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1 POWER AND CITIZENSHIP IN AMERICAN POLITICS

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IN YOUR OWN WORDS

After you've read this chapter, you will be able to

1.1 Explain the importance of the democratic process, and identify the challenges to our democracy today.

1.2 Describe the role that politics plays in determining how power and resources, including control of information, are distributed in a society.

1.3 Compare how power is distributed between citizens and government in different economic and political systems.

1.4 Describe the enduring tension in the United States between self-interested human nature and public-spirited government and the way that has been shaped in a mediated world.

1.5 Analyze the role of immigration and the meaning of citizenship in American politics.

1.6 Describe values that most Americans share, and the political debates that drive partisan divisions in American politics.

1.7 Discuss the essential reasons for approaching politics from a perspective of critical thinking, analysis, and evaluation.

NOT YOUR USUAL TEXTBOOK INTRODUCTION

This textbook won't begin like any you have read, or any we have written, for that matter.

Why? Because on January 6, 2021, a mob of people, citizens of the world's longest-lived democracy, stormed the U.S. Capitol. In a frenzy of fury and disbelief over the results of the 2020 presidential election, they tried to subvert the U.S. Constitution by derailing the certification of a lawful and fair election. In the months since, millions of election-deniers have refused to accept the fact that Joe Biden won the U.S. presidency, his predecessor has been under multiple state and federal investigations for, among other things, trying to stage a coup that would keep him in power, and the country has seen multiple participants in the January 6th riots tried and sentenced. In the 2022 midterm elections, although history and political science told us that Democrats would lose many seats in the House of Representatives and even in the Senate, the results turned out to be a wash, as election deniers running for top posts in key states were defeated. For the moment, democracy seems to be winning, but there is a long struggle ahead.

How did this happen??? When we published the first edition of this textbook over twenty years ago—we chose the title *Keeping the Republic* to drive home a frequently forgotten point—that democracies need a lot of tending to stay vibrant and functional. And even though, in the year 2000, we could begin to see the erosion of democratic norms at the highest level of American politics, we never actually believed that a determined group of Americans, urged on

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by a disappointed office seeker who didn't like to lose, would be so . . . so what? So delusional? So confused? So enchanted by one candidate and so overwhelmed with disinformation—that they would risk throwing away our democracy?

And yet, here we are. Since that sixth of January, and all the ensuing events, we have begun our classroom teaching much as we are beginning this book—with a call to awareness that the foundations of our democracy are rocky, that the American commitment to the principles that underlay the Constitution—principles best described as a set of ideas called classical liberalism (and no, that has nothing, or very little, to do with the way the term *liberalism* is used in contemporary partisan politics) are fast being abandoned by some Americans with predictable and dire consequences. Our warnings that the democratic sky is falling have been met mostly with a mix of indifference and alarm on the part of our students.

Finally, one of our students said, with an air of weary tolerance for an older person who just didn't get it, "Professor, you keep talking about the threats to our great democracy but what you don't get is that for most of us, it's not all that great to begin with."

Aha! Lightbulb moment. Another reminder that the teachable moments in the classroom are not always for the student.

What we realized is that our experiences as Baby Boomers (we know, we know—cue the Boomer jokes) had led us to see American democracy as essentially a hopeful story of progress, the tale of the moral arc of the universe that truly does bend, slowly, toward justice. That same optimism that made us believe in the possibilities of American democracy contributed to our anguish on January 6.

For those of our students who have on some level lost their faith in the possibilities of that democracy, January 6 wasn't that much of a surprise, and not that much of a loss.

Don't get us wrong. Plenty of you think like we do. But for a significant number of younger Americans, American democracy, and the older generations who sing its praises, have let them down. Badly.

About that time, some polls came out that confirmed what our students had tried to tell us. Many young people, way more of you than of older generations, *are not optimistic about democracy*, not very, anyway. The Harvard Youth Poll of 18- to 29-year-old Americans—conducted in both English and Spanish—found, in the fall of 2021, that 52 percent of young people believe that democracy is in trouble or has failed. A scant 7 percent believe it is healthy. The partisan breakdown was especially interesting: while those identifying as Democrats were split roughly in half on the health of democracy, 70 percent of young Republicans reported that democracy had failed or was in trouble. In fact, half of the young Republicans, compared to less than a third of Democrats and just over a third of the unaffiliated, believed that they might see a second American civil war in their lifetimes.[1]

Interestingly, those numbers did not signal a collapse of the youth vote in 2022. While it wasn't as high as it had been in 2018—which set a record for midterm election turnout for all age groups—it was a very strong turnout in some areas—up to 31 percent in some battlegrounds. Yes, this is still low in an election where the overall turnout was 47 percent but, to be fair, in many places the laws intentionally make it harder for younger voters to get to the polls.

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Some of the reasons why 18- to 29-year-olds are indifferent to the events of January 6, and to politics in general, make a lot of sense to us. Some make less sense. Here are the top three:

- American democracy is run mostly by old people who don't care about the younger generation and have bled the country and the planet dry of valuable resources to supply their comfort, leaving younger people, loaded with debt, to clean up the mess. American democracy just reinforces a power structure that fails marginalized communities and perpetuates economic and power inequities.
- Democracy is not such a great way to make decisions if it resists the big structural change that is necessary to establish a decent way of life for all Americans.
- And even this: American democracy was once great but it is now suffering from an influx of immigrants who bring crime and drugs into the country. The "deep state" bureaucracy who really runs things needs to be purged of its pernicious influence before the country can return to its former glory. And if democracy can't do the job, it should be done by whatever means can get it done.

Both the "America was never great but maybe could be someday—with a lot of change" and the "America was once great but can't be great again without a lot of change" schools of thought have in common that they blame someone for why things aren't great and mostly want to get the offenders out of the way so that things can be improved. And since the democratic politics of the day just seems to perpetuate the problems that all sides see, no side is particularly wedded to democratic decision making as a way to restore the country to its former state of health.

How the Politics of the Past Impacts Your Future

If you are reading this book, you are a college student or, at least, college bound, perhaps, a person making plans for your life. Those plans might be aspirational for humanity: to explore the world, see what it has to offer, change it, maybe even save it. Your plans might be ambitious for yourself and your family: to get a job, build a business, raise some kids, get rich, and if it all pays off, leave a legacy behind for the next generations. Maybe you have less acquisitive intentions. Maybe you want to get a job and pay your bills and enjoy yourself and your friends as much as possible in the times outside your nine-to-five job.

There are as many ways to design the future as there are people to live it. But whichever way you plan to go, you will need to conjure up a few things that the generations before you took for granted, a luxury that will, for the most part, be denied to you.

You will need a way to guarantee the stability of the political system, to maintain the conditions for economic prosperity, to defend America from threats around the world. And, oh yeah, you'll have to preserve the health and survival of the planet as well. Americans in the past century and a half have typically felt confident looking to government to provide those things, although they have argued vigorously about just how much or what kinds of those things they need.

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Your parents' generation, even your grandparents' generation, didn't worry too much about those fundamentals. If there was one issue a majority of Americans felt confident about in the 1900s, and even in the opening years of the 2000s, it was the strength of their democracy and the power of the American ideal around the world to help keep other countries from flexing their muscles at our expense. Sure, the economy had growth spurts and slowdowns, but the experience of the New Deal gave Americans the reassuring illusion that while the government could not control economic cycles, it could lessen the drama of the ups and downs and buffer their impact.

That doesn't mean that earlier generations didn't have worries, even big, huge, terrifying worries over the fighting of world wars, the Great Depression, the war in Vietnam, and the attack on the World Trade Center. But underneath, for the most part, was faith in American democracy, both in the value of it—that it was a good thing—and in the survival of it—that it would endure, regardless of what history threw at it.

And history threw a great deal. Catch some black-and-white reruns of television in mid-twentieth century America and you might get the impression that Americans had figured out the good life. But that sit-com Happy Land was not everyone's experience of American life, nor was it an experience to which everyone aspired. The people who thought that the TV life shown on *Leave It to Beaver*, *Father Knows Best*, and *Make Room for Daddy* (yes, those were real, popular shows; check them out!) was a good thing were content with a world that was largely white, in which dads went off to work in the morning and moms stayed home with the kids, where dads had the financial power and called the shots, and people of color, if they appeared in a white world, were usually there as servants. African Americans were not equal citizens with whites; they didn't effectively get their right to vote protected and enforced until *1965*. And while women got the vote in 1920, they were not independent financial beings; women were not even guaranteed the right to obtain a credit card in their own name in the United States until *1974*.

Behind the happy façade of mid-century life, forces were brewing that would turn the country upside down over the next seventy-five years. People of color would demand and receive their constitutional rights to attend nonsegregated schools, to vote, and to live, work, and travel where they wanted without interference. Women got their credit cards, the right to keep their jobs if they got pregnant, control of their reproductive and family planning decisions, and the right to divorce their husbands and to retain custody of their kids. LGBTQ+ people won the right to marry, to adopt children, to live their authentic lives without legally sanctioned restraint.

All sounds good, right? Not so fast. You may have heard of Newton's third law, that for every action in nature there is an equal and opposite reaction. The laws of physics don't apply to social culture and political power, but sometimes they describe it pretty well.

The changes in American life between 1950 and 2010 freed many people from a life of powerlessness and second-class citizenship and welcomed them into the world they had seen on TV screens. But power is zero sum—if some people gain it, others lose. If nothing else, they lose the power to control the ones who have newly gained it. The liberation experienced in the latter part of the twentieth century by women and people of color and LGBTQ+ people and people with disabilities—and all the other groups who had been marginalized through much of American history—was not seen as a step forward by everyone. It was not "progress" at all for

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a large group of people—largely middle- to working-class white people, living in rural areas and/or the South who were unlikely to be college educated, who lived according to the rules they had been brought up with and who had fought world wars to preserve those rules, and who enjoyed the privileges those rules conferred on them.

Understood through the lens that defined their world, the new century felt like a step back. The screen of the TV set no longer implied that their lives constituted the be-all-end-all desirable lifestyle for all Americans but instead laughed at them while it celebrated the lives of working moms, unmarried women, and Black families living the American dream. TV shows began to depict the exploits of families with single moms and families of color as they had once portrayed white nuclear families.

From the perspective of many white, Christian, southern, rural, working-class Americans, those who would dethrone them or at least require that they share their thrones, seemed to be telling them that they had been demoted, that *they* were now the marginalized ones because they weren't any longer the ones who defined what it means to be "American." Many of them, especially those who didn't have any power elsewhere in their lives, felt this change in their guts as the deepest of injustices. And they saw the agents of change—feminists, Black activists, "liberals," the government—especially a bureaucracy that seemed too secretive and, even more especially, the courts that seemed too activist—as enemies of their way of life, a way of life that they felt had been guaranteed to them by the U.S. Constitution and was now under existential threat.

You can see how that restructuring of power among groups in the population that became enforced by law in the second half of the twentieth century set up tensions that still frame the battles in American politics. For some Americans, life in the mid-twentieth century was good in ways that mattered to them. And when they think about their goal for the United States, it is to go back there, to make America great *again*. Clearly, for those who were disenfranchised and unable to even keep their own wages, control their bodies, or get a credit card and the independent life that comes with those things, that time was not great, and their political goal is to never return to that state of powerlessness.

So that's one truth about the political world in which you are coming of age. It is fraught with stress and animosity between people who feel that they are losing power when others are gaining it and who do not want to cede any of it. And the power they are fighting over is not just the power to vote or to charge their college tuition on a credit card. It's the power to define what it means to be American: on the one side, the vision is largely white, Christian, older, patriarchal, rural, and working class; and on the other, it is racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse, younger, urban, college educated, and professional.

Among other things, that tension has rendered the federal government unable to solve problems. Because Republicans (representing the white, rural, Christian constituency) and Democrats (representing diverse, urban, non-religious people) are carrying their fight about who we are into the halls of Congress, a victory for one side is seen as a loss for the other and, possibly, something that might enhance the winner's chance to appeal to more voters. So Congress has a hard time acting—both sides want to win, a compromise position often doesn't exist, and, anyway, a compromise that lets both sides claim victory might still feel like a loss to the side that feels itself to be in existential danger.

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And this is where your generation comes in. Many of the things that young people look to government to provide in order to make their own lives more livable—cheaper college, forgiven student loans, guaranteed health care, affordable housing, legalized weed, and safe communities—can't be addressed because Congress is deadlocked in struggles about who the "real" Americans are. The things that worry young voters—a planet whose melting poles, rising seas, and parched deserts constitute a literal existential threat to global food supplies, housing, and disease-free lives; and runaway national debt that consumes our tax revenue and prevents spending on new priorities—cannot be addressed by a Congress whose members have a death grip on power and see their own survival as imperative. Young voters don't give a fig about the political survival of leaders of political parties that they see as irrelevant to their lives.

No wonder, if you are mad and beyond skeptical that the government will ever do your bidding. No wonder if you are uninterested and uninformed about what is happening in Washington or even in your state capital. No wonder if you look at the names on the ballot and see no one you want to vote for. No wonder if you look askance at your political science professor who tries to interest you in the political process. Your alienation makes perfect sense, except for one thing: in a democratic polity (which we still are, at the moment), your disengagement guarantees that the government will *never* reflect your wishes. Our students, hearing in our voices enthusiasm and respect for the constitutional order, tend to miss that what gets us excited about American politics is not what is, right this second. It's not what was in 1950 or in 1865 or in 1776. It's not what it has ever been in any one moment in time. It's the promise that circumstances can get better without inevitable bloodshed. It's the promise that, when politics is executed properly, we can have freedoms that people in most of the world cannot dream of and that we can work to expand those freedoms to more and more people. It's the promise that if we do get involved and pay attention and stay focused, we can create a country one day that *will* be good in a particular moment of time. What makes us optimistic is the promise of American politics.

But that promise is not a guarantee. It's a commitment that good things are possible, not that they will come. The world today is remembering more vividly than it has since the end of World War II that dictatorship and repression, not democracy and freedom are not the default setting for human society. We see the deep attraction held by dictators who foster grievances and fear among their followers and who promise revenge on the enemies they amplify and dwell on. And in response, those followers turn a blind eye to the grift and corruption of their leaders that bankrupts a nation for the benefit of a few. We see it in Turkey, in Hungary, in Venezuela, and, until just recently, in Brazil. We see it, grimly, in Russia, which, as we are writing this, has decided to gobble up its democratic neighbor Ukraine. But so thoroughly have Vladimir Putin and his oligarch cronies stolen everything of value from the Russians that even their army is underfunded and ill-equipped.

That is the alternative to democracy. Not a government where you get things your way, done efficiently because you have legitimately seized the reins of power, not a country where good values prevail because you are a good person and you impose good values. The alternative to democracy, as we will see more than once in this book, is, sooner or later, autocracy and the death of any freedom worth having. In Russia, journalists are poisoned or shot, protesters are jailed, and people stand in grocery lines to buy whatever foodstuffs they can get their hands on. Other

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countries where the people turn control over to leaders who do not value democracy, who don't honor its norms, and who mock its freedoms become Russia in their turn. That is the alternative to democracy. And as soon as you stop saving democracy, you begin the march to autocracy.

A Question of Bias

So we have never actually said this in a textbook before. We didn't think we had to. But this textbook has a bias. That shouldn't surprise you after everything we have just said, but it is worth being transparent about it in this political climate.

Our bias is pro-democracy, and pro all the classical liberal ideas that go along with democracy, about which you will learn shortly. They include being pro-science, pro–empirical testing of the truth, pro–critical thinking, pro–limited government, pro–individual freedom, pro–rule of law and process (as opposed to adhering to the ideas and preferences of one person), pro-elections, and pro-markets. We will go to the mat on this one. Democracy is not something on which we can agree to be neutral.

Neutrality is where we often get hung up in political discourse—whether it takes place in academia, in journalism, or in education. We expect political parties to be partisan, to take sides, but we want all the sources we depend on for information to be fair, and being fair means not putting your thumb on the scale for one side, not privately betting on one team while pretending to be an objective referee.

In most cases, we agree with that 100 percent. We have always told our students that our job is not to teach them *what* to think; it is to teach them *how* to think. Be a strong critical thinker, master the tools of analysis, and focus those skills on any argument that attracts you. If the argument survives the scrutiny, then adopt it, advocate for it, vote for it, or support it in any way you want. We don't take sides. In teaching, that is how it generally works.

When you see this emphasis on neutrality or objectivity in the mainstream media, it often takes the form of something its critics call "both-sidesism," or false equivalency. In an effort not to appear biased, journalists often insist on countering an example of a fault on one side with an example of a fault on another. Most commonly we see this in reporting on political parties. If a reporter notes an instance of corruption in one party, she will immediately reach for an example in the other party to maintain "balance," so that no one will think she is picking on one side or favoring the other.

This practice is fine and even admirable as long as both sides are equally guilty. It is *not* fine if only one side has committed a crime, or made a mistake, or exercised an error in judgment. In fact, in those cases, both-sidesism has the effect of watering down the charge, of trivializing it, of creating a narrative of cynicism, an attitude that says "everyone does it." And it's often not accurate. It just fulfills an ingrained sense that fairness demands being critical of everyone.

But the fact is, in teaching and in journalism—in all instances of education and informing people about the real world, including the political world—there are not always two equal sides. If one of us looks out the window and says, "It's raining," and the other of us, looking out the same window, says, "No, it isn't," then reporting on both of those findings isn't balanced. It's confusing, because one of us is *wrong*. The teacher or the journalist needs to explain that.

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A rainy day may be trivial, but consider if one side says, "Science finds that vaccines prevent severe cases of COVID-19," and that statement is countered with, "although some people don't believe those findings." If journalists treat the two sides as though both are worth a hearing, that just confuses the issue and leads people to think that the scientific finding is one of two competing beliefs rather than an empirical discipline that is true or false. Those are the only two sides that empirical findings have.

But because, by its nature, science depends on open inquiry, freedom to dispute and replicate findings, and correction of earlier errors to advance our understanding, it leaves itself open to the charge that it is wrong or that it doesn't know what it is talking about. *In fact, science is the best method we have of understanding how the world works, but it achieves that understanding by leaving itself vulnerable to the claim that it isn't.* And those who seek to profit by claiming that science is a scam exploit that vulnerability.

Journalists and educators can't afford to both-sides science and the scientific method that produces it because their very jobs depend on the idea that there is truth and there is falsity. That's behind the entire enterprise of disseminating information. When the distinction is lost, disinformation travels as freely as the real thing.

The same imperative that obtains for holding information accountable to the standard of truth applies to classical liberalism as well. Classical liberalism is a political philosophy that holds that freedom is best preserved when government is limited, liberties are protected, discourse is open, differences of opinion are tolerated, and laws are made democratically, by polling all people who will be held accountable under those laws.

Classical liberalism, which underpins both modern liberalism and modern conservative thought, owes its existence to the free exchange of ideas and, like science, carries within itself, by definition, the obligation to entertain threats to its own existence. Put simply, the openness and transparency of classical liberalism renders it peculiarly fragile to threats from without. When one side is open, tolerant of dissent, and encouraging of scrutiny, it invites in and welcomes the airing of the precise views that would do it in. The only way it can survive being drowned in the bathtub of its own tolerance and openness is for its defenders to stand up for it and to say, no.

Which brings us to our bias. We are pro-truth, pro-science, pro–classical liberalism, and pro-democracy. Those are the values that make possible the world of education. Academic freedom, freedom in the classroom, and the accrual of knowledge demand that we defend the things that make it possible, and that we not both-sides them.

Some journalists, usually the first group to jump on the both-sides train, are coming to similar conclusions, in the current, dangerous climate defined by our partisan tensions and the seething aftermath of the 2020 presidential election. Andrew Donohue has predicted the rise of a new perspective for reporters that will center less on the machinations of parties and politics, and more on democracy, a so-called democracy beat. According to Donohue, the democracy beat is distinct from the typical political or government assignment, with reporters using the lens of honesty, fairness, and transparency to "focus exclusively on the modern threats to our democracy. . . . These reporters will cover something that is, at its heart, a local story. It will unfold far from the spotlights of Washington. And it will do the most basic and vital things that journalism is supposed to do: Safeguard democracy. Tell the truth."[2]

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Our bias means that we, too, will stand up and say no to people who want to spread disinformation and call it truth, to people who want to control what schools teach according to their personal values and not the dictates of advancing science, to march on the Capitol and subvert U.S. elections, and to replace the Constitution with a regime that decides what is true and what is false instead of relying on science and empirical testing to do that.

Broken Glass

A member of a pro-Trump mob shatters a window with his fist from inside the Capitol Building after breaking into it on January 6, 2021, in Washington, D.C.

Jon Cherry/Getty Images

IN YOUR OWN WORDS

Explain the importance of the democratic process, and identify the challenges to our democracy today.

WHAT IS POLITICS?

A peaceful means to determine who gets power and influence in society

And now, back to our regularly scheduled textbook. Over two thousand years ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle said that we are political animals, and political animals we seem destined to remain. The truth is that politics is a fundamental and complex human activity. In some ways it is our capacity to be political—to cooperate, bargain, and compromise—that helps distinguish us from all the other animals out there. While it certainly has its baser moments

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(impeachments, indictments, and intelligence abuses come to mind), politics also allows us to reach more exalted heights than we could ever achieve alone—from dedicating a new public library or building a national highway system, to stabilizing a crashing economy, to curing deadly diseases or exploring the stars.

To explore politics—in all its glory as well as its degradation—we need to begin with a clear understanding of the word. One of the most famous definitions, put forth by the late, well-known political scientist Harold Lasswell, is still one of the best, and we use it to frame our discussion throughout this book. Lasswell defined **politics** as "who gets what, when, and how."[3] Politics is a way of determining, without recourse to violence, who gets the power and resources in society, and how they get them. **Power** is the ability to get other people to do what you want them to do. The resources in question here might be government jobs, tax revenues, laws that help you get your way, or public policies that work to your advantage.

A major political resource that helps people to gain and maintain power is the ability to control the **media**, not just the press and television but the multiple channels created by companies like Google, Meta, and Apple, through which people get information about politics. These days we live in a world of so many complex information networks that sorting out and keeping track of what is happening around us is a task in itself. Anyone who can influence the stories that are told has a big advantage.

Politics provides a process through which we try to arrange our collective lives in some kind of **social order** so that we can live without crashing into each other at every turn, provide ourselves with goods and services we could not obtain alone, and maximize the values and behaviors we think are important. But politics is also about getting our own way. The way we choose may be a noble goal for society or it may be pure self-interest, but the struggle we engage in is a political struggle. Because politics is about power and other scarce resources, there will always be winners and losers. If we could always get our own way, politics would disappear. It is because we cannot always get what we want that politics exists.

Our capacity to be political gives us tools with which to settle disputes about the social order and to allocate scarce resources. The tools of politics are compromise and cooperation; discussion and debate; deal making, bargaining, storytelling, even, sometimes, bribery and deceit. We use those tools to agree on the principles that should guide our handling of power and other scarce resources and to live our collective lives according to those principles. Because there are many competing narratives about how to manage power—who should have it, how it should be used, how it should be transferred—agreement on those principles can break down. The tools of politics do not include violence. When people shoot up a church, a synagogue, or a supermarket, or when they blow themselves up, fly airplanes into buildings, or storm a legislature to halt the political process, they have tried to impose their ideas about the social order through nonpolitical means. That may be because the channels of politics have failed, because they cannot agree on basic principles, because they don't share a common understanding of and trust over what counts as negotiation and so cannot craft compromises, because they are unwilling to compromise, or because they don't really care about deal making at all—they just want to impose their will or make a point. The threat of violence may be a political tool used as leverage to get a deal, but when violence is employed, politics has broken down. Indeed, the human history of warfare attests to the fragility of political life.

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It is easy to imagine what a world without politics would be like. There would be no resolution or compromise between conflicting interests, because those are political activities. There would be no agreements struck, bargains made, or alliances formed. Unless there were enough of every valued resource to go around, or unless the world were big enough that we could live our lives without coming into contact with other human beings, life would be constant conflict—what the philosopher Thomas Hobbes called in the seventeenth century a "war of all against all." Individuals, unable to cooperate with one another (because cooperation is essentially political), would have no option but to resort to brute force to settle disputes and allocate resources. Politics is essential to our living a civilized life.

Politics and Government

Although the words *politics* and *government* are sometimes used interchangeably, they really refer to different things. Politics is a process or an activity through which power and resources are gained and lost. **Government**, by contrast, is a system or organization for exercising authority over a body of people.

American *politics* is what happens in the halls of Congress, on the campaign trail, at Washington cocktail parties, and in neighborhood association and school board meetings. It is the making of promises, deals, and laws. American *government* is the Constitution and the institutions set up by the Constitution for the exercise of authority by the American people, over the American people.

Authority is power that citizens view as **legitimate**, or "right"—power to which we have implicitly consented. Think of it this way: as children, we probably did as our parents told us or submitted to their punishment if we didn't, because we recognized their authority over us. As we became adults, we started to claim that our parents had less authority over us, that we could do what we wanted. We no longer saw their power as wholly legitimate or appropriate. Governments exercise authority because people recognize them as legitimate, even if they often do not like doing what they are told (paying taxes, for instance). When governments cease to be regarded as legitimate, the result may be revolution or civil war, unless the state is powerful enough to suppress all opposition. When angry citizens marched on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, they were declaring that the actions the government was about to take were illegitimate in their eyes. It is easy to see that that fury could be harnessed by those fomenting civil war if a political solution cannot be found.

Rules and Institutions

Government is shaped by the process of politics, but it in turn provides the rules and institutions that shape the way politics continues to operate. The rules and institutions of government have a profound effect on how power is distributed and who wins and who loses in the political arena. Life is different in other countries not only because people speak different languages and eat different foods but also because their governments establish rules that cause life to be lived in different ways.

Rules can be thought of as the *how* in the definition "who gets what, . . . and how." They are directives that determine how resources are allocated and how collective action takes

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place—that is, they determine how we try to get the things we want. We can do it violently, or we can do it politically, according to the rules. Those rules can provide for a single dictator, for a king, for rule by God's representative on Earth or by the rich, for rule by a majority of the people, or for any other arrangement. The point of rules is to provide us with a framework for solving—without violence—the problems generated by our collective lives.

Because the rules we choose can influence which people will get what they want most often, understanding the rules is crucial to understanding politics. Consider for a moment the impact a change of rules would have on the outcome of the sport of basketball, for instance. What if the average height of the players could be no more than 5'10"? What if the baskets were lowered? What if foul shots counted for two points rather than one? Basketball would be a very different game, and the teams recruited would look quite unlike the teams for which we now cheer. So it is with governments and politics: change the people who are allowed to vote or the length of time a person can serve in office, and the political process and the potential winners and losers change drastically.

Rules can be official—laws that are passed, signed, and entered into the books; amendments that are ratified; decisions made by bureaucrats; or judgments handed down by the courts. Less visible but no less important are **norms**, the tacitly understood rules about acceptable political behavior, ways of doing things, boundaries between the branches, and traditional practices that grease the wheels of politics and keep them running smoothly. Because norms are understood but not explicitly written down, we often don't even recognize them until they are broken.

Let's take a silly example close to home. Say it's Thanksgiving dinner time and your brother decides he wants the mashed potatoes on the other side of the table. Imagine that, instead of asking to have them passed, he climbs up on the table and walks across the top of it with his big, dirty feet, retrieves the potatoes, clomps back across the table, jumps down, takes his seat, and serves himself some potatoes. Everyone is aghast, right? What he has just done just isn't done. But when you challenge him, he says, "What, there's a rule against doing that? I got what I wanted, didn't I?" And you have to admit there isn't and he did. But the reason there is no broken rule is because nobody ever thought one would be necessary. You never imagined that someone would walk across the table because everyone knows there is a norm against doing that, and until your brother broke that norm, no one ever bothered to articulate it. And "getting what you want" is not generally held to be an adequate justification for bad behavior.

Just because norms are not written down doesn't mean they are not essential for the survival of a government or the process of politics. In some cases they are far more essential than written laws. A family of people who routinely stomp across the table to get the food they want would not long want to share meals; eating alone would be far more comfortable.

We can think of **institutions** as the *where* of the political struggle, though Lasswell didn't include a "where" component in his definition. They are the organizations where government power is exercised. In the United States, our rules provide for the institutions of a representative democracy—that is, rule by the elected representatives of the people, and for a federal political system. Our Constitution lays the foundation for the institutions of Congress, the presidency, the courts, and the bureaucracy as a stage on which the drama of politics plays itself out. Other systems might call for different institutions, perhaps an all-powerful parliament, or a monarch, or even a committee of rulers.

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These complicated systems of rules and institutions do not appear out of thin air. They are carefully designed by the founders of different systems to create the kinds of society they think will be stable and prosperous, but also where people like themselves are likely to be winners. Remember that not only the rules but also the institutions we choose influence which people most easily and most often get their own way.

Power, Narratives, and Media

From the start of human existence, an essential function of communication has been recording events; giving meaning to them; and creating a story, or narrative, about how they fit into the past and stretch into the future. It is human nature to tell stories, to capture our experiential knowledge and beliefs and weave them together in ways that give larger meaning to our lives. Native peoples of many lands do it with their legends; the Greeks and Romans did it with their myths; Jews, Christians, Muslims, and other major religious groups do it with their holy texts; enslaved Americans did it with their folktales; and the Brothers Grimm did it with their fairy-tales. Human beings tell stories. It's what we do, and it gives us our history and a way of passing that history down to new generations.

A major part of politics is about competing to have your narrative accepted as the authoritative account. Control of political information has always been a crucial resource when it comes to making and upholding a claim that one should be able to tell other people how to live

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their lives, but it used to be a power reserved for a few. Creation and dissemination of **political narratives**—the stories that people believe about who has power, who wants power, who deserves power, and what someone has done to get and maintain power—were the prerogative of authoritative sources like priests, kings, and their agents.

Through much of our common history, the storytellers of those narratives were given special status. They were wise men or women, shamans, prophets, oracles, priests, and rabbis. And they were frequently in the service of chiefs, kings, emperors, and other people of enormous power. It's no accident that the storytellers frequently told narratives that bolstered the status quo and kept the power structure in place. The storytellers and the power holders had a monopoly on control for so much of human history because books were in scarce supply and few people could read, in any case, or had the leisure to amass facts to challenge the prevailing narratives. The **gatekeepers** of information—those who determined what news got reported and how—were very few.

Before the seventeenth-century era known as the Enlightenment, there may have been competing narratives about who had claims to power, but they were not that hard to figure out. People's allegiance to power was based on tribal loyalties, religious faith, or conquest. Governments were legitimate through the authority of God or the sword, and that was that. Because most people then were illiterate, that narrative was *mediated*, that is, passed to people through channels that could shape and influence it. Information flowed mostly through medieval clergy and monarchs, *the very people who had a vested interest in getting people to believe it.*

Even when those theories of legitimacy changed, information was still easily controlled because literacy rates were low and horses and wind determined the speed of communication until the advent of steam engines and radios. Early newspapers were read aloud, shared, and reshared, and a good deal of the news of the day was delivered from the pulpit. As we will see when we discuss the American founding, there were lively debates about whether independence was a good idea and what kind of political system should replace the colonial power structure, but by the time information reached citizens, it had been largely processed and filtered by those higher up the power ladder. Even the American rebels were elite and powerful men who could control their own narratives. Remember the importance of this when you read the story behind the Declaration of Independence in Chapter 2.

These days, we take for granted the ease with which we can communicate ideas to others all over the globe. Just a hundred years ago, radio was state of the art and television had yet to be invented. Today many of us carry access to a world of information and instant communication in our pockets.

When we talk about the channels through which information flows, and the ways that the channel itself might alter or control the narrative, we are referring to media. Just like a medium is a person through whom some people try to communicate with those who have died, media (the plural of *medium*) are channels of communication, as mentioned earlier. The integrity of the medium is critical. A scam artist might make money off the desire of grieving people to contact a lost loved one by making up the information they pass on. The monarch and clergy who channeled the narrative of the Holy Roman Empire were motivated by their wish to hold

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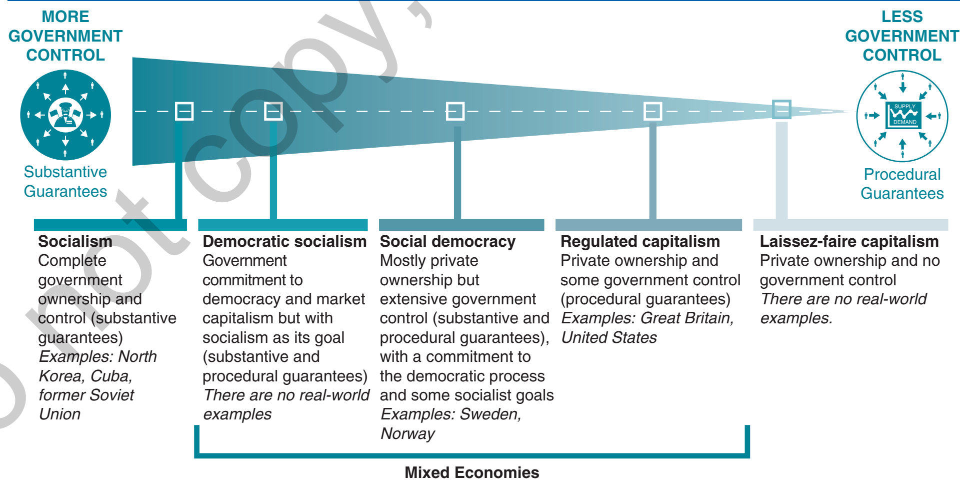
on to power. Think about water running through a pipe. Maybe the pipe is made of lead, or is rusty, or has leaks. Depending on the integrity of the pipe, the water we get will be toxic or rust-colored or limited. *In the same way, the narratives and information we get can be altered by the way they are mediated—that is, by the channels, or the media, through which we receive them.* And if the medium is truly corrupted, the information that we get won't be information at all but **disinformation**—false information deliberately disseminated to deceive people.

Politics and Economics

Whereas politics is concerned with the distribution of power and resources and the control of information in society, **economics** is concerned specifically with the production and distribution of society's wealth—material goods like bread, toothpaste, and housing, and services like medical care, education, and entertainment. Because both politics and economics focus on the distribution of society's resources, political and economic questions often get confused in contemporary life. Questions about how to pay for government, about government's role in the economy, and about whether government or the private sector should provide certain services have political and economic dimensions. Because there are no clear-cut distinctions here, it can be difficult to keep these terms straight. We can begin by examining different economic systems, shown in Figure 1.1.

The processes of politics and economics can be engaged in procedurally or substantively. In procedural political and economic systems, the legitimacy of the outcome is based on the legitimacy of the process that produced it. In substantive political and economic systems, the legitimacy of the outcome depends on how widely accepted is the narrative the government

FIGURE 1.1 ■ A Comparison of Economic Systems



Economic systems are defined largely by the degree to which government owns the means by which material resources are produced (for example, factories and industry) and controls economic decision making. On a scale ranging from socialism—complete government ownership and control of the economy (on the left)—to laissez-faire capitalism—complete individual ownership and control of the economy (on the right)—social democracies would be located in the center. These hybrid systems are characterized by mostly private ownership of the means of production but considerable government control over economic decisions.

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tells about who should have what. The outcome is based on the decision of a powerful person or people, not a process that people believe is impartial. In procedural systems, the means (process) justify the ends; in substantive systems, the ends justify the means.

Socialism. In a **socialist economy** like that of the former Soviet Union, economic decisions are made not by individuals through the market but rather by politicians, based on their judgment of what society needs. In these systems the state often owns the factories, land, and other resources necessary to produce wealth. Rather than trusting the market process to determine the proper distribution of material resources among individuals, politicians decide what the distribution ought to be—according to some principle like equality, need, or political reward—and then create economic policy to bring about that outcome. In other words, they emphasize **substantive guarantees** of what they believe to be fair outcomes, rather than **procedural guarantees** of fair rules and process.

The societies that have tried to put these theories into practice have ended up with very repressive political systems, even though Karl Marx, the most famous of the theorists associated with socialism, hoped that eventually humankind would evolve to a point where each individual had control over their own life—a radical form of democracy. Since the socialist economies of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have fallen apart, socialism has been left with few supporters, although some nations, such as China, North Korea, and Cuba, still claim allegiance to it. Even China, however, introduced market-based reforms in the 1970s and by 2010 ranked as the world's second largest economy, after the United States.

Capitalism. Capitalism is a procedural economic system based on the working of the *market*—the process of supply and demand. In a pure **capitalist economy**, all the means used to produce material resources (industry, business, and land, for instance) are owned privately, and decisions about production and distribution are left to individuals operating through the free-market process. Capitalist economies rely on the market to decide how much of a given item to produce or how much to charge for it. In capitalist countries, people do not believe that the government is capable of making such judgments (like how much toothpaste to produce), so they want to keep such decisions out of the hands of government and in the hands of individuals who they believe know best what they want. The most extreme philosophy that corresponds with this belief is called **laissez-faire capitalism**, from a French term that, loosely translated, means "let people do as they wish." The government has no economic role at all in such a system, except perhaps to provide the national security in which the market forces can play out.

Mixed Economies. Most real-world economies fall somewhere in between the idealized points of socialism and laissez-faire capitalism, because most real-world countries have some substantive political goals that they want their economies to serve. The economies that fall in between the extremes are called mixed economies. **Mixed economies** are based on modified forms of capitalism, tempered by substantive values about how the market should work. In mixed economies, the fundamental economic decision makers are individuals rather than the government. In addition, individuals may decide they want the government to step in and regulate behaviors that

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they think are not in the public interest. It is the type and degree of regulation that determines what kind of mixed economy it is.

- **Democratic socialism** and **social democracy** are, as their names suggest, mixed economies that fall to the right of socialism in Figure 1.1. They are different from the pure socialist economy we discussed because they combine socialist ideals that empower government with a commitment to the *political* democratic principle of popular sovereignty and the *economic* principle of market capitalism that empowers individuals. The difference between them is that democratic socialists keep socialism as their end goal and social democrats are happy to keep the capitalist economy as long as they use the democratic process to attain some of the goals a socialist economy is supposed to produce (like more equality). However, they are both considered hybrids of democracy and socialism.
    - Socialism hybrids in theory, and often in practice, try to keep checks on government power to avoid the descent into authoritarianism that plagues most socialist experiments. They generally hold that there is a preferred distribution of stuff that requires prioritizing political goals over the market but that democracy is worth preserving as well.
    - When people claim to endorse a hybrid of democracy and socialism, note which word is the noun and which is the modifier. The noun will tell you where the true commitment lies. Democratic socialists (that is, "socialists") prioritize the results of a socialist economy; social democrats (that is, "democrats") prioritize the democratic process over economic outcomes.
    - Since World War II, the citizens of many Western European nations have elected social democrats to office, where they have enacted policies to bring about more equality—for instance, better housing, adequate health care for all, and the elimination of poverty and unemployment. Even where social democratic governments are voted out of office, such programs have proved so popular that it is often difficult for new leaders to alter them. Few people in the United States would identify themselves with social democracy, as presidential candidate Bernie Sanders found out in 2016 and 2020, although his campaigns did help people understand that some versions of socialism did not require a wholesale elimination of capitalism, and some of his proposals found their way into the Democratic Party platform.
- **Regulated capitalism** is also a hybrid system, but, unlike the socialist hybrids, it does not often prioritize political and social goals—like reducing inequality or redressing power inequities—as much as it does economic health. Although in theory the market ought to provide everything that people need and want—and should regulate itself as well—sometimes it fails. The notion that the market, an impartial process, has "failed" is a somewhat substantive one—it is the decision of a government that the outcome

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is not acceptable and should be replaced or altered to fit a political vision of what the outcome should be. When markets have ups and downs—periods of growth followed by periods of slowdown or recession—individuals and businesses look to government for economic security. If the market fails to produce some goods and services, like schools or highways, individuals expect the government to step in to produce them (using taxpayer funds). It is not very substantive—the market process still largely makes all the distributional decisions—but it is not laissez-faire capitalism, either. The United States has a system of regulated capitalism, along with most other countries today.

IN YOUR OWN WORDS

Describe the role that politics plays in determining how power and resources, including control of information, are distributed in a society.

POLITICAL SYSTEMS AND THE CONCEPT OF CITIZENSHIP

Competing ideas about power and social order, different models of governing

Just as there are different kinds of economic systems on the substantive-to-procedural scale, there are many sorts of political systems, based on competing ideas about who should have power and what the social order should be—that is, how much substantive regulation there should be over individual decision making. For our purposes, we can divide political systems into two types: those in which the government has the substantive power to impose a particular social order, deciding how individuals ought to behave, and those procedural systems in which individuals exercise personal power over most of their own behavior and ultimately over government as well. These two types of systems are different not just in a theoretical sense. The differences have very real implications for the people who live in them; the notion of citizenship (or the lack of it) is tied closely to the kind of political system a nation has.

Figure 1.2 compares these systems, ranging from the more substantive authoritarian governments that potentially have total power over their subjects to more procedural nonauthoritarian governments that permit citizens to limit the state's power by claiming rights that the government must protect. Figure 1.3 shows what happens when we overlie our economic and political figures, giving us a model of most of the world's political/economic systems. Note that when we say *model*, we are talking about abstractions from reality used as a tool to help us understand. We don't pretend that all the details of the world are captured in a single two-dimensional figure, but we can get a better idea of the similarities and differences by looking at them this way.

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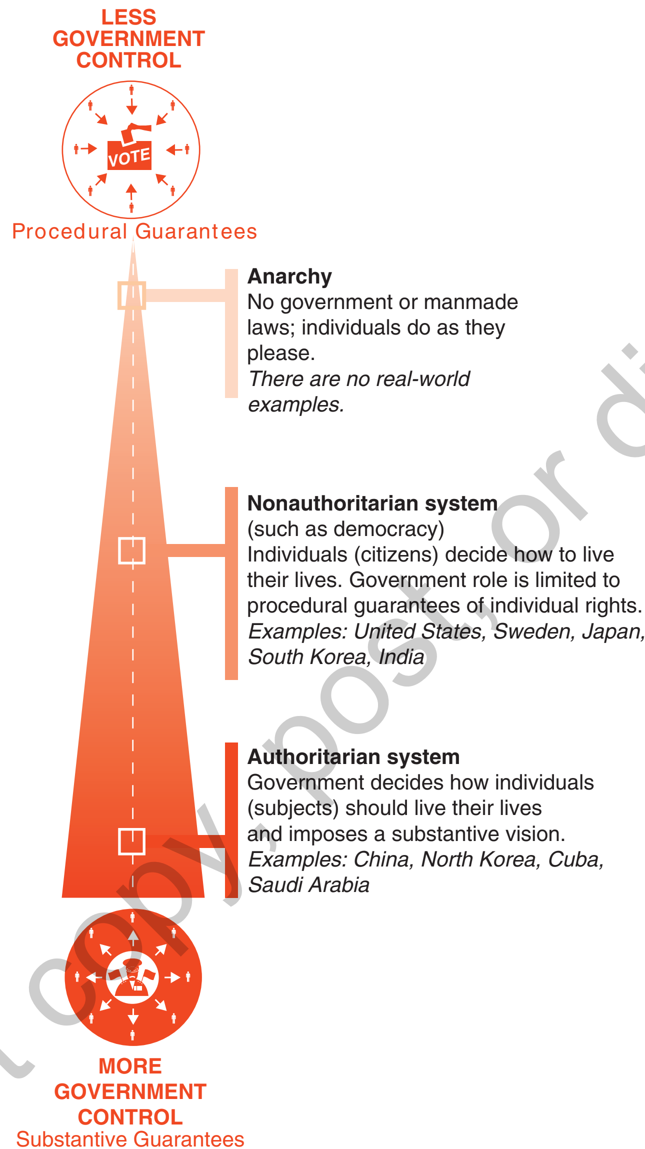
FIGURE 1.2 ■ A Comparison of Political Systems



Political systems are defined by the extent to which individual citizens or governments decide what the social order should look like—that is,how people should live their collective, noneconomic lives. Except for anarchies, every system allots a role to government to regulate individualbehavior—for example, to prohibit murder, rape, and theft. But beyond such basic regulation, they differ radically on who gets to vdetermine how individuals live their lives, and whether government's role is simply to provide procedural guarantees that protect individuals' rights to make their own decisions or to provide a much more substantive view of how individuals should behave.

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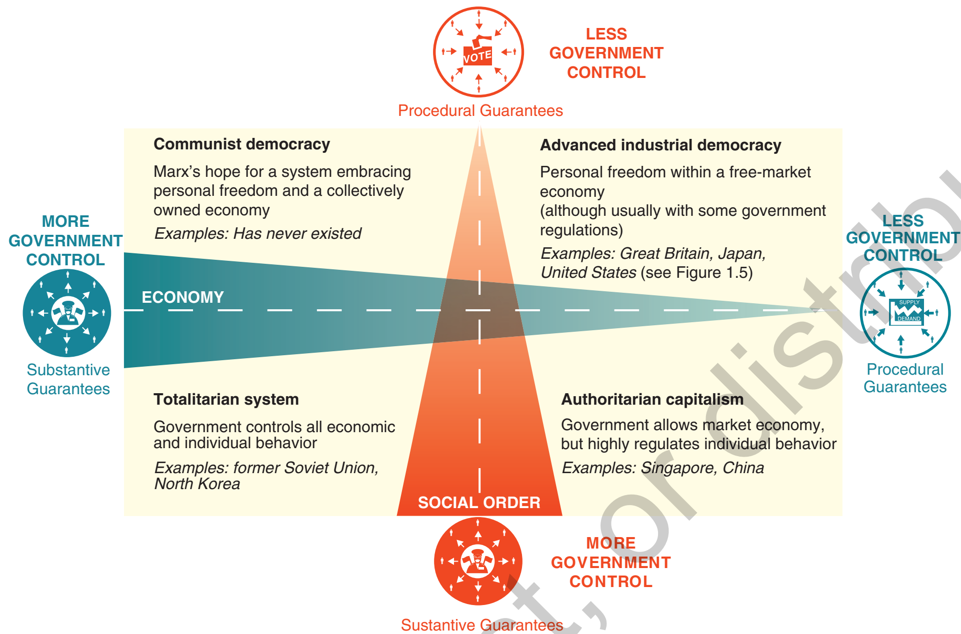
FIGURE 1.3 ■ Political and Economic Systems



Political systems work in conjunction with economic systems, but government control over the economy does not necessarily translate into tight control over the social order. We have identified four possible combinations of these systems,signified by the labeled points in each quadrant.These points are approximate, however, and some nations cannot be classified so easily. Sweden is an advanced industrial democracy by mostmeasures, for instance, but because of its commitment to substantive economic values, it would be located much closer to the vertical axis.

Authoritarian Systems

Authoritarian governments give ultimate power to the state rather than to the people to decide how they ought to live their lives. By *authoritarian governments*, we usually mean those in which the people cannot effectively claim rights against the state; where the state chooses to exercise its power, the people have no choice but to submit to its will. Authoritarian governments can take various forms: sovereignty can be vested in an individual (dictatorship or monarchy), in God (theocracy), in the state itself (fascism), or in a ruling class (oligarchy).

When a system combines an authoritarian government with a socialist economy, we say that the system is **totalitarian**. That is, as in the earlier example of the former Soviet Union, it may exercise its power over every part of society—economic, social, political, and moral—leaving little or no private realm for individuals.

An authoritarian state may also limit its own power. In such cases, it may deny individuals rights in those spheres where it chooses to act, but it may leave large areas of society, such as a capitalist economy, free from government interference. Singapore is an example of this type of **authoritarian capitalism**; people have considerable economic freedom, but stringent social regulations limit their noneconomic behavior.

Often authoritarian governments pay lip service to the people, but when push comes to shove, as it usually does in such states, the people have no effective power against the government. Again, government does not just provide guarantees of fair processes for individuals; it

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guarantees a substantive vision of what life will be like—what individuals will believe, how they will act, what they will choose.

Democracy and Nonauthoritarian Systems

In nonauthoritarian systems, ultimate power rests with the individuals to make decisions concerning their lives. The most extreme form of nonauthoritarianism is called **anarchy**. Anarchists would do away with government and laws altogether. People advocate anarchy because they value the freedom to do whatever they want more than they value the order and security that governments provide by forbidding or regulating certain kinds of behavior. Few people are true anarchists, however. Anarchy may sound attractive in theory, but the inherent difficulties of the position make it hard to practice. For instance, how could you even organize a revolution to get rid of government without some rules about who is to do what and how decisions are to be made?

A less extreme form of nonauthoritarian government, and one much more familiar to us, is **democracy** (from the Greek *demos*, meaning "people"). In democracies, government is not external to the people, as it is in authoritarian systems; in a fundamental sense, government is the people. Recognizing that collective life usually calls for some restrictions on what individuals may do (laws forbidding murder, for instance, or theft), democracies nevertheless try to maximize freedom for the individuals who live under them. Although they generally make decisions through some sort of majority rule, democracies still provide procedural guarantees to preserve individual rights—usually protections of due process (guarantee of a fair trial, right to a lawyer, and so on) and minority rights. This means that if individuals living in a democracy feel their rights have been violated, they have the right to ask government to remedy the situation.

Democracies are based on the principle of **popular sovereignty**; that is, there is no power higher than the people and, in the United States, the document establishing their authority, the Constitution. The central idea here is that no government is considered legitimate unless the governed consent to it, and people are not truly free unless they live under a law of their own making. People and their power act as a limiting restraint on the power of government, in a rebuke to the claims of authoritarians.

Democratic narratives vary, however, in how much active control they give to individuals:

- Theorists of **elite democracy** propose that democracy is merely a system of choosing among competing leaders; for the average citizen, input ends after the leader is chosen.[4] In this view, elections are merely symbolic—to perpetuate the illusion that citizens have consented to their government.

- Advocates of **pluralist democracy** argue that what is important is not so much individual participation but rather membership in groups that participate in government decision making on their members' behalf.[5] As a way of trying to influence a system that gives them a limited voice, citizens join groups of people with whom they

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share an interest, such as labor unions, professional associations, and environmental or business groups.

- Supporters of **participatory democracy** claim that individuals have the right to control *all* the circumstances of their lives, and direct democratic participation should take place not only in government but in industry, education, and community affairs as well.[6] For advocates of this view, democracy is more than a way to make decisions: it is a way of life, an end in itself.

These theories about how democracy should (or does) work locate the focus of power in elites, groups, and individuals, respectively. Real-world examples of democracy probably include elements of more than one of these theories; they are not mutually exclusive.

The people of many Western countries have found the idea of democracy persuasive enough to found their governments on it. In recent years, especially after the mid-1980s, democracy has been spreading rapidly through the rest of the world as the preferred form of government. No longer the primary province of industrialized Western nations, attempts at democratic governance now extend into Asia, Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe, and the republics of the former Soviet Union. There are many varieties of democracy other than our own. Some democracies make the legislature (the representatives of the people) the most important authority, some retain a monarch with limited powers, and some hold referenda at the national level to get direct feedback on how the people want the government to act on specific issues.

Most democratic forms of government, because of their commitment to procedural values, practice a capitalist form of economics. Fledgling democracies may rely on a high degree of government economic regulation, but **advanced industrial democracies** combine a considerable amount of personal freedom with a free-market (though still usually regulated) economy. It is rare to find a country that is truly committed to individual political freedom that also tries to regulate the economy heavily. The economist Karl Marx believed that radical democracy would coexist with communally owned property in a form of **communist democracy**, but such a system has never existed, and most real-world systems fall somewhere along the horizontal continuum shown in Figure 1.3.

The Role of the People

What is important about the political and economic systems we have been sorting out here is that they have a direct impact on the lives of the people who live in them. So far we have given a good deal of attention to the latter parts of Lasswell's definition of politics. But easily as important as the *what* and the *how* in Lasswell's formulation is the *who*. Underlying the different political theories we have looked at are fundamental differences in the powers and opportunities possessed by everyday people.

In authoritarian systems, the people are **subjects** of their government. They possess no rights that protect them from that government; they must do whatever the government says or face the consequences, without any other recourse. They have obligations to the state but

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no rights or privileges to offset those obligations. They may be winners or losers in government decisions, but they have very little control over which it may be.

Everyday people in democratic systems have a potentially powerful role to play. They are more than mere subjects; they are **citizens**, or members of a political community with rights as well as obligations. Democratic theory says that power is drawn from the people—that the people are sovereign, that they must consent to be governed, and that their government must respond to their will. In practical terms, this may not seem to mean much, since not consenting doesn't necessarily give us the right to disobey government. It does give us the option of leaving, however, and seeking a more congenial set of rules elsewhere. Subjects of authoritarian governments rarely have this freedom.

Theoretically, democracies are ruled by "the people," but different democracies have at times been very selective about whom they count as citizens. Beginning with our days as colonists, Americans have excluded many groups of people from citizenship: people of the "wrong" religion, income bracket, race, ethnic group, lifestyle, and gender have all been excluded from enjoying the full rights of colonial or U.S. citizenship at different times. In fact, American history is the story of those various groups fighting to be included as citizens. Just because a system is called a democracy is no guarantee that all or even most of its residents possess the status of citizen.

In democratic systems, the rules of government can provide for all sorts of different roles for those they designate as citizens. At a minimum, citizens possess certain rights, or powers to act, that government cannot limit. Just what these rights are varies in different democracies, but they usually include freedoms of speech and the press, the right to assemble, and certain legal protections guaranteeing fair treatment in the criminal justice system. Almost all of these rights are designed to allow citizens to criticize their government openly without threat of retribution by that government—in essence to retain some of that power over the narrative that we discussed earlier. Citizens can usually vote in periodic and free elections. They may be able to run for office, subject to certain conditions, like age or residence. They can support candidates for office, organize political groups or parties, attend meetings, write letters to officials or the press, march in protest or support of various causes, even speak out on street corners. As we noted earlier, increasingly, citizens can vocalize their views and disseminate them electronically, through social networks, blogs, and self-published work.

Citizens of democracies also possess obligations or responsibilities to the public realm. They have the obligation to obey the law, for instance, once they have consented to the government (even if that consent amounts only to not leaving). They may also have the obligation to pay taxes, serve in the military, or sit on juries. Some theorists argue that truly virtuous citizens should put community interests ahead of personal interests. A less extreme version of this view holds that while citizens may go about their own business and pursue their own interests, they must continue to pay attention to their government, following the news to keep a critical eye on their elected officials. Participating in its decisions is the price of maintaining their own liberty and, by extension, the liberty of the whole. Should citizens abdicate this role by tuning out of public life, the safeguards of democracy can disappear, to be replaced with the trappings of authoritarian government. There is nothing automatic about democracy. If left unattended by

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nonvigilant citizens, the freedoms of democracy can be lost to an all-powerful state, and citizens can become transformed into subjects of the government they failed to keep in check.

Do subjects enjoy any advantages that citizens don't have?

This Western notion of citizenship as conferring both rights and responsibilities first became popular in the 1700s, as Europeans emerged from the Middle Ages and began to reject notions that rulers were put on Earth by God to be obeyed unconditionally. Two British philosophers, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, led the new way of thinking about subjecthood and citizenship. Governments are born not because God ordains them, but because life without government is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" in Hobbes's words, and "inconvenient" in Locke's. The foundation of government is reason, not faith, and reason leads people to consent to being governed because they are better off that way.

People have freedom and rights before government exists, declared Locke. When they decide they are better off with government than without it, they enter into a **social contract**, giving up some of those rights in exchange for the protection of the rest of their rights by a government established by the majority. If that government fails to protect their rights, it has broken the contract, and the people are free to form a new government or not, as they please. But the key element here is that for authority to be legitimate, citizens must consent to it. Note, however, that nowhere did Locke suggest that all people ought to participate in politics, or that people are necessarily equal. In fact, he was concerned mostly with the preservation of private property, suggesting that only property owners would have cause to be bothered with government because only they have something concrete to lose. Still, the political narratives of **classical liberalism** that emerged from the Enlightenment emphasized science and rational thought, government limited by individual rights, and democratic citizenship. It provides a powerful theoretical foundation for the modern nonauthoritarian views of government we looked at earlier (see the upper right quadrant of Figure 1.3).

Meanwhile, as philosophers in Europe were beginning to explore the idea of individual rights and democratic governance, there had long been democratic stirrings on the founders' home continent. The Iroquois Confederacy was an alliance of five (and eventually six) East Coast Native American nations whose constitution, the "Great Law of Peace," impressed such American leaders as Benjamin Franklin with its suggestions of federalism, separation of powers, checks and balances, and consensus-building. Although historians are not sure that these ideas had any direct influence on the founders' thinking about American governance, they were clearly part of the stew of ideas that the founders could dip into, and some scholars make the case that their influence was significant.[7]

IN YOUR OWN WORDS

Compare how power is distributed between citizens and government in different economic and political systems.

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DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA

Democratic but not too democratic

For our purposes, the most important thing about these ideas about politics is that they were prevalent at the same time the American founders were thinking about how to build a new government. Locke particularly influenced the writings of James Madison, a major author of our Constitution. The founders wanted to base their new government on popular consent, but they did not want to go too far. Madison, as we will see, was particularly worried about a system that was too democratic.

The Dangers of Democracy

Enthusiastic popular participation under the government established by the Articles of Confederation—the document that tied the colonies together before the Constitution was drafted—almost ended the new government before it began. Like Locke, Madison thought government had a duty to protect property, and if people who didn't have property could get involved in politics, they might not care about protecting the property of others. Worse, they might form "factions," groups pursuing their own self-interests rather than the public interest, and even try to get some of that property for themselves. So Madison rejected notions of "pure democracy," in which all citizens would have direct power to control government, and opted instead for what he called a "republic."

A **republic**, according to Madison, differs from a democracy mainly in that it employs representation and can work in a large state. Most theorists agree that democracy is impossible in practice if there are a lot of citizens and all have to be heard from. But we do not march to Washington or phone our legislator every time we want to register a political preference. Instead, we choose representatives—members of the House of Representatives, senators, and the president—to represent our views for us. Madison thought this would be a safer system than direct participation (all of us crowding into town halls or the Capitol) because public passions would be cooled off by the process. You might be furious about health care costs when you vote for your senator, but they will represent your views with less anger. The founders hoped the representatives would be older, wealthier, and wiser than the average American and that they would be better able to make cool and rational decisions.

The Evolution of American Citizenship

Unlike the founders, certainly, but even unlike most of the people currently running this country (who are, let's face it, kind of old), people born in this century are almost all **digital natives**. They have been born in an era in which not only are most people hooked up to electronic media, but they also live their lives partly in cyberspace as well as in "real space." For many of us, the lives we live are often mediated—that is, with much, if not most, of our relationships, our education, our news, our travel, our sustenance, our purchases, our daily activities, our job seeking, and our very sense of ourselves being influenced by, experienced through, or shared via electronic media.

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Citizens Stepping Up

Americans may be individualists, but that doesn't mean they don't pitch in to help others in need—at least some of the time. When Hurricane Maria struck Puerto Rico in 2017, chef José Andrés jumped into action via his organization World Central Kitchen to provide meals to people across the islands who had lost power, or even their homes.

World Central Kitchen

Essentially, in a digital age we conduct our lives through channels that, like that water pipe we talked about earlier, may be made of lead, may be rusty, or may be full of holes. When we search online, certain links are offered first according to the calculations made by the search engine we use. When we shop online, we are urged to buy certain products that an algorithm thinks we will like or that people like us have purchased. When we travel, certain flights and hotels are flagged, and when we use social media, certain posts appear while others don't. Most of us don't check very hard to ensure that the information on which we base our choices isn't emerging from the cyberequivalent of lead pipes.

A mediated world has all kinds of implications for everyday living and loving and working. The implications we care about here are the political implications for our roles as citizens—the ones to do with how we exercise power and are impacted by it. We will turn to these implications again and again throughout this book.

Even though Americans today still largely adhere to the basic governing narrative the founders promoted, the country is now light-years removed from the founding era, when communication was limited by illiteracy and the scarcity of channels through which it could pass. Consider the timeline in Figure 1.4. It follows the development of the media through which we get information, receive narratives, and send out our own information (see also *Snapshot of America: How Do We Engage Politically Online?*). Being a citizen in a mediated world is just night-and-day different from being one in the world in which James Madison helped write the Constitution. It's the genius of the Constitution that it has been able to navigate the transition successfully so far. The mediated world we live in gives us myriad new ways to keep the republic

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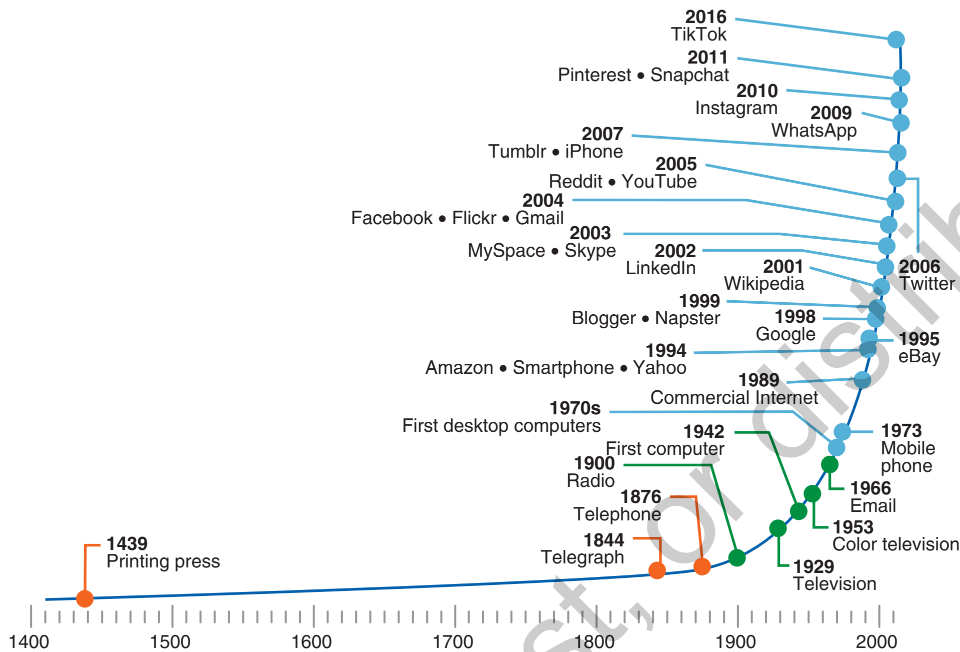
FIGURE 1.4 ■ Media Timeline



It is notable that over the long history of humankind's relationship with the printed word, a majority of the most significant technological developments, other than the 1439 invention of the printing press, have taken place over the last 100 years.

and some pretty high-tech ways to lose it. That puts a huge burden on us as **mediated citizens** and also opens up a world of opportunity.

Among the things we disagree on in this country is what it means to be a citizen. James Madison obviously had some thoughts on that subject. As mentioned earlier, he hoped people would be so filled with what he called republican virtue that they would readily sacrifice their self-interest to advance the public interest. As we will see in Chapter 2, this **public-interested citizenship** proved not to be the rule, much to Madison's disappointment. Instead, early Americans demonstrated **self-interested citizenship**, trying to use the system to get the most they could for themselves. This was a dilemma for Madison because he was designing a constitution that depended on the nature of the people being governed. He believed he had solved that dilemma by creating a political system that would check our self-interested nature and produce laws that would support the public interest.

Still, the Constitution has not put that conflict to rest. Today there are plenty of people who put country first—who enlist in the armed services, sometimes giving their lives for their nation, or who go into law enforcement or teaching or other lower paying careers because they want to serve. There are people who cheerfully pay their taxes because it's a privilege to live in a free democracy where you can climb the ladder of opportunity. Especially in moments of

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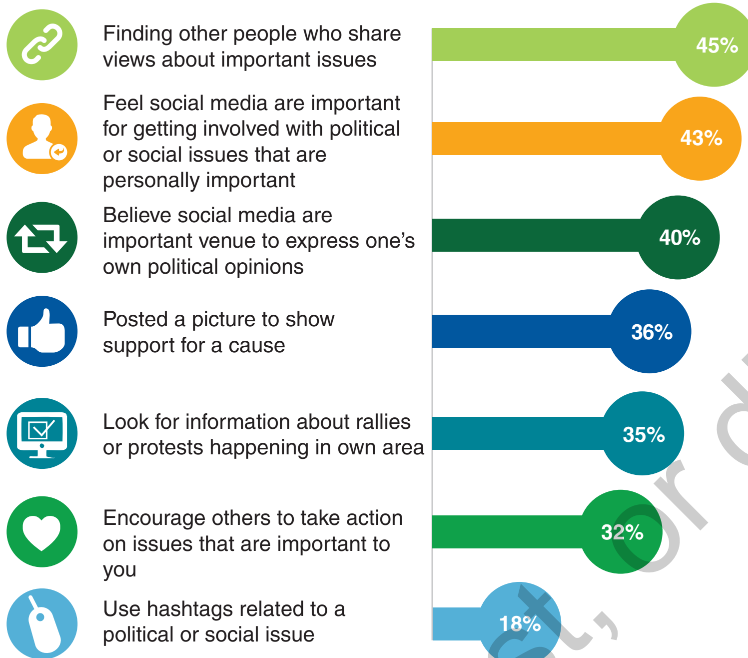
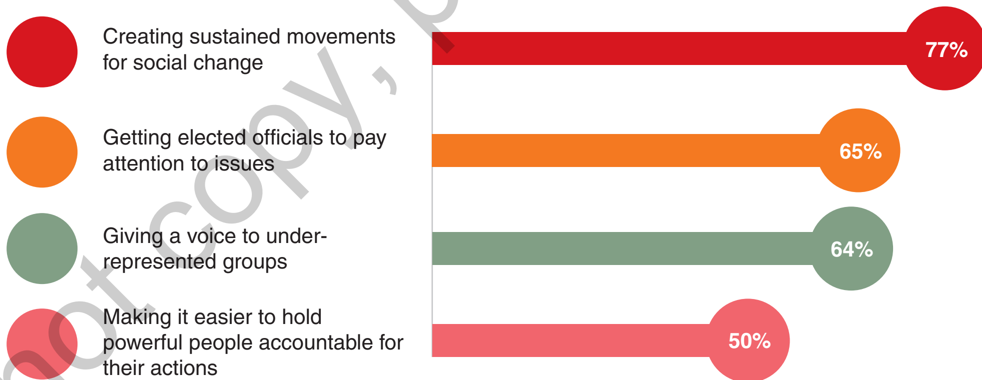
Snapshot of America: *How Do We Engage Politically Online?*





Behind the Numbers

Social media enable citizens to engage with their government, the news media, and each other much more efficiently than in previous decades. But widespread and easy access to political information comes to us with few quality checks. Did you engage politically during the 2020 presidential election in any of the ways listed above? In what ways might social media affect political outcomes?

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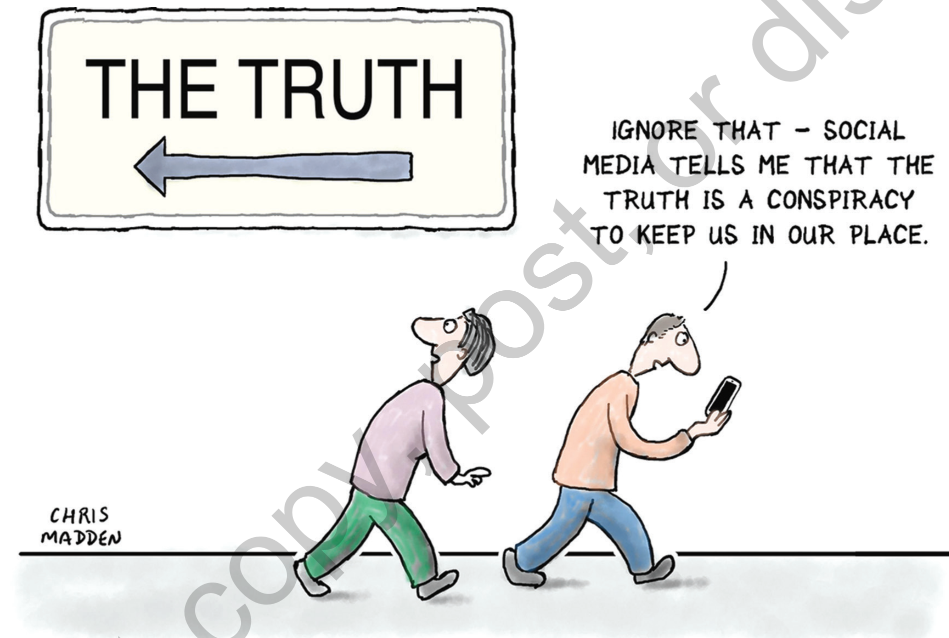
national trouble—after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in September 2001, for instance, or during the COVID-19 pandemic—Americans willingly help their fellow citizens. At the same time, the day-to-day business of life turns most people inward. Many people care about self and family and friends, but most don't have the energy or inclination to get beyond that. President John F. Kennedy challenged his "fellow Americans" in 1961 to "ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country," but only a rare few have the time or motivation to take up that challenge.

Unlike the citizens for whom Madison and his colleagues designed a constitution, mediated citizens experience the world through multiple channels of information and interaction. That doesn't change whether citizens are self-interested or public-interested, but it does give them more opportunities and raise more potential hazards for being both.



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Many older Americans who are not digital natives nonetheless experience political life through television or through web surfing and commenting, usually anonymously and often rudely. This is not always a positive addition to our civil discourse, but they are trying to adapt. You may have grandparents who fit this description. They probably want to know why you are not on Facebook.

But younger, more media-savvy digital natives, millennials, Gen Xers—and even some tech-savvy Baby Boomers—not only have access to traditional media if they choose but also are accustomed to interacting, conducting friendships and family relationships, and generally

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attending to the details of their lives through electronic channels. Their digital selves exist in networks of friends and acquaintances who take for granted that they can communicate in seconds. They certainly get their news digitally and increasingly organize, register to vote, enlist in campaigns, and call each other to action that way.

When, if ever, should individuals be asked to sacrifice their own good for that of their country?

In fact, a phenomenon called **hashtag activism**, the forming of social movements through viral calls to act politically—whether to march, to boycott, to contact politicians, or to vote—has become common enough that organizers warn that action has to go beyond cyberspace to reach the real world or it will have limited impact. #BlackLivesMatter, #ItGetsBetter, and #NeverAgain are just three very different, very viral, very successful ways of using all the channels available to us to call attention to a problem and propose solutions.

Although living an intensely mediated life has the potential to broaden our horizons and expose us to multiple views and cultures, it does not automatically produce public-interested citizens. People can easily remain self-interested in this digital world. We can customize our social media to give us only news and information that confirm what we already think. We can live in an **information bubble** where everything we see and hear reinforces our preferred narratives. That makes us more or less sitting ducks for whoever's political agenda in injected into our bubble, whether from inside an online media source or from a foreign power that weaponizes social media to influence an election, as the Russians did in both 2016 and 2020. Without opening ourselves up to multiple information and action channels, we can live an unexamined mediated life.

But mediated citizenship also creates enormous opportunities that the founders never dreamed of. Truth to tell, Madison wouldn't have been all that thrilled about the multiple ways to be political that the mediated citizen possesses. He thought citizens should be seen on Election Day, but not heard most of the time, precisely because he thought we would push our own interests and destabilize the system. He was reassured by the fact that it would take days for an express letter trying to create a dissenting political organization to reach Georgia from Maine. Our mediated world has blown that reassuring prospect to smithereens.

Mediated citizens are not only the receivers and distributors of narratives from powerful people. We can be the creators and disseminators of our own narratives, something that would have terrified the old monarchs comfortably ensconced in their own narratives. Even the founders would have been extremely nervous about what the masses might get up to.

As mediated citizens, we have unprecedented access to power, but we are also targets of the use of unprecedented power—attempts to shape our views and control our experiences. That means it is up to us to pay critical attention to what is happening in the world around us.

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IN YOUR OWN WORDS

Describe the enduring tension in the United States between self-interested human nature and public-spirited government and the way that has been shaped in a mediated world.

WHO IS A CITIZEN AND WHO IS NOT?

Native-born and naturalized citizens

Citizenship is not just a normative concept—that is, a prescription for how governments ought to treat residents and how those residents ought to act. It is also a very precise legal status. A fundamental element of democracy is not only the careful specification of the rights granted and the obligations incurred in citizenship but also an equally careful legal description of just who is a citizen and how that status can be acquired by noncitizens.

If you are born in any of the fifty states, in the District of Columbia, or in most of America's overseas territories, such as Puerto Rico or Guam, you are an American citizen, whether your parents are Americans or not and whether they are here legally or not. This rule follows the principle of international law called *jus soli*, which means literally "the right of the soil." The exceptions to this rule in the United States are children born to foreign diplomats serving in the United States and children born on foreign ships in U.S. waters. These children would not be considered U.S. citizens. According to another legal principle, *jus sanguinis* ("the right by blood"), if you are born outside the United States to American parents, you are also an American citizen (or you can become one if you are adopted by American parents). Interestingly, if you are born in the United States but one of your parents holds citizenship in another country, you may be able to hold dual citizenship, depending on that country's laws. Most countries, including the United States, require that a child with dual citizenship declare allegiance to one country on turning age eighteen. It is worth noting that requirements for U.S. citizenship, particularly as they affect people born outside the country, have changed frequently over time.

So far, citizenship seems relatively straightforward. But as we know, the United States since before its birth has been attractive to **immigrants**, people who are citizens or subjects of another country who come here to live and work. Today there are strict limitations on the numbers of immigrants who may legally enter the country. There are also strict rules governing the criteria for entry. If immigrants come here legally on permanent resident visas—that is, if they follow the rules and regulations of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)—they may be eligible to apply for citizenship through a process called **naturalization**.

However, many people who come to the United States do not come as legal permanent residents. The USCIS refers to these people as nonimmigrants. Some arrive seeking asylum, or protection. These are political refugees, who are allowed into the United States if they face or are threatened with persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinions. Not everyone who feels threatened is given legal

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refugee status, however. The USCIS requires that the fear of persecution be "well founded," and it is itself the final judge of a well-founded fear. Claiming refugee status can be an intensely political act, as evidenced by President Trump's attempt to blame Democrats for the 2018 border crisis caused by his own administration's policy of separating children from their parents in an effort to deter refugees.[8] Refugees may become legal permanent residents after they have lived here continuously for one year (although there are annual limits on the number who may do so), at which time they can begin accumulating the in-residence time required to become a citizen, if they wish to.

Other people who may come to the United States legally but without official permanent resident status include visitors, foreign government officials, students, international representatives, temporary workers, members of foreign media, and exchange visitors. These people are expected to return to their home countries and not take up permanent residence in the United States.

Undocumented immigrants have arrived here by avoiding the USCIS regulations, usually because they would not qualify for one reason or another. Many come as children and may not even know they do not have the proper papers. After Congress repeatedly failed to pass the DREAM Act, which would have given permanent legal status to thousands of young adults who were brought to the United States illegally as children, President Obama created the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which allowed them to stay in the country and go to school or work. The Trump administration was locked in a court battle to end the program, leaving these young adults mostly in political limbo. President Biden has tried to do what he can to support the program through executive action, but it's up to Congress to find a legislative solution. Even though a large majority of Americans support allowing the "dreamers" to stay in the country, Republicans are afraid to back legislation allowing a path to citizenship for them for fear of angering their constituents.

American laws have become increasingly harsh with respect to undocumented immigrants. Even so, people continue to come, although the numbers have declined in recent years. Many undocumented immigrants act like citizens, obeying laws, paying taxes, and sending their children to school. Nonetheless, some areas of the country, particularly those near the Mexico–U.S. border, like Texas, California, and Arizona, often have serious problems brought on by those who skirt the immigration laws. Even with border controls to regulate the number of new arrivals, communities can find themselves swamped with new residents, often poor and unskilled, looking for a better life. Because their children must be educated and they themselves may be entitled to receive social services, they can pose a significant financial burden on those communities without necessarily increasing the available funds. Although many undocumented immigrants pay taxes, many also work off the books, meaning they do not contribute to the tax base. Furthermore, most income taxes are federal, and federal money is distributed back to states and localities to fund social services based on the population count in the census. Since undocumented immigrants are understandably reluctant to come forward to be counted, their communities are typically underfunded in that respect as well.

Even people without legal permanent resident status have rights and responsibilities in the United States, just as U.S. citizens do when they travel to other countries. Immigrants enjoy some rights, primarily legal protections. Not only are they entitled to due process in the courts,

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but the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that it is illegal to discriminate against immigrants in the United States.[9] Nevertheless, their rights are limited. They cannot, for instance, vote in our national elections (although some localities, in the hopes of integrating immigrants into their communities, allow them to vote in local elections[10]) or decide to live here permanently without permission (which may or may not be granted). In addition, immigrants, even legal ones, are subject to the decisions of the USCIS, which is empowered by Congress to exercise authority in immigration matters.

IN YOUR OWN WORDS

Analyze the role of immigration and the meaning of citizenship in American politics.

WHAT DO AMERICAN CITIZENS BELIEVE?

A common culture based on shared values

Making a single nation out of a diverse group of people is no easy feat. It is possible only because, despite all our differences, Americans share some fundamental attitudes and beliefs about how the world works and how it should work. These ideas, our political culture, pull us together and, indeed, provide a framework in which we can also disagree politically over who gets what without resorting to violence and civil war.

American Political Culture: Ideas That Unite Us

Political culture refers to the general political orientation or disposition of a nation—the shared values and beliefs about the nature of the political world that give us a common language in which to discuss and debate political ideas. **Values** are ideals or principles that most people agree are important, even though they may disagree on exactly how the value—such as "equality" or "freedom"—ought to be defined. Note that statements about values and beliefs are not descriptive of how the world actually is but rather are prescriptive, or **normative**, statements about how the value-holders believe the world ought to be. Our culture consists of deep-seated, collectively held ideas about how life should be lived. Normative statements aren't true or false but depend for their worth on the arguments made to back them up. Often we take our own culture (that is, our common beliefs about how the world should work) so much for granted that we aren't even aware of it. For that reason, it is often easier to see our own political culture by contrasting it to another.

Political culture is handed down from generation to generation, through families, schools, communities, literature, churches and synagogues, and so on, helping to provide stability for the nation by ensuring that a majority of citizens are well grounded in and committed to the basic values that sustain it. We talk about the process through which values are transferred in Chapter 10, "Public Opinion."

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Free Speech, Even When It's Ugly

Americans don't agree on much, but they do cherish their right to disagree. Most citizens have little tolerance for censorship and expect the government to protect even the most offensive speech. Here, white nationalists attend a 2017 rally in Shelbyville, Tennessee. Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam announced ahead of time that white supremacists were not welcome in Tennessee, but he also said that state and local law enforcement officials would be out "in full force" to respond to any situation that might arise.

Scott Olson/Getty Images

Although political culture is shared, some individuals certainly find themselves at odds with it. When we say, "Americans think . . . ," we mean that most Americans hold those views, not that there is unanimous agreement on them. To the extent that we are increasingly politically polarized—that is, to the extent that our political differences get farther apart—the political culture itself may begin to break down and we may lose the common language that enables us to settle those differences through conventional political means. The 2016 and 2020 election campaigns showed us just how fragile the cultural ties that bind us can be when our differences are stoked and the legitimacy of our system is challenged.

In American political culture, our expectations of government focus on rules and processes rather than on results. For example, we think government should guarantee a fair playing field but not guarantee equal outcomes for all the players. In addition, we believe that individuals are responsible for their own welfare and that what is good for them is good for society as a whole. Our insistence on fair rules is the same emphasis on *procedural guarantees* we saw in our earlier discussion of capitalism, whereas the belief in the primacy of the individual citizen is called **individualism**. American culture is not wholly procedural and individualistic—indeed, differences on these matters constitute some of the major partisan divisions in American politics—but it tends to be more so than is the case in most other nations.

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When we say that American political culture is procedural, we mean that Americans generally think government should guarantee fair processes—such as a free market to distribute goods, majority rule to make decisions, and due process to determine guilt and innocence—rather than specific outcomes. By contrast, people in the social democratic countries of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark typically believe that government should actively seek to realize the values of equality—perhaps to guarantee a certain quality of life for all citizens or to increase equality of income. American politics does set some substantive goals for public policy, but Americans are generally more comfortable ensuring that things are done in a fair and proper way and trusting that the outcomes will be good ones because the rules are fair. Although the American government gets involved in social programs and welfare, and it took a step in a substantive direction with passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act in 2010, it aims more at helping individuals get on their feet so that they can participate in the market (fair procedures) rather than at cleaning up slums or eliminating poverty (substantive goals).

The individualistic nature of American political culture means that individuals, not government or society, are seen as responsible for their own well-being. This notion contrasts with a collectivist social democratic point of view, which holds that what is good for society may not be the same as what is in the interest of individuals. Thus our politics revolves around the belief that individuals are usually the best judges of what is good for themselves; we assume that what is good for society will automatically follow. American government rarely asks citizens to make major economic sacrifices for the public good, although individuals often do so privately and voluntarily. Where Americans are asked to make economic sacrifices, like paying taxes, they are unpopular and more modest than in most other countries. A collective interest that supersedes individual interests is generally invoked in the United States only in times of war or national crisis. This echoes the two American notions of self-interested and public-interested citizenship we discussed earlier. Collectivist citizenship is rarer in the United States precisely because we're such an individualistic culture.

Should it be possible to lose one's citizenship under any circumstances?

We can see our American procedural and individualistic perspective when we examine the different meanings of three core American values: democracy, freedom, and equality.

Democracy. Democracy in America, as we have seen, means representative democracy, based on consent and majority rule. Basically, American democracy is a procedure for making political decisions, for choosing political leaders, and for selecting policies for the nation. It is seen as a fundamentally just or fair way of making decisions because every individual who cares to participate is heard in the process, and all interests are considered. We don't reject a democratically made decision because it is not fair; it is fair precisely because it is democratically made. Democracy is valued primarily not for the way it makes citizens feel, or the effects it has on them, but for the decisions it produces. Americans see democracy as the appropriate procedure for making public decisions—that is, decisions about government—but generally not for

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decisions in the private realm. Rarely do employees have a binding vote on company policy, for example, as they do in some Scandinavian countries.

In procedural democracies, the various players all participate because they know that according to the rules, even if they don't win today, they can try again and win further on down the road. When people stop feeling that they can win in a democratic system, they either try to change the rules, a procedural solution, or call the legitimacy of the whole thing into question because it didn't produce the result they wanted. When that happens, we are moving from a procedural to a substantive system when people make decisions to achieve specific outcomes they believe to be valuable.

Freedom. Americans also put a high premium on the value of freedom, defined as freedom for the individual from restraint by the state. This view of freedom is procedural in the sense that it holds that no unfair restrictions should be put in the way of your pursuit of what you want, but it does not guarantee you any help in achieving those things. For instance, when Americans say, "We are all free to get a job," we mean that no discriminatory laws or other legal barriers are stopping us from applying for any particular position. A substantive view of freedom would ensure us the training to get a job so that our freedom meant a positive opportunity, not just the absence of restraint. Americans' extraordinary commitment to individualism can be seen nowhere so clearly as in the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees our basic civil liberties, the areas where government cannot interfere with individual action. (See Chapter 4, "Fundamental American Liberties," for a complete discussion of our civil liberties.)

Finally, our proceduralism is echoed in the value we attach to economic freedom, the freedom to participate in the marketplace, to acquire money and property, and to do with those resources pretty much as we please. Americans believe that government should protect our property, not take it away or regulate our use of it too heavily. Our commitment to individualism is apparent here, too. Even if society as a whole would be better off if we paid down the federal debt (the amount our government owes from spending more than it brings in), our individualistic view of economic freedom means that Americans have one of the lowest tax rates in the industrialized world. This reflects our national tendency in normal times to emphasize the rights of citizenship over its obligations.

Equality. A third central value in American political culture is equality. For Americans, equality is valued not because we want individuals to be the same but because we want them to be treated the same. Equality in America means government should guarantee equality of treatment, of access, and of opportunity, not equality of result. People should have equal access to run the race, but we don't expect them all to finish in the same place. Thus we believe in political equality (one person, one vote) and equality before the law—that the law shouldn't make unreasonable distinctions among people the basis for treating them differently, and that all people should have equal access to the legal system.

One problem the courts have faced is deciding what counts as a reasonable distinction. Can the law justifiably discriminate between—that is, treat differently—men and women, minorities and white Protestants, rich and poor, young and old? When the rules treat people

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differently, even if the goal is to make them more equal in the long run, many Americans get very upset. Witness the controversy surrounding affirmative action policies in this country. The point of such policies is to allow special opportunities to members of groups that have been discriminated against in the past, in order to remedy the long-term effects of that discrimination. For many Americans, such policies violate our commitment to procedural solutions. They wonder how treating people unequally can be fair.

American Ideologies: Ideas That Divide Us

Most Americans are united in their commitment to proceduralism and individualism at some level, and to the key values of democracy, freedom, and equality, although as we have indicated, their commitment on some of these points has begun to waiver under intense polarization. Ideally, this shared political culture can give us a common political language, a way to talk about politics that keeps us united even though we may use that common language to tell different narratives about who we are, what's important to us, or in what direction we feel the country should move.

The sets of beliefs and opinions about politics, the economy, and society that help people make sense of their world, and that can divide them into opposing camps, are called **ideologies**. Again, like the values and beliefs that underlie our culture, our ideologies are based on normative prescriptions. Remember that one of the reasons we can disagree so passionately on political issues is that normative statements about the world are not true or false, good or bad—instead, they depend for their force on the arguments we make to defend them. We cannot even pretend to live in a Norman Rockwell world where we learn our values face-to-face at our parents' dinner table. In a mediated age there are more and more arguments from more and more channels that are harder and harder to sort out. It might seem crystal clear to us that our values are right and true, but to a person who disagrees with our prescriptions, we are as wrong as they think we are. And so we debate and argue. In fact, anyone who pays attention to American politics knows that we disagree about many specific political ideas and issues, and that our differences have gotten more passionate and polarized (that is, farther apart) in recent years.

But because we share that political culture, the range of debate in the United States is relatively narrow. We have no successful communist or socialist parties here, for instance. The ideologies on which those parties are founded seem unappealing to most Americans because they violate the norms of procedural and individualistic culture. The two main ideological camps in the United States are the liberals (associated, since the 1930s, with the Democratic Party) and the conservatives (associated with the Republican Party), with many Americans falling somewhere in between. But because we are all part of American political culture, we are still procedural and individualistic, and we still believe in democracy, freedom, and equality, even if we are also liberals or conservatives. Even though Bernie Sanders, a self-identified democratic socialist, ran for president in 2016 and 2020, he did it as a Democrat (a party he had joined only briefly, to run), and he lost the nomination both times.

There are lots of different ways of characterizing American ideologies. It is conventional to say that **conservatives** promote a political narrative based on traditional social values, distrust of government action except in matters of national security, resistance to change, and the

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maintenance of a prescribed social order. **Liberals**, in contrast, are understood to tell a narrative based on the potential of progress and change, trust in government, innovations as answers to social problems, and the expansion of individual rights and expression. For a more nuanced understanding of ideology in America, however, we can focus on the two main ideological dimensions of economics and social order issues.

Traditionally we have understood ideology to be centered on differences in economic views, much like those located on our economic continuum (see Figure 1.1). Based on these economic ideological dimensions, we often say that the liberals who take a more positive view of government action and advocate a large role for government in regulating the economy are on the far left, and those conservatives, more suspicious of government, who think government control should be minimal are on the far right. Because we lack any widespread radical socialist traditions in the United States, both American liberals and conservatives are found on the right side of the broader economic continuum.

In the 1980s and 1990s, another ideological dimension became prominent in the United States. Perhaps because, as some researchers have argued, most people are able to meet their basic economic needs, many Americans began to focus less on economic questions and more on issues of morality and quality of life. The new ideological dimension, which is analogous to the social order dimension we discussed earlier, divides people on the question of how much control government should have over the moral and social order—whether government's role should be limited to protecting individual rights and providing procedural guarantees of equality and due process, or whether the government should be involved in making more substantive judgments about how people should live their lives.

Do ideological differences strengthen or weaken a political culture?

Few people in the United States want to go so far as to allow government to make all moral and political decisions for its subjects, but there are some who hold that it is the government's job to create and protect a preferred social order, although visions of what that preferred order should be may differ. Clearly this social order ideological dimension does not dovetail neatly with the more traditional liberal and conservative orientations toward government action. Figure 1.5 shows some of the ideological positions that are yielded by these two dimensions; note that this figure shows a detail of the broader political spectrum that we saw in Figure 1.3 and is focused on the narrower range commonly found in an advanced industrial democracy.

Economic conservatives, in the upper-right quadrant of Figure 1.5, are reluctant to allow government interference in people's private lives or in the economy. With respect to social order issues, they are willing to let government regulate such behaviors as murder, rape, and theft, but they generally believe that social order issues such as reproductive choices, marijuana usage, LGBTQ+ rights, and physician aid in dying are not matters for government regulation. These economic conservatives also prefer government to limit its role in economic decision making to regulation of the market (like changing interest rates and cutting taxes to end recessions), elimination of "unfair" trade practices such as monopolies, and provision of some public goods such as highways and national defense. Economic conservatism is often summed up with the

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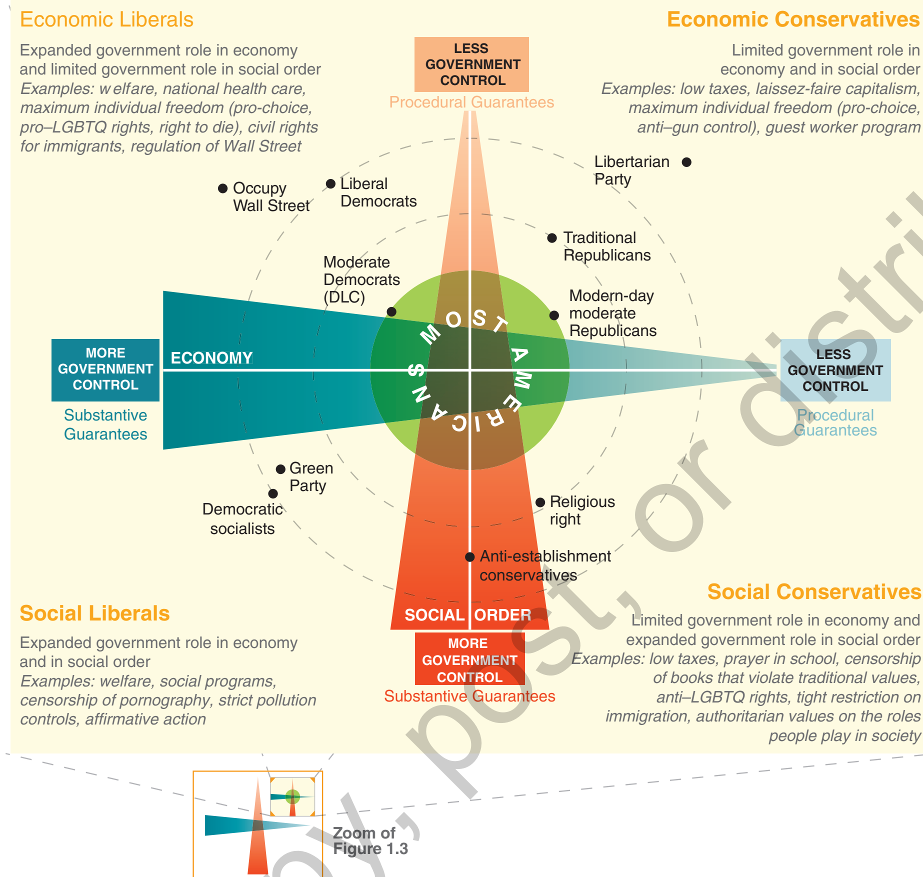
FIGURE 1.5 ■ Ideological Beliefs in the United States



catchphrase: "get government out of the boardroom (economic decisions) and out of the bedroom (decisions concerning personal morality)," or "the government that governs best governs least." When it comes to immigration, economic conservatives favor more open border policies, since immigrants often work more cheaply and help keep the labor market competitive for business. The most extreme holders of economic conservative views are called **libertarians**, people who believe that only minimal government action in any sphere is acceptable. Consequently, economic conservatives also hold the government accountable for sticking to the constitutional checks and balances that limit its own power.

Economic conservatives generally don't love government, but they do embrace procedural rules that allow individual lives the maximum amount of freedom. Practically speaking, that means they are committed to the protections in the Constitution and the democratic process that check government power. They often believe that American rights are even more extensive than the ones written down in the Bill of Rights, they endorse checks and balances as a way of limiting government power, and if they fail to win an election, they subscribe to

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"good-loserism"—waiting to fight again another day rather than trying to change the rules or discredit or subvert the process in order to create a more favorable political environment for themselves. Democracies require that people be good losers sometimes, having confidence that a loss today does not mean a loss forever. Trust in the rules of the game and a willingness to accept the loss are essential to the compromise and cooperation valued by the founders and required by the Constitution. Since the rules of the game in the United States tend to favor the wealthy and powerful even when they lose an election, good-loserism doesn't entail a lot of sacrifice or risk for many economic conservatives, but it still has stabilizing implications for American democracy.

Economic liberals hold views that fall into the upper-left quadrant of Figure 1.5 because, while they share their conservative counterparts' maximum procedural commitment to individual freedom in determining how to live their lives, they are willing to allow government to make substantive decisions about the economy. Some economic policies they favor are job training and housing subsidies for the poor, taxation to support social programs, and affirmative action to ensure that *opportunities* for economic success (but not necessarily outcomes) are truly equal. As far as government regulation of individuals' private lives goes, however, these liberals favor a hands-off stance, preferring individuals to have maximum freedom over their noneconomic affairs. They value diversity, expanding rights for people who have historically been left out of the power structure in the American social order—women, minorities, LGBTQ+ people, and immigrants. Their love for their country is tempered by the view that the government should be held to the same strict procedural standard to which individuals are held—laws must be followed, checks and balances adhered to in order to limit government power, and individual rights protected, even when the individuals are citizens of another country.

Even though economic liberals embrace government action to further their goals, they, like economic conservatives, practice good-loserism, prioritizing the Constitution and the democratic process over their policy preferences. That can result in a "two-steps-forward, one-step-back" type of incremental policy change, as the founders had hoped, rather than revolutionary change that could be a shock to the system. Accepting that sometimes they will lose means also accepting that it may take them several runs through the electoral cycle to accomplish their policy goals.

Social conservatives occupy the lower-right quadrant in our ideological scheme. These people share economic conservatives' views on limited government involvement in the economy, but with less force and commitment and perhaps for different reasons (in fact, following the Great Depression, social conservatives, many of whom were members of the working class, were likely to be New Deal liberals). They may very well support government social programs like Social Security or Medicaid or educational support for those they consider deserving. Their primary concern is with their vision of the moral tone of life, including an emphasis on fundamentalist religious values, demonstrated, for instance, by government control of reproductive choices, including the elimination of a woman's right to end a pregnancy, often without exceptions for rape, incest, or her health, opposition to LGBTQ+ rights, including the right to marry, to adopt kids, and to be protected at the workplace, and the promotion of religious values and narratives, through public prayer, public display of religious icons, and the insertion of religious

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considerations into public education. They endorse traditional family roles and reject change or diversity that they see as destructive to the preferred social order. Immigration is threatening because it brings into the system people who are different and threatens to dilute the majority that keeps the social order in place, something that many social conservatives believe is being intentionally encouraged by their political opponents in order to replace them in the electorate. Many resent what they view as condemnation by liberal elites of the way they talk about race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation and believe that they are labeled racist or sexist or accused of not practicing **political correctness** or being "woke" by overly sensitive liberal "snowflakes."

In response to the argument made by many liberals that there is deep-seated and damaging racism against African Americans and native peoples built into American political culture and the political system, many social conservatives say that they themselves are the ones being discriminated against for refusing to be politically correct and in some cases for being white and Christian. Social conservatives seek to protect people's moral character, and they embrace an authoritarian notion of community that emphasizes a hierarchical order (everyone in their proper place) rather than equality for all, so they favor tax laws that benefit married couples where the mom stays home. Since limited government is not valued here, a large and powerful state is appreciated as being a sign of strength on the international stage. Patriotism for social conservatives is not a matter of holding the government to the highest procedural standards, as it is for those in the top half of Figure 1.5. Less worried about limiting government power over individual lives, they adopt more of a "my country right or wrong," "America First" view that sees criticism of the United States as unpatriotic.

Because social conservatism, like social liberalism, as we shall see, falls below the mid-point on the political continuum, it places less value on the processes of democracy to achieve social ends, and more value on achieving those ends in the first place. Social conservatives, because they believe they are substantively right about the proper order of society, are less concerned with the means by which correct policy is arrived at than by the fact that it is achieved. Individual choice through the democratic process and the framework of the Constitution is less important than is following a leader who promises to fulfill their views on the social order. Especially if they feel they have truth on their side, they may feel obligated to refuse to compromise with their opponents, which is also not conducive to democracy. Another reason that social conservatives may be less committed to democratic processes over their policy goals is that they are a shrinking demographic in this country. As their numbers decline, they face the real possibility that they will lose in a majority-rule decision. As such, good-loserism may be costly for them because they are not at all sure that a loss today will be followed by a win tomorrow.

All of this lack of concern for the survival of democracy was on display on January 6, 2021, and the days following, when social conservatives were at the forefront of the effort to insist that Donald Trump had really won the 2020 presidential election and Joe Biden had "stolen" it. Despite the fact that all of their so-called evidence had been proven to be false and had been rejected by the courts, they continued to follow Trump's lead and to push the lie at every opportunity. The effect of this trafficking in disinformation, as we said earlier in the chapter, has been to undermine people's faith in democracy and the electoral process. Not only does the "win at any cost" attitude weaken

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the political culture that holds American democracy together, but it also seeks to use lies about election fraud to legitimate efforts to regulate the electorate through tightening voting restrictions and reducing alternatives to in-person voting. In combination with practices like redrawing congressional districts, making the appointment of judges sympathetic to their cause a top priority, and eliminating immigration of people they think will not support their views, these efforts help social conservatives win in the policy arena even when they don't have the numbers behind them to form a majority. When you institutionalize making an end-run around democracy to achieve goals that you believe are justified regardless of whether the designated decision-making processes would produce them, you have left the realm of classical liberalism.

Social liberals, or **progressives** (although some economic liberals also refer to themselves as progressive), in the lower-left corner of Figure 1.5, believe not only in a stronger role for government to create social change but also in restructuring the system so that there is no advantage to those who have wealth. This is not the gradual, step-by-step change that economic liberals believe can improve the system for everyone, but a more revolutionary philosophy that says that incremental change will never be enough and that those who advocate it are part of the problem for supporting a classist, unfair system. They often see their political enemies in all three of the other ideologies we have discussed.

Social liberals want climate change addressed immediately, regardless of the cost to business or taxpayers. They believe that solving the climate crisis is a top priority and that without action on this front, nothing else will ultimately matter. They want to see private health insurance eliminated and preferably the private health care system as well, replaced with a government-run system that holds costs down and prevents what they see as unacceptable profiteering by insurance companies and many health care providers. They want college tuition to be free for all Americans, regardless of income, which requires drastic reform of the higher education system.

The essential tenet of social liberals is that the system is rigged to produce unfair economic and thus political outcomes. For many progressives, the other inequities that liberals want to address—along gender, racial, and other lines—are ultimately economic in nature, and if the economic restructuring takes place, those other inequities will disappear. Fixing the rigged system requires radical system change—sometimes social liberals even use the language of revolution, which does not bode well for the Constitution. Like social conservatives, social liberals have concrete ideas about what they think is right, but they are aware that they face considerable democratic opposition to making those things happen. Because their numbers are small, and they are not particularly wedded to procedural norms, good-loserism is less important to them. Consequently, they might blame losses on a rigged electoral system or unfair behavior on the part of their opponents rather than on their inability to attract majority support. But in rejecting democratic outcomes, they are closing in on authoritarian impulses that, like those of social conservatives, run counter to classical liberal roots of American politics.

Although they can be very vocal, those in the social liberal ideological quadrant are a relatively small slice of Americans overall. If you think about it, a country whose culture is in the upper-right quadrant (capitalist democracies defined by limited government over individual lives and the economy) is less likely to have a lot of ideological commitment to a narrative that endorses stronger government responsibility for both. The social liberal quadrant doesn't grab a lot of adherents because it pushes the limits of Americans' limited government, individualistic

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political culture. Many economic liberals, however, pick up some of the policy prescriptions of social liberals, like environmentalism and gun regulation.

Who Fits Where?

Many people, indeed most of us, might find it difficult to identify ourselves as simply "liberal" or "conservative," because we consider ourselves liberal on some issues, conservative on others. Others of us have more pronounced views. The framework in Figure 1.5 allows us to see how major groups in society might line up if we distinguish between economic and social-moral values. We can see, for instance, the real spatial distances that lie among (1) the religious right, who are very conservative on political and moral issues but who were once part of the coalition of southern blue-collar workers who supported Roosevelt on the New Deal; (2) traditional Republicans, who are very conservative on economic issues but often more libertarian on political and moral issues, wanting government to guarantee procedural fairness and keep the peace, but otherwise to leave them alone; and (3) moderate Republicans, who are far less conservative economically and morally. As recent politics has shown, it can be difficult or impossible for a Republican candidate on the national stage to hold together such an unwieldy coalition. Similarly, the gaps among Democratic Socialists and the Green Party and the Democratic Party show why those on the left have such a hard time coming together.

In the summer of 2009, with the nation in economic crisis and the new African American president struggling to pass his signature health care reform in Washington, a wave of populist anger swept the nation. The so-called Tea Party movement (named after the Boston Tea Party rebellion against taxation in 1773) crafted a narrative that was pro-American, anticorporation, and antigovernment (except for programs like Social Security and Medicare, which benefit the Tea Partiers, who tended to be older Americans). Mostly it was angry, fed by emotional appeals of conservative talk show hosts and others, whose narratives took political debate out of the range of logic and analysis and into the world of emotional drama and angry invective.

A *New York Times* poll found that Americans who identified as Tea Party supporters were more likely to be Republican, white, married, male, and over forty-five, and to hold views that were more conservative than Republicans generally.[11] In fact, they succeeded in shaking up the Republican Party from 2010 onward, as they supported primary challenges to officeholders who did not share their antigovernment ideology, culminating in the rejection of the party establishment in 2016. The election that year signaled a moment of reckoning for a party that had been teetering on the edge of crisis for more than a decade. As establishment candidates like former Florida governor Jeb Bush and Ohio governor John Kasich fell in the primaries, so too did Tea Party favorites like Florida senator Marco Rubio and Texas senator Ted Cruz. The split in the party left an opening for the unconventional candidacy of Donald Trump, which—much to the dismay of party leaders like Speaker of the House Paul Ryan and Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell—proved to be more about Trump's personality and the anger of his followers than it did about the Republican Party, although in the end most party members fell in line to vote for him.

The escalating anger of social conservatives who felt inadequately represented by the Republican Party's mainstream came to a peak in the anti-establishment fury displayed in 2016. During that primary season, both Donald Trump and Texas senator Ted Cruz competed

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to address the anger that drove that group. Those voters felt used and betrayed, especially by a party that had promised and failed to defeat Barack Obama, a president they viewed as illegitimate, in part because of Trump's challenge to the president's birth certificate. The rage of social conservatives seemed to be one of **authoritarian populism**, a mix of populist anger against the economic elite who profited at their expense; nativist anger at the perception that whites seemed to be falling behind while government was reaching out to help people of color; and partisan anger that, since the days of President Richard Nixon, economic conservative Republicans had been promising them socially conservative accomplishments without delivering.

Indeed, social scientists trying to understand the surprising phenomenon of the Trump vote found that one particular characteristic predicted it: a commitment to "authoritarian values."[12] These social scientists have found that some social conservatives, when they feel that the proper order and power hierarchy are threatened, either physically or existentially, are attracted to authoritarian narratives that seek to secure the old order by excluding the perceived danger. In the words of one scholar who studies this, the response is, "In case of moral threat, lock down the borders, kick out those who are different, and punish those who are morally deviant."[13] Those who score higher on the authoritarianism scale hold the kind of ideas one would expect from social conservatives seeking to keep faith with a familiar and traditional order—anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment, anti-immigration views, even white supremacy and overt racism. Interestingly, authoritarianism has been found most recently to correspond to narratives that reject the idea of political correctness, a reaction to the sense that expressing fear and anger about perceived threats is not socially acceptable.[14]

There have been major splits in the Democratic coalition in the past. Even though the more recent splits during the Bill Clinton and Barack Obama administrations were disguised, they have come more fully alive after the last two presidential election seasons when a self-avowed democratic socialist who was not even a party member challenged and lost to a more moderate liberal. The Democrats have to satisfy the party's *economic liberals*, who are very procedural on most political and moral issues (barring affirmative action) but relatively (for Americans) substantive on economic concerns; the *social liberals*, substantive on both economic and social issues; and the more middle-of-the-road Democratic groups in between. In the late 1960s, the party almost shattered under the weight of anti–Vietnam War sentiment, and in 1972 it moved sharply left, putting it out of the American mainstream. It was President Bill Clinton, as a founder of the now-defunct Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), who in the 1990s helped move his party of liberal Democrats closer to the mainstream from a position that, as we can see in Figure 1.5, was clearly out of alignment with the position taken by most Americans. Whereas Al Gore, himself a DLC-er, faced a threat from the more extreme segments on the left in 2000, dislike of George W. Bush united Democrats across their party's ideological spectrum in the 2004 and 2008 presidential races.

Recent Democratic contenders for the presidency have not had to deal with serious interparty conflict. Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama fought a hard primary battle in 2008, but it was not ideological in nature. Clinton and Obama occupied, in many ways, identical ideological spaces and policy positions. In response to the primary challenge from democratic socialist Bernie Sanders, Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden, in turn, moved to adopt more substantive economic positions, but they still stayed primarily as moderate, center left Democrats. President

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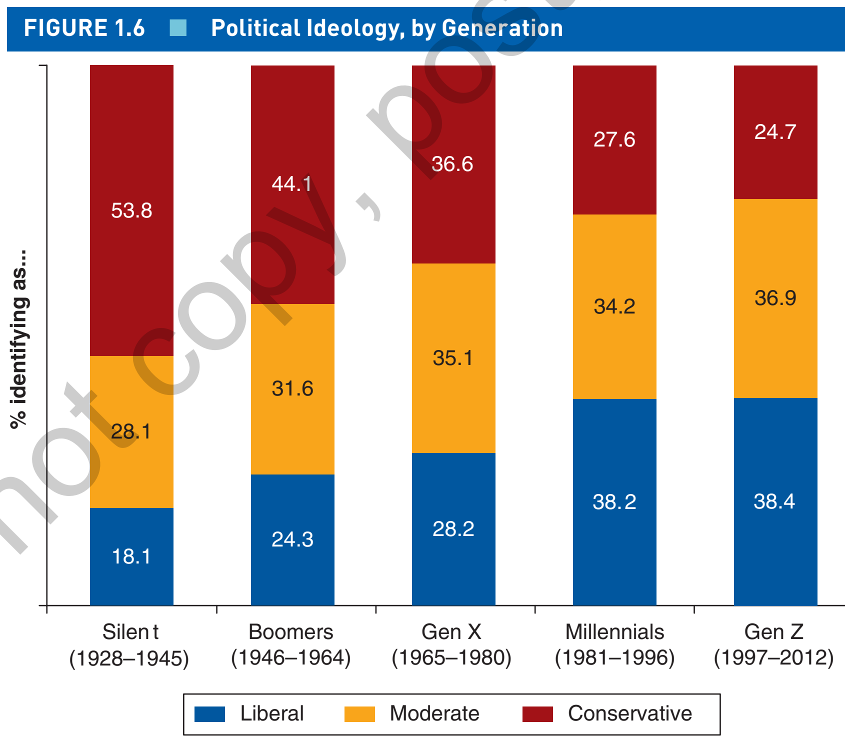
Biden has had his hands full balancing the demands of the progressive wing of the party with his own less radical preferences and those of his party's moderates, but he has managed it, at least so far. The Democrats have been able to manage the ideological dissension in their ranks more easily than have Republicans, for whom the challenge is more fundamental.

Where Do You Fit?

One of the notable aspects of American ideology is that it often shows generational effects (see Figure 1.6). Although we have to be careful when we say that a given generation begins definitively in a certain year (there is much overlap and evolution between generations), it can be helpful to look for patterns in where people stand in order to understand political trends. We know, for instance, that older white Americans tend to be more ideologically conservative, and because they are reliable voters, they get a lot of media attention. But with researchers gathering public opinion data on younger voters, and with those voters promising to turn out on issues they care about, it's a good idea to look at where millennials and post-millennials fall in Figure 1.6.

Keep in mind that all we can do is talk about generalities here—obviously there will be many, many exceptions to the rule, and you may very well be one of them. But as a group, younger voters, especially the *youngest* voters, tend to be economically and socially liberal—that is, they fall in the left-hand side of Figure 1.6.

FIGURE 1.6 ■ Political Ideology, by Generation



Source: 2018 Cooperative Congressional Survey, calculated by authors.

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IN YOUR OWN WORDS

Describe values that most Americans share, and the political debates that drive partisan divisions in American politics.

HOW TO USE THE THEMES AND FEATURES IN THIS BOOK

Our primary goal in this book is to get you thinking critically about American politics—to introduce you to the twin tasks of analysis and evaluation with the aid of the themes of power and citizenship. **Critical thinking** means challenging the conclusions of others, asking why or why not, and exploring alternative information based on reason and evidence. Lasswell's definition of politics gives us a framework of **analysis** for this book; that is, it outlines how we will break down politics into its component parts in order to understand it. Lasswell's definition provides a strong analytic framework because it focuses our attention on questions we can ask to figure out what is going on in politics.

Accordingly, in this book, we analyze American politics in terms of three sets of questions:

- Who are the parties involved? What resources, powers, and rights do they bring to the struggle?
- What do they have at stake? What do they stand to win or lose? Is it power, influence, position, policy, or values?
- How do the rules shape the outcome? Where do the rules come from? What strategies or tactics do the political actors employ to use the rules to get what they want?

If you know who is involved in a political situation, what is at stake, and how (under what rules) the conflict over resources will eventually be resolved, you will have a pretty good grasp of what is going on, and you will probably be able to figure out new situations, even when your days of taking an American government course are far behind you. To get you in the habit of asking those questions, we have designed some features in this text explicitly to reinforce them.

Each chapter starting with Chapter 2 opens with a *What's at Stake . . . ?* feature that analyzes a political situation in terms of what various groups of citizens stand to win or lose. Each chapter ends with a *Let's Revisit: What's at Stake . . . ?* feature, in which we return to the issues raised in the opening, once you have the substantive material of the chapter under your belt. We reinforce the task of analysis by analyzing (that is, taking apart) different sources of information about politics. The trick to learning how to think critically is to do it. It helps to have a model to follow, however, and we provide one in *The Big Picture* in this chapter. *The Big Picture* infographics relate the book's themes to the big concepts, big processes, and big data that will help you make sense of American politics. *Snapshots of America* provide you with a lot more data to help you understand who the American people are, and they include *Behind the Numbers* boxes to help you dig into the question of what challenges our diversity poses for the task of governance.

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THE BIG PICTURE:
How to Think Critically

Follow the CLUES to Critical Thinking

START
Your Comfort Zone

CONSIDER THE SOURCE

ASK YOURSELF

- *Where does this information come from?*
- *Who is the author?*
- *Who are they talking to?*
- *How do the source and the audience shape the author's perspective?*

LAY OUT THE ARGUMENT

ASK YOURSELF

- *What argument is the author asking you to accept?*
- *If you accept the argument, what values are you also buying?*
- *Does the argument hold together logically?*

UNCOVER THE EVIDENCE

ASK YOURSELF

- *Did the author do research to back up the conclusions?*
- *Is there any evidence or data that is not provided that should be there?*
- *If there is no evidence provided, does there need to be?*

OCEAN OF EXCUSES

I read it on the Internet. It must be true.

My parents always watch this TV station. Of course it's reliable.

Arguments sound like conflict. I hate conflict.

Values are private. It's rude to pry.

Logic gives me hives!

Data mean numbers. Numbers freak me out.

BRIDGE to ENLIGHTENMENT

What, do I look like some kind of detective?

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Who cares? What do I need to know for the test?

SEA OF CONFUSION

There is no way to know what conclusions are right.

Ouch! Thinking is hard work. Wake me up when it's over.

How would I know?

These ideas make me really uncomfortable. They don't click with anything I think I know. Time for a beer!

I don't like this person's values. Why should I care about their conclusions?

ASK YOURSELF

- What difference does this argument make to your understanding of the political world?
- How does it affect who gets what and how they get it?
- Was getting this information valuable to you or did it waste your time?

SORT OUT THE POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE

ASK YOURSELF

- What's the punch line here?
- Did the author convince you that they are correct?
- Does accepting the conclusion to this argument require you to change any of your ideas about the world?

EVALUATE THE CONCLUSIONS

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As political scientists, however, not only do we want to understand how the system works, but we also want to assess *how well* it works. A second task of critical thinking is **evaluation**, or seeing how well something measures up according to a standard or principle. We could choose any number of standards by which to evaluate American politics, but the most relevant, in this political moment, are the preservation of the democratic system, freedom of speech, and the role of citizens.

We can draw on the two traditions of self-interested and public-interested citizenship we have discussed to evaluate the powers, opportunities, and challenges presented to American citizens by the system of government under which they live. In addition to the two competing threads of citizenship in America, we can also look at the kinds of action in which citizens engage and whether they take advantage of the options available to them. The United States has elements of the elite, pluralist, and participatory ideals of democracy we discussed earlier, and one way to evaluate citizenship in America is to look at what opportunities for participation exist and whether citizens take advantage of them.

To evaluate how democratic the United States is, chapters end with some discussion of the changing concept and practice of citizenship in this country with respect to the chapter's subject matter. Here we look at citizenship from many angles, considering the following types of questions: What role do "the people" have in American politics? How has that role expanded or diminished over time? What kinds of political participation do the rules of American politics (formal and informal) allow, encourage, or require citizens to take? What kinds of political participation are discouraged, limited, or forbidden? Do citizens take advantage of the opportunities for political action that the rules provide them? How do they react to the rules that limit their participation? How do citizens in different times exercise their rights and responsibilities? What do citizens need to do to keep the republic? and How democratic is the United States?

Each of these features is designed to help you to think critically about American politics, either by analyzing power in terms of who gets what, and how, or by evaluating citizenship to determine how well we are following Benjamin Franklin's mandate to keep the republic.

IN YOUR OWN WORDS

Discuss the essential reasons for approaching politics from a perspective of critical thinking, analysis, and evaluation.

WRAPPING IT UP

Let's Revisit: What's at Stake . . . ?

As we just explained, the chapters in this book will typically conclude with *Let's Revisit: What's at Stake . . . ?* features where we return to a power conundrum we introduced at the beginning and look at it in the light of what we learned in the chapter. This chapter,

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however didn't begin with *What's at Stake . . . ?* because we wanted to have a direct word with you about what we believe are the challenges and pitfalls of trying to be a responsible, data-driven, classical liberal defender of the concept of democratic governance. We argued in the introduction that taking a neutral, "both-sides" position on this topic—which, as textbook authors, we usually feel honor-bound to do on controversial issues—is not really an option for us today because there don't exist two good sides to the truth, to free inquiry, to science, to self-governance that still allows us the freedom to be good teachers and good democratic citizens.

We cannot say, "Oh, sure, the Enlightenment legacy—a worldview founded on fact-based empirical inquiry and a political system based on democratic process, limited government, and the freedom to challenge anything, even the value of that democratic process—has its strong points. But so does its opposite—a Russian-style authoritarian government run by oligarchs out to line their own pockets at their subjects' expense, who stay in power by eliminating a free media and freedom of speech and assembly." If we did that, we would be failing the obligations of that very worldview that has made human progress so possible since the 1600s.

Another way to look at it is, how can we depend on and enjoy the benefits of free speech and empirical inquiry if we refuse to defend those hallmarks of a democratic system when they are being challenged or undermined?

We don't propose censoring those who circulate disinformation under the guise of free speech or silencing those who argue that the democratic process should be restricted to certain people or that it is illegitimate, but we also won't both-sides the issue, either. If we whose life advantages and livelihoods have depended on the Enlightenment legacy of classical liberalism do not take a stand in favor of it, we will have again failed all the generations who come after us, just as surely as we have failed them by not addressing the climate crisis or the unmanageable cost of higher education.

REVIEW

A book called *Keeping the Republic* has an obvious, pro-republic bias. This book, like much of modern education, grows out of the free-thinking, free-speaking, empirically grounded, scientifically based, limited government, classical liberal tradition that began with the European Enlightenment, and from which both modern liberalism and modern conservatism have grown. Our bias means we don't treat every issue as if it has two equally good sides. Issues may have classically liberal, empirically verified, democratic sides, and classically illiberal, factually inaccurate, authoritarian sides. And from the standpoint of keeping the republic and reinforcing the values of education and free speech, we can't afford not to be clear about which is which.

What Is Politics?

Politics is the struggle for **power** and resources in society—who gets what, and how they get it—including control of information via the **media**. We can use the tools of politics to allocate scarce resources and to establish our favored vision of the **social order**.

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Government is an organization set up to exercise **authority**—power that citizens view as **legitimate**, or "right"—over a body of people. It is shaped by politics and helps provide the **rules**, **norms**, and **institutions** that in turn continue to shape the political process. Control of political information—that is, defining the **political narrative** or acting as a **gatekeeper**—is also a crucial form of power. We also need to be on guard for **disinformation**, which in the end can undermine people's faith in democracy and the electoral process.

Politics is different from **economics**, which is a system for distributing society's wealth. Economic systems vary in how much control government has over how that distribution takes place, ranging from a **socialist economy**, where government regulates the market but makes **substantive guarantees** of what it holds to be fair distributions of material resources, to a **capitalist economy**, where the free market reigns but government may provide **procedural guarantees** that the rules are fair. The most extreme form of capitalism, **laissez-faire capitalism**, gives the government no economic role at all except perhaps to provide the national security in which the market forces can play out.

Most real-world economies fall somewhere in between the idealized points of socialism and laissez-faire capitalism. **Mixed economies** are based on modified forms of capitalism, tempered by substantive values about how the market should work. In mixed economies, the fundamental economic decision makers are individuals rather than the government. **Democratic socialism** is a mixed economy that combines socialist ideals with a commitment to democracy and market capitalism, keeping socialism as its goal. **Social democracy** is a mixed economy that uses the democratic process to bend capitalism toward socialist goals. **Regulated capitalism**, like that seen in the United States, is also a hybrid system, where the government intervenes to protect rights. Unlike democratic socialism and social democracy, however, it does not often prioritize political and social goals—like reducing inequality or redressing power inequities—as much as it does economic health.

Political Systems and the Concept of Citizenship

Economic systems vary according to how much control government has over the economy; political systems vary in how much control government has over individuals' lives and the social order. They range from **totalitarian** governments, where an **authoritarian government** might make substantive decisions about how lives are to be lived and the social order arranged, to **anarchy**, where there is no control over those things at all. An authoritarian government might be a monarchy, a theocracy, a fascist government, or an oligarchy. An authoritarian state may also limit its own power, denying individuals rights in those spheres where it chooses to act, but leaving large areas of society, such as a capitalist economy, free from government interference. In this type of **authoritarian capitalism**, people have considerable economic freedom, but stringent social regulations limit their noneconomic behavior.

A less extreme form of nonauthoritarian government than anarchy is **democracy**, based on **popular sovereignty**, where individuals have considerable individual freedom and the social order provides fair processes rather than specified outcomes. Theories of democracy—**elite democracy**, **pluralist democracy**, and **participatory democracy**—vary in how much power they believe individuals do or should have, but all individuals who live under democratic

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systems are **citizens** because they have fundamental rights that government must protect. By contrast, **subjects** are obliged to submit to a government authority against which they have no rights. The idea that government exists to protect the rights of citizens originated with the idea of a **social contract** between rulers and ruled. The idea that people have individual rights over the power of the state is a hallmark of **classical liberalism**. Other economic-political systems include **advanced industrial democracy**, as well as **communist democracy**, a theoretical possibility with no real-world examples.

Democracy in America

The American government is a representative democracy called a **republic**. Two visions of citizenship exist in the United States: **self-interested citizenship** holds that individual participation in government should be limited, and that "too much" democracy may be dangerous; **public-interested citizenship** puts its faith in the citizen's ability to act virtuously for the common good. Modern communication and **hashtag activism** have enabled citizens, especially **digital natives**, to engage more efficiently with their government and each other, creating new venues for civic engagement and challenging traditional control of the political narrative. However, today's **mediated citizens** rely on self-tailored media streams that can back us into **information bubbles**.

Who Is a Citizen and Who Is Not?

Immigrants are citizens or subjects of another country who come to the United States to live and work. Legal immigrants may be eligible to apply for citizenship through the process of **naturalization**. Some people arrive here as **refugees** seeking asylum, or protection from persecution, subject to permission from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

What Do American Citizens Believe?

Americans share a **political culture**—common **values** and beliefs, or **normative** ideas about how life should be lived, that draw them together. The U.S. political culture emphasizes procedural guarantees and **individualism**, the idea that individuals know what is best for themselves. The core values of American culture are democracy, freedom, and equality, all defined through a procedural, individualistic lens.

Within the context of our shared political culture, Americans have divergent beliefs and opinions, called **ideologies**, about political and economic affairs. Generally these ideologies are referred to as **conservative** and **liberal**, but we can be more specific. Depending on their views about the role of government in the economy and in establishing the social order, most Americans can be defined as one of the following: **economic liberals**; **economic conservatives**, including **libertarians**; **social liberals** or **progressives**; or **social conservatives**. Social conservatives may accuse liberals of **political correctness** and may believe themselves to be discriminated against for refusing to be "politically correct" in their speech about social issues involving race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Others may support **authoritarian populism**, a movement whose underlying values are not democratic. In a two-party political system like ours, it can be hard for either party to maintain the support of a majority when ideologies are so diverse.

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How to Use the Themes and Features in This Book

The goal of this book is to teach **critical thinking** about American politics using the tools of **analysis** and **evaluation**. We will analyze how American politics works through the framework of our definition of politics—who gets power and resources, and how they get them. We will evaluate how well American politics works by focusing on the opportunities and challenges of citizenship.

KEY TERMS

advanced industrial democracy (p. 51)
analysis (p. 47)
anarchy (p. 22)
authoritarian capitalism (p. 21)
authoritarian governments (p. 21)
authoritarian populism (p. 45)
authority (p. 12)
capitalist economy (p. 17)
citizens (p. 24)
classical liberalism (p. 25)
communist democracy (p. 23)
conservatives (p. 38)
critical thinking (p. 47)
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digital native (p. 26)
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economic conservatives (p. 39)
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