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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.

1

POWER AND CITIZENSHIP IN AMERICAN POLITICS

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 we are writing about American politics at the beginning of the second administration of Donald Trump. Trump presents some unique challenges for the way political scientists do their job and a couple of those challenges will impact you because they influence the way we write this book.

In the interests of transparency and academic integrity we want to clear the air about what that means before we dive into the nuts and bolts of how our government works.

Trump poses a challenge for political scientists because he is not like any of the other 45 people who have served as president of the United States. Most of the ways he is different don't really matter to us. Trump is colorful. He loves the spotlight and takes up a lot of the available oxygen in the political media world. He's rich and he flaunts it. He boasts about himself *a lot*: how great he is, how smart, how successful. He's abrasive and bullying to people he dislikes; he's bafflingly obsequious and fawning to people he admires.

None of that is exactly "normal," but it's not illegal or disqualifying either. His defiance of the norms is exactly why some people love him. But all the flashy flamboyance of the president is irrelevant to political scientists, except that it serves as a distraction from what really matters to us—how Trump operates within the constitutional framework of American politics. And here Trump's "idiosyncrasies" begin to matter. Because behind all the color and drama and outrage and adoration is a central fact about how Donald Trump did the job of president the first time and how he promises to do it a second: Donald Trump doesn't like to be bound by rules, even the ones written in the Constitution.

And for political scientists, the rules are everything.

Trump's disinclination to see the rules of American politics as constraining his actions makes it hard for us to write this textbook in two ways. First, his refusal to acknowledge and follow the rules of American politics challenges our ability to explain to you how politics works and, second, it also makes it impossible for us to present politics to you without making value judgments about the impact of the president's actions. This runs deeply counter to the way we have been taught to do our work and we are intensely uncomfortable with the role we find it necessary to take (hence this explanatory introduction). It is interesting that in grappling with the norm-busting behavior of Trump, we have had to break some norms of our own.

THE NON-NEGOTIABLE ROLE OF RULES

American politics, like any political system but, most explicitly, like any democratic, constitutional system, runs on rules. The core definition of this book, as you will soon learn, is a classic: *politics is who gets what and how they get it*. In that famous description of politics, the "who" are the citizens, the "what" is power and influence, and the "how" is the bundle of rules and norms that structure the struggle over power and influence and, ultimately, that help determine who will win and who will lose. It's a pretty simple and powerful formulation and it will take you far in your quest to understand most political situations.

In political science, another name for rules is "laws." Understanding laws—how they are crafted, executed, enforced and how they impact people's lives—is central to what we do. In the democratic systems we study, the defining principle is called *the rule of law*, the idea that we are governed by laws, not men and women, and that no person is ever above the law. *Commitment to the rule of law—instead of rule by an individual—is the signature political invention that led us from the darkness of the Middle Ages to the brilliant light of the modern world*. It is what distinguishes democracies from dictatorships, and it is what keeps us free as human beings.

That period of European history after the Middle Ages is called "the Age of Enlightenment" and among the other things the Enlightenment is known for—the beginnings of science and technology, industry and capitalism—is the political philosophy known as **classical liberalism**. Until very recently, as we will see in Chapter 2, both liberals and conservatives in American politics shared the core values of a classical liberal view of the world. (Classical liberalism really needs a different name because the word "liberalism" there is confusing.) Chief among those values is the commitment to the rule of law we just mentioned, and all the political ideals that it makes possible: equality before the law, individual rights, limited government, separation of powers, checks and balances, individualism and capitalism. It is the core principle behind the U.S. Constitution.

The commitment to the rule of law has enabled the advances and prosperity of modern life. The promise of classical liberalism is that it provides a framework within which progress—and the solving of problems—is possible. That’s because while classical liberalism rejects the socialist vision that there is a public good that is greater than the well-being of individuals, it also rejects the idea that the well-being of any one of those individuals is greater than that of any other. We are all equal before the law.

Do you see where we are going with this? Donald Trump accepts the idea that no individual is above the law the way oil accepts vinegar. If you know anything about him at all, you know that Trump is a free-wheeling guy who likes to operate without constraint. No matter how you feel about him, you know he likes to do whatever he wants to do, whenever he wants to do it, and he really doesn’t like being told “no.”

If you think about it, though, the whole point of rules and laws is to tell people “no.” No, don’t run the traffic light; no, don’t steal the money; no, don’t limit people’s freedom of speech; no, don’t betray the public trust; just to name a random few of the “no’s” that shape our collective lives. The First Amendment to the Constitution imposes a big “no” on the U.S. Congress about establishing a religion or prohibiting free speech or abridging freedom of the press, and it’s pretty much all “no’s” through the rest of the Bill of Rights.

Donald Trump is okay with rules that constrain other people’s behavior, but he chafes under rules that apply to him. There is a reason why, when he left office in 2021, he faced a barrage of lawsuits and criminal indictments at the state and federal level, and that reason was not that his political enemies wanted to go after him. It’s because he broke or ignored multiple laws he didn’t want to follow or that he decided didn’t apply to him, and some of the consequences caught up with him.

If you admire Trump, that may very well be the reason why—there is something exciting, even validating about the idea of a guy who can go through life knocking impediments out of his way. Especially if we are feeling disempowered in our own lives, seeing someone tell “the man”—in fact *all* the men

and women public servants we don’t trust—to go to hell, that they are “fired,” might be deeply satisfying. Trump is president the way he runs his business—if something he wants is outside institutional constraints and legal norms, he does it anyway and essentially dares anyone to stop him.

Of course, if you dislike Trump, it’s likely for the very same reason. One person’s swashbuckling hero is another’s lawbreaking menace. Trump’s insistence on being above any law he doesn’t like is galling to those who think he already benefits from many privileges denied to the average American. They are infuriated by his insistence that he is the victim of unfair laws when they think he has already been the beneficiary of special treatment most Americans can’t benefit from.

From a political scientist’s point of view, whether we admire or dislike Trump is beside the point—Donald Trump’s rejection of the rule of law is what matters. It means the rejection of the central value of classical liberalism and threatens the whole package of values supporting the U.S. Constitution. If you respect what the rule of law has made possible and if you think that the laws, not the actions of an individual avenger, are the key to citizen empowerment, then he not only cannot make America great, but he’s also likely to bring the whole enterprise of self-government down on our heads. This presents us with two challenges—how to talk about the rule of law when our chief executive doesn’t think it applies to him, and how do we maintain our objectivity in the face of such unprecedented disregard for the foundations of our system?

CHALLENGE # 1—HOW TO TALK ABOUT THE RULE OF LAW AND THE RULE BREAKER IN CHIEF

So, for all political scientists, but especially, perhaps, for those of us writing books about how American politics works, the first challenge is this: How do we tell the story of Trump’s presidency? Do we explain the rules and norms (the unwritten principles that underlie the rules and laws that make our system work) of the executive branch as the founders

planned it and as 45 presidents not named Trump have engaged with it? And then do we treat his version of the presidency as a blip, after which things will go back to “normal?” Or do we assume that if he can blow through the rules and norms, so will all the presidents who follow him, and that we should write about American politics as if the founders’ shrewd political experiment has finally failed? Do we focus on the rules as they always have been, treat the way they are twisted and manipulated by Trump as just a “Trump-thing”, or assume that he is changing the rules in significant ways for future presidents as well? Without making any value judgments about it—how do we just describe it in factual terms?

Different textbook writers choose different ways of responding to the challenge. We have tried treating him as a blip or an anomaly, the exception that proves the rule of the founder’s genius, but that is not very satisfying, and it became less so when he was elected a second time. Do blips come back? And even if Trump *is* a blip and things go back more or less to normal after he leaves office again, that only means “normal” for those of us old enough to have seen a lot of different presidents who mostly obey the law. Most of you students reading this book, however, have grown up in Trump’s America. He is your normal. Treating him as a blip fundamentally ignores your experience of what politics is like. Why would you ever believe or trust in what we might call “normal?”

Another problem with the blip strategy is that no president can be truly just a blip. Even if the next president who follows Trump comes at the job from a totally different perspective, the politics of the day—the relationship of the executive with other branches of government, the degree to which the media holds officeholders accountable, and the citizens’ understanding of their own role and their expectations of what their leaders owe them—have been shaped by what came before. Some of the problems Joe Biden faced as president, for instance, came from assuming that he could bring the country “back to normal” by sheer force of doing things like they had been done before without recognizing that some—not all, but some of those things had changed

during the first Trump administration and were never going back.

A very minor example of changes Trump has made. It used to be unthinkable that a candidate would not show up for a presidential or primary debate. Or not reveal their tax returns. Or not share their medical records. Trump has made refusing to do all that normal. Will any candidate ever do it again? How do we explain the process of running for president? What about the norm that the president should not lie to the public? A more serious example: it used to be that getting caught in a lie was a grave threat to a person’s political career. That didn’t mean that politicians never made stuff up or embellished their resumes or refused to take responsibility for something they did, but there used to be a cost attached, and so they tried not to lie. And if they lied, they tried not to get caught. Trump hasn’t felt those scruples and since his supporters don’t seem to much care if he lies—that is, they don’t exact any political price—the media doesn’t dwell on it either. Will all future presidents be brazen liars? Or does Trump get away with what others might not?

Treating the Trump presidency as a blip or ignoring the impact of the significant difference in the way he wields power is not satisfactory. Ignoring almost 250 years of American history to focus primarily on the Trump show isn’t either. Sounding an alarm and declaring that Trump spells the beginning of the end of the long American experiment of self-government is to jump to a conclusion that overlooks the myriad checks and balances that remain in place, even for a president who hates being checked or balanced.

Simply put, deciding how to explain and teach American politics as a story about the rules when you have a president who delights in breaking them is one challenge Trump presents to political scientists. The office of the presidency we discuss in the 12th edition of this textbook is very different from the office we described in earlier versions. The Constitution hasn’t been amended but how it works seems to have changed under the force of one man’s will and actions. We just don’t know what the long run-impact of that will be.

CHALLENGE # 2—THE MEANING OF OBJECTIVITY WHEN WE HOLD AN EXISTENTIAL STAKE IN HOW THIS TURNS OUT

The other way Trump's presidency challenges the way we do our job as textbook authors is: how to stay politically neutral and refuse to take sides in the partisan battle of American politics—an imperative of the job of teaching—while still calling out Trump's lawless behavior and noting that his party has been largely complicit in enabling him.

Objectivity is big in academia. Stereotypes of “woke” university administrators and “radical” profs aside, almost all of us believe that professors should teach their students the facts of their subject matter, and *how* to think critically about those facts. We should teach you how to ask tough questions about American politics and gather the data necessary to answer them. Professional ethics tell us it is not our job to tell you *what* to think. Reaching your own conclusions is your responsibility and, frankly, it is your right. Academic freedom—the idea that no one should stop us from pursuing knowledge where it takes us—is not just for professors, it protects students too.

That means it would be a gross dereliction of our obligation as your professors or your textbook authors to teach you *what* to think politically. We shouldn't try to persuade you to be Democrats or Republicans. That we remain neutral on questions of partisanship is important not just because it protects your academic freedom, but because you need to be able to trust us to give you unbiased information without wondering if we have a partisan motive. It's good intellectual hygiene as well as pedagogical hygiene for us to do our best to be objective about these issues.

But while it's our job to be objective about partisan values, part of what you come to college for is to learn the values that undergird our system of education, that support free inquiry and critical thinking and reaching independent conclusions. Shared values of academic freedom, reliance on the scientific method, and having the intellectual courage to subject our conclusions to the scrutiny of our critics

all make the acquisition of knowledge possible and enable us all to engage in the “give and take” that is higher education. Our job isn't to turn you into Democrats and Republicans but in a real sense it *is* to turn you into classical liberals. That is the training you come to us for—to learn the values that will make you successful scholars, successful democratic citizens, successful human beings.

Being a classical liberal used to be nonpartisan. But now that one party seems to be veering away from its classical liberal roots in order to engage in culture wars that involve taking positions contrary to scientific understanding, and in order to support a president who refutes the rule of law as it applies to him, it takes on partisan overtones. It may look like we are taking sides with the Democrats but that's only because they are the party that has stuck with the classical liberal paradigm—the reliance on procedural values (which we discuss later in this chapter), the emphasis on individual freedom, and the refusal to put particular interests over the rules that make the system fair or everyone. Many, many Republicans have left their party recently for precisely that reason and the two parties seem to be realigning around commitment to the rule of law and procedural democracy as much they were along the old fault lines of political regulation of the economy. Conservative academics, who used to proudly cast votes for Republicans, are in a particular bind because of the tension between the classical liberal values of their training and the partisan identity they still value. Almost all academics are pro-truth, pro-science, pro-classical liberalism, and, incidentally, pro-democracy. Those are the values that make possible the world of education.

Those same values support another profession, journalism, whose practitioners share similar angst about their changing role in Trump's America. The plight of journalists has instructive lessons for those of us in education. Just as in academia, objectivity is the gold standard of good journalism, which makes perfect sense in a world where we are all committed to classical liberal values. It runs into trouble when it must report on a world where those values are rejected. Journalists want to be seen as fair in a culture where “fair” is interpreted as not taking sides.

But what should journalists do when the phenomenon they are reporting on is *not* engaged in by both sides. What does “fair” look like in that case? This is a glimmer of the challenge we academics face as well.

This professional emphasis on objectivity, or neutrality, in the mainstream media, the confusion about what true “fairness” entails, often pushes those in the mainstream media to engage in 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, they will immediately reach for an example in the other party to maintain “balance,” so that no one will think they are picking on one side or favoring the other.

This practice is fine and even admirable if both sides are equally guilty. It is *not* fine if only one side has committed a crime, or said something offensive 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 empirically, or factually accurate. It just fulfills an ingrained sense that fairness demands treating everyone the same, which in the case of being critical of someone, means being critical of everyone.

The same things that tempt a journalist to “both-sides” their reporting are at work on academics as well. No professor wants to fulfill the stereotype of the liberal college professor when we work very hard to keep our political preferences out of our professional judgments in the classroom. But both-sidesism seems like a cowardly way out when so much is at stake.

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, 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 there is empirical, real-world evidence that one side is wrong or they are misleading their audience.

A rainy day may be trivial, but consider if one side says, “Science finds that mandatory vaccine programs prevent severe cases of COVID-19 and saves lives,” and the other counters with “We don’t believe those findings.” If we treat the two sides as though both are reasonable, without providing context about why science is more reliable than personal feelings, that just confuses the issue and leads people to think that the scientific finding is one of two competing but equally valid beliefs rather than the product of an empirical discipline that can be tested and judged as true or false. *Truth and falsity 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 is willing in theory to entertain the possibility that its results are incomplete or can be improved. If people come in with dry shoes and no umbrella, or other plausible, verifiable evidence that the rain has stopped, the scientist is going to look out the window again. Scientists believe what their eyes tell them.

Open-mindedness makes science more reliable to those who understand the scientific method, but those who seek to profit by claiming that science is a scam can exploit what looks like a vulnerability. Hence we have vaccine deniers, climate deniers, election deniers, along with a host of other political claimants and conspiracy theorists who prosper by offering “proof” of narratives that deny empirical truths. Many of these fake “controversies” are the flashpoints of today’s culture wars. There is money and power in keeping people stirred up, angry, fearful and resentful and it’s easy to do that if you can convince them that the institutions they should trust are lying to them.

Journalists and academics have a critical role to play here in promoting the truth. Those who engage in both-sidesism don’t just betray their audiences, they betray the values that give their work meaning. Their very jobs depend on the idea that there is

truth and there is falsity. When the distinction is lost, disinformation travels as freely as the real thing. No surprise that disinformation entrepreneurs are seizing on this moment to sow ever more fanciful narratives and that a frustrated public chooses its media sources by what feels good rather than what tells them the sometimes uncomfortable or unpalatable truths that they need to know to navigate the world.

Being honest about scientific matters even when it means calling out one side for promoting lies is not the only obligation that the fraying consensus on classical liberal values places on academics (and journalists) in the Trump years. Science is not the only liberal process that lives by surviving external scrutiny and criticism, and which academics are bound to support by the values of their profession. Democracy is another such process, and its future is also at stake in this perilous moment.

Political scientists don't have social rules as clear cut and easily verified as the Law of Gravity is in physics, but we know that for democracies to exist, certain conditions have to be met. Without those conditions, democracies die. Because it is clear that democratic governance and all the values that go along with it have been a positive thing for humankind, allowing people *on the whole* to live longer, better, richer, healthier, more satisfying lives, the prospect of losing that is a scary one indeed. One of the main conditions that political scientists, historians, philosophers, and economists have determined can cause democracies to topple into autocracies, or authoritarian governments, is a loss of commitment to the rule of law, precisely what we see in Donald Trump's refusal to play by the rules.

It is not that political scientists are out to get Donald Trump or his Republican supporters, or want to put their thumb on the scale for the Democratic Party. They might dislike him, but they might equally be people who would like to vote for him. And many political scientists are long-term conservative Republicans. But Democrat, Republican or whatever, most academics recognize that Trump's rejection of classical liberal values means that he is a threat to American democracy

and here our temptation to both-sides things is particularly dangerous.

Why does it matter? Here's the thing. Democracy, classical liberalism, the whole paradigm of modern thought that was born in the Age of Reason is the only belief system that invites its critics right into the living room, to kick off their shoes and tell them what they think they are doing wrong. 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 loudly and clearly.

Our classical values say we have to entertain any one's criticism of the system that makes our world possible—free speech and academic freedom are as fundamental to that world as values can be—but if we tolerate the attacks without even piping up in its defense, then we are betraying our world in a very real way.

Science invites criticism, but science is not a belief system. It's an empirical way of understanding the world and its claims can be tested by subjecting them to empirical analysis—putting them to the test against evidence in the real world. Democracy isn't an empirical theory, it is a normative concept. It's not validated by testing; it is promoted by the attractiveness of its values and the best cases that its supporters can make for it. But that means supporters *must* make the case, defending it even as they turn the light of critical thinking on it, asking hard questions about its own viability, about equity and freedom and atrocities committed on its watch. It provides a climate in which its critics can tear it apart, and that is a good thing, as long as the strengths of democracy get to have their defenders too. If those defenders have to be "objective," in the "not taking sides" sense, then classical liberal values, on which so much depends, will have people tearing it down but no one touting its successes and building it up.

What does any of this have to do with the price of beans and Donald Trump, you wonder? Concerning Trump in his capacity as a Republican leader, a U.S. president and a partisan actor, we are agnostic. We have no partisan bone to pick with anyone. But in his capacity as norm breaker, challenger of the rule of law, and science skeptic we

can't default to a both-sides version of fair treatment. Others with commitments to objectivity—ex-military officials and others who served in Trump's first administration grappled with the same issues, and they decided their obligation to truth-telling and democracy merited the risk that their honest assessment of Trump would be seen as unfair.

Many of the people who worked for Trump 1.0 have since disavowed him and left his circle, some vigorously calling him out for his refusal to respect the law. He's a "fascist to the core," says retired four-star General Mark Milley, the man that Trump himself appointed to be the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the nation's highest ranking military officer, who advises the president and the members of his cabinet on military affairs.¹ One of his former chiefs of staff, John Kelly, another former four-star general himself, said "So he certainly falls into the general definition of fascist, for sure."² An alarming number of people who knew Trump the best during the first administration have almost all repudiated him in some version of this kind of language: "he doesn't recognize any limits on his power." The second time around they warn, he'll be careful to surround himself with people who won't apply the brakes.

Other theories about Trump's presidency hold that the people worried about Trump turning the United States into an authoritarian playground for billionaire "tech bros" or Christian nationalists are overreacting, taking every possible thing Trump says literally when he only means a few of them. He is "just being Donald Trump," an iconoclastic leader making his base happy by feeding their fantasies of political revenge and mayhem. He's a performer as much as a politician.

Perhaps. Still, only one side is doing what he is doing and our obligation to "objectivity as truth" means we need to be clear about the stakes and the accountability. Writing about Donald Trump is a challenge, one we have to meet seriously and wisely. In the course of this book we will work to tell the story of this president, not as a blip or a destroyer, but as a participant in a new stage in American history, one in which we are unapologetically rooting

for democracy to survive, stronger than ever. Perhaps Trump will even prove to be a democratic blessing, teaching us where the political, constitutional, and cultural weak spots are that we need to shore up. (We've already noted one, in the widespread practice of both-sidesing.) We will bring the same approach to assessing conflicts over science and civil liberties, democracy and the rule of law—a clear-sighted recognition that academic roles change with circumstance, but that all of us in the truth-telling business, grateful for the Enlightenment culture that makes our work possible, also have an obligation to defend it lest we find our world suspended in air, resting on mere memories of a remarkable value system that gave human beings more freedom than even the founders anticipated.

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: ***In Your Own Words 1.1*** Explain the
: importance of the democratic process, and identify
: the challenges to our democracy today.
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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 (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, or **political narratives**, about who should hold power and how they should wield it that are accepted by large swathes of the population has a huge advantage. Remember these four concepts—politics, power, media, and narratives—we will return to them over and over throughout this book.

POLITICS AND THE SOCIAL ORDER

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 the 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. 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 and does 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 think they will win if they follow the rules, 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.

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 how 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 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.

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

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. 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 fairytales.

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 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



Marty Bucella, Cartoon Stock

someone has done to get and maintain power—were the prerogative of authoritative sources like priests, kings, and their agents. In many parts of the world, it still is.

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*. Stop and think for a moment about what that means for the ways most people would be able to live their lives.

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 most 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 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 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.

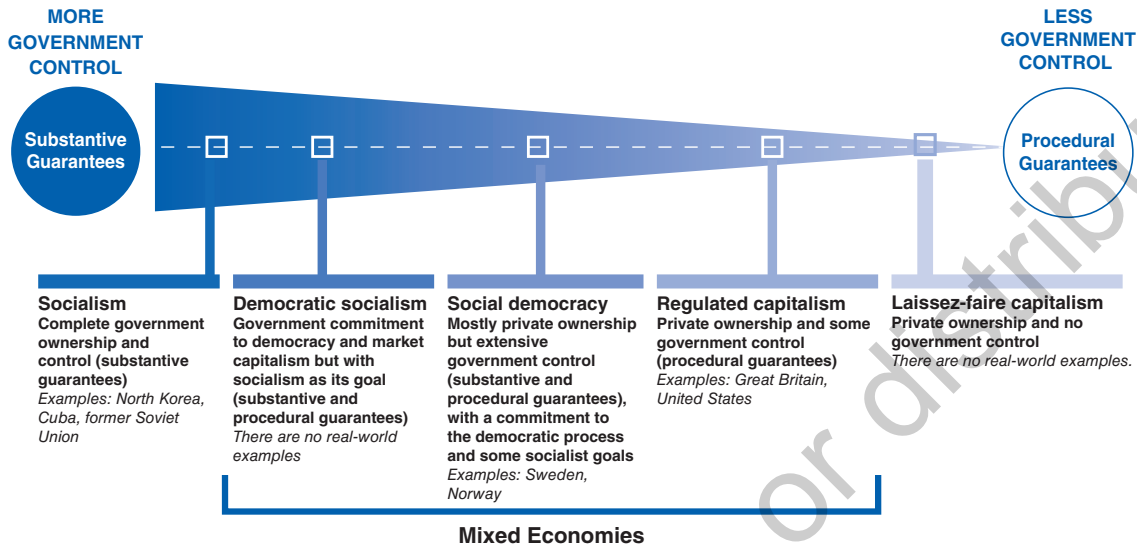
Socialism. In a **socialist economy** like that of the former Soviet Union, economic decisions are made not by individuals through the market but rather by politicians, based on their judgment of what society needs. In these systems the state often owns the factories, land, and other resources necessary 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

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.

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 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 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 slow-down 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 1.2 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

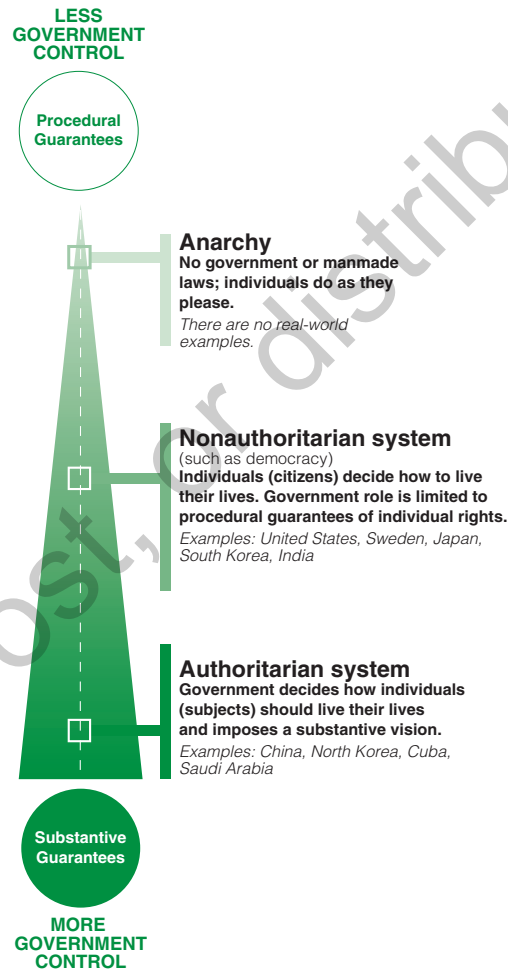
Competing ideas about power and social order, different models of governing

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 overlay 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

FIGURE 1.2

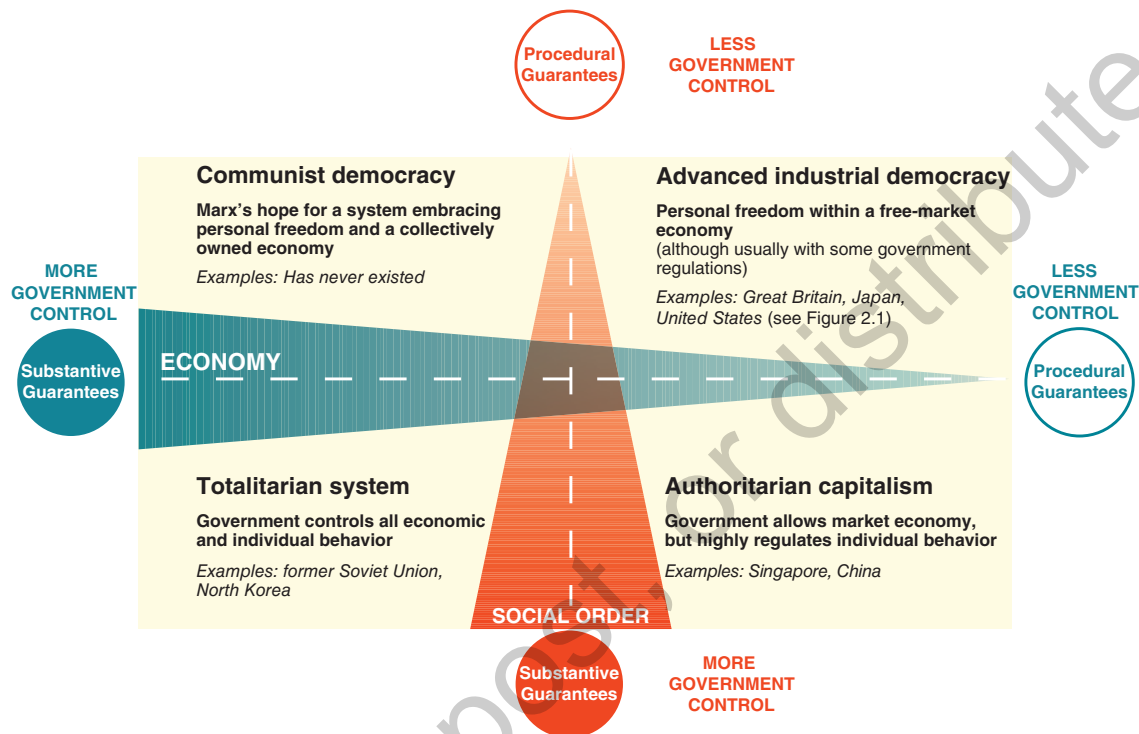
A Comparison of Political Systems



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 individual behavior—for example, to prohibit murder, rape, and theft. But beyond such basic regulation, they differ radically on who gets to determine 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.

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 most measures, for instance, but because of its commitment to substantive economic values, it would be located much closer to the vertical axis.

two-dimensional figure, but we can get a better idea of the similarities and differences by looking at them this way.

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 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 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 an **advanced industrial democracy** combines 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 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 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, as we said in the chapter opener, emphasized science and rational thought, government limited by the rule of law, 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 1.3 Compare how power is distributed between citizens and government in different economic and political systems.

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 **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.

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

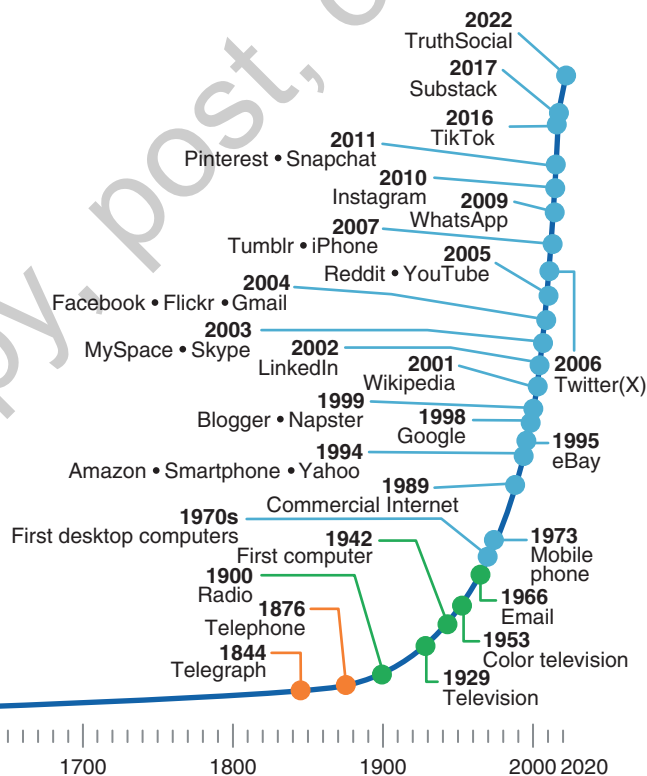
online, we are urged to buy certain products that an algorithm thinks we will like or that people like us have purchased. When we travel, certain flights and hotels are flagged, and when we use social media, certain posts appear while others don't. Most of us don't check very hard to ensure that the 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 those by which we are impacted. 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 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

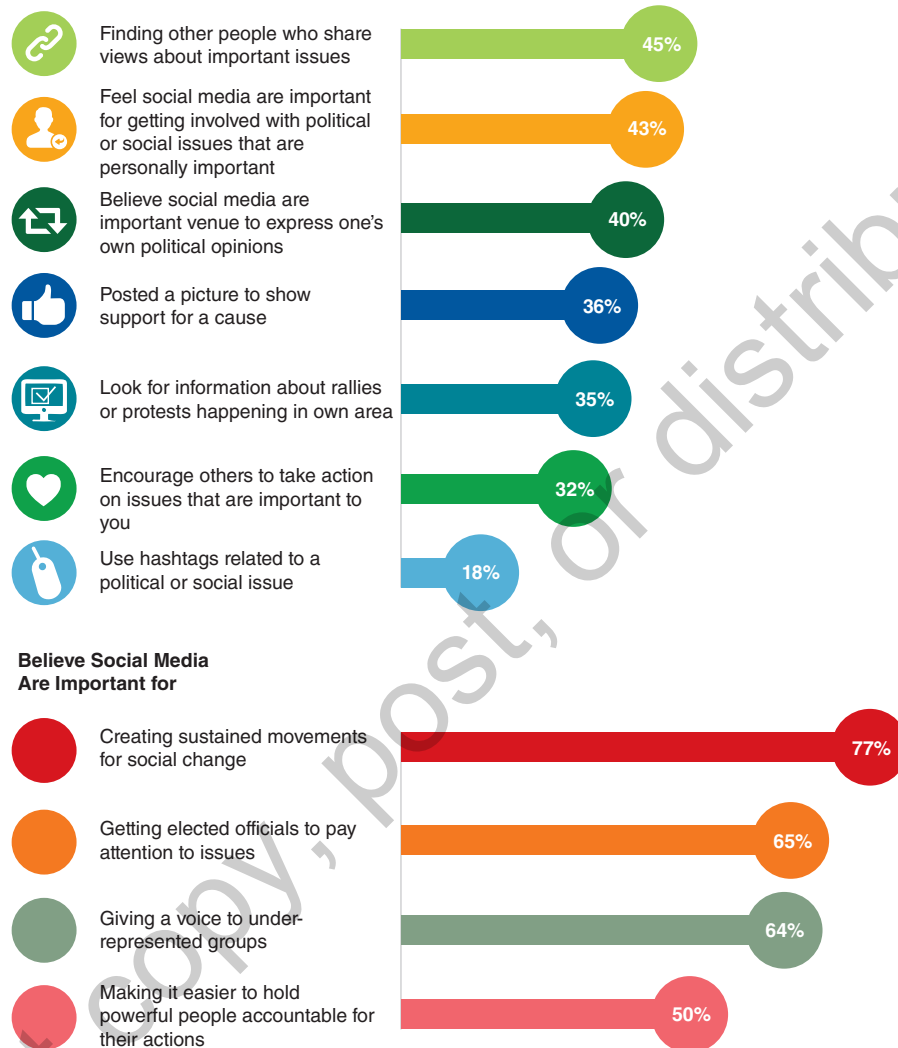
FIGURE 1.4

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.

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?

Sources: Brooke Auxier, "Activism on Social Media Varies by Race and Ethnicity, Age, Political Party," Pew Research Center, July 13, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/07/13/activism-on-social-media-varies-by-race-and-ethnicity-age-political-party/>; and Brooke Auxier and Colleen McClain, "Americans Think Social Media Can Help Build Movements, but Can Also Be a Distraction," Pew Research Center, September 9, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/09/09/americans-think-social-media-can-help-build-movements-but-can-also-be-a-distraction/>.

mediated world we live in gives us myriad new ways to keep the republic 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. 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 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.

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 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 is 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.

In Your Own Words 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.

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.

CITIZENSHIP AND NATURALIZATION

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**.

NONIMMIGRANTS

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 **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



Seeking the American Dream

Anna Schiaccittano arriving at Ellis Island from Sicily in 1908 with her children Paolo, Mary, and infant Domenico, intending to join Anna’s husband, Giovanni Gustozzo, in Scranton, Pennsylvania. Stories similar to theirs fill the family trees of many Americans.

Universal History Archive/ Getty Images

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 tried to do what he could 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 in search of a better life. However, even before the 2016 election of President Trump, with his harsh anti-immigrant rhetoric, levels of undocumented immigration had actually fallen off, although this fact does not fit well with one of the prevailing narratives that says the country is being overrun by unsavory people crossing the border illegally.⁹ 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, but the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that it is illegal to discriminate against immigrants in the United States.¹⁰ 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)¹¹ 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.

U.S. IMMIGRATION POLICY

Immigration law is generally made by Congress with the approval of the president. In the wake of September 11, 2001, security issues came to play a central role in deciding who may enter the country, and new legislation took the federal agency tasked with implementing immigration law out of the Department of Justice, where it was located at the time. As noted above, the new agency, the USCIS, was placed under the jurisdiction of the newly formed Department of Homeland Security. But still, it is Congress' job to make the laws, and the executive department's job to enforce them. One side can't really act very effectively without the other.

In Your Own Words 1.5 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.”

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



Scenes from the Culture Wars, Take 1

This photo and the one right after come straight from the front lines of America's culture wars and show people with very different stories to tell. The people here are telling a story that prizes diversity, nonconformity, and an individual's right to author their own narrative. For them, there is no one single way that all people should live their lives, and the American Dream is the freedom to live their lives as they want and not as others dictate. How do the people who see the world defined by this narrative live peacefully with the people who see the world defined in the next photo?

Daniel Knighton/ Getty Images

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, 2020, and 2024 presidential 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



Scenes from the Culture Wars, Take 2

This photo like the one before, comes straight from the front lines of America's culture wars and shows people with very different stories to tell. The people in this photo are telling a story focused on the belief that there is one right way to live one's life, raise one's children, and organize society. If there is a correct way to live — a way that almost always focuses on a religious narrative — then any ways of life that deviate from that way are, well, deviant. How do the people who see the world defined by this narrative, live peacefully with the people who see the world defined in the previous photo?

David McNew/ Getty Images

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.

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 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. This is one of the areas where American culture is weakening. Former President Trump's insistence—in the face of all the facts to the contrary—that he won elections he lost has played into a frustration among some groups of people that “majority rule” systems are rigged against them and that it is righteous to challenge the results or to ignore the procedures.

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 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 believe—and say—that they 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 still, for the most part, 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 Sen. 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 many 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 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

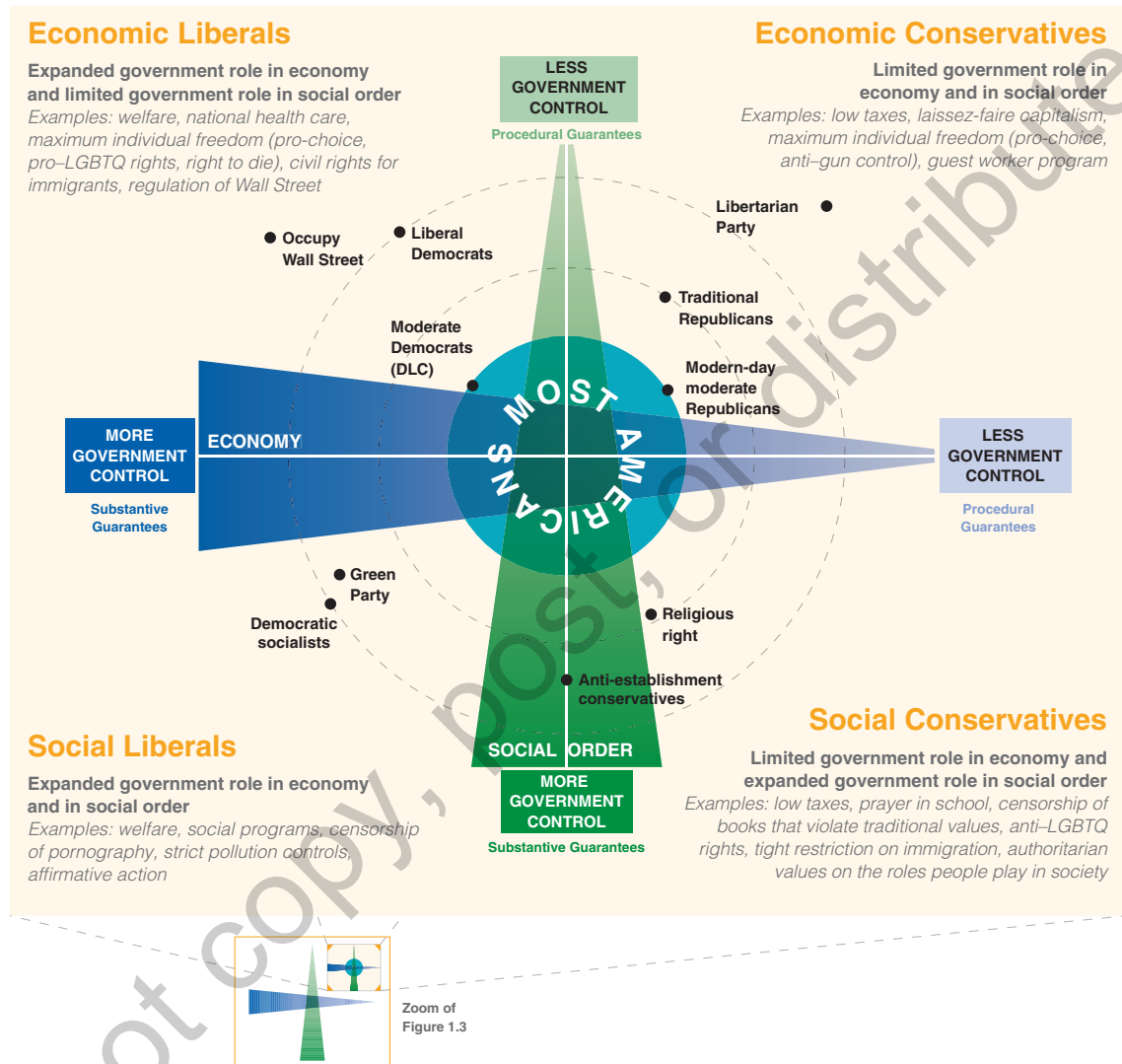
positions that are yielded by these two dimensions; note that this figure shows a detail of the broader political spectrum that we saw in Figure 1.3 and is focused on the narrower range commonly found in an advanced industrial democracy.

Economic Conservatives. Located in the upper-right quadrant of Figure 1.5, **economic conservatives** 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 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

FIGURE 1.5

Ideological Beliefs in the United States



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 “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. While **economic liberals** hold views that fall into the upper-left quadrant of Figure 1.5, indicating they are willing to allow government to make substantive decisions about the economy, they share their conservative counterparts' maximum procedural commitment to individual freedom in determining how to live their lives. 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 non-economic 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. They are committed to the idea that no one is above the law and that laws should apply to everyone equally.

Even though economic liberals embrace government action to further their goals, they, like economic conservatives, believe that good-loserism is fundamental to a functioning democracy, 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. Occupying the lower-right quadrant in our ideological scheme, **social conservatives** 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, restrictions on such family planning treatments as in vitro fertilization (IVF) and access to contraception, 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, the censorship of books, media, and art that isn't consistent with Christian values, and the insertion of religious considerations into public education. Social conservatives often endorse traditional patriarchal family roles (some Christian wedding services include the phrases like or similar to “[t]he husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church”) 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.”

Many social conservatives say that the argument made by many liberals that there is deep-seated and damaging racism against Black and Native peoples built into American political culture and the political system unfairly blames them for something (enslavement) that they had nothing to do with, and that they themselves are the ones being discriminated against for refusing to be politically correct and in some cases for being white and Christian. Since limited government is not prized by this group, a large and powerful state is valued if it is an agent of restoring American greatness (seen as the days in the middle of the past century when traditional values prevailed)—that is, it is valued if it achieves the correct substantive goals. Democracy is valued when it produces the results they like, but it is discredited and mocked when it doesn't. Since social conservatives believe they know the correct social order government should strive to attain, they really don't think voting for it is all that relevant. In this sense, as in several others, social conservatives are closer to authoritarians than the “small d democrats” of procedural political culture. Especially since 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 Trump had really won the 2020 presidential election and 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 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. In the lower left corner of Figure 1.5, **social liberals**, or **progressives** (although some economic liberals *also* refer to themselves as progressive), 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.

Because they can be very vocal, and because they are concentrated among younger Americans and in university settings where they get a lot of attention, this group can seem larger than it is. In reality, 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 of Figure 1.3 (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 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.

Rise of the Tea Party/Freedom Caucus on the Right.

In the summer of 2009, with the nation in economic crisis and the new Black 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.¹² 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 Trump, who was ready to step into it. 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.

Trump's Appeal to Anti-Establishment Conservatives. The escalating anger of social conservatives who felt inadequately represented by the Republican Party's mainstream was evident in the anti-establishment fury displayed in 2016 that resulted in the unexpected defeat of Democrat Hillary Clinton—a former First Lady, senator, and secretary of state who was an establishment figure if ever there was one. During that primary season, both Trump and Cruz competed 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 Obama, a president they viewed as illegitimate, in large part because of Trump's relentless challenge to the president's birth certificate. The rage of social conservatives moved them in the direction of a kind of **authoritarian populism** that was erupting around the world. Illustrated by the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, the rise of domestic populism in countries like Poland, Hungary, Turkey, and Israel, authoritarian populism is a right-wing uprising that looks democratic on its face, but it is not in support of democratic values. In fact, it is a rebuke to precisely the values of classical liberalism that supported so many of the democracies that fill up the

upper-right quadrant of Figure 1.3: limited government, procedural over substantive values, the rule of law, capitalism, and representative democracy (with the implied good-loserism that supports it). In fact, authoritarian populism looks a lot like the values of social conservatives as we describe them—and a rejection of the values of economic conservatives who used to define the beliefs of the Republican Party.

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.”¹³ 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.”¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

These values were on full display in the public rejection of “good loserism” we all saw in the nation's capital on January 6, 2021, the day that President Biden's victory over Trump was to be certified by Congress. For weeks Trump had been insisting that the election was stolen, encouraging various plots to have the votes decertified, and urging his supporters to come to D.C. on January 6 to “Stop the Steal,” promising, via tweet, “will be wild.” As the Congressional Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol later showed in detail, Trump was aware that he lost and was determined to stay in office despite the dozens of court cases that rejected his claims that Biden had somehow cheated him of his rightful election. His supporters bought the

unlikely story because he had been preparing them for it for weeks, telling them over and over that the only way he *could* lose was if the election were rigged, and because they wanted to believe it—it fit with the social conservative narrative that the rules were stacked against them, that there was a proper—even Godly—social order that they had to fight to keep. As Theda Skocpol, a Harvard sociologist, noted in an interview a couple of years later, “Stop the Steal” is a metaphor . . . for the country being taken away from the people who think they should rightfully be setting the tone. . . . Doug Mastriano [the Republican nominee for governor of Pennsylvania who lost in 2022] said it in so many words: ‘It’s a Christian country. That doesn’t mean we’ll throw out everybody else, but they’ve got to accept that we’re the ones setting the tone.’”¹⁶

The effect of the extensive trafficking in disinformation about the so-called “steal” has been, to undermine people’s faith in democracy and the electoral process. Trump never stopped claiming the election was stolen and eventually, many in his party agreed. The party, however, had undergone considerable change, with many of the economic conservatives and the still-procedural social conservatives refusing to support a convict who openly promised to abandon democratic governance on Day One of a second term. The “win at any cost” attitude is in character for Trump, as anyone who has followed his career can attest, but for the American public, it cuts at the procedural norms that are at the heart of our political culture. Not only does it weaken the political culture that holds American democracy together, but it also uses 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, prioritizing the appointment of judges sympathetic to their cause, 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.

The Democrats. The Democratic Party is not immune to pressure from an illiberal contingent who would swing the party in an anti-democratic direction, but so far they have done a better job than Republicans of containing it, being responsive to some of their policy demands but not putting adherents into positions of power in the party and policing any movement in an authoritarian direction. The majority of the party is ideologically moderate, and candidates who profess progressive views cannot count on replacing their less radical colleagues. As some economic conservatives have exited the Republican Party, they are voting with Democrats, trying to anchor the party in the middle of the spectrum, giving moderates in the party more weight but potentially angering progressives.

There have been major splits in the Democratic coalition in the past. 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 out of alignment with the position taken by most Americans.

Hillary Clinton and 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 Sanders, Clinton, and Biden, in turn, moved to adopt more substantive economic positions, but they still stayed primarily as moderate, center left Democrats.

The Democrats’ current intraparty disputes have been relatively minor, as shown by the quick resolution to the 2020 Democratic Party nomination

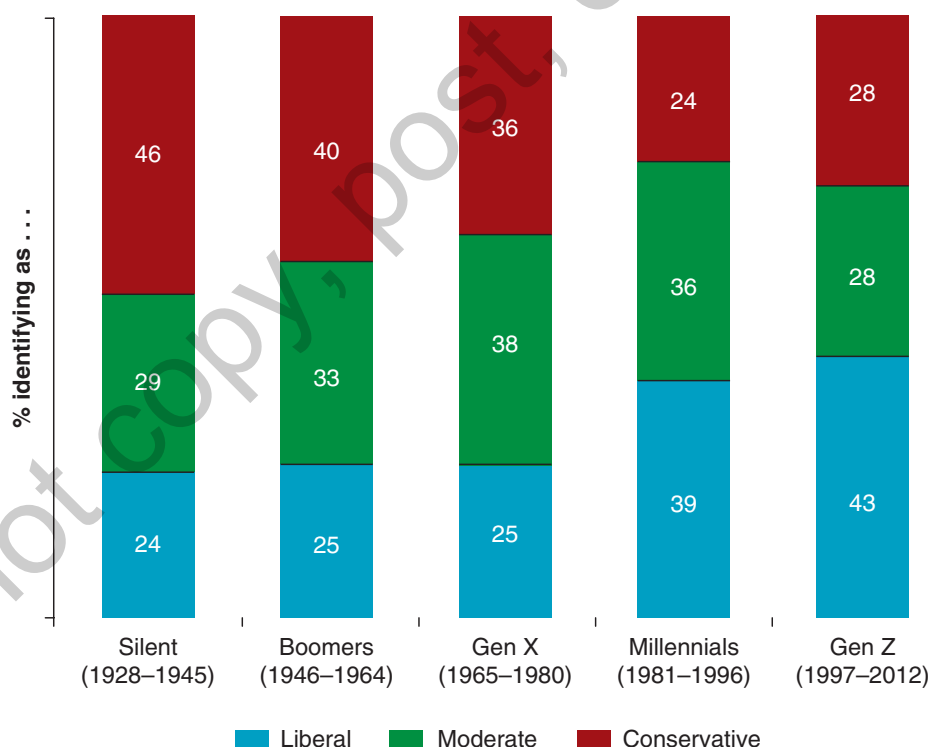
and the even quicker acclamation by Democrats for Vice President Kamala Harris to become the Democratic presidential nominee when President Biden dropped his reelection bid just 107 days before the 2024 election. The Democrats have generally been able to manage the ideological dissension in their ranks more easily than have Republicans, for whom the challenge is more fundamental. But President Biden 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, and he faced a greater threat toward the end of his term when many Americans criticized as brutal and disproportionate Israel's response to the massacre and capture of their citizens by the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas.

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.

FIGURE 1.6

Political Ideology, by Generation



Source: "A Political and Cultural Glimpse Into America's Future: Generation Z's Views on Generational Change and the Challenges and Opportunities Ahead," PRRI, January 22, 2024, <https://www.prri.org/research/generation-zs-views-on-generational-change-and-the-challenges-and-opportunities-ahead-a-political-and-cultural-glimpse-into-americas-future/>.

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?

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

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

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?

*Arguments sound
like conflict.
I hate conflict.*

**OCEAN OF
EXCUSES**

*Values are private.
It's rude to pry.*

*Logic gives
me hives!*

*Data mean numbers.
Numbers freak me out.*

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?

BRIDGE to ENLIGHTENMENT

*What, do I look like some
kind of detective?*

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



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 the spectrum in Figure 1.5.

In Your Own Words 1.6 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.

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 Franklin's mandate to keep the republic.

In Your Own Words 1.7 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, however, didn't begin with *What's at Stake . . . ?* because we wanted to have a direct word with you about the challenges that Donald Trump poses to how political scientists do their jobs... We argued in the introduction that taking a neutral, "both-sides" position on this topic—which,

as classical liberal academics and 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**.

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 narratives** 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 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.

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
analysis
anarchy
authoritarian capitalism
authoritarian governments
authoritarian populism
authority
capitalist economy
citizens
classical liberalism
communist democracy
conservatives
critical thinking
democracy
democratic socialism
digital native
disinformation
economic conservatives
economic liberals
economics
elite democracy
evaluation

gatekeepers
government
hashtag activism
ideologies
immigrants
individualism
information bubble
institutions
laissez-faire capitalism
legitimate
liberals
libertarians
media
mediated citizens
mixed economies
naturalization
normative
norms
participatory democracy
pluralist democracy
political correctness
political culture

political narratives
politics
popular sovereignty
power
procedural guarantees
progressives
public-interested citizenship
refugees
regulated capitalism
republic
rules
self-interested citizenship
social conservatives
social contract
social democracy
social liberals
social order
socialist economy
subjects
substantive guarantees
totalitarian
values



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In Your Own Words

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

- 2.1 Identify some of the questions to ask when examining the historical narrative of America's founding.
- 2.2 Outline the events and political motivations that led to the colonies' split from England.
- 2.3 Explain the competing narratives under the Articles of Confederation.
- 2.4 Identify the competing narratives, goals, and compromises that shaped the Constitution.
- 2.5 Explain the system of separation of powers and checks and balances.
- 2.6 Summarize the debate over ratification of the Constitution.
- 2.7 Evaluate the narratives told about the founding of the United States.

2

THE POLITICS OF THE AMERICAN FOUNDING

What's at Stake . . . in Challenging the Legitimacy of the Government?

DECLARING WAR ON THE U.S. GOVERNMENT is a risky business. Governments depend for their authority on people believing their power is legitimate—when that legitimacy is challenged, so is their authority, and they need to bring the full weight of their power to defend their right to use that power. If they aren't successful, they are no longer “the government.” Just ask the British how the eighteenth century challenge to their authority by American colonists worked out.

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Quelling *insurrection*—a violent challenge to government authority—is even trickier in the nation those colonies became. The United States is a democracy that guarantees free speech and the right “peaceably to assemble.” Where do we draw the line between peaceful protest and violent uprising? As we witnessed with the January 6, 2021, protests of the results of the 2020 presidential election, the very nature of “violent” can become the object of dispute. Though most of us have seen video footage of angry mobs from that day forcing themselves into the Capitol through broken windows, assaulting law enforcement officers, and calling for the death of the vice president, some of their defenders tried to argue that they were not threatening violence at all, with one Republican member of Congress calling the event “a normal tourist visit.” The former president, running for election again in 2024, promised to pardon all the January 6 “hostages” and “unbelievable patriots” who had been arrested, he claimed, for exercising their constitutional rights.

So in democracies, governments have to perfect the Goldilocks task of policing protests in a way that is “just right”—not so strict as to quell the people’s voice, but not so lax as to allow protest that weakens the state’s authority, always aware that they are the defenders of a state that had its own birth in a successful violent insurrection. One person’s armed rebel is another’s freedom fighter, after all.

While the January 6 insurrection was the most recent and the most threatening challenge to the nation’s security, it was by no means the first group of irate citizens intent on forcing a course correction on a United States government they see becoming too powerful, and/or too much of a threat to individual liberties like the right to bear arms or religious freedom. It was not the first time the federal authorities had to reach for that Goldilocks response.

Anti-government extremists aren’t new in American politics—groups of militia-minded Americans have been certain the government was taking away their

liberties since the nation’s inception—but the rise of the internet in the past fifty years has made the organization and spread of the movement easier than ever. With the 2009 rise of the Tea Party movement (discussed in Chapter 1), these ideas began to seep into the mainstream of American party politics—still at the fringes but no longer cloaked in the shadows. The villain that these groups see—whether they actually hold the U.S. government responsible or whether they believe there is a shady international cabal behind it—might vary, but the point is the same. Somehow the government, whether by enforcing gun laws or tax laws or civil rights laws or some other element of national policy that they disagree with, has become the enemy. Not always but more often than not, the groups dabble in other extremist beliefs as well, maybe white supremacism, anti-Semitism, apocalyptic religious views, other survivalist ideas that have them stockpiling for Armageddon, or conspiracy theories like QAnon. Sometimes they combine them all.¹

The public began to become collectively aware of the so-called patriot movement in 1992 and 1993, when law enforcement tried to serve warrants for weapons violations on two different compounds in the western United States held by anti-government religious extremists, one in Ruby Ridge, Idaho, and one in Waco, Texas. Both times federal agents were involved. Both times civilians were killed—three by gunfire in the first instance and seventy-five, including twenty-five children, in a disastrous fire in the second. The first siege lasted eleven days, the second fifty-one, during which much of the nation’s attention was captured by the images of the standoff and the fiery blaze that finished it. CNN, the first 24-hour news cable station, was only a dozen years old in 1992, but it was created to provide just that kind of moment to moment disaster coverage, and it brought the tense standoffs right into people’s homes. Although it was determined that the Waco fire was not caused by the federal agents, public opinion, originally supportive of the police, ultimately came down hard on the police action that had ended with the deaths of so many people.

Even though what happened was by no means all, or even mostly, the fault of the agents involved, both Ruby Ridge and Waco were followed by extensive federal investigations of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) role in these events. Armed people who believe the government is their enemy are notoriously hard to arrest, and concern about the arms was exactly why the agents approached the compounds in the first place. Nonetheless, federal investigators recommended multiple reforms and changes to FBI procedure. For many conspiracy-minded, anti-government-thinking people, the causes were more nefarious than the ones found by the investigation and the reforms were not enough.

The twin debacles infuriated a former army servicemember named Timothy McVeigh, who wanted retribution against the federal government for, as he saw it, waging war against its own citizens. In the military, McVeigh had made friends with others who shared his fringe views. Himself once briefly a member of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), McVeigh and his friends were associated with a Michigan militia group once they were discharged. After Waco, he received their help in planning his campaign to wage war against the federal government, but it was McVeigh alone who detonated a massive bomb outside the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, on April 19, 1995, two years to the day after the fire that ended the Waco siege. It was the largest domestic terror attack in the country's history; 168 people were killed, including nineteen babies and children in the on-site childcare facility. McVeigh was caught, tried, and executed for the murders, but he was another link in the chain of grievance against the federal government for those who were convinced that the government was their enemy.

The Southern Poverty Law Center says there were 858 extremist anti-government groups in the United States by 1996, fed in large part by the same anger that fueled McVeigh.² While that number dropped considerably during the Bush administration, it shot up to 1,360³ when Barack Obama was elected to the presidency, along with the myriad Tea Party conspiracies claiming to prove that he wasn't

really a citizen, he was really a sleeper agent, or he was a Manchurian candidate secretly serving foreign interests. The Tea Party movement was a decentralized mix of many groups—mostly simply frustrated Republicans (the major party that most Tea Partiers identified with or leaned toward). Marco Rubio from Florida and Ted Cruz from Texas won seats in the U.S. Senate with Tea Party support in 2010 and 2012, respectively. Tea Party members elected to Congress caused many headaches for Speaker of the House John Boehner, leading to his resignation in 2015 (and in the form of the Freedom Caucus, proceeded to make Republican Speakers Paul Ryan, Kevin McCarthy, and Mike Johnson miserable as well. We discuss this in more detail in Chapter 6).

But other members of the rebellious faction chose less establishment paths. David Barstow of the *New York Times* wrote in early 2010 that a “significant undercurrent within the Tea Party movement” was less like a part of the Republican Party than it was like “the Patriot movement, a brand of politics historically associated with libertarians, militia groups, anti-immigration advocates, and those who argue for the abolition of the Federal Reserve.”⁴ The Tea Partiers who chose the patriot route, like McVeigh and his associates, along with groups like the Oath Keepers and Proud Boys, designated hate groups by the SPLC who showed up to join the January 6, 2021, insurrection, say they are the ideological heirs of the American Revolution, no different from the colonial Sons of Liberty who instigated the Boston Massacre and the Boston Tea Party. Those events were considered treasonous by the British at the time of course, though we Americans today celebrate them as the most patriotic events of our history. Today's patriot groups base their claim to legitimate existence on the Constitution's Second Amendment, declaring that they are the “well regulated Militia,” that is necessary to the security of a free State. Members of state militias, and other groups like them, take this amendment literally and absolutely.

Donald Trump was long seen by militia members as sympathetic to their cause. His loud support for

birtherism no doubt put him on their radar screen. Obama defenders cited alleged instances of racism in Trump's past and his father's involvement with the KKK, which may have strengthened his credibility with white supremacist groups.⁵ Trump recognized the appeal he had for such people, wooing them by making statements that obliquely supported them while using his own version of doublespeak to maintain some plausible deniability. For instance, while he explicitly condemned "neo-Nazis and white supremacists" at a Unite the Right protest in Charlottesville, North Carolina, in August 2017, he also said there were "fine people" among both the protestors and the counter-protestors who showed up to oppose them. But the protest was *organized* and attended by white supremacist groups; it's hard to see who else was left on that side to be "fine people" once you subtract the "neo-Nazis and white supremacists." Similarly, when asked by the moderator, Chris Wallace, to disavow the Proud Boys during a 2020 presidential debate with Joe Biden, he confusingly said "Proud Boys, stand back and stand by." His supporters insisted he had told the militia groups to "stand down," but the group themselves heard the second part of the message, exciting post-debate spikes in recruitment, with one member responding on social media, "Standing down and standing by sir," and others printing t-shirts with their new motto. The Proud Boys were one of many of the groups who turned out to try to "Stop the Steal" on January 6, 2021. While there was a reduction in documented militia activity during the arrests and trials for the January 6 participants during the Biden administration, in the days leading to the 2024 election, their online activity and recruitment picked up quickly.⁶

The federal government has tried to limit the threat presented by state militias and others who believe

that its authority is not legitimate. Congress passed an anti-terrorism bill signed by President Bill Clinton in 1996 that would make it easier for federal agencies to monitor the activities of such groups, and these powers were broadened after September 11, 2001. In June 2014, in reaction to the surging numbers of radicalized people within the country, then-attorney general Eric Holder announced that he would revive the domestic terrorism task force that had been formed after the Oklahoma City bombings but had not met since 9/11 turned the nation's attention to terrorism overseas. And in the wake of January 6 and just weeks after the 2022 attack on then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's husband by a right-wing conspiracy theorist determined to find her and hold her hostage, the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee submitted a report claiming that the nation was not doing enough to monitor and manage the threat of domestic terrorism.

Is that enough? Too much? How *should* the federal government respond to these challenges to its legitimacy? Are these groups, as they themselves claim, the embodiment of revolutionary patriotism? Do they support the Constitution, or sabotage it? And where do we draw the line between an irate citizen who wants to sound off against elected officials and policies they don't like, and one who advocates resorting to violence to protect their particular reading of the Constitution? What about a disappointed office seeker who tries to mobilize citizen militias to stay in office? Think about these questions as you read this chapter on the founding of the United States. At the end of this chapter, we revisit the question of what's at stake for American democracy with revolutionary challenges to government authority. <<

INTRODUCTION

SCHOOLCHILDREN in the United States have had the story of the American founding pounded into their heads. From the moment they start coloring pictures of grateful Pilgrims and cutting out con-

struction paper turkeys in grade school, the founding is a recurring focus of their education, and with good reason. Democratic societies, as we saw in Chapter 1, rely on the consent of their citizens to maintain lawful behavior and public order. A commitment to the rules and goals of the American system requires that

we feel good about that system. What better way to stir up good feelings and patriotism than by recounting thrilling stories of bravery and derring-do on the part of selfless heroes dedicated to the cause of American liberty? We celebrate the Fourth of July with fireworks and parades, displaying publicly our commitment to American values and our belief that our country is special, in the same way that other nations celebrate their origins all over the world. Bastille Day (July 14) in France, May 17 in Norway, October 1 in China, and July 6 in Malawi all are days on which people rally together to celebrate their common past and their hopes for the future.

Of course, people feel real pride in their countries, and many nations, not only our own, do have amazing stories to tell about their earliest days. But since this is a textbook on politics, not patriotism, we need to look beyond the pride and the amazing stories. As political scientists, we must separate myth from reality. For us, the founding of the United States is central not because it inspires warm feelings of patriotism but because it can teach us about American politics—the struggles for power that forged the political system that continues to shape our collective struggles today.

The history of the American founding has been told from many points of view. You are probably most familiar with this narrative: The early colonists escaped from Europe to avoid religious persecution. Having arrived on the shores of the New World, they built communities that allowed them to practice their religions in peace and to govern themselves as free people. When the tyrannical British king made unreasonable demands on the colonists, they had no choice but to protect their liberty by going to war and by establishing a new government of their own.

Sound historical evidence suggests that the story is more complicated, and more interesting, than that. A closer look shows that early Americans were complex beings with economic and political agendas as well as religious and philosophical motives. After much struggle among themselves, the majority of Americans decided that those agendas could be carried out better and more profitably if they broke their ties with England.⁷ Just because a controversial event like the founding is recounted by historians or

political scientists one or two hundred years after it happens does not guarantee that there is common agreement on what actually took place. People write history not from a position of absolute truth but from particular points of view. When we read a historical narrative, as critical thinkers we need to ask the same probing questions we ask about contemporary political narratives: Who is telling the story? What point of view is being represented? What values and priorities lie behind it? If I accept this interpretation, what else will I have to accept?

In this chapter we talk a lot about history—the history of the American founding and the creation of the Constitution. Like all authors, we have a particular point of view that affects how we tell the story. True to the basic theme of this book, we are interested in power and citizenship. We want to understand American government in terms of who the winners and losers are likely to be. It makes sense for us to begin by looking at the founding to see who the winners and losers were then. We are also interested in how rules and institutions make it more likely that some people will win and others lose. Certainly an examination of the early debates about rules and institutions will help us understand that. Because we are interested in winners and losers, the *who* of politics, we are interested in understanding how people come to be defined as players in the system in the first place. It was during the founding that many of the initial decisions were made about who “We, the people” would actually be. Finally, we are interested in the product of all this debate—the Constitution of the United States, the ultimate rule book for who gets what in American politics. Consequently, our discussion of American political history focuses on these issues. Specifically in this chapter we explore the colonial break with England and the Revolution, and the initial attempt at American government—the Articles of Confederation, the Constitutional Convention, the Constitution itself, and the ratification of the Constitution.

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- ***In Your Own Words 2.1*** Identify
- some of the questions to ask when examining the
 - historical narrative of America's founding.

THE SPLIT FROM ENGLAND

From British subjects to American citizens

America was a political and military battlefield long before the Revolution. Not only did nature confront the colonists with brutal winters, harsh droughts, disease, and other unanticipated disasters, but the New World was also already inhabited before the British settlers arrived, both by Native Americans and by Spanish and French colonists. These political actors in North America during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries had, perhaps, more at stake than they knew. All were trying to lay claim to the same geographical territory; none could have foreseen that that territory would one day become the strongest power in the world. Whoever won the battle for North America would put their stamp on the globe in a major way.

By the late 1700s the eastern colonies of North America were heavily English. For many reasons, life in England had limited opportunities for freedom, for economic gain, and for political power. English settlers arrived in America seeking, first and foremost, new opportunities. But those opportunities were not available to all. “We, the people” had been defined in various ways throughout the 1600s and 1700s, but never had it meant anything like “everybody” or even “every white male.” Religious and property qualifications for the vote, and the exclusion of women and Black people from political life, meant that the colonial leaders did not feel that simply living in a place, obeying the laws, or even paying taxes carried with it the right to participate in government. Following the rigid British social hierarchy, they wanted the “right kind” of people to participate—people who could be depended on to make the kind of rules that would ensure their status and maintain the established order. The danger of expanding the vote, of course, was that the new majority might have wanted something very different from what the old majority wanted.

Those colonists who had political power in the second half of the eighteenth century gradually began to question their relationship with England. For much of the history of colonial America,

England had left the colonies pretty much alone, and they had learned to live with the colonial governance that Britain exercised. Of course, they were obliged, as colonies, to make England their primary trading partner. Even goods they exported to other European countries had to pass through England, where taxes were collected on them. However, smuggling and corrupt colonial officials had made those obligations less than burdensome. It is important to remember that the colonies received many benefits by virtue of their status: they were settled by corporations and companies funded with British money, such as the Massachusetts Bay Company; they were protected by the British army and navy; and they had a secure market for their agricultural products.

Whether the British government was actually being oppressive in the years before 1776 is open to interpretation. The colonists certainly thought so. Britain was deeply in debt, having won the **French and Indian War**, which effectively forced the French out of North America and the Spanish to vacate Florida and retreat west of the Mississippi. The war, fought to defend the British colonies and colonists in America, turned into a major and expensive conflict across the Atlantic as well. Britain, having done its protective duty as a colonial power and having heavily taxed British citizens at home to finance the war, turned to its colonies to help pay for their defense. It chose to do that by levying taxes on the colonies and by attempting to enforce more strictly the trade laws that would increase British profits from American resources.

The series of acts passed by the British infuriated the colonists. The Sugar Act of 1764, which imposed customs taxes, or duties, on sugar, was seen as unfair and unduly burdensome in a depressed postwar economy, and the Stamp Act of 1765 incited protests and demonstrations throughout the colonies. Similar to a tax in effect in Great Britain for nearly a century, it required that a tax be paid, in scarce British currency, on every piece of printed matter in the colonies, including newspapers, legal documents, and even playing cards. The colonists claimed that the law was an infringement on their liberty and a violation of their right not to be taxed without their consent. Continued protests and political

changes in England resulted in the repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766. The Townshend Acts of 1767, taxing goods imported from England, such as paper, glass, and tea, and the Tea Act of 1773 were seen by the colonists as intolerable violations of their rights. To show their displeasure, the colonists hurled 342 chests of tea into Boston Harbor in the famous Boston Tea Party. Britain responded by passing the Coercive Acts of 1774, designed to punish the citizens of Massachusetts. In the process, Parliament sowed the seeds that would blossom into revolution in just a few years.

REVOLUTION

From the moment the unpopularly taxed tea plunged into Boston Harbor, it became apparent that Americans were not going to settle down and behave like proper and orthodox colonists. Britain was surprised by the colonial reaction, and it could not ignore it. Even before the Boston Tea Party, mobs in many towns were demonstrating and rioting against British control. Calling themselves the Sons of Liberty, and under the guidance of the eccentric and unsteady Sam Adams, cousin of future president John Adams, they routinely caused extensive damage. In early 1770 they provoked the Boston Massacre, an attack by British soldiers that left six civilians dead and further inflamed popular sentiments.

By the time of the December 1773 Boston Tea Party, also incited by the Sons of Liberty, passions were at a fever pitch. The American patriots called a meeting in Philadelphia in September 1774. Known as the First Continental Congress, the meeting declared the Coercive Acts void, announced a plan to stop trade with England, and called for a second meeting in May 1775. Before they could meet again, in the early spring of 1775, the king's army went marching to arrest Sam Adams and another patriot, John Hancock, and to discover the hiding place of the colonists' weapons. Roused by the silversmith Paul Revere, Americans in Lexington and Concord fired the first shots of rebellion at the British, and the Revolution was truly under way. The narrative about where the locus of power should be spread

quickly, even given the limited communication channels of the day. The mobs were not fed by social media or connected electronically—the story was passed by word of mouth and, therefore, could be controlled relatively easily because each person could not disseminate ideas widely. The people who stood to gain the most financially from independence—the propertied and economic elite, the attendees at the Continental Congress—were translating a philosophical explanation for the masses to act on. Because many colonists could not read, they got their news at the tavern or at the Sunday pulpit, where it was colored by the interests of the teller, and then passed it on. The vast majority of citizens were passive recipients of the narrative.

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

In 1776, at the direction of a committee of the Continental Congress, thirty-four-year-old Thomas Jefferson sat down to write a declaration of independence from England. His training as a lawyer at the College of William and Mary and his service as a representative in the Virginia House of Burgesses helped prepare him for his task, but he had an impressive intellect in any case. President John F. Kennedy once announced to a group of Nobel Prize winners he was entertaining that they were “the most extraordinary collection of talents that has ever gathered at the White House, with the possible exception of when Thomas Jefferson dined alone.”⁸ A testimony to Jefferson's capabilities is the strategically brilliant document that he produced.

The **Declaration of Independence** is first and foremost a political document. Having decided to make the break from England, the American founders had to convince themselves, their fellow colonists, and the rest of the world that they were doing the right thing. Jefferson did not have to hunt far for a good reason for his revolution. John Locke, whom we discussed in Chapter 1, had handed him one on a silver platter. Remember that Locke said that government is based on a contract between the rulers and the ruled. The ruled agree to obey the laws as long as the rulers protect their basic rights to life,

liberty, and property. If the rulers fail to do that, they break the contract, and the ruled are free to set up another government. This is exactly what the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence says, except that Jefferson changed “property” to “the pursuit of happiness,” perhaps to garner the support of those Americans who didn’t own enough property to worry about. The rest of the Declaration focuses on documenting the ways in which the colonists believed that England, and particularly George III, had violated their rights and broken the social contract.

Are there any circumstances in which it would be justifiable for groups in the United States to rebel against the federal government today?

“... THAT ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL”

The Declaration of Independence begins with a statement of the equality of all men. Since so much of this document relies heavily on Locke, and since clearly the colonists did *not* mean that all men are created equal, it is worth turning to Locke for some help in seeing exactly what they did mean. In his most famous work, *A Second Treatise of Government*, Locke wrote,

Though I have said above that all men are by nature equal, I cannot be supposed to understand all sorts of equality. Age or virtue may give men a just precedency. Excellency of parts and merit may place others above the common level. Birth may subject some, and alliance or benefits others, to pay an observance to those whom nature, gratitude, or other respects may have made it due.⁹

Men are equal in a natural sense, said Locke, but society quickly establishes many dimensions on which they may be unequal. A particularly sticky point for Locke’s ideas on equality was his treatment of slavery. Although he hemmed and hawed about it, ultimately he failed to condemn it. Here, too, our founders would have agreed with him.

African Americans and the Revolution. The Revolution was a mixed blessing for enslaved Americans. On the one hand, many enslaved people won their freedom during the war. Slavery was outlawed north of Maryland, and many enslaved people in the Upper South were also freed. The British offered freedom in exchange for service in the British army, although the conditions they provided were not always a great improvement over enslavement. The abolitionist, or antislavery, movement gathered steam in some northern cities, expressing moral and constitutional objections to the institution of slavery. Whereas before the Revolution only about 5 percent of Black Americans were free, the proportion grew tremendously with the coming of war.¹⁰

In the aftermath of war, African Americans did not find their lot greatly improved, despite the ringing rhetoric of equality that fed the Revolution. The economic profitability of slave labor still existed in the South, and enslaved people continued to be imported from Africa in large numbers. The explanatory myth that all men were created equal, but that Black people weren’t quite men and thus could be treated unequally, spread throughout the new country, making even free Black people unwelcome in many communities. By 1786 New Jersey prohibited free Black people from entering the state, and within twenty years northern states started passing laws specifically denying free Black people the right to vote.¹¹ No wonder the well-known Black abolitionist Frederick Douglass said, in 1852, “This Fourth of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn.”

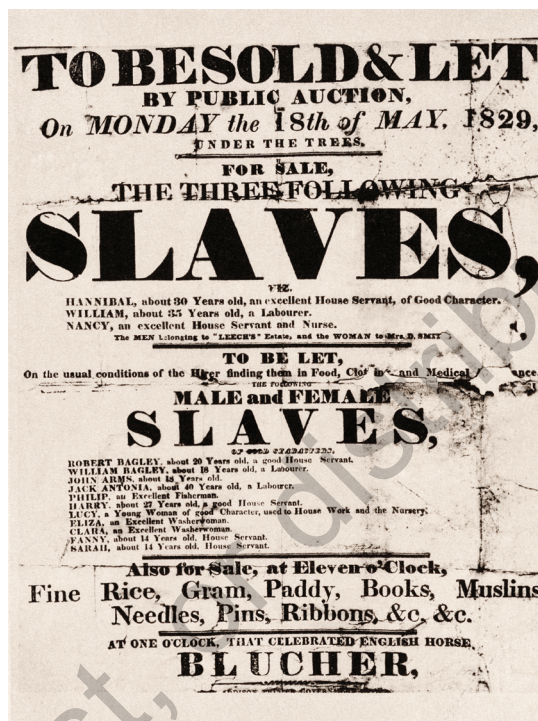
Native Americans and the Revolution. Native Americans were another group the founders did not consider to be prospective citizens. Not only were they already considered members of their own sovereign nations, but their communal property holding, their nonmonarchical political systems, and their divisions of labor between women working in the fields and men hunting for game were not compatible with European political notions. Pushed farther and farther west by land-hungry colonists, the Native Americans

were actively hostile to the American cause in the Revolution. Knowing this, the British hoped to gain their allegiance in the war. Fortunately for the revolutionary effort, the colonists, having asked in vain for the Native Americans to stay out of what they called a “family quarrel,” were able to suppress early on the Native Americans’ attempts to get revenge for their treatment at the hands of the settlers.¹² There was certainly no suggestion that the claim of equality at the beginning of the Declaration of Independence might include the peoples who had lived on the continent for centuries before the white man arrived.

Women and the Revolution. Neither was there any question that “all men” might somehow be a generic term for human beings that would include women. The Revolution proved to be a step backward for women politically: it was after the war that states began specifically to prohibit women, even those with property, from voting.¹³ That doesn’t mean, however, that women did not get involved in the war effort. Within the constraints of society, they contributed what they could to the American cause. They boycotted tea and other British imports, sewed flags, made bandages and clothing, nursed and housed soldiers, and collected money to support the Continental army. Under the name Daughters of Liberty, women in many towns met publicly to discuss the events of the day, spinning and weaving to make the colonies less dependent on imported cotton and woolen goods from England, and drinking herbal tea instead of tea that was taxed by the British. Some women moved beyond such mild patriotic activities to outright political behavior, writing pamphlets urging independence, spying on enemy troops, carrying messages, and even, in isolated instances, fighting on the battlefields.¹⁴

Men’s understanding of women’s place in early American politics was nicely put by Jefferson, writing from Europe to a woman in America in 1788:

But our good ladies, I trust, have been too wise to wrinkle their foreheads with politics. They are contented to soothe & calm the



Human Trade

Enslaved people were used to meet the needs of the South’s burgeoning economy in tobacco and cotton, which required plentiful, cheap labor. They were shipped from Africa and sold to farmers alongside rice, books, and other goods. In the eighteenth century, approximately 275 enslaved people were shipped to the American colonies. Many did not survive the harsh conditions of the passage.

Paul Popper/Getty Images

minds of their husbands returning ruffled from political debate. They have the good sense to value domestic happiness above all others. There is no part of the earth where so much of this is enjoyed as in America.¹⁵

Women’s role with respect to politics at the time was plain. They may be wise and prudent, but their proper sphere was the domestic, not the political, world. They were seen as almost “too good” for politics, representing peace and serenity, moral happiness rather than political dissension, the values of the home over the values of the state. This narrative

provided a flattering reason for keeping women in “their place” while allowing men to reign in the world of politics.

In Your Own Words 2.2 Outline
the events and political motivations that led to the
colonies’ split from England.

THE ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION

Political and economic instability under the Nation’s first constitution

In 1777, the Continental Congress met to try to come up with a **constitution**, or a framework that established the rules for the new government. The **Articles of Confederation**, our first constitution, created the kind of government the founders, fresh from their colonial experience, preferred. The rules set up by the Articles of Confederation show that the states jealously guarded their power. Having just won their independence from one large national power, the last thing they wanted to do was create another. They were also extremely wary of one another, and much of the debate over the Articles of Confederation reflected wide concern that the rules not give any states preferential treatment. (See the Appendix for the text of the Articles of Confederation.)

The Articles established a “firm league of friendship” among the thirteen American states, but they did not empower a central government to act effectively on behalf of those states. The Articles were ultimately replaced because, without a strong central government, they were unable to provide the economic and political stability that the founders wanted. Even so, under this set of rules, some people were better off and some problems, namely the resolution of boundary disputes and the political organization of new territories, were handled extremely well.

THE PROVISIONS OF THE ARTICLES

The government set up by the Articles was called a **confederation** because it established a system in which each state retained almost all the power to do what it wanted. In other words, in a confederation, each state is sovereign and the central government has the job of running only the collective business of the states. It has no independent source of power and resources for its operations. Another characteristic of a confederation is that because it is founded on state sovereignty (authority), it says nothing about individuals. It creates neither rights nor obligations for individual citizens, leaving such matters to be handled by state constitutions.

Under the Articles of Confederation, Congress had many formal powers, including the power to establish and direct the armed forces, to decide matters of war and peace, to coin money, and to enter into treaties. However, its powers were quite limited. For example, although Congress controlled the armed forces, it had no power to draft soldiers or to tax citizens to pay for its military needs. Its inability to tax put Congress—and the central government as a whole—at the mercy of the states. The government could ask for money, but it was up to the states to contribute or not as they chose. Furthermore, Congress lacked the ability to regulate commerce between states, as well as between states and foreign powers. It could not establish a common and stable monetary system. In essence, the Articles allowed the states to be thirteen independent units, printing their own currencies, setting their own tariffs, and establishing their own laws with regard to financial and political matters. In every critical case—national security, national economic prosperity, and the general welfare—the U.S. government had to rely on the voluntary good will and cooperation of the state governments. That meant that the success of the new nation depended on what went on in state legislatures around the country.

SOME WINNERS, SOME LOSERS

The era of American history following the Revolution was dubbed “this critical period” by

John Quincy Adams, nephew of patriot Sam Adams, son of John Adams, and himself a future president of the country. During this time, while the states were under the weak union of the Articles, the future of the United States was very much up in the air. The lack of an effective central government meant that the country had difficulty conducting business with other countries and enforcing harmonious trade relations and treaties. Domestic politics was equally difficult. Economic conditions following the war were poor. Many people had debts they could not pay. State taxes were high, and the economy was depressed, offering farmers few opportunities to sell their produce, for example, and hindering those with commercial interests from conducting business as they had before the war.

The radical poverty of some Americans seemed particularly unjust to those hardest hit, especially in light of the rhetoric of the Revolution about equality for all.¹⁶ This is a difficulty of having a narrative controlled from on high—if it doesn't match up with the reality on the ground, new narratives can develop. Having used "equality" as a rallying cry during the war, the founders were afterward faced with a population that wanted to take equality seriously and eliminate the differences that existed between men.¹⁷ One of the places the American passion for equality manifested itself was in some of the state legislatures, where laws were passed to ease the burden of debtors and farmers. Often the focus of the laws was property, but rather than preserving property, per the Lockean narrative, it frequently was designed to confiscate or redistribute property instead. The "have nots" in society, and the people acting on their behalf, were using the law to redress what they saw as injustices in early American life. To relieve postwar suffering, they printed paper money, seized property, and suspended "the ordinary means for the recovery of debts."¹⁸ In other words, in those states, people with debts and mortgages could legally escape or postpone paying the money they owed. With so much economic insecurity, naturally those who owned property would not continue to invest and lend money. The Articles of Confederation, in their effort to preserve power for the states, had provided for no checks or limitations

on state legislatures. In fact, such actions would have been seen under the Articles as infringing on the sovereignty of the states. What you had was a clash between two visions of what America was to be about.

The political elite in the new country started to grumble about **popular tyranny**. In a monarchy, one feared the unrestrained power of the king, but perhaps in a republican government, one had to fear the unrestrained power of the people. The final straw was **Shays's Rebellion**. Massachusetts was a state whose legislature, dominated by wealthy and secure citizens, had not taken measures to aid the debt-ridden population. Beginning in the summer of 1786, mobs of musket-wielding farmers from western Massachusetts began marching on the Massachusetts courts and disrupting the trials of debtors in an attempt to prevent their land from being foreclosed (taken by those to whom the farmers owed money). The farmers demanded action by a state legislature they saw as biased toward the interests of the rich. Their actions against the state culminated in the January 1787 attack on the Springfield, Massachusetts, federal armory, which housed more than 450 tons of military supplies. Led by a former captain in the Continental army, Daniel Shays, the mob, now an army of more than 1,500 farmers, stormed the armory. They were turned back, but only after a violent clash with the state militia, raised to counter the uprisings. Such mob action frightened and embarrassed the leaders of the United States, who of course also were the wealthier members of society. The rebellion seemed to foreshadow the failure of their grand experiment in self-governance and certainly challenged their story of what it was about. In the minds of the nation's leaders, it underscored the importance of discovering what James Madison would call "a republican remedy for those diseases most incident to republican government."¹⁹ In other words, they had to find a way to contain and limit the will of the people in a government that was to be based on that will. If the rules of government were not producing the "right" winners and losers, the rules would have to be changed before the elite lost control of their narrative and the power to change the rules.

In Your Own Words 2.3 Explain the competing narratives under the Articles of Confederation.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

Division and compromise

State delegates were assigned the task of trying to fix the Articles of Confederation, but it was clear that many of the fifty-five men who gathered in May 1787 were not interested in saving the existing framework at all. Many of the delegates represented the elite of American society—wealthy lawyers, speculators, merchants, planters, and investors—and thus they were among those most injured under the Articles. Members of the delegations met through a sweltering Philadelphia summer to reconstruct the foundations of American government (see *Snapshot of America: Who Were the Founders?*). As the delegates had hoped, the debates at the **Constitutional Convention** produced a very different system of rules than that established by the Articles of Confederation. Many of them were compromises to resolve conflicting interests brought by delegates to the convention.

HOW STRONG A CENTRAL GOVERNMENT?

Put yourself in the founders' shoes. Imagine that you get to construct a new government from scratch. You can create all the rules and arrange all the institutions just to your liking. The only hitch is that you have other delegates to work with. Delegate A, for instance, is a merchant with a lot of property. He has big plans for a strong government that can ensure secure conditions for conducting business and can adequately protect property. Delegate B, however, is a planter. In Delegate B's experience, big government is dangerous. Big government is removed from the people, and it is easy for corruption to take

root when people can't keep a close eye on what their officials are doing. People like Delegate B think that they will do better if power is decentralized (broken up and localized) and there is no strong central government. In fact, Delegate B would prefer a government like that provided by the Articles of Confederation. How do you reconcile these two very different agendas?

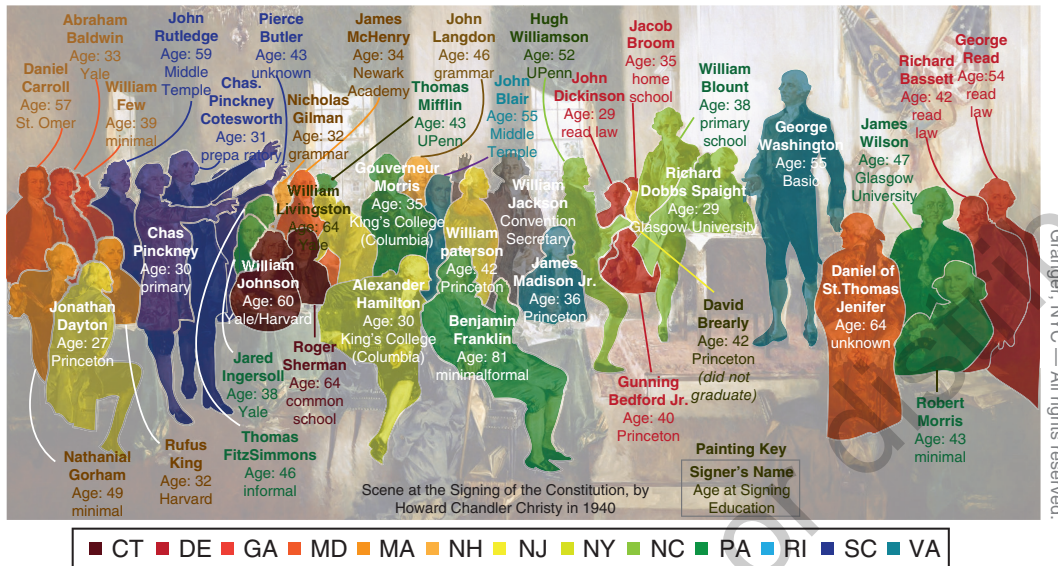
The solution adopted under the Articles of Confederation basically favored Delegate B's position. The new Constitution, given the profiles of the delegates in attendance, was moving strongly in favor of Delegate A's position. Naturally, the agreement of all those who followed Delegate B would be important in ratifying, or getting approval for, the final Constitution, so their concerns could not be ignored. The compromise chosen by the founders at the Constitutional Convention is called **federalism**. Unlike a confederation, in which the states retain the ultimate power over the whole, federalism gives the central government its own source of power, in this case the Constitution of the people of the United States. But unlike a unitary system, which we discuss in Chapter 3, federalism also gives independent power to the states.

Compared to how they fared under the Articles of Confederation, the advocates of states' rights were losers under the new Constitution, but they were better off than they might have been. The states could have had *all* their power stripped away. The economic elite, people like Delegate A, were clear winners under the new rules. This proved to be one of the central issues during the ratification debates. Those who sided with the federalism alternative, who mostly resembled Delegate A, came to be known as **Federalists**. The people like Delegate B, who continued to hold on to the strong-state, weak-central-government option, were called **Anti-Federalists**. We return to them shortly.

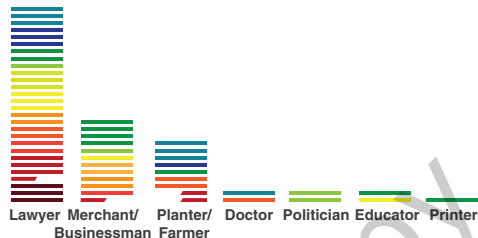
LARGE STATES, SMALL STATES

Once the convention delegates agreed that federalism would provide the framework of the new government, they had to decide how to allot power among the states. Should all states count the same in

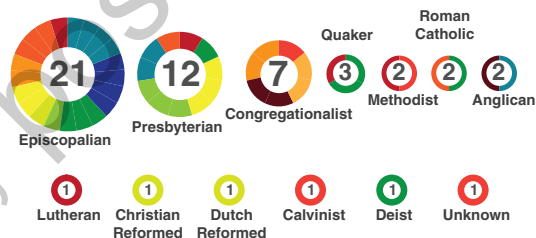
Snapshot of America: *Who Were the Founders?*



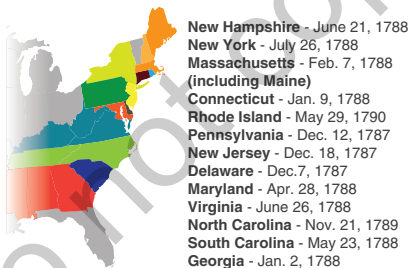
Occupations of the Founders



Religions of the Founders



Ratification by State



How Many Signed and How Many Didn't?



Behind the Numbers

The founders were clearly an elite group of men. They attended the top schools, and most were successful and wealthy. In general, how does one's economic and social status affect one's political views? Are your views shaped by your own circumstances? Can a government created by "an assembly of demigods" work for the rest of us mortals?

decision making, or should the large states have more power than the small ones? The rules chosen here would have a crucial impact on the politics of the country. If small states and large states had equal amounts of power in national government, residents of large states such as Virginia, Massachusetts, and New York would actually have less voice in the government than residents of small states like New Jersey and Rhode Island.

Picture two groups of people trying to make a joint decision, each group with one vote to cast. If the first group has fifty people in it and the second has only ten, the individuals in the second group are likely to have more influence on how their single vote is cast than the individuals in the first group. If, however, the first group has five votes to cast and the second only one, the individuals are equally represented, but the second group is effectively reduced in importance when compared to the first. This was the dilemma faced by the representatives of the large and small states at the Constitutional Convention. Each wanted to make sure that the final rules would give the advantage to states like his own.

Two plans were offered by convention delegates to resolve this issue. The first, the **Virginia Plan**, was the creation of Madison. Fearing that his youth and inexperience would hinder the plan's acceptance, he asked fellow Virginian Edmund Randolph to present it to the convention. The Virginia Plan represented the preference of the large, more populous states. This plan proposed a strong national government run by two legislative houses. One house would be elected directly by the people, one indirectly by a combination of the state legislatures and the popularly elected national house. The numbers of representatives would be determined by the taxes paid by the residents of the state, which would reflect the free population in the state. In other words, large states would have more representatives in both houses of the legislature, and national law and policy would be weighted heavily in their favor. Just three large states—Virginia, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania—would be able to form a majority and carry national legislation their way. The Virginia Plan also called for a single executive, to see that the laws were carried out, and a national judiciary, both

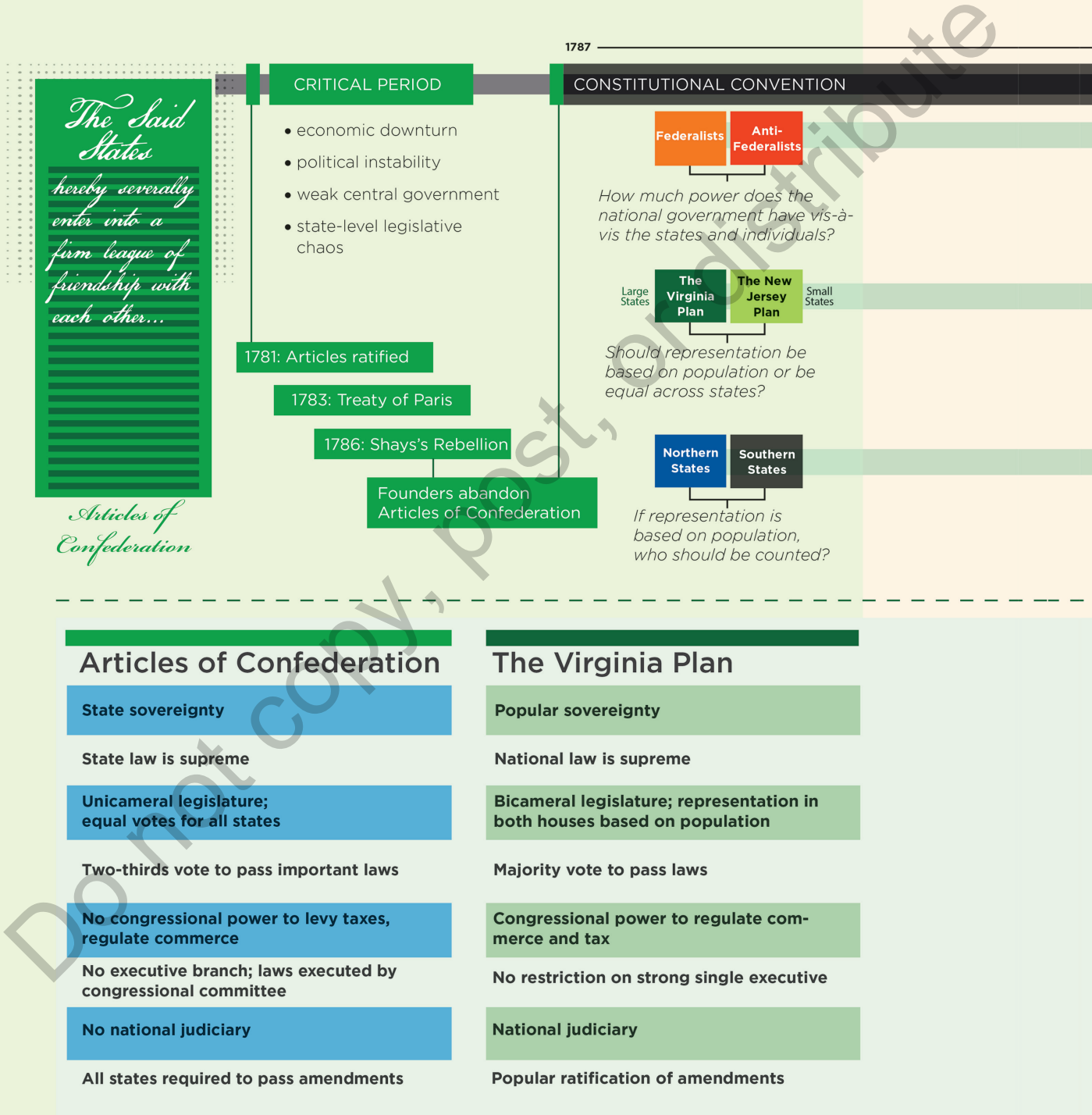
appointed by the legislature, and it gave the national government the power to override state laws.

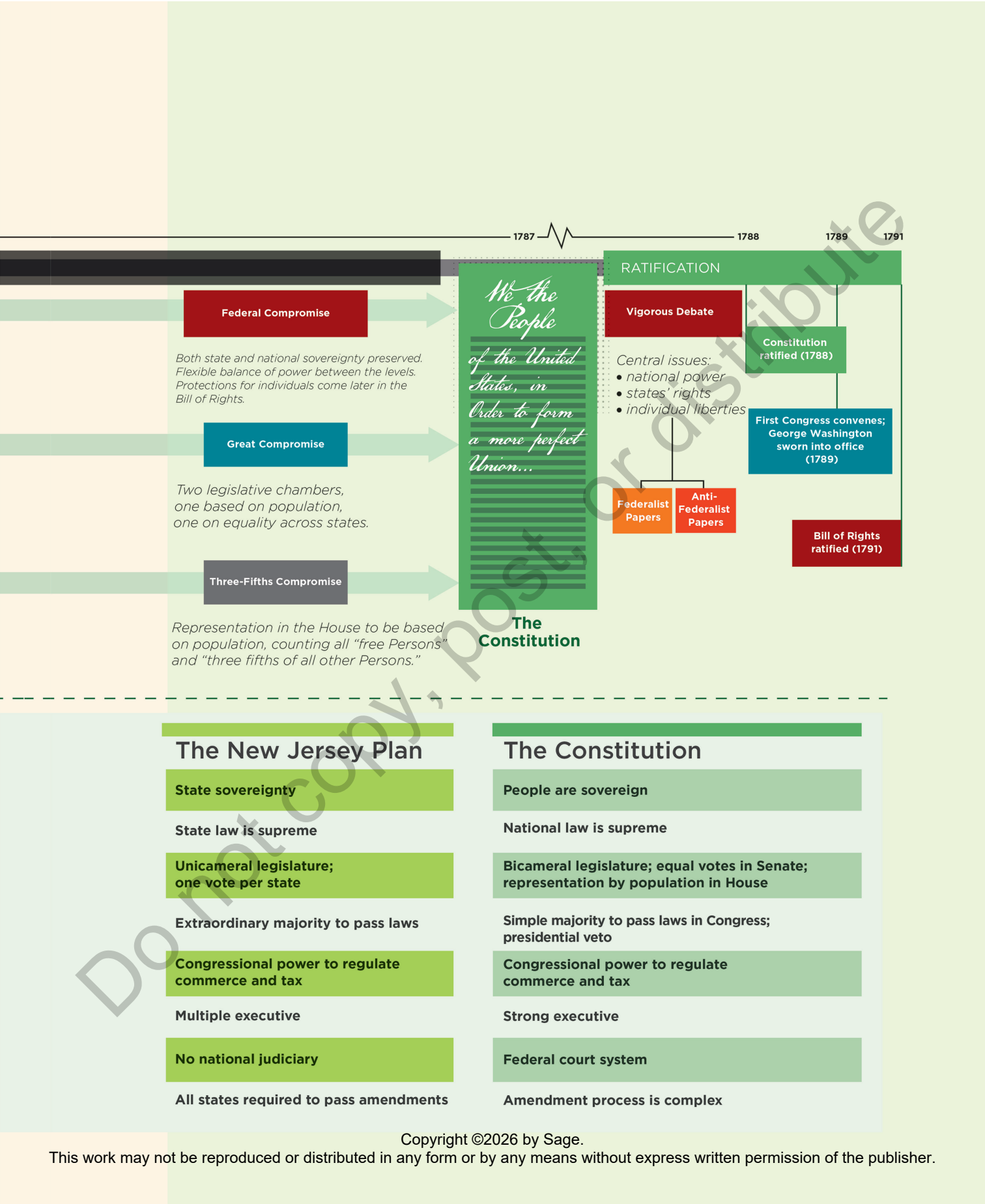
A different plan, presented by William Paterson of New Jersey, was designed by the smaller states to better protect their interests. The **New Jersey Plan** amounted to a reinforcement, not a replacement, of the Articles of Confederation. It provided for a multiperson executive, so that no one person could possess too much power, and for congressional acts to be the “supreme law of the land.” Most significantly, however, the Congress would be much like the one that had existed under the Articles. In its one house, each state would have only one vote. The delegates would be chosen by the state legislatures. Congressional power was stronger than under the Articles, but the national government was still dependent on the states for some of its funding. The large states disliked this plan because the small states together could block what the large states wanted, even though the large states had more people and contributed more revenue.

The prospects for a new government could have foundered on this issue. The stuffy heat of the closed Convention Hall shortened the tempers of the weary delegates, and frustration made compromise difficult. Each side had too much to lose by yielding to the other's plan. The solution finally arrived at was politics at its best and shows the triumph of the compromise narrative. The **Great Compromise** kept much of the framework of the Virginia Plan. It proposed a strong federal structure headed by a central government with sufficient power to tax its citizens, regulate commerce, conduct foreign affairs, organize the military, and exercise other central powers. It called for a single executive and a national judicial system. The compromise that allowed the small states to live with it involved the composition of the legislature. Like the Virginia Plan, it provided for two houses. The House of Representatives would be based on state population, giving the large states the extra clout they felt they deserved, but in the Senate each state would have two votes. This would give the small states much more power in the Senate than in the House of Representatives. Members of the House of Representatives would be elected directly by the people, members of the

THE BIG PICTURE:

How We Got to the Constitution From the Articles of Confederation





Senate by the state legislatures. Thus the government would be directly binding on the people as well as on the states. A key to the compromise was that most legislation would need the approval of both houses, so that neither large states nor small states could hold the entire government hostage to their wishes. The small states were sufficiently happy with this plan that most of them voted to ratify the Constitution quickly and easily. See this chapter's *The Big Picture* for a visual illustration of how the founders got from the Articles of Confederation to the Constitution.

NORTH AND SOUTH

The compromise reconciling the large and small states was not the only one the delegates crafted. The northern and southern states, which is to say the non-slave-owning and the slave-owning states, were at odds over how population was to be determined for purposes of representation in the lower house of Congress. The southern states wanted to count enslaved people as part of their population when determining how many representatives they got, even though they had no intention of letting the enslaved people vote. Including enslaved people would give them more representatives and thus more power in the House of Representatives. For exactly that reason, the northern states said that if enslaved people could not vote, they should not be counted. The bizarre compromise, also a triumph of politics if not humanity, is known as the **Three-Fifths Compromise**. It was based on a formula developed by the Confederation Congress to allocate tax assessments among the states. According to this compromise, for representation purposes, each enslaved person would count as three-fifths of a person—that is, every five enslaved people would count as three people. Interestingly, the actual language in the Constitution is a good deal vaguer than this. It says that representatives and taxes shall be determined according to population, figured “by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons.”

The issue of slavery was divisive enough for the early Americans that the most politically safe

approach was not to mention it explicitly at all and thus to avoid having to endorse or condemn it. Implicitly, of course, the silence had the effect of letting slavery continue. Article I, Section 9, of the Constitution, in similarly vague language, allows that

The Migration or Importation of such Persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by Congress prior to the Year one thousand eight hundred and eight, but a Tax or duty may be imposed on such Importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each Person.

Even more damning, Article IV, Section 2, obliquely provides for the return of runaway enslaved people:

No Person held to Service or Labour in one State under the Laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any Law or Regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labour, but shall be delivered up on Claim of the Party to whom such Service or Labour may be due.

The word *slavery* did not appear in the Constitution until it was expressly outlawed in the Thirteenth Amendment, passed in December 1865, nearly eighty years after the writing of the Constitution.

In Your Own Words 2.4 Identify the competing narratives, goals, and compromises that shaped the Constitution.

THE CONSTITUTION

Three branches—legislative, executive, and judicial—separate and checked

The document produced as a result of these compromises was a political innovation. All governments must have the power to do three things: (1) legislate,

or make the laws; (2) administer, or execute the laws; and (3) adjudicate, or interpret the laws. Because of their fear of concentrated power, however, the founders did not give all the power to one institution. Instead, they provided for separate branches of government to handle it, and then ensured that each branch would have the ability to check the others. In this section we review briefly the U.S. Constitution and the principles that support it. While we are focused on the rules as written in the Constitution, we also need to be aware of the importance of the commitment to play by those rules. In Chapter 1, we discussed the power of norms—the unspoken understandings about how to behave that underlie the rules of law. One hugely important norm, the one that makes the rules meaningful, is the commitment not to cheat by breaking, bending, or skirting the rules, and the obligation to report anyone who does break them. Another important norm is to accept the results of the rules, even if it means you lose. If we tolerate the breaking of norms, then the bad behavior becomes “normal” and the rules become meaningless. What makes rules work is the norm that most of us agree to follow them and anyone who doesn’t is penalized.

How would American politics be different today if we had retained the Articles of Confederation instead of adopting the Constitution?

THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

Legislative power is lawmaking power. The body of government that makes laws is called the **legislature**. The U.S. Congress is a **bicameral legislature**, meaning that there are two chambers—the House of Representatives and the Senate. Article I, by far the lengthiest article of the Constitution, sets out the framework of the legislative branch of government. Since the founders expected the legislature to be the most important part of the new government, they spent the most time specifying its composition, the qualifications for membership, its powers, and its limitations. The best-known part of Article I is the famous Section 8, which spells out the specific

powers of Congress. This list is followed by the provision that Congress can do anything “necessary and proper” to carry out its duties. The Supreme Court has interpreted this clause so broadly that there are few effective restrictions on what Congress can do.

The Rules. The House of Representatives, where representation is based on population, was intended to be truly representative of all the people—the “voice of the common man,” as it were. To be elected to the House, a candidate need be only twenty-five years old and a citizen for seven years. Since House terms last two years, members run for reelection often and can be ousted fairly easily, according to public whim. The founders intended this office to be accessible to and easily influenced by citizens, and to reflect frequent changes in public opinion.

The Senate is another matter. Candidates have to be at least thirty years old and citizens for nine years—older, wiser, and, the founders hoped, more stable than the representatives in the House. Because senatorial terms last for six years, senators are not so easily swayed by changes in public sentiment. In addition, senators were originally elected by members of the state legislatures, not directly by the people. (This was changed by constitutional amendment in 1913.) Election by state legislators, themselves a “refinement” of the general public, would ensure that senators were a higher caliber of citizen: older and wiser but also more in tune with “the commercial and monied interest,” as Massachusetts delegate Elbridge Gerry put it at the Constitutional Convention.²⁰ The Senate would thus be a more aristocratic body—that is, it would look more like the British House of Lords, where members are admitted on the basis of their birth or achievement, not by election.

The Norms. The Constitution created two bodies that have to agree on a law in the exact same form for it to pass. But it does not also spell out the norms—the assumptions underlying those procedures. For instance, the founders assumed that legislating meant compromise. If they hadn’t wanted to force compromise, a unicameral legislature (a one-chambered legislature) would have

been an easier way to go. They rejected that. Given that the authors of the Constitution themselves had to compromise with those who preferred the Articles of Confederation, we can infer that *compromise* is an important democratic norm. The founders also set up the Senate to be the older and more stable chamber. That means the founders expected more from senators, that they behave with more *dignity* than the more unruly House. Senators were expected to act like the adults in the room. Finally, the members of Congress were to be elected, so they intended that the results of fair elections would be recognized by all parties. This implies the norm of *good sportsmanship*, another way of saying that one occasionally has to be a good loser. When one side loses, it doesn't take its marbles and go home. It doesn't call the other side a cheater or say the win is illegitimate (unless it is). Instead, it accepts the loss, knowing it will have another chance, another day.

THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

The **executive** is the part of government that “executes” the laws, or sees that they are carried out. Although technically executives serve in an administrative role, many end up with some decision-making or legislative power as well. National executives are the leaders of their countries, and they participate, with varying amounts of power, in making laws and policies. That role can range from the U.S. president—who, though not a part of the legislature itself, can propose, encourage, and veto legislation—to European prime ministers, who are part of the legislature and may have, as in the British case, the power to dissolve the entire legislature and call a new election.

The fact that the Articles of Confederation provided for no executive power at all was a testimony to the founders' conviction that such a power threatened their liberty. The chaos that resulted under the Articles, however, made it clear to founders like Alexander Hamilton that a stronger government was called for, not only a stronger legislature but a stronger executive as well. The constitutional debates reveal that many of the founders were

haunted by the idea that they might inadvertently reestablish the same tyrannical power over themselves that they had escaped only recently with the Revolution.

The Rules. The solution finally chosen by the founders is a complicated one, but it satisfied all the concerns raised at the convention. The president, a single executive, would serve an unlimited number of four-year terms. (A constitutional amendment in 1951 limited the president to two elected terms.) But the president would be chosen neither by Congress nor directly by the people. Instead, the Constitution provides for the president's selection by an intermediary body called the **Electoral College**. Citizens vote not for the presidential candidates but for a slate of electors, who in turn cast their votes for the candidates about six weeks after the general election. The founders believed that this procedure would ensure a president elected by well-informed delegates who, having no other lawmaking power, could not be bribed or otherwise influenced by candidates. We say more about how this works in Chapter 12, on elections.

Article II of the Constitution establishes the executive branch. The four sections of that article make the following provisions:

- Section 1 sets out the four-year term and the manner of election (that is, the details of the Electoral College). It also provides for the qualifications for office: that the president must be a natural-born citizen of the United States, at least thirty-five years old, and a resident of the United States for at least fourteen years. The vice president serves if the president cannot, and Congress can make laws about succession if the vice president is incapacitated.
- Section 2 establishes the powers of the chief executive. The president is commander-in-chief of the armed forces and of the state militias when they are serving the nation, and he has the power to grant pardons for offenses

against the United States. With the advice and consent of two-thirds of the Senate, the president can make treaties, and with a simple majority vote of the Senate, the president can appoint ambassadors, ministers, consuls, Supreme Court justices, and other U.S. officials whose appointments are not otherwise provided for.

- Section 3 says that the president will periodically tell Congress how the country is doing (the State of the Union address given every January) and will propose to the members those measures thought to be appropriate and necessary. Under extraordinary circumstances, the president can call Congress into session or, if the two houses of Congress cannot agree on when to end their sessions, can adjourn them. The president also receives ambassadors and public officials, executes the laws, and commissions all military officers of the United States.
- Section 4 specifies that the president, vice president, and other civil officers of the United States (such as Supreme Court justices) can be impeached, tried, and convicted for “Treason, Bribery, or other high Crimes and Misdemeanors.”

The Norms. The founders knew what kind of man they wanted to hold the presidency; George Washington was right in front of them, a model executive. But they left that description unspoken. Implied by the rules is the norm of *independence*—a separate executive and legislature make it difficult to ram through legislation, and the Constitution strictly guards against any allegiance to another country (hence the requirement of natural-born citizenship and the complicated emoluments clause, which forbids the president from taking expensive gifts from another country). They also wanted the president to demonstrate *dignity*. The office combines the jobs of head of government (the political role) and head of state (the symbolic role). Truth to tell, they never imagined a government as large and complex as ours is today, so the head-of-government role didn’t loom as large. But

the head-of-state role, representing the country as a whole, was key. So the founders implied the norm of *unity*, of representing the entire country. Finally, it is clear from the impeachment powers of Congress and from limits such as the emoluments clause that the founders had created a limited executive who could be removed from office by Congress for “Treason, Bribery, or other high Crimes and Misdemeanors.” So another executive norm is that the president is bound by *the rule of law*.

THE JUDICIAL BRANCH

Judicial power is the power to interpret the laws and to judge whether they have been broken. Naturally, by establishing how a given law is to be understood, the courts (the agents of judicial power) end up making law as well. Our constitutional provisions for the establishment of the judiciary are brief and vague; much of the American federal judiciary under the Supreme Court is left to Congress to arrange. But the founders left plenty of clues as to how they felt about judicial power in their debates and their writings, particularly in *The Federalist Papers*, a series of newspaper editorials written to encourage people to support and vote for the new Constitution.

For instance, the practice of judicial review is introduced through the back door, first mentioned by Hamilton in *Federalist* No. 78 and then institutionalized by the Supreme Court itself with Chief Justice John Marshall’s 1803 ruling in *Marbury v. Madison*, a dispute over presidential appointments.

Judicial review allows the Supreme Court to rule that an act of Congress or the executive branch (or of a state or local government) is unconstitutional—that is, that it runs afoul of constitutional principles. This review process is not an automatic part of law-making; the Court does not examine every law that Congress passes or every executive order to be sure that it does not violate the Constitution. Rather, if an individual or a group challenges a law as unjust or unconstitutional, and if it is appealed all the way to the Supreme Court, the justices may decide to rule on it.

The Rules. This remarkable grant of the power to nullify legislation to what Hamilton called the “least dangerous” branch is not in the Constitution. In *Federalist* No. 78, however, Hamilton argued that it was consistent with the Constitution. In response to critics who objected that such a practice would place the unelected Court in a superior position to the elected representatives of the people, Hamilton wrote that, on the contrary, it raised the people, as authors of the Constitution, over the government as a whole. Thus judicial review enhanced democracy rather than diminished it.

In 1803 Marshall agreed. As the nation’s highest law, the Constitution sets the limits on what is acceptable legislation. As the interpreter of the Constitution, the Supreme Court must determine when laws fall outside those limits. It is interesting to note that this gigantic grant of power to the Court was made by the Court itself and remains unchallenged by the other branches. It is ironic that this sort of empire building, which the founders hoped to avoid, appears in the branch that they took the least care to safeguard and spent the least amount of ink detailing in the Constitution. We return to *Marbury v. Madison* and judicial review in Chapter 9, on the court system.

Article III of the Constitution is very short. It says that the judicial power of the United States is to be “vested in one Supreme Court, and in such inferior courts as the Congress may from time to time ordain and establish,” and that judges serve as long as they demonstrate “good behavior.” It also explains that the Supreme Court has original jurisdiction in some types of cases and appellate jurisdiction in others. That is, in some cases the Supreme Court is the only court that can rule. Much more often, however, inferior courts try cases, but their rulings can be appealed to the Supreme Court. Article III provides for jury trials in all criminal cases except impeachment, and it defines the practice of and punishment for acts of treason. Because the Constitution is relatively silent on the role of the courts in America, that role has been left to Congress and, in some cases, the courts themselves to define.

The Norms. It’s a little more difficult to make inferences about the judiciary because

the founders didn’t spell out the details in the Constitution. The founders wanted a judiciary to have *independence* from political and public influence, hence the grant of lifetime tenure. And it’s pretty clear that the Federalists, at least, wanted it to be *powerful*. Hamilton’s argument in *Federalist* No. 78 laid the groundwork for John Marshall’s decision in *Marbury v. Madison* granting the Court the power of judicial review. The founders also wanted the federal judiciary to be supreme, something they spelled out gently because it was still a sore spot with Anti-Federalists. And they wanted the Court to be perceived as above politics. One way to achieve that illusion was for the Court to remain *nonpartisan* in its rulings. Rulings would undoubtedly have political impact but not show blatant support for the agenda of one party over another. Recent political activity in the Senate to manipulate the appointment of justices to the Court and the subsequent rulings of a Court seen as deeply out of sync with public opinion have been perceived as violating the norm of judicial nonpartisanship. Over 80 percent of the public say they think the justices should leave their own political views out of judicial decisions, and only a bare majority say they approve of an institution that used to enjoy high approval rates.²¹

SEPARATION OF POWERS AND CHECKS AND BALANCES

Separation of powers means that legislative, executive, and judicial powers are not exercised by the same person or group of people, lest they abuse the considerable amount of power they hold. We are indebted to the French Enlightenment philosopher the Baron de Montesquieu for explaining this notion. In his massive book *The Spirit of the Laws*, Montesquieu wrote that liberty could be threatened only if the same group that enacted tyrannical laws also executed them. He said, “There would be an end of everything, were the same man or the same body, whether of nobles or of the people, to exercise those three powers, that of enacting laws, that of executing the public resolutions, and of trying the causes of individuals.”²² Putting all political power into one set of hands is like putting all our eggs in

one basket. If the person or body of people entrusted with all the power becomes corrupt or dictatorial, the whole system will go bad. If, however, power is divided so that each branch is in separate hands, one may go bad while leaving the other two intact.

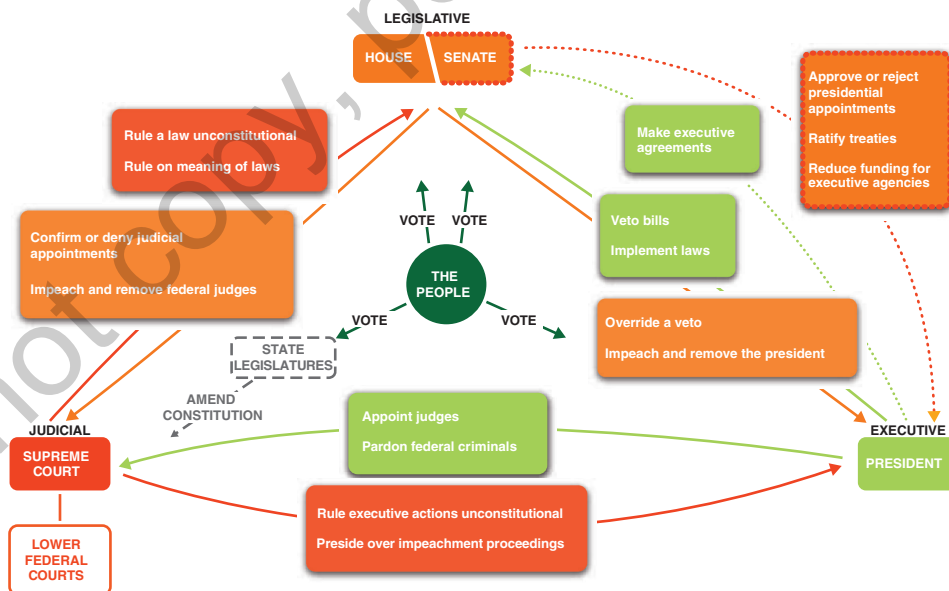
The principle of separation of powers gives each branch authority over its own domain. A complementary principle, **checks and balances**, allows each of the branches to police the others, checking any abuses and balancing the powers of government. The purpose of this additional authority is to ensure that no branch can exercise power tyrannically. In America's case, the president can veto an act of Congress; Congress can override a veto; the Supreme Court can declare a law of Congress unconstitutional; Congress can, with the help of the states, amend the Constitution itself; and so on. Figure 2.1 illustrates these relationships.

The Rules. As we saw, the Constitution establishes separation of powers with articles setting up a different institution for each branch of government. Checks and balances are provided by clauses within these articles:

- Article I sets up a bicameral legislature. Because both houses must agree on all legislation, they can check each other. Article I also describes the presidential veto, with which the president can check Congress, and the override provision, by which two-thirds of Congress can check the president. Congress can also check abuses of the executive or judicial branch with impeachment.
- Article II empowers the president to execute the laws and to share some legislative function by “recommending laws.” The president has

FIGURE 2.1

Separation of Powers and Checks and Balances



some checks on the judiciary through the power to appoint judges, but the appointment power is checked by the requirement that a majority of the Senate must confirm the president's choices. The president can also check the judiciary by granting pardons. The president is commander-in-chief of the armed forces, but the ability to exercise that authority is checked by the Article I provision that only Congress can declare war.

- Article III creates the Supreme Court. The Court's ruling in the case of *Marbury v. Madison* fills in some of the gaps in this vague article by establishing judicial review, a true check on the legislative and executive branches. Congress can countercheck judicial review by amending the Constitution (with the help of the states).

The Constitution wisely ensures that no branch of the government can act independently of the others, yet none is wholly dependent on the others, either. This results in a structure of separation of powers and checks and balances that is distinctively American.

The Norms. What the Constitution doesn't say about checks and balances is that the branches have to make it work for it to work. Congress has to hold the president to account through oversight and by withholding consent to unqualified appointments. The president has to veto bills they think are wrongheaded or that the country cannot afford in some way. The courts have to truly be independent—judges must be loyal not to the person who appointed them but to the country and the Constitution. The norms that are implied in the Constitution with respect to separation of powers and checks and balances are the principles of institutional independence and country over party. The founders expected checks and balances to hold even if a single party held Congress and the White House, and they intended for each institution to prioritize the nation's well-being over furthering the goals of the dominant party in

the institution. They would have chosen a parliamentary system if they had wanted the Congress to rubberstamp executive action or the courts to take partisan sides.

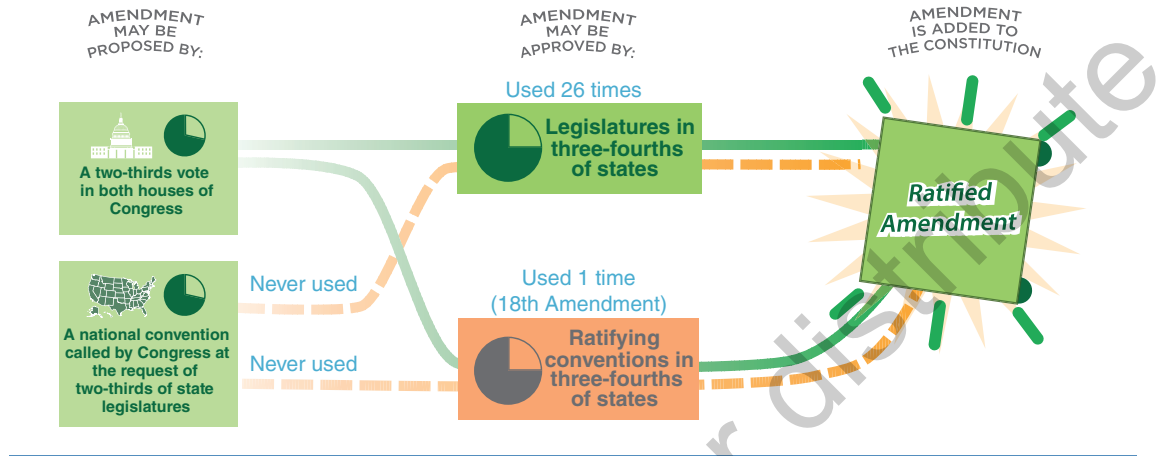
AMENDABILITY

If a constitution is a rule book, then its capacity to be changed over time is critical to its remaining a viable political document. A rigid constitution runs the risk of ceasing to seem legitimate to citizens who have no prospect of changing the rules according to shifting political realities and visions of the public good. A constitution that is too easily revised, on the other hand, can be seen as no more than a political tool in the hands of the strongest interests in society. A final feature of the U.S. Constitution that deserves mention in this chapter is its **amendability**—the founders' provision for a method of amendment, or change, that allows the Constitution to grow and adapt to new circumstances. In fact, they provided for two methods: the formal amendment process outlined in the Constitution, and an informal process that results from the vagueness of the document and the evolution of the role of the courts (see Figure 2.2).

In the 200-plus years of the U.S. Constitution's existence, more than 10,000 constitutional amendments have been introduced, but the Constitution has been amended only twenty-seven times. By contrast, in the course of interpreting the Constitution, the Supreme Court has, for example, extended many of the Bill of Rights protections to state citizens via the Fourteenth Amendment, permitted the national government to regulate business, prohibited child labor, and extended equal protection of the laws to women (see the next section for more on the Bill of Rights). In some cases, amendments previously introduced to accomplish these goals (such as the Child Labor Amendment and the Equal Rights Amendment) were not ratified, and in other cases the Court has simply decided to interpret the Constitution in a new way. Judicial interpretation is at times quite controversial. Many scholars and politicians believe that the literal word of the founders should be adhered to, whereas others claim that the

FIGURE 2.2

Amending the Constitution



founders could not have anticipated all the opportunities and pitfalls of modern life and that the Constitution should be considered a flexible, or “living,” document. We return to this controversy when we look more closely at the courts in Chapter 9.

The Constitution is silent on the subject of judicial interpretation, but in part because it is silent, especially in Article III, the courts have been able to create their own role. In contrast, Article V spells out in detail the rather confusing procedures for officially amending the Constitution. These procedures are federal—that is, they require the involvement and approval of the states as well as the national government. The procedures boil down to this: amendments may be proposed either by a two-thirds vote of the House and the Senate or when two-thirds of the states request it by a constitutional convention; they must be approved either by the legislatures of three-fourths of the states or by conventions of three-fourths of the states. Two interesting qualifications are contained in Article V: no amendment affecting slavery could be made before 1808, and no amendment can deprive a state of its equal vote in the Senate without that state’s consent. We can easily imagine the North-South and large

state—small state conflicts that produced those compromises.

The constitutional convention method of amendment, where change is initiated by the states, has never actually been used, although states have frequently tried to initiate such a movement. In fact, an effort to create a balanced budget amendment in this way is currently under way. Nineteen of the necessary thirty-four states (nearly all Republican-led) have passed resolutions calling on Congress to hold a constitutional convention to pass a balanced budget amendment, with many more in the works. Several other efforts are right behind it that would try to put in extra protections for religious freedom (and perhaps defining citizenship as beginning at conception) or other limitations on government action. Opponents argue that once a convention is convened, it might be hard to contain the urge to make multiple changes to the Constitution, although three-quarters of the states would still need to approve the amendments.²³

In Your Own Words 2.5

Explain the system of separation of powers and checks and balances.

RATIFICATION

Selling the Constitution to Americans

For the Constitution to become the law of the land, it had to undergo **ratification**, that is, it had to be voted on and approved by state conventions in at least nine states. As it happens, the Constitution was eventually ratified by all thirteen states, but not until some major political battles had been fought.

FEDERALISTS VERSUS ANTI-FEDERALISTS

So strongly partisan were the supporters and opponents of the Constitution that, if the battle were taking place today, Twitter feeds would be on fire and we would probably find the two sides sniping at each other on cable TV programs like *The Sean Hannity Show* and *The Rachel Maddow Show*, and Samantha Bee would be busy mocking both groups. It was a fierce, lively battle to control the narrative of what the new republic would be like, but instead of producing viral videos with the lifespan of a fruit fly and high television ratings, it yielded some of the finest writings for and against the American system. Those in favor of ratification called themselves Federalists. The Federalists, like Delegate A in our earlier hypothetical constitution-building scenario, were mostly men with a considerable economic stake in the new nation. Having fared poorly under the Articles, they were certain that if America were to grow as an economic and world power, it needed to be the kind of country people with property would want to invest in. Security and order were key values, as was popular control. The Federalists thought people like themselves should be in charge of the government, although some of them did not object to an expanded suffrage if government had enough built-in protections. Mostly they were convinced that a good government could be designed if the underlying principles of human behavior were known. If people were ambitious and tended toward corruption, then government should make use of those characteristics to produce good outcomes.

The Anti-Federalists told a different story. They rejected the notion that ambition and corruption

were inevitable parts of human nature. If government could be kept small and local, the stakes not too large and tempting, and popular scrutiny truly vigilant, then Americans could live happy and contented lives without getting involved in the seamier side of politics. America did not need sprawling urban centers of commerce and trade; nor did it need to be a world power. If it did not stray from its rural roots and values, it could permanently avoid the creeping corruption that the Anti-Federalists believed threatened the American polity. The reason the Anti-Federalists found the Articles of Confederation more attractive than the Constitution was that the Articles did not call for a strong central government that, distant from the voters' eyes, could become a hotbed of political intrigue. Instead, the Articles vested power in the state governments, which could be more easily watched and controlled.

Writing under various aliases as well as their own names, the Federalists and Anti-Federalists fired arguments back and forth in pamphlets and newspaper editorials aimed at persuading undecided Americans to come out for or against the Constitution. Because the channels of communication were limited, the competing ideas were concentrated into two streams. The Federalists were far more aggressive and organized in their “media blitz,” hitting New York newspapers with a series of eloquent editorials, known collectively as ***The Federalist Papers***, published under the pen name Publius but really written by Hamilton, Madison, and John Jay. These essays were bound and distributed in other states where the ratification struggle was close. *The Federalist Papers* is one of the main texts on early American politics today. In response, the Anti-Federalists published essays under names such as Cato, Brutus, and the Federal Farmer.²⁴

The Federalist Papers. Eighty-five essays were written by Publius. In a contemporary introduction to the essays, compiled as a book, one scholar calls them, along with the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, part of “the sacred writings of American political history.”²⁵ Putting them on a par with holy things is probably a mistake. Far from being divinely inspired, *The Federalist Papers* are quintessentially the work of

human beings. They are clever, well thought out, and logical, but they are also tricky and persuasive examples of the “hard sell.” Their archaic language makes *The Federalist Papers* generally difficult reading for contemporary students. However, the arguments in support of the Constitution are laid out so beautifully that it is worthwhile to take the trouble to read them. It would be a good idea to turn to them now and read them carefully.

In *Federalist* No. 10, Madison tries to convince Americans that a large country is no more likely to succumb to the effects of special interests than is a small one (preferred by the Anti-Federalists). He explains that the greatest danger to a republic comes from factions, what we might call interest groups. **Factions** are groups of people motivated by a common interest, but one different from the interest of the country as a whole. Farmers, for instance, have an interest in keeping food prices high, even though that would make most Americans worse off. Businesspeople prefer high import duties on foreign goods, even though they make both foreign and domestic goods more expensive for the rest of us. Factions are not a particular problem when they constitute a minority of the population because they are offset by majority rule. They do become problematic, however, when they are a majority. Factions usually have economic roots, the most basic being a difference between the “haves” and “have nots” in society. One of the majority factions that worried Madison was the mass of propertyless people whose behavior was so threatening to property holders under the Articles of Confederation.

To control the *causes* of factions would be to infringe on individual liberty. But Madison believed that the *effects* of factions are easily managed in a large republic. First of all, representation will dilute the effects of factions, and it is in this essay that Madison makes his famous distinction between “pure democracy” and a “republic.” In addition, if the territory is sufficiently large, factions will be neutralized because there will be so many of them that no one is likely to become a majority. Furthermore, it will be difficult for people who share common interests to find one another if some live in South Carolina, for instance, and others live in Maine. (Clearly, Madison never anticipated social

media or even the telegraph.) We discuss Madison’s argument about factions again when we take up the topic of interest groups in Chapter 11. In the meantime, notice how Madison relies on mechanical elements of politics (size and representation) to remedy a flaw in human nature (the tendency to form divisive factions). This is typical of the Federalists’ approach to government and reflects the importance of institutions as well as rules in bringing about desired outcomes in politics.

We see the same emphasis on mechanical solutions to political problems in *Federalist* No. 51. Here Madison argues that the institutions proposed in the Constitution will lead neither to corruption nor to tyranny. The solution is the principles of checks and balances and separation of powers we have already discussed. Again building his case on a potential defect of human character, he says, “Ambition must be made to counteract ambition.”²⁶ If men tend to be ambitious, give two ambitious men the job of watching over each other, and neither will let the other have an advantage.

Federalist No. 84, written by Hamilton, is interesting politically because the Constitution was ratified in spite of it, not because of it. In this essay, Hamilton argues that a **Bill of Rights**—a listing of the protections against government infringement of individual rights guaranteed to citizens by government itself—is not necessary in a constitution. The original draft of the Constitution contained no Bill of Rights. Some state constitutions had them, and so the Federalists argued that a federal Bill of Rights would be redundant. Moreover, the limited government set up by the federal Constitution didn’t have the power to infringe on individual rights anyway, and many of the rights that would be included in a Bill of Rights were already in the body of the text. To the Anti-Federalists, already afraid of the invasive power of the national government, this omission was more appalling than any other aspect of the Constitution.

In *Federalist* No. 84, Hamilton explains the Federalist position, that a Bill of Rights was unnecessary. Then he makes the unusual argument that a Bill of Rights would actually be dangerous. As it stands, he says, the national government doesn’t have the power to interfere with citizens’ lives in

many ways, and any interference at all would be suspect. But if the Constitution were prefaced with a list of things government could *not* do to individuals, government would assume it had the power to do anything that wasn't expressly forbidden. Therefore government, instead of being unlikely to trespass on citizens' rights, would be more likely to do so with a Bill of Rights than without. This argument was so unpersuasive to Americans at the time that the Federalists were forced to give in to Anti-Federalist pressure during the ratification process. The price of ratification exacted by several states was the Bill of Rights, really a "Bill of Limits" on the federal government, added to the Constitution as the first ten amendments.

Would we have more freedoms today, or fewer, without the Bill of Rights?



Sidney Harris/ScienceCartoonsPlus

THE FINAL VOTE

The small states, gratified by the compromise that gave them equal representation in the Senate and believing they would be better off as part of a strong nation, ratified the Constitution quickly. The vote was unanimous in Delaware, New Jersey, and Georgia. In Connecticut (128–40) and Pennsylvania (46–23), the votes, though not unanimous, were strongly in favor of the Constitution. This may have helped to tip the balance for Massachusetts, voting much more closely to ratify (187–168). Maryland (63–11) and South Carolina (149–73) voted in favor of ratification in the spring of 1788, leaving only one more state to supply the requisite nine to make the Constitution law.

The battles in the remaining states were much fiercer. When the Virginia convention met in June 1788, the Federalists felt that it could provide the decisive vote and threw much of their effort into securing passage. Madison and his Federalist colleagues debated with Anti-Federalist advocates such as George Mason and Patrick Henry, promising as they had in Massachusetts to support a Bill of Rights. Virginia ratified the Constitution by the narrow margin of 89 to 79, preceded by a few days by New

Hampshire, voting 57 to 47. Establishment of the Constitution as the law of the land was ensured with the approval of ten states. New York also narrowly passed the Constitution (30–27), but North Carolina defeated it (193–75), and Rhode Island, which had not sent delegates to the Constitutional Convention, refused to call a state convention to put it to a vote. Later both North Carolina and Rhode Island voted to ratify and join the Union, in November 1789 and May 1790, respectively.²⁷

Again we can see how important rules are in determining outcomes. The Articles of Confederation had required the approval of all the states. Had the Constitutional Convention chosen a similar rule of unanimity, the Constitution may very well have been defeated. Recognizing that unanimous approval was not probable, however, the Federalists decided to require ratification by only nine of the thirteen states, making adoption of the Constitution far more likely.

In Your Own Words 2.6 Summarize the debate over ratification of the Constitution.

CITIZENSHIP AND THE FOUNDING

New rights bring obligations

As we said at the beginning of this chapter, there are different narratives to be told about the American founding. We did not want to fall into the oversimplification trap, portraying the founding as a headlong rush to liberty on the part of an oppressed people. Politics is always a good deal more complicated than that, and this is a book about politics. We also wanted to avoid telling a story that errs on the other end of one-sidedness, depicting the American founding as an elite-driven period of history in which the political, economic, and religious leaders decided they were better off without English rule, inspired the masses to revolt, and then created a constitution that established rules that benefited people like themselves.

Neither of these stories is entirely untrue, but they obscure a very important point. There was not just one “elite” group at work during the founding period. Although political and economic leaders might have acted together over the matter of the break from England (even then, important elites remained loyal to Britain), once the business of

independence was settled, it was clear that competing elite groups existed. These groups included leaders of big states and leaders of small states, leaders of northern states and leaders of southern states, merchant elites and agricultural elites, and elites who found their security in a strong national government and those who found it in decentralized power. The power struggle between all those adversaries resulted in the compromises that form the framework of our government today.

Because the debates about the Constitution took place in a pre-digital age, they were vociferous, reasoned, angry, manipulative, and stubborn—but the players were limited. Imagine, if you can, what the arguments over constitutional winners and losers would have looked like in a hypermediated age like ours. Perhaps all of the norms that support the Constitution were easier to respect and observe when there were not multiple channels calling for them to be bent or broken to serve the ends of different players.

.....
• ***In Your Own Words 2.7*** Evaluate the
• narratives told about the founding of the
• United States.
•

Wrapping It Up

Let’s Revisit: What’s at Stake ... ?

Having read the history of revolutionary America, what would you say is at stake in the modern militia movement? The existence of state militias and similar groups poses a troubling dilemma for the federal government; and groups whose members are mostly benign, like the Tea Partiers, or even part

of one of the two major political parties, are even trickier for the government to deal with. Clinton, who was president when McVeigh bombed the federal building in Oklahoma City, warned at the time of the fifteenth anniversary of those attacks that “there can be real consequences when what you say animates people who do things you would never do.” Angry rhetoric and narratives that justify that anger can result in violence that those who goad the anger might not necessarily endorse.²⁸

The dilemma is that, on the one hand, the purpose of government is to protect our rights, and the Constitution surely guarantees Americans freedom of speech and assembly. On the other hand, government must hold the monopoly on the legitimate use of force in society or it will fall, just as the British government fell to the American colonies. If groups are allowed to amass weapons and forcibly resist or even attack U.S. law enforcers, then they constitute “mini-governments,” or competing centers of authority, and life for citizens becomes chaotic and dangerous.

The American system was designed to be relatively responsive to the wishes of the American public. Citizens can get involved; they can vote, run for office, change the laws, and amend the Constitution. By permitting these legitimate ways of affecting American politics, the founders hoped to prevent the rise of groups, like the ones we discussed in *What's at Stake . . . ?* that would promote and act with violence. The founders intended to create a society characterized by political stability, not by revolution, which is why Jefferson's Declaration of Independence is so careful to point out that revolutions should occur only when the causes

are egregious and there is no alternative course of action.

Some militia members reject the idea of working through the system; they say, as did McVeigh, that they consider themselves at war with the federal government. The January 6 insurrectionists were protesting the very elections that are our mechanism for working through the system. We call disregard for the law at the individual level “crime,” at the group level “terrorism” or “insurrection,” and at the majority level “revolution.” It is the job of any government worth its salt to prevent all three kinds of activities. Thus it is not the existence or the beliefs of the militia groups that government seeks to control but rather their activities.

What's at stake in challenges to the legitimacy of government are the very issues of government authority and the rights of individual citizens. It is difficult to draw the line between the protection of individual rights and the exercise of government authority. In a democracy, we want to respect the rights of all citizens, but this respect can be thwarted when a small number of individuals reject the rules of the game agreed on by the vast majority.

Review

Introduction

The history of the American founding has been told from many points of view. Historical evidence points to a more complicated story than the one we are told in grade school about the early colonists who escaped from Europe to avoid religious persecution. The early Americans had economic and political agendas as well as religious and philosophical motives. After much struggle among themselves, the majority of Americans decided that those agendas could be carried out better and more profitably if they broke their ties with England.

The Split From England

The battle for America involved a number of groups, including Native Americans, and Spanish, French, and British colonists. By the time the British won the **French and Indian War** to secure the

colonists' defense, the colonists, already chafing under British rule, felt secure enough to sever the ties that bound them to the mother country, starting the Revolution and then in 1776 issuing the **Declaration of Independence**. Although that document proclaimed the equality of "all men," the American founders clearly did not include African Americans, Native Americans, or women in that category.

The Articles of Confederation

Charged with creating a **constitution**, the founders drew up the **Articles of Confederation**, establishing a **confederation** of sovereign states. The new government wasn't strong enough to provide political stability in the face of popular discontent, however. Worried about popular tyranny, which they saw threatened in actions like **Shays's Rebellion**, the political elite called for a new constitution.

The Constitutional Convention

At the **Constitutional Convention** in 1787, the founders rejected a confederal system in favor of **federalism**, giving the central government and the states each some power of their own. Those who endorsed this political innovation were known as the Federalists, and those who opposed it, the **Anti-Federalists**. Federalists supported a strong central government in which representation was determined by population—a plan, called the **Virginia Plan**, favored by the large states. The Anti-Federalists, suspicious of centralized power, favored the **New Jersey Plan**, which limited power and gave each state equal congressional representation regardless of its size. These issues were resolved in the **Great Compromise**, which created a bicameral legislature, basing representation on population in one house and on equality in the other. The other major conflict among the founders, over how enslaved people were to be counted for purposes of representation, was resolved by the **Three-Fifths Compromise**.

The Constitution

The new Constitution was based on **separation of powers** and **checks and balances**, keeping the **legislature**, the **executive**, and the judiciary distinct but allowing each some power over the others. The independence of the branches and the checks between them were enhanced by such institutions as the **bicameral legislature**, the **Electoral College**, **judicial power**, and the practice of **judicial review**, though the latter are not mentioned explicitly in the Constitution. The founders provided for **amendability**, should circumstances require that the Constitution be changed in the future.

Ratification

The Federalists and the Anti-Federalists waged a battle over **ratification** of the new Constitution, with the former setting out their case in a series of newspaper editorials known today as **The Federalist Papers**. In the most famous of these essays, Madison argued that the new republic would be well able to handle the danger of **factions**, and in another, Alexander Hamilton argued that it would be dangerous to add a **Bill of Rights** to the document. Hamilton ultimately lost the argument, and the

Bill of Rights was the price the Anti-Federalists demanded for their agreement to ratify the Constitution.

Citizenship and the Founding

The American founding reflects competition among elites as well as the establishment of a new form of citizenship.

Key Terms

amendability
Anti-Federalists
Articles of Confederation
bicameral legislature
Bill of Rights
checks and balances
confederation
constitution
Constitutional Convention
Declaration of Independence

Electoral College
executive
factions
federalism
The Federalist Papers
Federalists
French and Indian War
Great Compromise
judicial power
judicial review

legislature
New Jersey Plan
popular tyranny
ratification
separation of powers
Shays's Rebellion
Three-Fifths Compromise
Virginia Plan