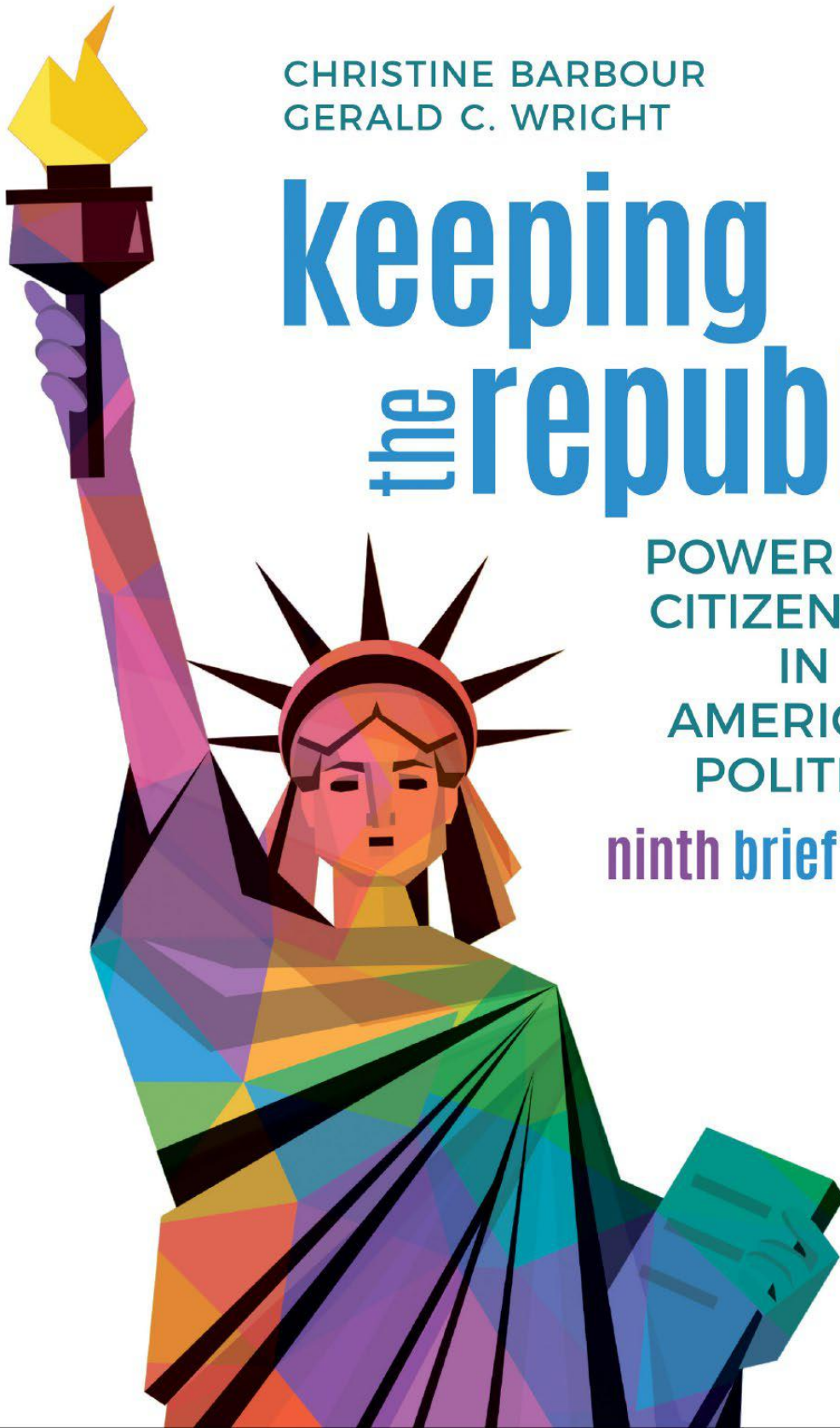



CHRISTINE BARBOUR
GERALD C. WRIGHT

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CITIZENSHIP
IN
AMERICAN
POLITICS

ninth brief edition



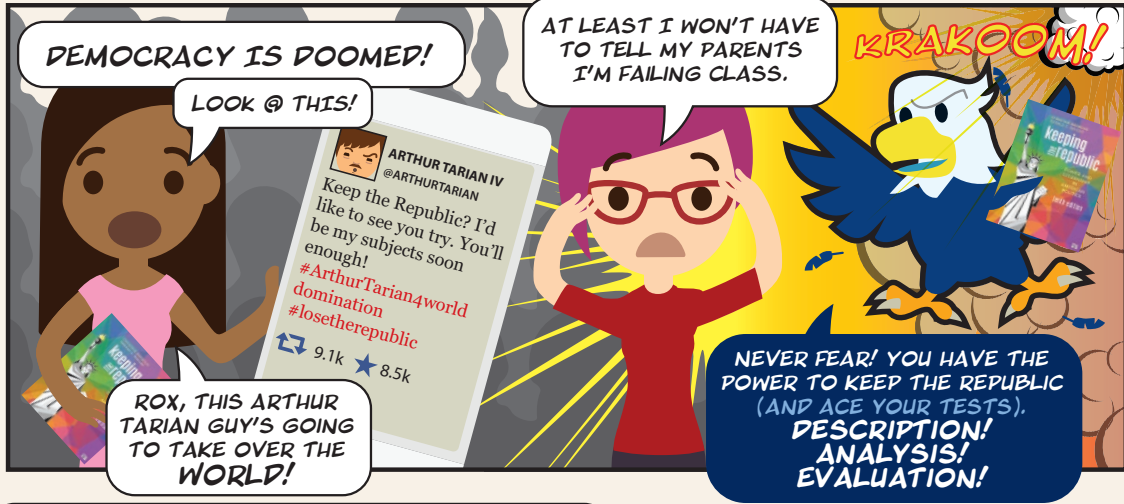


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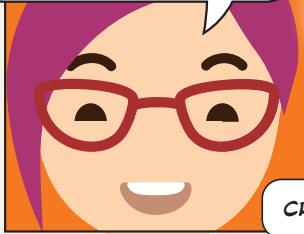
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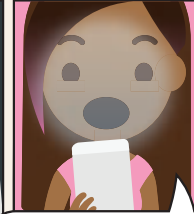
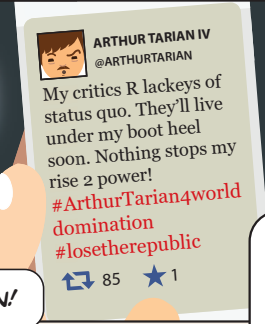
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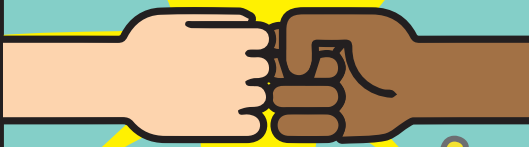


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keeping the republic

POWER AND
CITIZENSHIP
IN
AMERICAN
POLITICS

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Indiana University

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

CHRISTINE BARBOUR

Christine Barbour teaches in the Political Science Department and the Hutton Honors College at Indiana University, where she has become increasingly interested in how teachers of large classes can maximize what their students learn. She is working with online course designers to create an online version of her Intro to American Politics class. At Indiana, Professor Barbour has been a Lilly Fellow, working on a project to increase student retention in large introductory courses, and a member of the Freshman Learning Project, a university-wide effort to improve the first-year undergraduate experience. She has served on the *New York Times* College Advisory Board, working with other educators to develop ways to integrate newspaper reading into the undergraduate curriculum. She has won several teaching honors, but the two awarded by her students mean the most to her: the Indiana University Student Alumni Association Award for Outstanding Faculty and the Indiana University Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists Brown Derby Award. When not teaching or writing textbooks, Professor Barbour enjoys playing with her dogs, traveling with her coauthor, and writing about food. She is the food editor for *Bloom Magazine* of Bloomington and is a coauthor of *Indiana Cooks!* (2005) and *Home Grown Indiana* (2008). She also makes jewelry from precious metals and rough gemstones. If she ever retires, she will open a jewelry shop in a renovated Airstream on the beach in Apalachicola, Florida, where she plans to write a book about the local politics, development, and the fishing industry.

GERALD C. WRIGHT

Gerald C. Wright has taught political science at Indiana University since 1981, and he is currently the chair of the Political Science Department. Professor Wright is an accomplished scholar of American politics and the 2010 winner of the State Politics and Policy Association's Career Achievement Award, and his books include *Statehouse Democracy: Public Opinion and Policy in the American States* (1993), coauthored with Robert S. Erikson and John P. McIver. He has published more than fifty articles on elections, public opinion, and state politics. Professor Wright has long studied the relationship among citizens, their preferences, and public policy.

He is currently conducting research funded by grants from the National Science Foundation and the Russell Sage Foundation on the factors that influence the equality of policy representation in the states and in Congress. He is also writing a book about representation in U.S. legislatures. He has been a consultant for Project Vote Smart in the past several elections. Professor Wright is a member of Indiana University's Freshman Learning Project, a university-wide effort to improve the first-year undergraduate experience by focusing on how today's college students learn and how teachers can adapt their pedagogical methods to best teach them. In his nonworking hours, Professor Wright also likes to spend time with his dogs, travel, eat good food, fish, and play golf.



PREFACE

THIS ninth brief edition of *Keeping the Republic* is designed for those who want a concise, streamlined, inexpensive, and engaging version of its longer, more comprehensive parent. Brief books do not have to be dull! While we have condensed the longer text's account of the American political system, we have taken great pains to preserve the accessibility and enthusiasm of that book. Our goal was to meet the needs of those looking for a shorter text to use with various supplemental readings, as well as those who want broad coverage in a price-sensitive package.

We have also stayed true to our original goal in writing the text: to share the excitement of discovering humankind's capacity to find innovative solutions to those problems that arise from our efforts to live together on a planet too small, with resources too scarce, and with saintliness in too short a supply. In this book we honor the human capacity to manage our collective lives with peace and even, at times, dignity. And, in particular, we celebrate the American political system and the founders' extraordinary contribution to the possibilities of human governance.

This book covers essential topics with clear explanations, but it is also a thematic book, intended to guide students through a wealth of material and to help them make sense of the content both academically and personally. To that end we develop two themes that run throughout every chapter: an analytic theme to assist students in organizing the details and connecting them to the larger ideas and concepts of American politics, and an evaluative theme to help them find personal meaning in the American political system and develop standards for making judgments about how well the system works. Taken together, these themes provide students a framework on which to hang the myriad complexities of American politics.

The analytic theme we chose is a classic in political science: politics is a struggle over limited power and resources, as gripping as a sporting event in its final minutes, but much more vital. The rules guiding that struggle influence who will win and who will lose, so that often the struggles with the most at stake are over the rule making itself. In short, and in the words of a famous political scientist, *politics is about who gets what, and how they get it*. To illustrate this theme, we begin and end every chapter with a feature called *What's at Stake . . . ?*—an in-depth look at a specific political situation or controversy that poses a question about what people want from politics—what they are struggling to get, and how the rules affect who gets it.

Our citizenship theme has three dimensions. First, *Profiles in Citizenship* boxes in selected chapters introduce students to important figures in American politics, exploring why each one is involved in public service or some aspect of their political life. We feel unabashedly that a primary goal of teaching introductory politics is not only to create good scholars but also to create good citizens. These profiles—based on our own interviews, model republic-keeping behavior for students, helping them to see what is expected

of them as members of a democratic polity. A second dimension of citizenship is offered at the end of most chapters: *Citizenship and . . .* provides a critical view of what citizens can or cannot do in American politics, evaluating how democratic various aspects of the American system actually are and what possibilities exist for change. Third, the *Don't Be Fooled by . . .* feature assists students to critically examine the various kinds of political information they are bombarded with—from information in textbooks like this one, to information from social networks, to information from their congressional representative or political party.

The book's themes are further illustrated through two unique features that will enhance students' visual literacy and critical thinking skills. Each chapter includes a vivid, poster-worthy display called *The Big Picture* that focuses on a key element in the book, complementing the text with a rich visual that grabs students' attention and engages them in understanding *big processes* like how cases get to the Supreme Court; *big concepts* such as when the law can treat people differently; and *big data*, including who has immigrated to the United States and how they have assimilated. In addition, *Snapshot of America* describes through graphs, charts, and maps just who we Americans are and where we come from, what we believe, how educated we are, and how much money we make. This recurring feature aims at exploding stereotypes, and *Behind the Numbers* questions lead students to think critically about the political consequences of America's demographic profile. These two visual features are the result of a partnership with award-winning designer, educator, and artist Mike Wirth, who has lent his expert hand in information design and data visualization to craft these unique, informative, and memorable graphics.

The chapter sections are built around key learning goals—*In Your Own Words*—listed at the beginning of each chapter. A *Review* section at the end of each chapter summarizes the key points for each section, including the key terms with page references.

We have long believed that teaching is a two-way street, and we welcome comments, criticisms, or just a pleasant chat about politics or pedagogy. You can email us directly at barbour@indiana.edu and wright1@indiana.edu.

WHAT'S NEW IN THE NINTH BRIEF EDITION

These are strange days in American politics. We have tried to deal with that strangeness bluntly, objectively, and clearly. We are in a “moment.” Whether that moment becomes the “new normal” or remains a historical blip, we have no way of knowing. Writing about it in real time, we take it as it comes. We are political scientists, not magicians, and thus have a hard bias toward the scientific, the empirical, the observable. Distinguishing between truth and falsity is central to what we do. As always, in this edition we rely on and have integrated the most recent research, government statistics, and public opinion data to help us keep the narrative grounded in facts. We can make projections and predictions, but our crystal ball has been particularly hazy lately and we make no pretense of knowing the future.

The 2016 election only exacerbated divisions that have been building for decades, the product of economic displacement, demographic change, and a widening gap between those with college educations and those without. Some days it really does feel like there are two Americas, and the challenge of writing a textbook for both of them has been heavy

at times. We have worked hard to explain the nature of our ideological divisions as objectively as possible, and I suspect we have ruffled a few feathers, including our own. That's as it should be. No one likes to be described as a statistic or a faceless member of a demographic group or have opinions ascribed to them that they may not even knowingly hold, or may actively reject. It's a good thing if this book inspires debate, disagreement, and discovery.

Ideological polarization is not the only characteristic of American politics that has been a challenge to deal with in this edition. We have had a president who likes the lime-light and, love him or hate him (it's hard to be indifferent), he delights in shattering the norms that underlie the rules of American politics. Indeed, that is his appeal to many Americans who would like to see the system turned upside down. That means we have had to be more careful about focusing on those norms and explaining the roles they play in supporting the Constitution, so that we can fully understand the consequences as we decide whether they matter.

As we say later in this book, if we have a bias it is unquestionably toward diversity, toward the whole crazy salad of Americans. We can't write effectively for our students unless they can see themselves mirrored in the pages. This book has to belong to them, and so we have deplored the movement to return to an America where women, people of color, immigrants, members of the LGBTQ community, and other minority groups are marginalized. In the last four years some Americans have felt freer to voice disparaging or degrading remarks about members of all those groups. We reject that view.

Writing the ninth brief edition also gave us an opportunity to revitalize the book's theme to reflect the influences of modern technology on power and citizenship, in particular the ways that citizenship is mediated by third parties. To do that, we looked at the ways that controlling the political narrative has translated into political power and how that power has shifted with the advent of new and social media. This coverage is integrated throughout each chapter and is especially notable in the *Citizenship and . . .* sections and the *Don't Be Fooled by . . .* boxes' focus on digital media.

Students entering college today will have lived through one of the most challenging periods of American life, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the extreme polarization of politics. New *What's at Stake . . . ?* vignettes and related content examine such topics as the activism of the Black Lives Matter movement, the continued rise of the alt-right and the Make America Great Again movement, the impact of political outsiders on the nomination process and parties, what happens when the federal government lacks the will or the ability to address national problems like the pandemic, and the unusual presidency of Donald Trump.

Reviews for this edition helped guide some key changes that we hope will make the text even more useful to you and your students. We have sought to streamline both the main narrative and its features to provide a more focused reading experience.

DIGITAL RESOURCES

This text includes an array of instructor teaching materials designed to save you time and to help you keep students engaged. To learn more, visit sagepub.com or contact your SAGE representative at sagepub.com/findmyrep.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Africans say that it takes a village to raise a child—it is certainly true that it takes one to write a textbook! We could not have done it without a community of family, friends, colleagues, students, reviewers, and editors who supported us, nagged us, maddened us, and kept us on our toes. Not only is this a better book because of their help and support, but it would not have been a book at all without them.

In addition to all the folks we gratefully acknowledge in the full edition of this text, some made a particular contribution to this brief edition. We would like to thank the reviewers who have given us their feedback on the past and current brief editions of our book:

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University

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Finally, it is our great privilege to acknowledge and thank all the people at CQ Press who believed in this book and made this edition possible. In this day and age of huge publishing conglomerates, it has been such a pleasure to work with a small, committed team dedicated to top-quality work.

**Christine Barbour
Gerald C. Wright**

TO THE STUDENT

SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO READ THIS TEXTBOOK

1. If you open the book for the first time the night before the exam, you will not learn much from it and it won't help your grade. Start reading the chapters in conjunction with the lectures, and you'll get so much more out of class. **Do it early and often.**
2. Pay attention to the **chapter headings** and *In Your Own Words* goals. They tell you what we think is important, what our basic argument is, and how all the material fits together. Often, chapter subheadings list elements of an argument that may show up on a quiz. Be alert to these clues.
3. **Read actively.** Constantly ask yourself: Why is this important? How do these different facts fit together? What are the broad arguments here? How does this material relate to class lectures? How does it relate to the broad themes of the class? When you stop asking these questions, you are merely moving your eyes over the page, and that is a waste of time.
4. **Highlight or take notes.** Some people prefer highlighting because it's quicker than taking notes, but others think that writing down the most important points helps in recalling them later. Whichever method you choose (and you can do both), be sure you're doing it properly.
 - **Highlighting.** An entirely highlighted page will not give you any clues about what is important. Read each paragraph and ask yourself: What is the basic idea of this paragraph? Highlight that. Avoid highlighting all the examples and illustrations. You should be able to recall them on your own when you see the main idea. Beware of highlighting too little. If whole pages go by with no marking, you are probably not highlighting enough.
 - **Outlining.** Again, the key is to write down enough, but not too much. Go for key ideas, terms, and arguments.
5. **Note all key terms**, and be sure you understand the definition and significance.
6. Do not skip **tables and figures**. These things are there for a purpose, because they convey crucial information or illustrate a point in the text. After you read a chart or graph or *Big Picture* infographic, make a note in the margin about what it means.

7. **Do not skip the boxes.** They are not filler! The *Don't Be Fooled by . . .* boxes provide advice on becoming a critical consumer of the many varieties of political information that come your way. The *Profiles in Citizenship* box highlights the achievements and advice of some well-known political actors. They model citizen participation and can serve as a beacon for your own political power long after you've completed your American government course. The *Snapshot of America* boxes help you understand who Americans are and how they line up on all sorts of dimensions.



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POWER AND CITIZENSHIP IN AMERICAN POLITICS

What's at Stake . . . in Hashtag Activism?

THE LAST THING THEY WANTED to do was become famous. Not this way, not now. But when seventeen of their classmates and teachers were murdered on February 14, 2018, by a disturbed former student, the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, decided to make some noise.

They had seen this movie before. There had been mass shootings. Ever since they were little they had practiced what to do if someone showed up with a gun in their classrooms. There was even an armed guard on their campus. And still, it happened again. So they knew the ritual that would follow.

Every time the United States experiences a mass shooting, a grimly familiar routine follows. First there is unrelenting press coverage—of the dead, of the bereaved, of the shooter. Then those who lost loved ones make

In Your Own Words

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

- 1.1 Identify the broad concepts that relate to politics.
- 1.2 Describe the role that politics plays in determining how power and resources, including control of information, are distributed in a society.
- 1.3 Compare how power is distributed between citizens and government in different economic and political systems.
- 1.4 Describe the enduring tension in the United States between self-interested human nature and public-spirited government and the way that has been shaped in a mediated world.
- 1.5 Analyze the role of immigration and the meaning of citizenship in American politics.
- 1.6 Describe values that most Americans share, and the political debates that drive partisan divisions in American politics.
- 1.7 Discuss the essential reasons for approaching politics from a perspective of critical thinking, analysis, and evaluation.

impassioned calls for more gun control, and those who oppose gun control make equally impassioned declarations that we should not politicize tragedy, that it is too soon to talk about it. There are funerals. The president (usually) makes a speech. Then the press moves on to the next big news item and only the grieving are left to testify before Congress, create foundations in the names of their loved ones, and implore people not to forget. Lather, rinse, repeat.

But the MSD students knew the drill and were media savvy enough to figure out how to hack it. They were ready. Some, in the drama club, comfortable on stage; some, school journalists, eloquent and at ease with words; others, bright, articulate, privileged to attend a school with an embarrassment of extracurricular activities that had prepared them for their futures. Smart enough to know that their moment in the spotlight would be brief, they were determined to make it count.

The shooting was on a Wednesday. Cameron Kasky was so angry he took to Facebook, first to announce that he and his brother were safe and then to vent. “I just want people to understand what happened and understand that doing nothing will lead to nothing. Why is that so hard to grasp?” His social media posts caught the eye of CNN, which asked him to write an op-ed piece on Thursday, which led to television appearances. It became apparent to Kasky that his words were helping to shape the story of what had happened and what it meant. “People are listening and people care,” Kasky wrote. “They’re reporting the right things.”¹

To capitalize on that fickle national attention before it turned away, Kasky and several of his friends met that night to plan a social media campaign. By midnight they had a hashtag, #NeverAgain, social media accounts, and a message for politicians: legislate better background checks on gun buyers, or we will vote you out.

MSD student Jaclyn Corin took to her own social media accounts to express her grief and anger at the loss of her friends. She, a girl who had never been political, also began to strategize. With the help of Florida Democratic congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz, she planned a bus trip for one hundred students to Tallahassee to lobby state lawmakers.

By Friday, Corin and Kasky had joined forces, and on Saturday they added David Hogg, a student journalist who had conducted interviews while they were under fire; Sarah Chadwick, already famous for her angry, grief-filled tweets; and Emma González, whose speech at a local rally went viral. On Sunday they hit the morning talk shows to proclaim that the Never Again movement was planning the first March for Our Lives in Washington, D.C., on March 24.

Two weeks later (forever in the typical media cycle), the kids were still making news. Boycotts were organized to put pressure on companies doing business with the National Rifle Association (NRA), which has repeatedly blocked background checks. A National School Walkout was planned for the one-month anniversary of the shooting. Thousands of students across the nation participated. Famous people donated large sums to help fund the March 24 March for Our Lives. As Dahlia Lithwick wrote in *Slate*, “These teens have—by most objective measures—used social media to change the conversation around guns and gun control in America.”²

The March for Our Lives, when it happened, defied expectations. Huge crowds assembled not just in Washington but in eight hundred places around the world. The only adults who appeared on the D.C. stage were entertainers. The Parkland kids, knowing they had created a unique platform, had invited other kids whose lives had been touched by gun violence. Yolanda King, the nine-year-old granddaughter of Martin Luther King, confidently stood before tens of thousands to lead the crowd in a call and response:

Spread the word.
Have you heard?
All across the nation.
We
Are going to be
A great generation.

The event highlight was not words, eloquent as many of them were, but silence—four minutes and twenty-six seconds of uneasy, suspenseful silence as Emma González stood like a sculpture, tears tracking down her face, so that the crowd would experience the duration of the shooting that ended seventeen of her friends' and teachers' lives.

Just like the 2017 and 2018 Women's Marches, which brought out millions of pink-hatted women marching for human rights around the world; like Black Lives Matter, founded in 2013 to protest the unwarranted deaths of Black men at the hands of police; like Occupy Wall Street, a 2011 movement to protest the unequal distribution of wealth in the United States; and like the It Gets Better Project, which works to convince LGBTQ youths that life does get better after the high school years, #NeverAgain was fueled and spread by social media.

Many older people know their way around the Internet, but #NeverAgain was the first mass movement planned and executed by digital natives, people who have never *not* known the world of digital media, for whom navigating digital terrain is second nature. It's not clear what the generation will be called by history. Gen Z is so far the term of preference. Generational divides are blurry, and few social scientists agree where the dividing lines fall. But the post-millennial generation—those born since the mid-1990s or thereabouts—has an amazing political skill set to use if, like the Parkland students, they choose to do so. They have the ability, as Lithwick said, to “change the conversation,” or to create a powerful political narrative that they can disseminate and that helps level the playing field with powerful opponents like the NRA.

No movement can create change or defeat an opponent if it is only hashtag activism. Eventually, you have to put your vote where your # is. What is especially remarkable about the Never Again movement is that it emphasizes not just marching but voting. March for Our Life rallies throughout the summer of 2018 gave movement leaders the chance to hone the narrative, register people to vote and activate other students. Youth participation in the 2018 midterms soared.³ And young people turned out in force in the 2020 general election, voting overwhelmingly for Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. Some writers are calling for the vote to be extended to those who are sixteen years old. Political scientist Jonathan Bernstein says that is a good idea because voting is “the training wheels of political participation.”⁴ By the time they are eighteen, kids are distracted by the drama of their lives and they tend not to want to be bothered.

In fact, since the military draft ended in 1973, young people have been notoriously uninvolved in politics, often seeing it as irrelevant to their lives and the things they really care about. Knowing that young people pay little attention and tend not to vote in large numbers, politicians feel free to ignore their concerns, reinforcing their cynicism and apathy. Young people have turned out in larger numbers since the 2008 election of Barack Obama, however, and the Never Again movement promises to energize even more.

The American founders weren't crazy about the idea of mass movements, political demonstrations, or even political parties, but they did value political engagement, and they knew that democracies needed care and attention in order to survive. In 1787, when Benjamin Franklin was asked by a woman what he and other founders of the Constitution had created, he replied, "A republic, madam, if you can keep it." Today, many commentators worry that we are not "keeping the republic" and that, as new generations who find politics a turn-off become disaffected adults, the system will start to unravel. As one writer says, "a nation that hates politics will not long thrive as a democracy."⁵

Yet protesters like Cameron Kasky, Emma González, David Hogg, and Yolanda King sound as committed to democracy as Benjamin Franklin could have wished, even though their efforts are not focused solely on voting or traditional methods of political engagement. Is a nation of these young activists a nation in trouble, or can movements begun via technology that Franklin could not have imagined help to keep the republic? What, exactly, is at stake in *hashtag activism*—what one writer called a "netroots outcry" to follow an online call to political action? We return to this question after we learn more about the meaning of politics and the difference it makes in our lives. <<

INTRODUCTION

HAVE you got grand ambitions for your life? Do you want to found an Internet start-up and sell it for millions, be the investment banker that funds the project, achieve a powerful position in business, gain influence in high places, and spend money to make things happen? Perhaps you'd like to make a difference in the world, heal the sick, fight for peace, feed the poor. Maybe you want a "normal" life when you can travel the world, learning languages and immersing yourself in new cultures and working abroad. Or maybe all you want from life is a good education; a well-paying job; a healthy family; a comfortable home; and a safe, prosperous, contented existence. Think politics has nothing to do with any of those things? Think again.

The things that make those goals attainable—a strong national defense, good relations with other countries, student loans, economic prosperity, favorable mortgage rates, secure streets and neighborhoods, cheap and efficient public transportation, affordable health care, and family leave protections—are all influenced by or are the products of politics.

Yet if you listen to the news, politics may seem like one long campaign commercial: eternal bickering and finger-pointing by public servants who seem more interested in winning an argument against their ideological opponents than actually solving our collective problems. Far more often than not, political actors with the big bucks seem to have more influence over the process than those of us with normal bank accounts. Politics, which we would like to think of as a noble activity, can take on all the worst characteristics of the business world, where we expect people to take advantage of each other and pursue their own private interests. Can this really be the heritage of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln? Can this be the "world's greatest democracy" at work?

In this book we explore that question, getting to the heart of what politics is and how it relates to other concepts such as power, government, rules, economics, and citizenship. We propose that politics can best be understood as the struggle over who gets power and resources in society, and the fight to control the narrative that defines each contestant. Politics produces winners and losers, and much of the reason it can look so ugly is that

people fight desperately not to be losers, and to create and perpetuate narratives that celebrate their wins and put the best face possible on their losses. It can get pretty confusing for the average observer.

Contrary to the way they appear in the media, and maybe even in our own minds, the people who are doing that desperate fighting are not some special breed—more corrupt or self-interested or greedy than the rest of us. They are us. Whether they are officials in Washington or mayors of small towns, corporate CEOs or representatives of labor unions, local cops or soldiers in the Middle East, churchgoers or atheists, doctors or lawyers, shopkeepers or consumers, professors or students, they are the people who in a democracy we call citizens.

As we will see, it is the beauty of a democracy that *all* the people, including the everyday people like us, get to fight for what they want. Not everyone can win, of course, and many never come close. There is no denying that some people bring resources to the process that give them an edge, and that the rules give advantages to some groups of people over others. But as the *What's at Stake . . . ?* shows, what makes living today so different from previous eras is that we all have some access to the multiple channels of information through which battles over political narratives take place. The people who pay attention, who learn how the rules work and how to use those communication channels effectively, can begin to increase their chances of getting what they want, whether it is restrictions on ownership of assault weapons, a lower personal tax bill, greater pollution controls, a more aggressive foreign policy, safer streets, a better-educated population, or more public parks. If they become very skilled citizens, they can even begin to change the rules so that people like them have more control of the rules and narratives and a greater chance to end up winners in the high-stakes game we call politics.

In this chapter we introduce you to this fascinating world of politics, focusing on the meaning of politics itself, the varieties of *political* systems and the roles they endorse for the individuals who live under them, the American founders' ideas about democracy and citizenship, the ideas that hold us together as a nation, the ideas that define our political conflicts, and the themes of power and citizenship that will serve as our framework for understanding American politics.

.....
: ***In Your Own Words*** Identify the broad concepts that relate to politics.

WHAT IS POLITICS?

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

Over two thousand years ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle said that we are political animals, and political animals we seem destined to remain. The truth is that politics is a fundamental and complex human activity. In some ways it is our capacity to be political—to cooperate, bargain, and compromise—that helps distinguish us from all the other animals out there. While it certainly has its baser moments (impeachments, indictments, and intelligence abuses come to mind), politics also allows us to reach more exalted heights than we could ever achieve alone—from dedicating a new public library or building a national highway system, to stabilizing a crashing economy, to curing deadly diseases or exploring the stars.

To explore politics—in all its glory as well as its disgrace—we need to begin with a clear understanding of the word. One of the most famous definitions, put forth by the late, well-known political scientist Harold Lasswell, is still one of the best, and we use it to frame our discussion throughout this book. Lasswell defined **politics** as “who gets what, when, and how.”⁶ Politics is a way of determining, without recourse to violence, who gets the power and resources in society, and how they get them. **Power** is the ability to get other people to do what you want them to do. The resources in question here might be government jobs, tax revenues, laws that help you get your way, or public policies that work to your advantage.

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

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

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

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

politics who gets what, when, and how; a process for determining how power and resources are distributed in a society without recourse to violence

power the ability to get other people to do what you want

media the channels—including television, radio, newspapers, and the Internet—through which information is sent and received

social order the way we organize and live our collective lives

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

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

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

Authority is power that citizens view as **legitimate**, or “right”—power to which we have implicitly consented. Think of it this way: as children, we probably did as our parents told us or submitted to their punishment if we didn’t, because we recognized their authority over us. As we became adults, we started to claim that our parents had less authority over us, that we could do what we wanted. We no longer saw their power as wholly legitimate or appropriate. Governments exercise authority because people recognize them as legitimate, even if they often do not like doing what they are told (paying taxes, for instance). When governments cease to be regarded as legitimate, the result may be revolution or civil war, unless the state is powerful enough to suppress all opposition.

RULES AND INSTITUTIONS

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

Rules can be thought of as the *how* in the definition “who gets what, . . . and how.” They are directives that determine how resources are allocated and how collective action takes place—that is, they determine how we try to get the things we want. We can do it violently, or we can do it politically, according to the rules. Those rules can provide for a single dictator, for a king, for rule by God’s representative on Earth or by the rich, for rule by a majority of the people, or for any other arrangement. The point of rules is to provide us with a framework for solving—without violence—the problems generated by our collective lives.

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

Rules can be official—laws that are passed, signed, and entered into the books; amendments that are ratified; decisions made by bureaucrats; or judgments handed down by the courts.

government

a system or organization for exercising authority over a body of people

authority power that is recognized as legitimate, or right

legitimate accepted as “right” or proper

rules directives that specify how resources will be distributed or what procedures govern collective activity

Less visible but no less important are **norms**, the tacitly understood rules about acceptable political behavior, ways of doing things, boundaries between the branches, and traditional practices that grease the wheels of politics and keep them running smoothly. Because norms are understood but not explicitly written down, we often don't even recognize them until they are broken.

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

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

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

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

norms informal, unwritten expectations that guide behavior and support formal rule systems; often most noticeable when broken

institutions organizations in which government power is exercised

POWER, NARRATIVES, AND MEDIA

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

A major part of politics is about competing to have your narrative accepted as the authoritative account. Control of political information has always been a crucial resource when it

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

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

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

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

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

When we talk about the channels through which information flows, and the ways that the channel itself might alter or control the narrative, we are referring to media. Just like a



Marty Bucella via Cartoonstock.com

**political
narrative**

a persuasive story about the nature of power, who should have it, and how it should be used

gatekeepers

journalists and the media elite who determine which news stories are covered and which are not

economics

production and distribution of a society's material resources and services

socialist economy

an economic system in which the state determines production, distribution, and price decisions, and property is government owned

medium is a person through whom some people try to communicate with those who have died, media (the plural of *medium*) are channels of communication, as mentioned earlier. The integrity of the medium is critical. A scam artist might make money off the desire of grieving people to contact a lost loved one by making up the information they pass on. The monarch and clergy who channeled the narrative of the Holy Roman Empire were motivated by their wish to hold on to power. Think about water running through a pipe. Maybe the pipe is made of lead, or is rusty, or has leaks. Depending on the integrity of the pipe, the water we get will be toxic or rust-colored or limited. *In the same way, the narratives and information we get can be altered by the way they are mediated, by the channels, or by the media through which we receive them.*

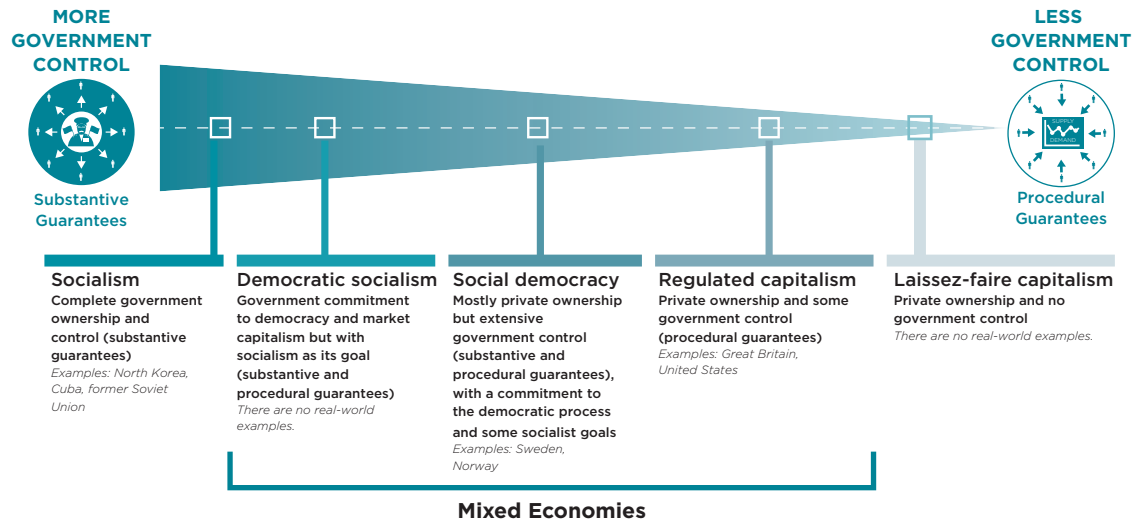
As we will see, in today's digital world, there are so many channels of information that it is all the more important that people check the integrity of the media they use in order to understand the narratives those media may be pushing.

POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

Whereas politics is concerned with the distribution of power and resources and the control of information in society, **economics** is concerned specifically with the production and distribution of society's wealth—material goods like bread, toothpaste, and housing, and

FIGURE 1.1

A Comparison of Economic Systems



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

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

The processes of politics and economics can be engaged in procedurally or substantively. In procedural political and economic systems, the legitimacy of the outcome is based on the legitimacy of the process that produced it. In substantive political and economic systems, the legitimacy of the outcome depends on how widely accepted is the narrative the government tells about who should have what. The outcome is based on the decision of a powerful person or people, not a process that people believe is impartial. In procedural systems, the means (process) justify the ends; in substantive systems, the ends justify the means.

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

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



Presidents for Life?

In March 2018, China's legislature, the National People's Congress, voted to change the country's constitution to eliminate the existing ten-year presidential term limit, reaffirming the authoritarianism in China's political culture and setting up President Xi Jinping as president for life. In March 2020, constitutional amendments were proposed by a member of Vladimir Putin's United Russia Party that would allow Putin to run twice more for the presidency, opening up the possibility that he could remain in office until 2036. Putin had already served three four-year terms (with a break as Russian prime minister). Here, Presidents Xi and Putin meet up at a summit in Brazil in November 2019.

Mikhail Svetlov/Getty Images

substantive guarantees
government assurance of particular outcomes or results

procedural guarantees
government assurance that the rules will work smoothly and treat everyone fairly, with no promise of particular outcomes

capitalist economy

an economic system in which the market determines production, distribution, and price decisions, and property is privately owned

laissez-faire capitalism

an economic system in which the market makes all decisions and the government plays no role

mixed economies

economic systems based on modified forms of capitalism tempered by substantive values

democratic socialism

a mixed economy that combines socialist ideals with a commitment to democracy and market capitalism, keeping socialism as its goal

social democracy

a mixed economy that uses the democratic process to bend capitalism toward socialist goals (like more equality)

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

MIXED ECONOMIES Most real-world economies fall somewhere in between the idealized points of socialism and laissez-faire capitalism, because most real-world countries have some substantive political goals that they want their economies to serve. The economies that fall in between the extremes are called mixed economies. **Mixed economies** are based on modified forms of capitalism, tempered by substantive values about how the market should work. In mixed economies, the fundamental economic decision makers are individuals rather than the government. In addition, individuals may decide they want the government to step in and regulate behaviors that they think are not in the public interest. It is the type and degree of regulation that determines what kind of mixed economy it is.

- **Democratic socialism** and **social democracy** are, as their names suggest, mixed economies that fall to the right of socialism in Figure 1.1. They are different from the pure socialist economy we discussed because they combine socialist ideals that empower government with a commitment to the *political* democratic principle of popular sovereignty and the *economic* principle of market capitalism that empowers individuals. The difference between them is that democratic socialists keep socialism as their end goal and social democrats are happy to keep the capitalist economy as long as they use the democratic process to attain some of the goals a socialist economy is supposed to produce (like more equality). However, they are both considered hybrids of democracy and socialism.

Socialism hybrids in theory, and often in practice, try to keep checks on government power to avoid the descent into authoritarianism that plagues most socialist experiments. They generally hold that there is a preferred distribution of stuff that requires prioritizing political goals over the market but that democracy is worth preserving as well.

When people claim to endorse a hybrid of democracy and socialism, note which word is the noun and which is the modifier. The noun will tell you where the true commitment lies. Democratic socialists (that is, “socialists”) prioritize the results of a socialist economy; social democrats (that is, “democrats”) prioritize the democratic process over economic outcomes.

Since World War II, the citizens of many Western European nations have elected social democrats to office, where they have enacted policies to bring about

more equality—for instance, better housing, adequate health care for all, and the elimination of poverty and unemployment. Even where social democratic governments are voted out of office, such programs have proved so popular that it is often difficult for new leaders to alter them. Few people in the United States would identify themselves with social democracy, as presidential candidate Bernie Sanders found out in 2016 and 2020, although his campaigns did help people understand that some versions of socialism did not require a wholesale elimination of capitalism, and some of his proposals found their way into the Democratic Party platform.

- **Regulated capitalism** is also a hybrid system, but, unlike the socialist hybrids, it does not often prioritize political and social goals—like reducing inequality or redressing power inequities—as much as it does economic health. Although in theory the market ought to provide everything that people need and want—and should regulate itself as well—sometimes it fails. The notion that the market, an impartial process, has “failed” is a somewhat substantive one—it is the decision of a government that the outcome is not acceptable and should be replaced or altered to fit a political vision of what the outcome should be. When markets have ups and downs—periods of growth followed by periods of slowdown or recession—individuals and businesses look to government for economic security. If the market fails to produce some goods and services, like schools or highways, individuals expect the government to step in to produce them (using taxpayer funds). It is not very substantive—the market process still largely makes all the distributional decisions—but it is not laissez-faire capitalism, either. The United States has a system of regulated capitalism, along with most other countries today.

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

POLITICAL SYSTEMS AND THE CONCEPT OF CITIZENSHIP

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

Just as there are different kinds of economic systems on the substantive-to-procedural scale, there are many sorts of political systems, based on competing ideas about who should have power and what the social order should be—that is, how much substantive regulation there should be over individual decision making. For our purposes, we can divide political systems into two types: those in which the government has the substantive power to impose a particular social order, deciding how individuals ought to behave, and those procedural systems in which individuals exercise personal power over most of their own behavior and ultimately over government as well. These two types of systems are

regulated capitalism

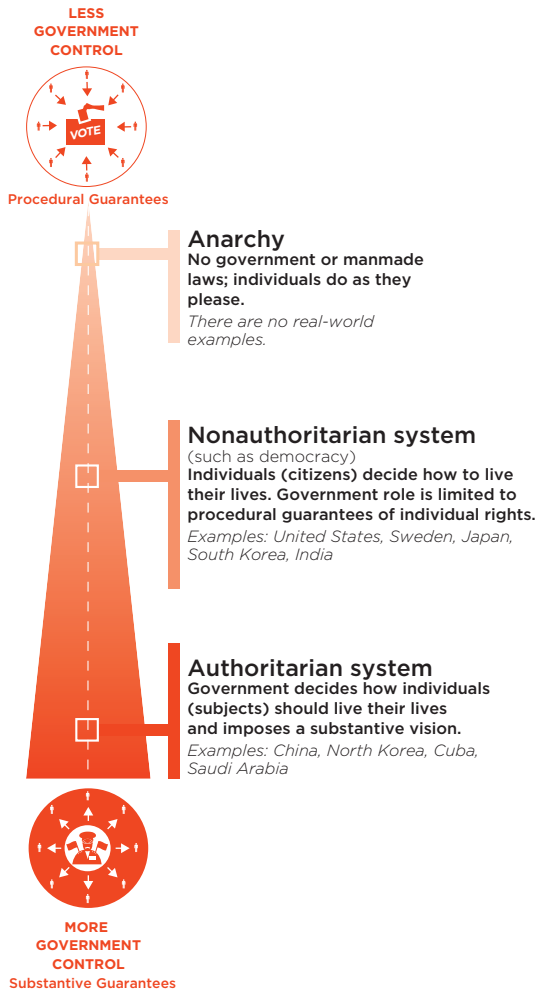
a market system in which the government intervenes to protect rights

authoritarian governments

systems in which the state holds all power over the social order

FIGURE 1.2

A Comparison of Political Systems



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

different not just in a theoretical sense. The differences have very real implications for the people who live in them; the notion of citizenship (or the lack of it) is tied closely to the kind of political system a nation has.

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

AUTHORITARIAN SYSTEMS

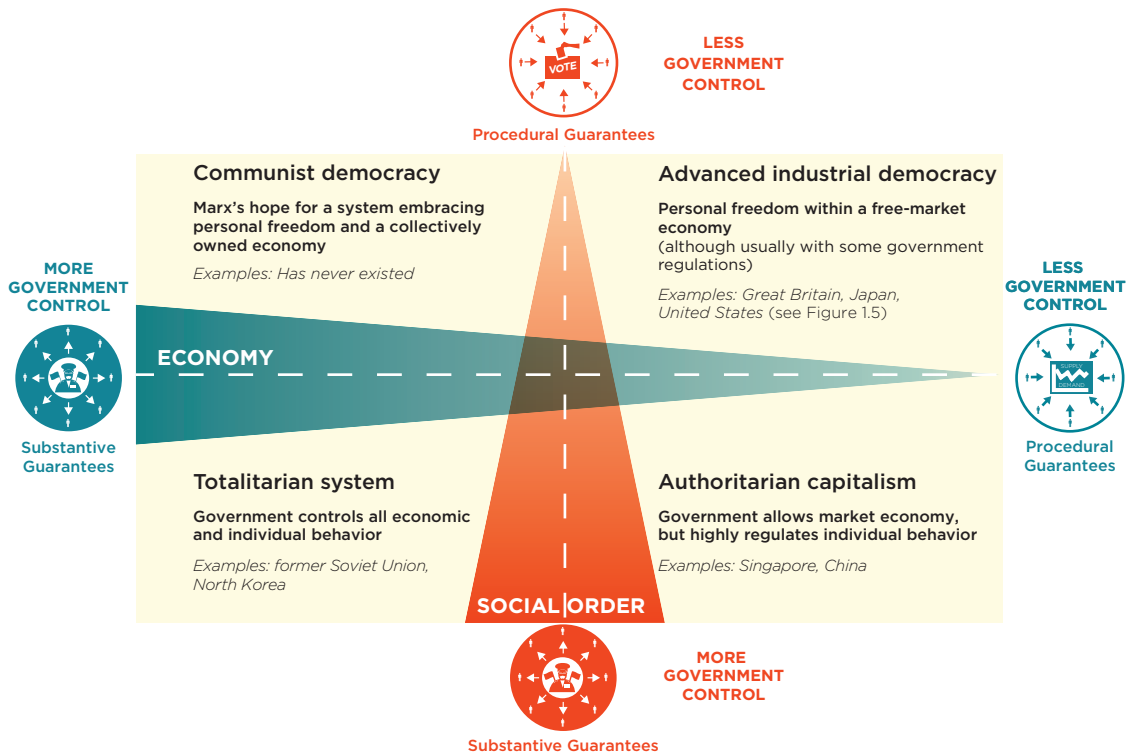
Authoritarian governments give ultimate power to the state rather than to the people to decide how they ought to live their lives. By *authoritarian governments*, we usually mean those in which the people cannot effectively claim rights against the state; where the state chooses to exercise its power,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

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

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

FIGURE 1.3

Political and Economic Systems



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

Often authoritarian governments pay lip service to the people, but when push comes to shove, as it usually does in such states, the people have no effective power against the government. Again, government does not just provide guarantees of fair processes for individuals; it guarantees a substantive vision of what life will be like—what individuals will believe, how they will act, what they will choose.

DEMOCRACY AND NONAUTHORITARIAN SYSTEMS

In nonauthoritarian systems, ultimate power rests with the individuals to make decisions concerning their lives. The most extreme form of nonauthoritarianism is called **anarchy**. Anarchists would do away with government and laws altogether. People advocate anarchy because they value the freedom to do whatever they want more than they value the order

totalitarian
a system in which absolute power is exercised over every aspect of life

authoritarian capitalism

a system in which the state allows people economic freedom but maintains stringent social regulations to limit noneconomic behavior

anarchy the absence of government and laws

democracy a government that vests power in the people

popular sovereignty the concept that the citizens are the ultimate source of political power

elite democracy a theory of democracy that limits the citizens' role to choosing among competing leaders

pluralist democracy a theory of democracy that holds that citizen membership in groups is the key to political power

participatory democracy a theory of democracy that holds that citizens should actively and directly control all aspects of their lives

and security that governments provide by forbidding or regulating certain kinds of behavior. Few people are true anarchists, however. Anarchy may sound attractive in theory, but the inherent difficulties of the position make it hard to practice. For instance, how could you even organize a revolution to get rid of government without some rules about who is to do what and how decisions are to be made?

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

Democracies are based on the principle of **popular sovereignty**; that is, there is no power higher than the people and, in the United States, the document establishing their authority, the Constitution. The central idea here is that no government is considered legitimate unless the governed consent to it, and people are not truly free unless they live under a law of their own making. Democratic narratives vary, however, in how much active control they give to individuals:

- Theorists of **elite democracy** propose that democracy is merely a system of choosing among competing leaders; for the average citizen, input ends after the leader is chosen.⁷ In this view, elections are merely symbolic—to perpetuate the illusion that citizens have consented to their government.
- Advocates of **pluralist democracy** argue that what is important is not so much individual participation but rather membership in groups that participate in government decision making on their members' behalf.⁸ As a way of trying to influence a system that gives them a limited voice, citizens join groups of people with whom they share an interest, such as labor unions, professional associations, and environmental or business groups.
- Supporters of **participatory democracy** claim that individuals have the right to control *all* the circumstances of their lives, and direct democratic participation should take place not only in government but in industry, education, and community affairs as well.⁹ For advocates of this view, democracy is more than a way to make decisions: it is a way of life, an end in itself.

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

The people of many Western countries have found the idea of democracy persuasive enough to found their governments on it. In recent years, especially since the mid-1980s, democracy has been spreading rapidly through the rest of the world as the preferred form of government. No longer the primary province of industrialized Western nations,

attempts at democratic governance now extend into Asia, Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe, and the republics of the former Soviet Union. There are many varieties of democracy other than our own. Some democracies make the legislature (the representatives of the people) the most important authority, some retain a monarch with limited powers, and some hold referenda at the national level to get direct feedback on how the people want the government to act on specific issues.

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

THE ROLE OF THE PEOPLE

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

In authoritarian systems, the people are **subjects** of their government. They possess no rights that protect them from that government; they must do whatever the government says or face the consequences, without any other recourse. They have obligations to the state but no rights or privileges to offset those obligations. They may be winners or losers in government decisions, but they have very little control over which it may be.

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

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

In democratic systems, the rules of government can provide for all sorts of different roles for those they designate as citizens. At a minimum, citizens possess certain rights,

advanced industrial democracy

a system in which a democratic government allows citizens a considerable amount of personal freedom and maintains a free-market (though still usually regulated) economy

communist democracy

a utopian system in which property is communally owned and all decisions are made democratically

subjects

individuals who are obliged to submit to a government authority against which they have no rights

citizens

members of a political community having both rights and responsibilities

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

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

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

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

People have freedom and rights before government exists, declared Locke. When they decide they are better off with government than without it, they enter into a **social contract**, giving up some of those rights in exchange for the protection of the rest of their rights by a government established by the majority. If that government fails to protect their rights, it has broken the contract, and the people are free to form a new government or not, as they please. But the key element here is that for authority to be legitimate, citizens must consent to it. Note, however, that nowhere did Locke suggest that all people ought to participate in politics, or that people are necessarily equal. In fact, he was concerned mostly with the preservation of private property, suggesting that

social contract the notion that society is based on an agreement between government and the governed, in which people agree to give up some rights in exchange for the protection of others

only property owners would have cause to be bothered with government because only they have something concrete to lose. Still, the political narratives of **classical liberalism** that emerged from the Enlightenment emphasized individual rights and nonauthoritarianism.

Meanwhile, as philosophers in Europe were beginning to explore the idea of individual rights and democratic governance, there had long been democratic stirrings on the founders' home continent. The Iroquois Confederacy was an alliance of five (and eventually six) East Coast Native American nations whose constitution, the "Great Law of Peace," impressed such American leaders as Benjamin Franklin with its suggestions of federalism, separation of powers, checks and balances, and consensus-building. Although historians are not sure that these ideas had any direct influence on the founders' thinking about American governance, they were clearly part of the stew of ideas that the founders could dip into, and some scholars make the case that their influence was significant.¹⁰

In Your Own Words Compare how power is distributed between citizens and government in different economic and political systems.

DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA

Democratic but not too democratic

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

THE DANGERS OF DEMOCRACY

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

A **republic**, according to Madison, differs from a democracy mainly in that it employs representation and can work in a large state. Most theorists agree that democracy is impossible in practice if there are a lot of citizens and all have to be heard from. But we do not march to Washington or phone our legislator every time we want to register a political preference. Instead, we choose representatives—members of the House of

classical liberalism

a political ideology dating from the seventeenth century emphasizing individual rights over the power of the state

republic

a government in which decisions are made through representatives of the people



Citizens Stepping Up

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

World Central Kitchen

Representatives, senators, and the president—to represent our views for us. Madison thought this would be a safer system than direct participation (all of us crowding into town halls or the Capitol) because public passions would be cooled off by the process. You might be furious about health care costs when you vote for your senator, but they will represent your views with less anger. The founders hoped the representatives would be older, wealthier, and wiser than the average American and that they would be better able to make cool and rational decisions.

THE EVOLUTION OF AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP

Unlike the founders, certainly, but even unlike most of the people currently running this country (who are, let's face it, kind of old), people born in this century are almost all **digital natives**. They have been born in an era in which not only are most people

hooked up to electronic media, but they also live their lives partly in cyberspace as well as in “real space.” For many of us, the lives we live are often mediated—that is, with much, if not most, of our relationships, our education, our news, our travel, our sustenance, our purchases, our daily activities, our job seeking, and our very sense of ourselves being influenced by, experienced through, or shared via electronic media.

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

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

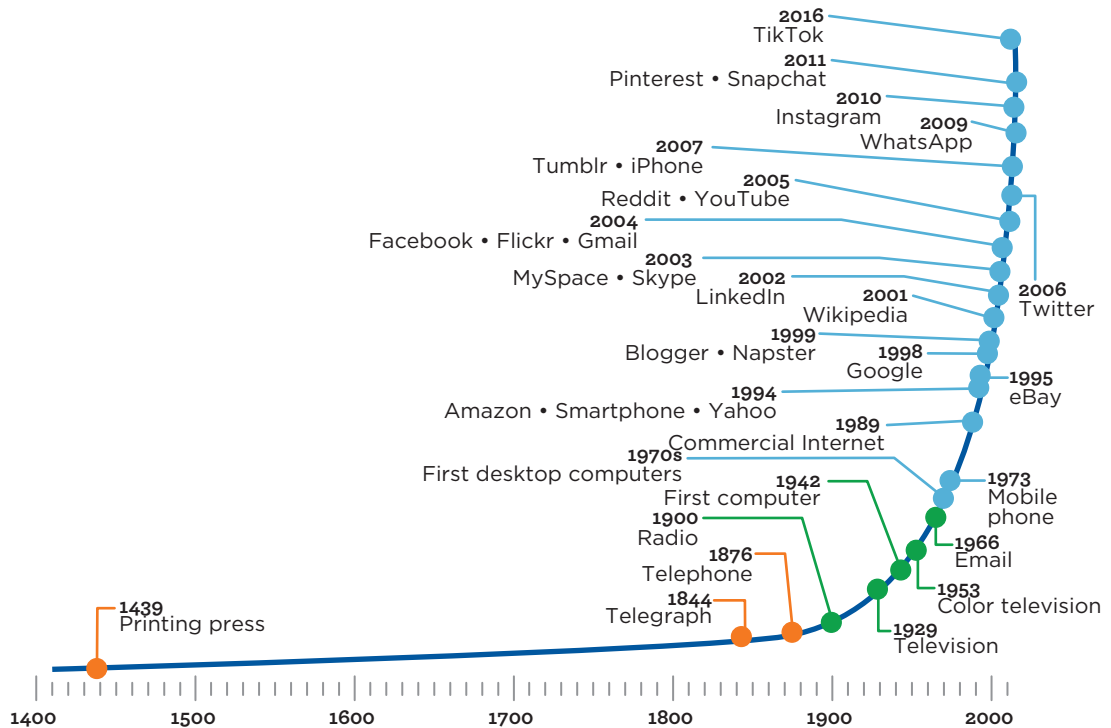
Even though Americans today still largely adhere to the basic governing narrative the founders promoted, the country is now light-years removed from the founding era, when communication was limited by illiteracy and the scarcity of channels through which it could pass. Consider the timeline in Figure 1.4. It follows the development of the media through which we get information, receive narratives, and send out our own information (see also *Snapshot of America: How Do We Engage Politically Online?*). Being a citizen in a mediated world is just flat out different from being one in the world in which James

digital native

an individual born after the advent of digital technology who is proficient in and dependent on its use

FIGURE 1.4

Media Timeline



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

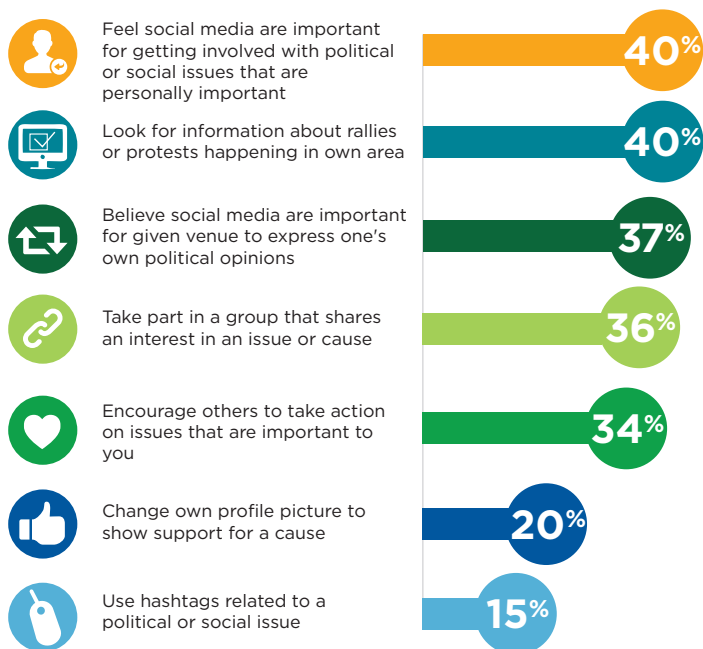
Madison wrote the Constitution. It's the genius of the Constitution that it has been able to navigate the transition successfully so far. The mediated world we live in gives us myriad new ways to keep the republic and some pretty high-tech ways to lose it. That puts a huge burden on us as **mediated citizens**, and also opens up a world of opportunity.

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

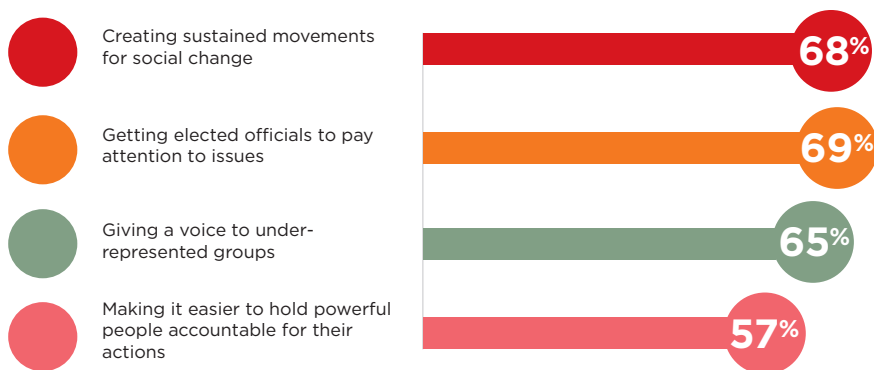
Still, the Constitution has not put that conflict to rest. Today there are plenty of people who put country first—who enlist in the armed services, sometimes giving their lives for

mediated citizens those for whom most personal and commercial relationships; access to information about the world and recreational or professional activities; and communication with others passes through third-party channels, which may or may not modify or censor that information

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



Believe Social Media Are Important for



Behind the Numbers

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

Source: Calculated by the authors from the 2018 Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel, Wave 35, May 29–June 11, 2018, N=4,594.

their nation, or who go into law enforcement or teaching or other lower paying careers because they want to serve. There are people who cheerfully pay their taxes because it's a privilege to live in a free democracy where you can climb the ladder of opportunity. Especially in moments of national trouble—after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in September 2001, for instance, or during the COVID-19 pandemic—Americans willingly help their fellow citizens. At the same time, the day-to-day business of life turns most people inward. Many people care about self and family and friends, but most don't have the energy or inclination to get beyond that. President John F. Kennedy challenged his “fellow Americans” in 1961 to “ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country,” but only a rare few have the time or motivation to take up that challenge.

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

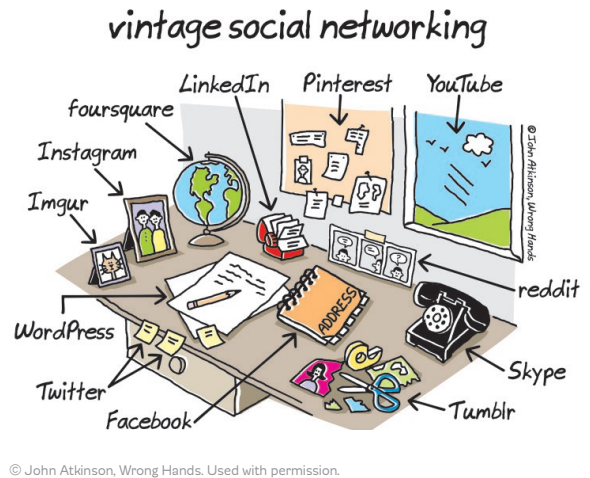
Many older Americans who are not digital natives nonetheless experience political life through television or through web surfing and commenting, usually anonymously and often rudely. This is not always a positive addition to our civil discourse, but they are trying to adapt. You may have grandparents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

But younger, more media-savvy digital natives, millennials, Gen Xers—and even some tech-savvy Baby Boomers—not only have access to traditional media if they choose but also are accustomed to interacting, conducting friendships and family relationships, and generally attending to the details of their lives through electronic channels. Their digital selves exist in networks of friends and acquaintances who take for granted that they can communicate in seconds. They certainly get their news digitally and increasingly organize, register to vote, enlist in campaigns, and call each other to action that way.

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

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

Although living an intensely mediated life has the potential to broaden our horizons and expose us to multiple views and cultures, it does not automatically produce



public-interested citizenship

a view of citizenship focused on action to realize the common good

self-interested citizenship

a view of citizenship focused on action to realize an individual citizen's interests

hashtag activism

a form of political engagement that occurs by organizing individuals online around a particular issue



DON'T BE FOOLED BY . . .

Your Own Information Bubble

Technologies that enable citizens to connect with one another, to engage in lively

debate, and to organize for common purposes hold great promise for democracy. The power to communicate on a massive scale was once held only by governments and those with access to print or broadcast media outlets, but today it is in the hands of anyone who has access to a cell phone. As every superhero learns quickly, along with great power comes great responsibility. There is no guarantee that what you learn through social media is true, and if you are sharing information that isn't reality based, you are helping to perpetuate a false narrative.

In addition, your social media feeds and even your browser are working against you, ensuring that the news that comes your way is tailored to your interests and preconceptions, creating what one observer calls a *filter bubble*.¹¹ Whether your news feed is custom made or crowd-sourced, always look before you "like" since social media algorithms can channel information to you that reinforces the narrative you get about "who gets what, and how" in today's political world.

What to Watch Out For

- **Don't create your own echo chamber.** Social networking sites and other tools make it easy to create your own custom news channel, ensuring that you see stories from sources you like, about subjects that interest you. Important stories can easily slip past you, and your understanding of political matters will suffer. But if you follow

only the political sources you like, that will get you in trouble, too. So open yourself up to alternative sources of news and opinions that you might find offensive or wrong. If what's showing up in your news feed does not challenge your ideas and beliefs from time to time, consider whether you've been censoring news that you don't like. Make sure you're getting all sides of the story, not just the one that you want to hear.¹²

- **Don't trust your browser.** It's not just your self-selected social media feeds that are shaping your information diet: every link you click and word you search is fed into complex algorithms that tailor your results into a custom feed of "things you might like." Just as Amazon knows what items to suggest on your personal Amazon front page based on your browsing and purchase history, your Google results are similarly parsed and packaged for your viewing pleasure. Two people searching on a particular topic may get very different results.¹³ Search around—don't just click on the first links offered to you.
- **Separate truth from truthiness.** Some of the most compelling (and viral) political material on the Internet comes from people who are intent on selling you on their narrative. Their arguments may be valid, and their evidence may be strong—but bear in mind that an opinion piece is different from a statement of fact. Take care to seek out news sources that strive for objectivity and don't have an ax to grind (such as the Associated Press or the news pages of the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, or Politico) alongside those that offer analysis and argument.

public-interested citizens. People can easily remain self-interested in this digital world. We can customize our social media to give us only news and information that confirm what we already think. We can live in an **information bubble** where everything we see and hear reinforces our narratives (see *Don't Be Fooled by . . . Your Own Information Bubble*). That makes us more or less sitting ducks for whatever media narrative is directed our way, whether from inside an online media source or from a foreign power that weaponizes social media to influence an election, as the Russians did in both 2016 and 2020. Without opening ourselves up to multiple information and action channels, we can live an unexamined mediated life.

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

Mediated citizens are not only the receivers and distributors of narratives from powerful people, like the TV-watching couch potato or earbud-wearing student with their eyes fixed on Insta. We can be the creators and disseminators of our own narratives, something that would have terrified the old monarchs comfortably ensconced in their narrative. Even the founders would have been extremely nervous about what the masses might get up to.

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

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

WHO IS A CITIZEN AND WHO IS NOT?

Native-born and naturalized citizens

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

If you are born in any of the fifty states, in the District of Columbia, or in most of America's overseas territories, such as Puerto Rico or Guam, you are an American citizen, whether your parents are Americans or not and whether they are here legally or not. This rule follows the principle of international law called *jus soli*, which means literally “the right of the soil.” The exceptions to this rule in the United States are children born to foreign diplomats serving in the United States and children born on foreign ships in U.S. waters.

information bubble a closed cycle, sometimes self-created, in which all the information we get reinforces the information we already have, solidifying our beliefs without reference to outside reality checks

These children would not be considered U.S. citizens. According to another legal principle, *jus sanguinis* (“the right by blood”), if you are born outside the United States to American parents, you are also an American citizen (or you can become one if you are adopted by American parents). Interestingly, if you are born in the United States but one of your parents holds citizenship in another country, you may be able to hold dual citizenship, depending on that country’s laws. Most countries, including the United States, require that a child with dual citizenship declare allegiance to one country on turning age eighteen. It is worth noting that requirements for U.S. citizenship, particularly as they affect people born outside the country, have changed frequently over time.

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

However, many people who come to the United States do not come as legal permanent residents. The USCIS refers to these people as nonimmigrants. Some arrive seeking asylum, or protection. These are political refugees, who are allowed into the United States if they face or are threatened with persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinions. Not everyone who feels threatened is given legal **refugee** status, however. The USCIS requires that the fear of persecution be “well founded,” and it is itself the final judge of a well-founded fear. Claiming refugee status can be an intensely political act, as evidenced by President Trump’s attempt to blame Democrats for the 2018 border crisis caused by his own administration’s policy of separating children from their parents in an effort to deter refugees.¹⁴ Refugees may become legal permanent residents after they have lived here continuously for one year (although there are annual limits on the number who may do so), at which time they can begin accumulating the in-residence time required to become a citizen, if they wish to.

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

Undocumented immigrants have arrived here by avoiding the USCIS regulations, usually because they would not qualify for one reason or another. Many come as children and may not even know they do not have the proper papers. After Congress repeatedly failed to pass the DREAM Act, which would have given permanent legal status to thousands of young adults who were brought to the United States illegally as children, President Obama created the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which allowed them to stay in the country and go to school or work. The Trump administration is locked in a court battle to end the program, leaving these young adults mostly in political limbo. Congress has so far been unwilling to find a solution for fear of angering constituents, even though a large majority of Americans support allowing the “dreamers” to stay in the country.

American laws have become increasingly harsh with respect to undocumented immigrants. Even so, people continue to come, although the numbers have declined in recent years.

immigrants

citizens or subjects of one country who move to another country to live or work

naturalization

the legal process of acquiring citizenship for someone who has not acquired it by birth

refugees

individuals who flee an area or a country because of persecution on the basis of race, nationality, religion, group membership, or political opinion

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

Even people without legal permanent resident status have rights and responsibilities in the United States, just as U.S. citizens do when they travel to other countries. Immigrants enjoy some rights, primarily legal protections. Not only are they entitled to due process in the courts, but the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that it is illegal to discriminate against immigrants in the United States.¹⁵ Nevertheless, their rights are limited. They cannot, for instance, vote in our national elections (although some localities, in the hopes of integrating immigrants into their communities, allow them to vote in local elections¹⁶) or decide to live here permanently without permission (which may or may not be granted). In addition, immigrants, even legal ones, are subject to the decisions of the USCIS, which is empowered by Congress to exercise authority in immigration matters.

In Your Own Words Analyze the role of immigration and the meaning of citizenship in American politics.

WHAT DO AMERICAN CITIZENS BELIEVE?

A common culture based on shared values

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

AMERICAN POLITICAL CULTURE: IDEAS THAT UNITE US

Political culture refers to the general political orientation or disposition of a nation—the shared values and beliefs about the nature of the political world that give us a common language in which to discuss and debate political ideas. **Values** are ideals or principles that

political culture the broad pattern of ideas, beliefs, and values that a population holds about citizens and government

values central ideas, principles, or standards that most people agree are important



Free Speech, Even When It's Ugly

Americans don't agree on much, but they do cherish their right to disagree: most citizens have little tolerance for censorship and expect the government to protect even the most offensive speech. Here, a police officer flanks a marcher at a Ku Klux Klan rally in South Carolina in 2015.

REUTERS/Chris Keane

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

Political culture is handed down from generation to generation, through families, schools, communities, literature, churches and synagogues, and

so on, helping to provide stability for the nation by ensuring that a majority of citizens are well grounded in and committed to the basic values that sustain it. We talk about the process through which values are transferred in Chapter 10, “Public Opinion.”

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

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

When we say that American political culture is procedural, we mean that Americans generally think government should guarantee fair processes—such as a free market to distribute goods, majority rule to make decisions, and due process to determine guilt and innocence—rather than specific outcomes. By contrast, people in the social democratic countries of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark typically believe that government should

normative

a term used to describe beliefs or values about how things should be or what people ought to do rather than what actually is

individualism

the belief that what is good for society is based on what is good for individuals

actively seek to realize the values of equality—perhaps to guarantee a certain quality of life for all citizens or to increase equality of income. American politics does set some substantive goals for public policy, but Americans are generally more comfortable ensuring that things are done in a fair and proper way, and trusting that the outcomes will be good ones because the rules are fair. Although the American government gets involved in social programs and welfare, and took a big step in a substantive direction with passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act in 2010, it aims more at helping individuals get on their feet so that they can participate in the market (fair procedures) rather than at cleaning up slums or eliminating poverty (substantive goals). The individualistic nature of American political culture means that individuals, not government or society, are seen as responsible for their own well-being. This notion contrasts with a collectivist social democratic point of view, which holds that what is good for society may not be the same as what is in the interest of individuals. Thus our politics revolves around the belief that individuals are usually the best judges of what is good for themselves; we assume that what is good for society will automatically follow. American government rarely asks citizens to make major economic sacrifices for the public good, although individuals often do so privately and voluntarily. Where Americans are asked to make economic sacrifices, like paying taxes, they are unpopular and more modest than in most other countries. A collective interest that supersedes individual interests is generally invoked in the United States only in times of war or national crisis. This echoes the two American notions of self-interested and collectivist citizenship we discussed earlier. Collectivist citizenship is rarer in the United States precisely because we're such an individualistic culture.

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

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

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

FREEDOM Americans also put a high premium on the value of freedom, defined as freedom for the individual from restraint by the state. This view of freedom is procedural in the sense that it holds that no unfair restrictions should be put in the way of your pursuit of what you want, but it does not guarantee you any help in achieving

those things. For instance, when Americans say, “We are all free to get a job,” we mean that no discriminatory laws or other legal barriers are stopping us from applying for any particular position. A substantive view of freedom would ensure us the training to get a job so that our freedom meant a positive opportunity, not just the absence of restraint. Americans’ extraordinary commitment can be seen nowhere so clearly as in the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees our basic civil liberties, the areas where government cannot interfere with individual action. (See Chapter 4, “Fundamental American Liberties,” for a complete discussion of our civil liberties.) Finally, our proceduralism is echoed in the value we attach to economic freedom, the freedom to participate in the marketplace, to acquire money and property, and to do with those resources pretty much as we please. Americans believe that government should protect our property, not take it away or regulate our use of it too heavily. Our commitment to individualism is apparent here, too. Even if society as a whole would be better off if we paid down the federal debt (the amount our government owes from spending more than it brings in), our individualistic view of economic freedom means that Americans have one of the lowest tax rates in the industrialized world. This reflects our national tendency in normal times to emphasize the rights of citizenship over its obligations.

EQUALITY A third central value in American political culture is equality. For Americans, equality is valued not because we want individuals to be the same but because we want them to be treated the same. Equality in America means government should guarantee equality of treatment, of access, and of opportunity, not equality of result. People should have equal access to run the race, but we don’t expect them all to finish in the same place. Thus we believe in political equality (one person, one vote) and equality before the law—that the law shouldn’t make unreasonable distinctions among people the basis for treating them differently, and that all people should have equal access to the legal system. One problem the courts have faced is deciding what counts as a reasonable distinction. Can the law justifiably discriminate between—that is, treat differently—men and women, minorities and white Protestants, rich and poor, young and old? When the rules treat people differently, even if the goal is to make them more equal in the long run, many Americans get very upset. Witness the controversy surrounding affirmative action policies in this country. The point of such policies is to allow special opportunities to members of groups that have been discriminated against in the past, in order to remedy the long-term effects of that discrimination. For many Americans, such policies violate our commitment to procedural solutions. They wonder how treating people unequally can be fair.

AMERICAN IDEOLOGIES: IDEAS THAT DIVIDE US

Most Americans are united in their commitment to proceduralism and individualism at some level, and to the key values of democracy, freedom, and equality. This shared political culture gives us a common political language, a way to talk about politics that keeps us united even though we may use that common language to tell different narratives about who we are, what’s important to us, or in what direction we feel the country should move.

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

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

There are lots of different ways of characterizing American ideologies. It is conventional to say that **conservatives** promote a political narrative based on traditional social values, distrust of government action except in matters of national security, resistance to change, and the maintenance of a prescribed social order. **Liberals**, in contrast, are understood to tell a narrative based on the potential of progress and change, trust in government, innovations as answers to social problems, and the expansion of individual rights and expression. For a more nuanced understanding of ideology in America, however, we can focus on the two main ideological dimensions of economics and social order issues.

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

In the 1980s and 1990s, another ideological dimension became prominent in the United States. Perhaps because, as some researchers have argued, most people are able to meet their basic economic needs, many Americans began to focus less on economic questions and more on issues of morality and quality of life. The new ideological dimension,

ideologies sets of beliefs about politics and society that help people make sense of their world

conservatives people who generally favor limited government and are cautious about change

liberals people who generally favor government action and view change as progress

which is analogous to the social order dimension we discussed earlier, divides people on the question of how much control government should have over the moral and social order—whether government’s role should be limited to protecting individual rights and providing procedural guarantees of equality and due process, or whether the government should be involved in making more substantive judgments about how people should live their lives.

Do ideological differences strengthen or weaken a political culture?

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

Economic conservatives, in the upper-right quadrant of the figure, are reluctant to allow government interference in people’s private lives or in the economy. With respect to social order issues, they are willing to let government regulate such behaviors as murder, rape, and theft, but they generally believe that social order issues such as reproductive choices, marijuana usage, gay rights, and physician aid in dying are not matters for government regulation. These economic conservatives also prefer government to limit its role in economic decision making to regulation of the market (like changing interest rates and cutting taxes to end recessions), elimination of “unfair” trade practices such as monopolies, and provision of some public goods such as highways and national defense. Economic conservatism is often summed up with the catchphrase: “get government out of the bedroom and out of the boardroom.” When it comes to immigration, economic conservatives favor more open policies, since immigrants often work more cheaply and help keep the labor market competitive for business. The most extreme holders of economic conservative views are called **libertarians**, people who believe that only minimal government action in any sphere is acceptable. Consequently, economic conservatives also hold the government accountable for sticking to the constitutional checks and balances that limit its own power.

Economic conservatives generally don’t love government, but they do embrace procedural rules that allow individual lives the maximum amount of freedom. Practically speaking, that means they are committed to the protections in the Constitution and the democratic process that check government power. They often believe that American rights are even more extensive than the ones written down in the Bill of Rights, they endorse checks and balances as a way of limiting government power, and if they fail to win an election, they subscribe to “good-loserism”—waiting to fight again another day rather than trying to change the rules or discredit or subvert the process in order to create a more favorable political environment for themselves. Democracies require that people be good losers sometimes, having confidence that a loss today does not mean a loss forever. Trust in the rules of the game and a willingness to accept the loss are essential to the compromise and cooperation valued by

economic conservatives

those who favor a strictly procedural government role in the economy and the social order

libertarians

those who favor a minimal government role in any sphere