



2014 ELECTIONS AND UPDATES EDITION

GOVERNMENT IN AMERICA

EDWARDS & WATTENBERG

GOVERNMENT IN AMERICA

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GOVERNMENT IN AMERICA

PEOPLE, POLITICS, AND POLICY

2014 ELECTIONS AND UPDATES SIXTEENTH EDITION

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TO THE STUDENT

In 2012, American voters reelected **President**

Barack Obama, a Democrat. In 2014, voters elected Republican majorities to both the House and the Senate. You may be puzzled about why voters divide political power in Washington. And you might also wonder why our political system permits, and even encourages, such mixed verdicts. We have found that election results like these lead many students to conclude that government in America is incredibly complex and hard to make sense of. We are not going to make false promises and tell you that American government is easy to understand. However, we do intend to provide you with a clear roadmap to understanding our complex political system.

The framers of our Constitution could have designed a much simpler system, but they purposely built in complexities as insurance against the concentration of power. Despite these complexities, many of the founders, such as Jefferson, were confident that the American people would be able to navigate their constitutional system and effectively govern themselves within it. In writing this book, we are similarly confident that young adults in the twenty-first century can participate effectively in our democracy.

The major message that we convey in this book is that politics and government matter to everyone. *Government in America* explains how policy choices make a difference and shape the kind of country in which we live. We will show you how these choices affect the taxes we pay, the wars we fight, the quality of our environment, and many other critical aspects of our lives.

Students often ask us whether we are trying to convey a liberal or conservative message in this book. The answer is that our goal is to explain the major viewpoints, how they differ, and how such differences matter. We wish to give you the tools to understand American politics and government. Once you have these tools, you can make your own judgment about policy choices and become a well-informed participant in our democratic process. In the twenty-first century, it is often said that “knowledge is power.” We sincerely hope that the knowledge conveyed in this book will help you exercise your fair share of political power in the years to come.

Meet Your Authors

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is University Distinguished Professor of Political Science at Texas A&M University and the Jordan Chair in Presidential Studies. He is also a Distinguished Fellow at the University of Oxford. When he determined that he was unlikely to become shortstop for the New York Yankees, he turned to political science. Today, he is one of the country’s leading scholars of the presidency and has written or edited 26 books on American politics.



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TO THE INSTRUCTOR

In 2008, the United States elected Barack Obama as

president in the hope of making progress on a host of issues, including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, immigration, climate change, and health care. Some changes did occur: health care reform expanded health insurance coverage to millions of Americans and protected millions of others against abuses by insurance companies; new regulations on Wall Street were put in place in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008; and immigration policy limited the deportation of young illegal immigrants.

More generally, however, the nation faced gridlock, especially following the substantial Republican gains in the 2010 congressional elections. The national government even came close to defaulting on its debt. Democrats and Republicans have been further apart in their thinking about the role of government than at any time since Reconstruction, and Republicans have pledged to undo the Democrats' health care reform.

The 2014 Elections and Updates Edition of *Government in America* explains the reasons we have such a difficult time resolving differences over public policy and the stakes we all have in finding solutions to the challenges facing our nation. We frame its content with a public policy approach to government in the United States and continually ask—and answer—the question, “What difference does politics make to the policies that governments produce?” It is one thing to describe the Madisonian system of checks and balances and separation of powers or the elaborate and unusual federal system of government in the United States; it is something else to ask how these features of our constitutional structure affect the policies that governments generate.

The essence of our approach to American government and politics is that *politics matters*. The national government provides important services, ranging from retirement security and health care to recreation facilities and weather forecasts. The government may also send us to war or negotiate peace with our adversaries, expand or restrict our freedom, raise or lower our taxes, and increase or decrease aid to education. In the twenty-first century, decision makers of both political parties are facing difficult questions regarding American democracy and the scope of our government. Students need a framework for understanding these questions.

We do not discuss policy at the expense of politics, however. We provide extensive coverage of four core subject areas: constitutional foundations, patterns of political behavior, political institutions, and public policy outputs; but we try to do so in a more analytically significant—and interesting—manner. We take special pride in introducing students to relevant work from current political scientists, for example, on the role of PACs and SuperPACs or the impact of divided party government—something we have found instructors to appreciate.

New to This Update

Government in America, 2014 Elections and Updates Edition, has been revised and updated to reflect recent changes—often of a historic magnitude—in politics, policy, and participation. The revisions focus on updates in the following areas:

- The 2014 congressional elections
- Recent Supreme Court decisions, ranging from searches and seizures to same-sex marriage.
- The Obama administration
- Current policies, including health care reform and conflict in the Middle East
- Recent events with significant political implications
- The 2012 presidential election, incorporating additional data and the most recent scholarly studies

Naturally, we have full up-to-the-minute coverage of the **2014 congressional elections** and of the **latest Supreme Court decisions** on civil liberties, civil rights, federalism, and congressional and presidential powers. The updating of Supreme Court decisions includes recent key decisions such as those on the conflict between religious views and insurance mandates, searches and seizures, and same-sex marriage.

In addition, we have devoted attention to **recent events with significant political implications** such as Edward Snowden and leaked national security documents; changes in the rules on women in combat, the Senate filibuster, and on campaign contributions; and the clash over the legalization of marijuana. The historic struggles over the budget and national debt, health care reform, economic policy, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan also receive significant coverage.

In our chapter on the presidency and throughout the book, we have **broad coverage of the Obama administration and current policies**, in areas ranging from budgetary policy and relations with Congress in this era of polarization to foreign policy challenges such as the upheaval in the Middle East. The entire chapter on the core issue of the budget has been thoroughly updated to reflect the central importance of taxing and spending in American government and the core issues of the fiscal and debt crises. We have the latest on all the policies we cover, from health care reform and Medicare to the war in Afghanistan and relations with Iran.

All of the **figures and tables reflect the latest available data**. Since the last edition, we have been able to incorporate **updated data related to the 2012 presidential election, and the most recent scholarly studies**. We take pride in continuously improving our graphical presentations of this data.

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Themes and Features

Government in America follows two central themes. The first great question central to governing, a question every nation must answer, is, *How should we govern?* In the United States, our answer is “by democracy.” Yet democracy is an evolving and somewhat ambiguous concept. The first theme, then, is the nature of our democracy. In Chapter 1, we define democracy as a means of selecting policymakers and of organizing government so that policy represents and responds to citizens’ preferences. As with previous editions, we incorporate theoretical issues in our discussions of different models of American democracy. We try to encourage students to think analytically about the theories and to develop independent assessments of how well the American system lives up to citizens’ expectations of democratic government. To help them do this, in every chapter we raise questions about democracy. For example, does Congress give the American people the policies they want? Is a strong presidency good for democracy? Does our mass media make us more democratic? Are powerful courts that make policy decisions compatible with democracy?

The second theme, the scope of government, focuses on another great question of governing: *What should government do?* Here we discuss alternative views concerning the proper role and size for American government and how the workings of institutions and politics influence this scope. The government’s scope is the core question around which politics revolves in contemporary America, pervading many crucial issues: To what degree should Washington impose national standards for health care or speed limits on state policies? How high should taxes be? Do elections encourage politicians to promise more governmental services? Questions about the scope of government are policy questions and thus obviously directly related to our policy approach. Since the scope of government is the pervasive question in American politics today, students will have little problem finding it relevant to their lives and interests.

Each chapter begins with a preview of the relevancy of our two themes to the chapter’s subject matter, refers to the themes at points within the chapter, and ends with an “Understanding” section that discusses how the themes illuminate that subject matter.

Our coverage of American government and politics is comprehensive. First, we present an introductory chapter that lays out the dimensions of our policymaking system and introduces our themes of democracy and the scope of government. Next, we provide four chapters on the constitutional foundations of American government, including the Constitution, federalism, civil liberties, and civil rights. We then offer five chapters focusing on influences on government, including public opinion, the media, interest groups, political parties, and elections and voting behavior.

Our next five chapters focus on the workings of the national government. These chapters include Congress, the president, budgeting (at the core of many issues before policymakers), the federal courts, and the federal bureaucracy. Finally, we present three chapters on the decisions policymakers take and the issues they face. First are economic and social welfare policies, then

You Are the Policymaker

Should Political Parties Choose Their Nominees in Open or Closed Primaries?

Some states restrict who can participate in party caucuses or primaries to those who are registered in advance with a party vote in the primary. In contrast, open primaries allow voters to decide an Election Day whether they want to participate in the Democratic or Republican caucuses. Each state legislature is faced with making the choice between an open or closed primary, and the pros and cons of these two basic options are often hotly debated.

Closed primaries are generally favored by the party's leadership because they ensure that voters who are already decided on a partisan preference when they register to vote. By requiring voters to sign up in advance to participate in its primary, a party can be reasonably assured that most people who participate in the caucus or primary will be reasonably committed to its platform. In other words, closed primaries favor the party's leadership and help to keep the party's platform consistent. The major and Republican caucuses have a similar advantage for the party organization in that a closed primary system requires the voter's decision authority to manifest a record of the party organization's choice. It is, of course, a record who you vote for, but anything you do show on your voter registration form is public information. Hence, a closed primary provides each party with invaluable information identifying voters who consider themselves to be party members. Imagine running a business and having the government collect all the names for you regarding who takes your product. It's not wonder that if the decision were left up to the leaders of the party organization most would choose a closed primary.

Despite these advantages, the trend among the states in recent years has been toward more open primaries. The most advantage of open primaries is that they allow for more voters to participate in party nomination decisions. Because independents can vote in either party's primary and primaries can readily switch sides, the two major parties are faced with that of competing for voter support in the primary round as well as the general election. In particular, several states, whose independent voters often leave them on the sidelines in closed primaries, can be brought into the contest in an open primary. For many politicians, the chance to elicit participation in a caucus or primary is an opportunity to encourage the advantage of having participation in local party meetings in a caucus or primary. However, they come with an open primary disadvantage: that is, a primary that the party of one side will "steal" the other party's primary in order to give a boost to its base vote total. This would be akin to letting NCAA students participate in the choice of the quarterback for the USC football team. Though seeing it done at an actual possible, scholars have found that when voters cast a ballot in the other party's primary, it is usually for candidates whom they generally support.

What do you think? Which do you choose: an open or closed primary?

come health care, environmental protection, and energy policies, and finally, we focus on national security policy.

Our features support our fundamental idea that politics matters and engage students in important political and policy issues.

- **Chapter-opening vignettes** make the subject matter of each chapter as relevant as possible to current concerns and pique student interest. From the first chapter, we emphasize the significance of government to young people and the importance of their participation.

America in Perspective

Interest Group Participation

Members are very occasionally compared to members in other democracies, as you can see in the graphic.

Question: For civic associations—“In the last 12 months, how many have participated in the activities of one of the following associations or groups?”

Country	Participated in a civic association or group (%)	Worked together with people to express political views (%)
USA	~45	~35
Australia	~25	~15
UK	~20	~10
France	~15	~5
Germany	~10	~5
Spain	~5	~2
Sweden	~5	~2
Japan	~5	~2

- The classic **You Are the Policymaker** asks students to read arguments on both sides of a current issue—such as whether we should prohibit PACs—and then to make a policy decision. In Chapters 4 and 5 (Civil Liberties and Civil Rights), this feature is titled **You Are the Judge** and presents the student with an actual court case.

Why It Matters to You

The Voting Rights Act

In passing the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Congress enacted an extraordinarily strong law to protect the rights of minorities to vote. There is little question that officials pay more attention to minorities when they can vote. And many more members of minority groups are now elected to high public office.

- The **America in Perspective** feature examines how the United States compares to other nations, students can obtain a better perspective on the size of our government and the nature of democracy. Instructors report that this feature provides them with especially useful teaching points.

Young People & Politics

Freedom Riders

Most political activity is quite safe. There have been assassinations, however, when young adults have raised loudly their voice and even death to fight for their beliefs. Now after Brown v. Board of Education (1954), integrated transportation was still the law in some parts of the Deep South. To change this, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) organized Freedom Riders in 1961. Young blacks and white students in their buses and early busses traveled on buses through the Deep South. In Anniston, Alabama, segregationists disrupted the bus, and men armed with clubs, bricks, iron pipes, and knives attacked them on another. In Birmingham, the passengers were greeted by members of the Ku Klux Klan with further acts of violence. In Montgomery, the state capital, a white mob beat the buses with chains and a baseball.

The Ku Klux Klan hoped that the violent treatment would stop other young people from taking part in Freedom Riders. It did not. Over the next six months, more than a thousand people took part in Freedom Riders. A young white man from Madison, Wisconsin, James Zwerg, was badly injured by a mob and left in the need for care in a hospital. In an interview afterward, he reflected the great determination of the Freedom Riders: “Integration must be stopped. It must be broken down. There is a lot of Freedom Riders and others. No matter what happens we are dedicated to this. We will take the beating. We are willing to accept death.”

As with the Montgomery bus boycott and the case of Little Rock, the Freedom Riders gave worldwide publicity to the racial discrimination suffered by African Americans, and in doing so they helped to bring change. Attorney General Robert Kennedy petitioned the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) to staff regulations to end racial segregation in bus terminals. The ICC was reluctant, but in September 1961 it issued the new rules.

The Freedom Riders did not limit themselves to desegregitating buses. During the summer of 1961, they also sat, bussed, in segregated restaurants, lunch counters, and hotels. Typically they were refused service and they were often threatened and sometimes beaten and that began to desegregate their businesses. At the end, the courage of young people contributed to social equality provided. They helped to change the face of America.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. What are young adults doing to fight racism today?
2. Does civil disobedience have a role in contemporary America?

- Several times in each chapter, **Why It Matters to You** insets encourage students to think critically about an aspect of government, politics, or policy and to consider the repercussions—including for themselves—if things worked differently. Each **Why It Matters to You** feature extends the book's policy emphasis to situate it directly within the context of students' daily lives.

1968 they had the chance to “send a message” for tougher law and order measures, which to this day is still the case. In 1962 he was not ignored in the campaign. And in 2000 forced more attention on environmental issues by drawing away a small percentage of liberal voters.

Despite the regular appearance of third party systems, as so many European countries have, the obvious consequence of two-party governance in America is that many parties, each would have to out of the crowd. It is not hard to imagine who the United States. Quite possibly, African American pressing vigorously for racial equality. Environments voting to clean up the rivers, oppose nuclear power, have religious parties, union-based parties. In some European countries, there could be 10 in Congress (see “America in Perspective: Multi

winner-take-all system
An electoral system in which legislative seats are awarded only to the candidates who come in first in their constituencies.

proportional representation
An electoral system used throughout most of Europe that awards legislative seats to political parties in proportion to the number of votes won in an election.

coalition government
When two or more parties join together to form a majority in a national legislature. This form of government is quite common in the multiparty systems of Europe.

- The popular **Young People & Politics** feature illustrates how policies specifically impact young adults, how their political behavior patterns are unique and important, and how public officials are meeting or ignoring their particular policy desires.

- Every chapter includes a **marginal glossary** to support students' understanding of new and important concepts at first encounter. For easy reference, key terms from the marginal glossary are repeated at the end of each chapter and in the end-of-book glossary. Unique to *Government in America*, we also include a key term glossary in Spanish.

We hope that students—long after reading *Government in America*—will employ these perennial questions about the nature of our democracy and the scope of our government when they examine political events. The specifics of policy issues will change, but questions about whether the government is responsive to the people or whether it should expand or contract its scope will always be with us.

Supplements

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Pearson is pleased to offer the following resources to qualified adopters of *Government in America*. Several of these supplements are available to instantly download on the Instructor Resource Center (IRC); please visit the IRC at www.pearsonhighered.com/irc to register for access.

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GOVERNMENT IN AMERICA

1

Introducing Government in America



POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT MATTER—that is the single most important message of this book. Consider, for example, the following list of ways that government and politics may have already impacted your life:

- Chances are pretty good that you or someone in your family has recently been the recipient of one of the 80 million payments made to individuals by the federal government every month. In 2014, nearly 20 percent of the money that went into Americans’ wallets was from government payments like jobless benefits, food stamps, Social Security payments, veterans’ benefits, and so on.
- Any public schools you attended were prohibited by the federal government from discriminating against females and minorities and from holding prayer sessions led by school officials. Municipal school boards regulated your education, and the state certified and paid your teachers.
- The ages at which you could get your driver’s license, drink alcohol, and vote were all determined by state and federal governments.
- Before you could get a job, the federal government had to issue you a Social Security number, and you have been paying Social Security taxes every month that you have been employed. If you worked at a low-paying job, your starting wages were likely determined by state and federal minimum-wage laws.

1.1

Identify the key functions of government and explain why they matter, p. 8.

1.2

Define politics in the context of democratic government, p. 10.

1.3

Assess how citizens can have an impact on public policy and how policies can impact people, p. 11.

1.4

Identify the key principles of democracy and outline theories regarding how it works in practice and the challenges democracy faces today, p. 14.

1.5

Outline the central arguments of the debate in America over the proper scope of government, p. 23.



Our political leaders play a symbolic role in representing our nation—one that transcends partisan affiliation. Here, Democrats Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton and Republicans George W. and Laura Bush are shown arriving in South Africa to represent the United States at Nelson Mandela's funeral in December 2013.

- As a college student, you may be drawing student loans financed by the government. The government even dictates certain school holidays.
- Even though gasoline prices have risen substantially in recent years, federal policy continues to make it possible for you to drive long distances relatively cheaply compared to citizens in most other countries. In many other advanced industrialized nations, such as England and Japan, gasoline is twice as expensive as in the United States because of the high taxes their governments impose on fuel.
- If you apply to rent an apartment, by federal law landlords cannot discriminate against you because of your race or religion.

This list could, of course, be greatly extended. And it helps explain the importance of politics and government. As Barack Obama said when he first ran for public office in 1993, "Politics does matter. It can make the difference in terms of a benefits check. It can make the difference in terms of school funding. Citizens can't just remove themselves from that process. They actually have to engage themselves and not just leave it to the professionals."¹

More than any other recent presidential campaign, Obama's 2008 run for the White House was widely viewed as having turned many young Americans on to politics. *Time* magazine even labeled 2008 as the "Year of the Youth Vote," noting that Obama was "tapping into a broad audience of energized young voters hungry for change."² And young people did more than display enthusiasm at massive rallies for Obama. By supporting Obama by a two-to-one margin, they provided him with a key edge in the election. Many observers proclaimed that the stereotype of politically apathetic American youth should finally be put to rest.

Stereotypes can be outdated or even off the mark; unfortunately, the perception that young Americans are less engaged in politics than older people has been and continues to be supported by solid evidence. Whether because they think that politicians don't listen to them, that they can't make a difference, that the political system is corrupt, or they just don't care, many young Americans are clearly apathetic about public affairs. And while political apathy isn't restricted to young people, a tremendous gap has opened up between young adults and the elderly on measures of political interest, knowledge, and participation. It cannot be emphasized enough that such a gap has not always existed. Consider some data from the National Election Study, a nationally representative survey conducted each presidential election year since 1952.

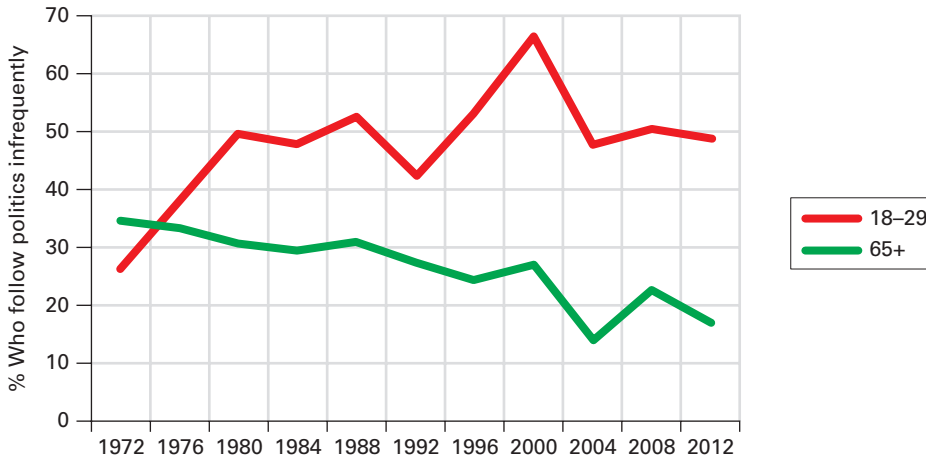
In 2012, when the National Election Study asked a nationwide sample of people about their general level of interest in politics, roughly half of Americans under the age of 30 said they paid infrequent attention to politics and elections compared to just 17 percent among those over the age of 65. One might think that this is a normal pattern, with young people always expressing less interest in politics than older people. But notice in Figure 1.1 that in the 1970s there was no generation gap in political interest. Something has happened in the years since that has resulted in young adults being substantially less interested in politics than the elderly.

Lack of interest often leads to lack of information. The National Election Study asks a number of political knowledge questions. Figure 1.2 shows the average percentage of correct answers for age groups in 1972 and 2012. In 2012 young people were correct only 37 percent of the time, whereas people over 65 were correct 57 percent of the time. Whether the question concerned identifying partisan control of the House and Senate, or accurately estimating the unemployment rate, or identifying prominent politicians, the result was the same in 2012: Young people were less knowledgeable than the elderly. This pattern of age differences in political knowledge has been found time and time again in surveys in recent years.³ By contrast, Figure 1.2 shows that in 1972 there was virtually no pattern by age, with those under 30 scoring 4 percent higher than those over 65.⁴

Thomas Jefferson once said that there has never been, nor ever will be, a people who are politically ignorant and free. If this is indeed the case, write Stephen Bennett and Eric Rademacher, then "we can legitimately wonder what the future holds" if young people "remain as uninformed as they are about government and public affairs."⁵ While this may well be an overreaction, there definitely are important consequences when citizens lack

FIGURE 1.1 POLITICAL APATHY AMONG YOUNG AND OLD AMERICANS, 1972–2012

In every presidential election from 1972 to 2012, the American National Election Studies has asked a cross-section of the public how often they follow what’s going on in government and public affairs. Below we have graphed the percentage who said they followed politics on an infrequent basis. Lack of political interest among young people hit a record high during the 2000 campaign between Bush and Gore, when over two-thirds said they rarely followed public affairs. Since then, political interest among young people has recovered somewhat; however, compared to senior citizens, they are still much more likely to report low political interest.

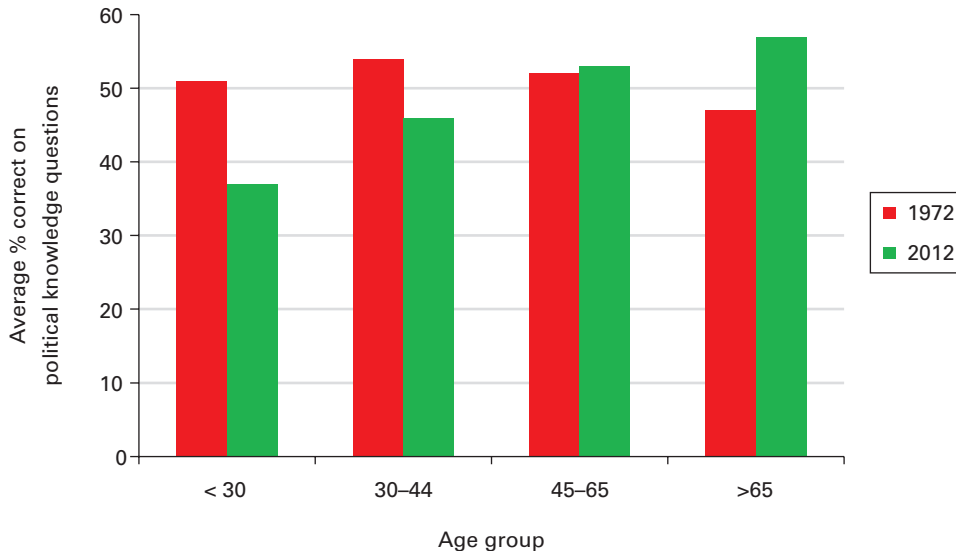


SOURCE: Authors’ analysis of 1972–2012 American National Election Studies data.

political information. In *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*, Michael Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter make a strong case for the importance of staying informed about public affairs. Political knowledge, they argue, (1) fosters civic virtues, such as political tolerance; (2) helps citizens to identify what policies would truly benefit them and then incorporate this information in their voting behavior; and (3) promotes active participation in politics.⁶ If you’ve been reading about the debate on immigration reform, for example,

FIGURE 1.2 AGE AND POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE, 1972 AND 2012

This figure shows the percentage of correct answers to five questions in 1972 and twelve questions in 2012 by age group. In 1972, the relationship between age and political knowledge was basically flat: each age group displayed roughly the same level of information about basic political facts, such as which party currently had more seats in the House of Representatives. By 2012, the picture had changed quite dramatically, with young people being substantially less likely to know the answer to such questions than older people.



SOURCE: Authors’ analysis of 1972 and 2012 National Election Studies data.

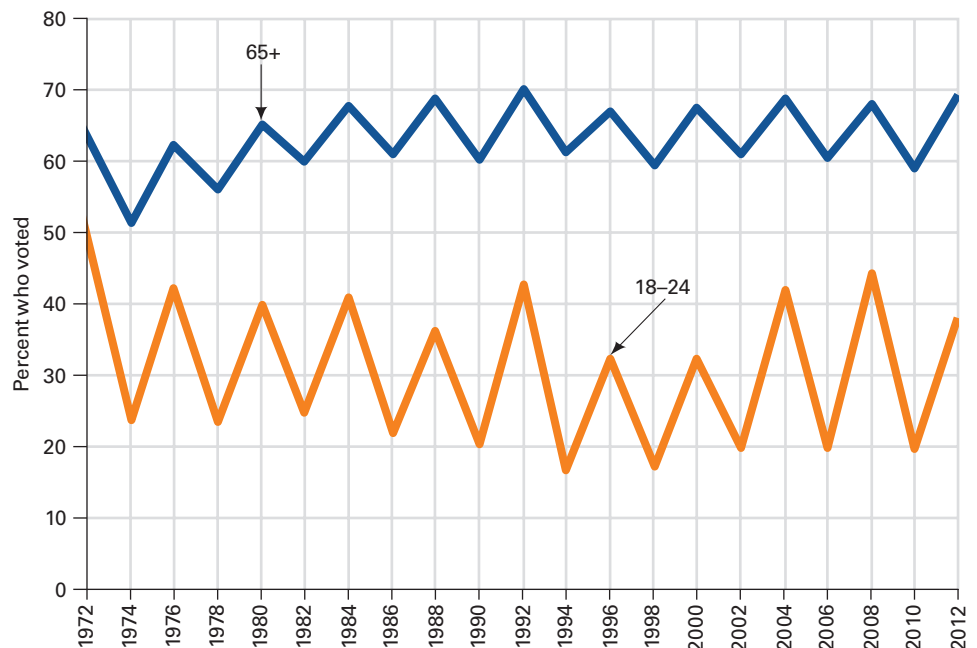
you'll be able to understand the proposed legislation, and that knowledge will then help you identify and vote for candidates whose views agree with yours.

As you will see throughout this book, those who participate in the political process are more likely to benefit from government programs and policies. Young people often complain that the elderly have far more political clout than they do—turnout statistics make clear why this is the case. As shown in Figure 1.3, in recent decades the voter turnout rate for people under 25 has consistently been much lower than that for senior citizens, particularly for midterm elections. Whereas turnout rates for the young have generally been going down, turnout among people over 65 years of age has actually gone up slightly since 1972. Political scientists used to write that the frailties of old age led to a decline in turnout after age 60; now such a decline occurs only after 80 years of age. Greater access to medical care because of the passage of Medicare in 1965 must surely be given some of the credit for this change. Who says politics doesn't make a difference?

More than any other age group, the elderly know that they have much at stake in every election, with much of the federal budget now devoted to programs that help them, such as Medicare and Social Security. In recent decades these programs have consumed more and more of the federal domestic (non-military) budget as the population has aged and the costs of medical care have skyrocketed. Furthermore, they are projected to continue to grow as the baby boom generation retires. In contrast, the share of domestic federal spending that benefits children, though substantial, has generally declined. Julia Isaacs et al. estimate that in 2020 spending on Social Security benefits and health care for the elderly will make up 51 percent of domestic federal spending, as compared to just 11 percent for programs that benefit children.⁷

FIGURE 1.3 ELECTION TURNOUT RATES OF YOUNG AND OLD AMERICANS, 1972–2012

This graph shows the turnout gap between young and old Americans in all presidential and midterm elections from 1972 through 2012. The sawtooth pattern of both lines illustrates how turnout always drops off between a presidential election and a midterm congressional election (e.g., from 2008 to 2010). The ups and downs in the graph are much more evident among young people because they are less interested in politics and hence less likely to be regular voters. In 2008, turnout among young people rose to the highest level since 1972, spurred by a surge of participation by minority youth. Record rates of turnout were set by young African Americans, who for the first time had a higher turnout rate than young whites, and by young Hispanics and Asian Americans. The 2010 election, however, saw a sharp drop-off in youth turnout. Some, but not all, of these young voters came back to the polls in 2012. If the normal pattern holds, young people's turnout in 2014 will be quite low—probably only about 20 percent—whereas turnout among senior citizens is likely to be roughly three times that high.



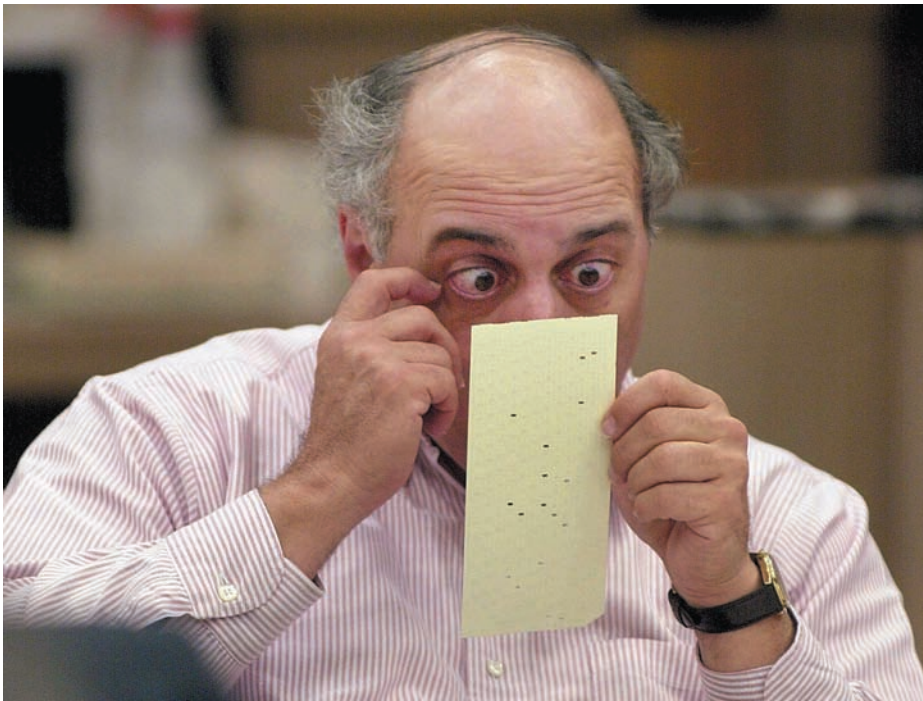
SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Surveys.

Of course, today's youth have not had any policy impact them in the way that, say, the introduction of Medicare or the military draft and the Vietnam War affected previous generations. However, the causes of young people's political apathy probably run deeper. Today's young adults have grown up in an environment in which news about political events has been increasingly more avoidable than in the past. When CBS, NBC, and ABC dominated the airwaves, in the 1960s and 1970s, their extensive coverage of presidential speeches, political conventions, and presidential debates frequently left little else to watch on TV. As channels proliferated over subsequent decades, it became much easier to avoid exposure to politics by switching the channel—and of course the Internet has exponentially broadened the choices. Major political events were once shared national experiences. But for many young adults today, September 11, 2001, represents the only time that they closely followed a major national event along with everyone else.

Consider some contrasting statistics about audiences for presidential speeches. Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter all got an average Nielsen rating of 50 for their televised addresses, meaning that half the population was watching. In contrast, President Obama averaged only about 23 for his nationally televised appearances from 2009 to 2014, despite the public's anxiety about the economy.⁸ Political conventions, which once received more TV coverage than the Summer Olympics, have been relegated to an hour per night and draw abysmal ratings. The 2008 and 2012 presidential debates averaged a respectable Nielsen rating of 37, but this was only about three-fifths of the size of the typical audience from 1960 to 1980.

In sum, young people today have never known a time when most citizens paid attention to major political events. As a result, most of them have yet to get into the habit of following and participating in politics. In a 2012 Pew Research Center survey, 24 percent of young adults said they enjoyed keeping up with the news, compared to 58 percent of senior citizens. And young people have grown up in a fragmented media environment in which hundreds of TV channels and millions of Internet sites have provided them with a rich and varied socialization experience but have also enabled them to easily avoid political events. It has become particularly difficult to convince a generation that has channel and Internet surfed all their lives that politics really does matter.

How will further expansion of channels and, especially, blogs and other Web sites, affect youth interest in and knowledge of politics? Political scientists see both opportunities and



The narrow 537-vote margin by which George W. Bush carried the state of Florida in 2000 proved the old adage that “every vote counts.” Here, an election official strains to figure out how to interpret a voter’s punch in the tedious process of recounting ballots by hand.

government

The institutions through which public policies are made for a society.

challenges. Some optimistic observers see these developments as offering “the prospect of a revitalized democracy characterized by a more active and informed citizenry.”⁹ Political junkies will certainly find more political information available than ever before, and electronic communications will make it easier for people to express their political views in various forums and directly to public officials. However, with so many media choices for so many specific interests, it will also be easy to avoid the subject of public affairs. It may also be easier to avoid a range of opinions. Political scientist Jeremy Mayer argues that “if we all get to select exactly how much campaign news we will receive, and the depth of that coverage, it may be that too many Americans will choose shallow, biased sources of news on the Internet.”¹⁰

Groups that are concerned about low youth turnout are focusing on innovative ways of reaching out to young people via new technologies, such as social networking sites like Facebook, to make them more aware of politics. In doing so, they are encouraged and spurred by the fact that young people are far from inactive in American society and in recent years have been doing volunteer community service at record rates. As Harvard students Ganesh Sitaraman and Previn Warren write in *Invisible Citizens: Youth Politics After September 11*, “Young people are some of the most active members of their communities and are devoting increasing amounts of their time to direct service work and volunteerism.”¹¹ It is only when it comes to politics that young people seem to express indifference about getting involved.

It is our hope that after reading this book, you will be persuaded that paying attention to politics and government is important. Government has a substantial impact on all our lives. But it is also true that we have the opportunity to have a substantial impact on government. Involvement in public affairs can take many forms, ranging from simply becoming better informed by browsing through political Web sites to running for elected office. In between are countless opportunities for *everyone* to make a difference.

Government

1.1

Identify the key functions of government and explain why they matter.

The institutions that make public policy decisions for a society are collectively known as **government**. In the case of our own national government, these institutions are Congress, the president, the courts, and federal administrative agencies (“the bureaucracy”). Thousands of state and local governments also decide on policies that influence our lives. There are about 500,000 elected officials in the United States. Thus, policies that affect you are being made almost constantly.



When elections result in a change of party control, power is transferred peacefully in the United States. In 2011, the outgoing Speaker of the House, Democrat Nancy Pelosi, symbolically passed the gavel to the incoming Speaker, Republican John Boehner.

Because government shapes how we live, it is important to understand the process by which decisions are made as well as what is actually decided. Two fundamental questions about governing will serve as themes throughout this book:

- ***How should we govern?*** Americans take great pride in calling their government democratic. This chapter examines the workings of democratic government; the chapters that follow will evaluate the way American government actually works compared to the standards of an “ideal” democracy. We will continually ask, “Who holds power and who influences the policies adopted by government?”
- ***What should government do?*** This text explores the relationship between *how* American government works and *what* it does. In other words, it addresses the question, “Does our government do what we want it to do?” Debates over the scope of governmental power are among the most important in American political life today. Some people would like to see the government take on more responsibilities; others believe it already takes on too much.

While citizens often disagree about what their government should do for them, all governments have certain functions in common. National governments throughout the world perform the following functions:

- ***Maintain a national defense.*** A government protects its national sovereignty, usually by maintaining armed forces. In the nuclear age, some governments possess awesome power to make war through highly sophisticated weapons. The United States currently spends over \$600 billion a year on national defense. Since September 11, 2001, the defense budget has been substantially increased in order to cope with the threat of terrorism on U.S. soil.
- ***Provide public goods and services.*** Governments in this country spend billions of dollars on schools, libraries, hospitals, highways, and many other public goods



Governments provide a wide range of public services, including providing a national defense. Because of the threat from Al Qaeda, U.S. troops have been in Afghanistan since 2001. Here, an Afghan farmer walks by while U.S. troops work to secure the road against improvised explosive devices planted by Taliban insurgents.