

THIRD EDITION

GATE

WAYS

TO DEMOCRACY

an Introduction to
American Government
The Essentials

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Wendy J. **Schiller**

Jeffrey A. **Segal**

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TO DEMOCRACY

an Introduction to
American Government

THE ESSENTIALS

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Gateways to Democracy: An Introduction to American Government, The Essentials, Third Edition

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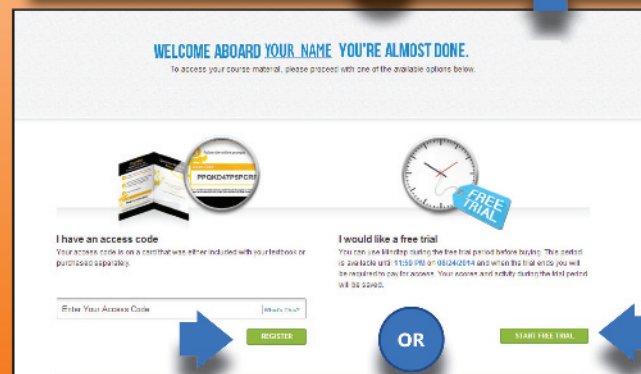
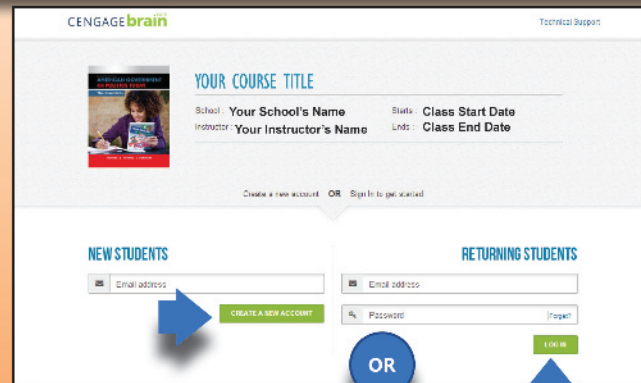
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Letter to Instructor...

Dear *Introduction to American Government* Instructor:

As teachers and scholars of American government, we have come together to write a textbook that would engage students in both the process and the policy outcomes of U.S. government. The book presents an updated lens through which we can examine the theoretical and structural foundations of American democracy and the resulting political process that demands an active and informed citizenry. To help students understand American democracy and see how they can be involved in their government, we peel back the layers of the political system to expose its inner workings and to examine how competing interests can both facilitate and block the people's will. In doing so, we use the conceptual framework of gateways. We contend that there are gates—formal and informal—that present obstacles to participation and empowerment. But there are also gateways that give students a chance to influence the process and to overcome the obstacles. The gateways framework helps students conceptualize participation and civic engagement—even democracy itself. Our book is both realistic and optimistic, contending that the American system can be open to the influence of students and responsive to their hopes and dreams—if they have information about how the system works. But we avoid cheerleading by also pointing out the many gates that undermine the workings of government. Although the size and complexity of the American constitutional system is daunting, it is imperative to prepare for the demands of democratic citizenship. This has never been truer than today, when we have a rapidly changing demographic balance within our population. Today groups that were formerly underrepresented in American politics and society, such as second- and third-generation Latinos, are a powerful force in our government. It is our hope that this textbook can awaken students and motivate them not only to learn about politics but to also participate actively throughout every stage of their lives.

In keeping with the theme of gates and gateways in American politics, we also open each chapter with a **vignette** that tells the story of people who have successfully navigated their own way in politics. The important role of the vignette for the instructor is to show the students how people like them have made a difference in American political and social life; our vignette subjects vary by historical era, career choice, gender, race, ethnicity, and party affiliation. We also include landmark **Supreme Court cases** related to every chapter's subject to show students the continuous and vital role it plays in both upholding and knocking down gates to policy implementation and political participation. We include **policy features** in each chapter to illustrate how the chapter's core content operates in a real-time, real-life basis. To round out our emphasis on how the core structure of a political system can encourage or discourage participation, we include a **Global Gateway feature** in each chapter, which informs students about politics around the globe and how it compares to what they see in the American context.

New to This Edition

- A new dedicated focus on Latino politics and participation reflects the changing demographic infrastructure in America today by providing new coverage of the politics and issues affecting Latinos in every chapter of the book:
 - New sections on the history of Latino civil rights, including a time line of significant events in Latino political history
 - New Supreme Court cases of significance to Latino constitutional and voting rights
 - New section on Latino political leaders and grassroots organizations
 - New chapter vignettes highlighting the gateways used by Latinos
 - Expanded discussion of the Latino vote and its implications for elections and governing
- New freestanding chapter on domestic, economic, and foreign policy making
- New freestanding chapter which combines the chapters on Public Opinion and the Media into one comprehensive chapter
- Revamped policy features embedded in each chapter that reflect the most current issues related to each chapter's subject

- Updated opening vignettes, Global Gateways, and new Supreme Court cases to incorporate the changes in American politics since the publication of the second edition
- Streamlined learning objectives and outcomes
- New coverage of the impact of the changes in campaign spending that arose from recent Supreme Court decisions
- Revamped discussion of microtargeting in light of the success of the Obama campaign in 2012
- New coverage of social media and its role in forging opportunities for participation
- Up-to-date coverage of the 2014 midterm elections examining the impact of the Tea Party, turnout trends, and the role of money in 2014 campaigns

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Teaching American government remains a vitally important but constantly challenging task for all of us. We know that there are many books to choose from to use in your course. We believe that *Gateways* is a book that has an innovative approach in reaching and engaging students across a range of backgrounds and enables instructors to more easily achieve their pedagogical goals in American government courses. We have seen it work for our students, and we know it will work for yours.

Sincerely,

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Wendy J. Schiller, Wendy_Schiller@Brown.edu
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Richard Herrera, Richard.Herrera@asu.edu
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Letter to Student...

Dear Student:

Our book begins with a simple question: How does anyone exert political influence in a country of more than 318 million people? Students in American government classrooms across the country are grappling with this question as they develop an appreciation of their role in American public life. In our own classrooms, students ask us, What is my responsibility? Can I make a difference? Does my participation matter? How can I get my opinions represented? These are gateway questions that probe the opportunities and limits on citizen involvement in a democracy. For that reason, we not only provide you with essential information about the American political system but also show you how to become a **more powerful advocate for yourself** within that system. It is not enough to know what you want your government and society to be—you must learn how to make it happen. This book shows you how people from all walks of life have opened gates to influence public policy, and it shows you the relevance of government in your life. It is our hope that this textbook motivates you not only to learn about politics but also to participate actively throughout every stage of your life.

In keeping with the theme of gates and gateways in American politics, we open each chapter with a vignette that tells the story of people who have successfully navigated their own way in politics. These are people like you who have different gender, ethnic, racial, and partisan backgrounds, and who have made a difference in American political and social life. We also include other features focusing on the Supreme Court, public policy, and global governance that show you how politics plays out in the United States and around the world. All of these special features are designed to relate specifically to you—the student—to give you a blueprint with which to navigate the political system. What makes our book different?

- Streamlined learning objectives and outcomes help you better understand the material and prepare for the graded assignments that go with the class. We have checkpoint questions at the end of each main section, as well as key terms study guide questions throughout each chapter.
- Latino politics and participation coverage reflect the changing demographic infrastructure in America, especially among young people by providing new coverage of the politics and issues affecting Latinos in every chapter of the book.
- Updated accounts are included of people who are changing American politics today.
- Current policy case studies are included on issues such as voting participation, environmental protection, military conflict, and personal privacy.
- A comprehensive chapter which discusses public opinion and the media.
- A comprehensive chapter on elections, campaigns, and voting.

As a student, the benefits of using MindTap with this book are endless. With automatically graded practice quizzes and activities, automatic detailed revision plans on your essay assignments offered through Write Experience, an easily navigated learning path, and an interactive eBook, you will be able to test yourself inside and outside the classroom with ease. The accessibility of current events coupled with interactive media makes the content fun and engaging. On your computer, phone, or tablet, MindTap is there when you need it, giving you easy access to flashcards, quizzes, readings, and assignments.

As teachers, our main goal both in this book and in the classroom is to empower you as active participants in American democracy. We know that you balance a lot of competing demands for your time, from other classes, to work, to family responsibilities. This book provides you with the core information you need to succeed in your American government classes, and just as important, to knock open the gates that may stand in your way to achieve your goals within the political system.

Sincerely,

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Richard Herrera, Richard.Herrera@asu.edu
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Resources for Students and Instructors

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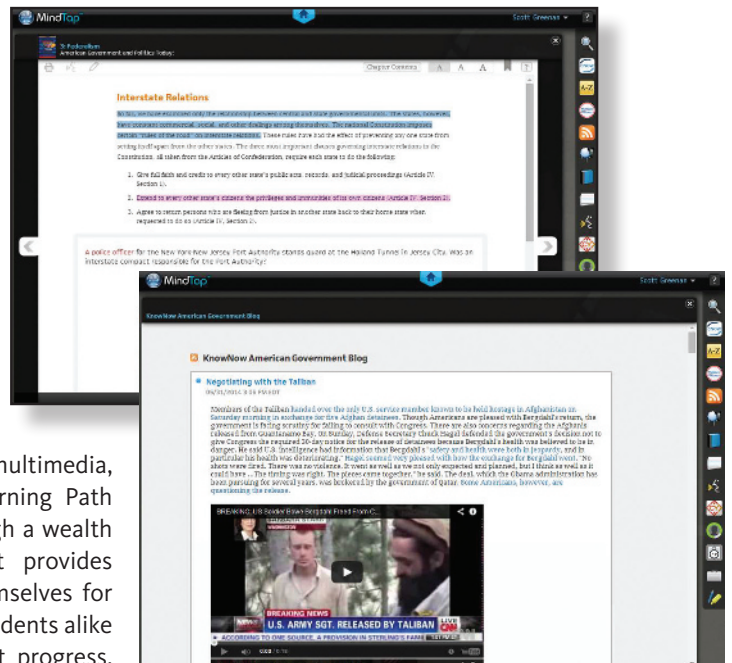


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Election 2014 Supplement

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Written by John Clark and Brian Schaffner, this booklet addresses the 2014 campaigns and elections, with real-time analysis and references.

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Career Opportunities: Political Science

Introduction

It is no secret that college graduates are facing one of the toughest job markets in the past fifty years. Despite this challenge, those with a college degree have done much better than those without since the 2008 recession. One of the most important decisions a student has to make is the choice of a major; many consider future job possibilities when making that call. A political science degree is incredibly useful for a successful career in many different fields, from lawyer to policy advocate, pollster to humanitarian worker. Employer surveys reveal that the skills that most employers value in successful employees—critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and clarity of verbal and written communication—are precisely the tools that political science courses should be helping you develop. This brief guide is intended to help spark ideas for what kinds of careers you might pursue with a political science degree and the types of activities you can engage in now to help you secure one of those positions after graduation.

Careers in Political Science

LAW AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Do you find that your favorite parts of your political science classes are those that deal with the Constitution, the legal system, and the courts? Then a career in law and criminal justice might be right for you. Traditional jobs in the field range from lawyer or judge to police or parole officer. Since 9/11, there has also been tremendous growth in the area of homeland security, which includes jobs in mission support, immigration, travel security, as well as prevention and response.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The many offices of the federal government combined represent one of the largest employers in the United States. Flip to the bureaucracy chapter of this textbook and consider that each federal department, agency, and bureau you see looks to political science majors for future employees. A partial list of such agencies would include the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Federal Trade Commission. This does not even begin to account for the multitude of similar jobs in state and local governments that you might consider as well.

CAMPAIGNS, ELECTIONS, AND POLLING

Are campaigns and elections the most exciting part of political science for you? Then you might consider a career in the growing industry based around political campaigns. From volunteering and interning to consulting, marketing, and fundraising, there are many opportunities for those who enjoy the competitive and high-stakes electoral arena. For those looking for careers that combine political knowledge with statistical skills, there are careers in public opinion polling. Pollsters work for independent national organizations such as Gallup and YouGov, or as part of news operations and campaigns. For those who are interested in survey methodology there are also a wide variety of non-political career opportunities in marketing and survey design.

INTEREST GROUPS, INTERNATIONAL AND NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Is there a cause that you are especially passionate about? If so, there is a good chance that there are interest groups out there that are working hard to see some progress made on similar issues. Many of the positions that one might find in for-profit companies also exist in their non-profit interest group and nongovernmental organization counterparts, including lobbying and high-level strategizing. Do not forget that there are also quite a few major international organizations—such as the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and the International Monetary Fund, where a degree in political science could be put to good use. While competition for those jobs tends to be fierce, your interest and knowledge about politics and policy will give you an advantage.

FOREIGN SERVICE

Does a career in diplomacy and foreign affairs, complete with the opportunity to live and work abroad, sound exciting for you? Tens of thousands of people work for the State Department, both in Washington D.C. and in consulates throughout the world. They represent the diplomatic interests of the United States abroad. Entrance into the Foreign Service follows a very specific process, starting with the Foreign Service Officers Test—an exam given three times a year that includes sections on American government, history, economics, and world affairs. Being a political science major is a significant help in taking the FSOT.

GRADUATE SCHOOL

While not a career, graduate school may be the appropriate next step for you after completing your undergraduate degree. Following the academic route, being awarded a Ph.D. or Master's degree in political science could open additional doors to a career in academia, as well as many of the professions mentioned earlier. If a career as a researcher in political science interests you, you should speak with your advisors about continuing your education.

Preparing While Still on Campus

INTERNSHIPS

One of the most useful steps you can take while still on campus is to visit your college's career center in regards to an internship in your field of interest. Not only does it give you a chance to experience life in the political science realm, it can lead to job opportunities later down the road and add experience to your resume.

SKILLS

In addition to your political science classes, there are a few skills any number of which will prove useful as a complement to your degree:

Writing: Like anything else, writing improves with practice. Writing is one of those skills that is applicable regardless of where your career might take you. Virtually every occupation relies on an ability to write cleanly, concisely, and persuasively.

Public Speaking: An oft-quoted 1977 survey showed that public speaking was the most commonly cited fear among respondents. And yet oral communication is a vital tool in the modern economy. You can practice this skill in a formal class setting or through extracurricular activities that get you in front of a group.

Quantitative Analysis: As the Internet aids in the collection of massive amounts of information, the nation is facing a drastic shortage of people with basic statistical skills to interpret and use this data. A political science degree can go hand-in-hand with courses in introductory statistics.

Foreign Language: One skill that often helps a student or future employee stand out in a crowded job market is the ability to communicate in a language other than English. Solidify or set the foundation for your verbal and written foreign language communication skills while in school.

STUDENT LEADERSHIP

One attribute that many employers look for is “leadership potential” which can be quite tricky to indicate on a resume or cover letter. What can help is a demonstrated record of involvement in clubs and organizations, preferably in a leadership role. While many people think immediately of student government, most student clubs allow you the opportunity to demonstrate your leadership skills.

Conclusion

Hopefully reading this has sparked some ideas on potential future careers. As a next step, visit your college's career placement office, which is a great place to further explore what you have read here. You might also visit your college's alumni office to connect with graduates who are working in your field of interest. Political science opens the door to a lot of exciting careers, have fun exploring the possibilities!

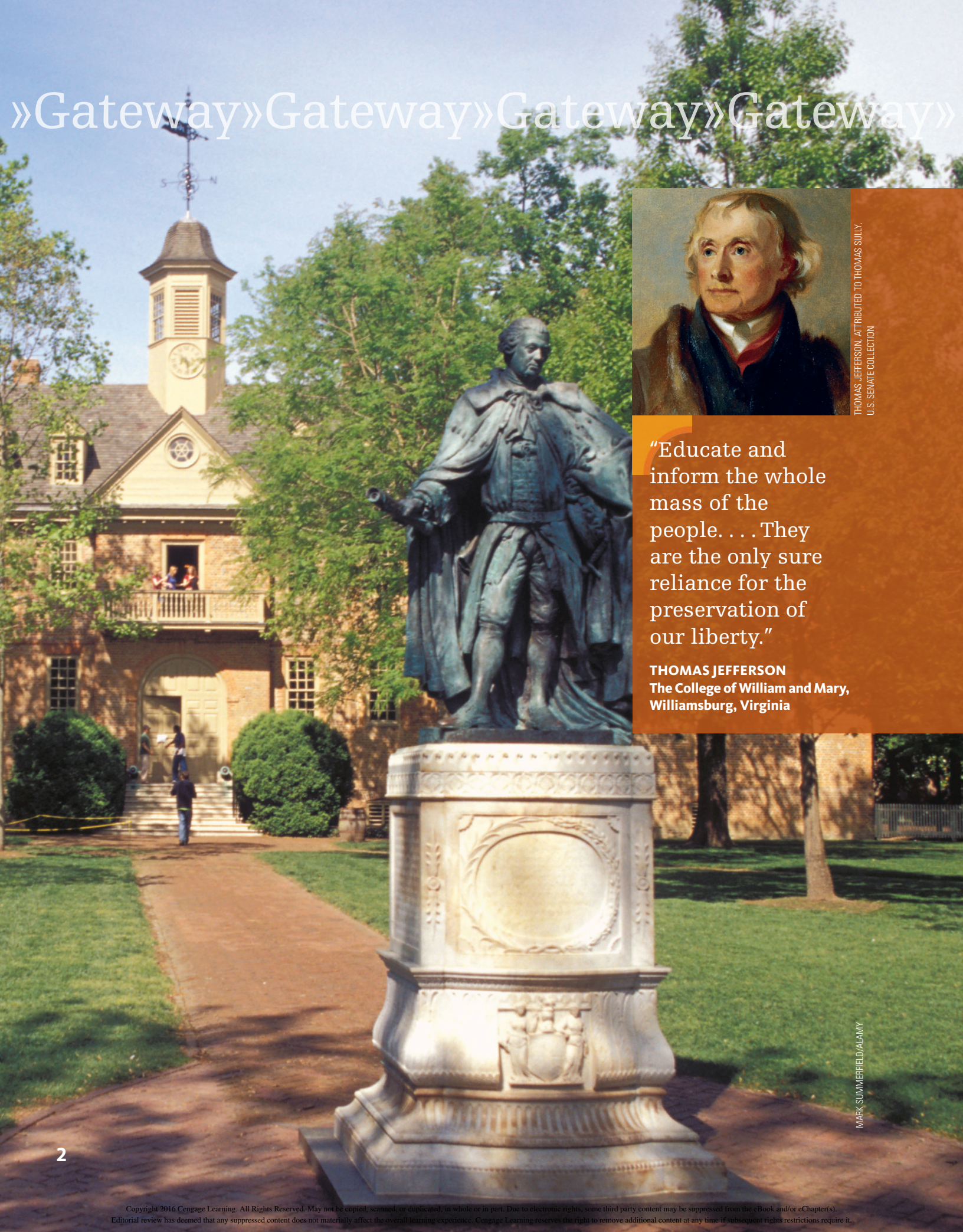
GATEWAYS

TO DEMOCRACY

an Introduction to
American Government

THE ESSENTIALS

»Gateway»Gateway»Gateway»Gateway»



THOMAS JEFFERSON, ATTRIBUTED TO THOMAS SULLY,
U.S. SENATE COLLECTION

“Educate and inform the whole mass of the people. . . . They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty.”

THOMAS JEFFERSON
The College of William and Mary,
Williamsburg, Virginia

MARK SUMMERFIELD/ALAMY

Gateways to American Democracy

In 1760 Thomas Jefferson left his boyhood home in the hills of Piedmont, Virginia, to attend the College of William and Mary in the colonial capital of Williamsburg.

There were only six colleges in the American colonies at that time, and Jefferson was fortunate to have the opportunity to pursue his education. At William and Mary, he studied mathematics, physics, ethics, and the law. He described himself as a “hard student,” and, according to family tradition, he studied fifteen hours a day, rising at dawn and reading far past midnight. “Determine never to be idle,” he later told his daughter. “It is wonderful how much may be done if we are always doing.” His family’s position in Virginia gave rise to expectations. Jefferson’s father, Peter Jefferson, owned a considerable amount of land and, like his grandfather and great-grandfather, was involved in colonial politics.

Despite his family’s wealth, however, Jefferson faced personal hardships. His father died unexpectedly in 1757, making him the head of the family at age 14. Once he turned 21, he would inherit most of his father’s wealth and land, but until then, he had to pursue his education while assisting his seven siblings. He managed to fulfill his family responsibilities and complete his studies, staying in Williamsburg after graduating from William and Mary in 1762 to study law with one of the colony’s leading lawyers. In 1769, at age 26, he won election to the House of Burgesses—the legislative assembly for the colony of Virginia.

Thomas Jefferson entered politics at a time of great upheaval in America. Discontent with British rule was rising, and Virginia was a hotbed of opposition. When the House of Burgesses began considering various measures in opposition to British rule, the colonial governor—a representative of the

British Crown—dissolved it. This act closed an avenue—or what we call in this textbook a “gateway”—for participation. With no legitimate way to express grievances, the colonists began to talk of independence. Independence was a radical step; it meant revolution, and revolution would mean the end of colonial government and the creation of new institutions of government. Jefferson understood the connection between the people and their government as a social contract; if a government did not serve the people, the people should end it. In the Declaration of Independence, he speaks of revolution as a right of self-governing men:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with

Need to Know

- 1.1 Identify the successes we have achieved and the obstacles we face in establishing a “more perfect union”**
- 1.2 Analyze how the constitutional system balances liberty and order**
- 1.3 Describe the political values and ideologies Americans share**
- 1.4 Evaluate American democracy in terms of responsiveness and equality**
- 1.5 List the responsibilities of individuals in a democracy**



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Watch a brief “What Do You Know?” video summarizing The Democratic Republic.

certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.”

This passage from the Declaration of Independence is famous. Most Americans know the ringing statement on equality with which it begins. But it is also important to note Jefferson’s statement that government not only derives its power “from the consent of the governed,” but that if government is not responsive to the governed, the people have the right “to alter or to abolish it.” In other words, it is the people’s right—and responsibility—to ensure that the “gateways to democracy” are always open and available to them in their pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness. Jefferson and the other Founders in

effect sought to replace the British Crown and build effective and meaningful institutions (or gateways) whereby the people of the new nation could enjoy a responsive government while retaining their individual freedoms. These themes of the Declaration of Independence—equality and responsiveness—were present at the creation of the new government. They continue to shape the government as each generation of Americans has sought to make them a reality.

The questions we put before you are fundamental. How does American government work? Is our system of government really democratic? Does it foster equality and responsiveness?

These are not easy questions to answer, but they are important and enduring. The Founders wrestled with them more than 200 years ago. We hope this book helps you wrestle with them as well. Our goal is not to answer the questions for you. Rather, it is your responsibility to draw your own conclusions. The central aim of this book is to give you the information and the analytical tools you need to judge the Founders’ democratic experiment for yourself.



1.1 Gateways: Evaluating the American Political System

› Identify the successes we have achieved and the obstacles we face in establishing a “more perfect union”



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Chapter 1.

This textbook, *Gateways to Democracy*, explains how citizen involvement has expanded American democracy and how each of you can also influence the political system. We call the avenues of influence, as noted previously, “gateways.” This book serves as a handbook for democratic citizenship by peeling back the layers of American government to reveal the ways you can get involved and to explain the reasons you should do so. The American political system is complicated, large, and sometimes frustrating. As the term *gateways* implies, there are also *gates*—obstacles to influence, institutional controls that limit access, and powerful interests that seem to block the people’s will. We describe these as well because to be a productive and influential member of American society, you need to understand how American government and politics work.

Through citizen involvement, American democracy has achieved many successes:

- The nation and its institutions are amazingly stable. The United States has the oldest written constitution in the world.
- The government has weathered severe economic crises, a civil war, and two world wars; yet it still maintains peaceful transitions of power from one set of leaders to the next.
- Citizens are able to petition the government and to criticize it. They can assemble and protest the government’s policies.
- The American economy has created an excellent standard of living, among the highest in the world.

- American society has attracted millions of immigrants, giving many of them a gateway to citizenship.
- Americans exhibit more commitment to civic duty than do citizens in nearly all other major democracies.¹
- Americans show more tolerance of different political views than do citizens in other major democracies.²

These successes do not mean that there are not problems:

- Inequality persists, and government is sometimes slow to respond.
- Even with the election and reelection of President Barack Obama, racial tensions continue to haunt the country.
- The gap between the rich and the poor continues to grow, with increasing numbers of people living in poverty.³
- The public's trust in the institutions of government has never been so low.⁴
- The rate of turnout in elections is among the lowest of the major democracies.
- Despite a high level of religious tolerance, there is also persistent distrust of some religious minorities, such as Muslims and Mormons.⁵
- Despite being proud of our nation of immigrants, at times the country seeks to erect gates to certain groups as they seek to become citizens.
- Political polarization continues to increase, as reflected in staggering partisan differences in the public's judgment of President Obama.⁶
- The U.S. national debt is \$17.7 trillion as of September 15, 2014, and growing every day.⁷

To solve these and other problems and achieve the “more perfect Union” promised in the Constitution, the nation's citizens must be vigilant and engaged. We have framed our book with the goal of demonstrating the demands and rewards of democratic citizenship. As we explore the American political system, we place special emphasis on the multiple and varied connections among citizenship, participation, institutions, and public policy. Our focus is on the following gateway questions:

- How can you get yourself and your opinions represented in government?
- How can you make government more responsive, and responsible, to citizens?
- How can you make American democracy better?

The laws that regulate the American economy, social issues, and even political participation are examples of **public policy**—the intentional action by government to achieve a goal. In the arena of public policy, we determine who gets what, when, and how, and with what result. In each chapter of this book, we will examine a major public policy issue related to the chapter topic. You will find that the public policy process is often divided into stages: identification of the problem; placing the problem on the agenda of policy makers;



DAVID GROSSMAN/ALAMY

Social scientists have been measuring the gap between the rich and the poor since the 1930s, and that gap has grown in the past few decades. Reports in 2013 indicated that the incomes of the top 1 percent rose 20 percent, while the remaining 99 percent's income rose only 1 percent. The wealthiest 1 percent in 2012 earned 19 percent of all income in the United States. The wealthiest 10 percent earned nearly 50 percent of total earnings.⁸



Checkpoint

CAN YOU:

- List the successes of American democracy
- Identify challenges we face in achieving “a more perfect union”

formulating a solution; enacting and implementing the solution; and finally evaluating the solution to make sure that it solves the problem and revising the solution to improve it. These stages combine to form an ideal model of the process; however, this process does not always unfold so neatly. You will also find that individuals, organizations, and political institutions all work together to determine public policies: Congress, the president, the executive branch agency that deals with the issue, the courts, political parties, interest groups, and interested citizens. In each chapter, you will learn about an important public policy, analyze who the stakeholders are and how the policy is formed, evaluate the policy, and, finally, construct your own solution (see Public Policy and Gateways to Democracy).



1.2

Democracy and the American Constitutional System

› Analyze how the constitutional system balances liberty and order

Democracy is the kind of government to which the people of many nations aspire, but it has not always been so. Only in the past two centuries—partly through the example of the United States—has democracy gained favor. Let us sketch some of the fundamental aspects of American democracy.

Liberty and Order

Literally and most simply, **democracy** is rule by the people, or **self-government**. In a democracy, the citizens hold political authority, and they develop the means to govern themselves. In practice, that means rule by the majority, and in the years before American independence, **majority rule** had little appeal. In 1644 John Cotton, a leading clergyman of the colonial period, declared democracy “the meanest and worst of all forms of government.”⁹ Even after American independence, Edmund Burke, a British political philosopher and politician, wrote that a “perfect democracy is . . . the most shameless thing in the world.”¹⁰ At the time democracy was associated with mob rule, and mobs were large, passionate, ignorant, and dangerous. If the mob ruled, the people would suffer. There would be no **liberty** or safety; there would be no **order**. Eighteenth-century mobs destroyed private property, burned effigies of leaders they detested, tarred and feathered their enemies, and threatened people who disagreed with them. In fact, such events occurred in the protests against British rule in the American colonies, and they were fresh in the minds of those who wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

John Adams, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and later the nation’s second president (1797–1801), was not a champion of this kind of democracy. “Democracy,” he wrote, “is more bloody than either aristocracy or monarchy. Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There is never a democracy that did not commit suicide.”¹¹ Adams knew about mobs and their effects firsthand. As a young lawyer

before the Revolution, he agreed to defend British soldiers who had been charged with murder for firing on protesters in the streets of Boston. The soldiers' cause was unpopular, for the people of Boston detested the British military presence. But Adams believed that, following British law, the soldiers had a right to counsel (a lawyer to defend them) and to a fair trial. In later years, he considered his defense of these British soldiers "one of the best pieces of service I ever rendered my country."¹²

Why? In defending the soldiers, Adams was standing up for the **rule of law**, the principle that could prevent mob rule and keep a political or popular majority under control so it could not trample on **minority rights**. An ancient British legal principle, the rule of law holds that all people are equal before the law, all are subject to the law, and no one is above it. Adams and the others who wrote America's founding documents believed in a **constitutional system** in which the people set up and agree on the basic rules and procedures that will govern them. A constitutional system is a government of laws, not of men. Without a constitution and rule of law, an unchecked majority could act to promote the welfare of some over the welfare of others, and society would be torn apart.

The American constitutional system, therefore, serves to protect both liberty and order. The Constitution sets up a governmental structure with built-in constraints on power (gates) and multiple points of access to power (gateways). It also has a built-in means for altering the basic rules and procedures of governance through amendments. As you might expect, the procedure for passing amendments comes with its own set of gates and gateways.

The Constitution as Gatekeeper

"If men were angels," wrote James Madison, a leading author of the Constitution and later the nation's fourth president (1809–17), "no government would be necessary. . . . In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men," he continued, "the great difficulty lies in this: You must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself" (see *Federalist* 51 in the Appendix). Madison and the other **Framers** of the Constitution recognized that the government they were designing had to be strong enough to rule but not strong enough to take away the people's rights. In other words, the Constitution had to serve as a gatekeeper, both allowing and limiting access to power at the same time.

James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and the other **Founders** had read many of the great political theorists. They drew, for example, on the ideas of the British political philosophers Thomas Hobbes and John Locke in perceiving the relationship between government and the governed as a **social contract**. If people lived in what these philosophers called a state of nature, without the rule of law, conflict would be unending, and the strong would destroy the weak. To secure order and safety, individuals come together to form a government and agree to live by its rules. In return, the government agrees to protect life, liberty, and property. The right to life, liberty, and property, said Locke, are **natural** or **unalienable rights**—rights so fundamental that government cannot take them away.

But these ideas about government as a social contract were untested theories when Madison and others began to write the Constitution. There were no working examples in other nations. The only model for self-government was ancient Athens, where the people had



Public Policy and Gateways to Democracy: Raising the Minimum Wage

The first federal minimum wage requirement was signed into law by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1938 as part of the Fair Labor Standards Act; it set the minimum wage at 25 cents per hour and established a 44-hour workweek. States could mandate pay levels above the federal minimum wage, but they could not go below it. While he was lobbying Congress and the public on behalf of the bill, President Roosevelt said that the United States should give “all our able-bodied working men and women a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work.”¹³ Others have also argued that individuals, families, and communities must be able to earn a living wage in order to rise above the poverty level, which would in turn give them more time and energy to participate in the democratic process.

Today the federal minimum wage is set at \$7.25, although twenty-one states require employers to pay more than that wage (see Table 1.1). Still, even at that wage, working full time leaves workers 40 percent below the poverty level.¹⁴ Some states, such as California and Connecticut, are considering proposals to raise the minimum wage to more than \$10 an hour over a period of several years. However, there are also states that either have no state-mandated minimum wage or a minimum wage lower than the federal standard; in both cases, businesses earning more than \$500,000 per year in revenues are required to meet the federal standards.¹⁵

Table 1.1 Minimum Wage (MW) by State

Greater Than Federal MW		Equals Federal MW of \$7.25		Less Than Federal MW	No MW Required
AK—\$7.75	MO—\$7.50	DE	NH	AR—\$6.25	AL
AZ—\$7.90	MT—\$7.90	HI	OK	GA—\$5.15	LA
CA—\$8.00	NJ—\$8.25	IA	PA	WY—\$5.15	MS
CO—\$8.00	NM—\$7.50	ID	SD		SC
CT—\$8.70	NV—\$8.25	IN	TX		TN
DC—\$8.25	NY—\$8.00	KS	UT		
FL—\$7.93	OH—\$7.95	KY	VA		
IL—\$8.25	OR—\$9.10	MD	WV		
MA—\$8.00	RI—\$8.00	NC	WI		
ME—\$7.50	VT—\$8.73	ND			
MI—\$7.40	WA—\$9.32	NE			
MN—\$8.00*					

*scheduled to rise to \$9.50 by 2016

Source: <http://www.dol.gov/whd/minwage/america.htm#Washington>

In February 2014, President Barack Obama echoed FDR's sentiment in his annual State of the Union address to Congress, when he announced that he would raise the minimum wage by executive order for all federally funded employees to \$10.10 per hour. In his words, "if you cook our troops' meals or wash their dishes, you shouldn't have to live in poverty."¹⁶ He went on to ask that Congress formally raise the federal minimum wage for all workers to that same level.¹⁷

The central argument against raising the minimum wage to \$10.10 or even higher is that most of these types of jobs are located in small businesses that cannot afford to pay the higher wages. Opponents of higher minimum wages fear these employers will not hire more workers, and they may even fire existing workers, in order to keep their businesses profitable. Those who oppose raising the minimum wage also argue that open trade policies have given an unfair advantage to foreign manufacturers that can hire workers at very low wages and so produce and sell goods for less. However, it is difficult to assess the impact of raising the minimum wage on job growth or trade imbalances because there are so many other factors that affect the economy. For example, the last raise in the federal minimum wage occurred in 2009 in the midst of a major recession caused by a crash in the housing market. How many jobs were lost due to the recession, and how many resulted from the hike in minimum wage? It is possible that the increased minimum wage contributed to a decline in jobs, but it is also possible that the increase had no effect at all in the larger context of an economic downturn. Economists and other experts have not reached a consensus on this question.

In terms of policy choices then, society must judge what FDR called a "fair day's pay for a fair day's work." In the context of the American democracy, the minimum wage debate raises fundamental questions about the government's role in guaranteeing equality of economic opportunity.



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Construct Your Own Policy

1. Using the table, figure out what the minimum wage is in your state. Do you think it is reasonable given the cost of living in your area? If you wanted to change the minimum wage laws in your area, what level of government would you have to lobby—local, state, federal, or a combination?
2. Construct a minimum wage policy that takes into account a worker's age, education, and family circumstance.