

The background of the cover is a photograph of a sailboat on the water, taken from the perspective of someone on the boat looking towards the horizon. The sky is blue with some clouds, and the water is dark blue with whitecaps. A large, semi-transparent American flag is overlaid on the left side of the image, with the stars and stripes clearly visible. The text is contained within a dark blue rectangular box with a thin white border.

GOVERNMENT BY THE PEOPLE

2009 BRIEF EDITION

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chapter 3



Political Culture and Ideology

On the third Monday of January, the United States commemorates the birth of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as a federal holiday. Designated as a day of service, the holiday has come to celebrate the civil rights movement and progress toward Dr. King's dream of racial equality and social justice. Many have long forgotten the controversy surrounding its creation, however. Legislation to create Martin Luther King Jr. Day was first introduced in Congress just days after Dr. King's assassination in 1968, but fifteen years elapsed before Congress passed it and President Reagan signed the holiday into law.

Early support for the idea of the holiday came from labor unions, who pressed for the holiday in contract negotiations and at all levels of U.S. government. The entertainer Stevie Wonder helped advance the campaign with his single "Happy Birthday." A petition for the holiday with six million signatures was presented to Congress in 1982.¹

Opposition centered on the costs of giving workers the day off, concerns about creating national holidays for persons other than U.S. presidents, the view that the importance of Dr. King's accomplishments would fade with time, and even attacks on Dr. King's reputation that linked him to communists.² When Arizona voters defeated a referendum to establish the holiday in 1990, the National Football League moved the 1993 Super Bowl from Arizona to Pasadena, California.³ Some states adopted the holiday but at first named it "Human Rights Day" (Utah) or "Lee-Jackson-King Day" (oddly, Virginia combined the two confederate generals and Dr. King). In 2000, South Carolina became the last state to adopt the holiday.

During the 2008 presidential election, though racial tensions were never far from the headlines, candidates from both parties celebrated the accomplishments of Dr. King. Republican candidate Mike Huckabee attended an event at the Atlanta church where Dr. King served as pastor, and Democratic candidates Clinton, Edwards, and Obama honored Dr. King in South Carolina before their debate cohosted by the Congressional Black Caucus.

Although substantial progress has been made in achieving Dr. King's dream of equal opportunity for all races, challenges remain. As we discuss in Chapter 5, substantial differences persist between the races in the rate of poverty, educational attainment, and income. Racial minorities and women continue to be underrepresented in Congress, on corporate boards, and as partners in law firms. Racial tensions persist in some neighborhoods and schools. Our society has not become free of racism, but we have seen substantial changes in voting rights, access to public accommodations, and educational opportunity as a result of the civil rights movement, one leader of which was Dr. King.

These changing attitudes toward civil rights and toward a holiday honoring one of the movement's central figures exemplify a shift in political culture in the United States. Dr. King's famous "I have a dream" speech expressed the idea that the American dream of freedom, opportunity, and tolerance for others should be open to everyone. The story of how Martin Luther King Jr. Day came about is not only a story of political persistence, but also an example of how political attitudes can change over time. Political culture can also be understood in terms of attitudes and values, which when they are coherent and consistent are known as *ideology*. In this chapter we look at political culture and ideology.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1 Identify the most important elements of the American political culture and how we learn them.
- 2 Assess the importance of the "American dream" in the context of economic change.
- 3 Compare and contrast different ideological assumptions about government.
- 4 Assess the arguments for and against each ideology.
- 5 Analyze the importance of political ideology in light of competing ideas such as pragmatism, practicality, and the changing agenda of American politics.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Defining the American Political Culture
- Political Ideology and Attitudes Toward Government
- Political Ideology and the American People

Defining the American Political Culture

Many American citizens' first experience with democracy is a school election, sometimes as early as in elementary school. What are the expectations of these young voters, and what do their expectations teach us about our political culture? Were we to observe such an election, we would see recurrent patterns. For example, it would be considered unfair if some students' votes counted for more than others, or if some students were not allowed to vote at all. The candidates would probably be asked to speak, and might even make campaign promises. When the votes are counted, the young participants expect the person with the most votes to be elected.

Other elements of our political culture are learned in the family or from peers. Many important elements of our political culture are widely shared by Americans, others are evolving, and some are no longer widely shared. This chapter examines our assumptions, beliefs, and values about politics, government, participation, freedom, and liberty.

Political scientists use the term **political culture** to refer to the widely shared beliefs, values, and norms citizens hold about their relationship to government and to one another. We can discover the specifics of a nation's political culture not only by studying what its people believe and say, but also by observing how they behave. That behavior includes such fundamental decisions as who may participate in political decisions, what rights and liberties citizens have, how political decisions are made, and what people think about politicians and government generally.

Some elements of our political culture—such as our fear of concentrated power and our reverence for individual liberty—have remained constant over time. Our ideas about **suffrage**, the right to vote, however, have changed from a belief that only property-owning white men should be allowed to vote to a conviction that all adults, excluding felons in some states, should have the right. Thus, citizens now vote in party primaries to select nominees for office, whereas for much of our history party leaders determined who would run for office. The surge in political activity on the Internet in the 2004 and 2008 elections may be a harbinger of a new political culture in which citizens interact more with candidates, contribute money to campaigns, and mobilize each other.

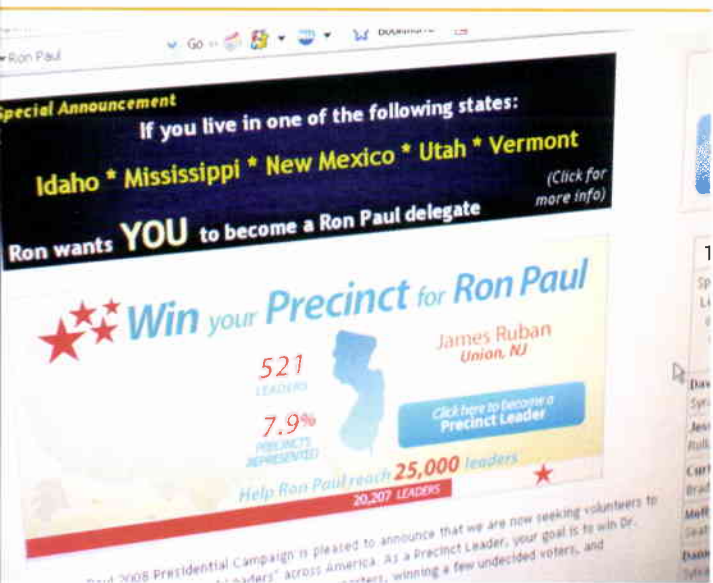
The idea of people coming together, listening to each other, exchanging ideas, learning to appreciate each other's differences, and defending their opinions is sometimes called "deliberation" and builds what has been called **social capital**. Such interaction is thought to foster

and strengthen community and relationships in ways that do not happen when citizens only cast ballots. Political scientist Robert Putnam has defined social capital as "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit."⁴ In at least some respects the Barack Obama campaign, through its extensive use of the Internet to network volunteers and donors, is an application of the social capital idea to political campaigning.

American political culture centers on democratic values such as liberty, equality, individualism, justice, the rule of law, patriotism, optimism, and idealism. There is no "official" list of American political values; however, and as we noted in Chapter 1, these widely shared democratic values overlap and sometimes conflict with each other.

Shared Values

Before the American and French Revolutions of the late eighteenth century, discussions about individual liberty, freedom, equality, private property, limited government, and popular consent were rare. Europe had been dominated by aristocracies, had experienced centuries of political and social inequality, and had been ruled by governments that often exercised power arbitrarily. Political philosophers rebelled against these traditions and proclaimed the principles of classical liberalism.



Like many 2008 presidential candidates, Ron Paul used the internet extensively to allow more people to participate in the election process and thereby build social capital.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

- 1 Identify the most important elements of the American political culture and how we learn them.

political culture

The widely shared beliefs, values, and norms about how citizens relate to government and to one another.

suffrage

The right to vote.

social capital

Democratic and civic habits of discussion, compromise, and respect for differences, which grow out of participation in voluntary organizations.

The founders of our nation claimed that individuals have certain **natural rights**—the rights of all people to dignity and worth—and that government must be limited and controlled because it was a threat to those rights. During this same period, the economic system was changing from a *mercantile system*, under which countries sought to strengthen the role of the state, establish colonies, and develop industry by encouraging exports and discouraging imports, to a *free market system* with the government taking a more “hands off” approach to the economy and setting up fewer trade barriers.⁵ People began to think they could improve their lot in life and enhance their political and social status. Radical new ideas such as these influenced the thinking of the founders and shaped the values essential to the United States’ political culture today.

Liberty No value in the American political culture is more revered than liberty. “We have always been a nation obsessed with liberty. Liberty over authority, freedom over responsibility, rights over duties—these are our historic preferences,” wrote the late Clinton Rossiter, a noted political scientist. “Not the good man but the free man has been the measure of all things in this sweet ‘land of liberty’; not national glory but individual liberty has been the object of political authority and the test of its worth.”⁶ Not all students of U.S. thought accept this emphasis on freedom and individualism over virtue and the public good, and in reality both sets of values are important.⁷

Equality Thomas Jefferson’s famous words in the Declaration of Independence express the strength of our views of equality: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” In contrast to Europeans, our nation shunned aristocracy, and our Constitution explicitly prohibits governments from granting titles of nobility. Although our rhetoric about equality was not always matched by our policy—slavery, racial segregation in schools—the value of social equality is now deeply rooted.

American citizens also believe in *political equality*, the idea that every individual has a right to equal protection under the law and equal voting power. Although political equality has always been a goal, it has not always been a reality. In the past, African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and women were denied the right to vote and otherwise participate in the nation’s political life.

Equality encompasses the idea of *equal opportunity*, especially with regard to improving our economic status. American adults believe social background should not

natural rights

The rights of all people to dignity and worth; also called *human rights*.



A teacher reads a book to a multi-ethnic class as part of the Head Start program in Washington, D.C.



THE CHANGING FACE OF U.S. POLITICS

Immigrants and Assimilation into American Political Culture

As a nation of immigrants, the United States has assimilated individuals from many countries. This process takes time as new immigrants learn the language, pursue education, and begin to understand the institutions and process of government, including elections. The scholar Samuel Huntington has argued that over time, immigrants from Mexico are less likely to support core American values and learn English than are immigrants from other Latin American countries. Huntington quotes others who have also found that Mexican immigrants have “a strong resistance to acculturation...[and] persistence of their communal bonds.”*

Huntington’s findings have been challenged. One study found that “nearly all Hispanic adults born in the United States of immigrant parents report they are fluent in English,” suggesting assimilation after the first generation. Others have come to similar conclusions.† The data presented in the figure is from a survey of Latinos in the United States. Latinos who are not American citizens are more likely to identify themselves with their country of birth and less likely to ever describe themselves as “American.” But for both groups the political focus is on the United States.

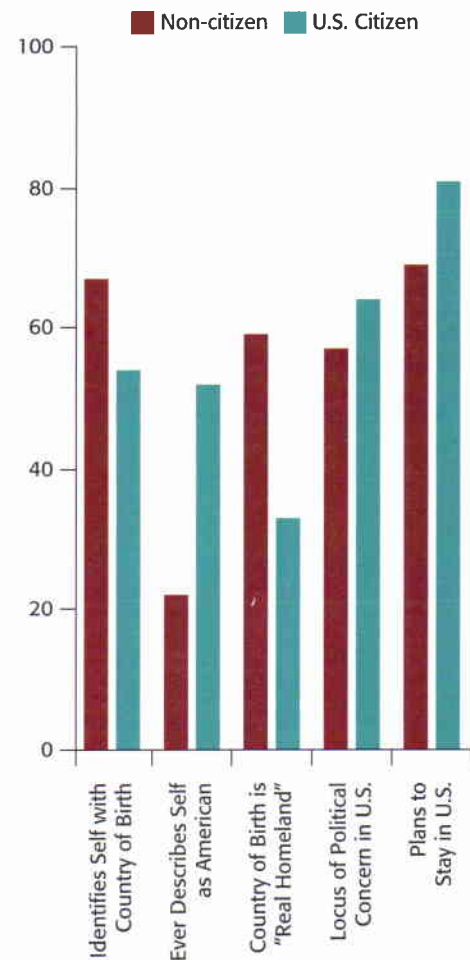
The immigration/assimilation debate inspires strong emotions on both sides. Some, like Huntington, fear that the influx of immigration will challenge “American” ideals. These groups and individuals are fearful that the immigration trends will mean the end of something—although they rarely specify what

that will be. Fox News commentator John Gibson called on his presumably white viewers to “make more babies,” otherwise, in “twenty-five years...the majority of the population [will be] Hispanic.”‡ The United States has been down this road before. In the 1850s, following a devastating period of famine due to a potato mold, Irish émigrés began arriving in the Americas in droves. In the United States, the Irish settled mainly in the population centers of the Northeast, and today more than 34 million Americans claim Irish ancestry—that number is more than nine times the population of Ireland today.§ However, in the 1850s, these immigrants were held in contempt. They were predominantly Catholic and generally poor. In short, they represented—at least in the minds of their contemporaries—a threat to American culture.

QUESTIONS

1. What factors may make it more or less difficult to assimilate new waves of immigrants into U.S. society today?
2. How does the racial composition of the United States affect the country’s political culture?
3. Is the comparison between the Irish immigration of the 1850s and our current situation valid?

Identity and Citizenship Status (Percent Foreign-Born Latinos).



SOURCE: Used by permission of The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press.

*Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (Simon & Schuster, 2004), pp. 189–190.

†Shirin Hakimzadeh and D'Vera Cohn, “English Usage Among Hispanics in the United States,” *Pew Hispanic Center*, November 29, 2007; see also Mary C. Water and Tomas R. Jimenez, “Assessing Immigrant Assimilation: Empirical and Theoretical Challenges,” *Annual Review of Sociology* (2005), pp. 105–125; and Jack Citrin, Amy Lerman, Michael Murakami, and Kathryn Pearson, “Testing Huntington: Is Hispanic Immigration a Threat to American Identity?” *Perspectives on Politics*, March 2007.

‡John Gibson, “My Word,” *Fox News*, May 11, 2006.

§U.S. Census Bureau, “Facts for Features: Irish-American Heritage Month,” March 10, 2006, www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/006328.html.

limit our opportunity to achieve to the best of our ability, nor should race, gender, or religion. The nation’s commitment to public education programs such as Head Start for disadvantaged preschool children, state support for public colleges and universities, and federal financial aid for higher education reflects this belief in equal opportunity.

Individualism The United States is characterized by a persistent commitment to the individual, who has both rights and responsibilities. Policies that limit individual

choice generate intense political conflict. The debates over legalized abortion and universal health care are often framed in terms of our ability to exercise choices. A single-payer system of health care, which generally means the government as payer, would ensure universal coverage but limit choice and run counter to the norm of individualism. The counterargument says that all persons in the United States have a right to health care and that is more important than individualism. Although American citizens support individual rights and freedoms, they also understand that their rights can conflict with another person's or with the government's need to maintain order or promote the general welfare.

Respect for the Common Person Most American adults prefer action to reflection. We are often anti-expert and sometimes anti-intellectual, and an emphasis on practicality and common sense has become part of our national image. Poets such as Walt Whitman and Carl Sandburg and storytellers such as Mark Twain, Will Rogers, Eudora Welty, and Garrison Keillor helped shape this tradition. Reverence for the common people helps explain our ambivalence toward power, politics, and government authority. In the 2008 presidential primaries, for example, Democrat John Edwards made frequent reference to his father's work in textile mills, and Republican Mike Huckabee frequently mentioned that he was the first male in his family to graduate from high school.

Democratic Consensus We are a people from many different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, histories, and religions. Despite these differences, our political culture includes a **democratic consensus**, a set of widely shared attitudes and beliefs about government and its values, procedures, documents, and institutions. We have strong opinions about fundamental "rules of the game" such as who has power to do what, how people acquire power, and how they are removed from power. But this shared commitment does not necessarily mean that people vote, keep up with public affairs, or believe government is always fair or just.

We believe in **majority rule**—governance according to the preferences of the majority as expressed through regular elections. Yet we also believe that people in the minority should be free to try to win majority support for their opinions. Even though many lack strong party attachments, we favor a two-party system and the idea of competition between the parties. Our institutions are based on the principles of representation and consent of the governed. We believe in **popular sovereignty**—the idea that ultimate power resides in the people. Government exists to serve the people



You Are a Polling Consultant

democratic consensus

Widespread agreement on fundamental principles of democratic governance and the values that undergird them.

majority rule

Governance according to the expressed preferences of the majority.

popular sovereignty

A belief that ultimate power resides in the people.



A woman reacts as a passerby offers her a hug of consolation in front of her home destroyed by fire. The October 2007 fire in San Diego County, California, burned nearly 200,000 acres, destroyed more than 1,000 homes, and resulted in two deaths.

TABLE

3-1 What Do You Mean by Rights and Freedoms? It Depends . . .

	Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
Freedom of speech should apply to groups that are sympathetic to terrorists.	45%	50%	5%
There has been real improvement in the position of African Americans.	49	41	10
Books that contain dangerous ideas should be banned from public school libraries.	46	50	4
Abortions should be more difficult to obtain.	35	56	9
The police should be allowed to search the houses of known terrorist sympathizers without a court order.	37	61	2
School boards ought to have the right to fire teachers who are known homosexuals.	28	66	6

SOURCE: Used by permission of The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press.

rather than the other way around. The government learns the will of the people through *elections*, the most important expression of popular consent, and to an extent through public opinion polls (see Chapter 8). But sometimes other fundamental rights limit popular sovereignty and majority rule.⁸ Examples include California's vote in a 1964 referendum that permitted race discrimination in the sale of residential housing; the courts later overturned it.

The Constitution, especially the first ten amendments (the Bill of Rights) and the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Nineteenth amendments, spells out many of the limits on what governments can do. The Constitution is revered as a national symbol, yet we often differ about what it means, and we honor many constitutional rights more in the abstract than in the particular. About half of us, for instance, think books with dangerous ideas should be banned from public school libraries (see Table 3-1). Intolerance of dissenting or offensive views is amply demonstrated in public opinion polls and on college and university campuses. Still, most of us support democratic and constitutional values.

Justice and the Rule of Law Inscribed over the entrance to the U.S. Supreme Court are the words "Equal Justice Under Law." The *rule of law* means government is based on a body of law applied equally and by just procedures, as opposed to arbitrary rule by an elite whose whims decide policy or resolve disputes. In 1803, Chief Justice John Marshall summarized this principle: "The government of the United States has been emphatically termed a government of laws, not of men."⁹ American adults believe strongly in fairness: Everyone is entitled to the same legal rights and protections.

To adhere to the rule of law, government should follow these five rules:

1. *Generality*: Laws should be stated generally and not single out any group or individual.
2. *Prospectivity*: Laws should apply to the present and the future, not punish something someone did in the past.
3. *Publicity*: Laws cannot be kept secret and then enforced.
4. *Authority*: Valid laws are made by those with legitimate power, and the people legitimate that power through some form of popular consent.
5. *Due process*: Laws must be enforced impartially with fair processes.

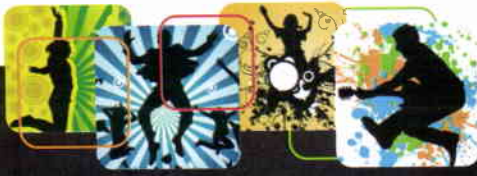


War, Peace, and Public Opinion

nationalism

An enduring sense of national identity or consciousness that derives from cultural, historic, linguistic, or political forces.

Patriotism, Optimism, and Idealism The terrorist attacks of 2001 united the nation and reinforced American **nationalism**. As President George W. Bush said, "We are a different country than we were on September 10th: sadder and less innocent; stronger and



GENERATION NEXT

Patriotism

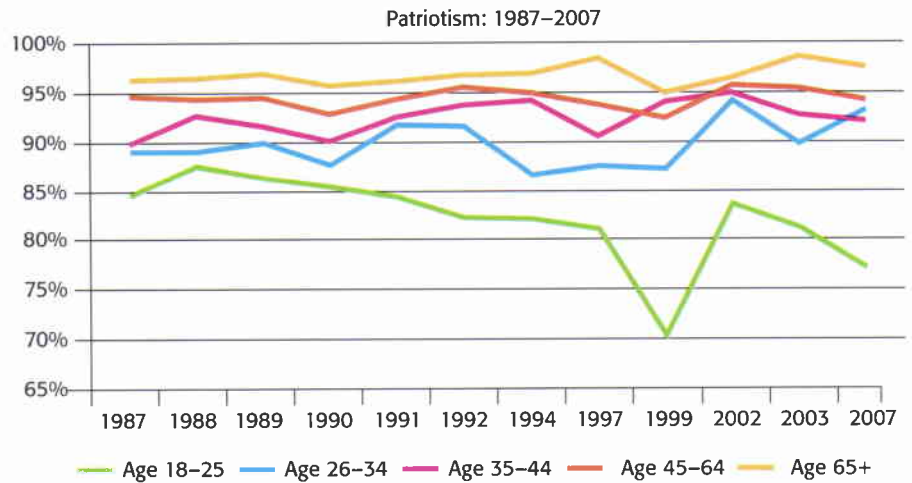
The horrors of September 11, 2001, rekindled among many a greater sense of patriotism. The nation was drawn together across party lines and ideological divides. American citizens have generally been more patriotic than people from other countries (see the results from the World Values Survey in the “How Other Nations Govern” feature in this chapter). Indeed, we have what some social scientists have termed a “civil religion” in the United States, and this common bond is one of the strongest cross-cutting cleavages in the United States.* But are there differences in the level of patriotism among those in Generation Next and older persons? Respondents were asked, “Do you agree with the statement ‘I am very patriotic?’” The figure plots the percentage of respondents who reported that they completely or mostly agreed with the statement.

Patriotism seems to generally increase with age, but 18- to 25-year-olds today are less patriotic than this same age group was 20 years ago. With one notable exception, patriotism seems to be trending downward among this age group. However, one event stands out immediately when we first look at these charts: the jump in patriotism across all age groups and political persuasions between 1999 and 2002. Another interesting difference is how much lower Independents are in self-reported patriotism than Democrats or Republicans. Among those older than 25, patriotism fluctuates mostly between 90 and 95 percent, while younger voters vary widely between a low of 50 percent and a high of 94 percent.

QUESTIONS

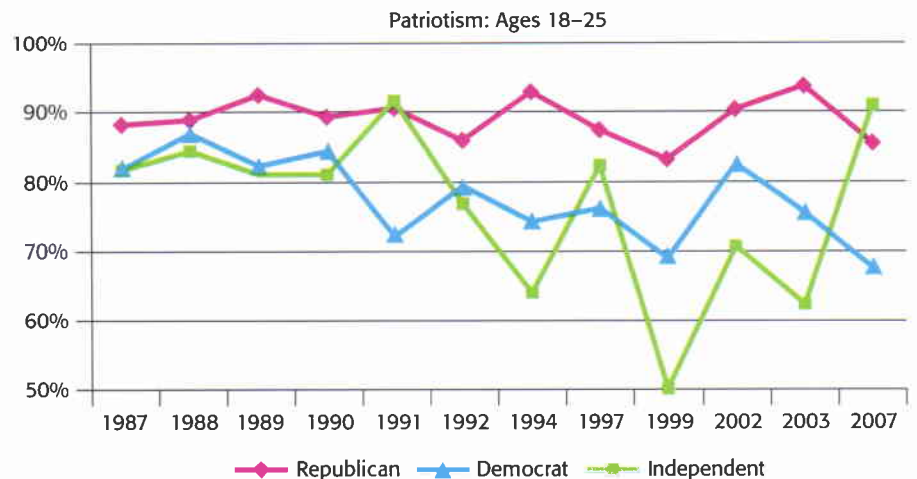
1. Why does Generation Next report being less patriotic than older citizens?
2. What factors might account for the gradual decline in patriotism between 1988 and 1999? Do you think this trend would have continued if September 11 had never happened?
3. Why might there be partisan differences in patriotism? Why might these differences be more pronounced in younger people?

Percentage of Respondents Who Completely Agreed or Mostly Agreed with the Statement, “I Am Very Patriotic.”



SOURCE: Used by permission of The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press.

Percentage of 18- to 25-Year-Old Respondents Who Completely Agreed or Mostly Agreed with the Statement, “I Am Very Patriotic.”



SOURCE: Used by permission of The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press.

*Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus* 96 (Winter 1967), pp. 1–21.

YOU WILL DECIDE

Is the American Dream Still Alive and Important?

Is the American dream alive? Is it important to people? Some argue that the wealth and prosperity so many have achieved in the United States means that for most the dream has been achieved and is no longer important as a motivating force or a way to explain behavior. Others contend that for people in poverty, the hopelessness of their situation makes the American dream seem far-fetched and unattainable. The American dream also includes the idea of the United States as a land of opportunity, beyond economic opportunities. What do you think? Is the American dream still an important element of the political culture of the United States?

more united; and in the face of ongoing threats, determined and courageous.”¹⁰ However, as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq became less popular, the country became sharply divided on how best to confront the terrorism threat.

We believe in opportunity, choice, individualism, and most of all, in the freedom to improve ourselves and to achieve success with as little interference as possible from others or from government. U.S. citizens are more satisfied with their democratic government than are the citizens of many other countries.¹¹

We know that our system is imperfect, yet we still believe in government by the people. We often grumble that elected officials have lost touch with us, we

are disgusted by scandals, and we are impatient with how long the system takes to solve problems such as high gas taxes, crime, drug abuse, and terrorism. Despite the dissatisfactions, we believe that America is better, stronger, and more virtuous than other nations. Like every country, the United States has interests and motives that are selfish as well as generous, cynical as well as idealistic. Still, our support of human needs and rights throughout the world is evidence of an enduring idealism.

Where We Learn the American Political Culture

One important source of political culture in the United States, as in other nations, is the family. Young children are taught what it means to be an American. They are curious about why people vote, what the president does, and whether Grandpa fought in Korea or Vietnam. The questions may vary from family to family, yet the themes of authority, freedom, equality, liberty, and partisanship are common. Families are the most important reference group, with parents and siblings orienting each other to politics, the media, and the community more generally. Compared to families in other cultures, American families are much more egalitarian, with children having more input in family decisions than in other cultures.¹²

Public schools are another source of the American political culture. Children and teachers often begin the school day by saluting the flag, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, or singing the national anthem. Political and economic values are part of the curriculum. Not only are values taught in American history classes, but they are put into practice in school elections and newspapers and in everyday economic activities such as work and saving.¹³

Colleges and universities also help foster the American political culture. Students who attend college are often more confident than others in dealing with bureaucracy and politics generally and are more likely to participate in politics, vote, and know more about government.¹⁴ Many states require students at state colleges and universities to take courses in American or state government, in part to instill a sense of civic duty.

American churches, synagogues, and mosques have long fostered a common understanding of right and wrong and of freedom—including freedom of religion, individualism, pluralism, and civic duty. Churches do not all take the same positions on political issues, but they have played important roles in such major social and political movements as the abolition of slavery, the expansion of civil rights, and opposition to war.

In modern times, the mass media have taken over some functions the family used to perform. By the time children leave high school, they will have spent more time watching television than talking to their parents. They may have learned more about politics from Comedy Central and Jon Stewart than from their parents, schools, or other media.¹⁵ Finally, American adults educate each other about political values at work, at PTA meetings, and in more expressly political activities.

The American Dream

Many of our political values come together in the **American dream**, a complex set of ideas that holds that the United States is a land of opportunity where individual initiative and hard work can bring economic success. Whether fulfilled or not, this dream speaks to our most deeply held hopes and goals. Its essence is expressed in our enthusiasm for **capitalism**, an economic system based on private property, competitive markets, economic incentives, and limited government involvement in the production, pricing, and distribution of goods and services.¹⁶

The concept of *private property* enjoys extraordinary popularity in the United States. Most cherish the dream of acquiring property and believe that the owners of property have the right to decide how to use it. In many European democracies, the state owns and operates transportation systems and other businesses that are privately owned and operated in the United States. Even in Europe, though, some privatization has occurred in communications systems such as telephone companies and broadcast media.

The right to private property is just one of the economic incentives that cement our support for capitalism and fuel the American dream. Although it is difficult to compare social mobility across countries, especially because of differences in rates of immigration, the American dream is more attainable for middle-income persons in the United States than in Europe. But the bottom fifth of the economic distribution in the United States appears to be less upwardly mobile than in Europe.¹⁷

What explains these differences? We assume that people who have more ability or who work hard will get ahead, earn more, and enjoy economic rewards. We also believe that people should be able to pass most of the wealth they have accumulated along to their children and relatives. Even the poorest generally oppose high inheritance taxes or limits on how much someone can earn. American adults believe that the free market system gives almost everyone a fair chance, that capitalism is necessary, and that freedom depends on it. We reject communism and socialism—a rejection fortified in recent decades as most communist nations shifted toward capitalism. In the United States, individuals and corporations have acquired wealth and, at the same time, exercised political clout. Their power has in turn been widely criticized. Wealthy individuals have used their assets to fund their campaigns for public office (Jon Corzine spent \$60 million on his successful New Jersey Senate race in 2000 and another \$43 million on his successful gubernatorial race in 2005,¹⁸ and Mitt Romney spent \$44.6 million of his own money on his 2008 presidential campaign), or to influence elections or public policy (George Soros gave \$27 million to organizations such as America Coming Together, the Media Fund, MoveOn.org, Joint Victory Campaign, Young Democrats of America, and a few other groups working to defeat George W. Bush in 2004).¹⁹

In 2008 there was less activity by wealthy individuals funding outside groups. This decline may have been due to the requests from both presidential candidates that supports not fund these kinds of groups. Some individuals like T. Boone Pickens, who had given millions to groups in 2004 that promoted President Bush and attacked John Kerry, spent millions in 2008 on advertising supporting his “Pickens Plan” to develop wind energy as a way to reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

THINKING IT THROUGH

The persistence of poverty in a land of plenty is perplexing, but it does not change the reality that some are able to escape it. Examples of individuals who have achieved at least a portion of the American dream arise often enough to reinforce acceptance that the dream can come true. Although some achieve the dream because they win the lottery, more do so because of opportunities such as education.

The American dream does not have to be achieved by everyone to be an important motivator. New immigrant groups have long been an incubator of the American dream, and they continue to be so today. Parents working multiple low-paying jobs while stressing education for their children provide an example of both the work and the dream components of this aspiration. At the same time, it is also clear that the American dream is less available to some than to others and that access to it can be limited by larger forces such as recessions, unemployment, and illness. Some problems that many middle-class individuals can take in stride can derail the hopes and aspirations of those without a safety net.

The American dream also includes the idea that people in this country have more opportunity to pursue an education, to express themselves, and to associate with others as they see fit. In short, part of the dream is that the United States is a more open society. The extent to which the American dream persists in our political culture, despite its limitations, is evidence of its power and importance.

Questions

1. What examples can you identify of people who have achieved the American dream, and what difference has that success made to others having the dream?
2. Is the American dream more attainable for some than others? If so, why is that the case?
3. Does the American dream encompass more than economic wealth? How important is religious or political freedom to the idea that the American dream is about opportunity?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

- 2 Assess the importance of the “American dream” in the context of economic change.



Coming from humble beginnings, Oprah Winfrey—television host, movie actress, and one of the highest-paid people in the country—epitomizes the American dream.



HOW OTHER NATIONS GOVERN

Government and Nation: Differing Public Perspectives

To understand the politics and government of a country, we must understand its political culture in terms of how people view the political system or government, how involved they feel in the political process, the extent to which they have become assimilated, and how well diversity is tolerated. Scholars have gathered these and other dimensions of public opinion in more than 80 societies. To learn more about their work, go to www.worldvaluessurvey.org. In the table following we compare our sample of seven countries on a set of questions related to political culture and ideology.

There are some surprises here. People in China, for example, say they are more confident in their government than are people in

Japan or the United States. This may reflect differences in what people mean by a term like "confidence." For the Chinese it may mean predictability, while in the United States or Japan it may mean efficiency.

On other items, such as the frequency with which people discuss political matters with friends, there is greater similarity, with no more than 24 percent in any country reporting that they do so frequently. In all but Japan, roughly three-quarters of people report being willing to fight for their country, while in Japan only 25 percent so reporting. Japanese respondents are also least likely to report that they are proud of their country.

QUESTIONS

1. Do any other numbers in this table surprise you? Why or why not?
2. What methodology problems do you think pollsters face when trying to collect data across countries? How might those problems have affected World Values Survey data?
3. What factors do you think may explain why Japan is so different from the other countries in nationalism and willingness to fight for the country?

World Values Survey.

	Total	China (2001)	Great Britain (1999)	India (2001)	Japan (2000)	Mexico (2000)	Nigeria (2000)	United States (1999)
Confidence in the government (% "A great deal" or "Quite a lot")	50%	97%	n/a	56%	27%	37%	48%	38%
Political involvement (% "Frequently" discuss political matters with friends)	15	24	10%	17	7	13	17	17
War (% Yes, "Willing to fight for country")	73	97	n/a	82	25	74	n/a	73
Proud of nationality (% "Very proud" or "Quite proud")	84	82	90	93	59	95	91	96
Language at home (% who report speaking the national language at home)	n/a	n/a	n/a	35	100	96	14	95

SOURCE: World Values Survey, "World Values Survey 2005," downloaded data files, www.worldvaluessurvey.org.

American dream

The widespread belief that the United States is a land of opportunity and that individual initiative and hard work can bring economic success.

capitalism

An economic system characterized by private property, competitive markets, economic incentives, and limited government involvement in the production, distribution, and pricing of goods and services.

The conflict in values between a *competitive economy*, in which individuals reap large rewards for their initiative and hard work, and an *egalitarian society*, in which everyone earns a decent living, carries over into politics. How the public resolves this tension changes over time and from issue to issue.

As important as the American dream is to the national consciousness, it remains unfulfilled. The gap between rich and poor has grown in recent years, and a sharp income difference between whites and blacks remains tenacious.²⁰

For more people than we want to admit, chances for success still depend on the family they were born into, the neighborhood they grew up in, or the college they attended. An underclass persists in the form of impoverished families, malnourished and poorly educated children, and the homeless.²¹ Many cities are actually two cities, where some residents live in luxury, others in squalor. This reality was starkly reinforced in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 as the world observed that poor people were much more likely to lack the transportation or resources to flee the hurricane-stricken city. National public opinion polls showed stark differences along racial lines in perceptions of whether the government's response would have been different if most of the victims had been white and not black. Two-thirds of African Americans held this view, compared to fewer than one in five whites.²²



Three years after Hurricane Katrina, many people still live in large trailer parks set up by FEMA as temporary housing after the storm.

Political and Economic Change

Historical developments and economic and technological growth affect political values. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution identified such important political values as individual liberty, property rights, and limited government.²³ These values have been shaped by events and political movements as have others such as political equality and more democratic forms of participation.

The Industrial Transformation By 1900, industrial capitalism and the growth of giant corporations had largely replaced the agrarian society of small farmers and plantations that the framers had known. These changes irreversibly transformed our political and social ideology. Large privately owned corporations changed not only the economic order, but the role of government and the way people viewed each other. No one captures the implications of this shift better than political scientist Robert A. Dahl:

One of the consequences of the new order has been a high degree of inequality in the distribution of wealth and income, and far greater inequality than had ever been thought likely or desirable under an agrarian order by Democratic Republicans like Jefferson and Madison, or had ever been thought consistent with democratic or republican government in the historic writings on the subject from Aristotle to Locke, Montesquieu, and Rousseau. Previous theorists and advocates had, like many of the framers of our own Constitution, insisted that a republic could exist only if the citizen body continued neither rich nor poor. Citizens, it was argued, must enjoy a rough equality of conditions.²⁴

The success of the American economy led to the concentration of great wealth in the hands of a few—the “robber barons” or tycoons. Many had taken great risks or earned their fortunes through inventions and efficient production practices. But as disparities of income grew, so did disparities in political resources. People with more economic resources can invest time, energy, and money in political campaigns, parties, and candidates, which in turn enhance their power and influence.²⁵

The Great Depression and the New Deal The Great Depression of the 1930s and the near collapse of the capitalistic system that followed it shaped much of our thinking about the role of government in a capitalistic system. The Depression was largely blamed on unrestrained capitalism and an unregulated market. The collapse of the stock market, massive unemployment, and a failed banking system caused widespread



Plumes of black smoke rise from steel mills in Homestead, Pennsylvania, behind a group of children on their way to school in the early 1900s. The rapid industrialization of the United States around the beginning of the 20th century resulted in an increased disparity between the richest and the poorest Americans.

Bread lines like this provided handouts of food to thousands of unemployed and destitute people during the Great Depression.



suffering. Workers had no unemployment compensation, no guarantee for the money they put in banks, no federal regulation of the stock market, and no Social Security. People turned to the government to improve the lot of millions of jobless and homeless citizens. Beginning with President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s, most people came to accept that governments, at both the national and state levels, should use their powers and resources to ensure some measure of equal opportunity and social justice.

Building on Roosevelt's policies, Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson worked with the civil rights movement in the 1960s to pass civil rights and voting rights legislation and launch a "war on poverty." Modern-day liberalism and conservatism turn, in large measure, on how much we believe that governments should help minorities, women, and others who have suffered discrimination or been left behind by the industrial or technological revolutions of the twentieth century.

Today, free enterprise is no longer unbridled. Government regulations, antitrust laws, job safety regulations, environmental standards, and minimum wage laws try to balance freedom of enterprise against the rights of individuals. Most people today support a semiregulated or mixed free enterprise system that checks the worst tendencies of capitalism, but they reject excessive government intervention (see Table 3-2). Much of American politics centers on how to achieve this balance. Currently, most liberals and conservatives agree that some governmental intervention is necessary to assist those who fall short in the competition for education and economic prosperity. This was brought sharply into focus in 2008 when banks and other financial institutions faced a crisis leading to a \$700 billion bailout.

TABLE

3-2 Attitudes About Business and Labor

	Percentage Agreeing
The strength of this country is mostly based on the success of American business.	72%
Government regulation of business usually does more harm than good.	57
Business corporations generally strike a fair balance between making profits and serving the public interest.	38
There is too much power concentrated in the hands of a few big companies.	76
Labor unions are necessary to protect the working person.	68

SOURCE: Used by permission of The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press.

Political Ideology and Attitudes Toward Government

Political ideology refers to a consistent pattern of ideas or beliefs about political values and the role of government, including how it should work and how it actually does work.

Two major schools of political ideology dominate American politics: *liberalism* and *conservatism*. Two less popular schools of thought—*socialism* and *libertarianism*—also help define the spectrum of ideology. (See Table 3–3.)

Liberalism

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, classical liberals favored *limited government* and sought to protect people from governmental harassment in their political and economic lives. Over time, the liberal emphasis on individualism has remained constant, but the perception of the need for government changed.

Contemporary Liberals In its current U.S. usage, **liberalism** refers to a belief that government can bring about justice and equality of opportunity. Modern-day liberals



Are You a Liberal or a Conservative?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

- 3 Compare and contrast different ideological assumptions about government.

political ideology

A consistent pattern of beliefs about political values and the role of government.

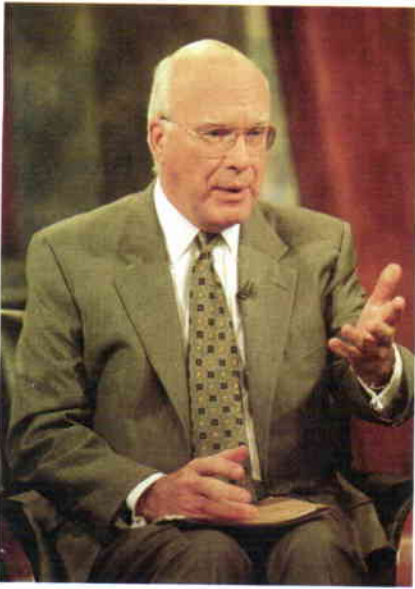
liberalism

A belief that government can and should achieve justice and equality of opportunity.

TABLE
3–3 Differences in Political Ideology

	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal	Don't Know/Haven't Thought About It
Sex				
Male	36%	26%	21%	17%
Female	24	27	24	25
Race				
White	35	26	24	15
Black	14	31	12	43
Asian	27	26	26	21
Hispanic	20	25	30	25
Age				
18–34	23	30	30	18
35–45	34	26	17	23
46–55	34	24	26	16
56–64	36	23	22	19
Religion				
Protestant	41	24	15	20
Catholic	31	27	25	17
Jewish	13	23	64	0
Education				
Less than high school	16	18	16	50
High school diploma	26	34	13	27
Some college	34	27	24	15
Bachelor's degree	42	23	32	3
Advanced degree	33	17	47	3
Party				
Democrat	9	28	40	23
Independent	16	31	10	43
Republican	59	23	5	13

SOURCE: Center for Political Studies, University of Michigan, 2004 *American National Election Study Guide to Public Opinion and Electoral Behavior*.



Patrick Leahy (D-Vermont) has promoted liberal programs and legislation for many years.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

- 4 Assess the arguments for and against each ideology.



**Who Are Liberals and Conservatives?
What's the Difference?**

wish to preserve the rights of the individual and the right to own private property, yet they believe that some government intervention in the economy is necessary to remedy the defects of capitalism. Liberals advocate equal access to health care, housing, and education for all citizens. They generally believe in affirmative action programs, protections for workers' health and safety, tax rates that rise with a person's income, and unions' rights to organize and strike. Liberals are generally more inclined to favor greater environmental protection and individual choice in such matters as same-sex marriage and abortion.

Liberals generally believe that the future will be better than the past or the present—that obstacles can be overcome and the government can be trusted to, and should, play a role in that progress. They contend that modern technology and industrialization cry out for government programs to offset the loss of liberties that the poor and the weak suffer. Liberals such as Senators Edward Kennedy, Barack Obama, and Hillary Rodham Clinton frequently stress the need for an involved and affirmative government.

Liberals led in expanding civil rights in the 1960s and 1970s and favor affirmative action today. Some liberals favor reducing the great inequalities of wealth that make equality of opportunity impossible. Most favor a certain minimum level of income for all. Rather than placing a cap on wealth, they want to build a floor beneath the poor. In short, liberals seek to extend opportunities to all, regardless of how poor they may be. If necessary, they favor raising taxes to achieve these goals.

Criticisms of Liberalism Critics say liberals rely too much on government, higher taxes, and bureaucracy to solve the nation's problems. They argue that liberals have forgotten that government has to be limited if it is to serve our best interests. Power tends to corrupt, and too much dependence on government can corrupt the spirit, undermine self-reliance, and make people forget those cherished personal freedoms and property rights our Republic was founded to secure and protect. In short, critics of modern liberalism contend that the welfare and regulatory state liberals advocate will ultimately destroy individual initiative, the entrepreneurial spirit, and the very engine of economic growth that might lead to true equality of economic opportunity.

In recent elections, Republicans have made liberalism a villain while claiming that their own presidential candidates represent the mainstream. Bill Clinton was careful not to label his programs liberal, focusing on the need for economic growth, jobs, and a balanced budget. He insisted he was a "New Democrat." In 2000, Al Gore also positioned himself as a centrist, not a liberal, but George W. Bush claimed that Gore was an advocate of "tax and spend" big government. Their Republican opponents and their allies often level the same charge against Democratic congressional candidates.

The movement to the center by some Democrats and the conventional wisdom that liberal or progressive approaches are in decline are disputed. The three major Democratic candidates for the presidency in 2008 (Clinton, Obama, and Edwards) rarely used the word "liberal" but aggressively campaigned for change and an agenda in health care, the environment, and the economy that stood in stark contrast to the Bush administration and conservatism.

The popularity of particular issues changes with world events. For a time, we were preoccupied with budget deficits. With the end of the Cold War we became more concerned about domestic than foreign policy. Policy concerns changed again with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the war on terrorism that followed. National security became a central focus of the 2002 and 2004 elections. Budget deficits replaced projected surpluses, and in 2008 we focused attention on the economy, environment, and places such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, and North Korea.

Conservatives for decades have emphasized differences with liberals on social and moral matters. For example, in 2004 referendums in 13 states defining marriage as between a man and a woman forced moral values questions into the presidential election.

Efforts by liberals to define the same-sex marriage issue as primarily about rights failed, and all the referendums passed, providing Republicans with an issue that helped motivate conservatives to vote in key states such as Ohio.²⁶

With the collapse of some large investment banks, a large drop in the value of stocks, a rise in home foreclosures, and growing unemployment, the 2008 election focused largely on the economy and on which candidate was better able to manage these problems. While John McCain's campaign tried to shift the focus to Obama as a "tax and spend liberal" or paint him as "among the most liberal U.S. Senators," these arguments did not carry much sway with voters who were not already committed to McCain. Obama's campaign countered by linking John McCain to Bush's deficits and to deregulation which Obama claimed was a major factor in the economic problems the country faced. Unlike 2000 and 2004 when social issues or national security fears were used to the benefit of Republicans, the primacy of the economy and the need for change worked to the advantage of Obama and the Democrats.

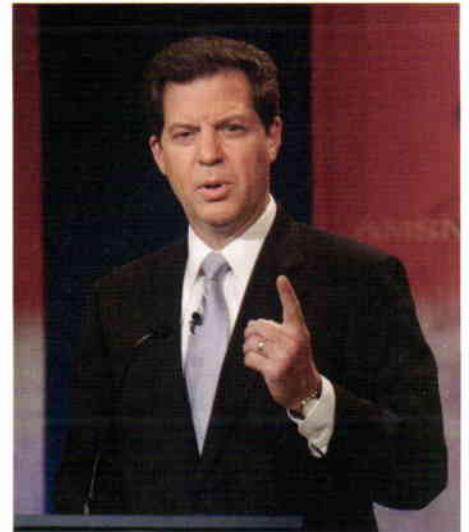
Conservatism

Belief in private property rights and free enterprise are cardinal attributes of contemporary **conservatism**. In contrast to liberals, conservatives want to enhance individual liberty by keeping government small, especially the national government, although they support a strong national defense. Conservatives take a more pessimistic view of human nature than liberals do. They maintain that people need strong leadership, firm laws, and strict moral codes. The primary task of government is to ensure order. Conservatives also believe that people are the architects of their own fortune and must solve their own problems and create their own successes.

Traditional Conservatives Conservatives are emphatically pro-business. They favor tax cuts and resist all but the minimum antitrust, trade, and environmental regulations on corporations. They believe that the sole functions of government should be to protect the nation from foreign enemies, preserve law and order, enforce private contracts, encourage economic growth by fostering competitive markets and free and fair trade, and promote family values. Traditional conservatives favor dispersing power throughout the political and social systems to avoid an overly powerful national government; they believe that the market, not the government, should provide services. These views were tested by the Bush Administration's advocacy of a massive government bailout of financial institutions in 2008 leading GOP candidate John McCain to call for new regulation.

Conservatives opposed the New Deal programs of the 1930s, the War on Poverty in the 1960s, and many civil rights and affirmative action programs. Families and private charities, they say, can and should take care of human needs and social and economic problems. Conservatives are more inclined to trust the private sector and dislike turning to governments, especially the national government, to solve social problems. Government social activism, they say, has been expensive and counterproductive. State and local government should address those social problems that do need a government response. For example, conservatives have long held abortion to be a matter for state and local governments to decide, as well as education. President Bush's education reform created under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 encountered opposition from some of the most conservative and Republican states, because they saw the policy as interfering with the ability of states and local school districts to manage education.

Conservatives, especially those in office, do, however, selectively advocate government activism, often expressing a desire for a more effective and efficient government. Early in the 2000 presidential campaign, George W. Bush said, "Too often, my party has confused the need for a limited government with a disdain for government itself." Love of country, he said, "is undermined by sprawling, arrogant, aimless government. It is restored by focused and effective and energetic government."²⁷



Sam Brownback (R-Kansas) has been a leader of conservative causes in the Senate.

conservatism

A belief that limited government ensures order, competitive markets, and personal opportunity.

Social Conservatives Some conservatives focus less on economics and more on morality and lifestyle. Social conservatives favor strong governmental action to protect children from pornography and drugs. They want to overturn or repeal judicial rulings and laws that permit abortion, same-sex marriage, and affirmative action programs. This brand of conservatism—sometimes called the New Right—emerged in the 1980s. The New Right shares traditional conservatism's love of freedom and backs an aggressive effort to defend American interests abroad. It favors the return of organized prayer in public schools and opposes policies such as job quotas, busing, and tolerance of homosexuality.

Accordingly, a defining characteristic of the New Right is a strong desire to impose *social controls*. Christian conservatives, who are disproportionately evangelical, want to preserve traditional values and protect the institution of the family. Groups like Focus on the Family, which along with its leader Dr. James Dobson promotes traditional marriage and committed parenting, wax and wane in importance. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the Christian Coalition, founded by Reverend Pat Robertson, was an important political force that has become much less prominent in recent years.²⁸ Evidence of the decline of the coalition is the fact that the Republican Party created its own large-scale effort to mobilize conservative religious voters in the 2000 election and since.²⁹ In 2008, the connection between Christian conservatives and the GOP was further reinforced by the candidacy of former Arkansas governor and ordained Baptist minister Mike Huckabee, who emphasized his being a conservative Christian in his 2008 campaign.³⁰ In the 2008 Iowa caucuses, 60 percent of all Republican caucusgoers were evangelicals who backed Huckabee 46 percent to Mitt Romney's 19 percent.³¹

Criticisms of Conservatism Not everyone agreed with Ronald Reagan's statement that "government is the problem." Indeed, critics point out that conservatives themselves urge more government when it serves their needs—to regulate pornography and abortion, for example—but are opposed to government when it serves somebody else's. Conservatives may also have fewer objections to big government when individuals have a choice in determining how government will affect them. Vouchers for schools, choices in prescription drug benefit plans, and options to manage Social Security savings are examples of such choices.³²

Their great faith in the market economy often puts conservatives at odds with labor unions and consumer activists and in close alliance with businesspeople, particularly large corporations. Hostility to regulation and a belief in competition lead conservatives to push for deregulation. This approach has not always had positive results, as the collapse of many savings and loan companies in the 1980s³³ and the energy crisis in California in the early 2000s demonstrated.³⁴ Conservatives counter that overall it is still best to rely on the free market.

The policy of lowering taxes is consistent with the conservative hostility to big government. Many conservatives embrace the idea that if the rich pay fewer taxes, they will spend and invest more, and the benefits of this increased economic activity will "trickle down" to the poor. But Democrats argue that most of the growth in income and wealth that followed the Bush tax cuts was largely concentrated among the well-to-do and that reduced taxes and increased government spending, especially for defense, tripled the deficit during the 1980s, when conservatives were in control.³⁵ President George W. Bush pushed through tax cuts during his first term and pressed to make them permanent after his reelection in 2004. Republican nominee John McCain, who had initially opposed the Bush tax cuts, campaigned in 2008 on a platform to make them permanent. Democrats criticized Bush for lowering taxes at the same time the budget deficit was growing, and Barack Obama proposed expanding social welfare programs with the revenue from allowing the Bush tax cuts to lapse. They also proposed redirecting the tax cuts to lower- and middle-class Americans. McCain and other Republicans charged that this would be tantamount to a tax increase. Obama and McCain voted for the government bailout of financial institutions in part because both agreed regulations had been too lax.

Liberals charge that some conservatives repeatedly fail to acknowledge and endorse policies that deal with racism and sexism. They cite conservative opposition to civil rights laws in the 1960s and more recently to affirmative action. They also blame conservatives for trying to weaken the enforcement of these laws by the executive branch and the courts.

Socialism and Communism

Socialism is an economic and governmental system based on public ownership of the means of production and exchange. The nineteenth-century German philosopher Karl Marx once described socialism as a transitional stage of society between capitalism and communism. In a capitalist system, the means of production and most property are privately owned; in a communist system, the state owns property in common for all the people, and a single political party that represents the working classes controls the government.

In communist countries such as Cuba and China, the Communist Party allows no opposition. Some countries, such as Sweden, have combined limited government ownership and operation of business with democracy. Most western European countries and Canada have various forms of socialized or government-run medical systems and sometimes telecommunications networks, while keeping most economic sectors private.

In one of the most dramatic transformations in recent times, Russia, its sister republics, and its former eastern European satellites abandoned communism in the early 1990s and have been attempting to establish free markets. These countries previously had a system of rigid state ownership and centralized government planning of the economy. The government arbitrarily set prices and production levels, which ultimately led to a very unstable economic system. But political and economic failure in the Soviet Union demoralized its communist leadership and weakened its hold over its satellite states. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, a tide of political and economic reform left communism intact in only a few countries, such as Cuba and North Korea. In addition, China and Vietnam, once also communist, now have growing private sectors and are thus not fully communist.

American socialists—of whom there are only a few prominent examples, including one United States senator, Vermont's Bernie Sanders—favor a greatly expanded role for the government but argue that such a system is compatible with democracy. They would nationalize certain industries, institute a public jobs program so that all who want to work could work, tax the wealthy much more heavily, and drastically cut defense spending.³⁶ Canada and most of the democracies of western Europe are more influenced by socialist ideas than we are in the United States, but they remain, like the United States, largely market economies. Debate will continue about the proper role of government and what the market can do better than government can.³⁷

Libertarianism

Libertarianism is a political ideology that cherishes individual liberty and insists on sharply limited government. It carries some overtones of anarchism, of the classical English liberalism of the nineteenth century (defined earlier in this chapter), and of a 1930s-style conservatism. The Libertarian Party has gained a small following among people who believe that both liberals and conservatives are inconsistent in their attitude toward the power of the national government.

Libertarians oppose almost all government programs. They favor massive cuts in government spending and an end to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), and most regulatory commissions. They oppose American participation in the United Nations and favor armed forces that would defend the United States only if directly attacked. They oppose *all* government regulation, including, for example, mandatory seat-belt and helmet laws, in part because they believe individuals will all benefit more



Bernie Sanders, a self-described socialist, represents Vermont in the U.S. Senate as an Independent.

socialism

An economic and governmental system based on public ownership of the means of production and exchange.

libertarianism

An ideology that cherishes individual liberty and insists on minimal government, promoting a free market economy, a noninterventionist foreign policy, and an absence of regulation in moral, economic, and social life.



Former Republican Congressman Bob Barr accepts the 2008 Libertarian Party nomination with his wife, Jeri Barr, looking on.

from an undistorted free market, and more generally because they embrace the attitude “live and let live.” Unlike conservatives, libertarians would repeal laws that regulate personal morality, including abortion, pornography, prostitution, and illicit drugs.

A Libertarian Party candidate for president has been on the ballot in all 50 states in recent presidential elections, although the party has never obtained more than 1 percent of the vote, and in 2008 received less than one-half of one percent of the vote. The 2000 Libertarian platform called for immediate and complete removal of the federal government from education, energy, regulation, crime control, welfare, housing, transportation, health care, and agriculture; repeal of the income tax and all other direct taxes; decriminalization of drugs and pardons for prisoners convicted of nonviolent drug offenses; and withdrawal of overseas military forces. Libertarian positions are rarely timid; at the least, they prompt intriguing political debate.³⁸ In 2008, the Libertarian Party endorsed same-sex marriage, legalizing drugs, repealing the Patriot Act, withdrawing from Iraq, eliminating all gun control laws, repealing business regulations, and eliminating the Food and Drug Administration. Texas representative Ron Paul, an unsuccessful candidate for the 2008 Republican presidential nomination, had run as the Libertarian nominee for president in 1988, getting only 0.4 percent of the popular vote. His positions on several issues in 2008 embraced Libertarian ideals.⁴⁰ The competitive nature of the presidential campaign and the historic nature of the Obama candidacy meant minor parties were given even less attention in 2008 than in prior campaigns. Moreover, the centrality of the economic crisis pushed voters to find a candidate who could provide solutions and get things done. In such times voters turn to established parties.

A Word of Caution

Political labels have different meanings across national boundaries as well as over time. To be a liberal in most European nations and Australia is to be on the right; to be a liberal in the United States and Canada is to be on the left. In recent elections, the term “liberal”—which while Franklin Roosevelt was president in the 1930s and 1940s had been popular—became “the L-word,” a label most politicians sought to avoid. But liberalism is more than a label. On big questions—such as the role of government in the economy, in promoting equality of opportunity, and in regulating the behavior of individuals or businesses—real differences separate conservative and liberal groups. This does not mean, however, that people who are conservative in one area are necessarily conservative in another, or that all liberals always agree with each other.

Ideology both causes events and is affected by them. For example, World War II, which showed how government can work to defend freedom, increased support for the role of the national government. The Vietnam War probably had the opposite effect, producing disillusionment with government. The antigovernment sentiment in recent presidential elections is undoubtedly related to Vietnam, the Watergate scandal of the early 1970s, allegations of sexual and financial misconduct by political leaders, and the inadequate response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The surge in patriotism and sense of national unity in the war against terrorism after the September 11 terrorist attacks stands in sharp contrast to the national mood during the mid-1970s, the final years of the Vietnam War. It reflected a view that government has an important role to play in responding to a crisis. But by the 2006 and 2008 elections, the country was increasingly opposed to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and looking for new leaders and different policies.

Unlike in 2000 and 2004, the 2008 election produced a winner with a large enough majority in the popular vote and electoral college to claim a mandate. Moreover the Democrats began 2009 with expanded majorities in both houses of congress. The extent to which the mandate was an ideological one will be debated. The major theme of the Obama campaign was change and while he and his party provided some specifics as to what they wanted to change—for example ending the war in Iraq, expanding health care coverage, and increasing educational opportunity—it was also the case that much of the rhetoric was couched in terms like “ending the failed Bush administration policies.”



HISTORY MAKERS

Rachel Carson and the Environmental Movement

“There was once a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings.... Then a strange blight crept over the area and everything began to change.... There was a strange stillness.... The few birds seen anywhere were moribund; they trembled



Rachel Carson.

violently and could not fly. It was a spring without voices.”* These words of Rachel Carson, from the beginning of her most famous book, *Silent Spring*, published in 1962, elicited a response that was anything but silent.

A gifted marine biologist and writer, Carson had been one of only two women employed on a professional level by the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries (later the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). Her first book, *Under the Sea Wind*, demonstrated her ability to describe the natural world. During her years in government service, from 1936 to 1949, she became alarmed by the harmful effects of pesticides on the environment. She contacted *Reader's Digest* to write an article on the subject, but was met with a lack of concern.[†] Eventually, the alarming death rates among wildlife in areas sprayed by pesticides drove her to write and publish *Silent Spring* despite the deaths of a niece and her mother and her own diagnosis of terminal cancer.[‡] In response to attacks by the chemical

industry, the Department of Agriculture, and many in the media, Carson said, “I have felt bound by a solemn obligation to do what I could.”[§] Carson's book had an enormous popular impact abroad and in the United States, where it virtually created the modern environmental movement. It led to legislation banning the use of DDT and to the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency.^{||}

QUESTIONS

1. To what extent is Al Gore's book *An Inconvenient Truth* like Carson's *Silent Spring*?
2. What elements of global warming are similar to scenes described by Carson in *Silent Spring*?
3. How do you think an idea such as protecting the environment becomes part of the political culture?

*Peter Matthiessen, “Rachel Carson,” *Time*, March 29, 1999, www.time.com/time/time100/scientist/profile/carson02.html.

[†]www.pbs.org/wgbh/aso/databank/entries/btcars.html.

[‡]Matthiessen, www.time.com/time/time100/scientist/profile/carson03.html.

[§]For a more detailed biography of Rachel Carson, see www.fws.gov/northeast/rachelcarson/carsonbio.html.

^{||}Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Houghton Mifflin, 1962), pp. 1, 2.

SOURCE: Excerpt from “A Fable for Tomorrow” from *SILENT SPRING* by Rachel Carson. Copyright © 1962 by Rachel L. Carson, renewed 1990 by Roger Christie. Used by permission of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

Obama made clear that accomplishing the changes he proposes will require greater cooperation and bipartisanship. Obama also cautioned his supporters that the costs of dealing with the economic challenges the country faces will mean slowing the pace of change in other areas. Whether Obama can hold his coalition together when he must compromise will be a measure of his skill as a leader.

Political Ideology and the American People

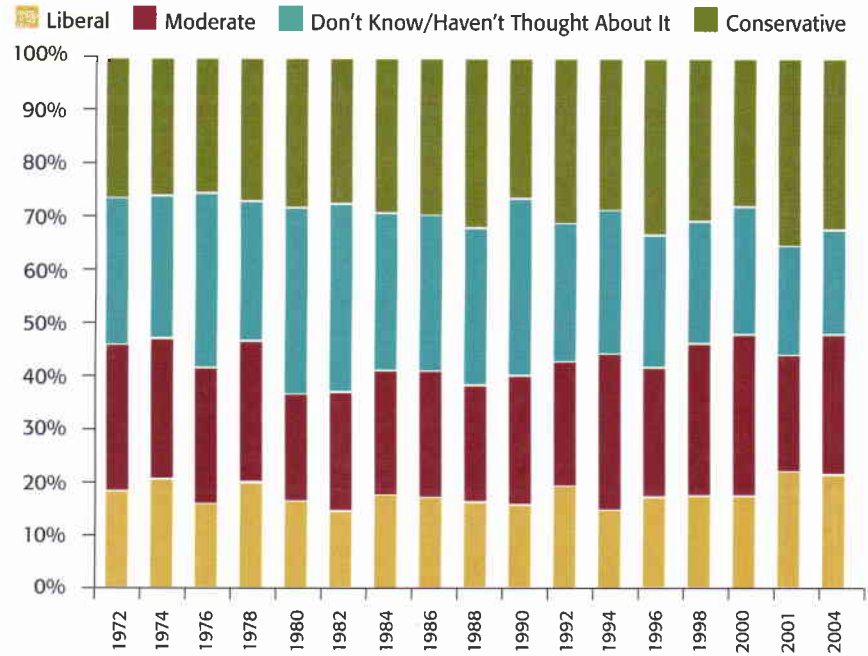
For some people, ideological controversy today centers on the role of the government in improving schools, encouraging a stronger work ethic, and stopping the flow of drugs into the country. For others, ideology focuses on whether to permit openly gay people into the military or sanction same-sex marriages, and on the best ways to instill moral values, build character, and encourage cohesive and lasting families. Ideology has economic, social/lifestyle, environmental, civil rights/civil liberties and foreign/defense policy dimensions. It is not surprising that some individuals are liberal or conservative in one dimension but not another.

Despite the twists and turns of American politics, the distribution of ideology in the nation has been remarkably consistent (see Figure 3–1). Conservatives outnumber liberals, but the proportion of conservatives did not increase substantially with the decisive Republican presidential victories of the 1980s or the congressional victories of the 1990s.

Moreover, in the United States most people are moderates or report not knowing whether they are liberal or conservative. In recent years, only 2 percent of the population saw themselves as extreme liberals, while extreme conservatives ranged from 2 to 4

FIGURE 3-1
Ideology over Time.

SOURCE: Center for Political Studies, University of Michigan, 2004 American National Election Study.



percent (see Figure 3-2). These percentages have changed little over time. Despite claims by ideological extremes in both parties of a move to the right or to the left, there are simply more voters in the middle who are moderate or do not have a preferred ideology.⁴¹

Both major parties target moderate or centrist voters, as reflected in the stands of the candidates on key issues, including their efforts to minimize ideological battles at the conventions. In 2008, John McCain won the GOP nomination despite opposition from some visible conservative leaders. At the same time, candidates from both parties also work hard to activate more ideological voters, sometimes called the “base” vote.

For those with a liberal or conservative preference, ideology provides a lens through which to view candidates and public policies. It helps simplify the complexities of politics, policies, personalities, and programs. However, most voters are selective or even inconsistent in their political views. A voter may support increased spending for defense but vote for the party that is for reducing defense spending because he or she has always voted for that party or prefers its stand on the environment. Or a person may favor tax cuts and a balanced budget while opposing substantial reductions in government programs.

The degree to which people have ideologically consistent attitudes and opinions varies but is often relatively low. Much of the time, people look at political issues individu-

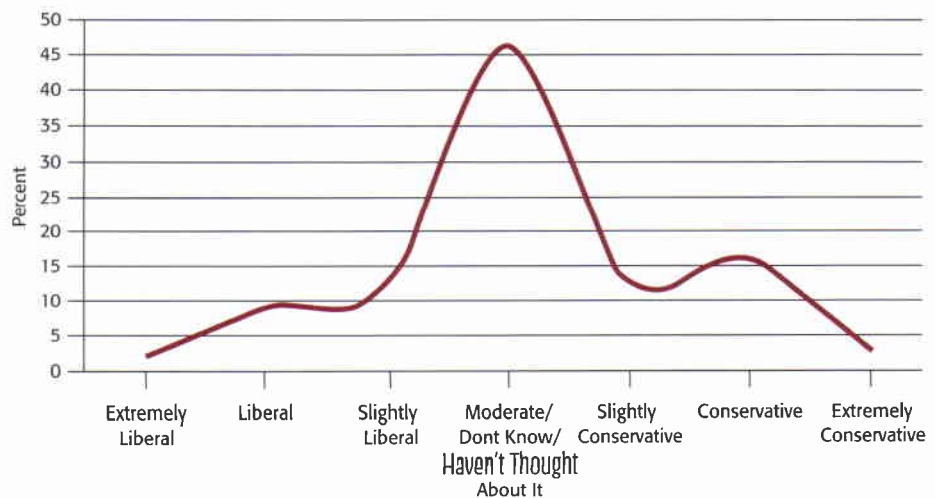


FIGURE 3-2
Distribution of Ideology in the U.S.

SOURCE: Center for Political Studies, University of Michigan, 2004 American National Election Study.

ally and do not evaluate parties or candidates systematically or according to an ideological litmus test. Indeed, many citizens favor specific policies at variance with their broader political philosophy. This problem becomes more complex as government gets involved in more and more policy areas. Hence many people, not surprisingly, have difficulty finding candidates who reflect their ideological preferences across a wide range of issues.

The absence of widespread and solidified liberal and conservative positions in the United States makes for politics and policy-making processes that are markedly different from those in most nations. Policy making in this country is characterized more by ad hoc coalitions than by fixed alignments that pit one set of ideologies against another. Our politics are marked more by moderation, pragmatism, and accommodation than by a prolonged battle between competing philosophies of government. Elsewhere, especially in countries such as Sweden or Germany, where a strong Socialist, Green, or Christian Democratic Party exists, things are different.

This does not mean that policies or ideas are not important in American politics. Since 1995, for instance, there has been a shift to more partisan and ideological voting in the House of Representatives. Part of the explanation is that Republicans have become more conservative and Democrats more liberal. Conservative Republicans have made large gains in the South, while the remaining Democrats have become more liberal,⁴² in other parts of the country, such as New England and parts of the Midwest, liberal Democrats have replaced moderate Republicans. Perhaps even more important, congressional districts are now being drawn to make more of them safe for one party or the other, so Republican members of Congress tend to appeal to the more conservative wing of their party, while Democratic members of Congress tend to appeal to the more liberal wing of their party.

Ideologies have consequences. These sharp cleavages in political thinking stir opposing interest groups into action. A wide variety of groups promote their views of what is politically desirable. It is also these differences in ideological perspectives that reinforce party loyalties and divide us at election time. Policy fights in Congress, between Congress and the White House, and during judicial confirmation hearings also have their roots in our uneasily coexisting ideological values.

Our hard-earned rights and liberties are never entirely safeguarded; they are fragile and shaped by the political, economic, and social climate of the day. In later chapters, we examine the interest groups and political parties that are battling to advance their values and compete in the American political culture. But before turning to those topics, we examine the social and economic diversity of the American political landscape in Chapter 4 and see why agreement on shared democratic values is all the more remarkable.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

- 5 Analyze the importance of political ideology in light of competing ideas such as pragmatism, practicality, and the changing agenda of American politics.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- 1 Identify the most important elements of the American political culture and how we learn them.

The American political culture consists of a widely held set of fundamental political values and accepted processes and institutions that help us manage conflict and resolve problems. American adults share a widespread commitment to classical liberalism, which embraces the importance of individual liberty, equality, individualism, power to the people, private property, limited government, nationalism, optimism, idealism, the democratic consensus, and justice and the rule of law. People respect the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the two-party system, and the right to elect officials on the basis of majority rule. We learn American political culture in the family, schools, religious and civic organizations, and through the mass media and political activities.

- 2 Assess the importance of the “American dream” in the context of economic change.

Even with the dramatic changes experienced in the United States, the American dream persists as an ideal. Reasons for this persistence include highly visible examples of people achieving the American dream, and more broadly, as a nation of immigrants, American residents perceive this to be a land of opportunity and upward mobility.

- 3 Compare and contrast different ideological assumptions about government.

The two most important ideologies in American politics are liberalism, a belief that government can and should help achieve justice and equality of opportunity, and

conservatism, a belief in limited government to ensure order, competitive markets, and personal opportunity while relying on free markets and individual initiative to solve social and economic problems. Socialism, which favors public ownership of the means of production, and libertarianism, which puts a premium on individual liberty and limited government, attract only modest followings in the United States.

4 Assess the arguments for and against each ideology.

Liberals hold the view that government can and should bring about justice, equality, and opportunity. Conservatives are less optimistic about what government can accomplish and fear that government solutions will limit liberty and stifle individual initiative. Critics of liberalism contend that liberals, by favoring government solutions to problems, limit the capacity of markets to function well and create large and unmanageable bureaucracies. Critics of conservatism contend

that some problems require government to become part of the solution and that too much faith in the market to solve problems is misplaced.

5 Analyze the importance of political ideology in light of competing ideas such as pragmatism, practicality, and the changing agenda of American politics.

Few in the United States are extremists. There are more conservatives than liberals, and ideology has come to be more important in the nomination battles in both parties and Congress. Because a large fraction of the public is moderate or has not thought much about ideology, politicians can expand their coalition of voters and supporters by being pragmatic. Because nonideological persons are less likely to vote, they are not as important in elections as the more committed ideologues. However, in close elections these pragmatic centrist voters can be critical.

Chapter Self-Test

1. Identify and define four of the shared political values listed on (pp. 74–80).
2. Which has been defined as “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit”? (p. 74)
 - a. Pragmatism
 - b. Social capital
 - c. Political parties
 - d. Political ideology
3. Which of the following “has taken over some functions the family used to perform”? (p. 80)
 - a. Schools
 - b. Churches
 - c. The internet
 - d. The mass media
4. What role do educational opportunity, economic wealth, and religious freedom play in achieving the American Dream? (pp. 81–82)
5. Which view was the result of a major shift in public perception after the Great Depression and New Deal? (pp. 83–84)
 - a. Government should focus on defense issues
 - b. Government should only regulate moral issues
 - c. Government should work to ensure social justice
 - d. Government should not become involved in the private lives of its citizens
6. Identify each belief as either conservative or liberal: (pp. 85–89)
 - a. Belief that government can bring about equality of opportunity
 - b. Belief that some government intervention in the economy is necessary to remedy the defects of capitalism
 - c. Pessimistic view of human nature
 - d. Preference for greater environmental protection
 - e. Belief in keeping government small, especially the national government
 - f. Preference for business
 - g. Preference for individual choice in moral issues such as same-gender marriage and abortion
 - h. Belief that the primary task of government is to ensure order
7. In a short essay, compare and contrast the major beliefs of liberalism and conservatism. Consider each ideology’s approach to moral, economic, and national defense issues. How are they alike? How are they different? Which do you think is more effective in today’s world? (pp. 85–89)
8. In a short essay define three major criticisms of both conservatism and liberalism. Which criticism do you find more persuasive? (pp. 85–89)
9. Identify which of the following is a major tenet of Libertarianism: (pp. 89–90)
 - a. Public ownership of business
 - b. Opposition to all government regulation
 - c. Government provision of universal health care
 - d. Use of government regulation only for moral issues such as abortion

10. In recent years, about how many people in the United States have identified themselves as “extreme” conservatives or liberals? (p. 91)
- 6%
 - 23%
 - 65%
 - 80%
11. How widespread and how solid are political parties in the United States? With this in mind, how important are values like moderation, pragmatism, and accommodation in policy making? (pp. 91–93)
12. During which of the following administrations was the term “liberal” popular among politicians in general? (p. 90)
- Bill Clinton
 - John F. Kennedy
 - Lyndon B. Johnson
 - Franklin D. Roosevelt

Key Terms

political culture, p. 74

suffrage, p. 74

social capital, p. 74

natural rights, p. 75

democratic consensus, p. 77

majority rule, p. 77

popular sovereignty, p. 77

nationalism, p. 78

American dream, p. 81

capitalism, p. 81

political ideology, p. 85

liberalism, p. 85

conservatism, p. 87

socialism, p. 89

libertarianism, p. 89

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