SUPPORT MATERIAL

ROUTLEDGE

Fourth Edition

Analyzing American Democracy

Politics and Political Science

Jon R. Bond, Kevin B. Smith and Lydia M. Andrade

Analyzing American Democracy

Praise for *Analyzing American Democracy*

The new edition of this revered text threads the needle by adding several exciting touches—most notably, the thoroughly updated content and thematically integrated boxes—without sacrificing the features that so many devoted instructors have long loved—most notably, the unapologetically scientific approach and the vivid, deeply engaging writing style.

—John Hibbing, *University of Nebraska–Lincoln*

From its focus on the principles of democracy to the actual practice of democracy in the United States, this introductory text provides university students with the necessary tools to critically analyze American politics. The authors effectively apply political science research in a way that is fresh and accessible to students and do so in a way that will make students think well beyond their preconceptions about politics. The chapter on elections is the most thorough and engaging treatment of presidential elections you will find in an introductory American politics textbook.

—Jeffrey S. Peake, *Clemson University*

Analyzing American Democracy provides the most comprehensive and nuanced treatment of American political institutions and behavior to date. By drawing upon the most recent political science literature, the text encourages students to see American politics through a theoretical lens, and promotes a more generalized understanding of political concepts that transcend time and space. With stimulating real-world examples of the trade-offs, paradoxes, and competing ethical perspectives that are negotiated in a modern representative democracy, students become conversant and critically engaged in the challenges confronting the country, and thus, become better citizens.

—Sarah A. Fulton, *Texas A&M University*

Analyzing American Democracy is one of the best American government books on the market. Not only is it comprehensive in covering material across the vast spectrum of American politics, but it also has an interesting point of view: the idea that our expectations of government and its performance may not be entirely realistic. The authors have written a book that is accessible to undergraduate students, yet provides sufficient detail for professors to examine the nuances of American politics today.

—Richard W. Waterman, *University of Kentucky*

No text does a better job of integrating modern political science with a thoroughly up-to-date introduction to American government. Most of my students have already been exposed to an AP-style high school American government survey, and a text that is clearly more science than civics is exactly what they need at the college level. On top of that the writing has the wit, snap, and drive that keeps students reading and thinking in spite of themselves.

—John R. Alford, *Rice University*

Teaching a broad survey course that covers the breadth of American politics can be a daunting task for both instructors and students. This text organizes what could be an overwhelming amount of information into a logical structure coupled with a straightforward, journalistic writing style that incorporates cutting-edge political science research with key political concepts. The result is a textbook that is truly an introduction to political science, not just civics or popular politics.

—Amanda Friesen, *Indiana University–Purdue University at Indianapolis*

Analyzing American Democracy

Politics and Political Science

Fourth Edition

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PART I: THE CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

PREFACE

We are political scientists, so almost by definition we are fascinated by politics and believe the best way to understand the political world is through the scientific method. Among us we also have decades of teaching experience, so we are acutely aware that the typical undergraduate shares neither our passion for politics nor a familiarity with the scientific method. The central mission of the fourth edition of *Analyzing American Democracy*, like its predecessors, is not simply to educate students about the political and policy world, but also to teach them two general lessons. First, as citizens of the republic and citizens of the world, as individuals pursuing an education, a career, and a fulfilling life, they have a lot of extremely good, self-interested reasons to know more about politics. Second, if they want to know more about politics, approaching it scientifically is the most systematic and useful way to do so.

That, we fully realize, can be a tough sell, especially in an era of alt-facts and roll-your-own reality. We live in a polarized and partisan world, and most of what undergraduates know and learn about politics comes from friends, family, and social media, not from political science or political scientists. Indeed, most undergraduates are likely to take only one class and read only one textbook on American politics during their college career. Precisely because our chances to contribute to their education are so limited, we believe that a textbook needs to pursue three fundamental goals. First, at the most basic level, it must be comprehensive. The content between the covers of this single volume should capture a soup-to-nuts overview of the context, rules, processes, and institutions of the American political system. Second, it must not only introduce students to the basic mechanics of American politics but also present in an accessible way the basics of political science and how political scientists explain why politics works the way it does. Third, and most importantly, it must provide students with some basic intellectual tools necessary to promote independent analytic thought about the often confusing and always changing world of American politics. The fourth edition of *Analyzing American Democracy: Politics and Political Science* seeks to achieve these three goals.

First, the book is comprehensive. It begins by providing students a historical and constitutional framework for understanding American politics. This means introducing students to the concept of democracy, the values democracy represents, and how these values are expressed in the structure and evolution of governance in America. It means a comprehensive examination of the linkage mechanisms that connect citizens to government and how those mechanisms express—or fail to express—the core democratic principles embodied in the American political system. It means systematically covering the key policymaking institutions of national government, not just the decision-making institutions established by the Constitution—

the legislative, executive, and judicial branches—but also bureaucracy, one of the most important and least understood institutions of American politics. Finally, it means giving an overview of how all these elements come together in making and implementing public policy. Of course, we can't cover everything, and we hope students reading this textbook might be intrigued enough by some of the topics that they will continue with additional upper-division courses in American politics. But we aim to include enough of the raw material to help students understand the workings of contemporary American politics such that they can become engaged members of the polity.

Second, this book aims not simply to cover the basics of the American political system but also to demonstrate how politics can be usefully and systematically studied generally. It is valuable for students to have the basic details down and even better for them to begin understanding how the pieces fit together. Our goal is to put into your hands a book that is about not just politics, but political *science.* We take seriously the charge implied in the book's title: A central goal here is to teach students how to think analytically about the complexities of political conflict, processes, institutions, behavior, and policies. We introduce students to the science and craft of political science in Chapter 1 and use the frameworks and scholarship of the discipline to organize and explain all aspects of the American political system. In particular, we introduce students to three theoretical frameworks that illustrate the scientific study of politics—rational choice models, behavioral models, and evolutionary/biological models—and repeatedly return to these frameworks as explanatory aids throughout the book. Because we believe that the text used in political science courses should show students how political scientists report the results of their research, we continue to use the American Political Science Association style of in-text citations, with a comprehensive list of references. More generally, we lean heavily on political science scholarship in all of our explanatory accounts—our aim is to show students political science in action. We particularly want to do this because an Introduction to American Politics class may be the only political science course many students take in their undergraduate career. We want them to leave that class knowing something about what political scientists do and why it is important, just as students taking introductory economics or biology come away knowing something about the core theories and perspectives of those disciplines. In our view, too few introductory American politics textbooks achieve this, and too few members of the population see the value of political science compared to punditry and sound bites.

Third, the book seeks to be accessible but not "dumbed down." In our experience, students get the most out of this course not just by mastering the facts and theories covered, but when they further develop the tools of analytical thought. All our chapters begin with a story, written magazine-style, that provides a quick and easy introduction to the core themes of the chapter. The next section highlights the core concepts associated with the topic: What principles guide the creation and practice of a federal system? What role does public opinion, which is often ambiguous or divided, play in governance? How does political participation uphold the core principles of American democracy? What purpose does Congress serve as

the national legislative institution? From there, chapters progressively build on these foundations to present the most important concepts, theories, and tools for understanding the great complexity of American politics. Undergraduate students could never hope to know everything about politics in America. Indeed, even if they did, such knowledge would quickly become outdated as new media emerge, rules change, and outcomes of public policies evolve to face new challenges among the citizenry. Students are best served by their textbook and by their undergraduate education if they also learn how to apply core principles and tools to future challenges. For example, the rapidly fragmenting and increasingly partisan media landscape feeds worries about media bias in many citizens. Understanding the core principle of political freedom puts a more partisan press into perspective—a functioning and healthy democracy does not need an unbiased press; what it needs is a *free* press. Or consider that many citizens are frustrated with the increasingly polarized nature of American politics and that elections increasingly seem to represent a choice between partisan extremes. Understanding the core principle of political equality and how the nomination process makes some more equal than others in deciding the general election ballot can help students understand why polarization exists and stimulate thinking on paths to reduce political polarization. American politics and the scholarship of political science tell an interesting and fascinating story; the task of telling that story in an engaging and accessible manner, we treated as both a challenge and an important responsibility.

NEW TO THE FOURTH EDITION

Updated coverage throughout includes the following:

- Provides 2020 election data updates throughout and examines policy implications of the ensuing changes in election laws across the country.
- Recaps controversial Trump administration policies and looks into the Biden administration's early days.
- Offers strategic updates on the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic crisis both in terms of questions of federalism as well as public policy.
- Considers the rise of new interest groups and social movements as well as the reckoning with racial injustice.
- Examines contemporary questions of social justice in light of civil rights and liberties as well as in terms of policy.
- Covers the death of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the battle to confirm her replacement, the addition of Justice Coney Barrett, and the policy implications of the shift in the ideological balance of the Court.
- For the fourth edition, a new co-author comes to the book with award-winning experience in diversity and teacher education as well as research interests in the presidency, women and politics, and foreign policy.

PEDAGOGICAL FEATURES

We have devised a number of learning tools in this text to help students master the goals of their course. First, before students get immersed in the details of a chapter, they will find at the start a list of key questions to help frame the objectives of that chapter. These questions will help form a conceptual map of what comes next.

Next, every chapter has at least two themed features—"Thinking Analytically" and "Applying the Frameworks"—specifically crafted to show students how the concepts and theories covered in the main body of the chapter are translated into promoting systematic understanding of politics and to prompt them to put that systemic approach to thinking analytically into practice. The framework for doing this is established in the first chapter, where we provide students with a basic framework on the scientific method and what it means to think analytically. The features in each chapter are designed not just to report how that method is put into action, but to get students to do it themselves. The idea is to present them with questions—How do we measure media bias? Does business experience make a better president?—and give them applied practice in systematically thinking their way to their own answers.

In keeping with our focus on political science, we try to graphically illustrate researchers' findings and general concepts as much as we can. In these pages you will find a rich assortment of tables, figures, charts, and maps to present the empirical details of American politics. These are designed to support and parallel the primary themes of each chapter and help reach students with diverse learning styles.

At the end of each chapter, students might rightly ask themselves what were the most important points covered. We present the "Top 10 Takeaway Points" to answer just such a question. These lists are a handy reference for students reviewing their reading and preparing for quizzes and tests. They also further our goal of helping students see the forest through the trees, discerning the general principles that make sense of the numerous factual details.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For the fourth edition, we are pleased to welcome Lydia Andrade as a co-author to this project. While Lydia was working on her PhD at Texas A&M University, she provided tremendous help as a graduate assistant to Jon Bond. Since those days, Lydia has gone on to become an accomplished researcher and administrator, and not surprisingly, a master teacher. Her teaching ability was immediately apparent. I remember having to step over dozens of freshmen sitting two deep in the hallway waiting to see her. She quickly perfected what I called "a stern mother" teaching style, pounding the desk with her index finger and scolding them mercilessly for not working hard enough to learn the material. Though the bits I heard as I walked by sounded harsh, the students loved her for it—and they learned the material. We hope Lydia's talents as a teacher will enrich the message in this book.

Like all books, this is a collaborative undertaking. The authors would like to extend thanks to all the good folks on the Routledge editorial team who contributed so much to what you hold in your hands, in particular: Jennifer Knerr, Jacqueline Dorsey, Katharine Atherton and Apex CoVantage, LLC. We also thank James B. Cottrill, Byron D'Andra Orey, Scott Granberg-Rademacker, Rebecca Hannagan, and Katelyn Abraham for their past work on the online eResource materials and add special thanks to Jacqueline Dorsey, who helped to update these materials for the fourth edition. We would also like to extend an extra thank you to Sarah Calabi, former Politics editor at CQ Press and now freelancer extraordinaire, whose work on the fourth edition expedited its revision and photo refreshment.

We appreciate it.

Thanks are also due to the distinguished team of teacher-scholars who have provided reviewed drafts of this book and given invaluable feedback and input for revisions. These reviewers included David Connelly, Don Dugi, Lawrence Friedman, Mike Gruszczynski, Rebecca Hannagan, Richard Krupa, Douglas Kuberski, Jason Frederick Lambacher, Adam Myers, Joanna Mosser, Geoffrey Peterson, Geoffrey Rogal, Joseph Stewart, Richard Waterman, and additional anonymous individuals.

As always, we must also recognize Ken Meier, who made the original phone call that brought the original two authors together on this project. In spite of all the hard work that phone call led to, the authors are still speaking to him—well, most of the time.

Jon Bond is grateful to numerous friends and colleagues. Rich Fleisher at Fordham University deserves special thanks. Although Rich is not a collaborator on this project, he has continued to offer cogent insights and advice that have made this a better book. Current and former colleagues at Texas A&M University who shared their expertise on various topics include George Edwards, Roy Flemming, Bob Harmel, Kim Hill, Pat Hurley, Paul Kellstedt, Norm Luttbeg, Dave Peterson, Eric Godwin, and Jim Rogers. Several current and former graduate students helped with background research, provided technical support, and contributed in many other ways (yes, students, "many" is the appropriate adjective here). I am grateful to Lydia Andrade, Kristi Campbell, Michelle Chin, Jim Cottrill, Nathan Ilderton, Glen Krutz,

Jose Villalobos, Leslie McDonald, and Garrett Vande Kamp. I am grateful to Gary Jacobson at the University of California, San Diego, and George Edwards at Texas A&M University, for sharing their data that helped me update some key sections so that we can compete more effectively with their books. Larry Baum at Ohio State University, Frank Baumgartner at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Beth Leech at Rutgers University, and John Bibby of the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee also offered helpful comments and advice. Finally, I am most grateful for the love and support of my wife, Karon, and my daughters, Lynne, Mika, and Monika.

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Lydia Andrade would like to thank numerous friends and colleagues. It would be wrong not to start by thanking Jon Bond who had faith in me all those years ago when I was a graduate student and again now when you asked me to co-author with you. I have been lucky enough to work with some exceptional teachers and scholars who have shared their teaching insights and experiences with me. Thank you to Kim Owens, Leslie Battaglia, Jeff Fine, Troy Hemphill, Sam Fisher, Drew Lanier, Jim Riddlesperger, Joe Stewart, and Rick Waterman. I would also like to thank all the wonderful students I have had over the years. Some of them have gone on to do amazing things and have become lifelong friends of mine, others have taught me a thing or two; both are greatly appreciated. A special thanks goes out to colleagues at the University of the Incarnate Word—especially Scott Dittloff, Brandon Metroka and Lopita Nath, who have always supported me and most of the time have been willing to join me in many questionable adventures. Finally, I thank the love of my life, David Whipple, who has been forced to endure way too many teaching stories and still manages to smile.

SUPPORT MATERIALS FOR STUDENTS AND INSTRUCTORS

Analyzing American Democracy is accompanied by a number of useful resources designed to aid in student learning and foster the instructional goals of faculty.

Online Support Material

Analyzing American Democracy offers online Support Material for both students and instructors at **www.routledge.com/9780367758691**.

Test Bank

A full test bank, written by James Cottrill (St. Cloud State University) and updated by Katelyn Abraham and the authors, covers each chapter with multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. It is available to professors in a password-protected Word file for easy editing.

Powerpoint Lecture Slides

Written by Scott Granberg-Rademacker (Minnesota State University, Mankato) and Rebecca Hannagan (Northern Illinois University) and updated by Katelyn Abraham, Jacqueline Dorsey, and the authors, these PowerPoint slides feature concise lecture outlines.

Figures and Tables

All figures and tables from the text are provided for instructor convenience.

Jon R. Bond
Kevin B. Smith
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Analyzing American Democracy

1 THE BASICS OF DEMOCRACY

KEY QUESTIONS

What is politics? What is government? What is a democracy?

What are the core principles of democracy?

How does a representative democracy uphold these core principles?

How can we make sense of democracy and politics in America?

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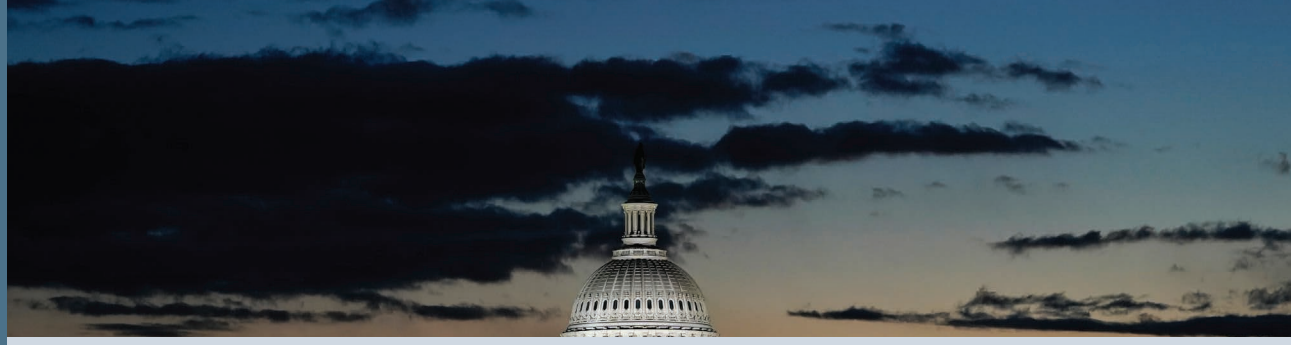

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POLITICIANS HAVE LONG been known for exaggerating their own accomplishments and diminishing those of their opponents, but in general the fear of pushback by the public has kept politicians from blatantly lying. This political norm, however, seemed to have faded under the Trump administration. From the first week in office when White House Spokesperson Sean Spicer had a heated exchange with reporters about the size of Trump's inauguration crowd (claiming it was the largest in history while standing in front of pictures comparing the Trump and Obama inaugurations, clearly showing a larger crowd at the Obama inauguration), to the final moments of Trump's term when he continually spouted unfounded assertions about election fraud to explain his loss, the truth no longer appeared to be a priority.

And following Trump's incitement of followers to storm the Capitol, the resultant security threat ensured that the Biden inauguration crowd would be pared to near-zero. Nevertheless, citizens rely on their political leaders to generally speak the truth and acknowledge reality. More and more unfortunately this expectation is not met, and the results have turned deadly. On January 21, 2020, the first known case of coronavirus in the U.S. was reported and the next day President Trump claimed, "we have it totally under control" (Keith 2020). For the next year, the President would continue to deny scientific evidence on the rate of the spread of the virus and the need for wearing protective masks as a preventative measure, all the while holding out the possibility of a vaccine as a panacea. Ten months into the U.S. outbreak, with more than 227,000 Americans dead and the number of new coronavirus cases on the rise approaching 60,000 per day, President Trump continued to promote his alternative view of reality, claiming "We are rounding the corner" on the virus. Each time the President was questioned by reporters on the discrepancy between his portrayal of the virus and that of the data and advice from medical and scientific experts, the President simply restated his factual inaccuracies. In the end even wearing a face mask became a political statement with Trump supporters refusing to comply with state and local ordinances to do so. The President's politicization of a national crisis rose to the point of dramatically misleading the American public, and in the end people needlessly died.

Arial views of the Obama (left) and Trump (right) inaugural crowds demonstrate the differences in attendance. Despite President Trump's claim that his was the largest inaugural crowd in history, photographic evidence shows otherwise.

Credit: National Park Service.

President Biden was inaugurated in the midst of the worst pandemic in U.S. history when public events across the country were widely prohibited and, when permitted, were restricted in terms of the number of attendees and social distancing. When photos of the day were released the conversation was not whose inaugural crowd was the largest as it had been four years earlier, but rather right-wing media outlets and social media chatter ignored the role of the pandemic and claimed the small attendance at Biden's inaugural was proof that he had not in fact won the election.

What were once just plain and simple falsehoods can now be "alternative facts" (as White House spokesperson Kellyanne Conway famously described some of President Trump's statements), and "truthiness"—believing something to be true because it feels true, even if it is demonstrably not—is an actual thing (Bradner 2017). If anyone says something that contradicts our comforting self-created "realities," especially if it comes from some know-it-all reporter or academic, you don't have to worry about taking it seriously. Just call it fake news. Tom Nichols, a political scientist who wrote a book about "the death of expertise," describes a contemporary America where "policy debates sound increasingly like fights between groups of ill-informed people who all manage to be wrong," where debate does not distinguish between "you're wrong" and "you're stupid," and where "to refuse to acknowledge all views as worthy of consideration, no matter how fantastic or inane they are, is to be close-minded" (Nichols 2017, 25).

That's kind of a depressing picture. And if it's even half-way accurate, you need to know from the beginning that this book is going to be swimming hard against the tide. We not only belong to the reality-based community; we also want you to join us. What follows is premised on the idea that whatever we want the world to be, and regardless of how hard we believe it is exactly

that, it just ain't necessarily so. We believe the world is more than the sum of our own preferences and biases, whatever they are, and that to act otherwise is not only to deny reality but to potentially put democracy at risk. We believe the world, including the political world, is real. It can be prodded and poked, observed and measured, patterns can be identified, outcome probabilities calculated, and cause and effect systematically assessed. We believe that some perspectives—those emerging from serious study and empirical analysis—are simply better than others. And by better, we mean better informed, better thought-out, and better at dealing with the often uncomfortable reality—and it is *reality*—that our political world presents us with.

Fair warning: This sort of analytical thinking, especially about a subject like politics, can be hard work. Most people think politics is, or at least should be, easy. It's just applied common sense, right? Well, no. Turns out that most people have it dead wrong. Americans know remarkably little about politics and government other than that they hold pretty much all of it in disdain. We think the fundamental reason for this is that Americans really do not understand what a democracy is and what a democracy does. Their judgments of politics and government are not based on hard-nosed assessments of the realities of democracy. Much of the frustration that Americans express about their government is anchored in a misunderstanding of what democracy is supposed to do, an unrealistic expectation of what it can do, and a failure to comprehend the dangers of pursuing undemocratic alternatives to solving problems.

This is not too surprising. Democratic politics is messy and contradictory; making reasoned sense of it is never going to be easy and there are other options that require a lot less effort.

For example, it takes a lot less effort to simply see and understand the political world through our biases and predispositions, our ideology and our preferences. Putting those aside and trying to rationally and analytically understand politics requires some intellectual sweat and labor. But it's not rocket science. We have no doubt the vast majority of citizens—and that definitely includes you—possess the ability to think cogently and logically about politics. Doing so requires knowing something about the machinery of democracy, its institutions and its operating principles. But that's not enough. If citizens are to really understand how the parts of a democracy fit together and whether they are working properly, they need to learn how to think analytically about politics. And that's exactly what this book is going to try and teach you to do.

Welcome to the reality-based community.

Analytical thinking is not always easy, but if you want to understand politics it's worth the effort.

KEY CONCEPTS: POLITICS, GOVERNMENT, AND POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY

This book is about understanding how democracy works in the United States. We examine what a democracy is, examine what it is supposed to do, and seek to explain how the institutions and processes of the American political system operate in theory and in practice. We also aim to help readers learn how to think systematically about politics, to employ reasoned analysis—as opposed to ideology, personal preference, or wishful thinking—to make their own independent judgments about what is happening in the political system, why it is happening, and whether it is compatible with the core principles of democracy. This first means gaining a firm understanding of three crucial concepts—politics, government, and popular sovereignty—and what their combination means in the American context.

Politics and Government

For many people, the word "politics" is derogatory. To call others "political" is to accuse them of being manipulative and self-serving. Scholars, however, tend to view politics in more neutral terms. Here are probably the two best-known scholarly definitions of **politics**.

1. According to Harold D. Lasswell (1938), politics is "who gets what, when, and how."
2. According to David Easton (1953), politics is the "authoritative allocation of values."

Both definitions say the same thing: All groups must have some way to make collective decisions, and the process of making those decisions is called politics. Politics is thus the process of coming to some definitive understanding of who is going to get what or whose values everyone is going to live by. Because individuals often disagree about who should get what or whose values should be binding on everyone, politics is a process of conflict management and resolution: It is a natural outcome of human interaction, not just something in which politicians and governments engage. Three friends arguing over what movie to watch are engaging in a small-scale form of politics; they are figuring out whose values (in this case, taste in movies) will be binding on the group.

politics The process of making binding decisions about who gets what or whose values everyone is going to live by.

Although disagreements among friends over what movie to watch usually can be resolved without the group resorting to formal decision-making institutions and processes, this is not the case for large groups such as nations. How can we decide what to do as a society? Who or what gets to decide which values are binding on everyone? The institution that has the authority to make such decisions is generally referred to as **government**.

government The institution that has the authority to make binding decisions for all of society.

Government is not the only institution that seeks to manage conflict and make authoritative decisions about who gets what. Churches, for example, make decisions about what behaviors are right and wrong and urge their members to follow church teachings. What makes government different from other decision-making institutions is coercion. Churches can coerce members of their congregation through threats of excommunication and the like, but they cannot extend that power over nonmembers and other organizations. Governments can. A church that decides that abortion or alcohol consumption is wrong can attempt to make such values binding on its congregation. A government can make such values binding on everyone. Act in defiance of government decisions—that is, break the law—and the government can take your property, your liberty, and even your life. Government is the only institution in society that can legitimately use such coercion on all individuals and organizations, making it the ultimate decider of who gets what (Downs 1957, 23).

Popular Sovereignty

The authority to legally wield this coercive power to allocate values is called **sovereignty** (this is why monarchs are sometimes called "sovereigns," reflecting the historical role of kings and queens as absolute rulers). Governments can be categorized into three basic forms based on who wields sovereign powers. Vesting sovereignty in a single person creates a form of government called an **autocracy**. Autocrats rule as absolute monarchs or dictators, personally deciding who gets what. Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler and the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin are examples of autocracies. A second option is to vest power in a small group of people, a government called an **oligarchy**. A military junta (a group of generals) is an example of an oligarchy. The third option is to broadly share power among all citizens, a form of government called a **democracy**. The word "democracy" is derived from two Greek roots: *demos,* which means "people," and *kratia,* which means "rule." Literally, democracy means "rule by the people."

Thus, in an autocracy a single person is sovereign, and in an oligarchy a small elite is sovereign. In contrast, in a democracy, sovereignty belongs to *all citizens*, a distribution of political power known as **popular sovereignty**. Popular sovereignty gets to the core of what a democracy is: a form of government where all citizens have the right to participate in the process of deciding who gets what. What this means is that democracy is primarily about *process*, or how decisions are made. But a democratic decision-making process does not guarantee that the *substance* of those decisions will be democratic.

sovereignty The legitimate authority in a government to wield coercive power to authoritatively allocate values.

autocracy A form of government in which the power to make authoritative decisions and allocate resources is vested in one person.

oligarchy A form of government in which the power to make authoritative decisions and allocate resources is vested in a small group of people.

democracy A form of government in which all the citizens have the opportunity to participate in the process of making authoritative decisions and allocating resources.

popular sovereignty The idea that the highest political authority in a democracy is the will of the people.

Process and Substance

Democracy as Process

In a democracy, how decisions are made is as important as what those decisions are. Indeed, some scholars view democracy as much more about means than ends (Schumpeter 1942). The means of democracy—the institutions and rules that

organize and operate the political system—create a decision-making process that is typically slow and inefficient. Because all citizens have a right to participate, democratic decision making demands patience, tolerance of opposing viewpoints, and a willingness to compromise.

Ironically, it is this basic nature of a democratic process—inefficiency, gridlock, and lots of conflict—that Americans find most objectionable (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995, 147). Given these distasteful features, it's worth asking whether a democratic decision-making process is the best approach to politics in the United States. Why opt for a form of government all but guaranteed to be slow, inefficient, and constantly embroiled in conflict? The short answer is that a system based on popular sovereignty tends to be more equitable and just. As one astute observer put it, "democracy is the worst form of government. It is the most inefficient, the most clumsy, the most unpractical … Yet democracy is the only form of social order admissible because it is the only one consistent with justice" (Briffault 1930, quoted in Thomsett and Thomsett 1994, 37). A democratic process is rarely marked by efficiency, agreement, clarity, or speed. Instead, the characteristics of a democratic process include the right to vote, to publicly disagree with government decisions and other citizens, to petition an elected representative, to sue, to form an organization with policy goals, to engage in a political campaign, and to support a political party.

Democratic Substance

Though the heart of democracy is about process, substance counts too. Paradoxically, a democratic process can produce an undemocratic outcome. For example, in the United States, majorities historically have supported policies to deny voting rights and educational and economic opportunities to citizens based on gender, ethnicity, and race. Legislatures responded to these preferences with laws systematically denying civil rights and liberties to certain citizens. The process of making those policies could be considered democratic—elections were held, legislators debated, and the majority preference became law. The substance of those decisions, though, systematically stripped large numbers of citizens of their ability to participate fully in political life. The end result was not just unfair, but undemocratic. By taking away the rights of certain citizens to participate in the process of deciding who gets what, the democratic process had made America less democratic.

This is one of the central problems of a democratic system: how to ensure popular sovereignty when people want to use their ability to authoritatively allocate values to limit the rights of others. As U.S. history amply demonstrates, those in power have been tempted to limit the political participation of those who disagree with them. How does democracy uphold the concept of popular sovereignty when some want to use that power to limit the rights of others?

Core Democratic Principles

Popular sovereignty helps ensure a system where everyone is a political equal and free to participate in making binding decisions. In practice, popular sovereignty

rests on the extent to which the process and outcomes of a political system are consistent with three core principles: majority rule, political freedom, and political equality. To be democratic, the process of making decisions *and* the outcomes of those decisions must be compatible with these core principles.

Majority Rule

In a democracy, popular sovereignty means government decisions should reflect the will of the people and that citizens hold the government accountable for its actions. While this sounds fine in theory, citizens often have very different ideas of what the government should or should not do. Government cannot respond to the preferences of all citizens, because citizens want government to do contradictory things. Consider differences in public opinion on issues ranging from immigration to tax cuts. The government cannot provide a path to legal residence for the undocumented while simultaneously seeking to deport them as illegal immigrants any more than it can cut taxes by raising tax rates. How can popular sovereignty be meaningful when people have such profoundly different notions about how values should be authoritatively allocated?

Democracies seek to exercise popular sovereignty through **majority rule**, which means that government follows the course of action preferred by most people. The preferred alternative does not necessarily have to be an **absolute majority**, defined as 50 percent plus one of all eligible citizens, or even a **simple majority**, defined as 50 percent plus one of those who actually vote. If voters' preferences are divided among three or more courses of action, so that none have more than 50 percent support, the choice with the greatest support is called a **plurality**.

Though majority rule is the basic guideline for translating popular sovereignty into political decisions in democracies, it has to be balanced with **minority rights**. A minority is any group numerically smaller than a majority, and it retains the full rights of democratic citizenship. In democracies, minority viewpoints are permitted to be heard and to be critical of the majority's views and actions. In the theory of democracy, the rights of minorities—their political freedom—cannot be taken away, even if the majority prefers this course of action. In practice, as we shall see, majorities often have succeeded in depriving minorities of their democratic rights.

majority rule The principle under which government follows the course of action preferred by most people.

absolute majority Fifty percent plus one of all members or all eligible voters.

simple majority Fifty percent plus one of those participating or of those who vote.

plurality The largest percentage of a vote, when no one has a majority.

minority rights The full rights of democratic citizenship held by any group numerically inferior to the majority. These fundamental democratic rights cannot be taken away—even if a majority wishes to do so—without breaking the promise of democracy.

Political Freedom

Government cannot respond to the will of the people if people are not free to express their wants and demands. To uphold the notion of popular sovereignty, minorities—even if they consist of one or two people with repugnant views—must have the right to participate and express those views. The necessary ingredients for political freedom are the right to criticize governmental leaders and policies, the right to propose new courses of government action, the right to form and join interest groups, the right to discuss political issues free from government censorship, and the right of citizens to seek and hold public office.

Note that the objects of free expression are plural. If all the people have the right to express their wants, demands, and preferences, they will rarely express the *same wants*, demands, and preferences. In the United States, political freedom means a lot

of different wants, demands, and preferences, which makes it difficult for government to respond to the people. The central reason democratic governments do not respond to the will of the people is not that they fail to listen. On the contrary, it is that they are listening all too well to a set of vague, conflicting, and contradictory preferences.

Political freedom also means a basic guarantee of individual liberty. Individual citizens are free to make their own choices and to select their own goals and the means to achieve them. However, there are limits on individual liberty. Society, for example, will not sanction an individual's desire to become a skillful thief. Yet democracies keep limits on individual freedom to a minimum. Political freedom bestows on the individual the right to choose, advocate, or follow different political, social, and economic ideas, paths, and plans.

Political Equality

Ensuring popular sovereignty also means giving all citizens the same opportunities to influence the process of deciding who gets what. This idea is captured in the concept of **political equality,** which means individual preferences are given equal weight. For example, when citizens vote, each vote should count the same. Wealth, partisanship, or ideology cannot make one person's vote count more than any other. This notion of political equality not only refers to participation in influencing governmental decisions; it also involves being subject to those decisions. Everyone is entitled to **equality under the law**. The law is applied impartially without regard to the identity or status of the individual involved. In a democracy, wealth, fame, and power are not supposed to exempt anyone from the sanction of law. Few quarrel with these notions and their importance to upholding popular sovereignty, but political equality is a complicated concept because of its relationship to social and economic equality. **Social equality** is the idea that people should be free from class or social barriers and discrimination. Many view social equality as a desirable ideal but disagree on what, if anything, the government should do to achieve it. The long battle over racial equality in the United States, for example, reflects different attitudes on race as well as different views about government's responsibility to deal with racial differences in social, political, or economic opportunities or outcomes. Under its strictest interpretation, **economic equality** means each individual should receive the same amount of material goods regardless of his or her contribution to society. Equal distribution of wealth, especially as a coercive government policy, is unlikely to be considered compatible with the core principles of American democracy. Redistributing power and wealth from the well-off to the less well-off is always controversial—and for good reason: It limits the freedom of individuals to decide how to use their economic and social resources.

Yet social and economic equality are inevitably tied to political equality because social and economic resources can be translated into political influence. People with wealth and status can participate in politics more easily and effectively than others. Since democratic government responds to the preferences of those who participate—those who actually exercise the right to express their preferences—government policy tends to benefit those with wealth and status. This upper-class

political equality The idea that individual preferences should be given equal weight.

equality under the law The idea that the law is supposed to be applied impartially, without regard for the identity or status of the individual involved.

social equality The idea that people should be free of class or social barriers and discrimination.

economic equality The idea that each individual should receive the same amount of material goods, regardless of his or her contribution to society.

bias in turn gives upper-class citizens a greater ability to influence government in the future and thus brings into question the basic notion of popular sovereignty.

The issue of how to handle the conundrum connecting political equality with social and economic equality is largely unresolved. At a minimum, democracies must preserve political equality by guaranteeing that everyone has an equal right to express their preferences. Yet, inequitable distribution of wealth also gives certain individuals more forceful and effective ways to express their preferences. A wealthy campaign contributor is much more likely to get the attention of a legislator than a busy single parent who can hardly find the time to vote. If accused of a crime, a rich individual can hire a top-notch attorney, a private investigator, and an independent set of experts for the defense. A poor person accused of the same crime may have to rely on a single overworked public defender.

Political equality is generally reconciled with social and economic equality through the concept of **equality of opportunity**, meaning the right of all people to develop their abilities to the fullest extent. In other words, all individuals should have the opportunity to go as far in life as their desires, talents, and efforts allow. If people differ in abilities, desires, and work ethic, some will acquire more social status and economic wealth than others. In the United States, democracy thus aims to give individuals the paradoxical right of an equal opportunity to become unequal. This sounds good, but does everyone really have the same opportunity to "become unequal" in practice? Those who are born into wealth, who live in neighborhoods with good schools, and who have nurturing parents have advantages and opportunities that those born into poverty, trapped in subpar schools, and suffering from abusive or neglectful parents do not. This disparity raises the question of whether government is required to level the playing field by guaranteeing a set of services (such as adequate nutrition, housing, education, and healthcare) considered essential to individual development. Equal opportunity to become unequal suggests that although a democratic society is not required to guarantee equality at the end of the individual's developmental process, it should ensure equality at the beginning. What constitutes equality at the beginning—what level of educational, health, and social services provides a roughly equal set of opportunities for all to develop to the fullest extent of their abilities—is a matter of constant controversy and debate.

Conflicting Values: A Delicate Balancing Act

To sum up, democracy is a form of government where the power to authoritatively allocate values is held by all citizens (popular sovereignty), which in turn rests on a commitment to three core principles: majority rule, political freedom, and political equality. One of these principles by itself is not enough to make a government democratic. At least in theory, all three must be reflected in the process and the outcomes of government decisions. In practice, achieving all three simultaneously is a difficult balancing act because these principles can conflict. Maximizing freedom may lead to less equality; achieving more equality may require placing limitations on someone's freedom; the majorities may use their power to rob minorities of their political freedom and their political equality.

equality of opportunity The idea that every individual has the right to develop to the fullest extent of his or her abilities.

TWO BASIC FORMS OF DEMOCRACY

All democracies share the basic traits described in the previous section, but all democracies are not the same. Democracy can take different forms depending on how popular sovereignty is put into practice. For example, consider the core principle of majority rule. Just how much control do citizens need to exercise over government decisions to uphold this principle? Is it sufficient that majorities choose decision makers, or must majorities approve specific government decisions? Do citizens need to be capable of determining for themselves what kind of policy is needed to preserve and advance liberty and equality in society, or is judging policies that are suggested by others sufficient?

These questions have no definitive answers. Reasonable people equally committed to democratic values may disagree on them. Thus, although a general theory of democracy rests on a core set of principles relating to popular sovereignty, there are different theories about the specific procedures, ideals, and assumptions associated with a democratic society. These differences can be divided into two broad categories: direct democracy and representative democracy.

Direct Democracy

In a **direct democracy**, citizens are the principal political decision makers. Direct democracy was first practiced in certain ancient Greek city-states, notably Athens. Direct democracy is used in the United States today, though in pretty limited forms. For example, the New England town meeting, where all citizens in the community are eligible to participate in making local government policy decisions, is a form of direct democracy. The **initiative** and **referendum** are other forms of direct democracy in which citizens vote on policy decisions. About half of the states allow ballot initiatives, which in the past 30 years have increasingly been used to make major policy decisions on everything from setting tax rates to approving—or rejecting—same-sex marriage.

Successful direct democratic systems are rare because inherent problems lead to instability and poor policy decisions. These include the unwieldy decision-making machinery of direct democracy (imagine setting tuition rates by inviting all taxpayers in the state to a series of meetings to decide what a college education should cost). More serious are the demands that direct democracy places on the individual. Sound decision making in a direct democracy requires a huge commitment to public life on the part of average citizens. At a minimum, it requires citizens to understand the nuts and bolts of government and politics, to be fully informed of the issues on which they vote, and to be actively and continuously engaged in public life. Citizens lacking these traits cannot grasp the consequences of their decisions for the government or society, and they can be misled or manipulated by well-funded groups with a stake in seeing one side prevail. When this happens, direct

direct democracy A form of democracy in which ordinary citizens, rather than representatives, collectively make government decisions.

initiative An election in which ordinary citizens circulate a petition to put a proposed law on the ballot for the voters to approve.

referendum An election in which a state legislature refers a proposed law to the voters for their approval.

democracy is prone to producing bad policy decisions. Critics argue that this is the problem with modern forms of direct democracy such as the ballot initiative, which some see more as a tool for well-heeled interest groups than as a means to ensure that the will of the people is reflected in public policy. The Founders explicitly rejected direct democracy as a desirable basis of governance for just these sorts of reasons.

Even with well-informed and fully engaged citizens, direct democracies are vulnerable to tyranny of the majority or mob rule, situations where the core values of political equality and political freedom are readily violated. Policy can quickly be shaped by whatever passions incite a majority of the citizens. Those who advocate unpopular minority viewpoints in a direct democracy and incur the displeasure of the majority may face some unpleasant consequences. These risks are acute in a large and diverse society with social fault lines—such as race, religion, and ideology—separating the majority from the minority. In a direct democracy, abiding by the core principles of democracy is the majority's responsibility. Thus, to live up to the promise of democracy, the majority must consist of individuals who understand and are deeply committed to all those principles, not just the principle of majority rule. Yet a constant temptation for the majority is to abandon those principles and benefit themselves by using democratic processes to make decisions that are undemocratic in substance, since those decisions discriminate or persecute a minority. For these reasons, the history of direct democracies is often one of instability and failure (Broder 2000).

Representative Democracy

Because direct democracy is simply not a stable or practical basis for government in large, diverse societies, an alternate form of democracy developed in Western nations. The form of democracy practiced in nations such as the United Kingdom and the United States is called **representative democracy**, defined as a system of government where ordinary citizens do not make governmental decisions themselves but choose public officials—representatives of the people—to make decisions for them. Representative democracy is based on popular sovereignty, but it is achieved indirectly by the people's representatives rather than by the people themselves, as in a direct democracy. Representative democracies such as the United Kingdom and the United States are sometimes called **liberal democracies** because of their concern for individual liberty. In liberal democracies, the rule of law and a constitution constrain elected representatives and the will of the majority from using their power to take away the rights of minorities. Thus, liberal representative democracies embody the three basic principles of democracy, but they use different institutions and slightly different ideals than direct democracies to accomplish these goals. In representative democracies, only a tiny fraction of citizens hold policymaking positions. For example, each member of the U.S. House of Representatives has a constituency of over 700,000 people, which means a single individual represents the interests of nearly three-quarters of a million citizens.

The form of liberal representative democracy we know today first developed in three Western nations: the United Kingdom, Switzerland, and the United States. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a large number of people in these

representative democracy Defined as a system of government where ordinary citizens do not make governmental decisions themselves but choose public officials—representatives of the people—to make decisions for them.

liberal democracy A representative democracy, such as the United Kingdom or the United States, that has a particular concern for individual liberty. The rule of law and a constitution constrain elected representatives and the will of the majority from using their power to take away the rights of minorities.

countries began to select their own political leaders. From this narrow base, liberal democracy spread to other nations of Western Europe and the British Commonwealth. Thus, liberal representative democracy is a relatively new form of government, originally practiced by just a handful of nations. In fact, if genuine democracy requires that *all* citizens have the right to affect governmental decisions by choosing the government's leaders, then this type of government is a modern phenomenon. In the United States, male citizens did not gain universal voting rights until the latter part of the nineteenth century, and women had to wait until the 1920s. Ethnic minorities were systematically excluded from political participation up until the early 1960s. One can reasonably argue that the core principles of democracy were not securely embedded in representative democratic systems until the past half-century.

REPRESENTATIVE SYSTEMS AND CORE DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES

Because citizens do not govern directly in a representative democracy, ensuring that basic democratic principles are protected and advanced rests on a set of political techniques and institutions different from those used in a direct democracy. Representative democracy means the many watching the few, but it is not just the few who rule who are important. The many who select and hold those rulers accountable are where we find out whether popular sovereignty is actually practiced. At a minimum, the many must be able to implement their observations through political action, and there must be an incentive for representatives to be responsive to the wishes of the people. To make this happen, representative democracy is heavily dependent on the institutions used to organize the political system and the values that underpin its operation. A number of democratic institutions are common in representative democracies. Three of the most central are elections, political parties, and interest groups.

If the country is going to pot, at least some of the blame goes to ballot initiatives. After the 2020 election a total of 36 states and 4 U.S. territories have legalized marijuana to some degree (Hansen and Garcia 2020).

Elections

Elections are the most obvious mechanism employed by representative democracies to incorporate democratic principles into the political system. Through elections, representative democracies deliberately create job insecurity for major officeholders. Those who hold office exercise power for a fixed term, so that citizens have periodic opportunities to determine whether the officeholders should continue exercising power. If citizens are displeased with the performance of those in

public office, the remedy is to replace them. In this fashion, the rulers have an incentive to be responsive to the needs and demands of the ruled, and the citizens can hold the rulers accountable if they fail to be responsive. Elections are the central mechanism for achieving majority rule in representative democracies. Though representatives are often chosen by plurality rather than outright majorities, in principle all citizens retain the power to decide whether representatives will continue for another term.

In a democracy every citizen has a right to vote and thus a direct voice in choosing elected officials. By creating insecurity of tenure for major officeholders, elections create incentives for the elected to respond to the needs of the electors and also provide recourse for the electors if the elected are not being responsive.

Political Parties

For elections to truly hold representatives accountable, a democratic system must offer citizens meaningful choices. The institution that typically fills this need is the political party, defined as an organization that puts forward candidates for public office. To provide an element of choice, at least two competing parties must propose candidates. With competition, voters can choose the party that best represents their preferences. Political parties must accept one another's existence as a necessity for a functioning representative democracy. Accordingly, the party (or parties) in control of the government must allow the opposition party (or parties) to criticize what current government leaders are doing and to propose alternative courses of action for the consideration of voters. That is, the party in control of government must recognize the political freedom of those out of power.

Interest Groups

Continuous communication between representatives and citizens is critical to ensuring that citizens' views are incorporated in political decision making. Political parties fulfill this function to some extent; decisive election results can send a clear message to government. But elections occur only once every few years, and citizens need ways to communicate their changing needs between elections. Although citizens have the freedom to express their opinions individually, communication is more effective if diverse individual views are aggregated and transmitted in a coherent way. Citizens in a democracy also have the freedom to organize around common interests and communicate those interests to government.

An institution that has emerged to promote such communication is the interest group. Interest groups aggregate the interests of like-minded individuals and organize to press their common views on government decision makers. Interest groups are likely to contain only a small proportion of the total population, but they enable elected officials to gain some understanding of how a number of peo-

ple in a common situation—for example, students, businesspeople, or farmers—feel about matters, such as student loan programs, taxes, or farm price supports. Moreover, because communication is a two-way process, interest groups not only press demands on decision makers; they also transmit proposals by political leaders back to their memberships. Just as parties compete to place their candidates in public office, interest groups vie to influence public policy. If the system is operating properly, these groups check and balance one another's efforts, and no one group or small collection of groups dominates the political process.

REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY IN THE UNITED STATES

Although these institutions and principles characterize all representative democracies, there is considerable variation in how they are implemented in different nations.

Central Beliefs of Democracy in America

In the United States, popular sovereignty is anchored in a core belief that people are, for the most part, rational and capable of deciding what is good for them personally. Even if the average person is often incorrect, no elite group is assumed to be wise enough or unselfish enough to rule in the interests of all members of society. To ensure that the interests of everyone will be taken into account, the bulk of the population has the right to influence decisions that affect their lives through mechanisms such as elections, and government has the obligation to make this possible by protecting individual rights to liberty and free expression.

These central beliefs underpinning American democracy—that fundamental individual rights are inviolate and there is a universal prerogative to participate in collective decisions—constitute a general commitment to popular sovereignty. Accordingly, we expect the American political system, in process and substance, to reflect and uphold the three core principles of democracy. Yet no political system produced by human beings completely lives up to its ideals; a gap always occurs between the ideals and the operation of the political institutions designed to embody them. To better understand how the American system lives up to the ideals embedded in the core principles of democracy, it is important to understand not just what a democracy is, but also what it is not.

Fallacies Associated With Democracy in America

In practice, a political system based on popular sovereignty contrasts sharply with a number of popularly held fallacies, or incorrect beliefs, about democracy. One fallacy is that democracy promises the best policy decisions. It does not.

Democracies in general, and certainly the democracy in America, make no promises to produce the most effective, efficient, or fair policy decisions. Representative democracy handles disagreements about what we ought to do by allowing everyone to get involved in the conflict. The result is often untidy, confusing decisions with which few are wholly satisfied. The outcomes, in other words, are frequently less than optimal. What we end up with is usually not what we want, but rather what we can, however grudgingly, live with. Such outcomes do not represent the failure of democracy. The whole point of a democratic system is to broker compromises among competing points of view and arrive at decisions that the majority supports and the minority can tolerate.

A second fallacy is a belief that democracy boils down to majority rule, that the American system is predicated on the majority always getting what it wants. The Founders of the American form of democracy placed no particular trust in the majority, and in the United States the majority has never been given the freedom to decide all matters that affect people's lives. If people have fundamental rights, as the Founders believed, then the majority must be kept from depriving the minority of those rights. Liberal representative democracy is founded on the notion that although government should respond to the wishes of the majority, the majority is limited. Certain fundamental rights cannot be taken away, even by majority vote. For example, in the United States and the United Kingdom, majorities of the population are Protestant, but they are not allowed to tell people of Catholic, Jewish, or other faiths how to worship. Likewise in Western democratic nations, the individual's right to private property is respected, and personal goods cannot be taken for public use without compensation. It is precisely such limitations on the scope of government that distinguish democratic societies from totalitarian ones. Majority rule, in other words, does not outrank political freedom or political equality.

A third fallacy is that social conflict is caused by the institutions of representative democracy and the people who occupy them. Representative institutions reflect rather than cause social conflict. Indeed, if the diverse views and conflicting interests that exist in society as a whole did not show up in our representative institutions, then they would not be representative. Political scientist Benjamin Barber argues that we must realize that in democracies, "representative institutions do not steal our liberties from us, [but rather] they are the precious medium through which we secure those liberties" (1996, 20). In other words, representative institutions help ensure that the people's often conflicting views are expressed and dealt with. They are designed not to make these conflicts disappear but to provide an arena and a set of ground rules where they can clash.

Exposing these fallacies is not intended to paint a cynical portrait of American democracy but rather to paint a more realistic one. Representative democracy is first and foremost about process, in how decisions are made. The system of representative democracy seeks to embody core democratic principles by instilling them into the institutions and mechanisms that organize the political system and by embedding a set of beliefs about individual liberty in the principles that operate it. For the whole system to be judged democratic, the outcomes, not just the process, must also reflect core democratic principles. Outcomes, though, are sec-

ondary; as long as they respect the core principles, outcomes do not have to be wise or effective to be democratic. Decisions made by representative institutions can be irritating, ineffective, silly, or even downright wrong but still uphold the core principles of democracy. A messy, less than optimal policy in which all views and rights are taken into account is not a failure of democracy. A failure is a fast, efficient policy where the dissent is ignored or, worse, quashed.

THE CHALLENGE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

The practice of democratic politics is always going to be messy. Conflict, confusion, and compromise are a central part of the package even in democratic societies where citizens share ethnicity, religious beliefs, and cultural roots. In a large, diverse society such as the United States, the practice of democracy is even more challenging.

Diversity and Difference

The United States is one of the most populous countries on the planet and geographically one of the largest. Its people are highly mobile and come from diverse religious, cultural, demographic, geographic, racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The astonishing diversity in these characteristics produces a wide range of different political interests and preferences. Blacks and whites may hold broadly different views about the merits of affirmative action. Latinos and blacks may have different ideas about what rights, if any, should be granted to undocumented immigrants. An urban city dweller in New York, Chicago, or Los Angeles likely has little interest in farm subsidies; those same subsidies may be the central topic of conversation in the coffee shop of a rural agricultural community in Nebraska, Kansas, or Iowa. Conservative Christians may view the posting of the Ten Commandments in public buildings and on public monuments with pride and approval; Muslims and agnostics may view such actions with trepidation or even fear. A wealthy individual may view the capital gains tax as unjust; a poor individual may not know what the capital gains tax is and may not care. For a college student at a public university, there may be no more important issue than government support for higher education, at least as it affects tuition; for senior citizens, Social Security may be much more important than subsidizing the studies of teenagers at the local state college.

This vast diversity in the backgrounds and interests of American citizens leads to different ideas of what we should do and who should get what. A big challenge for American democracy is to manage all these differences within a democratic framework, to make sure the process and the substance of collective decisions respects the rights of all. Given that many of these differences seem unbridgeable—for example, differences on abortion, immigration, and budget deficits—this is an enormously ambitious undertaking for a democratic system.

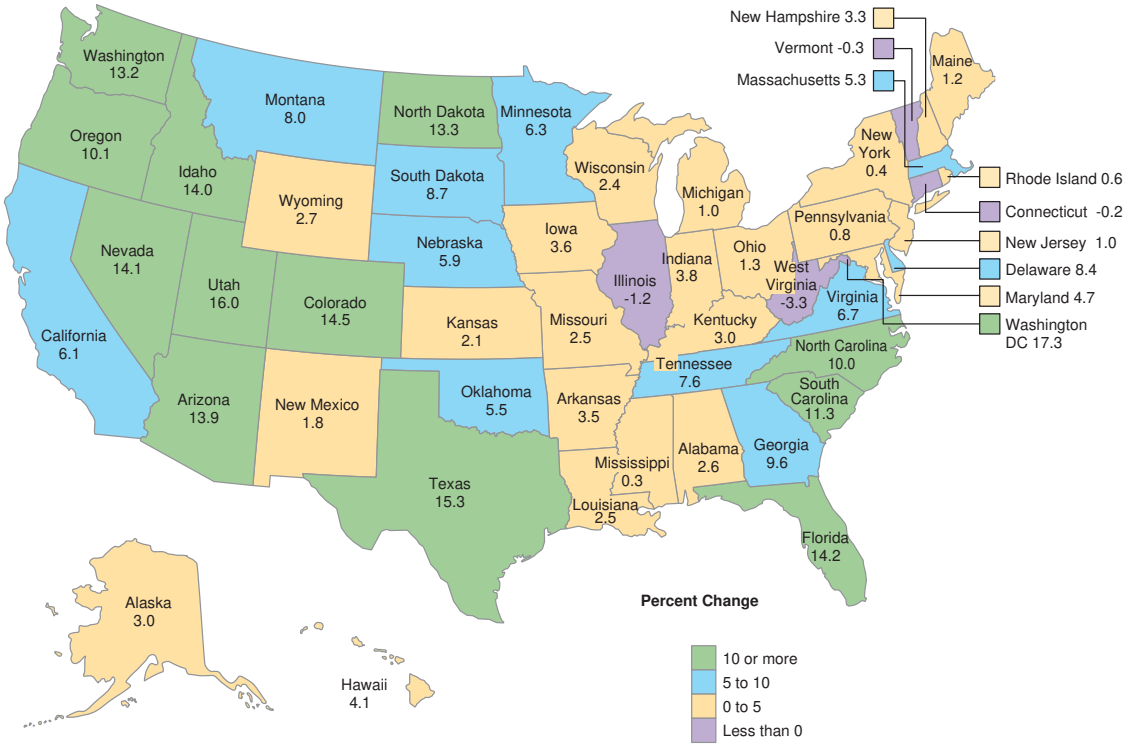


FIGURE 1.1 Population Growth in the United States, 2010–2020

Source: Data from U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division. Table 2, Cumulative Estimates of Resident Population Change for the United States, Regions, States, and Puerto Rico and Region and State Rankings: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2020 (NST-EST2019-02).

Dynamics

Getting a firm handle on American politics is sometimes difficult because the conflicts processed by democracy are shaped by a constantly changing backdrop. This changing context continually shapes and reshapes questions of what we ought to do.

Consider that the first census of the United States, taken in 1790, indicated that the 13 original colonies accounted for 900,000 square miles of land, forming a relatively narrow corridor along the eastern seaboard. Within this narrow corridor were fewer than 4 million people. Both of these basic characteristics have changed almost beyond recognition. Geographically, the United States grew west, steadily pushing its boundaries to the Pacific and beyond. Today, the 50 states include roughly 3.6 million square miles and a population of about 323 million. Population and geographic growth have a profound effect on politics. States, for example, do not grow at the same rate (see Figure 1.1), and because the number of representatives a state sends to Congress is based on population, population shifts can alter the size of a state's congressional delegation. Presently, power in the Congress is following population trends and shifting south and west. What New Yorkers and Wisconsinites want the government to do is becoming less important than what Californians and Texans want.

It is not just overall growth that presents a challenge. The population is becoming more diverse ethnically and economically. Hispanics and Latinos now make up roughly 18.5 percent of the nation's population, African Americans account for 13.4 percent, and while Asians only account for about 6 percent they have been the fastest-growing racial group since 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau). The nation is also seeing shifts economically, with those at the highest income levels increasing their share of the nation's wealth over the past few decades, while those at the bottom see incomes flatline or even decline (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 2016). As America becomes more urban, more racially and ethnically diverse, and as the gap between the poorest and wealthiest citizens grows, political interests and ideas about what we should do change. America is no longer a nation of farmers, so agriculture policy is less important to most people. America is much less white, so the concerns of ethnic minorities occupy a larger space in the political spectrum. Women are increasingly represented in jobs traditionally held by men in law, business, and politics. This shift in the gender makeup of the workforce can lead to conflict over such issues as salary structures. Women still earn only about 80 percent of what their male counterparts earn in comparable jobs (U.S. Census Bureau 2008; see Figure 5.3). The churn of social, economic, and demographic change is reshaping the political environment.

Ideology and Partisanship

ideology A consistent set of values, attitudes, and beliefs about the appropriate role of government in society.

An **ideology** is a consistent set of values, attitudes, and beliefs about the appropriate role of government in society (Campbell et al. 1960). Ideology is important to democratic politics because it helps people figure out what they do and do not support even on issues they have little knowledge of or interest in. You might not know anything at all about capital gains taxes, but if you know conservatives are against them and you consider yourself a conservative, then you are likely to also oppose them. These sorts of broad ideological cues are pretty much all the information Americans use to figure out their positions on a wide variety of issues (Bawn 1999). In America the range of ideological beliefs runs across a spectrum from liberals (the left) to conservatives (the right).

America is a diverse society, and responding to the variety of perspectives and goals of such a highly diverse population is a challenge for elected officials. Although elected officials cannot satisfy all of these demands, a core principle of democracy is that the rights of all will be upheld in both the process and the outputs of democratic decision making.

Traditionally, conservatives favor the status quo and want any social or political change to respect the laws and traditions of society. Traditionally, liberals believe that individual liberty is the most important political value and that people should be free to express their views and live their lives as they please with minimal limitations from government or from traditional values. Generically, conservatives are more likely to

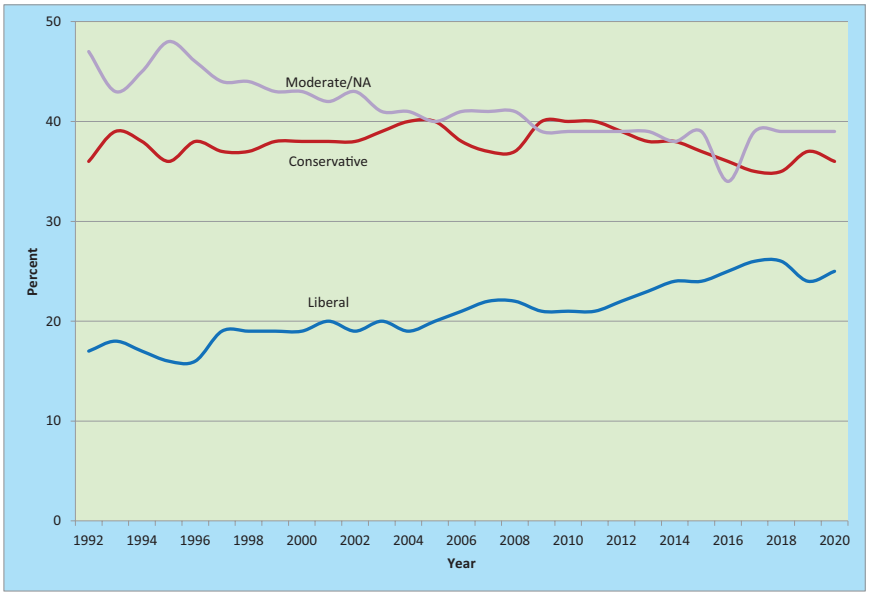


FIGURE 1.2 Ideological Self-Identification of Americans

Source: Data from the Gallup Poll, January 9, 2020. www.gallup.com/poll/275792/remained-center-right-ideologically-2019.aspx

oppose regulating individual economic choices and more likely to support regulating individual moral choices. Liberals do the opposite. However, ideological labels in the United States are, at best, only rough guides to how individuals orient themselves to political issues. Some readers of this text will support gay rights yet consider themselves conservative, and other readers will oppose gay rights yet consider themselves liberal.

Over the past couple of decades, public opinion data shows that, generally speaking, Americans are consistently center-right in their ideology. A bit less than 40 percent of Americans call themselves conservative, and roughly the same number consider themselves political moderates (neither conservative nor liberal). About 20 to 25 percent self-identify as liberals (see Figure 1.2).

Many Americans wed their ideological beliefs to their support for a political party. **Partisanship** in American politics is viewed as a psychological attachment to a political party (Campbell et al. 1960). This means that most people view one of the parties as standing for their "brand" of politics. Broadly speaking, Republicans represent the conservative and Democrats the liberal brand of politics. According to one poll, in 2015 roughly a quarter of Americans considered themselves Republicans, about 30 percent called themselves Democrats, and the remainder aligned with neither of the two major political parties (Jones 2016). Political parties (as we discuss in Chapter 7) are the dominant organizing force of American politics: They provide coherence to elections, mobilize voters, and organize the government. Because neither party has the support of a commanding majority and because many

partisanship A psychological attachment to a political party.

citizens either have weak party ties or shuttle their support between the parties, parties are more likely to reflect the differences of Americans rather than bridge them.

False Consensus

Despite the huge variation in everything from ideology to ethnicity, religion, geography, wealth, and partisanship, Americans by and large believe their views are shared by a majority of others (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2003, 132n3). This highly unrealistic view of politics is known as **false consensus**, the tendency of people to believe their views are "normal" or "common sense" and therefore shared by most people. False consensus creates a challenge and a danger to democratic decision making. If people believe their views represent the majority position, and the government fails to adopt that position, this creates a perception that the democratic system is somehow not working—something or someone is elevating the preferences of a minority over the preferences of the majority. In the popular mind, that something or someone is often viewed as a special interest. This false consensus rests on an unrealistic and uninformed view of politics and the democratic process. Though huge majorities support democratic principles and the American political system in the abstract, there is more disagreement than agreement on specific proposals or issues. Many see the disagreements as evidence that something has gone wrong. In reality, the noisy clash of interests is the natural outcome of a democracy as diverse, dynamic, and ideologically mixed as the United States.

MEETING THE CHALLENGE?

Now that we have some sense of what a democracy is, what it is supposed to do, what it is not supposed to do, and some ideas of the challenges to democracy in the American context, it's worth raising the question of whether the U.S. political system manages to live up to these democratic ideals. Does its organization and operation account for diversity and change in a way that upholds core democratic principles in both the process and substance of resolving questions of who gets what? As we shall see, there is more than one answer to this question. The purpose of this book is not to reveal which answer is correct, but to give you the tools to make an independent analysis and make up your own mind. If your answer, in a general sense or on a specific issue, differs from your classmates' answers, do not be surprised. Reasonable people have long disagreed about how the concept of democracy translates into the practice of democracy in the American political system.

false consensus The tendency of people to believe their views are normal or represent common sense and therefore are shared by most people.

The Case for American Democracy

The case for American democracy rests on the assessment that our political techniques and institutions operate, for the most part, according to core democratic

principles. This perspective views the American political system as highly **pluralistic,** where power is fragmented and distributed widely among diverse groups and interests. Businesspeople, laborers, farmers, African Americans, Latinos, students, the elderly, gays—virtually every conceivable group and interest has access to the political process. Although some may have more political assets—money, numbers, and campaign and propaganda skills—all have at least some political resources. At a minimum, citizens have the vote, but even non-citizens can participate by exercising First Amendment rights of free speech, press, and association.

Although some citizens may be more active in the political process than others—so-called political elites, activists, or influentials—those who are engaged ultimately represent a wide-ranging set of interests from the entire polity. The political moves and countermoves of this broad variety of political elites produce the energy for the American political system to work. They compete vigorously with one another but abide by the democratic rules of the game. They remain committed to the core principles of a democratic society, and they respect the fundamental rights and freedoms associated with majority rule, political equality, and political freedom—individual liberty, freedom of expression, the right to privacy, and the like. Indeed, these political activists are counted on to defend these principles when other less politically aware and less educated individuals oppose them. In the final analysis, supporters of the pluralistic view feel that American democracy serves the interests of a wide variety of individuals and groups. Although competing elites may take the initiative in public affairs, they must also take into account the interests of ordinary citizens. The elites require these ordinary citizens to provide support for public policy and to win elections.

Major Criticisms of American Democracy

Other analyses of American democracy reach considerably more critical conclusions than the pluralist perspective. Indeed, one of the major criticisms of American democracy is that it is not nearly as pluralistic or inclusive as its supporters claim. Many Americans believe that candidates and officeholders are more interested in manipulating public attitudes than in understanding and acting on them. Republicans and Democrats are charged with standing for little more than the acquisition of power and with robbing voters of meaningful choices rather than providing alternatives.

Some critics argue that significant minorities—including African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, the poor, the young, and women[1]—are poorly served by the American political process. These groups are proportionally underrepresented in major political institutions, such as Congress, the executive branch, and the Supreme Court, and none are as effectively organized as the more dominant affluent groups, which casts an unflattering shadow across the sunny pluralist portrait. Moreover, organized groups do not check and balance one another as pluralist orthodoxy claims. Instead, each concentrates on getting what it wants from

1 Women are not technically a minority. They constitute more than half of both eligible voters and the population as a whole. They may be considered a social minority in the sense that they have historically been both economically and politically disadvantaged compared to men.

pluralistic A term used to describe a society in which power is widely distributed among diverse groups and interests.

government: Business interests are served by the Department of Commerce, farmers by the Department of Agriculture, unions by the Department of Labor, and so on. Instead of regulating these groups in the public interest, government is organized to dole out favors to those with political muscle at the expense of the general taxpayer.

Such criticisms are supported by a good deal of systematic analysis. For example, a study by political scientist Morris Fiorina (2006) concludes that the intense party-based differences in American politics is evidence that government is not responsive to citizens. He argues that ideological extremists on the left and right have captured control of the parties' nominating process. The result is that in order to win party nominations, politicians must take extreme positions to appeal to these ideologues. Although most voters are not strongly ideological and prefer moderate, common-sense policies, party elites serve up two extreme candidates, and voters are forced to choose the one who is the least distasteful. "The result," according to Fiorina, "is a disconnect between the American people and those who purport to represent them" (2006, 51–52).

For such critics, the American system is not pluralistic, but **elitist**, in the sense that the political system is dominated by a set of organized, influential interests that are checked neither by one another nor by the general populace. These political elites are like professional athletes; they are devoted to the game they play, they are highly trained, they know all the rules and inside tricks, and they have access to a wide range of resources devoted solely to helping them win. When the rest of us try to get involved in politics, it's like 11 spectators coming out of the crowd to take on the Dallas Cowboys—even if the spectators manage to get on the field, the scoreboard will still end up reflecting the interest of the elite athletes. Critics of an elitist state of affairs thus offer a different picture of the American political system. The privileged status of elites and their overrepresentation in government enables them to set the public agenda and to determine which issues government considers of legitimate concern and which it does not. The result is a biased system that favors the status quo and provides an advantage to established groups over unorganized ones.

The contrasting overviews of American democracy represented by the positive pluralistic portrait and the negative elitist critique are not absolutes. Leading advocates of both lines of thought recognize elements of the other perspective in the reality of American political life. Pluralists acknowledge that some groups have greater control over the outcomes of political decision making than others; elitists observe that although a handful of organized interests control many major political decisions, they do not control all of them.

We bring up the pluralist and elitist perspectives to make the point that making systematic sense of politics, especially in a large, dynamic country such as the United States, is not easy. Coming to any kind of systematic and logically supported conclusion about the political system in general, or specific issues within it, is a tough analytical challenge. To reach those sorts of conclusions, to make systematic sense of the messy and often contradictory world of American democracy, it helps to know the analytical tools of political science and how to use them.

elitist A term used to describe a society in which organized, influential minority interests dominate the political process.

MAKING SENSE OF POLITICS: POLITICAL SCIENCE

Political science is the academic discipline dedicated to the study of government, political institutions, processes, and behavior (Isaak 1985). It is the job of political scientists to explain the how and why of the authoritative allocation of values—who gets what and why. Political scientists are interested in these sorts of questions: Who has power? Is it elites, or is sovereignty broadly shared? What determines power and power relationships in society? Is it class, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or the will of the people? Who votes? Is it rich people or poor people, the young or the old? Why do they vote the way they do? Is it ideology, loyalty to a party, or something else? Why are some people conservatives and others liberal? Why are some people Democrats and others Republicans?

Answers to these and similar questions clearly have direct bearing on the main goals of this book. Understanding who votes and why, for example, can help us better form a judgment of the political system. If certain groups disproportionately participate in politics, this raises questions about the true extent of majority rule and minority rights. If certain laws and rules—for example, voter registration requirements—let some groups gain more power and influence than others, this raises questions about political equality. If other laws—for example, campaign finance laws—limit the ability of groups to get their message out to citizens and to government, this raises questions about political freedom.

The Roots of Political Science

Political science is both a very old and a very new academic discipline. Its roots are in philosophy, law, history, and economics; political science claims thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, James Madison, and John Stuart Mill as its intellectual forebears. All were serious students of politics and are mostly remembered as normative political philosophers. Asking **normative** questions means seeking to prescribe how things should be valued, what should be, and what is good or just, better or worse. As normative political philosophers, these individuals were interested in these sorts of questions: What is the *best* form of government—democracy, autocracy, or oligarchy? What constitutes the legitimate and *just* use of power? What are the *fundamental rights* of man? What are the *best* means to serve the public interest?

Political scientists continue to pursue these questions with vigor, but the study of politics is also focused on describing and explaining institutions, processes, attitudes, and behavior as they *are* rather than as they *should* be. This sort of empirical approach to studying politics has a long history. Five hundred years ago, Niccolò Machiavelli became a champion of realist political theory, an approach that seeks to objectively record politics and to understand how it works

political science The systematic study of government, political institutions, processes, and behavior.

normative Theories or statements that seek to prescribe how things should be valued, what should be, what is good or just, and what is better or worse.

in practice rather than figure out how it should work in theory. It was not until the last 75 years or so, however, that this sort of approach came to dominate the study of politics and to shape the modern discipline of political science. Rather than asking, "Is democracy the best form of government?" modern political scientists are more likely to ask, "Why do interest groups form?" or "Why does government pay attention to some issues and not others?" These latter sorts of questions are **empirical**, meaning they can be answered by careful observation. Using the scientific method to answer these empirical questions not only puts the "science" in political science, it provides a ready-made framework for thinking analytically about politics. Indeed, when we say "thinking analytically," what we mostly mean is "thinking scientifically." But what does it mean to think scientifically about politics?

The Scientific Method

Science is a method or a system of acquiring knowledge about something. You can think of it as a rigorous and systematic procedure to answer questions about our world, and that includes the political world. Of course, there are plenty of other ways besides science for answering questions about politics. What should the government do about issue X? Why does public opinion favor candidate Y? Does the political system uphold core democratic values? These sorts of questions can be answered using everything from the "revealed" knowledge of religious teachings, to knowledge gained from intuition or the insight of experts. Citizens can and often do try to make sense of politics by using their religious beliefs, adopting the perspectives of those they trust or admire, applying ideological rules of thumb, or simply coming to a conclusion because it "feels" right. Science, though, differs in important ways from these other methods.

Thinking analytically about politics using a scientific approach, at a minimum, involves four basic steps: asking a question, formulating a testable answer to that question, getting the measures and data necessary for that test, and conducting that test in a specific way.

Scientists ask particular types of questions. A **research question** is simply a statement of the information or knowledge being sought. Importantly, it is assumed that there is no known universally correct answer to this question and alternative answers need to be given fair consideration. Generating good questions is at least as important to analytical thinking as coming up with answers. A classic research question in political science is, "Why do people vote the way they do?" This clearly defines the objectives of research—we want to know why people support particular parties, ideologies, or candidates with their ballots. It also raises an important issue: Who gets what in representative democracies is determined in large part by how these choices are made in the voting booth. It is also far from comprehensively answered. Political science research has certainly helped us understand a lot more about why people vote the way they do, yet lots of people cast ballots for reasons we still do not fully understand. In other words, it remains a question worth asking.

empirical Questions and debates that can be answered by careful observation. Systematic empirical observation is the foundation of science and the scientific method.

science A method of acquiring knowledge through the formulation of hypotheses that can be tested through empirical observation in order to make claims about how the world works and why.

research question a statement of information or knowledge being sought. A research question assumes there is no known universally correct answer and that alternative answers need to be given fair consideration.

THINKING ANALYTICALLY

CRACKING THE CODE OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Scientific research has its own language, but you really only need to understand a few terms to make sense of the studies we will be highlighting in this text. Below are some key concepts that will come up from time to time, and if you familiarize yourself with these you should have the basic information necessary to decode the material.

Hypothesis: An "educated guess" or proposition that there is a relationship between variables. A hypothesis is a declarative statement that logically must be true or false and must also be *testable* and *falsifiable*. Testable means that a hypothesis must make predictions that can be supported or refuted through careful observation. Falsifiable means that it is possible to conceive of observable evidence that would disprove the hypothesis. An example of a hypothesis is this: "Tax cuts increase economic performance." Logically, this statement must be true or false (tax cuts either do or do not increase economic performance), it can be tested by observing the impact of tax cuts on economic performance measures, and it is falsifiable because those performance measures will not increase (they will stay the same or decrease) if the hypothesis is false.

Variable: Something that takes on different values across a particular thing. For example, age, income, and political party affiliation vary from one person to another; election turnout varies across states; and the turnout rate in the nation varies over time.

Dependent Variable: In the context of a hypothesis, the dependent variable is something that is caused by another variable (or variables)—for example, whether you vote or not (the dependent variable) might *depend* on several other factors. It is what the research is trying to explain.

Independent Variable: If the dependent variable is what we are looking to explain, the independent variable is what we are using for the explanation. In the context of a hypothesis, we expect changes in the independent variable (e.g., education levels) to systematically predict changes in the dependent variable (e.g., probability of voting).

Operationalize: This is the process of taking an abstract concept and turning it into something that is observable. For example, *civic participation* is an abstract concept that can mean a lot of things. A set of survey questions might operationalize this concept by asking respondents whether they participated in different activities—voted in a recent election, donated to a campaign, put up a yard sign, or contacted a public official. This process operationalizes civic participation by giving us a set of data that we can observe and analyze.

Measurement: The process of systematically capturing and quantifying the values in a variable is called measurement. A yardstick is an instrument to measure linear distance; it provides a quantitative reading in inches or centimeters. A grading scale measures how well students perform on a test—pass/fail; A/B/C/D/F. A Wilson–Patterson Index is an instrument to measure ideology; it codes responses to a wide variety of questions about political issues to provide a numerical value of how conservative someone is.

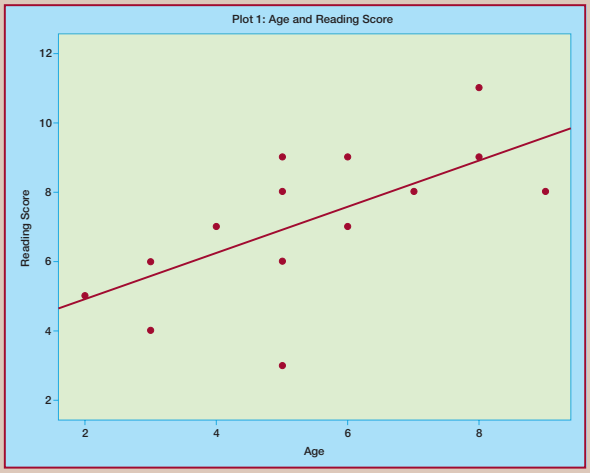
Relationship: How the value of the dependent variable changes with a change in value of the independent variable. A hypothesis should indicate the nature of the expected relationship. We might expect more in one category than another—for example, women vote more Democratic than men. Or if we expect a relationship between two continuous variables, we should specify a direction. A *direct* relationship is one in which high values in one variable are associated with high values in the other—for example, as education increases, income increases. In an *inverse* relationship, high values in one variable are associated with low values in the other—for example, as the price of gasoline increases, the number of miles people drive decreases.

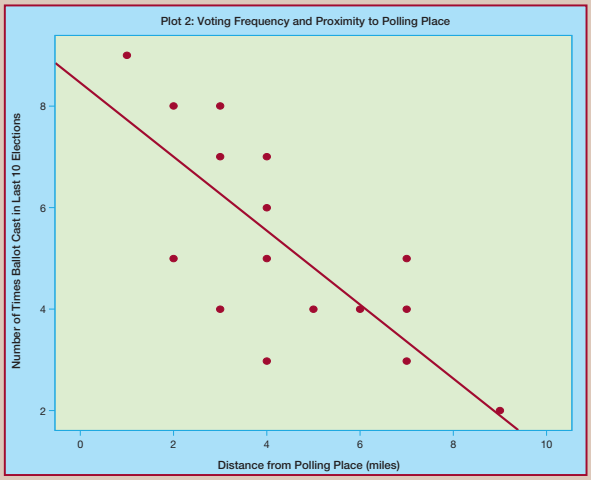
Strength of a Relationship: The relationship between two variables can be strong or weak. How can we tell how strong a relationship is? What does a strong or weak relationship look like? Two useful statistical indicators of the strength of a relationship are *correlation* and *slope*—both are used throughout this text, especially in the figures.

Correlation: A correlation is a measure of association between two variables. It is a number that ranges between –1.0 and +1.0. A –1.0 is a perfect inverse correlation; as the independent variable goes up, the dependent variable has a symmetrical decline. A +1.0 is a perfect direct correlation; as the independent variable goes up, the dependent variable has a symmetrical increase. A correlation of zero (0) means the variables have no relationship with each other.

Slope of a Regression Line: Don't be put off if this term seems unfamiliar or overly technical. Regression analysis is simply a way to estimate the relationship between two or more variables. This is done with the slope of a regression line, which simply shows how much y (the dependent variable) changes for a given change in x (the independent variable). A steep slope means that a small change in x is associated with a larger change in y, indicating that x has a strong effect on y. A shallow slope means that a large change in x is associated with a smaller change in y, indicating that x must change a lot to have an effect on y.

Consider the following scatterplots of two variables. The first plots age and reading score, the second proximity to a polling place and voting participation (the data in both cases are purely hypothetical). In Plot 1, we see a positive relationship, which is what you would expect—as children get older, they get better at reading. The correlation between these two variables is .70. The regression equation used to draw the solid line in Plot 1 is: Reading Score = .357 + .66(Age). This suggests that for every one unit increase across the horizontal or X axis—in other words, for every increase of one year in age—there is an associated .66 unit increase up the vertical or Y axis. In other words, it says that on average for every year they age, children's reading scores go up by .66 points. In Plot 2 we see a negative relationship—the farther away from a polling place you live, the fewer elections you vote in. The correlation between these two variables is –.80. The regression equation for the solid line is: Voting = 8.47 – .73(proximity). In other words, for every mile you live from a polling place, the regression equation is estimating that participation in the past 10 elections declines, on average, by .73.





Discussion Questions

1. Think of three different ways to operationalize each of the following two concepts: political participation and ideology.
2. Formulate a hypothesis about politics and identify the dependent and independent variables that would be needed to test this hypothesis. Remember: to be a scientific hypothesis, you must have a declarative statement that logically must be true or false, and is testable and falsifiable.