National Voter Registration Day at Miami Dade College in Florida. *Why is voting so important for democracy?*

- Alexander Hamilton, "Speech in the Constitutional Convention on a Plan of Government," in Joanne B. Freeman, ed., *Writings* (New York: Library of America, 2001).
- Michael Parenti, *Democracy for the Few*, 9th ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing, 2011).

Pluralism

A theory that views politics as a conflict among interest groups. Political decision making is characterized by bargaining and compromise.

Political Culture

The patterned set of ideas, values, and ways of thinking about government and politics that characterizes a people.

Political Socialization

The process by which people acquire political beliefs and values.

choose among competing elites. Popular movements of varying political persuasions often advocate simple versions of elite theory.

Democracy for Groups

A different school of thought holds that our form of democracy is based on group interests. Even if the average citizen cannot keep up with political issues or cast a deciding vote in any election, the individual's interests will be protected by groups that represent her or him.

Theorists who subscribe to **pluralism** see politics as a struggle among groups to gain benefits for their members. Given the structure of the American political system, group conflicts tend to be settled by compromise and accommodation. Because there are a multitude of interests, no one group can dominate the political process. Furthermore, because most individuals have more than one interest, conflict among groups need not divide the nation into hostile camps.

Many political scientists believe that pluralism works very well as a descriptive theory. As a theory of how democracy *should* function, however, pluralism has problems. Poor citizens are rarely represented by interest groups. At the same time, rich citizens may be overrepresented. There are also serious doubts as to whether group decision making always reflects the best interests of the nation.

Indeed, critics see a danger that groups may grow so powerful that all policies become compromises crafted to satisfy the interests of the largest groups. The interests of the public as a whole, then, are not considered. Critics of pluralism have suggested that a democratic system can be almost paralyzed by the struggle among interest groups. We will discuss interest groups at greater length in Chapter 7.

Fundamental Values

LO4: Summarize the conflicts that can occur between the values of liberty and order, and between those of liberty and equality.

The writers of the U.S. Constitution believed that the structures they had created would provide for both popular sovereignty and a stable political system. They also believed that the nation would be sustained by its **political culture**—the patterned set of ideas, values, and ways of thinking about government and politics that characterized its people. Even today, there is considerable consensus among American citizens about certain concepts—including the rights to liberty, equality, and property—that are deemed to be basic to the U.S. political system.

Most Americans are descendants of immigrants who came from diverse cultural and political backgrounds. You can see how immigration will continue to change the composition of the nation in future years in Figure 1 in the full-color insert at the beginning of this book. Given the changing nature of our population, now and in the past, how can we account for the broad consensus that exists around basic values? Primarily, it is the result of **political socialization**—the process by which political beliefs and values are transmitted to new immigrants and to our children. The two most important sources of political socialization are the family and the educational system. (See Chapter 6 for a more detailed discussion of the political socialization process.)

The most fundamental concepts of the American political culture are those of the dominant culture. The term *dominant culture* refers to the values, customs, and language established by the groups that traditionally have controlled politics and government in a society. The dominant culture in the United States has its roots in Western European civilization. From that civilization, American politics inherited a bias in favor of individualism, private property, and Judeo-Christian ethics.

Liberty versus Order

In the United States, our **civil liberties** include religious freedom—both the right to practice whatever religion we choose and the right to be free from any state-imposed religion. Our civil liberties also include freedom of speech—the right to express our opinions freely on all matters, including government actions. Freedom of speech is perhaps one of our most prized liberties, because a democracy could not endure without it. These and many other basic guarantees of liberty are found in the **Bill of Rights**, the first ten amendments to the Constitution.

Liberty, however, is not the only value widely held by Americans. A substantial portion of the American electorate believes that certain kinds of liberty threaten the traditional social order. The right to privacy is a particularly controversial liberty. The United States Supreme Court has held that the right to privacy can be derived from other rights that are explicitly stated in the Bill of Rights. The Supreme Court has also held that under the right to privacy, the government cannot ban either abortion⁵ or private homosexual behavior by consenting adults.⁶ Some Americans believe that such rights threaten the sanctity of the family and the general cultural commitment to moral behavior. Of course, others disagree with this point of view.

Security is another issue that follows from the principle of order. When Americans have felt particularly fearful or vulnerable, the government has emphasized national security over civil liberties. Such was the case after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, which led to the U.S. entry into World War II. Thousands of Japanese Americans were held in internment camps, based on the assumption that their loyalty to this country was in question. More recently, the terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, renewed calls for greater security at the expense of some civil liberties.

Liberty versus Equality

The Declaration of Independence states, “All men are created equal.” The proper meaning of *equality*, however, has been disputed by Americans since the Revolution. Much of American history—and indeed, world history—is the story of how the value of **equality**, the idea that all people are of equal worth, has been extended and elaborated.

First, the right to vote was granted to all adult white males, regardless of whether they owned property. The Civil War resulted in the end of slavery and established that, in principle at least, all citizens were equal before the law. The civil rights movement of



Bettmann/Corbis

One of the most fundamental rights Americans have is the right to vote. Here, African Americans in Mississippi are registering to vote for the first time after passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. **Does voting affect political socialization?**

Civil Liberties

Those personal freedoms, including freedom of religion and of speech, that are protected for all individuals in a society.

Bill of Rights

The first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution.

Equality

As a political value, the idea that all people are of equal worth.

5. *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973).

6. *Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 U.S. 558 (2003).