In December 1606, three ships—the Susan Constant, the Godspeed, and the Discovery—set sail from Blackwall, England, to America. On these ships were 104 men and boys seeking their fortunes, for it had been reputed that the New World offered tremendous riches. However, this sorry mix of laborers lacked the skills necessary to sustain a colony in the harsh terrain they were to encounter.

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

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

What Should I Know About . . .

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1.1 Trace the origins of American government, p. 4.
1.2 Show how European political thought provided the theoretical foundations of American government, p. 7.
1.3 Describe American political culture, and identify the basic tenets of American democracy, p. 11.
1.4 Explain the functions of American government, p. 13.
1.5 Analyze the changing characteristics of the American public, p. 15.
1.6 Assess the role of political ideology in shaping American politics, p. 20.
1.7 Characterize changes in Americans’ attitudes toward and expectations of government, p. 22.

The United States is a nation of immigrants. At left is an artist’s rendition of the first permanent English settlement in the New World, Jamestown, in what is today Virginia. At right, American immigrants take an oath of citizenship in 2010. Today, the people who make up the American body politic are far more diverse than those who settled in Virginia or any of the other thirteen original colonies.

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

Although the introduction of tobacco as a cash crop in 1612 improved the economic conditions of the settlement, living conditions remained grim. One resident called the area “an unhealthy place, a nest of Rogues, whores, desolate, and rooking persons; a place of intolerable labour, bad usage, and a hard Diet.”1 While eventually conditions improved, it is important to remember the sacrifices of early colonists and the trials other waves of immigrants have faced to be part of the American dream.
In this text, we explore the American political system through a historical lens. This perspective allows us to analyze the ways that the ideas and actions of a host of different Americans—from Indians, to colonists, to the Framers of the Constitution and beyond—have affected how our government works. Much has changed since the days of the Jamestown Colony, and the people who live in America today are very different from those early settlers. Their experiences and values, however, continue to influence politics. This chapter explores the political process, placing people at its center.

- First, we discuss the roots of American government by revealing who “We the People” really were.
- Second, we examine the theoretical foundations of American government.
- Third, we delve into American political culture and the basic tenets of American democracy.
- Fourth, we explore the functions of American government.
- Fifth, we analyze the changing American public.
- Sixth, we consider the role of political ideology in American politics.
- Finally, we discuss reforms as a result of people and politics.

ROOTS OF American Government:
We the People

1.1 Trace the origins of American government.

The Preamble to the U.S. Constitution begins with the phrase “We the People.” But, who are “the People”? In this section, we begin to explore that question by looking at the earliest inhabitants of the Americas, their initial and continued interactions with European colonists, and how Americans continually built on the experiences of the past to create a new future. (To learn more about how the meaning of the Preamble has evolved, see The Living Constitution: Preamble.)

The Earliest Inhabitants of the Americas

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

The indigenous peoples were not a homogeneous group; their cultures, customs, and values varied widely, as did their political systems. The number of these indigenous peoples is impossible to know for certain. Estimates, however, have ranged as high as 100 million people, a number that quickly diminished as colonists brought with them to the New World a range of diseases to which the indigenous peoples had not been exposed. In addition, warfare with the European settlers as well as within tribes not only killed many American Indians but also disrupted previously established
ways of life. The European settlers also displaced Indians, repeatedly pushing them westward as they created settlements and later, colonies.

The First Colonists

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

In addition to the English commercial settlements in Virginia, in 1609 the Dutch New Netherland Company settled along the Hudson and lower Delaware Rivers, calling the area New Netherland. Its charter was not renewed, and the Dutch West

The Living Constitution

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

—PREAMBLE

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

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

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. How do you think the Framers would respond to the broad interpretation of the Preamble’s intent embraced by many modern political leaders?
2. What are some specific examples of demands placed on government by the American people?
3. How have ideas such as promoting “the general Welfare” evolved over time? How has this affected the role and power of American government?
India Company quickly established trading posts on the Hudson River. Both Fort Orange, in what is now Albany, New York, and New Amsterdam, New York City’s Manhattan Island, were populated not by colonists but by salaried employees. Among those who flocked to New Amsterdam (renamed New York in 1664) were settlers from Finland, Germany, and Sweden. The varied immigrants also included free blacks. This ethnic and racial mix created its own system of cultural inclusiveness that continues to make New York City and its citizenry unique today.

A RELIGIOUS TRADITION TAKES ROOT  The Reformation in Europe started abruptly when Martin Luther rebelled against the Roman Catholic Church in 1517. A Catholic priest, he accepted some but not all of the church’s teachings and wished simply to reform the church, which he viewed as corrupt. This rebellion led to the founding of several new Protestant sects, such as Lutheranism, and a sense that people had the right to dissent from their church leaders. John Calvin, for example, developed a belief system called Calvinism that stressed the absolute sovereignty of God, possible redemption, and eternal damnation for unrepentant sinners. The Reformation period was followed by what we call the Enlightenment period.

During the Enlightenment, philosophers and scientists such as Isaac Newton (1642–1727) began to argue that the world could be improved through the use of human reason, science, and religious toleration. These intellectual and religious developments encouraged people to seek alternatives to absolute monarchies and to ponder the divine right of kings and the role of the church in their lives.

Among those who rejected the role of the Church of England were a group of radical Protestants known as Puritans. These people had been persecuted for their religious beliefs by the English monarchy. They decided that better opportunities for religious freedom might lie in the New World.

In 1620, a group of these Protestants, known as the Pilgrims, left Europe aboard the Mayflower. Although they were destined for Virginia, they found themselves off course and instead landed in Plymouth, in what is now Massachusetts. These new settlers differed from those in Virginia and New York, who saw their settlements as commercial ventures. The Pilgrims came instead as families bound together by a common belief in the powerful role of religion in their lives. They believed they were charged by the Old Testament to create “a city on a hill” that would become an example of righteousness. To help achieve this goal, the Pilgrims enforced a strict code of authority and obedience, while simultaneously stressing the importance of individualism.

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

A later challenge to the Puritans’ religious beliefs came from midwife Anne Hutchinson. She began to share her views that churches as they had been established in Massachusetts had lost touch with the Holy Spirit. Many of her followers were women, and her progressive views on the importance of religious tolerance, as well as on the equality and rights of women, led to her expulsion from Massachusetts. She and her followers eventually settled in
Portsmouth, Rhode Island, which became a beacon for those seeking religious tolerance. (To learn more about colonial settlement, see Figure 1.1.)

**RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE GROWS** Later colonies established in the New World were created with religious tolerance in mind. In 1632, King Charles I granted a well-known English Catholic's son a charter to establish a Catholic colony in the New World. This area eventually became known as Maryland after Mary, the mother of Jesus.

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

**Becoming Americans**

Common to all of these colonies was the immediately apparent need for some type of governance and a divine God. Ultimately, the beginnings of government, the formal vehicle through which policies are made and affairs of state are conducted, began to emerge. The structures created in each colony varied greatly, from initial chaos to far more inclusive and stable types of local and colonial self-governance. The Virginia House of Burgesses, created in 1619, was the first representative assembly in North America. In this body, twenty-two elected officials were chosen to make the laws for all of the colonists. In contrast, in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, all church members were permitted the right to participate in what were called town meetings. This more direct form of government enabled a broader base of participation and allowed the colonists to keep their religious and cultural values at the center of their governing process.

Eventually, the power of self-government as well as a growing spirit of independence resulted in tension with British rule. Though there were differences among the colonists about the proper form, role, and function of government, there was widespread agreement that the king of England was out of touch and unresponsive to the colonists’ needs (see chapter 2).

**The Theoretical Foundations of American Government**

1.2 Show how European political thought provided the theoretical foundations of American government.

The current American political system is the result of philosophy, religious tradition, trial and error, and even luck. To begin our examination of why we have the type of government we have today, we will look at the theories of government that influenced the Framers who drafted the Constitution and created the United States of America.

**Social Contract Theory**

Even before the Pilgrims arrived in the New World, they saw the necessity for a social contract, an agreement among the people signifying their consent to be governed. While at sea, they wrote a document called the Mayflower Compact, which enumerated government

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

social contract

An agreement between the people and their government signifying their consent to be governed.

Mayflower Compact

Document written by the Pilgrims while at sea enumerating the scope of their government and its expectations of citizens.
the scope of their government and its expectations of citizens. This document was based on a social contract theory of government. Two English theorists of the seventeenth century, Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and John Locke (1632–1704), built on conventional notions about the role of government and the relationship of the government to the people in proposing a social contract theory of government. They argued that all individuals were free and equal by natural right. This freedom, in turn, required that all people give their consent to be governed.

Hobbes was influenced greatly by the chaos of the English Civil War during the mid-seventeenth century. Its impact is evident in his most famous work, Leviathan (1651), a treatise on government that states his views on humanity and citizenship. Leviathan is commonly described as a book about politics, but it also deals with religion and moral philosophy. In Leviathan, Hobbes argued pessimistically that humanity’s natural state was one of war. Government, Hobbes theorized, particularly a monarchy, was necessary to restrain humanity’s bestial tendencies because life without government was but a “state of nature.” Without written, enforceable rules, people would live like animals—foraging for food, stealing, and killing when necessary. To escape the horrors of the natural state and to protect their lives, Hobbes argued, people must give up certain rights to government. Without government, Hobbes warned, life would be “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short”—a constant struggle to survive against the evil of others. For these reasons, governments had to intrude on people’s rights and liberties significantly to better control society and to provide the necessary safeguards for property.

Hobbes argued strongly for a single ruler, no matter how evil, to guarantee the rights of the weak against the strong. Leviathan, a biblical sea monster, was his characterization of an all-powerful government. Strict adherence to the laws, however all-encompassing or intrusive on liberty, was a small price to pay for living in a civilized society.

As Hobbes wrote in Leviathan, “I authorize and give up my right of governing myself, to this man, or to this assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up
thy right to him, and authorize all of his actions in like manner. . . . This is the generation of that great Leviathan, or rather (to speak more reverently) of that Mortal God, to which we owe under the Immortal God, our peace and defence.”

In contrast to Hobbes, John Locke, like many other political philosophers of the era, took the basic survival of humanity for granted. Locke argued that a government’s major responsibility was the preservation of private property, an idea that ultimately found its way into the U.S. Constitution. In two of his works—Second Treatise on Civil Government (1689) and Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690)—Locke not only denied the divine right of kings to govern but argued that individuals were born equal and with natural rights that no king had the power to void. Under Locke’s conception of social contract theory, the consent of the people is the only true basis of any sovereign’s right to rule. According to Locke, people form governments largely to preserve “the right of making laws with penalties . . . for the regulating and preserving of property, and of employing the force of the community in the execution of such laws . . . all this only for the public good.” If governments act improperly, they break their contract with the people and therefore no longer enjoy the consent of the governed. Because he believed that true justice comes from the law, Locke argued that the branch of government that makes laws—as opposed to the one that enforces or interprets laws—should be the most powerful.

Locke believed that having a chief executive to administer laws was important, but that he should necessarily be limited by law or by the social contract with the governed. Locke’s writings influenced many American colonists, especially Thomas Jefferson, whose original draft of the Declaration of Independence noted the rights to “life, liberty, and property” as key reasons to separate from England.

Two French political philosophers also had a significant impact on the theoretical foundations of American government. In 1749, Charles-Louis, the Second Baron of Montesquieu, published Spirit of the Laws, in which he adopted Hobbes’s and Locke’s concepts of the social contract. He offered that the best form of government is one
Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *Social Contract* went far beyond Locke and Hobbes, arguing that feeling, not reason, is what draws people to life in a community. He contended that property rights, the freedoms of speech and religion, and other basic rights come from society, not a state of nature. He believed that society based on a true social contract would provide absolute equality and freedom for individuals.

**Devising a National Government in the American Colonies**

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

The Framers wanted to create a political system that involved placing the people at the center of power. Due to the vast size of the new nation, direct democracy was unworkable. As more and more settlers came to the New World, many town meetings were replaced by a system of indirect democracy, however, in which people vote for representatives who work on their behalf. Representative government was considered undemocratic by ancient Greeks, who believed that all citizens must have a direct say in their governance. And, in the 1760s, Rousseau argued that true democracy is impossible unless all citizens participate in governmental decision making. Nevertheless, indirect democracy was the form of government used throughout most of the colonies.

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

**Types of Government: The People Choose**

Early Greek theorists such as Plato and Aristotle tried to categorize governments by who participates, who governs, and how much authority those who govern enjoy. As revealed in Table 1.1, a monarchy, the form of government in England from which that fits best with the “peculiar character of its people.” His most critical contribution was his theory of liberty, which held that governmental power was best when divided into distinct branches that provided a system to check power with power.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rule by</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Monarchy</td>
<td>Tyranny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Few</td>
<td>Aristocracy</td>
<td>Oligarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Many</td>
<td>Polity</td>
<td>Democracy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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**Why did Hobbes support a single ruler?** Hobbes favored a single ruler to protect the weak from the strong. The title page from Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (1651) depicts a giant ruler whose body consists of the bodies of his subjects. This is symbolic of the people coming together under one ruler.
the colonists fled, is defined by the rule of one hereditary king or queen in the interest of all of his or her subjects. The Framers rejected adopting an aristocracy, which is defined as government by the few in the service of the many.

The least appealing of Aristotle’s classifications of government is totalitarianism, a form of government that he considered rule by “tyranny.” Tyrants rule their countries to benefit themselves. This is the case in North Korea under Kim Jong–Il. In tyrannical or totalitarian systems, the leader exercises unlimited power, and individuals have no personal rights or liberties. Generally, these systems tend to be ruled in the name of a particular religion or orthodoxy, an ideology, or a personality cult organized around a supreme leader.

Another unappealing form of government, an oligarchy, occurs when a few people rule in their own interest. In an oligarchy, participation in government is conditioned on the possession of wealth, social status, military position, or achievement. This was the situation in South Africa during the period of apartheid.

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

**Democracies Worldwide**

The United States was part of a first wave of democratization that took place worldwide from 1787 to 1926. A second wave followed from 1943 to 1962 and included West Germany, Japan, and India. A third wave from 1974 to 1991 brought democracy to Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Africa. Freedom House presents an annual count of the number of electoral democracies in existence, and this table shows some of its findings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Electoral Democracies</th>
<th>Percentage of Countries That Are Electoral Democracies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- What might explain the large increase in the number of electoral democracies between 1989 and 1993?
- Why might it be harder to create a democracy today than it was during the first wave of democratization?
- Does it matter how many democracies exist in the world? Is it better for American democracy if the majority of governments are democracies?

**American Political Culture and the Basic Tenets of American Democracy**

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

The representative democratic system devised by the Framers to govern the United States is based on a number of underlying concepts and distinguishing characteristics that sometimes conflict with one another. Taken together, these ideas lie at the core of American political culture. More specifically, political culture can be defined as commonly shared attitudes, beliefs, and core values about how government should operate. American political culture emphasizes the values of liberty and equality; popular consent, majority rule, and popular sovereignty; individualism; and religious faith and freedom.

**Liberty and Equality**

Liberty and equality are the most important characteristics of the American republican form of government. The Constitution itself was written to ensure life and liberty. Over the years, however, our concepts of personal liberty have changed and evolved from freedom from to freedom to. The Framers intended Americans to be free from governmental infringements on freedom of religion and speech, from unreasonable searches and seizure, and so on (see chapter 5). The addition of the Fourteenth Amendment to the...
Values and Government

Government in the United States is influenced by Americans’ emphasis on liberty and equality, individualism, popular consent and popular sovereignty, and religious beliefs. Political leaders attempt to make policies that assure “liberty and justice for all,” and in so doing, pay a great deal of attention to citizens’ opinions and priorities.

But, American values are not global values. Other countries and regions prioritize different ideals. Citizens of many Asian countries, for example, value loyalty, self-sacrifice, and work ethic. In recent years, many Asian leaders, including the prime ministers of Malaysia and Singapore, have used these common values to justify the creation of a different variant of democratic government. In this new model, the government does not respond to public opinion, the media, and citizen demands so much as it acts as a trustee, looking out for society’s best interest by promoting growth and keeping order.

- Is it possible for there to be an Asian, African, or Latin American version of democracy that differs significantly from what is found in the United States?
- How would Asian values manifest themselves in this new form of government?
- Can a government be truly democratic if it does not respond to public opinion?

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

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

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

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

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

Constitution and its emphasis on due process and on equal protection of the laws as well as the subsequent passage of laws guaranteeing civil rights and liberties, however, expanded Americans’ concept of liberty to include demands for freedom to work or go to school without discrimination. Debates over how much the government should do to guarantee these rights and liberties illustrate the conflicts that continue to occur in our democratic system.

Another key characteristic of our democracy is political equality, the principle that all citizens are the same in the eyes of the law. Notions of political equality have changed dramatically from the founding time. The U.S. Constitution once treated slaves as equal to only three-fifths of a white man for purposes of assessing state population. No one then could have imagined that in 2008, Barack Obama would be elected president by large margins. President Obama even won Virginia, which is home to Richmond, the former capital of the Confederate States of America.

Popular Consent, Majority Rule, and Popular Sovereignty

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

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

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

Individualism

Although many core political tenets concern protecting the rights of others, tremendous value is placed on the individual in American democracy, an idea highly valued by the Puritans. This emphasis on individualism makes Americans quite different from
citizens of other democracies such as Canada, which practices a group approach to governance. 

Group-focused societies reject the American emphasis on individuals and try to improve the lives of their citizens by making services and rights available on a group or universal basis. In contrast, in the U.S. system, all individuals are deemed rational and fair and endowed, as Thomas Jefferson proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence, “with certain unalienable rights.” Those rights are ones social contact theorists believed were beyond the scope of governmental intervention except in extreme instances.

Religious Faith and Religious Freedom

Religious conflicts in Europe brought many settlers to the New World. Men, women, and their families settled large sections of the East Coast seeking an opportunity to practice their religious faith. However, that faith did not always imply religious tolerance. The clashes that occurred within settlements, as well as within colonies, led the Framers to agree universally that the new nation had to be founded on notions of religious freedom. Religious tolerance, however, has often proved to be more of an ideal than a reality. For example, as the nation wages war in Iraq and Afghanistan and attempts to export democracy, large numbers of Americans consider Islam “a religion that encourages violence” and do not view Islam as having much in common with their own religion.6

Most Americans today profess to have strong religious beliefs. In fact, many Americans are quite comfortable with religion playing an important role in public policy. President George W. Bush’s frequent references to his faith as guiding his decisions received the support of 60 percent of the American public in one 2005 poll.7

Functions of American Government

1.4 Explain the functions of American government.

In attempting “to form a more perfect Union,” the Framers, through the Constitution, set out several key functions of American government, as well as governmental guarantees to the people, that have continuing relevance today. As discussed in this section, several of the Framers’ ideas centered on their belief that the major function of government was creating mechanisms to allow individuals to solve conflicts in an orderly and peaceful manner. Moreover, it is important to note that each of these principles has faced challenges over time, restricting or expanding the underlying notion of a “more perfect Union.”

Establishing Justice

One of the first things expected from any government is the creation of a system of laws that allows individuals to abide by a common set of principles. Societies adhering to the rule of law allow for the rational dispensing of justice by acknowledged legal authorities. Thus, the Constitution authorized Congress to create a federal judicial system to dispense justice. The Bill of Rights also entitles people to a trial by jury, to be
informed of the charges against them, and to be tried in a courtroom presided over by an impartial judge. (To learn more about these liberties, see chapter 5.)

Insuring Domestic Tranquility
As we will discuss throughout this text, the role of governments in insuring domestic tranquility is a subject of much debate and has been so since the time of Hobbes and Locke. In times of crisis, such as the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the federal government, as well as state and local governments, took extraordinary measures to contain the threat of terrorism from abroad as well as within the United States. The creation of the Department of Homeland Security and the passage of legislation giving the national government nearly unprecedented ability to ferret out potential threats show the degree to which the government takes seriously its charge to preserve domestic tranquility. On an even more practical front, local governments have police forces, the states have national guards, and the federal government can always call up troops to quell any threats to order.

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

Promoting the General Welfare
When the Framers added “promoting the general Welfare” to their list of key government functions, they never envisioned how the involvement of the government at all levels would expand so tremendously. In fact, promoting the general welfare was more of an ideal than a mandate for the new national government. Over time, however, our notions of what governments should do have expanded along with the number and size of governments. As we discuss throughout this text, however, there is no universal agreement on the scope of what governments should do. For example, part of the debate around the reform of health care in 2010 concerned the question of whether health is a fundamental right to be guaranteed by the federal government.

Securing the Blessings of Liberty
Americans enjoy a wide range of liberties and freedoms and feel free to prosper. They are free to criticize the government and to petition it when they disagree with its policies or have a grievance. This is perhaps the best way to “secure the Blessings of Liberty.” The tea party movement that began in 2009 demonstrates the right to protest actions of the Congress and the president.

Taken together, these principal functions of government and the guarantees they provide to citizens permeate our lives. Whether it is your ability to obtain a low-interest student loan, buy a formerly prescription-only drug such as Claritin or Plan B over the counter, or be licensed to drive a car at a particular age, government plays a major role. And, without government-sponsored research, we would not have cell phones, the Internet, four-wheel-drive vehicles, or even Velcro.
The Changing American Public

1.5 Analyze the changing characteristics of the American public.

One year after the U.S. Constitution was ratified, fewer than 4 million people lived in the thirteen states. Most were united by a single language and a shared Protestant-Christian heritage, and those who voted were white male property owners. The Constitution mandated that each of the sixty-five members of the original House of Representatives should represent 30,000 people. However, because of rapid population growth, that number often was much higher.

As the nation grew westward, hundreds of thousands of new immigrants came to America often in waves, fleeing war or famine or simply in search of a better life. Although the geographic size of the United States has remained stable since the addition of Alaska and Hawaii as states in 1959, in 2010 there were more than 309 million Americans. In 2009 the sole member of the House of Representatives from Montana represented more than 974,000 people. As a result of this population growth, most citizens today feel far removed from the national government and their elected representatives. Members of Congress, too, feel this change. Often they represent diverse constituencies with a variety of needs, concerns, and expectations, and they can meet only a relative few of these people face to face. (To learn more about population growth, see Figure 1.2.)

Figure 1.2 How has the U.S. population grown over time?
Since around 1890, when large numbers of immigrants began arriving in America, the United States has seen a sharp increase in population. The major reasons for this increase are new births and increased longevity, although immigration is also a contributing factor.

Racial and Ethnic Composition

The American population has been altered constantly by the arrival of immigrants from various regions—Western Europeans fleeing religious persecution in the 1600s to early 1700s, slaves brought in chains from Africa in the late 1700s, Chinese laborers arriving to work on the railroads following the Gold Rush in 1848, Irish Catholics escaping the potato famine in the 1850s, Northern and Eastern Europeans from the 1880s to 1910s, and most recently, South and Southeast Asians, Cubans, and Mexicans, among others.

Immigration to the United States peaked in the first decade of the 1900s, when nearly 9 million people, many of them from Eastern Europe, entered the country. The United States did not see another major wave of immigration until the late 1980s, when nearly 2 million immigrants were admitted in one year. Today, nearly 40 million people in the United States are considered immigrants, and most immigrants are Hispanic.*

Unlike other groups that have come before, many Hispanics have resisted American cultural assimilation. Language appears to be a particularly difficult and sometimes controversial policy issue. In many sections of the country, Spanish-speaking citizens have necessitated changes in the way governments do business. Many government agencies print official documents in both English and Spanish. This has caused a debate in the country as to whether all Americans should speak English or if the nation should move toward a more bilingual society like that of Canada, where English and French are the official languages. (To learn more about the debate about immigrant assimilation, see Join the Debate: Should Immigrants Be Assimilated into American Political Culture?)

Immigration has led to significant changes in American racial and ethnic composition. As revealed in Figure 1.3, the racial and ethnic balance in America has changed dramatically since 1967, with the proportion of Hispanics growing at the quickest rate and taking over as the second most common racial or ethnic group in the United States. More importantly, what the figure does not show is that 40 percent of Americans under age twenty-five are members of a minority group, a fact that will have a significant impact not only on the demographics of the American polity but also on how America “looks.” In 2010, for example, nonwhites made up more than one-third of the population yet came nowhere close to that kind of representation in the halls of Congress.

Aging

Just as the racial and ethnic composition of the American population is changing, so too is the average age. “For decades, the U.S. was described as a nation of the young because the number of persons under the age of twenty greatly outnumber[ed] those sixty-five and older,” but this is no longer the case.8 (To learn more about the aging population, see Figure 1.4.) Because of changes in patterns of fertility, life expectancy, and immigration, the nation’s age profile has changed drastically. When the United States was founded, the average life expectancy was thirty-five years; by 2010, it was eighty-one years for women and seventy-six years for men.

An aging population places a host of costly demands on the government. In 2008, the first of the Baby Boomers (the 76.8 million people who were born between 1946 and 1964) reached age sixty-two and qualified for Social Security; in 2011, they will reach sixty-five and qualify for Medicare.9 An aging America also poses a great financial burden on working Americans, whose proportion of the population is rapidly declining.

These dramatic changes could potentially pit younger people against older people and result in dramatic cuts in benefits to the elderly and increased taxes for younger...

* In this text, we have made the decision to refer to those of Spanish, Latin American, Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican descent as Hispanic instead of Latino/a. Although this label is not accepted universally by the community it describes, Hispanic is the term used by the U.S. government when reporting federal data. In addition, a 2008 survey sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts found that 36 percent of those who responded preferred the term Hispanic, 21 percent preferred the term Latino, and the remainder had no preference. See www.pewhispanic.org.
workers. Moreover, the elderly often vote against programs favored by younger voters, such as money for new schools and other items that they no longer view as important. At the same time, younger voters are less likely to support some things important to seniors, such as Medicare and prescription drug reform.

Religious Beliefs

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

While many people still view the United States as a Christian nation, a great number of religious groups—including Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims—have established roots in the country. With this growth have come different political and social demands. For example, evangelical Christians regularly demand that school boards adopt textbooks with particular viewpoints. In 2010, the Texas Board of Education required that textbooks use the term “capitalism” instead of “free enterprise system,” question the Framers’ concept of a purely secular government, and present conservative beliefs in a much more positive light. Likewise, American Jews continuously work to ensure that America’s policies in the Middle East favor Israel, while Muslims demand more support for a Palestinian state.

Regional Growth and Expansion

Regional sectionalism emerged almost immediately in the United States. Settlers from the Virginia colony southward were largely focused on commerce. Those seeking various forms of religious freedom populated many of the settlements to the North. That search for political freedom also came with puritanical values so that New England evolved differently from the South in many aspects of culture.
One of the greatest strengths of the United States historically has been its ability to absorb and assimilate, or integrate into the social body, the diverse people who enter its borders. Indeed, the United States has long been described as a “melting pot” that collectively embraces immigrants and blends them into the one shared American culture based on the principles of equality, individual rights, and government by consent. However, according to authors such as Samuel Huntington, a new wave of immigrants coming from Mexico and Latin America is less likely to assimilate into American political culture. This has resulted in the creation of linguistic and cultural enclaves, or communities within the United States (areas of Los Angeles or Miami, for example), in which there is no need for those who live there to learn the language, history, and political values of America.

Some observers worry that the failure of America to assimilate this new wave of immigrants may foster a type of dual national or cultural allegiance that could weaken ties to American core values and undermine the distinctive features of American political culture. This trend raises serious questions. Are American core ideals so exceptional that only people who share those values should be members of the political community? What are the implications for American politics of assimilation or lack of assimilation by immigrants?

To develop an ARGUMENT FOR the assimilation of immigrants into American political culture, think about how:

- Assimilation provides the foundation for a common identity, which is necessary to create a political community. In what ways would competing sources of identity weaken individuals’ attachments to one another and their government? How does having a stronger political community facilitate more egalitarian policy making?
- Previous generations of immigrants successfully assimilated into American political culture. What do the experiences of early Irish, Polish, German, Japanese, and Chinese immigrants to America show us about the benefits of assimilation? How did these immigrants overcome language and cultural barriers to become Americans?
- The United States has been called a melting pot of immigrants. How has the assimilation of immigrants historically strengthened and transformed American political culture? How did successive waves of immigrants move the United States toward the realization of the ideals espoused in the Declaration of Independence?

To develop an ARGUMENT AGAINST the assimilation of immigrants into American political culture, think about how:

- Principles such as personal liberty and individualism are central to American political culture. In what ways are decisions about what language to speak, what cultural traditions and customs to practice, and what values to hold fundamentally individual decisions that should not be subject to governmental dictates? Why does it matter if citizens speak a different language if they share the same fundamental values as other Americans?
- The major public policy challenges facing the United States have little to do with the assimilation (or lack of assimilation) of immigrants. Would the assimilation of immigrants fundamentally change debates over the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, or the state of the U.S. budget? How might forced assimilation actually complicate policymaking?
- Multiculturalism has benefits for society. By emphasizing the need for assimilation rather than embracing diversity, do we deprive ourselves of the benefits of a multicultural society? Should American values and identity evolve with the times?

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*See, for example, Samuel Huntington, Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2004).*
Sectional differences continued to emerge as the United States developed into a major industrial nation and waves of immigrants with different religious traditions and customs entered the country, often settling in areas where other immigrants from their homeland already lived. For example, thousands of Scandinavians settled in Minnesota, and many Irish settled in the urban centers of the Northeast, as did many Italians and Jews. All brought with them unique views about numerous issues and varying demands on government, as well as different ideas about the role of government. These political views often have been transmitted through the generations, and many regional differences continue to affect public opinion today.

One of the most long-standing and dramatic regional differences in the United States is that between the South and the North. During the Constitutional Convention, most Southerners staunchly advocated a weak national government. The Civil War was later fought in part because of basic differences in philosophy toward government as well as toward slavery, which many Northerners opposed. As we know from the results of modern political polling, the South has continued to lag behind the rest of the nation in support for civil rights while continuing to favor return of power to the states at the expense of the national government.

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

Significant differences in attitude are also seen in rural versus urban areas. Those who live in rural areas are much more conservative than those who live in large cities. One need only look at a map of the vote distribution in the 2008 presidential election to see stark differences in candidate appeal. Barack Obama carried almost every large city in America; John McCain carried 53 percent of the rural and small-town voters as well as most of America’s heartland. Republicans won the South, the West, and much of the Midwest; Democrats carried the Northeast and West Coast.

**Family and Family Size**

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

In 1949, 49 percent of those polled thought that four or more children was the “ideal” family size; by 2007, only 9 percent favored large families, and 56 percent responded that no children to two children was “best.” In 1940, nine out of ten households were traditional family households. By 2008, just 69.9 percent of children under eighteen lived with both parents. In fact, over 25 percent of children under eighteen lived with just one of their parents; the majority of
those children lived with their mother. Moreover, by 2008, over 27 percent of all households consisted of a single person, a trend that is in part illustrative of the aging American population and declining marriage rate.

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

Political Ideology

Assess the role of political ideology in shaping American politics.

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

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

It is easier to understand how ideas get turned into action when one looks at the four functions political scientists attribute to ideologies. These include:

1. **Explanation.** Ideologies can provide us with reasons for why social and political conditions are the way they are, especially in time of crisis. Knowing that Kim Jong-Il rules North Korea as a totalitarian society helps explain, at least in part, why he continues to threaten to use unconventional force.

2. **Evaluation.** Ideologies can provide the standards for evaluating social conditions and political institutions and events. Americans’ belief in the importance of the individual’s abilities and personal responsibilities helps explain the opposition of some people to the Obama administration’s health care reforms.

3. **Orientation.** Much like a compass, ideologies provide individuals with an orientation toward issues and a position within the world. When many African American women, Oprah Winfrey among them, decided to campaign for Barack Obama and not Hillary Clinton in the 2008 Democratic presidential primary, their sense of identity as African Americans may have trumped their identity as women.

4. **Political Program.** Ideologies help people to make political choices and guide their political actions. Thus, since the Republican Party is identified with a steadfast opposition to abortion, anyone with strong pro-life views would find the party’s stance on this issue a helpful guide in voting.
Finding a Political Ideology

The four functions of ideology discussed above clearly have real-world implications. Religious, philosophical, and cultural beliefs can become cohesive ideologies that create natural groups within society and lead to political conflict.

In America, one often hears about conservative, liberal, and moderate political ideologies. (To learn more about the distribution of ideologies in the United States, see Figure 1.5.)

**CONSERVATIVES** According to William Safire’s *New Political Dictionary*, a conservative “is a defender of the status quo who, when change becomes necessary in tested institutions or practices, prefers that it come slowly, and in moderation.”

Conservatives tend to believe that a government is best when it governs least. They want less government, especially in terms of regulation of the economy. Conservatives favor local and state action over federal intervention, and they emphasize fiscal responsibility, most notably in the form of balanced budgets. Conservatives are also likely to believe that domestic problems such as homelessness, poverty, and discrimination are better dealt with by the private sector than by the government.

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

**LIBERALS** A liberal is one who seeks to change the political, economic, and social status quo to foster the development of equality and the well-being of individuals.

The meaning of the word liberal has changed over time, but in the modern United States, liberals generally value equality over other aspects of shared political culture. They are supportive of well-funded government social welfare programs that seek to protect individuals from economic disadvantages or to correct past injustices, and they generally oppose government efforts to regulate private behavior or infringe on civil rights and liberties.

**conservative**

One who believes that a government is best that governs least and that big government should not infringe on individual, personal, and economic rights.

**social conservative**

One who believes that traditional moral teachings should be supported and furthered by the government.

**liberal**

One who favors governmental involvement in the economy and in the provision of social services and who takes an activist role in protecting the rights of women, the elderly, minorities, and the environment.
In general, a **moderate** is one who takes a relatively centrist view on most political issues. Aristotle actually favored moderate politics, believing that domination in the center was better than any extremes, whether dealing with issues of wealth, poverty, or the role of government. Approximately 35 percent of the population today consider themselves political moderates.

**Problems with Ideological Labels**

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

Many also view themselves as **libertarians**. Political scientists generally do not measure for this choice. Libertarians believe in limited government and decry governmental interference with personal liberties. Libertarians were among many of those who protested various government policies in the tea party movement.

**TOWARD REFORM: People and Politics**

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

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

Nevertheless, American political culture continues to bind together citizens. Many Americans also share the common goal of achieving the **American dream**—an American ideal of a happy and successful life, which often includes wealth, a house, a better life for one’s children, and for some, the ability to grow up to be president. A 2009 poll revealed that 44 percent of Americans believe they have achieved the American dream, and another 31 percent expect that they will attain it in their lifetimes.

(To learn more about the American Dream, see Politics Now: What Happens to the American Dream in a Recession?)

**Redefining Our Expectations**

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

As the nation and its economy grew in size and complexity, the federal government took on more responsibilities, such as regulating some businesses, providing...
What Happens to the American Dream in a Recession?

By Katharine Q. Seelye

. . . Although the nation has plunged into its deepest recession since the Great Depression, 72 percent of Americans in this nationwide survey said they believed it is possible to start out poor in the United States, work hard and become rich — a classic definition of the American dream.

And yet only 44 percent said they had actually achieved the American dream, although 31 percent said they expect to attain it within their lifetime. Only 20 percent have given up on ever reaching it. Those 44 percent might not sound like much, but it is an increase over the 32 percent who said they had achieved the American dream four years ago, when the economy was in much better shape.

Compared with four years ago, fewer people now say they are better off than their parents were at their age or that their children will be better off than they are.

So even though their economic outlook is worse, more people are saying they have either achieved the dream or expect to do so.

What gives?

We asked Barry Glassner, who is a professor of sociology at the University of Southern California and studies contemporary culture and beliefs.

“You want to hold on to your dream even more when times are hard,” he said. “And if you want to hold on to it, then you better define it differently.”

In other words, people are shifting their definition of the American dream. And the poll—conducted on April 1 to 5 with 998 adults, with a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points—indicated just that.

The Times and CBS News asked this same open-ended question four years ago and again last month: “What does the phrase ‘The American dream’ mean to you?”

Four years ago, 19 percent of those surveyed supplied answers that related to financial security and a steady job, and 20 percent gave answers that related to freedom and opportunity.

Now, fewer people are pegging their dream to material success and more are pegging it to abstract values. Those citing financial security dropped to 11 percent, and those citing freedom and opportunity expanded to 27 percent. . . .
The current frustration and dissatisfaction with politics and government may be just another phase, as the changing American body politic seeks to redefine its ideas about and expectations of government and how it can be reformed. This process is likely to define politics well into the future, but the individualistic nature of the American system will have long-lasting consequences on how that redefinition can be accomplished. Many Americans say they want less government, but as they get older, they don’t want less Social Security. They want lower taxes and better roads, but they don’t want to pay road tolls. They want better education for their children, but lower expenditures on schools. They want greater security at airports, but low fares and quick boarding. Some clearly want less for others but not themselves, a demand that puts politicians in the position of nearly always disappointing some voters.

In this text, we present you with the tools that you need to understand how our political system has evolved and to prepare you to understand the changes that are yet to come. If you approach the study of American government and politics with an open mind, it should help you become a better citizen. We hope that you learn to ask questions, to understand how various issues have come to be important, and to see why a particular law was enacted, how it was implemented, and if it is in need of reform. We further hope that, with such understanding, you will learn not to accept at face value everything you see on the television news, hear on the radio, or read in the newspaper and on the Internet, especially in the blogosphere. Work to understand your government, and use your vote and other forms of participation to help ensure that your government works for you.
We recognize that the discourse of politics has changed dramatically even in the last few years: it is easier to become informed about the political process and to get involved in campaigns and elections than ever before. We also believe that a thorough understanding of the workings of government will allow you to question and think about the political system—the good parts and the bad—and decide for yourself the advantages and disadvantages of possible changes and reforms. Equipped with such an understanding, you likely will become a better informed and more active participant in the political process.

What Should I Have LEARNED?

Now that you have read this chapter, you should be able to:

1.1 Trace the origins of American government, p. 4.
American government is rooted in the cultures and experiences of early European colonists as well as interactions with the indigenous populations of the New World. The first colonists sought wealth. Later pilgrims came seeking religious freedom. The colonies set up systems of government that differed widely in terms of form, role, and function. As they developed, they sought more independence from the British monarchy.

1.2 Show how European political thought provided the theoretical foundations of American government, p. 7.
The ideas of social contract theorists John Locke, Charles-Louis, the Second Baron of Montesquieu, Thomas Hobbes, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau have had continuing implications for our ideas of the proper role of government in our indirect democracy. They held the belief that people are free and equal by natural right and therefore must give their consent to be governed.

1.3 Describe American political culture, and identify the basic tenets of American democracy, p. 11.
Political culture is a group’s commonly shared attitudes, beliefs, and core values about how government should operate. Key tenets of Americans’ shared political culture are liberty and equality; popular consent, majority rule and popular sovereignty; individualism; and religious freedom.

1.4 Explain the functions of American government, p. 13.
The functions of American government include establishing justice, insuring domestic tranquility, providing for the common defense, promoting the general welfare, and securing the blessings of liberty.

1.5 Analyze the changing characteristics of the American public, p. 15.
Several characteristics of the American electorate can help us understand how the system continues to evolve and change. Among these are changes in size and population, racial and ethnic composition, age, religious beliefs, regional growth and expansion, and family and family size.

1.6 Assess the role of political ideology in shaping American politics, p. 20.
Ideologies, the belief systems that shape the thinking of individuals and how they view the world, affect people’s ideas about government. The major categories of political ideology in America are conservative, liberal, and moderate.

1.7 Characterize changes in Americans’ attitudes toward and expectations of government, p. 22.
Shifts in population have created controversy in the American electorate throughout America’s history. Americans have high and often unrealistic expectations of government, yet often fail to appreciate how much their government actually does for them. Americans’ failing trust in institutions also explains some of the apathy among the American electorate.

Test Yourself: The Political Landscape

1.1 Trace the origins of American government, p. 4.
Which of the following settlements was not founded for religious reasons?
A. Pennsylvania
B. Portsmouth
C. New Amsterdam
D. Massachusetts Bay Colony
E. Boston

1.2 Show how European political thought provided the theoretical foundations of American government, p. 7.
The Declaration of Independence was most directly influenced by the ideas of which political philosopher?
A. John Locke.
B. Thomas Hobbes.
C. Isaac Newton.
D. Puritans.
E. Jean-Jacques Rousseau.
1.3 Describe American political culture, and identify the basic tenets of American democracy, p. 11.

Natural law forms the basis for which of the following principles?
A. Majority rule
B. Political equality
C. Popular sovereignty
D. Indirect democracy
E. Civil law

1.4 Explain the functions of American government, p. 13.

Which of the following is not a function of American government, as outlined in the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution?
A. Providing for the common defense
B. Promoting the general welfare
C. Securing the blessings of privacy
D. Establishing justice
E. Insuring domestic tranquility

1.5 Analyze the changing characteristics of the American public, p. 15.

Which of the following statements best describes recent population trends in the United States?
A. The size of the U.S. population has leveled out in the past twenty years.
B. African Americans have consistently comprised the second largest minority group.
C. Couples favor having more children than in the mid-twentieth century.
D. The average age in the United States has increased in recent years.
E. Nearly 40 percent of American children today live with only one parent.

1.6 Assess the role of political ideology in shaping American politics, p. 20.

Approximately 35 percent of the American population today identifies as
A. conservative.
B. liberal.
C. libertarian.
D. moderate.
E. socialist.

1.7 Characterize changes in Americans’ attitudes toward and expectations of government, p. 22.

The ideal of being able to live a happy and successful life in the United States is often called
A. The American expectation.
B. The American dream.
C. A constitutional right.
D. The American Creed.
E. Impossible to reach.

Essay Questions

1. Describe the differences between the views on human nature of John Locke and Thomas Hobbes.
2. What are the implications of the changing demographics of the U.S. population?
3. Why do Americans hold unrealistically high expectations of government and its ability to institute reform?
Key Terms

American dream, p. 22
conservative, p. 21
democracy, p. 11
direct democracy, p. 10
government, p. 7
indirect democracy, p. 10
liberal, p. 21
libertarian, p. 22
majority rule, p. 12
Mayflower Compact, p. 7
moderate, p. 22
monarchy, p. 10
natural law, p. 12
oligarchy, p. 11
personal liberty, p. 11
political culture, p. 11
political equality, p. 12
political ideology, p. 20
politics, p. 22
popular consent, p. 12
popular sovereignty, p. 12
republic, p. 10
social conservative, p. 21
social contract, p. 7
social contract theory, p. 8
totalitarianism, p. 11

To Learn More on the Political Landscape

In the Library


On the Web

To learn more about your political ideology, go to the Political Compass at www.politicalcompass.org.
To learn about the policy positions and attitudes of American conservatives, go to the American Conservative Union at www.conservative.org.
To learn more about the policy positions and attitudes of American liberals, go to the Liberal Oasis at www.liberaloasis.com.
To learn more about shifts in the American population, go to the U.S. Census Bureau at www.census.gov.