15TH EDITION

WE THE PEOPLE

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EDITION

15

We the People

An Introduction to American Politics

To:

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Horace, Annette, Peter, and Kenny Francis

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Preface

When we wrote the First Edition of this book, our concern was to explain to students why they should be interested in government and politics. But today our pedagogical priorities are different. After two years in which our nation has been confronted with steep inflation, new Supreme Court decisions on affirmative action and abortion, campus protests over the Israel–Hamas war, and a tumultuous presidential campaign and election, many, if not most, students know that politics can have a direct impact upon their lives. Indeed, they see every day that politics can be a matter of life and death, and that democracy itself may be in peril. Today's students are eager to learn what they need to know about politics and how they can affect the political world. In this book, we endeavor to provide students with a core of political knowledge and to show them how they can apply that knowledge as participants in the political process.

As events from the past several years have reminded us, "what government does" inevitably raises questions about political participation and political equality. The size and composition of the electorate, for example, affect who is elected to public office and what policy directions the government will pursue. Challenges to election administration, from the reliability of voting machines to the ability of local officials to handle the many complications of running a voting operation during a global pandemic, have become contentious issues. Questions have been raised about the integrity of the voting process, from fears of foreign attacks to concerns about mail-in voting. Fierce debates about the policies of the Trump and Biden administrations have heightened students' interest in politics. Other recent events have underscored how Americans from different backgrounds experience politics. Arguments about immigration have become heated as the nation once again debated the question of who is an American and who should have a voice in determining what the government does. Debates about whether pandemic-era expansions of the Child Tax Credit should be continued and whether federal student loans

should be forgiven have raised questions about which interests have effective voices in government policy. And disagreements over the power of the Supreme Court to intervene in a number of hot-button issues including guns, abortion, and religion have underscored the relationship between political institutions and the ability of Americans to exercise their individual liberties.

Reflecting all of these trends, this new Fifteenth Edition shows more than any other book on the market (1) how students are connected to government, (2) why students should think critically about government and politics, and (3) how Americans from different backgrounds and political persuasions experience and shape politics.

What's New in the Fifteenth Edition

In order to highlight the book's emphasis on the citizen's role in government and politics, Professor Andrea Campbell continues to write and revise engaging chapter introductions that focus on stories of individuals and how government has affected them. Many Americans, particularly the young, have difficulty understanding the role of government in their everyday lives. The Fifteenth Edition features 13 new chapter openers that profile people from diverse walks of life and political persuasions and illustrate their interactions with government, from a 13-year-old testifying before her state legislature about proposed limits on youth social media use (Chapter 7), to young Republicans working to mobilize youth voters to support their party's candidates (Chapter 9), to cotton farmers lobbying for disaster relief (Chapter 11), to people raising questions about Chinese companies purchasing land around local military bases (Chapter 18).

Several other elements of the book also help show students why politics and government should matter to them. These include:

- **Who Are Americans? infographics**—many new and updated for the Fifteenth Edition—ask students to think critically about how Americans from different backgrounds experience politics. These sections use bold, engaging graphics to present a statistical snapshot of the nation related to each chapter's topic. Critical-thinking questions are included in each infographic. In the Norton Illumine Ebook, these features are offered as Who Are Americans? interactive exercises with additional context and more opportunities for students to delve into the data. The Who Are Americans? interactive exercises also include new assessment questions, with feedback, that ensure students both grasp the main ideas presented in the infographic and think critically about the data they present.

- **Who Participates? infographics** show students how different groups of Americans participate in key aspects of politics and government, using engaging graphics and thought-provoking questions. Like Who Are Americans?, in the Norton Illumine Ebook, the Who Participates? infographics are offered as interactive exercises that provide even greater engagement with the data, along with assessment that better promotes student understanding and critical thinking.

- **How To guides** feature interviews with political experts to provide students with concrete advice about how to participate in politics.

These guides offer easy-to-follow instructions about getting involved in politics in effective ways.

- **America Side by Side boxes** in every chapter use data figures and tables to provide a comparative perspective. By comparing political institutions and behavior across countries, students gain a better understanding of how specific features of the American system shape politics.

- **Up-to-date coverage** has always been a hallmark of *We the People*. In the Fifteen Edition, this includes:

  Extensive coverage of the 2024 elections in the textbook and in the NEW 2024 Election Online Supplement. This unique supplement provides in-depth coverage and analysis of the run-up to the elections, the key issues at play, President Biden's decision not to run, the emergence of Kamala Harris, and the results.

  A thoroughly revised chapter on Civil Liberties (Chapter 4). In this chapter, coauthor Megan Ming Francis incorporates more contemporary examples emerging out of recent groundbreaking Supreme Court decisions.

  A sharper focus on political values. In Chapter 1 (Americans and Their Political Values), coauthor Megan Ming Francis highlights the contested nature of liberty, equality, democracy, and justice in the past and in today's contentious political environment.

  Extensive coverage of recent events throughout the book. This includes coverage of the Biden administration, and debates about abortion, student debt relief, immigration, inflation, and more.

- **For Critical Analysis questions** are incorporated throughout the text. These questions in the margins of every chapter prompt students' own critical thinking about the material in the chapter, encouraging them to engage with the topic.

- **What Do You Think? chapter conclusions** ask students to relate the chapter content and the personal profiles that begin each chapter to fundamental questions about the American political system and to reflect on the significance of government to the lives of individuals.

- **This Fifteenth Edition is accompanied by a new and expanded Norton Illumine Ebook** that offers students a rich and engaging reading experience online. Professor Campbell's chapter introductions have been brought to life in a series of videos featuring the book's authors, offering students a compelling beginning to each chapter. The Who Are Americans? and Who Participates? infographics have also been transformed into new interactive exercises that offer additional context, more opportunities for students to delve into the data, as well as assessment to help ensure students understand and retain the key ideas of this feature. Check Your Understanding questions conclude each chapter section, allowing students to test themselves

and offer instructors valuable insight into student comprehension. Overall, the Norton Illumine Ebook allows readers of the book to have a much more interactive, engaging, and memorable experience with the text, all easily accessed through your LMS or through the book's website.

- **InQuizitive**, Norton's award-winning formative, adaptive online quizzing program, accompanies this Fifteenth Edition. The InQuizitive course for *We the People* guides students through questions organized around the text's chapter learning objectives to ensure mastery of the core information and to help with assessment. InQuizitive helps ensure students understand the key concepts of each chapter and how to apply them. Ample feedback for both correct and incorrect answers guides and reinforces learning, and images, charts, and data figures from the text offer rich and varied types of questions. Visit digital.wwnorton.com/wethepeople15 for additional information and a demonstration.

We miss working with past contributors Theodore Lowi and Margaret Weir but continue to hear their voices and to benefit from their wisdom in the pages of our book. We also continue to hope that our book will itself be accepted as a form of enlightened political action. This Fifteenth Edition is another chance. It is an advancement toward our goal. We promise to keep trying.

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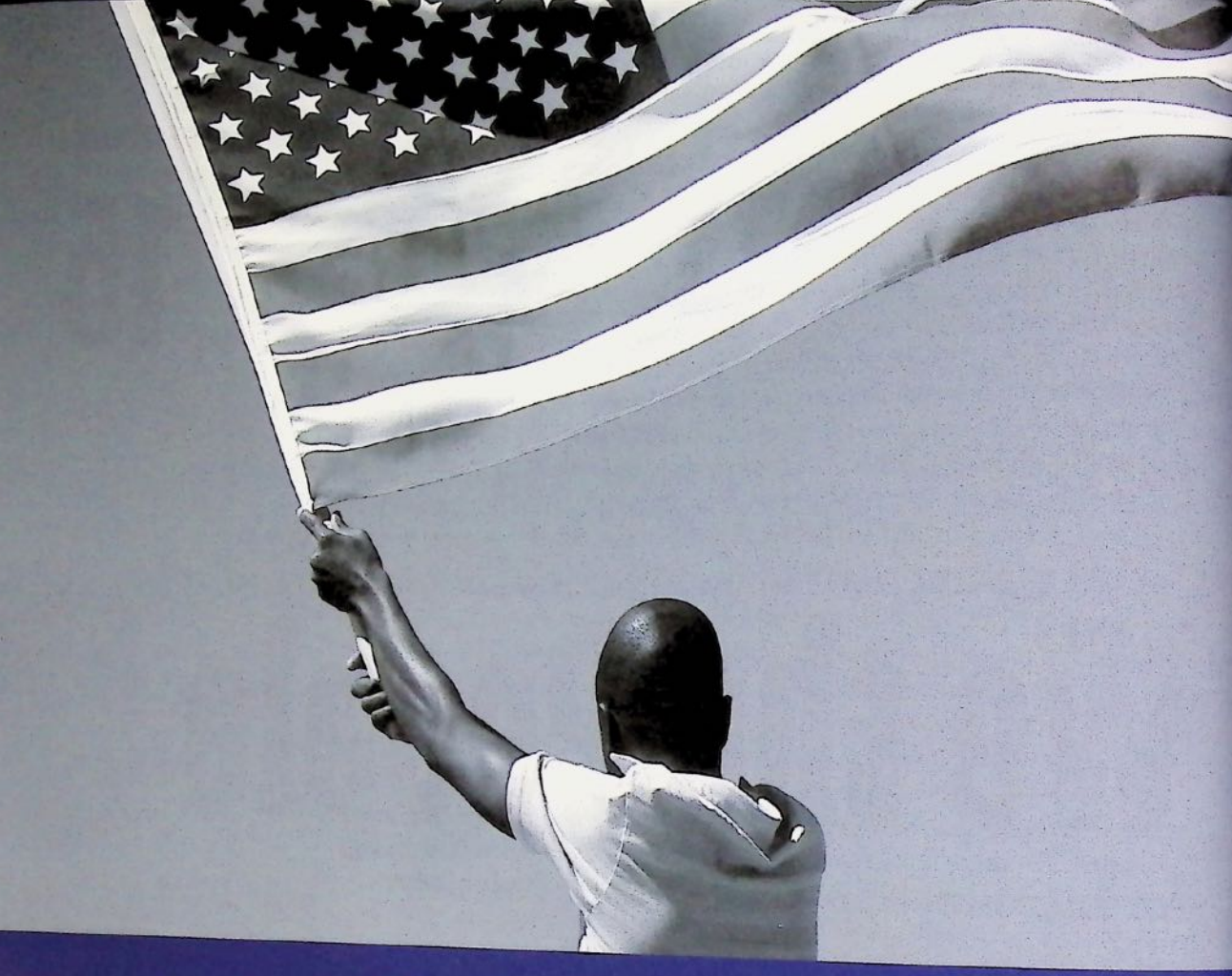
Margaret Weir is Professor of Sociology and Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley. She has written widely on social policy in Europe and the United States. She is the author of *Politics and Jobs: The Boundaries of Employment Policy in the United States* and coauthor (with Ira Katznelson) of *Schooling for All: Class, Race, and the Decline of the Democratic Ideal*. Weir has also edited (with Ann Shola Orloff and Theda Skocpol) *The Politics of Social Policy in the United States*.

EDITION

15

We the People

An Introduction to American Politics



1

WHAT GOVERNMENT DOES AND WHY IT MATTERS In 2023, Montana's Republican-led legislature passed a law guiding how state agencies conduct environmental reviews, barring the agencies from considering climate impacts when issuing permits for coal and natural gas energy projects.[1] Critics claimed that ignoring greenhouse gas emissions runs counter to the state's constitution, which proclaims that "the state and each person shall maintain and improve a clean and healthful environment in Montana for present and future generations." In an unusual case, 16 young people ages 5 to 22 sued the state, arguing that the new law violated their state constitutional right to a clean environment.

A judge in Montana's First Judicial District Court ruled in favor of the young people in summer 2023. The state had argued that its contributions to climate change are small in the global context and that the lawsuit was frivolous. But the judge said that the new law prohibiting even the consideration of the impacts of fossil fuel development was "unconstitutional on its face."

The ruling faces further court challenges. Nonetheless, legal observers said that the case was valuable in finding that governments

Americans & Their Political Values

could be held responsible for worsening climate conditions and in adding climate data to the legal record, which could be cited in future court cases (similar youth-led climate lawsuits are pending in Hawaii, Utah, Virginia, and Florida). Rikki Held, age 22, was the lead plaintiff in the case. Her family's ranch has been affected by some of the worst air quality in the country because of wildfires—worsened by climate change—and coal plant emissions. "For us to have this come to trial and have this science-based evidence in the court record and having decision-makers listen to us is just really amazing. The case can set a precedent for other legal cases outside of Montana's borders."

The Montana youth climate lawsuit illustrates the challenge of putting values into practice in American democracy. On one hand, the Montana legislature recognized that the state is a leading coal producer and that fossil fuel development is important for the state economy and jobs. On the other hand, the state's constitution had elevated living in a clean environment to the level of a legal right. Liberty is a value Americans hold dear, but sometimes definitions of values conflict and government must decide how to act, as when

▲ The makeup of the American population and the political values of liberty, democracy, equality, and justice greatly shape the politics and government of the United States.

▲ After experiencing worsening air quality around her family's ranch, Rikki Held led a group of young people who sued the state of Montana over environmental policies they said violated the state's constitution. Montana's First Judicial District Court agreed.

the freedom to pursue economic development runs against freedom from environmental damage.

The Montana case also shows how values can cut across political parties and ideologies. Climate activism is often associated with political liberals and Democrats, but another group that cheered the ruling was the American Conservation Coalition, whose conservative and Republican members also work on climate issues, advocating conservative environmentalism and market-based policy solutions.

The Montana youth climate lawsuit additionally illustrates how, in a democracy, ordinary people can influence government through participation. Individuals can act alone through voting, writing letters to elected officials, participating at local community meetings, and signing petitions. But often, participation is more effective when people work together. In Montana, ordinary people worked together and urged the law facilitating fossil fuel development, and ordinary people like Rikki Held worked together to challenge it.

This episode raises many questions about the nature of American government and politics that this book seeks to address. What are the responsibilities of the federal government versus the states? What values do Americans believe are important? How similar or different are Republicans' and Democrats' views on public policies? What are the roles ordinary citizens play in governance?

The purpose of this book is to show what government does, how, and why—and what you can do about it.

CHAPTER GOALS

Differentiate among forms of government (pp. 5–10)

Describe the rights and responsibilities that citizens have in a democracy (pp. 12–14)

Describe the social composition of the American population and how it has changed over time (pp. 14–21)

Describe how foundational values of liberty, democracy, equality, and justice influence the U.S. system of government (pp. 22–30)

Summarize Americans' attitudes toward government (pp. 30–33)

Government

Differentiate among forms of government

Government is the term generally used to describe the formal institutions through which a territory and its people are ruled. A government may be as simple as a town meeting in which community members make policy and determine budgets together or as complex as the vast establishments found in many large countries today, with extensive procedures, laws, and bureaucracies. In the history of civilization, thousands of governments have been established. The hard part is establishing one that lasts.

government institutions and procedures through which a territory and its people are ruled

Even more difficult is developing a stable government that is true to the core American political values of liberty, democracy, equality, and justice. Though in principle these values are endorsed by most Americans, in practice each of them means different things to different people, and they often seem to conflict with one another. This is where politics comes in. **Politics** refers to conflicts and struggles over the leadership, structure, and policies of governments. Much political conflict concerns policies and practices that seem to affirm one of the key American political values but that may contradict another.

politics conflict over the leadership, structure, and policies of governments

Is Government Needed?

Thomas Jefferson famously observed that the best government was one that "governed least," and since the nation's founding, Americans have always viewed government with some suspicion and a desire that it play only a limited role in their lives. Generally speaking, a government is needed to provide services, sometimes called public goods, that citizens all need but probably cannot provide adequately for themselves—such as defense against foreign aggression, maintenance of public order, a stable currency, enforcement of contractual obligations and property rights, and some measure of economic security. Government, with its powers to tax and regulate, is typically viewed as the best way to provide public goods. However, there is often disagreement about which public goods are essential and how they should be provided.

Much of what citizens take for granted every day is in fact affected by government. Throughout the day, for example, a typical college student relies on a host of services and activities organized by national, state, and local government agencies (see Table 1.1).

Forms of Government

Governments vary in their structure, their size, and the way they operate. Two questions are of special importance in determining how they differ: Who governs? And how much government control is permitted?

Some nations are governed by a single individual—a king or dictator, for example. This system is called **autocracy**. Where a small group—perhaps landowners, military officers, or the wealthy—controls most of the governing

autocracy a form of government in which a single individual—a king, queen, or dictator—rules

TABLE 1.1 | The Presence of Government in the Daily Life of a Student at "State University"

TIME	SCHEDULE
7:00 A.M.	Wake up. Standard time set by the national government.
7:10 A.M.	Shower. Water courtesy of local government and supplied by either a public entity or a regulated private company. Brush your teeth with toothpaste whose cavity-fighting claims have been verified by a federal agency. Dry your hair with an electric dryer manufactured according to federal government agency guidelines.
7:30 A.M.	Have a bowl of cereal with milk for breakfast. "Nutrition Facts" on food labels are a federal requirement, pasteurization of milk required by state law, freshness dating on milk based on state and federal standards, recycling the empty cereal box and milk carton enabled by state or local laws.
8:30 A.M.	Drive or take public transportation to campus. Airbags and seat belts required by federal and state laws. Roads and bridges paid for by state and local governments, speed and traffic laws set by state and local governments, public transportation subsidized by all levels of government.
8:45 A.M.	Arrive on campus of large public university. Buildings are 70 percent financed by state taxpayers.
9:00 A.M.	First class: Chemistry 101. Tuition partially paid by a federal loan (more than half the cost of university instruction is paid for by taxpayers); chemistry lab paid for with grants from the National Science Foundation (a federal agency) and smaller grants from corporations made possible by federal income tax deductions for charitable contributions.
Noon	Eat lunch. College cafeteria financed by state dormitory authority on land grant from federal Department of Agriculture.
12:47 P.M.	Felt an earthquake! Check the U.S. Geological Survey at www.usgs.gov to see that it was a 3.9 on the Richter scale.
2:00 P.M.	Second class: American Government 101 (your favorite class!). You may be taking this class because it is required by the state legislature or because it fulfills a university requirement.
4:00 P.M.	Third class: Computer Science 101. Free computers, software, and internet access courtesy of state subsidies plus grants and discounts from Apple and Microsoft, the costs of which are deducted from their corporate income taxes; internet built in part by federal government. Duplication of software prohibited by federal copyright laws.
6:00 P.M.	Eat dinner: hamburger and french fries. Meat inspected for bacteria by federal agencies.
7:00 P.M.	Work at part-time job at the campus library. Minimum wage set by federal, state, or local government; books and journals in library paid for by state taxpayers.
8:15 P.M.	Go online to check the status of your application for a federal student loan (FAFSA) on the Department of Education's website at studentaid.gov.
10:00 P.M.	Go home. Street lighting paid for by county and city governments, police patrols by city government.
10:15 P.M.	Watch TV. Networks regulated by federal government; cable public-access channels required by city law. Weather forecast provided to broadcasters by a federal agency.
10:45 P.M.	To complete your economics homework, visit the Bureau of Labor Statistics at www.bls.gov to look up unemployment levels since 1972.
Midnight	Put out the trash before going to bed. Trash collected by city sanitation department, financed by user charges.

decisions, that government is an **oligarchy**. If citizens or the general adult population have **popular sovereignty**—the power to rule themselves—that government is a **democracy**.

Governments also vary considerably in terms of how they govern. In the United States and some other nations, such as the United Kingdom and France, constitutions and other laws limit what governments can do and how they go about it. Governments limited in this way are called liberal or **constitutional governments**.

In other nations, including some in Latin America, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Africa, the rule of law imposes few constraints on the operation of government. Government is nevertheless kept in check by other political and social institutions that it cannot control—such as self-governing territories, organized religions, business organizations, or labor unions. Such governments are generally called **authoritarian**.

In a third group of nations, including the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin, Nazi Germany, and North Korea today, governments not only lack legal limits but also try to eliminate institutions that might challenge their authority. Because these governments typically attempt to control all of a nation's political, economic, and social life, they are called **totalitarian** (see Table 1.2).

Today, by one measure, 72 percent of the global population lives in some form of autocracy, and only 13 percent enjoy true liberal democracy with free and fair elections, the rule of law, and constraints on the executive (president or prime minister).[2] Moreover, constitutional, liberal democracies were unheard of before the modern era. Before 1800, governments seldom sought—and rarely received—the support of their subjects.[3]

Beginning in the 1600s, in a handful of European nations, two important changes in the character and conduct of government began:

TABLE 1.2 | Forms of Government

WHO GOVERNS	TYPE OF GOVERNMENT
One person	Autocracy
Small group (e.g., landowners, military officers, or wealthy merchants)	Oligarchy
Many people	Democracy
LIMITS ON GOVERNMENT	**TYPE OF GOVERNMENT**
Codified, legal substantive and procedural limits on what government can or cannot do	Constitutional
Few legal limits; some limits imposed by social groups	Authoritarian
No limits	Totalitarian

America's Founders were influenced by the English thinker John Locke (1632–1704). Locke argued that governments need the consent of the people.

oligarchy a form of government in which a small group—landowners, military officers, or wealthy merchants—controls most of the governing decisions

popular sovereignty a principle of democracy in which political authority rests ultimately in the hands of the people

democracy a system of rule that permits citizens to play a significant part in the governmental process, usually through the election of key public officials

constitutional government a system of rule in which formal and effective limits are placed on the powers of the government

authoritarian government a system of rule in which the government recognizes no formal limits but may nevertheless be restrained by the power of other social institutions

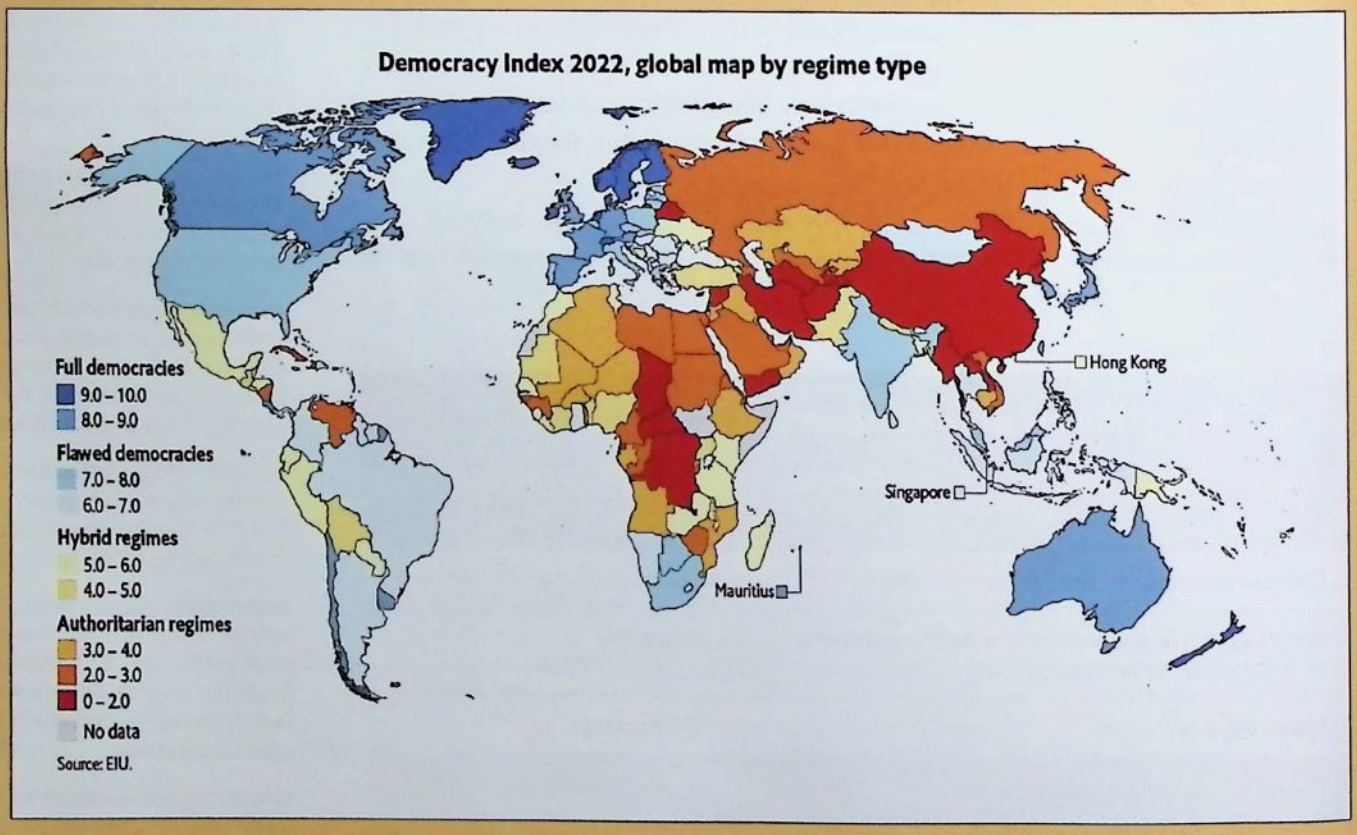
totalitarian government a system of rule in which the government recognizes no formal limits on its power and seeks to absorb or eliminate other social institutions that might challenge it

AMERICA | SIDE BY SIDE

Forms of Government

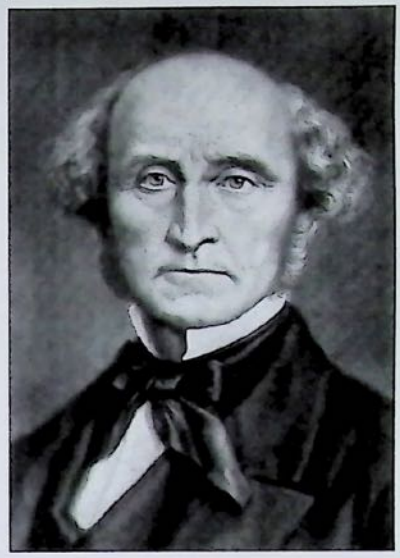
The question of whether a country is democratic or authoritarian is complex. Every year, the *Economist* rates countries on a scale from "Full Democracies" to "Authoritarian" systems based on expert evaluations of five factors: electoral processes, political culture, respect for civil liberties, political participation, and functioning of government. In 2016, for the first time, the United States was classified as a "Flawed Democracy" in response to a rise in polarization. In addition, in 2022, Russia recorded the largest democratic decline of any country in the world.

1. Is there a geographic pattern between the countries labeled "Full" or "Flawed" democracies and those that are labeled "Hybrid" or "Authoritarian" systems? What factors, historical, economic, geographic, or otherwise, might help to explain this pattern?
2. What do you think separates a "Full Democracy" from a "Flawed Democracy"? The United States' categorization as a "Flawed Democracy" happened during the Obama administration and persisted during the Trump and Biden administrations. What changes have you seen in the past few years that might explain this shift? How concerned should Americans be by this categorization?



SOURCE: "Democracy Index 2022," Economist Intelligence Unit.

governments started to acknowledge formal limits on their power, and a few governments started to provide ordinary citizens with a formal voice in public affairs—through the vote. These ideas influenced the political climate in the American colonies. In fact, support for limits on government and for popular influence on it lay at the heart of the American Revolution, in which "No taxation without representation" was fiercely asserted (see Chapter 2).



John Stuart Mill (1806–73) presented a ringing defense of individual freedom in his famous treatise *On Liberty*. Mill's work influenced Americans' evolving ideas about the relationship between government and the individual.

Limiting Government

On both sides of the Atlantic, a commercial class emerged in the eighteenth century that was interested in changing governmental institutions to allow its political participation and to protect its economic interests—not just the aristocracy's. In defending its own interests from government, the founding generation of the young United States established many of the principles that would come to define individual liberty for all citizens—freedom of speech, of assembly, and of conscience, as well as freedom from arbitrary search and seizure.

Notably, the Founders generally did not favor democracy as we know it today. Despite calls for liberty and freedom, many of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention owned enslaved Black people and sought to protect the brutal system of slavery.[4] In addition, along with political institutions based on elected representatives, they supported property requirements and other restrictions for voting and for holding office so as to limit political participation to the White male middle and upper classes. Yet once these institutions and the right to engage in politics were established, it was difficult to limit them to the economic elite. Through mass movements that also found political allies in Congress and the courts, voting rights have significantly expanded since the Founding era (see Chapters 2, 3, and 5). Today, the United States has laws that protect the voting rights of Black people, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. The expansion of participation has meant that more and more people have a legal right to take part in politics.

Democracy in the United States

What type of government exists in the United States? Most people respond with one word: democracy. Yet this is not the complete answer.

A system that permits citizens to vote directly on laws and policies is a **direct democracy**. However, Founders like James Madison were concerned that in a direct democracy, the majority could trample over the rights of the minority. In *Federalist* 51, he wrote: "If men were angels, no government would be necessary." That is, given that not all people are virtuous, government must be durable enough to withstand abuses of power. So the Founders focused on creating a democracy based on the principle of **majority rule** with **minority rights**.

direct democracy a system of rule that permits citizens to vote directly on laws and policies

majority rule, minority rights the democratic principle that a government follows the preferences of the majority of voters but protects the interests of the minority

Majority rule means that the wishes of the majority determine what government does. The House of Representatives—a large body elected directly by the

people—was designed in particular to ensure majority rule. But the Founders feared that popular majorities might turn government into a "tyranny of the majority"; thus, concern for individual rights and liberties has been a part of American democracy from the beginning.

representative democracy (republic) a system of government in which the populace selects representatives, who play a significant role in governmental decision-making

Today, the U.S. government is a **representative democracy**, or a **republic**, in which citizens have the opportunity to elect top officials. At the national level, citizens select government officials but do not vote directly on legislation. Some states and cities, however, do provide for direct legislation through initiatives and referenda. These procedures enable citizens to collect petitions, or legislators to pass bills, requiring a direct popular vote on an issue. Recently, 160 statewide ballot measures have been certified for the ballot, many addressing hot-button issues such as abortion access (10 states), increasing the state minimum wage (5 states), and electoral system changes such as voting requirements and ranked-choice voting (19 states).[5]

Influencing the Government through Participation: Politics

As political scientist Harold Lasswell once put it, politics is the struggle over "who gets what, when, how."[6] Although it exists in every organization, in this book *politics* will refer to conflicts over who the government's leadership is, how the government is organized, or what the government's policies are. Having a say in these issues is called having **political power** or influence.

political power influence over a government's leadership, organization, or policies

Participation in politics can take many forms, including voting, donating money, signing petitions, attending political meetings, posting and commenting online, sending emails to officials, lobbying legislators, working on a campaign, and participating in protest marches and even violent demonstrations. Groups and organized interests also participate in politics. Their political activities include providing funds for candidates, lobbying, and trying to influence public opinion. The pattern of struggles among interests is called group politics, or **pluralism**. Americans have always had mixed feelings about pluralist politics. On the one hand, the right of groups to support their views and compete for influence in government is the essence of liberty. On the other hand, groups may sometimes exert too much influence, advancing their own interests at the expense of larger public interests (see Chapter 11).

pluralism competition among groups and organized interests for influence in the government

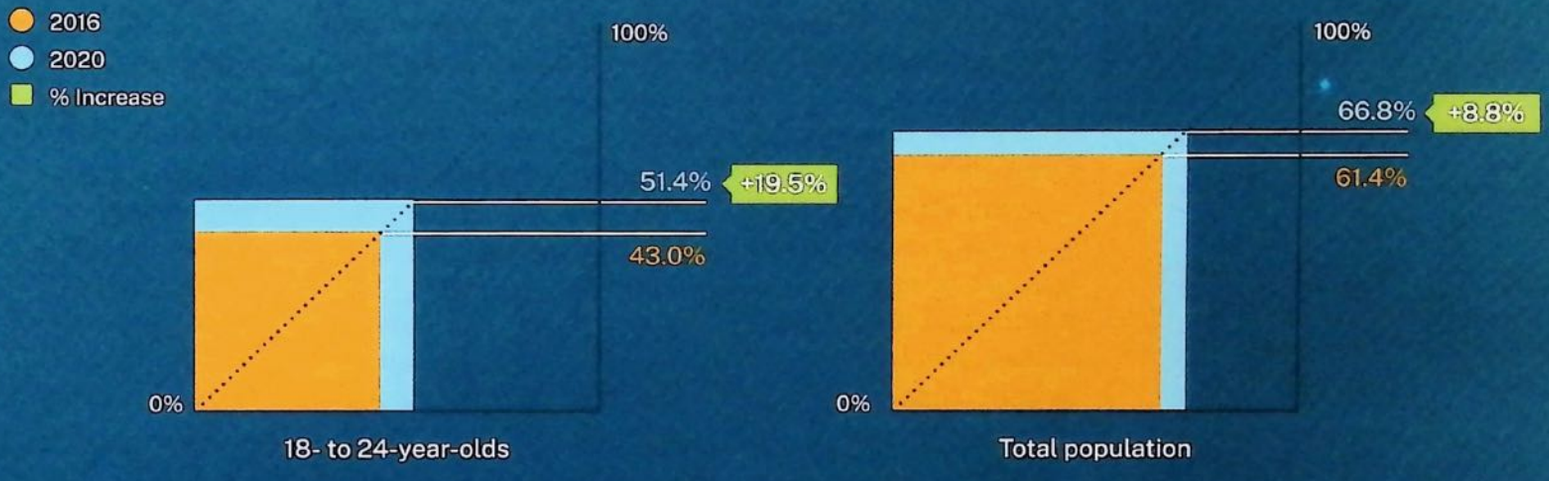
Sometimes, politics does not take place through formal channels but instead involves direct action. In addition to actions such as marches, demonstrations, and boycotts, direct action politics can include violent activities or civil disobedience, both of which attempt to shock or force political elites into changing their behavior. In recent years in the United States, groups ranging from animal rights activists to labor union advocates to antiabortion activists to those focused on climate change have used direct action to underline their demands.

WHO PARTICIPATES?

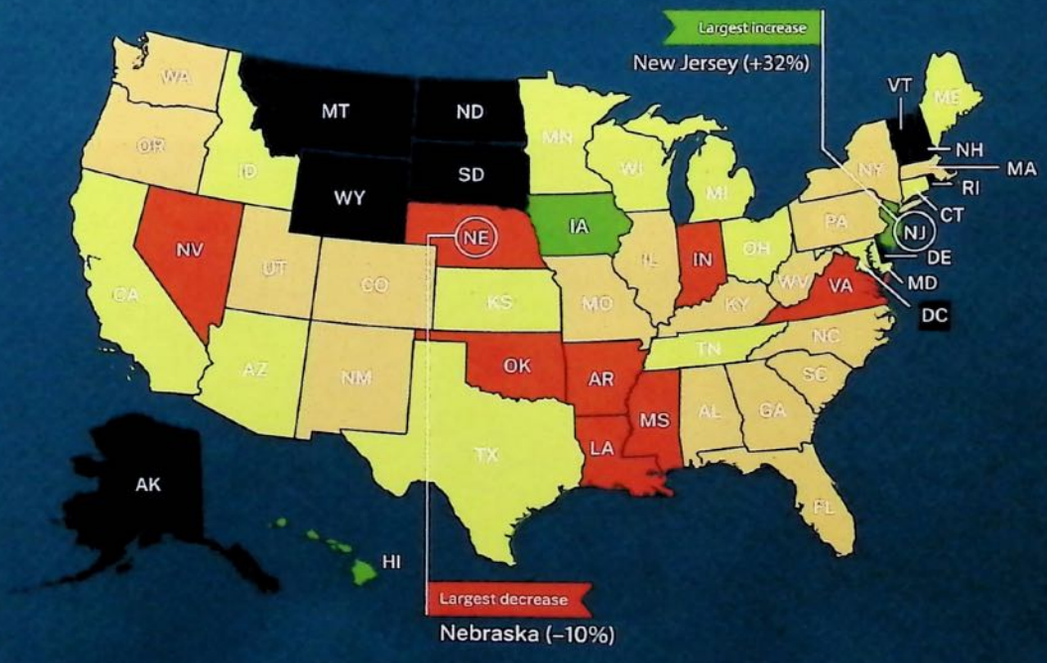
Can Young People Make a Difference in Politics?

Young people are less likely to participate in politics than older people. Only 43 percent of young people (age 18–24) voted in the 2016 presidential election, compared to 71 percent of those over age 65. The 2020 election was historic, with the highest voter turnout in 120 years, and youth voter turnout broke records in many states. Generation Z is a sizable age cohort in the United States, and they made their voices heard in 2020.

Change in Voter Turnout, 2016–20



Change in Voter Turnout among Younger People, by State, 2016–20



Percentage point difference in voter turnout among 18- to 24-year-olds

- + 20% and above
- + 10–19.9%
- + 0–9.9%
- % Decrease
- No Data

SOURCE: Data for 2016 and 2020: www.census.gov.

FOR CRITICAL ANALYSIS

1. Which five states had the largest increase in youth voting in 2020? Which states saw youth turnout decline?
2. What factors do you think led to increased youth participation in 2020? Characteristics of the candidates running? The importance of key issues to young people? Something else?

Citizenship: Participation, Knowledge, and Efficacy

Describe the rights and responsibilities that citizens have in a democracy

citizenship membership in a political community that confers legal rights and carries participation responsibilities

In a democracy, **citizenship** can be defined as membership in a political community that provides legal rights and carries participation responsibilities.[7] Civil liberties and rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of worship, and trial by jury are identified in the Constitution—particularly in the Bill of Rights (see Chapters 2 and 4). Citizens also have responsibilities, such as upholding the Constitution; obeying federal, state, and local laws; paying taxes; and serving on juries when called. Because political participation is the hallmark of democratic government and the source of its legitimacy, citizens also have a responsibility to be informed about issues and to take part in the democratic process.[8]

political knowledge information about the formal institutions of government, political actors, and political issues

One key ingredient for political participation is **political knowledge**. Democracy functions best when citizens have the knowledge needed to engage in political debate. Having political knowledge means more than having a few opinions to post on social media or to guide your decisions in a voting booth. It is also important to know the rules and processes that govern political institutions and the principles they rest on, *and* to know them in ways that relate to your own interests. If your street is blocked by snow, for example, you need to know that snow removal is a city or county responsibility and to be able to identify the agency that deals with the problem. Americans are fond of complaining that government isn't responsive to their needs, but in some cases they simply lack the information needed to present their problems to the appropriate officials.

Likewise, without political knowledge, citizens cannot be aware of their stakes in political disputes. For example, during the 2017 debate about whether to repeal the health care reform enacted in 2010, one-third of Americans did not know that "Obamacare" and the "Affordable Care Act" are the

Political participation sometimes involves direct action. People often hold public rallies or protests to draw attention to issues. These concerns can range from (left to right) government inaction on climate change, the legal rights of transgender individuals, gun rights, and abortion.

same thing.[9] Therefore, some people who had enrolled in "Obamacare" didn't realize their access to health insurance would be affected if the ACA were repealed. Citizens need knowledge in order to assess their interests and know when to act on them.

Surveys show that large majorities of Americans get political information online, although inequalities in internet access by income, education, geographic region, race, and age remain. Despite the internet making it easier than ever to learn about politics, actual political knowledge in the United States remains spotty. **Disinformation**—false information shared intentionally to reach a political goal—complicates the process of acquiring valid political information (see also Chapter 7).[10] Even with greater access to information, most Americans know little about current issues or debates, or even the basics of how government works. For example, in 2021 only 56 percent of those surveyed could identify all three branches of the federal government, and only 35 percent knew the term of office for a senator is six years. Just 55 percent correctly identified the party that controlled the House and 61 percent the Senate. However, 83 percent of respondents knew that the Supreme Court has ruled that citizens have a constitutional right to own a handgun (see Table 1.3).

disinformation false information that is shared intentionally to reach a political goal

Another ingredient in participation is **political efficacy**, the belief that ordinary citizens can affect what government does. Americans' sense of political efficacy has declined over time. In 1960 only 25 percent felt shut out of government. In 2019, 71 percent of survey respondents said that elected officials don't care what ordinary people think.[11] Moreover, 52 percent disagreed with the idea that the "government is really run for the benefit of all the people."[12]

political efficacy the belief that one can influence government and politics

This widely felt loss of political efficacy does not bode well for American democracy. Of course, not every effort by ordinary citizens to influence government will succeed, but without trust that such efforts can be effective, government decisions will be made by an increasingly smaller circle of powerful people. Fortunately, given the importance to American political ideals that all citizens be informed and able to act, individuals can build their own sense of political efficacy. Research shows that efficacy and participation are related: a feeling that one can make a difference leads to participation, and joining in can increase one's efficacy.[13]

FOR CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Many studies seem to show that most Americans know very little about government and politics. Can we have democratic government without knowledgeable and well-informed citizens? Why or why not?

TABLE 1.3 | What Americans Know about Government

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO . . .	
Could identify all three branches of government	56%
Knew that the First Amendment's protection of freedom of speech does not mean that Facebook must permit all Americans to freely express themselves on Facebook pages	39
Knew the size of the majority needed in Congress to override a presidential veto (two-thirds)	53
Knew the Supreme Court ruled that citizens have a constitutional right to own a handgun	83
Knew that a 5–4 Supreme Court ruling means the decision is law and needs to be followed	61
Knew that those in the country without authorization have some rights under the U.S. Constitution	55

SOURCES: 2021 and 2019 Annenberg Constitution Day Civics Survey, www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org.

Who Are Americans?

Describe the social composition of the American population and how it has changed over time

While American democracy aims to give the people a voice in government, the meaning of "we the people" has changed over time. Who are Americans? Throughout the nation's history, politicians, religious leaders, prominent scholars, and ordinary citizens have puzzled and fought over the answer to this fundamental question.

Immigration and American Diversity

The U.S. population has grown from 3.9 million in 1790, the year of the first official census, to 336 million in 2024.[14] At the same time, it has become more diverse on nearly every dimension imaginable.[15] (See Who Are Americans?, p. 15.)

In 1790, when the nation consisted of 13 states along the Eastern Seaboard, 81 percent of Americans traced their roots to Europe, mostly Britain and elsewhere in northern Europe, and nearly 20 percent, the vast majority of whom were enslaved, were of African origin.[16] Only 1.5 percent of the Black population were free. There were also an unknown number of Native peoples, the original inhabitants of the land, not counted by the census because the government didn't consider them Americans. The first estimates of Native Americans and Latinos in the mid-1800s showed that each group made up less than 1 percent of the total population.[17]

Fast-forward to 1900. The country now stretched across the continent, and waves of immigrants, mainly from Europe, had boosted the population to

WHO ARE AMERICANS?

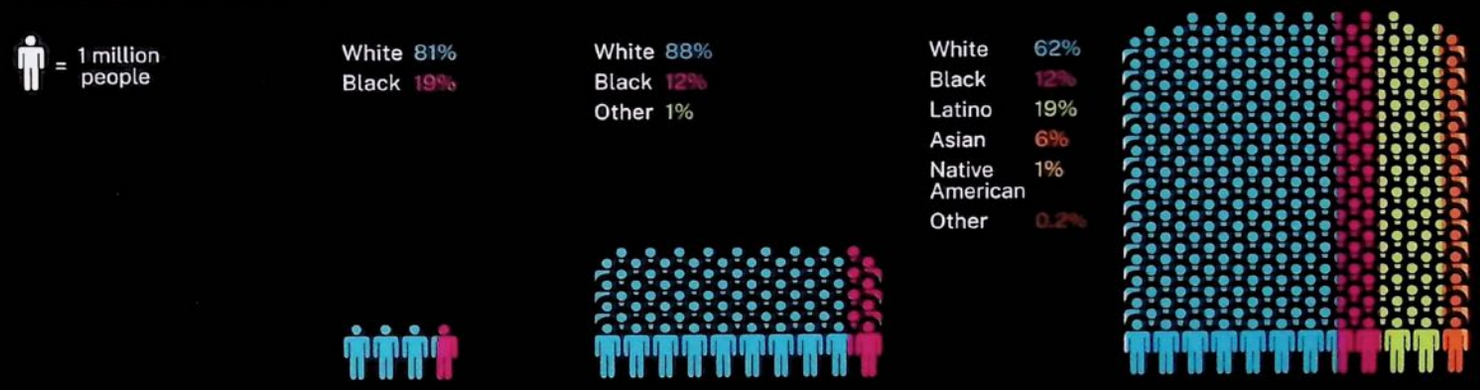
An Increasingly Diverse Nation

Since the Founding, the U.S. population has grown rapidly and people living in the United States have become increasingly diverse. Dramatic changes in population, demographics, and geography often drive changes in American government and politics.

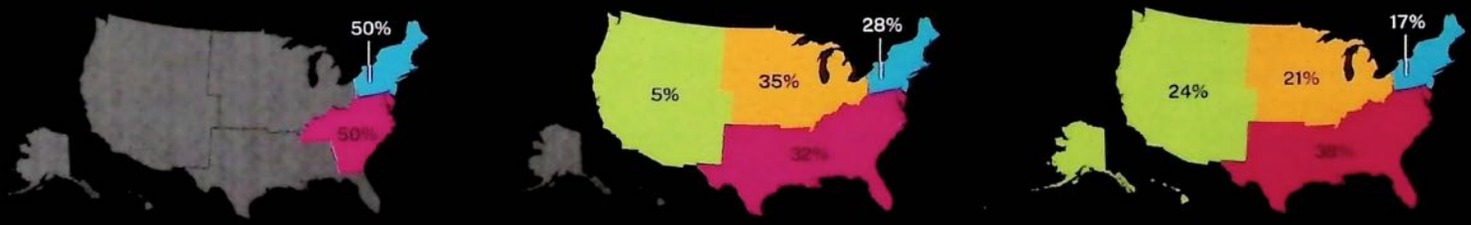
Race

= 1 million people

	1790*	1900*	2020**
White	81%	88%	62%
Black	19%	12%	12%
Latino			19%
Asian			6%
Native American			1%
Other		1%	0.2%
Total Population	3,929,214	75,994,575	329,484,119



Geography



1790		1900		2020	
Northeast	50%	Northeast	28%	Northeast	17%
South	50%	Midwest	35%	Midwest	21%
		South	32%	South	38%
		West	5%	West	24%

Age

1900		2020	
Under 18	41%	Under 18	22%
18–44	42%	18–44	36%
45–64	14%	45–64	25%
65+	4%	65+	17%

* The 1790 census does not accurately reflect the population because it only counted Black people and White people. It did not include Native Americans or other groups. The 1900 census did not count Latino Americans.

** Numbers may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community surveys, data.census.gov (accessed 1/6/21).

FOR CRITICAL ANALYSIS

1. The most recent census estimates show that the population of the South and the West continued to grow more rapidly than the Northeast and the Midwest. What are some of the political implications of this trend?
2. Today, Americans over age 38 outnumber Americans under 38, and older adults are more likely to participate in the political process. What do you think this means for the kinds of issues and policies considered by the government?

Native nations existed for thousands of years before the first European settlers arrived. By the time this photo of Red Cloud and other Sioux warriors was taken (left), around 1870, Native peoples made up about 1 percent of the American population. Today, many Native nations are considered sovereign nations and exist parallel to the United States government. The sovereign status of Native nations has sometimes led to fierce disagreement when the United States government does not fully engage them in decisions that impact their livelihood, such as the Dakota Access Pipeline protest seen here organized by the Standing Rock Sioux (right).

76 million. It still predominantly comprised people of European ancestry, but it now included many from southern and eastern as well as northwestern Europe; the Black population stood at 12 percent. Residents who traced their origin to Latin America or Asia each accounted for less than 1 percent of the population.[18] The large number of new immigrants was reflected in the high proportion of foreign-born people in the population, which peaked at 14.7 percent in 1910.[19]

As immigrants from southern and eastern Europe crowded into the nation's cities, anxiety mounted among those of British and other northwestern European ancestry, who feared losing their long-dominant position in American society and politics. Much like today, politicians and scholars argued heatedly about whether the country should welcome such large numbers of immigrants. Concerns ranged from whether the new immigrants' political and social values were compatible with American democracy, to whether they would learn English, to what new diseases they might bring. Growing religious differences became a source of tension as well. The first European immigrants to the United States were overwhelmingly Protestant, many fleeing religious persecution. But the German and Irish Catholics who arrived in the mid-1800s began to shift the religious balance, which changed further in the early twentieth century as more Catholics from southern Europe and Jews from eastern Europe and Russia arrived. This new religious diversity challenged the Protestantism previously assumed in many aspects of American life.

After World War I, Congress responded to nativist fears about immigration with new laws that sharply limited how many people could enter the country each year. It also passed the Immigration Act of 1924, which used a national origins quota system, based on the nation's population in 1890, before the wave of eastern and southern European immigrants arrived.[20] Supporters of these measures hoped to restore an earlier America in which northern and western Europeans dominated. The new system set up a hierarchy of admissions: northern and western European countries received generous quotas for new immigrants, whereas eastern and southern European countries were granted very small quotas. And almost all immigrants from Asia and Africa were banned.[21] By 1970 these guidelines had reduced the foreign-born population in the United States to an all-time low of 5 percent.

In the 1900s many immigrants entered the United States through New York's Ellis Island, where they were checked for disease before being admitted. Today, individuals hoping to immigrate to the United States often apply for a visa at the U.S. consulate in their home country before traveling to the United States, where the U.S. Customs and Border Protection checks their identity and legal status.

The use of ethnic and racial criteria to restrict the country's population and to draw boundaries around "American" identity began long before the national origins quota system, however. Most people of African descent were not deemed citizens until 1868, when the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution granted citizenship to formerly enslaved people (see Chapter 2). Native Americans weren't officially recognized as citizens until the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, but this did not include suffrage. More broadly, efforts to limit nonwhite immigration and citizenship dated back to the Naturalization Act of 1790—a law stating that only free White people could become naturalized citizens, a ban not lifted until 1870. Even then, different restrictions applied to Asians: the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 outlawed the entry of Chinese laborers to the United States, a limit lifted only in 1943, when China became America's ally during World War II. And after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, virtually all Japanese Americans were denied their basic rights of citizenship and were incarcerated for the duration of the war.

With laws about citizenship linked to "whiteness," questions arose about how to classify people of Latino origin. In 1930, for example, the census counted people of Mexican origin as nonwhite, but a decade later it reversed this decision—after protests by those affected and by the Mexican government. Then, in 1960, the census classified immigrants from Latin America as White. Only after a lengthy campaign by Latino activists and business leaders did the census adopt a "Hispanic" classification category in 1970, noting also that people identifying as Hispanic could be of any race.[22] (The census uses the term *Hispanic*, but we will generally use the term *Latino* to refer to people of Spanish or Latin American descent.)

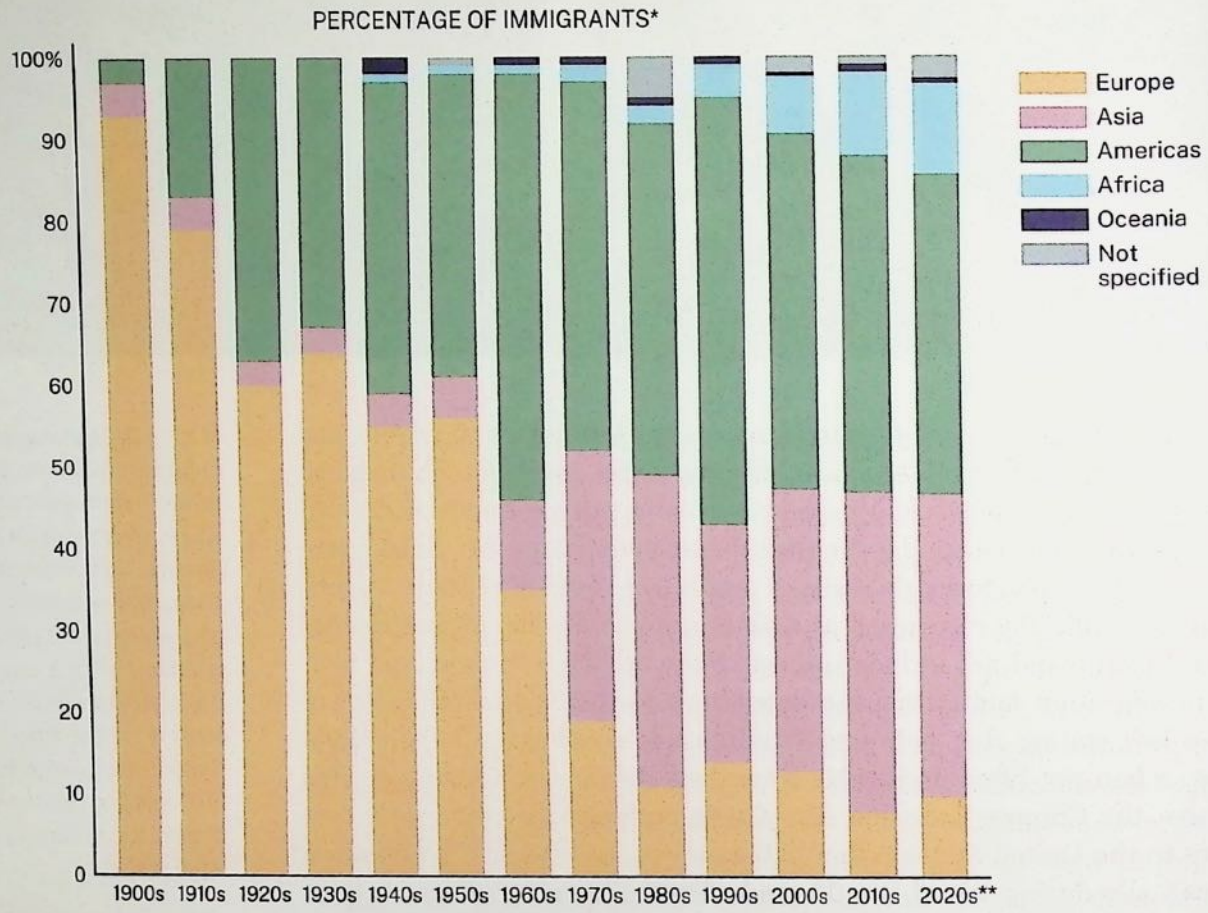
As this history suggests, debates have raged for more than two centuries about who can come to the United States, who can become a citizen, and who should be counted by the census and how.

Twenty-First-Century Americans

Race and Ethnicity Recent immigration patterns have profoundly shaped the nation's current racial and ethnic profile. The primary cause was Congress's decision in 1965 to lift the tight restrictions of the 1920s, allowing expanded

FIGURE 1.1 | Immigration by Continent of Origin

Where did most immigrants come from at the start of the 1900s? How does that compare with immigration in the 2000s?



*Less than 1 percent not shown.

**Through 2023.

NOTE: Figure shows those who have obtained "lawful permanent resident status" by continent of origin.

SOURCE: Department of Homeland Security, www.dhs.gov.

immigration from Asia and Latin America (see Figure 1.1). Census figures for 2020 show that Latinos (who can be of any race) constitute 18.7 percent of the total population, and Asians make up 6 percent. The Black, or African American, population is 12.4 percent of the total, while the non-Hispanic White population accounts for 61.6 percent. More than 33 million Americans, about 1 in 10, now identify as being of "two or more races," a category that was added in 2000.[23] Notably, in 2019, for the first time, more than half of Americans under age 16 identified as a member of a racial or ethnic minority group. The United States is continuing to diversify and is projected to become a majority-minority country by 2050.

Large-scale immigration means that many more residents now are foreign-born. In 2024, 13.9 percent of the population were born outside the United States, a figure comparable to that in 1900.[24] About half of today's foreign-born population came from Latin America and the Caribbean—just over one-third

from Central America (including Mexico), 1 in 15 from South America, and almost 1 in 10 from the Caribbean.[25] Those born in Asia made up 31.3 percent of foreign-born residents.[26] In sharp contrast to the immigration patterns of a century earlier, just 10.9 percent came from Europe.[27]

Estimates are that 12 million immigrants live in the country without legal authorization—the majority from Mexico and Central America.[28] This unauthorized population has become a flashpoint for controversy as states and cities have passed a variety of conflicting laws regarding these immigrants' access to public services. Several decades ago, some states tried to exclude undocumented immigrants from public services such as education and emergency medical care, but in 1982 the Supreme Court ensured access to K–12 education in its *Plyler v. Doe* ruling, and Congress guaranteed access to emergency medical care in a 1986 law.[29] Today, undocumented immigrants remain ineligible for most federal public benefits, but some states allow them to obtain driver's licenses or in-state tuition at public colleges and universities.[30]

Religion New patterns of immigration have combined with differences in birth rates and other social changes to alter the balance of Americans' religious affiliations. By 2023, only 33 percent of Americans identified as Protestant, 22 percent as Catholic, 13 percent as Christian (nonspecific), 2 percent Jewish, 1 percent Mormon, and 6 percent "Other" (this includes Muslims, who constitute nearly 1 percent of the population). Moreover, a growing number identify with no organized religion: 22 percent of the population in 2023.[31] These changes suggest an important shift in American religious identity. Although many Americans think of the United States as a "Judeo-Christian" nation—and indeed it was 95 percent Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish as recently as 50 years ago—by 2021 this number had fallen to 69 percent of the adult population.[32] The freedom to practice one religion, to change religions, or to practice no religion at all was considered a key value in the writing of the Constitution and was inscribed in the First Amendment.

Age As the population has grown and diversified, the country's age profile has shifted. In 1900 only 4 percent of the population was over age 65. As life expectancy increased, so did the number of older Americans: by 2020, 16 percent of the population was over 65. During the same period, the percentage of children under age 18 fell, from 44 percent in 1900 to 22.4 percent in 2020.[33] However, the population of racial and ethnic groups is younger than the American population overall: 32 percent of the Latino population and 26 percent of the Black population are under 18, compared to 19 percent of the White population. As a group, Americans are still younger than the populations of many other industrialized countries. The share of the population age 65 and over is 21 percent in the European Union and 28 percent in Japan.[34] But an aging population poses challenges. As the elderly population in the United States grows relative to those of working age, the funding of "safety-net" programs such as Social Security becomes more difficult.

Geography Over the nation's history, Americans have mostly moved from rural areas and small towns to large cities and suburbs. Before 1920 less than half the population lived in urban areas; today over 80 percent does.[35] As a result, the national political system created when the population was still largely rural underrepresents urban Americans. Providing each state with two senators, for example, overrepresents sparsely populated rural states and underrepresents those with large urban populations (see Chapter 2).

FOR CRITICAL ANALYSIS

What trend in America's changing population do you think has had the biggest influence on the nation's politics *over time*? Increasing racial and ethnic diversity? Aging? Changing religious affiliation? Increasing urbanization? Increased economic inequality? Why? Which trend do you think has had the most influence *recently*? Why?

The population has also shifted regionally. During the past 50 years especially, many Americans have left the Northeast and Midwest and moved to the South and Southwest, with congressional seats being reapportioned to reflect the population shift.

Socioeconomic Status For much of U.S. history, most Americans were relatively poor working people, many of them farmers. A new, extremely wealthy elite emerged in the late 1800s, a period called the Gilded Age. By 1928 nearly one-quarter of total annual national income went to the top 1 percent of earners; the top 10 percent took home 46 percent of the total. In the mid-1900s, the distribution of income and wealth shifted away from the top. A large, predominantly White middle class grew after New Deal programs helped counteract the Great Depression of the 1930s, and it grew further with the postwar economic boom of the 1950s and '60s.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawing legal segregation, and President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty programs in the 1960s, were instrumental in providing greater workplace opportunities for people from various racial and ethnic groups. During this time, median Black household income rose by 53 percent and the proportion of Black people below the poverty line dropped from 55 percent in 1960 to 27 percent in 1968. Overall, the income disparity between those at the bottom and those at the top continued to shrink as well: the share of national income going to the top 1 percent dropped sharply, to just 9 percent by 1976.

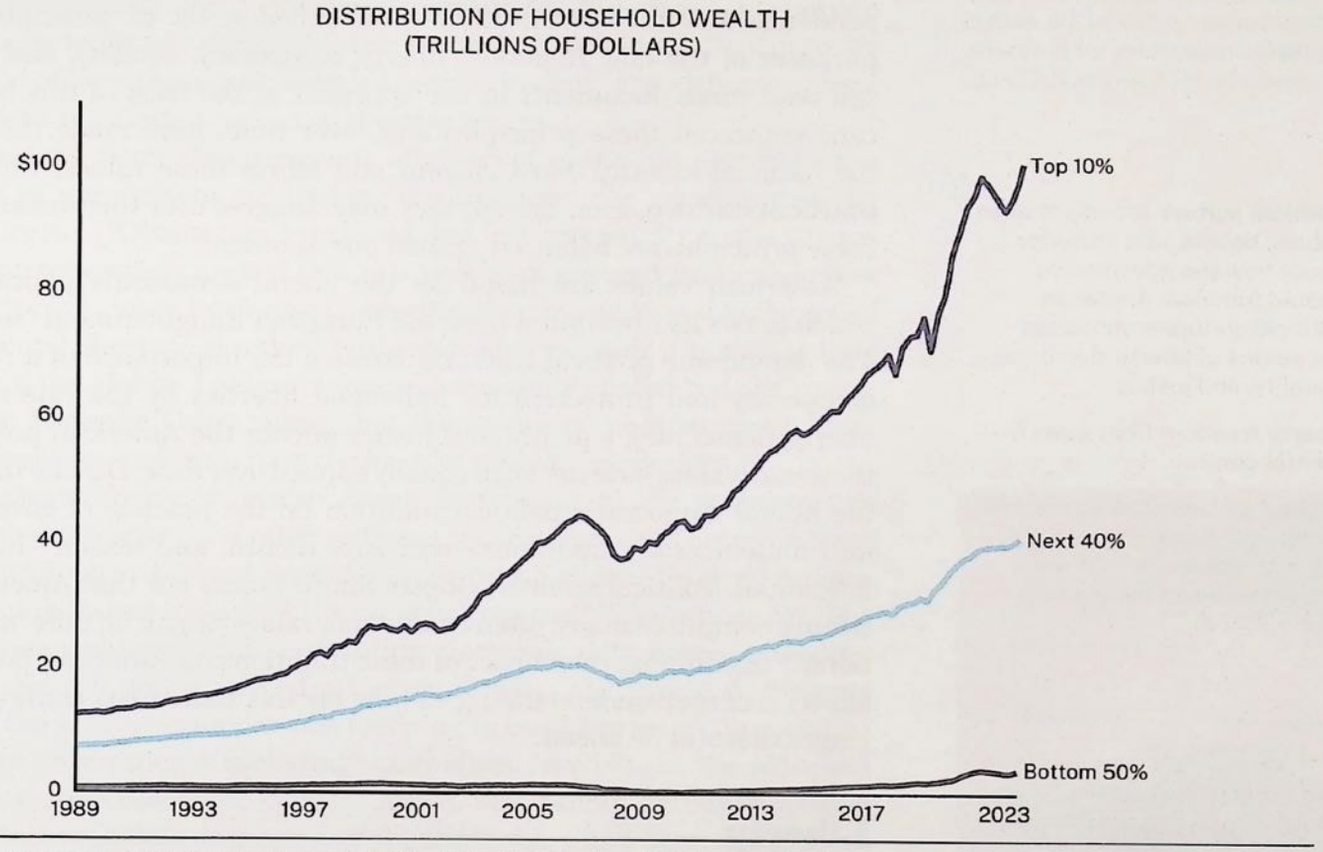
Since then, however, economic inequality has again widened in what some call a "new" Gilded Age.[36] Rising economic inequality is connected to a number of factors, including deindustrialization, globalization, slow growth in wages for the lowest-wage workers, and technological change.[37] The Great Recession between 2007 and 2009 further exacerbated economic inequality, as speculative lending ultimately caused home prices to crash and led to many families losing their homes through foreclosure.[38] After a period of recovery, the Covid-19 pandemic contributed to a widening of long-standing economic divides. By 2023 the top 10 percent earned 66.9 percent of total household wealth. During that same time, the next 40 percent of households saw their wealth drop to 30.6 percent. In other words, the top 10 percent hold more than twice the wealth of America's middle class.[39] At the same time, there has been an increase of people who live below the poverty line, to 11.5 percent of the population (see Figure 1.2).[40]

There are significant racial differences among levels of income and wealth. Wealth is defined as the difference between a household's assets (what you own that contains economic value, like houses and stock) and debt. The term "racial wealth gap" refers to the disparity in assets of typical American households across racial and ethnic groups. According to recent data, the median White household had $285,000 in wealth, compared to just $62,000 for the median Latino household and $44,890 for the median Black household.[41]

Population and Politics The changing contours of the American population have regularly raised challenging questions about politics and government. Population growth and shifts have spurred politically charged debates about how to apportion the population among congressional districts and how to draw those districts. These conflicts have significant implications for the

FIGURE 1.2 | Wealth in the United States

While the wealth of most Americans has risen only slightly since 1989, the wealth of the richest Americans (the top 10 percent) has increased dramatically. In 2023, the top 10 percent of Americans had more than double the total amount of combined wealth held by the middle 40 percent and bottom 50 percent of Americans. Does the growing economic gap between the richest groups and most other Americans conflict with the political value of equality?



SOURCE: Federal Reserve, "Distribution of Household Wealth in the U.S. since 1989," www.federalreserve.gov.

balance of representation among different regions of the country and between urban and rural areas. Representation of other demographic and political groups may also be affected, as evidence shows that Americans are increasingly divided from one another geographically according to education, income, marriage rates, and party voting.[42]

In addition, immigration and the resulting cultural and religious changes spark passionate debate today, just as they did 100 years ago. (You can read about valuable debate tips in the How To feature on p. 24.) The different languages and customs that immigrants bring trigger fears among some that the United States is changing in ways that undermine traditional American values. The large number of unauthorized immigrants heightens these anxieties. Yet a changing population has been one of the constants of American history. Indeed, each generation has confronted the many political challenges associated with answering the question anew: "Who are Americans?"

American Political Values

Describe how foundational values of liberty, democracy, equality, and justice influence the U.S. system of government

The essential documents of the American Founding—the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution—proclaimed a set of principles about the purposes of the new Republic: liberty, democracy, equality, and justice. (You can read these documents in the appendix at the back of this book.) Americans embraced these principles and, over time, have made them central to the national identity. Most citizens still affirm these values, which form our **political culture**, even though they may disagree over their meaning and how these principles are balanced against one another.

political culture broadly shared values, beliefs, and attitudes about how the government should function; American political culture emphasizes the values of liberty, democracy, equality, and justice

liberty freedom from governmental control

limited government a principle of constitutional government; a government whose powers are defined and limited by a constitution

American values are based on the liberal democratic political tradition, which draws its inspiration from the European Enlightenment (see Chapter 2). The democratic political tradition stresses the importance of a representative democracy and protection for individual liberties by the rule of law. While liberty, democracy, equality, and justice anchor the American political system, these core values have not been equally applied over time. Despite the influence of the liberal democratic political tradition on the practice of government, certain undemocratic traditions—nativism, racism, and sexism—have also been influential. Political scientist Rogers Smith points out that American political culture comprises many, often conflictual, values, which he calls "multiple traditions."[43] Examining the impact of these traditions on American political culture allows a deeper understanding of how far this nation has come and the challenges that still lie ahead.

Patrick Henry's famous "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death" speech demanded freedom at any cost and has resonated with Americans throughout the nation's history.

Liberty

Liberty is one of America's central political values. The Declaration of Independence identified three "unalienable" rights: "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." The Constitution likewise identified the need "to secure the Blessings of Liberty." For Americans, **liberty** means both personal freedom and economic freedom. Both are closely linked to the idea of **limited government**.

The Constitution's first 10 amendments, known collectively as the Bill of Rights, delineate individual personal liberties and rights. In fact, the word *liberty* has come to mean many of the freedoms guaranteed in the Bill of Rights: freedom of speech and the press, the right to assemble freely, and the right to practice religious beliefs without interference from the government.

Throughout American history, the scope of personal liberties has expanded as laws have become more tolerant and individuals have successfully used the courts to challenge restrictions on their personal freedoms. Far fewer restrictions exist today on the press, political speech, and individual behavior than in the nation's early years. Even so, conflicts emerge when personal liberties violate a community's accepted standards of behavior. For example, a number of cities have passed "sit-lie" ordinances, which limit the freedom of individuals to sit or lie down on sidewalks. Designed to limit the presence of people who are

homeless and to make city streets more attractive to pedestrians, the ordinances have also been denounced as restrictions on individual liberties.

Liberty also extends into the realm of economics. The American concept of economic freedom supports capitalism, free markets (including open competition and unrestricted movement of goods), and the protection of private property.[44] During the nation's first century, support for capitalism often meant support for the principle of *laissez-faire* (French for "allow to do"). **Laissez-faire capitalism** allowed the national government very little power to regulate commerce or restrict the use of private property. Today, however, federal and state governments impose many regulations to protect the public. For example, government regulations to slow the spread of the coronavirus included school closures, stay-at-home orders, and cancellations of entertainment and sporting events.

laissez-faire capitalism an economic system in which the means of production and distribution are privately owned and operated for profit with minimal or no government interference

Not surprisingly, fierce disagreements often erupt over what should be the proper scope of government regulation. For example, one provision of the Affordable Care Act ("Obamacare") required that insurers pay for access to contraceptive care. Supporters argued that this provision ensured women's access to basic health care. Some businesses, however, denounced it as a violation of their fundamental liberty to run their businesses and use their property as they see fit. In 2014 the Hobby Lobby company successfully challenged the provision, with the Supreme Court ruling that family-owned companies or businesses could be exempted from it on the basis of religious objections.[45]

Concerns about liberty have also arisen in relation to the government's efforts to combat terrorism and other national security threats. These concerns escalated in 2013 when Edward Snowden, a former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor, leaked top-secret documents from the NSA to the press. The NSA is the agency charged with monitoring electronic data flows—including radio, email, and cell phone calls—for foreign threats. The leaked documents revealed that the U.S. government was listening in on the private communications of foreign governments, including many allies. In addition, the NSA had access to Americans' Facebook, Google, Apple, and Yahoo! accounts, among many other electronic data sources, and for three years had been using these metadata to track connections among people, searching for suspicious ties.

This revelation set off a storm of controversy, since the NSA is not supposed to monitor American citizens. The controversy reinforced the tech companies' commitment to guard their users' privacy from government. In 2016, Apple refused an FBI order to unlock the iPhone used by a man suspected of terrorism who had killed 14 people in San Bernardino, California. Although the FBI dropped the case after opening the phone without Apple's help, a new court order to Apple related to an iPhone used in a drug conspiracy case made it clear that the tension between privacy and security will continue.[46] Can we find the proper balance between liberty and security? Between one person's liberty and another's?

FOR CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic there was much debate about the proper role of government in mandating the wearing of masks. When did you feel a mandate was appropriate? Were there times you felt it infringed on your liberty?

Democracy

Earlier in this chapter, we described the building blocks of American democracy, which include *popular sovereignty* and *majority rule* with *minority rights*. In the United States, democracy is more than a form of government; it is a deeply seated ideal that many Americans believe the country should strive for.

The Founders were in wide agreement about the importance of wider participation in the governance structure of a new country. Yet their fear of a

HOW TO

Debate Respectfully

APRIL LAWSON, THE DIRECTOR OF DEBATES FOR BETTER ANGELS

Government by the people functions best when individuals discuss ideas, share their preferences, and talk about what government is doing. But political discussion and debate can be uncomfortable, particularly among people who disagree or when politics is polarized, as it is in the current era. In order to have a productive discussion, it is important that people are respectful of others from different backgrounds, who might hold different political views.

To learn how to engage others and to debate respectfully, we spoke with April Lawson, the director of debates for Better Angels, a national organization that works with individuals from across the political spectrum to "combat polarization and restore civil dialogue across America." She offers these tips for successful and civil political conversations:

1. **The most important thing is the presumption of good faith.** If someone says something you can't stand, know that the other person is trying, just like you are, to address hard questions. Assume that the other person is smart and that they are moral.

2. **Say what you actually believe.** Genuineness and sincerity are crucial. You could debate either by making a case no one could disagree with or by sharing what you really feel about the issue. The latter will make for a more productive exchange of ideas.

3. **How can you launch such a conversation and set the tone?** A good technique is to start with a question of genuine curiosity for the other person, which reassures them that you want to know what they believe. Another tip is to paraphrase what they have said before you respond, to make sure the other person feels heard.

4. **When you respond, it helps if you express some doubt or nuance in your own argument,** or mention that you agree with some aspect of the other person's position. You do not need to agree with everything they have said, but you can pick something reasonable the other person said and affirm, "You said X, which makes sense because of Y."

5. **Know that you may need to be the bigger person in the conversation.** In order to be an ambassador of civility, you may need the patience to ask several genuine questions of curiosity before the other person believes that you are actually interested in what they have to say. And you need to control your own emotions and triggers, to manage your activation, because you know these rules for civil engagement, and they may not.

6. **Finally, realize that you have agency.** Prepare yourself for these tough conversations by telling yourself, "I will probably have feelings about this. But I can be patient and manage them." Remember, you're not trapped. You can take a break. You can change topics. Or you may want to have a conversational exit in mind. If you're speaking with your combative uncle, you might pivot to the football game.

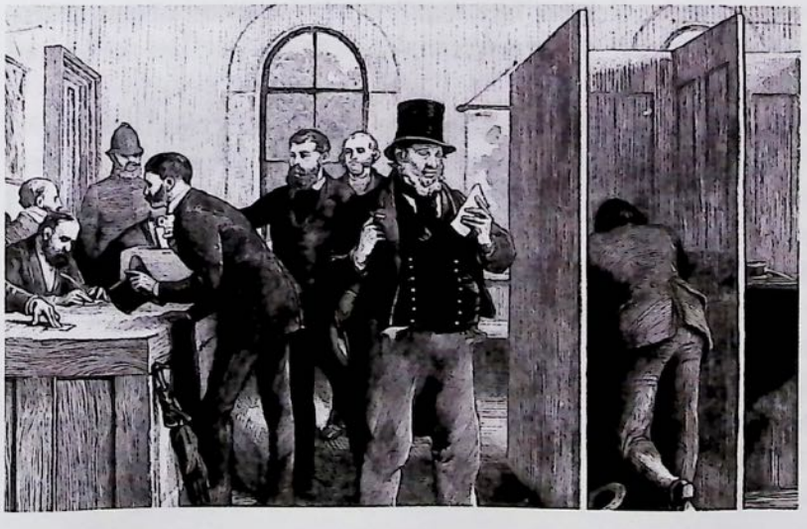
Debating respectfully requires coming to the table with a posture of openness and helping the other person feel heard. In America, at the talking-point level, which is a surface level, we don't agree at all. But if you can go down even one level to political values, or even one more level to moral values, then there's a lot of common ground. With these conversations, we're not trying to change how you see the issue; we're trying to change how you see the other person.

"tyranny of the majority" led them to write into the Constitution key institutions designed to constrain the practice of democracy, such as the electoral college, the equal number of senators representing each state despite state population, the appointment of United States senators by state legislatures instead of by popular vote, and the restriction of voting rights.

Despite these early attempts to limit democratic expression, the ideal of democracy has inspired generations of Americans to transform the practice of democracy. Emboldened by the belief that government is granted its legitimacy by the consent of the people, Americans have sought to make government more responsive by increasing political participation. Most notably, the right to vote has been significantly expanded over the last two centuries. Property restrictions on the right to vote were eliminated by 1828. In 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution guaranteed the vote to nonwhite men, although in practice, most of them were denied it for almost a century longer. In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment guaranteed women the right to vote. And in 1965, the Voting Rights Act prohibited racial discrimination in voting, which paved the way for the enfranchisement of Black Americans. The Twenty-Sixth Amendment, ratified in 1971 during the Vietnam War, gave 18- to 20-year-olds the right to vote.

More people securing the right to vote did not, and does not, end concerns about democracy. The ways in which elections are carried out can significantly affect who can actually vote or get elected. During the early 1900s, states and cities enacted many reforms, including strict registration requirements and scheduling of elections, which made it harder to vote. The stated goal was to rid politics of corruption, but the consequence was reduced participation. More recently, claims of voter fraud have eroded the public's trust in the election system, and disinformation campaigns have made it harder for citizens to make informed political decisions.

A further consideration about democracy concerns the relationship between economic power and political power. Although money has always played an important role in elections and governing in the United States, many argue that its pervasive influence in campaigns and lobbying activities today undermines democracy. With the decline of locally based political parties that depend on party loyalists to turn out the vote, and with the rise of political action committees, political consultants, expensive media campaigns, and court decisions reducing the government's regulatory power over campaign finance, money has



Americans have a strong belief in the values of democracy and equality, but how these values have been practiced have varied over time. In the 1700s and 1800s, voting was available only to a limited portion of White men who owned property. Today, equal access to voting has been extended to nearly all adult citizens, though rules around voting procedures are highly contested.

become the central fact of life in American politics. It often determines who runs for office, it can exert a heavy influence on who wins, and some argue that it affects what politicians do once they are in office.[47] Indeed, with the increasing importance of money to political campaigns, there is worry that politicians will be more responsive to donors than to actual constituents. Despite concerns that American democracy is being undermined, there is still a strongly held belief in democracy as an ideal worth striving for.

Equality

The Declaration of Independence declares as its first "self-evident" truth that "all men are created equal." Equality means the state of being equal. In its simplest form, it means that everyone should receive the same things and be treated equally. However, Americans make clear distinctions between social or economic equality and **political equality**—the right of a community's members to participate in politics on equal terms. During the Founding period, political equality meant that White men who owned a certain amount of property had equal rights in the political community.

political equality the right to participate in politics equally, based on the principle of "one person, one vote"

Beginning from a very restricted definition of political community, the United States has moved much closer to an ideal of political equality that can be summed up as "one person, one vote." Although considerable conflict remains over whether the political system makes it harder for some people to participate than others, and whether money plays too large a role in politics, most Americans agree that all citizens should have an equal right to participate, and that government should enforce that right.

Few Americans have wholeheartedly embraced the ideal of full equality of results (that everyone deserves equal wealth and power), but most share the ideal of **equality of opportunity** (that everyone deserves a fair chance to go as far as their talents will allow). Yet it is hard to agree on what constitutes equality of opportunity. Furthermore, in contrast to liberty, which requires limits on the role of government, equality implies an *obligation* of the government to the people.[48] But how far does this obligation extend? Must a group's past inequalities be redressed to ensure equality in the present? Should legal, political, and economic inequalities all be given the same weight?

equality of opportunity a widely shared American ideal that all people should have the freedom to use whatever talents and wealth they have to reach their fullest potential

Many Americans see economic inequality as largely due to individual choices, virtues, or failures, and so they tend to be more skeptical of government action to reduce it (compared to government action to reduce political inequality). Even when severe economic hardships, like the Great Depression of the 1930s, affect a large number of people, many Americans have supported only a limited response by government.

Three kinds of controversies have arisen about government's role in addressing inequality. The first involves determining what constitutes equality of access to public facilities, including those operated by government and those operated privately but open to the public. In 1896 the Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that providing "separate but equal" facilities for Black people and White people was constitutional.[49] But after grassroots organizing shifted public opinion and applied pressure on the political branches, Congress prohibited discrimination and mandated equal access to facilities through the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (see Chapter 5).

A second debate concerns government's role in ensuring equality of opportunity in private life, such as college admissions and corporate employment.

The Fight for $15—a nationwide effort to increase the minimum wage to $15 an hour—has increased public awareness of income inequality and dangerous working conditions in the United States. By 2024 many states had increased their minimum wage above the federal minimum wage, but few had reached the $15 threshold that workers had protested for.

Although Americans generally agree that discrimination in such areas should not be tolerated, they disagree over how to ensure equality of opportunity in those areas (see Table 1.4).[50] Supporters of affirmative action programs, for example, claim they are a necessary part of a larger effort to address past discrimination in order to establish true equality of opportunity today. Opponents maintain that they amount to reverse discrimination and that a truly equal society should not acknowledge gender or racial differences.

A third debate concerns differences in income and wealth. As noted earlier, income inequality has seldom led to widespread political controversy in the United States, which currently has the largest gaps in income and wealth between rich and poor citizens of any developed nation. This tolerance for inequality is reflected in America's tax code, which is more advantageous to wealthy taxpayers than that of almost any other Western nation.

FOR CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Many politicians and news commentators say that widening inequality is threatening the middle class. Is there any evidence that the American public is worried about the growth in inequality? Explain your response.

Justice

Justice is another central political value. Historically, justice meant the state of being fair and was often associated with the legal system. It was important to the Founders that government was just, so much so that it was the first of five political objectives highlighted in the Constitution: "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty . . ." The value of justice also appears in *Federalist* 51 (see appendix), where James Madison writes, "Justice is the end of government. It is the end of civil society." For Madison, justice is the ultimate goal of good government.

justice the fairness of how rewards and punishments are delivered, especially by governments and courts, but also in society

But who or what would be responsible for ensuring justice? To answer that question, we need to look to English common law, which influenced many of the Founders' conception of law and justice. According to English common law, natural justice was understood as the duty of the legal system to act fairly and without bias. As articulated in *Federalist* 78 by Alexander Hamilton: "The complete independence of the courts of justice is peculiarly essential in a limited Constitution."

TABLE 1.4 | Equality and Public Opinion

Americans believe in some forms of equality more than others. How do these survey results reflect disagreement about what equality means in practice?

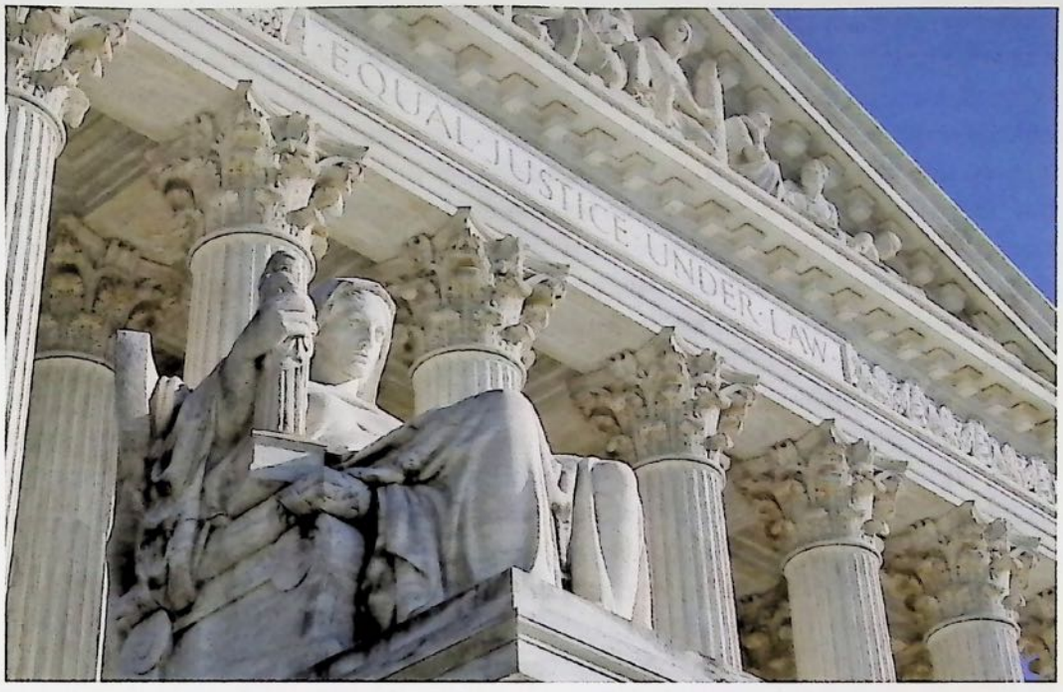
PERCENTAGE WHO AGREE WITH THE STATEMENT . . .	
It is very important that women have the same rights as men in our country.	97%
It is very important that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed.	82
It should be illegal for employers to fire people or refuse to hire people for being lesbian, gay, or bisexual.	90
It should be legal for gay and lesbian couples to get married.	61
There is too much economic inequality in the country these days.	61
Some amount of inequality is acceptable (among those who said there is too much economic inequality).	70
Our country has not gone far enough when it comes to giving Black people equal rights with White people (according to White people).	37
Our country has not gone far enough when it comes to giving Black people equal rights with White people (according to Black people).	78
The country hasn't gone far enough when it comes to gender equality (according to women).	64
The country hasn't gone far enough when it comes to gender equality (according to men).	49

SOURCE: Pew Research Center, www.pewresearch.org; Kaiser Family Foundation, kff.org.

fairness impartial decision-making; the quality of treating people equally, free from discrimination

A government that strived to be just and had a legal system centered on ensuring **fairness** was considered foundational to any new system the Founders created. The pursuit of justice contributed to the early colonists' decision to declare independence from Britain. Since they were taxed with no representation in Parliament, many colonists viewed their relationship with Britain as unfair, and they ultimately revolted in order to establish a more just form of government (see Chapter 2 for more on the American Revolution). Yet, while the Founders valued justice, their understanding of it was narrow. Viewed through a contemporary lens, numerous aspects of the Founding period were unjust, such as the taking of land from Native nations, the enslavement of Black people, and the absence of voting rights for women and other groups.

Over time, the value of justice has endured and evolved. Most importantly, a greater number of Americans have clung to the value of justice as a way to push for more political and legal rights. As a result, what constitutes justice has been intensely debated in the public sphere and contested in the judicial branch.



Justice is one of America's most important political values. In fact, justice is so central to the mission of the Supreme Court of the United States that engraved in marble on its building is the famous phrase "Equal Justice Under Law."

When it comes to court battles, a commitment to a fair and unbiased process continues to guide judicial decision-making. Today, many disputes over the meaning of justice are decided in the Supreme Court. For example, in the landmark case *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), gay and lesbian couples argued that state laws preventing same-sex marriage were unjust and asked the Court for the ability to marry. In its majority opinion, the Court ruled that banning same-sex marriage represented a grave injustice and that fairness required its legalization.[51]

But justice is not exclusively determined by judges, nor does it always necessitate a change in laws. Conceptions of justice arise from the people, and efforts to realize those visions can take many different forms. Recently, organized groups have used the language of justice—especially **social justice**—to advocate for change.[52] Examples include the disability justice movement, the environmental justice movement, and the criminal justice reform movement. Sometimes the change being sought is about present challenges, and other times it is focused on redressing past wrongs. The movement for racial justice inspired over 20 million people to take to the streets during the spring of 2020 to draw attention to persistent racism directed at Black people.[53] Protesters sought the transformation of policing, housing, and the economic system. In response, in many cases police reforms were instituted, cities provided help to families that needed housing, and corporations pledged resources to help improve race relations.[54] And as with other protests advocating for change, those who disagreed with the calls for racial justice held counter demonstrations.

social justice the just allocation of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society

Another recent example of a social justice movement is the landback movement led by Native nations.[55] Landback leaders point to centuries of land dispossession by the U.S. government and assert that justice will be achieved when government and private land are returned to the stewardship of Native Americans. However, because some of the land is now privately owned or part of national parks, detractors argue that the movement's goal is unfair to current landowners and to the public.

It can be easy to confuse justice with equality. However, these terms have important differences. The state of being fair is not the same as everything being equal. Sometimes, fairness might be defined as everyone having the same things, but other times, fairness rests in the process rather than the outcome. For example, what would it mean to ensure a fair tax system in the United States? Currently, the United States has a progressive tax system, in which the percentage of income an individual pays tends to increase with more income. For example, in our current system, someone with an income of $50,000 has a 22 percent tax rate and someone with an income of $50 million has a 37 percent tax rate. An alternative, called a proportional or flat tax, suggests that everyone pay the same percentage income tax, regardless of income or wealth. If, under a flat tax system, the standard income tax rate was 25 percent, someone with an income of $50,000 would pay $12,500 in taxes and someone with an income of $50 million would pay $12.5 million, but the tax rate would be equal. Advocates of a flat tax argue that it adheres to the principle of equality and gives taxpayers an incentive to work more because a growing income is not penalized with a higher tax rate. Critics say that a flat tax system is unjust because people with lower incomes have fewer resources and find paying taxes burdensome, while high earners can pay more in taxes without changing their lifestyles. Does tax justice come through wealthier people paying more and poor people less, or by everyone paying the same percentage?

An Unfinished Project

These examples show that despite Americans' reverence for justice, its meaning and practice are often deeply contested.[56] Some people understand it as closely related to liberty and requiring limitations from government intrusion. For others, it overlaps more closely with equality and requires government to intercede on behalf of citizens to address deep-seated inequalities. Just as we can say that the concept of justice is not static, we can consider all of American politics to be an unfinished project: the Founders established lofty guiding principles such as liberty, democracy, equality, and justice, but it has been the responsibility of successive generations of Americans to realize these ideals more fully.

What Americans Think about Government

Summarize Americans' attitudes toward government

Since the United States was established as a nation, Americans have been reluctant to grant government too much power, and they have often been suspicious of politicians. But they have also turned to government for assistance in times of need and have strongly supported it in periods of war. In 1933 the government's power began to expand to meet the crises created by the stock market crash of 1929, the massive business failures and unemployment of the Great Depression, and the threatened failure of the banking system. Congress passed legislation that brought government into the businesses of home mortgages,

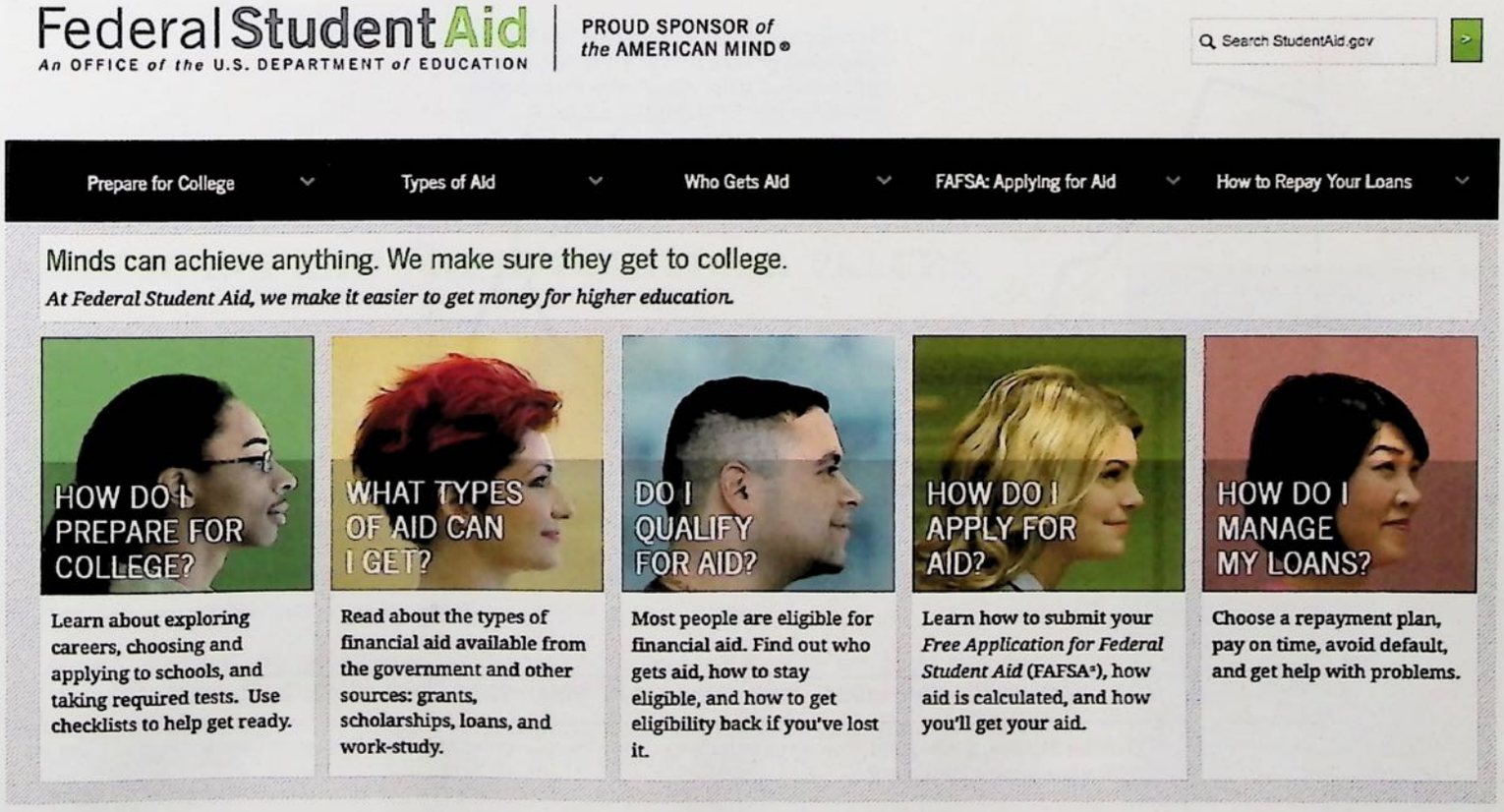
farm mortgages, credit, and relief of personal financial distress. More recently, when the economy suffered a deep recession in 2008 and 2009, the federal government took action to stabilize the financial system, oversee the restructuring of failing auto manufacturers, and provide hundreds of billions of dollars in economic stimulus. From 2020 to 2022, federal funds helped fight the coronavirus pandemic, providing funds to businesses and state and local governments and direct payments to many Americans.

Today the national government is enormous, with programs and policies reaching into every corner of American life. It oversees the nation's economy, it is the nation's largest employer, it controls the world's most formidable military, and it regulates a wide range of social and commercial activities. Americans use government services, benefits, and infrastructure every day, although they are simultaneously skeptical about the role of government in society.

Partisan Differences over the Size of Government

The Constitution lays out a system of limited government. Yet over the years, in response to citizen demands and economic downturns, the power and size of government have increased. Today, Americans are almost evenly divided in their opinions about the overall size of government: 48 percent would prefer smaller government with fewer services, and 49 percent would prefer bigger government with increased services.[57] Despite these differing opinions, a clear majority support increased federal spending in education (72 percent), veterans benefits (72 percent), and rebuilding highway infrastructure (62 percent).[58] Thus, while a sizable portion of Americans prefer small government in the abstract, many still very much like what government does in particular areas.[59]

The federal government maintains a large number of websites that provide useful information to citizens on such topics as loans for education, civil service job applications, the inflation rate, and how the weather will affect farming. These sites are just one way in which the government serves its citizens.



What explains the different levels of support in the size of government? Partisanship (being a strong supporter of a political party) is one factor. Democrats have often advocated for enlarging the size of government, while Republicans have argued for restraining it. A recent poll found that compared with Republicans (22 percent), significant majorities of Democrats (83 percent) and Independents (56 percent) favored increasing the role of government to solve more problems.[60] The partisan divide was especially pronounced over support for President Biden's American Rescue Plan stimulus package in 2021, with 94 percent of Democrats and only 26 percent of Republicans in support.[61]

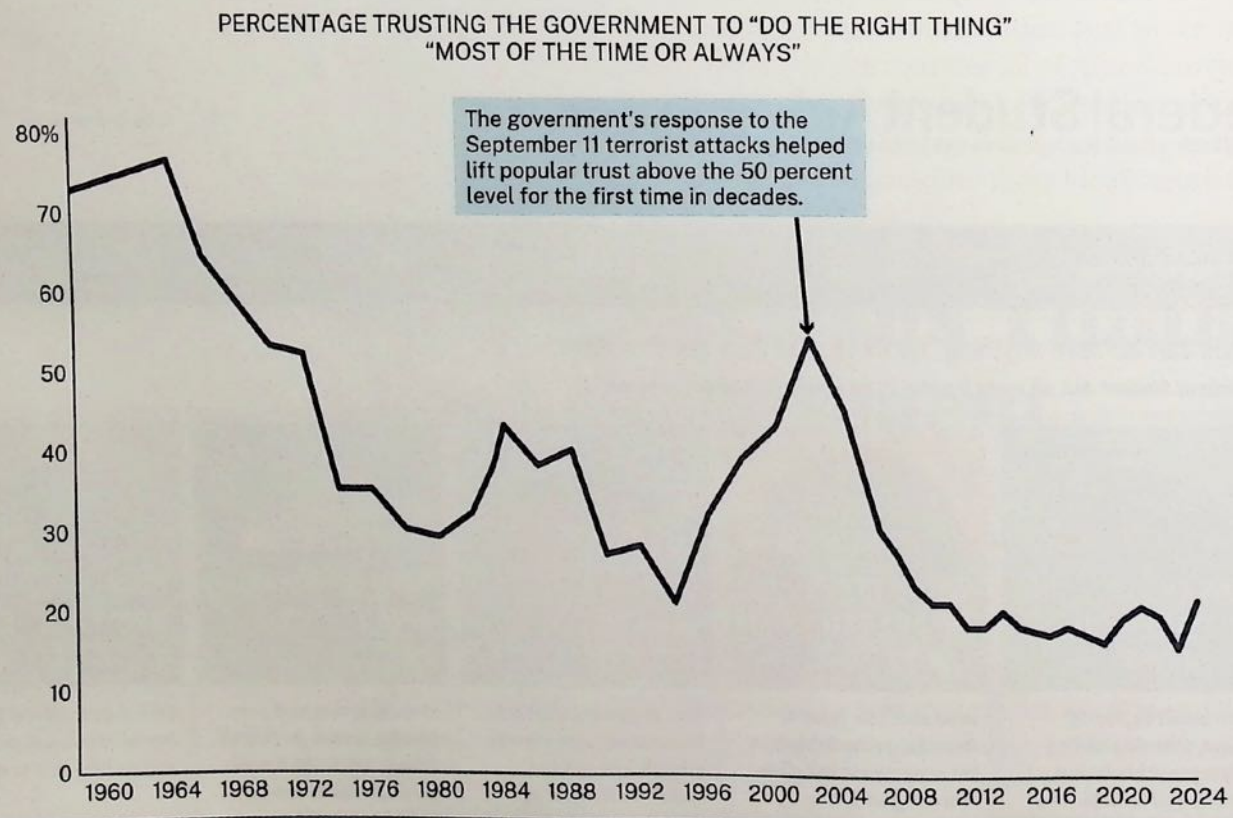
Trust in Government

A key characteristic of contemporary political culture is low *trust* in government. In the early 1960s, three-quarters of Americans said they trusted government "most of the time or always." By 2023, only 16 percent said they did.[62] (See Figure 1.3.)

Trust rose after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, but fell to pre-attack levels within three years, and the trend has continued downward.

FIGURE 1.3 | Public Trust in Government, 1958–2024

Since the 1960s, general levels of public trust in government have declined. What factors might help to account for changes in the public's trust in government? Why has confidence in government dropped again since September 11, 2001?



SOURCE: The American National Election Studies, 1958–2004; Pew Research Center, www.people-press.org; Pew Research Center, "Public Trust in Government: 1958–2024," May 2024, www.pewresearch.org.

Importantly, trust in government has been found to increase among members of the party that controls the presidency. For example, Republicans exhibited higher levels of trust when Trump was president (36 percent), while Democrats' trust fell (12 percent). In contrast, Democrats' trust in government increased to 36 percent during the Biden administration, while Republicans' plummeted to 9 percent.[63]

While Americans' trust in the federal government has fallen over recent decades, trust in local and state governments has stayed relatively high. One poll found that clear majorities of respondents expressed trust in their state governments (59 percent) and in their local governments (67 percent). In contrast, only 37 percent of Americans expressed trust in the federal government.[64] The differing levels in trust are likely related to the fact that state and local governments are smaller than the federal government, which means that citizens can exert greater influence on local and state politics.

Level of trust also differs across groups: Black people and Latinos express more confidence in the federal government than do White people. And there is a generational difference in levels of trust: baby boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) express greater confidence in the federal government than those from Generation Z (born after 1996).[65]

Does it matter if Americans trust their government? Yes. As we've seen, most Americans rely on government—federal, state, and local—for a wide range of services and protections. Long-term distrust in government can result in opposition to the taxes necessary to support such programs and can also make it difficult to attract talented workers to public service.[66] In addition, it may ultimately weaken the nation in defending its interests in the world economy and may jeopardize its national security. Likewise, a weakened government can do little to help citizens during periods of tumultuous economic or technological change. Public confidence in government is vital for the health of a democracy.

FOR CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Is your level of trust in government high or low? What is your feeling based on? If you have low trust in government, what changes in society or politics might increase that trust?

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

AMERICANS AND THEIR POLITICAL VALUES

- Given your political values—your beliefs about liberty, democracy, equality, and justice—what do you think of the environmental issues raised by young people in Montana (featured at the beginning of this chapter)? If you were to contact an elected official about this issue, which American values would you emphasize? What values do you think Rikki Held underlined? What about the people and groups aligned against her?
- In what ways does the diversity of the American people represent a strength for American democracy? In what ways is it a challenge?
- How important do you think participation, knowledge, and efficacy are for the functioning of American democracy? What would make you more engaged in government? How do you imagine Rikki Held would answer these questions? Are your friends, family, or fellow students engaged in politics? Why, or why not?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Use INQUIZITIVE *to help you study and master this material.*

Government

Differentiate among forms of government (pp. 5–10)

- Government is needed to provide services called public goods that all citizens require but cannot individually provide for themselves.
- Numerous countries including the United States are considered "constitutional democracies," in which laws limit what government can do and where citizens enjoy a considerable degree of personal and political freedom.
- America's representative democracy provides citizens with many opportunities to participate in politics.
- The United States' democracy rests on the principle of majority rule with minority rights.

TERMS TO KNOW

government (p. 5)
politics (p. 5)
autocracy (p. 5)
oligarchy (p. 7)
popular sovereignty (p. 7)
democracy (p. 7)
constitutional government (p. 7)
authoritarian government (p. 7)
totalitarian government (p. 7)
direct democracy (p. 9)
majority rule, minority rights (p. 9)
representative democracy (republic) (p. 10)
political power (p. 10)
pluralism (p. 10)

Citizenship: Participation, Knowledge, and Efficacy

Describe the rights and responsibilities that citizens have in a democracy (pp. 12–14)

- Citizenship requires political knowledge.
- The internet and social media have made it easier to learn about important political issues and participate in politics.
- However, disinformation has complicated the process, and many Americans still do not know much about current issues or debates.
- Political knowledge and participation can help increase one's efficacy.

TERMS TO KNOW

citizenship (p. 12)
political knowledge (p. 12)
disinformation (p. 13)
political efficacy (p. 13)

Who Are Americans?

Describe the social composition of the American population and how it has changed over time (pp. 14–21)

- The United States is defined by its ever-growing and ever-changing population.
- Over the last 100 years, America has become more racially, ethnically, geographically, and religiously diverse.
- Immigration has been an important factor in the country's shifting demographics.

American Political Values

Describe how foundational values of liberty, democracy, equality, and justice influence the U.S. system of government (pp. 22–30)

- The foundational documents of the United States enshrined the values of liberty, democracy, equality, and justice as key components of national identity.
- Over time, Americans have affirmed these values but questions and disagreements arise about how to apply and balance these values.
- Today, Americans hold a wide range of opinions on the government's role in ensuring equality and justice.

TERMS TO KNOW

political culture (p. 22)
liberty (p. 22)
limited government (p. 22)
laissez-faire capitalism (p. 23)
political equality (p. 26)
equality of opportunity (p. 26)
justice (p. 27)
fairness (p. 28)
social justice (p. 29)

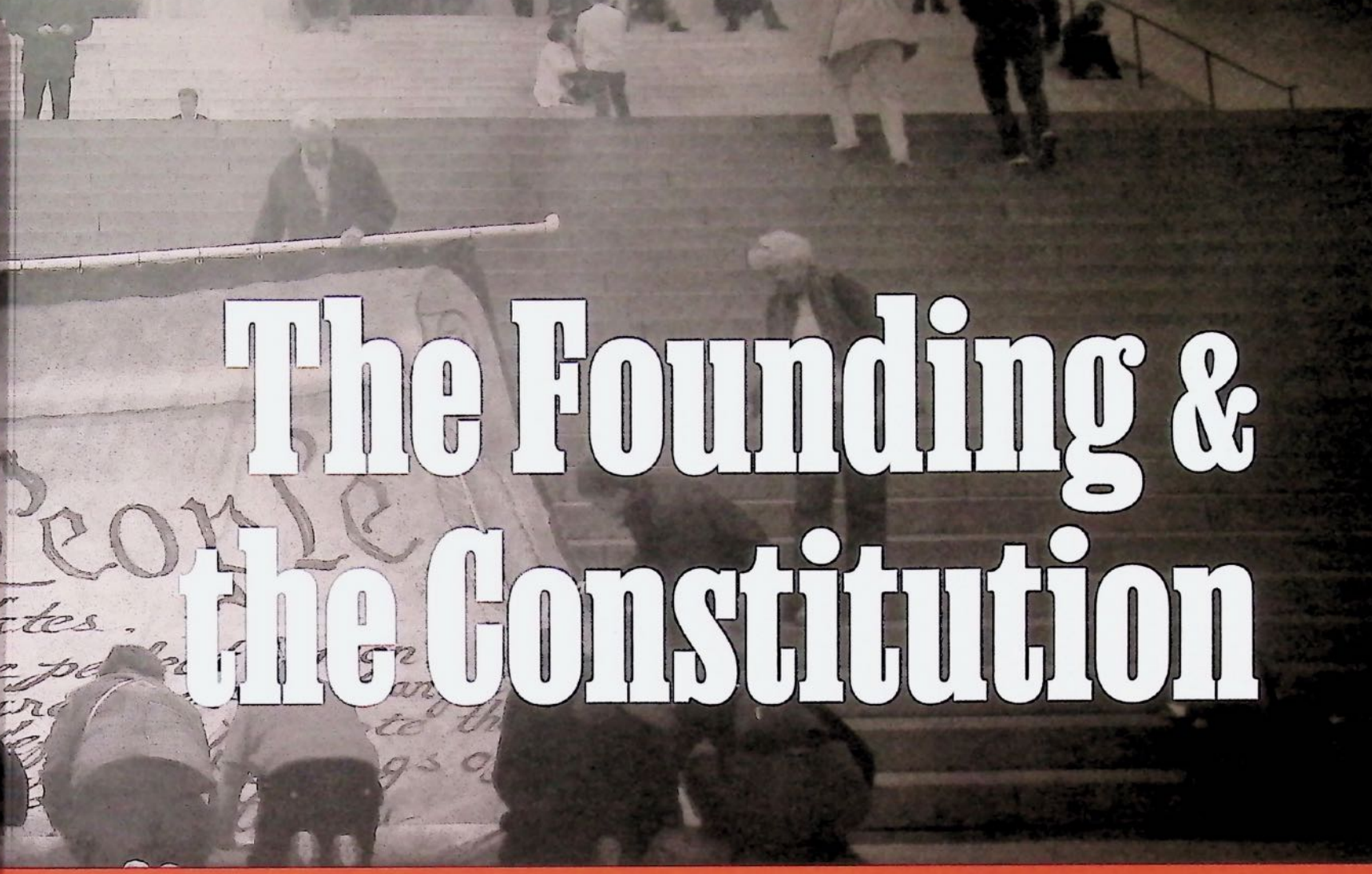
What Americans Think about Government

Summarize Americans' attitudes toward government (pp. 30–33)

- Americans have always been hesitant about granting government too much power. Still, they frequently rely on it during times of national crisis and are dependent on it to provide important services.
- Over the last few decades, trust in local and state governments has remained high.
- Yet Americans' trust in the federal government has declined significantly.
- Low levels of trust may threaten American democracy by reducing people's willingness to participate in political life.

2

WHAT GOVERNMENT DOES AND WHY IT MATTERS For nearly 200 years—since 1834—a statue of Thomas Jefferson stood in New York City Hall, residing in the city's Council Chambers since 1915. A debate simmered for two decades about removing the statue. Many of the Founders, including Jefferson, owned enslaved people even as they were formulating the nation's founding documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, which uphold the ideas of liberty, justice, equality, and the pursuit of happiness. On one side of the debate were members of the city council's Black, Latino, and Asian caucus, who described the statue as "oppressive" and "racist," and who, in a letter to the mayor, argued that it served as "a constant reminder of the injustices that have plagued communities of color since the inception of our country."[1] Council member Inez Barron said that Jefferson "felt that Blacks were inferior to Whites—in his own words," and that he had removed Native peoples from their ancestral lands.[2] Those urging that the statue remain in city hall had a different view. In a letter to the city's Public Design Commission, Princeton historian Sean Wilentz argued that "the statue honors Jefferson for his greatest contribution to America, indeed, to humankind: the basic idea, radical then, radical now, that



The Founding & the Constitution

▲ For nearly 250 years, the United States Constitution has provided the framework for American government. Despite its endurance, the meaning of the Constitution is constantly being contested, leading to some of America's fiercest debates and controversies.

all men are created equal."[3] Raymond Lavertue, a historian from the University of Oxford, testified that "removal is a very simple solution that will erase the debate" and that although Jefferson was "massively flawed," his ideas on equality should "be grappled with daily."[4]

In October 2021, the city's Public Design Commission decided to remove the statue. It was moved to the New-York Historical Society, whose president and chief executive, Louise Mirrer, planned to create an exhibition examining "the relationship between the founding ideals of freedom and equality set down by Jefferson and their lived experience, which included supporting slavery and owning enslaved people." She continued: "There are very, very difficult questions that need to be raised around the disconnect between our stated American ideals and the way in which they were not respected when it came to certain people. I think those are topics that should not be shied away from."[5]

The Declaration of Independence explained the American colonists' right to revolt against England. Abraham Lincoln called it a "rebuke . . . to tyranny and oppression." The U.S. Constitution lays out the purposes of government: to promote justice, to maintain peace at home, to defend the nation from foreign foes, to provide for the "general welfare" of Americans, and, above all, to secure the "blessings of

▲ After a contentious debate about Thomas Jefferson's history as a slaveowner and one of the primary drafters of America's founding documents, a statue of Jefferson was removed from the city council chambers in New York's city hall.

liberty" for them. It also spells out a plan for achieving these objectives, including institutions to exercise legislative, executive, and judicial powers and a division of powers among the federal government's branches and between the national and state governments.

These documents are revered. But as we will see in this chapter, they are also complicated. The Constitution was the product of conflict and intense bargaining among competing interests. The values of liberty, democracy, equality, and justice encapsulated in it and in the Declaration were contested then, and they are contested now. The debate over removing statues and monuments to Founders also reminds us that these documents were written by men whose legacy is complex. Historian Hasan Kwame Jeffries recounts that James Madison, the nation's fourth president, formulated the Bill of Rights in the library of his home at Montpelier, built with bricks made by enslaved children, whose handprints can still be traced in the building's foundation. Reckoning with these contradictions is "hard history," Jeffries says, which is uncomfortable to discuss.[6]

Although many Americans believe strongly in the values of liberty, equality, and justice, the ways those values are defined and implemented by the institutions that the Constitution created have generated much controversy. As this chapter will show, the Constitution reflects high principles as well as political self-interest. How those principles have been realized over time—and which groups have benefited and which groups have suffered—is an enduring theme of American governance.

CHAPTER GOALS

Explain the interests and conflicts that led to the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation (pp. 39–45)

Describe the political context of the Constitutional Convention and the compromises achieved there (pp. 46–52)

Describe the principles of governance and the powers of the national government defined by the Constitution (pp. 52–63)

Differentiate between the Federalists' and Antifederalists' stances on the ratification of the Constitution (pp. 63–67)

The First Founding: Interests and Conflicts

Explain the interests and conflicts that led to the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation

To understand dynamic historical eras such as the Founding of the United States, it is helpful to focus on the different perspectives of the people who were present. In American politics, the Founding story generally emphasizes ideas such as individual liberty, democracy, equality, justice, and the pursuit of happiness. The Founders—people like James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and Alexander Hamilton—take center stage and are revered for articulating American values and ideals. However, even though these men and these ideals are central to the Founding, there is more to the story.

Recent scholarship has highlighted the importance of incorporating two additional processes in our understanding of the Founding: land removal from Native nations and enslavement of Africans.[7] In fact, both practices are directly connected to some of the crucial conflicts that led the 13 colonies to declare independence. Disagreements with Native nations over land ownership fueled the desire for a stronger central government, and profits from the enslavement of Africans contributed to the financial security that the colonists needed to envision an independent nation. While it may be difficult to reconcile the lofty ideals of the Founders with the unfair and inhumane treatment of two groups of people, it is necessary to acknowledge the complexity of the Founding period.

Native Nations and Colonial Life

Before the first colonists arrived, the land that would come to be known as the United States was not empty.[8] Hundreds of independent Native nations and millions of Native peoples were already there (see Figure 2.1). Yet, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, representatives from the great European empires were crisscrossing the globe in search of territory, riches, and influence. Colonists from England set up the first successful colony in America in 1607 in Jamestown, Virginia. In 1620 the second colony was established in Plymouth, Massachusetts. In both places, the colonists settled on land that was occupied at the time by powerful Native nations (among them the Pequot, Narragansett, and Algonquin), who were already practicing a form of democratic self-governance. In fact, there were 60,000 Native Americans living in what would later become the New England colonies: Plymouth, Massachusetts Bay, New Hampshire, Connecticut, New Haven, and Rhode Island. The colonists brought desirable new goods to trade with the Native nations, but they also brought foreign diseases such as smallpox, to which the Native population had no immunity. As a result, their numbers were quickly decimated. For example, of an estimated 12,000 Native Americans when Jamestown was settled in 1607, only 1,000 were left by 1700.[9] For this reason and others, the initially cordial relations between colonists and Native peoples worsened steadily.