

TENTH ESSENTIALS EDITION

WE THE PEOPLE

GINSBERG · LOWI · WEIR · TOLBERT · SPITZER



TENTH ESSENTIALS EDITION

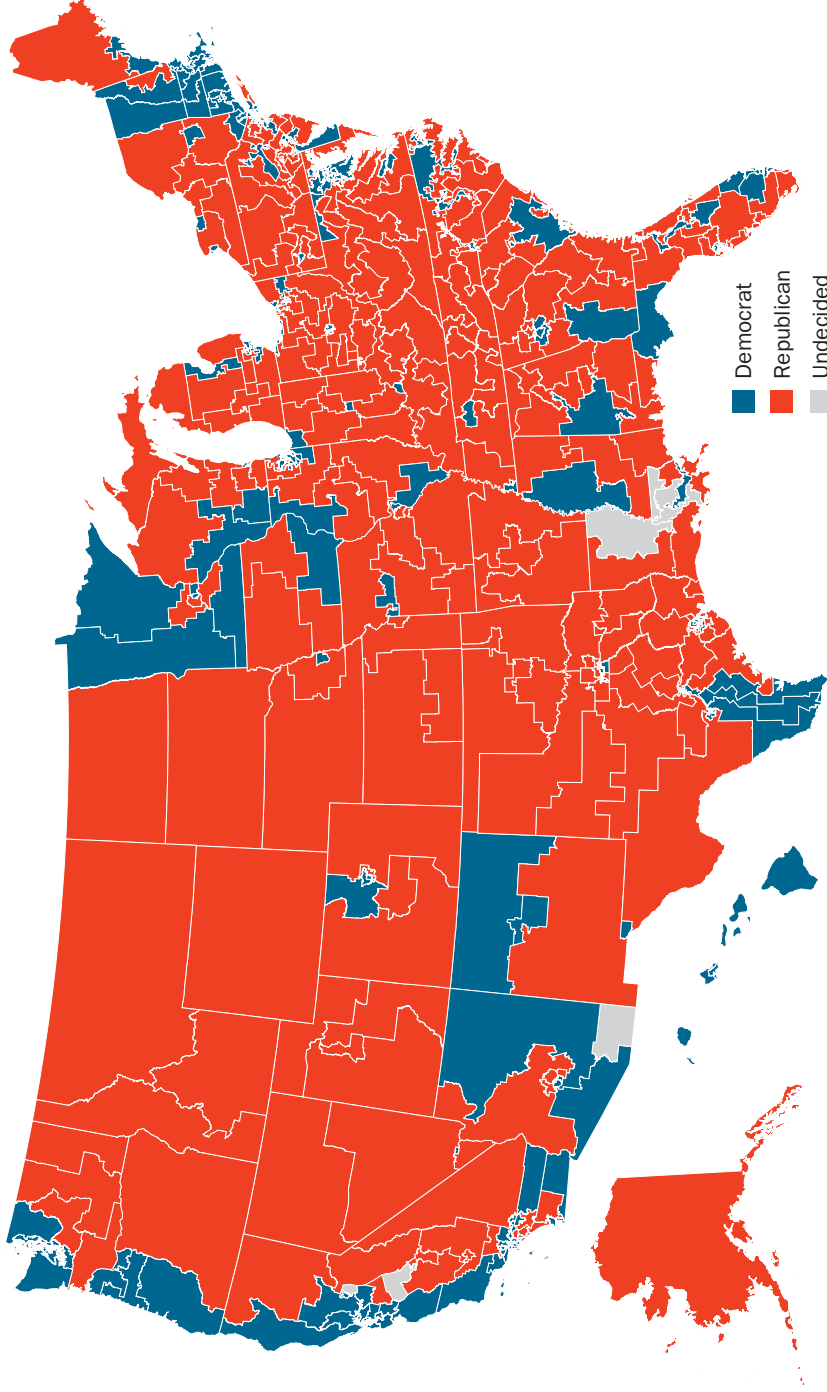
We the People

AN INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS

The 114th Congress, 2015–16*

United States House of Representatives

Democrats: 186 Republicans: 244 Undecided: 5 2014 Election Results: Republicans gained at least 10 seats.*



TENTH ESSENTIALS EDITION

We the People

AN INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS

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To Teresa Spitzer

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Angele, Anna, and Jason Lowi

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contents

Preface xxi

Acknowledgments xxiii

PART I Foundations

1 ● Introduction: The Citizen and Government 3

Government Affects Our Lives Every Day 5

Trust in Government Has Declined 5

Political Efficacy, Means People Can Make
a Difference 7

**Citizenship Is Based on Political Knowledge
and Participation 7**

Digital Citizenship Is the Newest Way to Participate 8

**● AMERICA SIDE BY SIDE Political Knowledge and Trust
in Government 9**

**Government Is Made Up of the Institutions and Procedures
by Which People Are Ruled 10**

Different Forms of Government Are Defined by Power and Freedom 11

Limits on Governments Encouraged Freedom 12

Expansion of Participation in America Changed the Political Balance 12

The Goal of Politics Is Having a Say in What Happens 13

The Identity of Americans Has Changed over Time 13

Immigration and Increasing Ethnic Diversity Have Always Caused Intense
Debate 14

Changing Government Criteria for Racial Classification Reflect America's
Changing Identity 14

Today the Country Still Confronts the Question "Who Are
Americans?" 15

America Is Built on the Ideas of Liberty, Equality, and Democracy 18

Liberty Means Freedom 18

Equality Means Treating People Fairly 19

Democracy Means That What the People Want Matters 21



American Political Values and Your Future 21

● **PLUG IN** 23

Key Terms 25

For Further Reading 26



2 ● The Founding and the Constitution 28

The First Founding: Ideals, Interests, and Conflicts 31

Narrow Interests and Political Conflicts Shaped the First Founding 31

British Taxes Hurt Colonial Economic Interests 32

Political Strife Radicalized the Colonists 33

The Declaration of Independence Explained Why the Colonists Wanted to Break with Great Britain 34

The Articles of Confederation Created America's First National Government 35

The Failure of the Articles Made the "Second Founding" Necessary 36

The Annapolis Convention Was Key to Calling a National Convention 36

Shays's Rebellion Showed How Weak the Government Was 37

The Constitutional Convention Didn't Start Out to Write a New Constitution 38

The Constitution Created Both Bold Powers and Sharp Limits on Power 41

The Legislative Branch Was Designed to Be the Most Powerful 43

The Executive Branch Created a Brand-New Office 44

The Judicial Branch Was a Check on Too Much Democracy 44

National Unity and Power Set the New Constitution Apart from the Old Articles 45

The Constitution Established the Process for Amendment 45

The Constitution Set Forth Rules for Its Own Ratification 46

The Constitution Limits the National Government's Power 46

Ratification of the Constitution Was Difficult 48

Federalists and Antifederalists Fought Bitterly over the Wisdom of the New Document 49

Both Federalists and Antifederalists Contributed to the Success of the New System 51

● **AMERICA SIDE BY SIDE** Comparing Systems of Government 52

Constitutional Amendments Dramatically Changed the Relationship between Citizens and the Government 53

Amendments: Many Are Called; Few Are Chosen 53

The Amendment Process Reflects "Higher Law" 54

The Constitution and Your Future 56

● **PLUG IN** 57

Key Terms 59

For Further Reading 60

3 ● Federalism 62

Federalism Shapes American Politics 65

Federalism Comes from the Constitution 65

The Definition of Federalism Has Changed Radically over Time 69

Federalism under the “Traditional System”
Gave Most Powers to the States 69

The Supreme Court Paved the Way for the End
of the “Traditional System” 71

FDR’s New Deal Remade the Government 73

Changing Court Interpretations of Federalism Helped
the New Deal While Preserving States’ Rights 75

Cooperative Federalism Pushes States to Achieve
National Goals 77

National Standards Have Been Advanced through Federal Programs 78

● AMERICA SIDE BY SIDE Government Spending in Federal and Unitary Systems 79

New Federalism Means More State Control 81

There Is No Simple Answer to Finding the Right National-State Balance 82

Federalism and Your Future 86

● PLUG IN 87

Key Terms 89

For Further Reading 90



4 ● Civil Liberties and Civil Rights 92

The Origin of the Bill of Rights Lies in Those Who Opposed the Constitution 95

The Fourteenth Amendment Created the Doctrine
of Incorporation 96

The First Amendment Guarantees Freedom of Religion 99

Separation between Church and State Comes from the
First Amendment 99

Free Exercise of Religion Means You Have a Right
to Your Beliefs 100

The First Amendment and Freedom of Speech and of the Press Ensure the Free Exchange of Ideas 101

Political Speech Is Consistently Protected 102

Symbolic Speech, Speech Plus, Assembly, and Petition Are Highly
Protected 103



Freedom of the Press Is Broad	105
Some Speech Has Only Limited Protection	105
The Second Amendment Now Protects an Individual's Right to Own a Gun	108
Rights of the Criminally Accused Are Based on Due Process of Law	110
The Fourth Amendment Protects against Unlawful Searches and Seizures	110
The Fifth Amendment Covers Court-Related Rights	111
The Sixth Amendment's Right to Counsel Is Crucial for a Fair Trial	113
The Eighth Amendment Bars Cruel and Unusual Punishment	114
The Right to Privacy Means the Right to Be Left Alone	115
● AMERICA SIDE BY SIDE Civil Liberties around the world	117
Civil Rights Are Protections by the Government	118
<i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> Established "Separate but Equal"	118
Racial Discrimination Began to Subside after World War II	119
The Civil Rights Struggle Escalated after <i>Brown v. Board of Education</i>	120
The Civil Rights Acts Made Equal Protection a Reality	121
The Civil Rights Struggle Was Extended to Other Disadvantaged Groups	125
Women Fought Gender Discrimination	125
Latinos and Asian Americans Fight for Rights	128
Native Americans Have Sovereignty but Still Lack Rights	129
Disabled Americans Won a Great Victory in 1990	130
Gay Men and Lesbians Gained Significant Legal Ground	130
Affirmative Action Attempts to Right Past Wrongs	132
The Supreme Court Shifts the Burden of Proof in Affirmative Action	132
Civil Liberties, Civil Rights, and Your Future	134
● PLUG IN	135
Key Terms	137
For Further Reading	139

PART II Politics

5 ● Public Opinion 140

Public Opinion Represents Attitudes about Politics 143

- Americans Share Common Political Values 144
- America's Dominant Political Ideologies Are Liberalism and Conservatism 146
- Americans Exhibit Low Trust in Government 147

Political Socialization Shapes Public Opinion 148

Political Knowledge Is Important in Shaping Public Opinion 153

The Media and Government Mold Opinion 155

- The Government Leads Public Opinion 157
- Private Groups Also Shape Public Opinion 157
- The News Media's Message Impacts Public Opinion 158
- Government Policies Also Respond to Public Opinion 158

● AMERICA SIDE BY SIDE Opinion on the Economy and the Environment 159

Measuring Public Opinion Is Crucial to Understanding What It Is 160

- Public-Opinion Surveys Are Accurate If Done Properly 160
- Why Are Some Polls Wrong? 162

Public Opinion, Democracy, and Your Future 166

● PLUG IN 167

Key Terms 169

For Further Reading 170

6 ● The Media 172

Traditional Media Have Always Mattered in a Democracy 175

- Print Media 175
- Broadcast Media 177
- More Media Outlets Are Owned by Fewer Companies 178

The Rise of New Media Has Strongly Influenced How Americans Get Their News 179

- Online News Takes Many Forms 181

● AMERICA SIDE BY SIDE Internet Use and Political News 182

- New Media Have Many Benefits 185
- But New Media Raise Concerns about Investigative Power, News Quality, and Political Tolerance 186



The Media Affect Power Relations in American Politics 186
 The Media Influence Public Opinion through Agenda Setting, Framing, and Priming 187
 Leaked Information Can Come from Government Officials or Independent Sources 189
 Adversarial Journalism Has Risen in Recent Years 190
 Broadcast Media Are Regulated but Not Print Media 191

The Media, Democracy, and Your Future 193

- **PLUG IN** 194

Key Terms 196

For Further Reading 197



7 ● Political Parties, Participation, and Elections 198

Parties and Elections Have Been Vital to American Politics and Government 201

- Political Parties Arose from the Electoral Process 201
- Parties Recruit Candidates 201
- Parties Organize Nominations 202
- Parties Help Get Out the Vote 202
- Parties Organize Power in Congress 203
- Presidents Need Political Parties 204

America Is One of the Few Nations with a Two-Party System 204

- Electoral Realignments Define Party Systems in American History 211
- American Third Parties Have Altered the Shape of the Major Parties 212
- Group Affiliations Are Based on Voters' Psychological Ties to One of the Parties 213

Political Participation Takes Both Traditional and Online Forms 215

- Voting Is the Most Important Form of Traditional Participation 215
- Online Political Participation Is Surging 215
- Voter Turnout in America Is Low 216
- Why Do People Vote? 218

- **AMERICA SIDE BY SIDE** Voter Turnout in Comparison 220

Voters Decide Based on Party, Issues, and Candidate 221

- Party Loyalty Is Important 221
- Issues Can Shape an Election 222
- Candidate Characteristics Are More Important in the Media Age 223

The Electoral Process Has Many Levels and Rules 224

- The Electoral College Still Organizes Presidential Elections 225

The 2012 and 2014 Elections 226

- The Republican Nomination Process in 2012 227
- The 2012 General Election 228
- The 2014 Midterm Elections 230

Money Is the Mother’s Milk of Politics 231
 Campaign Funds Come from Direct Mail, the Rich, PACs, and Parties 231

Political Parties, Elections, and Your Future 235

- **PLUG IN** 237
- Key Terms 239
- For Further Reading 240

8 ● Interest Groups 242

Interest Groups Form to Advocate for Different Interests 245

- What Interests Are Represented? 246
- Some Interests Are Not Represented 247

- **AMERICA SIDE BY SIDE** Interest Group Membership 248
- Group Membership Has an Upper-Class Bias 249

The Organizational Components of Groups Include Money, Offices, and Members 250

- The Internet Has Changed the Way Interest Groups Foster Participation 254

The Number of Groups Has Increased in Recent Decades 254

- The Expansion of Government Has Spurred the Growth of Groups 254
- Public Interest Groups Grew in the 1960s and '70s 255

Interest Groups Use Different Strategies to Gain Influence 255

- Direct Lobbying Combines Education, Persuasion, and Pressure 257
- Cultivating Access Means Getting the Attention of Decision Makers 258
- Using the Courts (Litigation) Can Be Highly Effective 259
- Mobilizing Public Opinion Brings Wider Attention to an Issue 260
- Groups Often Use Electoral Politics 262

Groups, Interests, and Your Future 264

- **PLUG IN** 265
- Key Terms 267
- For Further Reading 268





PART III Institutions

9 ● Congress 270

Congress Represents the American People 273

- The House and Senate Offer Differences in Representation 273
- Representation Can Be Sociological or Agency 274
- The Electoral Connection Hinges on Incumbency 277
- Direct Patronage Means Bringing Home the Bacon 282

The Organization of Congress Is Shaped by Party 284

- Party Leadership in the House and the Senate Organizes Power 285
- The Committee System Is the Core of Congress 285
- The Staff System Is the Power behind the Power 287

Rules of Lawmaking Explain How a Bill Becomes a Law 288

- The First Step Is Committee Deliberation 290
- Debate Is Less Restricted in the Senate Than in the House 290
- Conference Committees Reconcile House and Senate Versions of Legislation 292
- The President's Veto Controls the Flow of Legislation 292

Several Factors Influence How Congress Decides 293

- Constituents Matter 293
- Interest Groups Influence Constituents and Congress 293
- Party Leaders Rely on Party Discipline 294
- Partisanship Has Thwarted the Ability of Congress to Decide 298

Much Congressional Energy Goes to Tasks Other Than Lawmaking 300

- Congress Oversees How Legislation Is Implemented 300
- **AMERICA SIDE BY SIDE Public Opinion of the Legislature 301**
 - Special Senate Powers Include Advice and Consent 302
 - Impeachment Is the Power to Remove Top Officials 302

Congress and Your Future 303

- **PLUG IN 305**
- Key Terms 307**
- For Further Reading 309**

10 ● The Presidency 310

Presidential Power Is Rooted in the Constitution 313

Expressed Powers Come Directly from the Words of the Constitution 314

Delegated Powers Come from Congress 320

Modern Presidents Have Claimed Inherent Powers 320

● AMERICA SIDE BY SIDE Presidential Powers 322

Institutional Resources of Presidential Power Are Numerous 323

The Cabinet Is Often Distant from the President 323

The White House Staff Constitutes the President's Eyes and Ears 323

The Executive Office of the President Is a Visible Sign of the Modern Strong Presidency 325

The Vice Presidency Has Become More Important since the 1970s 325

The First Spouse Has Become Important to Policy 326

Party, Popular Mobilization, and Administration Make Presidents Stronger 327

Going Public Means Trying to Whip Up the People 327

The Administrative Strategy Increases Presidential Control 330

Presidential Power Has Limits 333

The Presidency and Your Future 335

● PLUG IN 336

Key Terms 338

For Further Reading 339



11 ● Bureaucracy 340

Bureaucracy Exists to Improve Efficiency 343

Bureaucrats Fulfill Important Roles 344

The Size of the Federal Service Has Actually Declined 345

The Executive Branch Is Organized Hierarchically 348

● AMERICA SIDE BY SIDE Bureaucracy in Comparison 349

Federal Bureaucracies Promote Welfare and Security 350

Federal Bureaucracies Promote the Public Welfare 350

Federal Agencies Provide for National Security 352

Federal Bureaucracies Help to Maintain a Strong National Economy 356

Several Forces Control Bureaucracy 358

The President as Chief Executive Can Direct Agencies 358



Congress Promotes Responsible Bureaucracy 360

Can the Bureaucracy Be Reformed? 362

Bureaucracy, Democracy, and Your Future 363

● **PLUG IN** 364

Key Terms 366

For Further Reading 367



12 ● The Federal Courts 368

The Legal System Settles Disputes 371

Court Cases Proceed under Criminal and Civil Law 371

Types of Courts Include Trial, Appellate, and Supreme 372

The Federal Courts Hear a Small Percentage of All Cases 375

The Lower Federal Courts Handle Most Cases 375

The Appellate Courts Hear 20 Percent of Lower Court Cases 376

The Supreme Court Is the Court of Final Appeal 377

Judges Are Appointed by the President and Approved by the Senate 378

The Power of the Supreme Court Is Judicial Review 380

Judicial Review Covers Acts of Congress 380

● **AMERICA SIDE BY SIDE** Judicial Review across the Globe 381

Judicial Review Applies to Presidential Actions 382

Judicial Review Also Applies to State Actions 383

Most Cases Reach the Supreme Court by Appeal 384

The Solicitor General, Law Clerks, and Interest Groups Also Control the Flow of Cases 385

The Supreme Court's Procedures Mean Cases May Take Months or Years 388

Supreme Court Decisions Are Influenced by Activism and Ideology 391

The Federal Judiciary and Your Future 394

PLUG IN 395

Key Terms 397

For Further Reading 398

PART IV Policy

13 ● Domestic Policy 400

The Tools for Making Policy Are Techniques of Control 403

Promotional Policies Get People to Do Things by Giving Them Rewards 403

Regulatory Policies Are Rules Backed by Penalties 405

Redistributive Policies Affect Broad Classes of People 407

Should the Government Intervene in the Economy? 409

● AMERICA SIDE BY SIDE Tax Rates around the World 410

Social Policy and the Welfare System Buttress Equality 411

The History of the Government Welfare System Dates Only to the 1930s 412

The Social Security Act of 1935 Was the Foundation of the Welfare System 413

Welfare Reform Has Dominated the Welfare Agenda in Recent Years 415

The Cycle of Poverty Can Be Broken by Education, Health, and Housing Policies 417

Education Policies Provide Life Tools 417

Health Policies Mean Fewer Sick Days 420

Housing Policies Provide Residential Stability 423

Social Policy Spending Benefits the Middle Class More Than the Poor 424

Senior Citizens Now Receive over a Third of All Federal Dollars 425

The Middle and Upper Classes Benefit from Social Policies 426

The Working Poor Receive Fewer Benefits 427

Spending for the Nonworking Poor Is Declining 428

Minorities, Women, and Children Are Most Likely to Face Poverty 428

Social Policy and Your Future 430

● PLUG IN 431

Key Terms 433

For Further Reading 434





14 ● Foreign Policy 436

Foreign Policy Goals Are Related 439

- Security Is Based on Military Strength 439
- Economic Prosperity Helps All Nations 443
- America Seeks a More Humane World 444

American Foreign Policy Is Shaped by Government and Nongovernment Actors 446

- The President Leads Foreign Policy 446
- The Bureaucracy Implements and Informs Policy Decisions 447
- Congress's Legal Authority Can Be Decisive 448
- Interest Groups Pressure Foreign Policy Decision Makers 449
- Putting It Together 451

Tools of American Foreign Policy Include Diplomacy, Force, and Money 451

- Diplomacy Is the Master Policy Tool 451
- The United Nations Is the World's Congress 452
- The International Monetary Structure Helps Provide Economic Stability 453
- Economic Aid Has Two Sides 453
- Collective Security Is Designed to Deter War 454
- Military Force Is "Politics by Other Means" 455

● AMERICA SIDE BY SIDE Military Expenditures around the World 456

- Arbitration Resolves Disputes 457

Foreign Policy, Democracy, and Your Future 457

● PLUG IN 458

Key Terms 460

For Further Reading 461

● Appendix

The Declaration of Independence A1

The Articles of Confederation A5

The Constitution of the United States of America A11

Amendments to the Constitution A23

The Federalist Papers A33

The Anti-Federalist Papers A43

Presidents and Vice Presidents A51

Glossary A55

Endnotes A69

Answer Key A95

Photo Credits A97

Index A99

preface

This book has been and continues to be dedicated to developing a satisfactory response to the question more and more Americans are asking: Why should we be engaged with government and politics? Through the first nine editions, we sought to answer this question by making the text directly relevant to the lives of the students who would be reading it. As a result, we tried to make politics interesting by demonstrating that students' interests are at stake and that they therefore need to take a personal, even selfish, interest in the outcomes of government. At the same time, we realized that students needed guidance in how to become politically engaged. Beyond providing students with a core of political knowledge, we needed to show them how they could apply that knowledge as participants in the political process. The “Plug In” sections in each chapter help achieve that goal.

As events from the last several years have reminded us, “what government does” can be a matter of life and death. Recent events have reinforced the centrality of government in citizens' lives. The U.S. government has fought two wars abroad, while claiming sweeping new powers at home that could compromise the liberties of its citizens. America's role in the world is discussed daily both inside and outside the classroom. Moreover, the Internet has opened up new avenues to participation and mobilization. Reflecting all of these trends, this new Tenth Essentials Edition shows more than any other book on the market (1) how students are connected to government; (2) how digital media are changing (or not changing) the way Americans experience politics; and (3) why students should think critically about government and politics. These themes are incorporated in the following ways:

- **New “Politics and Your Future” chapter conclusions give students direct, personal reasons to care about politics.** These sections focus on the political opportunities and challenges that students will face in their lives as a result of emerging social, political, demographic, and technological change. The conclusions reprise the important point made in the chapter introductions that *government matters* and prompt students to consider how political change will impact their futures.
- **New “Plug In” sections show students how to make a difference in politics.** These boxes replace the older “Get Involved” sections with succinct, realistic steps today's students can take—online and off—to *inform* themselves, *express* themselves, *connect* with others, and *act* in politically meaningful ways.

- **New content on how digital media are changing politics is now incorporated throughout the text.** With the Ninth Edition, we added “Digital Citizens” boxes to explore the ways that new information technologies are shaping how we experience politics. In this Tenth Edition, the coverage of digital politics has been integrated into the body of the text, in recognition of the fact that digital media have become an integral part of American politics.
- **New “America Side by Side” boxes use data figures and tables to provide a comparative perspective.** These one-page boxes appear in every chapter and provide a visual presentation of comparative data. By comparing political institutions and behavior across countries, students gain a better understanding of how specific features of the American system shape politics.
- **Chapter introductions focus on “What Government Does and Why It Matters.”** In recent decades, cynicism about “big government” has dominated the political zeitgeist. But critics of government often forget that governments do a great deal for citizens. Every year, Americans are the beneficiaries of billions of dollars of goods and services from government programs. Government “does” a lot, and what it does matters a great deal to everyone, including college students. At the start of each chapter, this theme is introduced and applied to the chapter’s topic. The goal is to show students that government and politics mean something to their daily lives.
- **Built-in study guides at the end of each chapter offer valuable learning tools.** A practice quiz and glossary definitions help students review the chapter material. Each chapter also includes a list of recommended readings to help the students get started on research projects.

We continue to hope that our book will itself be accepted as a form of enlightened political action. This Tenth Edition is another chance. It is an advancement toward our goal. We promise to keep trying.

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TENTH ESSENTIALS EDITION

We the People

AN INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS

Most Americans share the core political values of liberty, equality, and democracy and want their government and its policies to reflect these values. However, people often disagree on the meaning of these values and what government should do to protect them.



Introduction: The Citizen and Government

WHAT GOVERNMENT DOES AND WHY IT MATTERS Americans sometimes appear to believe that the government is an institution that does things to them and from which they need protection. Students may wonder why they have to fill in long, often complicated forms to apply for financial assistance. They may frown when they see the payroll tax deducted from their small paycheck. Like Americans of all ages, they may resent municipal “red-light” cameras designed to photograph traffic violators—and send them tickets.

Although most people complain about something that government does to them, most everyone wants the government to do a great deal *for* them. Some of the services that people expect from government are big-ticket items, such as providing national security and keeping the nation safe from terrorist attacks. We all know that government pays for and directs the military. Students attending a state university know that state and federal public dollars help support their education.

Yet many of the other services that government provides are far less visible, and often it is not even clear that government plays a role at all. For example, students grabbing a quick bite to eat between classes take it for granted that their hamburger will not contain bacteria that might make them sick. Without federal inspection of meat, however, chances of contracting food-borne

illnesses would be much higher and the everyday task of eating would be much riskier. Driving to school would not be possible if not for the tens of billions of dollars spent each year on road construction and maintenance by federal, state, and municipal governments. Like most Americans, young people expect to get reliable information about the weather for the week ahead and warnings about dangerous events such as hurricanes. The National Weather Service and the National Hurricane Center both provide reliable forecasts for such simple calculations as whether to bring an umbrella to more significant calculations made by airlines and air traffic control to get travelers safely where they need to go. These daily decisions don't seem to involve government but in fact they do. Indeed, most Americans would not be here at all if it were not for federal immigration policies, which set the terms for entry into the United States and for obtaining citizenship.

Government is the term generally used to describe the formal institutions through which a land and its people are ruled. As the government seeks to protect its citizens, it faces the challenge of doing so in ways that are true to the key American political values of liberty, equality, and democracy. Liberty means personal freedom and a government whose powers are limited by law. Equality is the idea that all individuals should have the right to participate in political life and society on equivalent terms. Democracy means placing considerable political power in the hands of ordinary people. Most Americans find it easy to affirm all three values in principle. In practice, however, matters are not always so clear. Policies and practices that seem to affirm one of these values may contradict another. Americans, moreover, are sometimes willing to subordinate liberty to security and have frequently tolerated significant departures from the principles of equality and democracy.

chaptergoals

- **Explore Americans' attitudes toward government (pp. 5–7)**
- **Describe the role of the citizen in politics (pp. 7–10)**
- **Define government and forms of government (pp. 10–13)**
- **Show how the social composition of the American population has changed over time (pp. 13–18)**
- **Analyze whether the U.S. system of government upholds American political values (pp. 18–21)**

● Government Affects Our Lives Every Day

Explore Americans' attitudes toward government

Since the United States was established as a nation, Americans have been reluctant to grant government too much power, and they have often been suspicious of politicians. But over the course of the nation's

history, Americans have also turned to government for assistance in times of need and have strongly supported the government in periods of war. In 1933 the power of the government began to expand to meet the crises created by the stock market crash of 1929, the Great Depression, and the run on banks. Congress passed legislation that brought the government into the businesses of home mortgages, farm mortgages, credit, and relief of personal distress. More recently, when the economy fell into a recession in 2008 and 2009, the federal government stepped in to shore up the financial system, oversee the restructuring of the ailing auto companies, and inject hundreds of billions of dollars into the faltering economy. Today, the national government is an enormous institution with programs and policies reaching into every corner of American life. It oversees the nation's economy; it is the nation's largest employer; it provides citizens with a host of services; it controls the world's most formidable military establishment; and it regulates a wide range of social and commercial activities.

Much of what citizens have come to depend on and take for granted—as, somehow, part of the natural environment—is in fact created by government. Take the example of a typical college student's day, throughout which that student relies on a host of services and activities organized by national, state, and local government agencies. The extent of this dependence on government is illustrated by Table 1.1.

Trust in Government Has Declined

Ironically, even as popular dependence on it has grown, the American public's view of government has turned more sour. Public trust in government has declined, and Americans are now more likely to feel that they can do little to influence the government's actions. Different groups vary somewhat in their levels of trust: African Americans and Latinos express more confidence in the federal government than do whites. But even among the most supportive groups, more than half do not trust the government.¹ These developments are important because politically engaged citizens and public confidence in government are vital for the health of a democracy.

By 2013, only 19 percent of Americans reported trusting the government in Washington “to do what is right” all or most of the time, down from 75 percent in the early 1960s.² Several factors contributed to the decline in trust. Revelations about the faulty information that led up to the war in Iraq and ongoing concern about the war had increased Americans' mistrust of government. In March 2007, 54 percent of those surveyed believed that the Bush administration had deliberately misled the American public about whether Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. By 2012, the government's inability to get the economy moving had further undermined trust in government. When political differences over the Affordable Care Act, President Obama's program to reform the American health care system (also called “Obamacare”), led to a two-week partial government

TABLE 1.1

The Presence of Government in the Daily Life of a Student at “State University”

TIME OF DAY	SCHEDULE
7:00 AM	Wake up. Standard time set by the national government.
7:10 AM	Shower. Water courtesy of local government, either a public entity or a regulated private company. Brush your teeth with toothpaste whose cavity-fighting claims have been verified by a federal agency.
7:30 AM	Have a bowl of cereal with milk for breakfast. “Nutrition Facts” on food labels are a federal requirement, pasteurization of milk required by state law, recycling the empty cereal box and milk carton enabled by state or local laws.
8:30 AM	Drive or take public transportation to campus. Air bags and seat belts required by federal and state laws. Roads and bridges paid for by state and local governments, speed and traffic laws set by state and local governments, public transportation subsidized by all levels of government.
8:45 AM	Arrive on campus of large public university. Buildings are 70 percent financed by state taxpayers.
9:00 AM	First class: Chemistry 101. Tuition partially paid by a federal loan (more than half the cost of university instruction is paid for by taxpayers), chemistry lab paid for with grants from the National Science Foundation (a federal agency).
Noon	Eat lunch. College cafeteria financed by state dormitory authority on land grant from federal Department of Agriculture.
2:00 PM	Second class: American Government 101 (your favorite class!). You may be taking this class because it is required by the state legislature or because it fulfills a university requirement.
4:00 PM	Third class: Computer Lab. Free computers, software, and Internet access courtesy of state subsidies plus grants and discounts from IBM and Microsoft, the costs of which are deducted from their corporate income taxes; Internet built in part by federal government.
6:00 PM	Eat hamburger for dinner. Meat inspected by federal agencies.
7:00 PM	Work at part-time job at the campus library. Minimum wage set by federal, state, or local government, books and journals in library paid for by state taxpayers.
8:15 PM	Check the status of your application for a federal student loan (FAFSA) on the Department of Education’s website at studentaid.ed.gov .
10:00 PM	Go home. Street lighting paid for by county and city governments, police patrols by city government.
10:15 PM	Watch TV. Networks regulated by federal government, cable public-access channels required by city law. Weather forecast provided to broadcasters by a federal agency.

shutdown in 2013 and the second dramatic showdown over raising the national debt limit in two years (usually a routine matter), public trust once again dipped to historically low levels.³

Does it matter if Americans trust their government? For the most part, the answer is yes. As we have seen, most Americans rely on government for a wide range of services and laws that they simply take for granted. But long-term distrust in government can result in public refusal to pay taxes adequate to support such widely approved public activities. Low levels of confidence may also make it difficult for government to attract talented and effective workers to public service.⁴ The weakening of government as a result of prolonged levels of distrust may ultimately harm the capacity of the United States to defend its national interest in the world economy and may jeopardize its national security. Likewise, a weak government can do little to assist citizens who need help in weathering periods of sharp economic or technological change.

Political Efficacy Means People Can Make a Difference

Another important trend in American views about government has been a declining sense of **political efficacy**, the belief that ordinary citizens can affect what government does, that they can take action to make government listen to them. In 2014, 78 percent of Americans said that elected officials do not care what people like them think; in 1960, only 25 percent felt so shut out of government.⁵ Accompanying this sense that ordinary people cannot be heard is a growing belief that government is not run for the benefit of all the people. In 2012, 57 percent of the public disagreed with the idea that the “government is really run for the benefit of all the people.”⁶ These views are widely shared across the age spectrum.

This widely felt loss of political efficacy is bad news for American democracy. The feeling that you can’t affect government decisions can lead to a self-perpetuating cycle of apathy, declining political participation, and withdrawal from political life. Why bother to participate if you believe it makes no difference? Yet the belief that you can be effective is the first step needed to influence government. Not every effort of ordinary citizens to influence government will succeed, but without any such efforts, government decisions will be made by a smaller and smaller circle of powerful people. Such loss of broad popular influence over government actions undermines the key feature of American democracy: government by the people.

● Citizenship Is Based on Political Knowledge and Participation

Describe the role of the citizen in politics

Beginning with the ancient Greeks, citizenship has meant membership in one’s community. In fact, the Greeks did not even conceive of the individual as a complete person. The complete person was the public person, the *citizen*; a noncitizen or a private person was referred to as an *idiōtēs*. Participation in public affairs was virtually the definition of citizenship.



When the federal government partially shut down in October 2013, millions of citizens were affected, including visitors who were turned away from the Statue of Liberty. Citizens need political knowledge to understand how such events affect their lives and what policies promote their interests.

Today, voting is considered the building block of **citizenship**—informed and active membership in a political community—as it is the method by which Americans choose their elected leaders. Citizens can influence their government in many ways, including serving on a jury, lobbying, writing a letter to the editor of a local newspaper, and engaging in a public rally or protest. The point of these activities is to influence the government.

Citizens need political knowledge to figure out how best to act in their own interests. To take a simple example, if the garbage is not collected from in front of people's homes, people need to know that this job is the responsibility of their local government, not the national government. Americans often complain that government does not respond to their needs, but sometimes the failure of government to act may simply result from citizens' lacking the information necessary to present their problems to the correct government office or agency. To put the matter more simply, effective participation requires knowledge. (It should come as no surprise, then, that people who have less knowledge of politics vote at lower

rates than those with more knowledge.) Knowledge is the first prerequisite for achieving an increased sense of political efficacy.

Digital Citizenship Is the Newest Way to Participate

As more and more of our social, workplace, and educational activities have migrated online, so too have opportunities for political knowledge and participation, creating a new concept of "digital citizenship." Digital citizenship is the ability to participate in society online, and it is increasingly important in politics. A 2012 Pew survey found that 75 percent of Americans read the news online and more than 6 in 10 look up political information online. People also seek out government information online; 67 percent visit a local, state, or federal government website.⁷ Digital citizenship benefits individuals, but it also provides advantages to society as a whole. Digital citizens are more likely to be

Political Knowledge and Trust in Government

In every country, citizens rely on government to provide certain services. But the relationship between a government and its people can vary, as does the level of trust a people have in their government. Trust in government may encourage citizens to pay taxes, engage in civic behavior, or join the government workforce. Lack of trust can make it hard for government officials to achieve public goals by reducing support for spending on public programs. Lack of trust may also cause citizens to be cynical about government and lead them to disengage from public life. In this sense, lack of trust

can undermine democracy. At the extreme, lack of trust can lead to social unrest and even revolution.

How much do levels of trust in government vary across countries? Which group is more likely to trust in government, the general population or the informed public? Many of the democracies in the table below, including the United States, have lower levels of trust in government than China, a nondemocratic country. Why would Americans be less trusting of their government than citizens of China, whose government is much less open to public scrutiny?

Country	Percentage Who Trusts Government among General Public	Percentage Who Trusts Government among Informed Public	Difference	Type of Government
	Public	Public		
China	70	80	-10	Communist state
India	64	71	-7	Parliamentary federal republic
Brazil	51	55	-4	Presidential federal republic
United States	45	59	-14	Presidential federal republic
Germany	44	55	-11	Parliamentary federal republic
Turkey	43	42	1	Republican parliamentary democracy
United Kingdom	43	53	-10	Constitutional monarchy
Poland	34	48	-14	Parliamentary republic
Russia	30	36	-6	Nondemocratic federation

NOTE: The data for the general population are based on 1,000 responses (adults age 18 years and older) per country surveyed. The data for informed publics are based on 500 responses each in China and the United States and 200 responses each in other countries; respondents are adults ages 25–64 who are college educated and in the top 25 percent of household income for their age bracket in their country, and who report significant engagement in business and policy news.

SOURCE: Edelman Trust Barometer Survey, 2013, http://edelmaneditions.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/EMBARGOED-2013-Edelman-Trust-Barometer-Global-Deck_FINAL.pdf (accessed 1/14/14).