

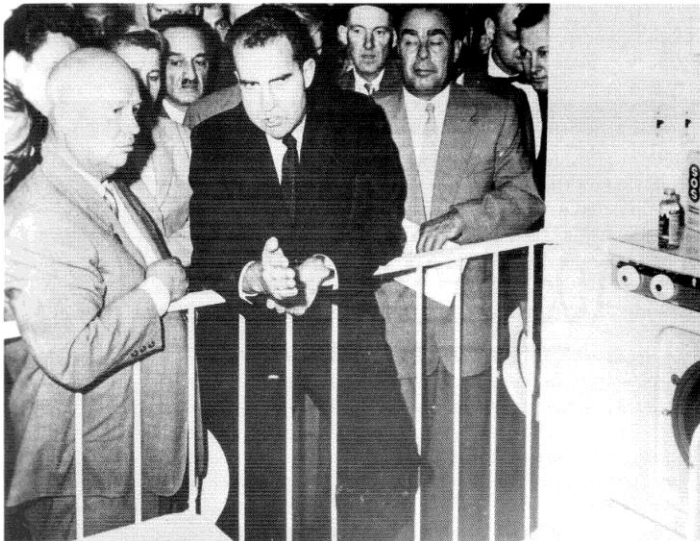
ple. Translating people's desires into effective public policy is crucial to the workings of democracy.

Democracy

In 1848, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published *The Communist Manifesto*, one of the most famous political documents ever written. It began with these words: "A specter is haunting Europe. It is the specter of communism." Today one could write, "A specter is haunting the world. It is the specter of democracy."

From the Russian Revolution in 1917 through the recent end of the Cold War, American foreign policy was concerned with preventing the spread of communism. This was especially true immediately after World War II, when the Soviet Union expanded its sphere of influence throughout Eastern Europe. As Winston Churchill warned, an "Iron Curtain" had descended across Europe. From then on, a cold war existed between the United States and the Soviet Union, a struggle between democracy and communism for control of governments around the world. In one famous televised encounter, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev predicted to then Vice President Richard Nixon that Nixon's grandchildren would be communists. Nixon naturally responded that Khrushchev's grandchildren would live in a democracy. Nixon later recalled that at the time he was sure that Khrushchev would be wrong about America but that he was unsure whether his prediction about the Soviet Union would ever be realized. Over three decades later, it was. All the countries that once were part of the Soviet empire now practice democracy, holding regular elections and permitting freedom of speech.

Resounding demands for democracy have recently been heard in many corners of the world. In Argentina, Brazil, and other South American countries, one-party or military regimes gave way to competitive party systems and civilian governments. Over three centuries of White rule ended in South Africa in 1994 as a result of the first election open to all races. In Mexico, over seven decades of one-party rule and fraudulent elections came to an end in 2000 with the presidential election of Vincente Fox. Yet despite this global move toward democracy, not everyone defines democracy the way Americans do—or think they do.



In 1959, then Vice President Nixon journeyed to Moscow to meet with Soviet Premier Khrushchev. Outside an exhibit of a model kitchen of the future, Nixon and Khrushchev had an impromptu debate in front of reporters as to which system—capitalism or communism—was the best course for a prosperous future.

democracy

A system of selecting policymakers and of organizing government so that policy represents and responds to the public's preferences.

Defining Democracy

Democracy is a means of selecting policymakers and of organizing government so that policy reflects citizens' preferences. Today, the term *democracy* takes its place among terms like *freedom*, *justice*, and *peace* as a word that seemingly has only positive connotations. Yet the writers of the U.S. Constitution had no fondness for democracy, as many of them doubted the ability of ordinary Americans to make informed judgments about what government should do. Roger Sherman, a delegate to the Constitutional Convention, said the people "should have as little to do as may be with the government." Only much later did Americans come to cherish democracy and believe that all citizens should actively participate in choosing their leaders.

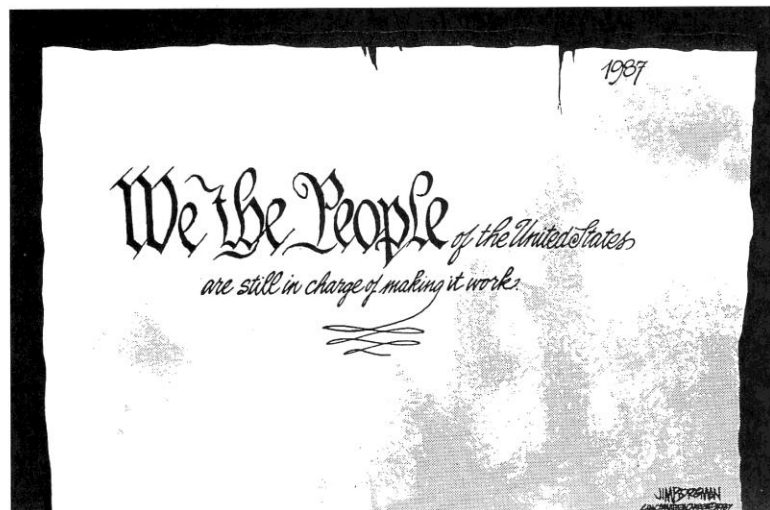
Most Americans would probably say that democracy is "government by the people." This phrase, of course, is part of Abraham Lincoln's famous definition of democracy from his Gettysburg Address: "government of the people, by the people, and for the people." How well each of these aspects of democracy is being met is a matter crucial to evaluating how well our government is working. Certainly, government has always been "of the people" in the United States, for the Constitution forbids the granting of titles of nobility. On the other hand, it is a physical impossibility for government to be "by the people" in a society of 280 million people. Therefore, our democracy involves choosing people from among our midst to govern. Where the serious debate begins is whether political leaders govern "for the people," as there always are significant biases in how the system works. Democratic theorists have elaborated a set of more specific goals for evaluating this crucial question.

Traditional Democratic Theory

Traditional democratic theory rests upon a number of key principles that specify how governmental decisions are made in a democracy. Robert Dahl, one of America's leading theorists, suggests that an ideal democratic process should satisfy the following five criteria:

Equality in voting. The principle of "one person, one vote" is basic to democracy. Voting need not be universal, but it must be representative.

Effective participation. Citizens must have adequate and equal opportunities to express their preferences throughout the decision-making process.



Enlightened understanding. A democratic society must be a marketplace of ideas. A free press and free speech are essential to civic understanding. If one group monopolizes and distorts information, citizens cannot truly understand issues.

Citizen control of the agenda. Citizens should have the collective right to control the government's policy agenda. If wealthy individuals or groups distort the agenda, the people cannot make government address the issues they feel are most important.

Inclusion. The government must include, and extend rights to, all those subject to its laws. Citizenship must be open to all within a nation if the nation is to call itself democratic.⁸

Only by following these principles can a political system be called "democratic." Furthermore, democracies must practice **majority rule**, meaning that in choosing among alternatives, the will of over half the voters should be followed. At the same time, most Americans would not want to give the majority free reign to do anything they can agree on. Restraints on the majority are built into the American system of government in order to protect those in the minority. Basic principles such as freedom of speech and assembly are inviolable **minority rights**, which the majority cannot infringe upon.

In a society too large to make its decisions in open meetings, a few will have to look after the concerns of the many. The relationship between the few leaders and the many followers is one of **representation**. The literal meaning of representation is to make present once again. In politics, this means that the desires of the people should be replicated in government through the choices of elected officials. The closer the correspondence between representatives and their constituents, the closer the approximation to an ideal democracy. As might be expected for such a crucial question, theorists disagree widely about the extent to which this actually occurs in America.

Three Contemporary Theories of American Democracy

Theories of American democracy are essentially theories about who has power and influence. All, in one way or another, ask the question, "Who really governs in our nation?" Each focuses on a key aspect of politics and government, and each reaches a somewhat different conclusion.

Pluralist theory. One important theory of American democracy, **pluralist theory**, states that groups with shared interests influence public policy by pressing their concerns through organized efforts.

The National Rifle Association (NRA), the National Organization for Women (NOW), and the United Auto Workers (UAW) are examples of groups of people who share a common interest. Because of open access to various institutions of government and public officials, organized groups can compete with one another for control over policy, and yet no one group or set of groups dominates. Given that power is dispersed in the American form of government, groups that lose in one arena can take their case to another. For example, civil rights groups faced congressional roadblocks in the 1950s but were able to win the action they were seeking from the courts.

Pluralists are generally optimistic that the public interest will eventually prevail in the making of public policy through a complex process of bargaining and compromise. They believe that rather than speaking of majority rule we should speak of groups of minorities working together. Robert Dahl expresses this view well when he writes that in America "all active and legitimate groups in the population can make themselves heard at some crucial stage in the process."⁹

Group politics is certainly as American as apple pie. Writing in the 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville called us a "nation of joiners," and pointed to the high level of associational activities as one of the crucial reasons for the success of American democracy. The recent explosion of interest group activity can therefore be seen as a very positive development from the perspective of pluralist theory. Interest groups and their lobbyists—the groups'

majority rule

A fundamental principle of **traditional democratic theory**. In a democracy, choosing among alternatives requires that the majority's desire be respected. See also **minority rights**.

minority rights

A principle of **traditional democratic theory** that guarantees rights to those who do not belong to majorities and allows that they might join majorities through persuasion and reasoned argument. See also **majority rule**.

representation

A basic principle of **traditional democratic theory** that describes the relationship between the few leaders and the many followers.

pluralist theory

A theory of government and politics emphasizing that politics is mainly a competition among groups, each one pressing for its own preferred policies. Compare **elite and class theory**, **hyperpluralism**, and **traditional democratic theory**.

representatives in Washington—have become masters of the technology of politics. Computers, mass mailing lists, sophisticated media advertising, and hard-sell techniques are their stock-in-trade. As a result, some observers believe that Dahl's pluralist vision that all groups are heard via the American political process is more true now than ever before.

On the other hand, Robert Putnam argues that many of the problems of American democracy today stem from a decline in group-based participation.¹⁰ Putnam theorizes that advanced technology, particularly television, has served to increasingly isolate Americans from one another. He shows that membership in a variety of civic associations, such as Parent-Teacher Associations, the League of Women Voters, the Elks, Shriners, and Jaycees have been declining for decades. Interestingly, Putnam does not interpret the decline of participation in civic groups as meaning that people have become “couch potatoes.” Rather, he argues that Americans' activities are becoming less tied to institutions and more self-defined. The most famous example he gives to illustrate this trend is the fact that membership in bowling leagues has dropped sharply at the same time that more people are bowling—indicating that more and more people must be bowling alone. Putnam believes that participation in interest groups today is often like bowling alone. Groups that have mushroomed lately, such as the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), typically just ask their members to write a check from the comfort of their own home as their participation. If people are indeed participating in politics alone rather than in groups, then pluralist theory is becoming less descriptive of American politics today.

Elite and Class Theory. Critics of pluralism believe that it paints too rosy a picture of American political life. By arguing that almost every group can get a piece of the pie, they say, pluralists miss the larger question of how the pie is distributed. The poor may get their food stamps, but businesses get massive tax deductions worth far more. Some governmental programs may help minorities, but the income gap between African Americans and Whites remains wide.

Elite and class theory contends that our society, like all societies, is divided along class lines and that an upper-class elite pulls the strings of government. Wealth—the holding of assets such as property, stocks, and bonds—is the basis of this power. Over a third of the nation's wealth is currently held by just one percent of the population. Elite and class theorists believe that this one percent of Americans controls most policy decisions because they can afford to finance election campaigns and control key institutions, such as large corporations. According to elite and class theory, a few powerful Americans do not merely influence policymakers—they *are* the policymakers.

At the center of all theories of elite dominance is big business. Around the turn of the century, President Woodrow Wilson charged that “the masters of the Government of the United States are the combined capitalists and manufacturers of the United States.” President Calvin Coolidge expressed a more favorable attitude, stating “The business of America is business.” No recent president has tried harder to help big business than Ronald Reagan, and many elite theorists believe that he succeeded beyond all expectations. As Kevin Phillips wrote in his best-seller *The Politics of Rich and Poor*, “The 1980s were the triumph of upper America—an ostentatious celebration of wealth, the political ascendancy of the richest third of the population and a glorification of capitalism, free markets and finance.”¹¹

It is doubtful that anything like this will be written about the Clinton administration. However, journalist Bob Woodward's account of Clinton's first year in office argues that many promises made in Clinton's “Putting People First” program were sacrificed to satisfy the demands of Wall Street.¹² Reflecting on the source of *real* power, Clinton's 1992 campaign manager, James Carville, reportedly told *The Wall Street Journal* that, “I used to think if there was reincarnation, I wanted to come back as the president or the pope or a .400 baseball hitter. But now I want to come back as the bond market. You can intimidate everybody.”¹³ Elite theorists maintain that who holds office in Washington is of marginal consequence; the corporate giants always have the power.

elite and class theory

A theory of government and politics contending that societies are divided along class lines and that an upper-class elite will rule, regardless of the formal niceties of governmental organization. Compare hyperpluralism, pluralist theory, and traditional democratic theory.



Hyperpluralism. A third theory, hyperpluralism, offers a different critique of pluralism. Hyperpluralism is pluralism gone sour. In this view, groups are so strong that government is weakened, as the influence of many groups cripples government's ability to make policy. **Hyperpluralism** states that many groups—not just the elite ones—are so strong that government is unable to act.

Whereas pluralism maintains that input from groups is a good thing for the political decision-making process, hyperpluralism asserts that there are *too* many ways for groups to control policy. Our fragmented political system containing governments with overlapping jurisdictions is one major factor that contributes to hyperpluralism. Too many governments can make it hard to coordinate policy implementation. Any policy requiring the cooperation of the national, state, and local levels of government can be hampered by the reluctance of any one of them.

According to hyperpluralists, groups have become sovereign and government is merely their servant. Groups that lose policymaking battles in Congress these days do not give up the battle; they carry it to the courts. Recently, the number of cases brought to state and federal courts has soared. Ecologists use legal procedures to delay construction projects they feel will damage the environment; businesses take federal agencies to court to fight the implementation of regulations that will cost them money; labor unions go to court to secure injunctions against policies they fear will cost them jobs. The courts have become one more battleground in which policies can be effectively opposed as each group tries to bend policy to suit its own purposes.

These powerful groups divide the government and its authority. Hyperpluralist theory holds that government gives in to every conceivable interest and single-issue group. When politicians try to placate every group, the result is confusing, contradictory, and muddled policy—if politicians manage to make policy at all. Like elite and class theorists, hyperpluralist theorists suggest that the public interest is rarely translated into public policy.

hyperpluralism

A theory of government and politics contending that groups are so strong that government is weakened. Hyperpluralism is an extreme, exaggerated, or perverted form of pluralism. Compare elite and class theory, pluralist theory, and traditional democratic theory.

Challenges to Democracy

Regardless of which theory is most convincing, there are a number of continuing challenges to democracy. Many of these challenges apply to American democracy as well as to the fledgling democracies around the world.

Increased Technical Expertise. Traditional democratic theory holds that ordinary citizens have the good sense to reach political judgments and that government has the capacity to act on those judgments. Today, however, we live in a society of experts, whose technical knowledge overshadows the knowledge of the general population. What, after all, does the average citizen—however conscientious—know about eligibility criteria for welfare, agricultural price supports, foreign competition, and the hundreds of other issues that confront government each year? Alexander Hamilton, the architect of the American economic system and George Washington's secretary of the treasury, once said that every society is divided into the few and the many. He argued that the few will rule; the many will be ruled. Years ago, the power of the few—the elite—might have been based on property holdings. Today, the elite are likely to be those who command knowledge, the experts. Even the most rigorous democratic theory does not demand that citizens be experts on everything; but as human knowledge has expanded, it has become increasingly difficult for individual citizens to make well-informed decisions.

Limited Participation in Government. When citizens do not seem to take their citizenship seriously, democracy's defenders worry. There is plenty of evidence that Americans know little about who their leaders are, much less about their policy decisions, as we will discuss at length in Chapter 6. Furthermore, Americans do not take

Many federal employees were furloughed in late-1995 and early-1996 when President Clinton vetoed the budget plans of the Republican Congress. Here, federal employees in Kansas City protest being put in this difficult position of not knowing when they could do their work and receive their next paycheck. Ultimately, such protests led Republican leaders to back down in the confrontation over the budget, as public opinion tended to sympathize with the federal employees and blame the GOP for their plight.



full advantage of their opportunities to shape government or select its leaders. Limited participation in government challenges the foundation of democracy. In particular, because young people represent the country's future, their abysmal turnout rates point to an even more serious challenge to democracy on the horizon.

Escalating Campaign Costs. Many political observers worry about the close connection between money and politics, especially in congressional elections. Winning a House seat these days usually requires a campaign war chest of *at least* half a million dollars, and Senate races are even more costly. Candidates have become increasingly dependent on Political Action Committees (PACs) to fund their campaigns because of the escalation of campaign costs. These PACs often represent specific economic interests, and they care little about how members of Congress vote on most issues—just the issues that particularly affect them. Critics charge that when it comes to the issues the PACs care about, the members of Congress listen, lest they be denied the money they need for their reelection. When democracy confronts the might of money, the gap between democratic theory and reality widens further.

Diverse Political Interests. The diversity of the American people is reflected in the diversity of interests represented in the political system. As will be shown in this book, this system is so open that interests find it easy to gain effective access to policymakers. Moreover, the distribution of power within the government is so decentralized that access to a few policymakers may be enough to determine the outcome of public policy battles.

When interests conflict, which they often do, no coalition may be strong enough to form a majority and establish policy. But each interest may use its influence to thwart those whose policy proposals they oppose. In effect, they have a veto over policy, creating what is often referred to as **policy gridlock**. In a big city, gridlock occurs when there are so many cars on the road that no one can move; in politics it occurs when each policy coalition finds its way blocked by others. This political problem is magnified when voters choose a president of one party and congressional majorities of the other party, as has often been the case in recent years.

The result is that nothing may get done, even if action is widely desired by a clear majority of voters. For example, in the early 1990s, most people in the United States

policy gridlock

A condition that occurs when no coalition is strong enough to form a majority and establish policy. The result is that nothing may get done.

felt that the country faced a crisis in health care. Yet President Clinton was unable to overcome the opposition of various interests to fashion a comprehensive proposal that could pass Congress—even with Democratic majorities in both the House and Senate in 1993–1994.

Democracy is not necessarily an end in itself. For many, evaluations of democracy depend on what democratic government produces. Thus, a major challenge to democracy in America is to overcome the diversity of interests and fragmentation of power in order to deliver policies that are responsive to citizens' needs.

Preview Questions about Democracy

Throughout *Government in America* you will be asked to evaluate American democracy. The chapters that follow will acquaint you with the development of democracy in the United States. For example, the next chapter will show that the U.S. Constitution was not originally designed to promote democracy but has slowly evolved to its current form. Much of America's move toward greater democracy has centered on the extension of civil liberties and civil rights that we review in Chapters 4 and 5. Probably the most important civil right is the right to vote. Upcoming chapters will examine voting behavior and elections and ask the following questions about how people form their opinions and to what extent they express these opinions via elections:

- Are people knowledgeable about matters of public policy?
- Do they apply what knowledge they have to their voting choices?
- Are American elections designed to facilitate public participation?

Linkage institutions, such as interest groups, political parties, and the media, help translate input from the public into output from the policymakers. When you explore these institutions, consider the extent to which they either help or hinder democracy.

- Does the interest group system allow for all points of view to be heard, or do significant biases give advantages to particular groups?
- Do political parties provide voters with clear choices, or do they intentionally obscure their stands on issues in order to get as many votes as possible?
- If there are choices, do the media help citizens understand them?

It is up to public officials to actually make the policy choices because American government is a representative democracy. For democracy to work well, elected officials must be responsive to public opinion.

- Is the Congress representative of American society, and is it capable of reacting to changing times?
- Does the president look after the general welfare of the public, or has the office become too focused on the interests of the elite?

These are some of the crucial questions you will address in discussing the executive and legislative branches of government. In addition, the way our nonelected institutions function—the bureaucracy and the courts—is crucial to evaluating how well American democracy works. These institutions are designed to implement and interpret the law, but bureaucrats and judges often cannot avoid making public policy as well. When they do so, are they violating democratic principles for policy decisions, given that neither institution can be held accountable at the ballot box?

All of these questions concerning democracy in America have more than one answer. A goal of *Government in America* is to offer different ways to evaluate and answer these questions. One way to approach all of the preceding questions is to address one of the most important questions facing modern American democracy: Is the scope of government responsibilities too vast, just about right, or not comprehensive enough?

The Scope of Government in America

In his first presidential address to Congress in 1993, Bill Clinton stated, “I want to talk to you about what government can do because I believe government must do more.” Toward this end, President Clinton later proposed a comprehensive government program to require businesses to provide a basic level of health insurance for their employees. Congressional Republicans lined up solidly against Clinton’s plan for national health insurance, arguing that government intervention in the affairs of individual citizens and businesses does more harm than good.

Those who are inclined to support government involvement in matters such as health care argue that intervention is the only means of achieving important goals in American society. How else, they ask, can we ensure that everyone has enough to eat, clean air and water, and affordable housing? How else can we ensure that the disadvantaged are given opportunities for education and jobs and are not discriminated against? Opponents of widening the scope of government agree that these are worthwhile goals but challenge whether involving the federal government is an effective way to pursue them. Dick Arney, a key Republican leader in the House, expresses this view well when he writes, “There is more wisdom in millions of individuals making decisions in their own self-interest than there is in even the most enlightened bureaucrat (or congressman) making decisions on their behalf.”¹⁴ Or as President George W. Bush regularly told supporters during the 2000 presidential campaign: “Our opponents trust the government; we trust the people.”

How Active Is American Government?

In terms of dollars spent, government in America is vast. Altogether, our governments—national, state, and local—spend about one out of every three dollars of our **gross domestic product**, the total value of all goods and services produced annually by the United States. Government not only spends large sums of money but also employs large numbers of people. About 18 million Americans work for one of our governments, mostly at the state and local level as teachers, police officers, university professors, and so on. Consider some facts about the size of our national government:

- It spends about \$2 trillion annually (printed as a number, that’s \$2,000,000,000,000 a year).
- It employs nearly 5 million people.
- It owns one-third of the land in the United States.
- It occupies 2.6 billion square feet of office space, more than four times the office space located in the nation’s 10 largest cities.
- It owns and operates over 400,000 nonmilitary vehicles.

How does the American national government spend \$2 trillion a year? National defense takes about one-sixth of the federal budget, a much smaller percentage than it did three decades ago. Social Security consumes more than one-fifth of the budget. Medicare is another big-ticket item, requiring a little over one-tenth of the budget. State and local governments also get important parts of the federal government’s budget. The federal government helps fund highway and airport construction, police departments, school districts, and other state and local functions.

When expenditures grow, tax revenues must grow to pay the additional costs. When taxes do not grow as fast as spending, a budget deficit results. The federal government ran a budget deficit every year from 1969 through 1997. In 1998, however, there was a surplus of \$69 billion, and in 1999 a \$124 billion surplus was recorded. The immediate outlook is that surpluses could be the norm in the early twenty-first century. However, years of deficits have left the country with a national debt of about \$5.5 trillion, which will continue to pose a problem for policymakers for decades to come.

gross domestic product

The sum total of the value of all the goods and services produced in a nation.

Whatever the national problem—pollution, AIDS, earthquake relief, homelessness, hunger, sexism—many people expect Congress to solve it with legislation. Thus, American government certainly matters tremendously in terms of dollars spent, persons employed, and laws passed. Our concern, however, is less about the absolute size of government and more about whether government activity is what we want it to be.

A Comparative Perspective

A useful way to think about political issues, such as the scope of government, is to compare the United States with other countries, especially other democracies with developed economies. For example, it is possible to compare the size of the gross domestic product spent by all levels of government in the United States with similar expenditures in other prosperous nations. Compared to most other economically developed nations, the United States devotes a smaller percentage of its resources to government. As we will see in Chapter 14, the tax burden on Americans is small compared to other democratic nations.

Further, most advanced industrial democracies have a system of national insurance that provides most health care; the United States does not, though President Clinton unsuccessfully tried to establish such a system. In other countries, national governments have taken it upon themselves to start up airline, telephone, and communications companies. Governments have built much of the housing in most Western nations, compared to only a small fraction of the housing in America. Thus, in terms of its impact on citizens' everyday lives, government in the United States actually does less than the governments of similar countries.



Former President Ronald Reagan and former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher were close both personally and politically. Both leaders were great supporters of free-market policies and were opposed to government interventionism, and both effected major changes in their countries to this end.

individualism

The belief that individuals should be left on their own by the government. One of the primary reasons for the comparatively small scope of American government is the prominence of this belief in American political thought and practice.

American Individualism

One reason for the comparatively small scope of American government is the prominence of **individualism**—the belief that people can and should get ahead on their own—in American political thought and practice. The immigrants who founded American society may have been diverse, but many shared a common dream of America as a place where one could make it on one’s own without interference from government. Louis Hartz’s *The Liberal Tradition in America* is a classic analysis of the dominant political beliefs during America’s formative years.¹⁵ Hartz argues that the major force behind limited government in America is that it was settled by people who fled from the feudal and clerical oppressions of the Old World. Once in the New World, they wanted little from government other than for it to leave them alone.

Another explanation for American individualism is the existence of a bountiful frontier—at least up until the turn of the twentieth century. Thus, not only did many people come to America to escape from governmental interference, but the frontier allowed them to get away from government almost entirely once they arrived. Frederick Jackson Turner’s famous work on the significance of the frontier in American history argues that “the frontier is productive of individualism.”¹⁶ According to Turner, being in the wilderness and having to survive on one’s own left settlers with an aversion to any control from the outside world—particularly from the government.

The results of these historical influences are evident in American politics today. Individualism remains highly valued in the United States, with the public policy consequences being a strong preference for free markets and limited government. The importance of individualism in American politics will be a recurring topic in our analysis of the scope of government.

Preview Questions about the Scope of Government

Debate over the scope of government is central to contemporary American politics, and it is a theme this text will examine in each chapter. Our goal is not to determine for you the proper role of the national government. Instead, you will explore the implications of the way politics, institutions, and policy in America affect the scope of government. By raising questions such as those listed in the next few paragraphs, you may draw your own conclusions about the appropriate role of government in America. Part One of *Government in America* examines the constitutional foundations of American government. A concern with the proper scope of government leads to a series of questions regarding the constitutional structure of American politics, including

- What role did the Constitution’s authors foresee for the federal government?
- Does the Constitution favor a government with a broad scope, or is it neutral on this issue?
- Why did the functions of government increase, and why did they increase most at the national rather than the state level?
- Has bigger, more active government constrained freedom?
- Or does the increased scope of government serve to protect civil liberties and civil rights?

Part Two focuses on those who make demands on government, including the public, political parties, interest groups, and the media. Here you will seek answers to questions such as

- Does the public favor a large, active government?
- Do competing political parties predispose the government to provide more public services?

- Do elections help control the scope of government, or do they legitimize an increasing role for the public sector?
- Are pressures from interest groups necessarily translated into more governmental regulations, bigger budgets, and the like?
- Has media coverage of government enhanced government's status and growth, or have the media been an instrument for controlling government?

Governmental institutions themselves obviously deserve close examination. Part Three discusses these institutions and asks

- Has the presidency been a driving force behind increasing the scope and power of government (and thus of the president)?
- Can the president control a government with so many programs and responsibilities?
- Is Congress, because it is subject to constant elections, predisposed toward big government?
- Is Congress too responsive to the demands of the public and organized interests?

The nonelected branches of government, which are also discussed in these chapters, are especially interesting when we consider the issue of the scope of government. For instance,

- Are the federal courts too active in policymaking, intruding on the authority and responsibility of other branches and levels of government?
- Is the bureaucracy too acquisitive, constantly seeking to expand its budgets and authority, or is it simply a reflection of the desires of elected officials?
- Is the bureaucracy too large, and thus a wasteful menace to efficient and fair implementation of public policies?

The next 20 chapters will search for answers to these and many other questions regarding the scope of government and why it matters. You will undoubtedly add a few questions of your own as you seek to resolve the issue of the proper scope of government involvement.

Summary

Evidence abounds that young people today are politically apathetic. But they shouldn't be. Politics and government matter a great deal to everyone, affecting many aspects of life. If nothing else, we hope this text will convince you of this.

Government consists of those institutions that make authoritative public policies for society as a whole. In the United States, four key institutions make policy at the national level: Congress, the presidency, the courts, and the bureaucracy. Politics is, very simply, who gets what, when, and how. People engage in politics for a variety of reasons, and all their activities in politics are collectively called political participation. The result of government and politics is public policy. Public policy includes all of the decisions and nondecisions made by government.

The first question central to governing is "How should we govern?" Americans are fond of calling their government democratic. Democratic government includes, above all else, a commitment to majority rule and minority rights. This text will help you compare the way American government works with the standards of democracy and will continually address questions about who holds power and who influences the policies adopted by government.

The second fundamental question regarding governing is "What should government do?" One of the most important issues about government in America has to do with its scope. Conservatives often talk about the evils of intrusive government; liberals see the national government as rather modest in comparison both to what it could do and to the functions governments perform in other democratic nations.