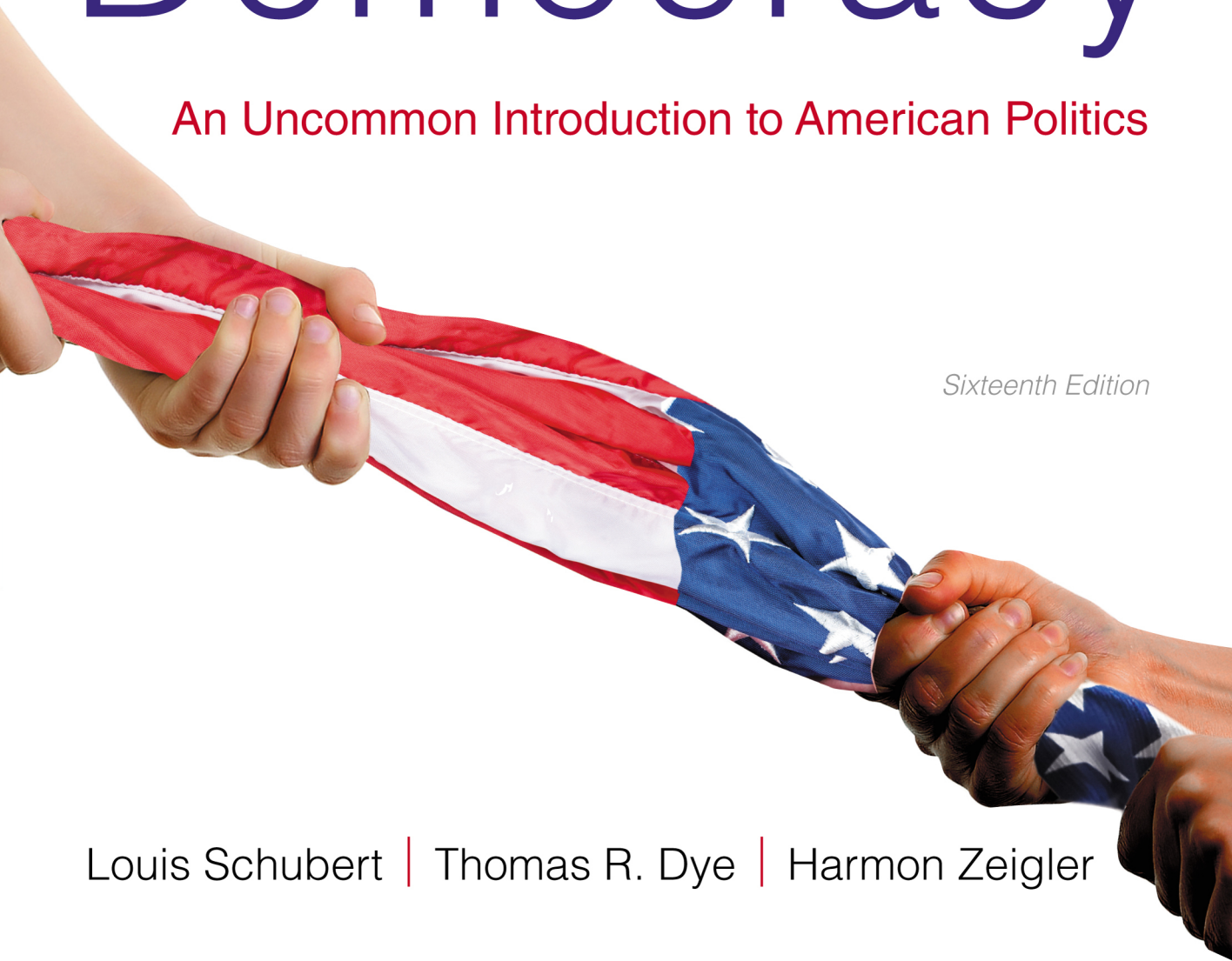


# The Irony of Democracy

An Uncommon Introduction to American Politics

*Sixteenth Edition*

Louis Schubert | Thomas R. Dye | Harmon Zeigler



# THE IRONY OF DEMOCRACY

An Uncommon Introduction to American Politics



# THE IRONY OF DEMOCRACY

An Uncommon Introduction to American Politics

SIXTEENTH EDITION

**Louis Schubert**

**Thomas R. Dye**

**Harmon Zeigler, Late**



Australia • Brazil • Japan • Korea • Mexico • Singapore • Spain • United Kingdom • United States

This is an electronic version of the print textbook. Due to electronic rights restrictions, some third party content may be suppressed. Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. The publisher reserves the right to remove content from this title at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it. For valuable information on pricing, previous editions, changes to current editions, and alternate formats, please visit [www.cengage.com/highered](http://www.cengage.com/highered) to search by ISBN#, author, title, or keyword for materials in your areas of interest.

**The Irony of Democracy: An Uncommon  
Introduction to American Politics,  
Sixteenth Edition**

**Louis Schubert, Thomas R. Dye,  
Harmon Zeigler, Late**

Publisher: Suzanne Jeans

Executive Editor: Carolyn Merrill

Acquisitions Editor: Anita Devine

Development Editor: Jean Findley

Assistant Editor: Patrick Roach

Editorial Assistant: Eireann Aspell

Brand Manager: Lydia LeStar

Market Development Manager: Kyle  
Zimmerman

Rights Acquisitions Specialist: Jennifer  
Meyer Dare

Manufacturing Planner: Fola Orekoya

Art and Design Direction, Production  
Management, and Composition:  
PreMediaGlobal

Cover Image: Shutterstock

Cover Designer: Riezebos Holzbaur/  
Tim Herald

© 2014, 2012, 2009 Wadsworth, Cengage Learning

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of this work covered by the copyright herein may be reproduced, transmitted, stored or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including but not limited to photocopying, recording, scanning, digitizing, taping, Web distribution, information networks, or information storage and retrieval systems, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

For product information and technology assistance, contact us at  
**Cengage Learning Customer & Sales Support, 1-800-354-9706.**

For permission to use material from this text or product,  
submit all requests online at **www.cengage.com/permissions.**

Further permissions questions can be emailed to  
**permissionrequest@cengage.com.**

Library of Congress Control Number: 2012951454

ISBN-13: 978-1-133-60725-0

ISBN-10: 1-133-60725-X

**Wadsworth**

20 Channel Center Street  
Boston, MA 02210  
USA

Cengage Learning is a leading provider of customized learning solutions with office locations around the globe, including Singapore, the United Kingdom, Australia, Mexico, Brazil, and Japan. Locate your local office at **international.cengage.com/region.**

Cengage Learning products are represented in Canada by  
**Nelson Education, Ltd.**

For your course and learning solutions, visit **www.cengage.com.**

Purchase any of our products at your local college store or at our preferred online store **www.cengagebrain.com.**

**Instructors:** Please visit **login.cengage.com** and log in to access instructor-specific resources.

Printed in the United States of America  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 16 15 14 13 12

# CONTENTS

	TO THE STUDENT	xix
	TO THE INSTRUCTOR	xxi
	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xxv
	SUPPLEMENTS FOR INSTRUCTORS	xxvii
CHAPTER 1	<b>The Irony of Democracy</b>	<b>1</b>
	The Meaning of Elitism	2
	The Meaning of Democracy	5
	Elitism in a Democracy	7
	<i>Issues with Direct Democracy</i>	8
	<i>Representative Democracy and Elites</i>	8
	FOCUS: MASS DISTRUST OF THE U.S. ELITE	9
	<i>Elite Competition as the Basis of Pluralism</i>	10
	The Meaning of Pluralism	12
	How Elitism and Pluralism Differ	12
	Elite and Mass Threats to Democracy	14
	<i>Elite Distemper</i>	16
	<i>Mass Unrest</i>	16
	FOCUS: MASS VIEWS OF ELITE GOVERNANCE	17
	<i>Elite Repression</i>	18
	An Elitist Theory of Democracy	18
	Notes	19

<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	<b>The Elite Consensus of the Founding Fathers: U.S. Political Principles</b>	<b>21</b>
	Elites and Masses in the New Nation	21
	Elite Preferences: Inspiration for a New Constitution	22
	Formation of a National Elite	23
	<i>George Washington's Prestige</i>	24
	<i>The Founders' Governing Experience</i>	25
	<i>The Founders' Education</i>	25
	<i>The Founders' Wealth</i>	26
	<i>The Founders' National View</i>	26
	Elite Consensus in 1787	28
	<i>Protecting Liberty and Property</i>	28
	<i>Government as Contract</i>	29
	<i>Republicanism</i>	29
	<i>Limited Government</i>	30
	<i>Elite Consensus in a World Context</i>	30
	An Elite in Operation: Conciliation and Compromise	30
	<i>Representation Compromise</i>	30
	<i>Slavery Compromises</i>	32
	<i>Trade and Commerce Compromises</i>	33
	<i>Voter Qualification Compromise</i>	33
	The Constitution as Elitist Document	34
	<i>Taxation and the Repayment of Loans</i>	35
	<i>Protecting Money and Credit</i>	36
	<i>Opening Western Land to Speculation</i>	37
	<i>Creating the Military</i>	37
	<i>Protecting against Revolution</i>	38
	Elitism and the Structure of the National Government	39
	<i>National Supremacy</i>	39
	<i>Republicanism in Operation</i>	40
	<i>Separation of Powers and Checks and Balances</i>	40
	<i>Judicial Review</i>	43
	FOCUS: JAMES MADISON: SUPPRESSING MAJORITY "FACTIONS"	44
	Ratification: An Exercise in Elite Political Skills	45
	<i>The Bill of Rights as an Afterthought</i>	45
	The Constitution: An Elitist Interpretation	46
	Notes	47
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	<b>Elites in America</b>	<b>49</b>
	The Evolution of U.S. Elites	50
	Early Elite Consensus: Hamilton's Financial Vision	51
	FOCUS: ELITE ATTITUDES TOWARD MASS GOVERNANCE	52
	The Rise of the West	53



Elite Cleavage: The Civil War	55
<i>Cleavage, Violence, and Secession</i>	55
<i>Lincoln and Slavery</i>	56
Rise of the New Industrial Elite	56
Reform as Elite Self-Interest: The Progressive Era to the New Deal	57
Progressive Era	57
The Great Depression and the New Deal	58
<i>Noblesse Oblige</i>	59
The Growth of Government: The New Deal to the Cold War	60
Globalization	61
Finding the Elites in the United States	62
Economic Elites in the United States	62
<i>Industrial Concentration</i>	63
<i>Financial Concentration</i>	64
FOCUS: HEDGE FUNDS	65
Corporate Elites	65
<i>Management Power</i>	66
<i>Interlocking Directorates</i>	67
Government and Corporate Elites: Revolving Doors	67
FOCUS: GREED IN THE BOARDROOM	68
Elite Policy-Making Institutions	69
<i>Public Policy as Elite Preference</i>	69
<i>The Foundations and Universities</i>	70
<i>The Think Tanks</i>	70
<i>The Media</i>	71
<i>The Washington Insiders</i>	71
Power in the United States: An Elitist Interpretation	72
FOCUS: THE ELITE THINK TANKS	73
Notes	74
CHAPTER 4	
<b>Masses in the United States</b>	<b>75</b>
Elite Gains, Mass Stagnation	76
<i>Stagnating Worker Earnings</i>	76
<i>Deunionization</i>	78
Inequality in the United States	79
<i>Inequality of Wealth</i>	80
Mass Disaffection from Politics	81
Antidemocratic Attitudes Among the Masses	84
<i>Social Class and Democratic Attitudes</i>	84
<i>Education and Democratic Attitudes</i>	85
<i>Elite Experience and Democratic Attitudes</i>	85

Are the Masses Becoming More Democratic?	86
Mass Political Ignorance	87
<i>Ignorance</i>	87
FOCUS: MASS CONFIDENCE IN U.S. INSTITUTIONS	88
<i>Phantom Opinions and Inconsistent Opinions</i>	90
<i>Ignorance and Paranoia: Conspiracy Theory</i>	91
Mass Political Apathy	91
The Dangers of Mass Unrest	94
<i>Sources of Mass Unrest</i>	94
FOCUS: POPULAR MOVEMENTS: THE TEA PARTY AND OCCUPY WALL STREET	95
<i>Counterelites</i>	96
<i>Left-Wing Extremism</i>	96
<i>Right-Wing Extremism</i>	97
<i>Single-Issue Extremism</i>	97
Elite Repression	98
<i>Repression and the War on Terrorism</i>	98
<i>A Brief History of Elite Repression</i>	98
How Does Democracy Survive?	100
Mass Conditions: An Elitist Interpretation	100
Notes	101

## CHAPTER 5 The Media: Elite–Mass Communication 103

The News Makers	103
<i>The Myth of the Mirror</i>	104
<i>The Concentration of Media Power</i>	105
<i>Inter-Elite Communication</i>	105
The Media’s Political Functions	106
<i>News Making</i>	106
<i>Interpretation</i>	106
<i>Socialization</i>	106
<i>Persuasion</i>	107
<i>Agenda Setting</i>	108
Bashing the United States for Fun and Profit	108
<i>Sex Sells</i>	109
FOCUS: POLITICAL ENTERTAINMENT	110
<i>Mass Reaction</i>	110
Bias in Television News	110
<i>Divisions among Mass Audiences</i>	112
<i>Hollywood Liberals</i>	112
Bias and Slander: Freedoms of the Press	113
<i>No Prior Restraint</i>	113
<i>“Absence of Malice”</i>	114
<i>Politics and the Internet</i>	115

	<i>Political Websites</i>	116
	<i>The Internet Uncensored</i>	117
	<i>Social Media</i>	117
	<b>Media Campaigns</b>	117
	<i>The Decline of Parties</i>	117
	<i>The Media as King Makers</i>	118
	<i>Image Elections</i>	118
	<i>The Media Campaign</i>	118
	<i>The Cost of Running for Office</i>	119
	<b>Media Coverage of Presidential Elections</b>	120
	<i>Horse Race Reporting</i>	120
	<i>Negative Coverage</i>	121
	<i>Shrinking Sound Bites</i>	121
	<i>Late-Night Laughs</i>	121
	<b>Assessing Media Impact</b>	121
	<i>Cognition and Comprehension</i>	122
	<i>Attitudes and Values</i>	122
	<i>Public Opinion</i>	123
	<i>Behavior</i>	123
	<b>The Media: An Elitist Interpretation</b>	124
	<b>Notes</b>	125
<b>CHAPTER 6</b>	<b>Elections, Parties, and Democracy</b>	127
	<b>The Functions of Elections</b>	128
	<i>Elections Give Legitimacy to Government</i>	128
	<i>Elections Choose People, Not Policy</i>	128
	<i>Elections Provide Protection against Official Abuse</i>	128
	<b>Why People Vote in the United States</b>	129
	<i>The Myth of the Policy-Oriented Voter</i>	129
	<i>Ideology and Voting</i>	130
	<i>Party Voting</i>	131
	<i>The Group Basis of Voting</i>	132
	<i>The Retrospective Basis of Voting</i>	133
	<i>Candidate Image Voting</i>	135
	<b>Political Parties and Elections</b>	136
	<i>Political Parties as Oligarchies</i>	136
	<b>FOCUS: IMAGES OF OBAMA AND ROMNEY, 2012</b>	137
	<i>Functions of the Political Parties</i>	139
	<i>Declining Mass Attachments to Parties</i>	140
	<i>The Attraction to the Center</i>	142
	<b>Two-Party Politics</b>	144
	<i>Why Third Parties Fail</i>	145
	<i>Strength of the Two-Party System</i>	145
	<b>Primary Elections and the Deterioration of the Parties</b>	146

Money Drives Elections 148  
*Finding and Feeding the “Fat Cats”* 148  
 FOCUS: DIRTY POLITICS 150  
*Wealthy Candidates* 150  
*Campaign Finance Reform* 151  
*The Supreme Court and Campaign Finance* 152  
*Last Election Cycle’s Loophole: Independent Group Expenditures (527s)* 152  
*This Election Cycle’s Loophole: SuperPACs* 152  
 Elections, Parties, and Democracy: An Elitist Interpretation 153  
 Notes 154

CHAPTER 7 **Elites and Organized Interests** 157

Interest Groups: Pluralist or Elitist? 157  
 The Elite Bias of Interest Groups 158  
*Class Bias* 158  
*The Dominance of Business and Union Organizations* 159  
 FOCUS: SUPER LOBBY: THE BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE 161  
*The Influence of Organized Labor* 161  
*Ideological Groups* 162  
*Liberal and Conservative* 162  
*Single-Issue Groups* 163  
*Civil Rights Organizations* 163  
 FOCUS: ARE YOU A LIBERAL OR A CONSERVATIVE? 164  
*Women’s Groups* 164  
*Gay Rights Groups* 165  
 How Well Do Groups Represent Their Members? 165  
 FOCUS: EMILY’S LIST 165  
*Large versus Small Organizations* 166  
*Single-Interest versus Traditional Interest Groups* 166  
 FOCUS: SIZE AND REPRESENTATION—AARP 167  
 Lobbying: How Organized Interests Influence Government 167  
*Access* 168  
*Information* 169  
*Demand* 169  
 FOCUS: LOBBYISTS AND INFLUENCE PEDDLERS 170  
*Grassroots Mobilization* 170  
*Direct Contacts* 171  
*Campaign Support* 171  
*The Fat Cats: Top Campaign Contributors* 172  
*Regulating the Lobbies* 172  
 Interest Group Influence through Campaign Support 174  
*PACs Prefer Incumbents* 174  
 Interest Group Bias against Change 175

Interest Groups: An Elitist Interpretation	175
Notes	176
<b>CHAPTER 8 Congress: The Legislative Elite</b>	<b>177</b>
The Elite Bias of Congressional Recruitment	177
<i>Political Entrepreneurship</i>	178
<i>Professionalism</i>	178
<i>Race and Gender</i>	179
FOCUS: REPRESENTATIVE PAUL RYAN	181
<i>Party</i>	182
<i>Personal Wealth</i>	184
Whom Does Congress Really Represent?	185
<i>Mass Inattention</i>	185
<i>Elites as the Relevant Constituents</i>	186
<i>Home Style</i>	186
Congress in Disrepute	187
<i>Throw the Rascals Out?</i>	187
<i>Incumbent Advantages</i>	189
<i>Term Limits?</i>	190
The Elaborate Procedures of Legislative Elites	190
<i>Kill Bill</i>	191
<i>The Lawmaking Process: How a Bill Becomes a Law</i>	191
<i>Standing Congressional Committees</i>	191
<i>Public Hearings</i>	194
<i>Committee Membership</i>	194
<i>The Power of the Chair</i>	194
<i>The Seniority System</i>	195
<i>Decentralization: Subcommittees and “Iron Triangles”</i>	195
<i>The House Rules Committee</i>	195
<i>Senate Filibusters</i>	196
<i>The Floor Vote</i>	196
<i>Conference Committees</i>	196
Elites Within Elites: The Congressional Establishment	197
<i>Senatorial Power</i>	197
FOCUS: SENATOR AL FRANKEN	198
<i>The Speaker of the House</i>	199
<i>Floor Leaders and Whips</i>	200
<i>Senate Leadership</i>	200
<i>Committee Chairs</i>	201
<i>Leadership PACs</i>	201
Polarization on Capitol Hill	201
<i>Party Voting</i>	202
<i>Conflict</i>	202
Congress and the President: An Unstable Balance of Power	203

*Mass Preference for Divided Government* 203  
*The Power of the Purse* 203  
*Presidential Support* 203  
*Congressional Investigations* 204  
*Impeachment* 204  
**FOCUS: CONGRESSIONAL ETHICS: AN OXYMORON?** 205  
**Congress: An Elitist Interpretation** 206  
**Notes** 207

**CHAPTER 9 The Presidency 209**

**The President as Symbolic Leader** 211  
*Presidential Approval Ratings* 211  
*Celebrity-in-Chief* 214  
**FOCUS: PRESIDENT AS SUPERHERO** 215  
*The President and Mass Psychology* 215  
*Presidential Character* 216  
*Presidential Powers of Persuasion* 216  
**The President's Formal Powers** 217  
*Chief Executive* 217  
*Chief Legislator* 218  
*Chief Diplomat* 219  
*Commander-in-Chief* 219  
*Chief of Law Enforcement and Grantor of Pardons* 221  
*Party Leader* 221  
**The Vice President** 222  
**The President and Congress** 222  
*White House Lobbying* 223  
*The Veto Power* 223  
**Limits on Presidential Executive Power** 224  
*Views on Presidential Power* 224  
*Executive Privilege* 225  
*Impeachment* 226  
*Judicial Checks on Presidential Power* 226  
**FOCUS: WATERGATE AND THE LIMITS OF PRESIDENTIAL POWER** 227  
**FOCUS: SEX, LIES, AND IMPEACHMENT** 228  
**George W. Bush: A Turbulent Presidency** 229  
*Background to the Presidency* 229  
*Terrorist Strike: 9/11* 229  
*Bush Policy Initiatives* 230  
*The War in Iraq* 231  
*The Financial Crisis* 231  
**The Obama Presidency** 232  
*Obama's Rise to Power* 232  
*Running for President* 233

<i>The Obama Administration</i>	234
<i>Obama's Policy Initiatives</i>	234
The Presidency: An Elitist Interpretation	235
Notes	236

## CHAPTER 10 **Courts: Elites in Black Robes** 237

Judicial Review as an Elitist Principle	238
The Making of a Supreme Court Justice	239
<i>Social Background</i>	239
<i>Politicizing the Confirmation Process</i>	239
<i>Rejection by Filibuster</i>	240
<i>Recent Supreme Court Nominations</i>	241
<i>Senate Questioning of Court Nominees</i>	241
FOCUS: SENATE CONFIRMATION AS SPECTACLE	242
The Structure of the Federal Court System	243
<i>Federal District Courts</i>	243
<i>Circuit Courts of Appeals</i>	243
<i>The U.S. Supreme Court</i>	244
The Jurisdiction of the Federal Court System	245
<i>Appeals from State Courts</i>	245
<i>Federal Court Caseloads</i>	246
Judicial Power: Activism versus Self-Restraint	246
<i>Rules of Restraint</i>	246
FOCUS: "MAKE IT A FEDERAL CRIME!"	247
<i>Stare Decisis</i>	248
<i>Original Intent</i>	248
<i>Wisdom versus Constitutionality</i>	248
Supreme Court Politics	249
<i>Changing Liberal and Conservative Blocs on the Supreme Court</i>	250
FOCUS: THE PRESIDENT VERSUS THE SUPREME COURT	250
Do the Courts Rule the Nation?	252
<i>Growing Reliance on the Courts</i>	252
<i>Court Congestion</i>	252
FOCUS: THE SUPREME COURT AND ABORTION	253
<i>Plea Bargaining</i>	254
<i>Judicial Reforms</i>	255
The Courts: An Elitist Interpretation	255
Notes	256

## CHAPTER 11 **The Bureaucratic Elite** 257

Sources of Bureaucratic Power	258
<i>Civil Service Reform Established Independence</i>	258

<i>Organized Expertise</i>	259
<i>Shifts in Responsibility</i>	259
<i>Bureaucratic Expansionism</i>	259
Government Size and Cost	260
Organization of the Washington Bureaucracy	260
<i>Cabinet</i>	260
FOCUS: THE GROWTH IN EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS	260
<i>National Security Council</i>	263
<i>Office of Management and Budget</i>	263
Presidential Control of the Bureaucracy	263
<i>Appointments</i>	263
<i>Reorganization</i>	264
<i>The Budget</i>	265
The Budget Maze	265
FOCUS: BUREAUCRATIC MANEUVERS	266
<i>The Presidential Budget</i>	266
<i>Congressional Consideration</i>	267
<i>Continuing Resolutions and Government Shutdowns</i>	269
<i>Presidential Vetoes of Appropriations Bills</i>	269
Elite Fiscal Responsibility?	270
<i>Overall Federal Spending</i>	270
<i>Entitlement Spending</i>	270
<i>Balancing the Budget</i>	272
Tax Politics	272
Bureaucratic Power, Iron Triangles, and Revolving Doors	275
FOCUS: CAPITAL GAINS TAXES AND THE ECONOMY	276
<i>Implementation, Regulation, and Adjudication</i>	276
<i>Bureaucratic Goals</i>	277
<i>Iron Triangles</i>	277
<i>Revolving Doors</i>	278
The Regulatory Quagmire	279
<i>The Captured Regulators</i>	280
FOCUS: THE FED: MONEY IS TOO IMPORTANT TO BE LEFT TO ELECTED OFFICIALS	280
<i>Elite Benefit from Regulation</i>	281
<i>The Activist Regulators</i>	282
<i>The Hidden Costs of Regulation</i>	282
<i>Deregulation and Reregulation</i>	283
Controlling the Bureaucracy: Checks and Balances?	284
<i>Presidential Constraints</i>	284
<i>Congressional Constraints</i>	284
<i>Judicial Constraints</i>	285
The Bureaucracy: An Elitist Interpretation	285
Notes	286



<b>CHAPTER 12</b>	<b>Federalism: State and Community Elites</b>	<b>289</b>
	Federalism: The Division of Power Between National and State Governments	290
	<i>Constitutional Powers and Federal and State Authority</i>	292
	<i>The States' Role in National Government</i>	293
	Power Flows to the National Elite	293
	<i>The "Necessary and Proper" Clause</i>	293
	<i>The Civil War</i>	294
	<i>Prohibition and Repeal</i>	294
	<i>Civil Rights</i>	294
	<i>The Interstate Commerce Clause</i>	294
	Money and Power	295
	The Evolution of U.S. Federalism	296
	<i>Dual Federalism</i>	296
	<i>Cooperative Federalism</i>	296
	<i>Increased Centralization and New Federalism</i>	297
	<i>Representational Federalism</i>	297
	FOCUS: RISING STAR: GOVERNOR BOBBY JINDAL	298
	<i>Coercive Federalism</i>	298
	<i>The Supreme Court's Reassertion of Federalism</i>	299
	Mass Influence in the States	300
	<i>The Populist Movement in the States</i>	301
	<i>The Initiative</i>	302
	<i>The Referendum</i>	302
	<i>The Recall</i>	302
	<i>The Politics of State Initiatives</i>	302
	The Old-Community Economic Elites	303
	FOCUS: CORPORATE ELITE STRUCTURES IN THE STATES	304
	FOCUS: RISING STAR: MAYOR CORY BOOKER	305
	The New-Community Political Elites	306
	Federalism: An Elitist Interpretation	308
	Notes	309
<b>CHAPTER 13</b>	<b>Civil Rights: Diversifying the Elite</b>	<b>311</b>
	How Elites Diversify	311
	Minorities Acquiring Elite Status	313
	The History and Decline of Minority Exclusion	315
	The African-American Struggle for Freedom	315
	<i>Abolition and Aftermath</i>	315
	<i>Elites and Desegregation</i>	316
	FOCUS: THE EARLY BLACK ELITE: BOOKER T. WASHINGTON	317
	<i>Mass Resistance to Desegregation</i>	317

Martin Luther King, Jr.: Nonviolent Protest Elite	317
<i>Hispanic-American Search for Rights</i>	318
<i>Asian-American Search for Rights</i>	319
Multiracial Rights Movement	320
The Civil Rights Act of 1964	321
Racial Inequality and Affirmative Action	321
<i>Opportunity versus Outcome</i>	321
<i>Affirmative Action</i>	322
FOCUS: “DIVERSITY” IN HIGHER EDUCATION	323
Elite versus Mass Response to Civil Rights	324
<i>Mass Opinion about Discrimination and Affirmative Action</i>	324
<i>Affirmative Action in Mass Referenda</i>	324
FOCUS: SECRETARY OF STATE HILLARY CLINTON	325
Women’s Rights in the United States	326
<i>The Women’s Movement</i>	326
<i>Equity Feminism</i>	327
<i>Gender Feminism</i>	327
Women and Work	328
<i>The Dual Labor Market and the Earnings Gap</i>	328
<i>Gender Equality in Civil Rights Laws</i>	330
Feminism and Elitism	331
<i>Women Acquiring Elite Status</i>	331
Gay Rights	332
Civil Rights: An Elitist Interpretation	333
Notes	334
CHAPTER 14	<b>The United States as Global Elite 337</b>
Approaches to Foreign Relations in the United States	339
<i>Idealism</i>	339
<i>Realism</i>	340
Elites Debate the Use of Military Force	341
<i>War as Politics</i>	341
Defense Policy-Making	341
FOCUS: ELITE FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING: THE COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS	342
<i>Organizing the Nation’s Defenses</i>	343
<i>Current Forces and Missions</i>	343
The United States in the International Security System	344
<i>United Nations Security Council</i>	345
NATO	346
<i>The Collapse of Communism</i>	346
<i>NATO and the Balkan Conflicts</i>	346
<i>NATO in Afghanistan</i>	346

	NATO over Libya	347
	Security Threats to the United States	347
	Nuclear Threats to Security	347
	<i>Deterrence and Arms Reductions</i>	348
	<i>Antiballistic Missile Defenses</i>	349
	<i>Nuclear Terrorism</i>	349
	The Terrorist Threat	349
	<i>Mass Response to the War on Terrorism</i>	350
	<i>Elite Response to Terrorism: Domestic Law</i>	350
	<i>The War on Terrorism</i>	351
	<i>Intelligence Gathering and the War on Terror</i>	352
	<i>Afghanistan: “Operation Enduring Freedom”</i>	353
	<i>Enemy Combatants</i>	353
	<i>Drone Warfare</i>	354
	The War in Iraq	354
	<i>“Operation Iraqi Freedom”</i>	354
	FOCUS: DAVID PETRAEUS	355
	<i>The Occupation of Iraq</i>	356
	The Global Economic Elite	357
	<i>The United States and Global Trade</i>	357
	<i>U.S. Economic Weaknesses</i>	358
	<i>International Trade Institutions</i>	359
	<i>The World Trade Organization</i>	360
	<i>The International Monetary Fund</i>	360
	<i>The World Bank</i>	361
	<i>The North American Free Trade Agreement</i>	361
	Globalization and Democracy	361
	United States as Global Hegemon: An Elitist Interpretation	364
	Notes	364
EPILOGUE	What Can Students Do?	367
APPENDIX	The Constitution of the United States of America	369
GLOSSARY		387
INDEX		391



# TO THE STUDENT

In assigning this book, your instructor wants to do more than teach you the basics of government in the United States. This book has a bit of attitude and a central theme: Only a tiny number of people make the decisions that shape our lives, and, despite the elaborate rituals of parties, elections, and interest-group activity, the vast majority have little direct influence over these decisions. This theme is widely known as *elitism*. Your instructor may not believe completely in this theory but may instead believe that many groups of people share power in the United States, that competition is widespread, that we have checks against the abuse of power, and that the individual citizen can personally affect the course of national events by voting, supporting political parties, and joining interest groups. That theory, widely known as *pluralism*, characterizes virtually every U.S. government textbook now in print—except this one. Your instructor, whether personally agreeing with the elitist or with the pluralist perspective, is challenging you to confront our arguments. He or she wants you to deal critically with some troubling questions about democracy in the United States.

It is far easier to teach the basics of government in the United States—the constitutional powers of the president, Congress, and courts; the function of parties and interest groups; the key cases decided by the Supreme Court; and so on—than to tackle the question, “How democratic is U.S. society?” It is easier to teach the “facts” of the political system than to search for the explanations. Although this book does not ignore such facts, its primary purpose is to present them to you through the critical lens of elite theory—to help you understand why government and politics work as they do.

*The Irony of Democracy* is not some polemic or even necessarily “antiestablishment.” This book challenges the prevailing pluralistic view of democracy in the United States, but it neither condemns nor endorses the reality of political life. Governance by a small, homogeneous elite is subject to favorable or unfavorable

interpretation, according to one's personal values. Readers are free to decide for themselves whether we as a society should preserve, reform, or restructure the political system described in these pages. If this book encourages thought about this question, we see it as a success.

*The Irony of Democracy* is neither a conservative nor a liberal textbook. It does not apologize for elite rule or seek to defend U.S. institutions or any of its leaders. On the contrary, we are critical of politicians, bureaucrats, corporate chieftains, media moguls, lobbyists, and special interests. But we do not advocate fruitless liberal nostrums promising to bring “power to the people” or “citizen movements” that are themselves led by elites with their own self-interests. We note that partisans are happy with the parts of the book that describe their opponents, but unhappy when the same gaze is cast on those they favor. Tough!

*The Irony of Democracy* is indeed an endorsement of the most fundamental democratic values—individual dignity, limited government, freedom of expression and dissent, equality of opportunity, private property, and due process of law. Our elitist theory of democracy is not an attack on democratic government but rather an effort to understand the realities of politics in a democracy.

# TO THE INSTRUCTOR

This 16th edition of *The Irony of Democracy* has two aims: to keep its vigorous classic elite theory approach and to reflect an ever-changing politics. This new edition unapologetically continues to assert that to understand democracy in the United States it is necessary to understand the elites who run the nation. There may be a near-universal acceptance of pluralist ideology in U.S. political science and government texts; that Noble Lie of the empowered masses certainly contains significant truth, but *The Irony of Democracy* unrepentantly remains an elitist introduction to U.S. government. Elite theory is used as an analytic model for understanding and explaining U.S. politics; it is *not* presented as a normative prescription for the nation. The discomfort caused by this approach in instructors or students stems from its being grounded in fact and observation of reality, not in idealism.

Few today still believe that government is run for the benefit of the people. Most see the political system as run by a few big interests for their own benefit, leaving the average person forgotten behind. This reality brings us no pleasure. Over the course of the 43 years of this text's publication, the situation has only gotten worse. Our elitist theory of democracy also recognizes the potential for danger in mass movements and intolerant demagogues. Mass ignorance and apathy do not inspire much hope that "the people" will somehow suddenly gain some newfound commitment to the hard work of democracy. The irony of democracy in the United States is that somehow democracy survives despite and possibly because of these conditions.

This book has provided a framework to understand U.S. politics for over four decades. It has seen many political events and eras come and go: the war in Vietnam, Watergate, Carter-era inflation, the collapse of communism, the rise of globalization, a balanced federal budget for four years, the influx of once unimaginable amounts of money into campaigns, mass death from terrorism, and the wars

in Iraq and Afghanistan. Still, the basic analytic model of staying focused on those in power remains critically necessary.

This edition reflects the growing role of the new coauthor to the text who joined last edition: Louis Schubert of City College of San Francisco, a very large, diverse, community college. His affection for the text and its project are deep, and many changes in this new edition reflect him having taught thousands of students using this text for over a decade. He brings fresh blood and new areas of interest to *Irony*, but it is worth noting that the first change he insisted on was restoring material from the first edition. He sees its classic focus as the key to its continuing relevance to political science and usefulness to teaching the politics of the United States.

Each chapter in this new edition has seen updating and improvement. It reflects the consolidation of the major revision begun last edition and the input of reviewers and hundreds of students. Chapter 1, the introduction to elite theory, has clearer presentation of the connection between elitism and pluralism. Chapter 2, concerning the Founders, has added attention to the classical liberal and classical conservative traditions from which they drew. Chapter 3 follows the evolution of U.S. elites, starting with Hamilton's financial vision for the new nation and adding significant new focus on the New Deal and the impact of the expansion of government on the nature of elite power. It includes a new Focus section on the role of hedge funds. Chapter 4, on the masses, gives credit for developments in tolerance over recent decades, but still recognizes the dominance of apathy and ignorance.

The media chapter, Chapter 5, has been revised to reflect the reality of current technology. Just a few decades ago, media required access to considerable capital to reach an audience of any size; now students are publishing to global audiences online with their cell phones (sometimes even during class). The role of social media has been integrated throughout. Chapter 6, on elections and political parties, continues the necessary focus on money in campaigns, the role of the parties, and updates including the 2010 congressional and 2012 presidential races. Speaking of money, Chapter 7 focuses on organized interests and their activities such as lobbying and funding campaigns to attempt to influence the political elites.

Each chapter on political institutions has been updated to reflect a changing Congress, the Obama administration, and a Supreme Court including Justices Sotomayor and Kagan. The sections on lawmaking have been rewritten to better show the "sausage making" nature of the entire process; the introduction to legislation is now called "Kill Bill" to reflect that Congress is far better at preventing laws than making them. The continuing diversification of the Congress is also covered. The impact of President Barack Obama and coverage of his White House has also been added.

Chapter 11 reflects the increased role of the bureaucracy in the political system in a time of a significantly larger government with some vastly greater roles. Chapter 12, federalism, has been revised to include more discussion on the state initiative process and highlights some rising political stars, Newark Mayor Cory Booker and Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal. It also addresses the tension between the federal and state governments over health care.



Civil rights, Chapter 13, showcases the rapid diversification of the elite in both politics and the economy. The exclusion of minorities and women from power was once a major theme in the study of the elite—now the theme must be the continually growing impact of persons who 40 years ago would have had little if any chance to hold power positions. From the presidency, to governors' mansions, to the corporate boardroom, substantive and qualitative change has occurred in the composition of the elites. This chapter has also been revised to give greater attention to the civil rights of Hispanic-Americans, Asian-Americans, multiracial persons, and gays and lesbians, as well as updated coverage of African-Americans and women.

The last chapter, “The United States as Global Elite,” deals with the fact that the United States holds an unprecedented position in the world. It leads economically and militarily, but the cost of functioning as hegemon and “global cop” has led to significant vulnerabilities as well. This chapter covers the role of the United States in the world political system, examines its current security threats, and shows the place of the United States in a globalized economy. New coverage of drone warfare has been added.

We believe that the strength of this textbook comes from its honest presentation of the world as it is, not as how one may wish it. Punches are not pulled, awkward areas are not avoided, and credit is given where it is due even if it is a difficult fit with the central elite theory theme. The text does not talk down to students. Suggestions to “dumb down” vocabulary have been respectfully declined. The Epilogue does not end the book with a warm, fuzzy feeling, but rather gives students some blunt advice on how to preserve democratic values in an elitist system and maybe in the process keep themselves from being rolled over by the elites. We are not concerned if students like this book, but we do hope they find it interesting and have some good arguments with it. For the instructor, whether you agree with the basic elitist approach or not, we hope this text helps get your pedagogical juices flowing and that it makes your classroom experience more enjoyable and rewarding through keeping you and your students intellectually and perhaps emotionally engaged in the wonderful world of U.S. politics.

*Louis Schubert*  
*Thomas R. Dye*  
*Harmon Zeigler, Late*



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In particular, we thank the following reviewers who provided useful comments and suggestions for the sixteenth edition:

Robert Porter, *Ventura College*

Bob Peter, *Tri-County Technical College*

Peter Davies, *California State University, Sacramento*



# SUPPLEMENTS FOR INSTRUCTORS



## **CourseReader: American Government 0-30 Selections**

- Printed Access Card ISBN-13: 9781111479954
- Instant Access Code ISBN-13: 9781111479978
- CourseReader: American Government allows you to create your reader, your way, in just minutes. This affordable, fully customizable online reader provides access to thousands of permissions-cleared readings, articles, primary sources, and audio and video selections from the regularly updated Gale research library database. This easy-to-use solution allows you to search for and select just the material you want for your courses.

Each selection opens with a descriptive introduction to provide context, and concludes with critical-thinking and multiple-choice questions to reinforce key points. CourseReader is loaded with convenient tools like highlighting, printing, note-taking, and downloadable MP3 audio files for each reading.

CourseReader is the perfect complement to any Political Science course. It can be bundled with your current textbook, sold alone, or integrated into your learning management system. CourseReader 0-30 allows access to up to 30 selections in the reader.

Please contact your Cengage sales representative for details or for a demo please visit us at [www.cengage.com/coursereader](http://www.cengage.com/coursereader). To access CourseReader materials go to [www.cengage.com/sso](http://www.cengage.com/sso), click on “Create a New Faculty Account,” and fill out the registration page. Once you are in your new SSO account, search for “CourseReader” from your dashboard and select “Course Reader: American Government.” Then click “CourseReader 0-30: American Government Instant Access Code” and click “Add to my bookshelf.” To access the live CourseReader, click on “CourseReader 0-30: American Government” under “Additional resources” on the right side of your dashboard.

**Custom Enrichment Module: Latino-American Politics Supplement**

- ISBN-13: 9781285184296
- This revised and updated 32-page supplement uses real examples to detail politics related to Latino Americans and can be added to your text via our custom publishing solutions.

**Election 2012: An American Government Supplement**

- Printed Access Card ISBN-13: 9781285090931
- Instant Access Code ISBN-13: 9781285420080
- Written by John Clark and Brian Schaffner, this booklet addresses the 2012 congressional and presidential races, with real-time analysis and references.

**Free Instructor Companion Website for *The Irony of Democracy*, 16e**

- ISBN-13: 9781285058610
- This password-protected website for instructors features all of the free student assets plus an instructor's manual, book-specific PowerPoint® presentations, JoinIn™ “clicker” questions, and a test bank. Access your resources by logging into your account at [www.cengage.com/login](http://www.cengage.com/login).

**The Wadsworth News DVD for American Government 2014**

- ISBN: 9781285053455
- This collection of two- to five-minute video clips on relevant political issues serves as a great lecture or discussion launcher.

*Government is always government by the few, whether in the name of the few, the one, or the many.*

—Harold Lasswell

# THE IRONY OF DEMOCRACY

CHAPTER

I

Elites—not masses—govern the United States. Life in U.S. democracy, as in all societies, is shaped by a tiny fraction of the population. Major political, economic, and social decisions are made by this elite minority, not by the masses of people.

**Elites** are the few who have power; the **masses** are the many who do not. Power is deciding who gets what, when, and how. Power is meaningful participation in the decisions that shape our lives. The masses are the many whose lives are shaped by institutions, events, and leaders over which they have little direct control. Political scientist Harold Lasswell wrote, “The division of society into elite and mass is universal,” and even in a democracy “a few exercise a relatively great weight of power, and the many exercise comparatively little.”<sup>1</sup>

**Elite theory**, or elitism, is an approach to describing society focusing on the few with power, their values, their behavior, and their demographics. Elite theory is not a normative endorsement of elite rule, nor is it an automatic dismissal of it. Elites are not necessarily conspiracies to oppress and exploit the masses. On the contrary, they may be deeply concerned with the welfare of the masses. This is especially true in democracies. Membership in the elite increasingly is open to ambitious and talented individuals from the masses, exemplified by leaders such as Barack Obama and Bill Gates, though it sometimes may still appear a closed group. Elites may compete with each other, or they may largely agree over the direction of domestic and foreign policy. Elites may be responsive to the demands of the masses and influenced by the outcomes of elections or public demands, or they may be unresponsive to mass movements and unaffected by elections. Still, whether elites are public-minded or self-serving, open or closed, competitive or consensual, unified or pluralistic, responsive or unresponsive, it is elites and not the masses who govern the modern nation. *How* elites rule is a separate discussion from the fact that they always do rule.

Democracy is government “by the people,” but the responsibility for the survival of democracy rests on the shoulders of elites. This is the irony of democracy: Elites

must govern wisely if government “by the people” is to survive. If the survival of the U.S. system depended on an active, informed, and enlightened citizenry, then democracy in the United States would have disappeared long ago, for the masses normally are apathetic and ill-informed about politics and public policy, and they exhibit a surprisingly weak commitment to democratic values—individual dignity, equality of opportunity, the right to dissent, freedom of speech and press, religious toleration, and due process of law. Fortunately for these values and for U.S. democracy, the masses do not lead; they follow. They respond to the attitudes, proposals, and behavior of elites. The abolition of slavery, civil rights for minorities, and religious freedom did not arise because of mass demand—elites led the United States to these important places.

Although the symbols of U.S. politics are drawn from democratic political thought, we can often better understand the reality of U.S. politics from the viewpoint of elite theory. The questions posed by elite theory are the vital questions of politics: Who governs the United States? What are the roles of elites and masses in U.S. politics? How do people acquire power? What is the relationship between economic and political power? How open and accessible are elite ranks? How do U.S. elites change over time? How widely is power shared in the United States? How much real competition takes place among elites? What is the basis of elite consensus? How do elites and masses differ? How responsive are elites to mass sentiments? How much influence do masses have over policies decided by elites?

This book, *The Irony of Democracy*, explains U.S. political life using elite theory. It presents evidence from U.S. political history and contemporary political science describing and explaining how elites function in a modern democratic society. But before we examine U.S. politics, we must understand more about *elitism*, *democracy*, and *pluralism*.

## THE MEANING OF ELITISM

The central idea of elitism is that all societies are divided into two classes: the few who govern and the many who are governed. Italian political scientist Gaetano Mosca expressed this basic concept as follows:

In all societies—from societies that are very underdeveloped and have largely attained the dawns of civilization, down to the most advanced and powerful societies—two classes of people appear—a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class, always the less numerous, performs all of the political functions, monopolizes power, and enjoys the advantages that power brings, whereas the second, the more numerous class, is directed and controlled by the first, in a manner that is now more or less legal, now more or less arbitrary and violent.<sup>2</sup>

Elites are not a product particular to capitalism or socialism or industrialization or technological development. They govern all societies—democracies and dictatorships, capitalist and socialist, monarchies and theocracies, developing and industrialized. All societies require leaders, and leaders acquire a stake in preserving the organization and their position in it. This motive gives them a perspective different from that of the organization’s members. That an elite is inevitable in any social organization is known in political science as the **Iron Law of Oligarchy**.



French political scientist Roberto Michels stated this thesis: “He who says organization, says oligarchy.”<sup>3</sup> The “law” holds true for all sizes of organizations, whether family, club, religious congregation, union, business, or society as a whole. In all these, there are the few who hold power and the many who do not.

**C. Wright Mills**  
Website devoted to the works of the author of the classic book on elitism in the United States, *The Power Elite* (1956). [www.cwrightmills.org](http://www.cwrightmills.org)

Elitism also asserts that the few who govern are not typical of the masses who are governed. Elites by definition control resources: power, wealth, education, prestige, status, skills of leadership, information, knowledge of political processes, ability to communicate, and organization. Elites in the United States are drawn disproportionately from wealthy, educated, prestigiously employed, and socially prominent elements of society. This has historically meant that elites were overwhelmingly European-American (or white), Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, and male, although it is clear today that the demographic diversity of the elite is changing significantly. Elites come disproportionately from society’s increasingly diverse upper classes, those whose families already network with leaders of economic, professional, and governmental institutions.

Elitism, however, does not necessarily bar individuals of the lower or middle classes from rising to the top. In a democracy, upward mobility is encouraged—the system needs “fresh blood.” The term for persons of nonelite origins entering the ranks of the elite is **circulation of elites**, and it is essential for the stability of the elite system. Openness in the system siphons off potentially revolutionary leadership from the lower classes; moreover, an elite system is strengthened when talented and ambitious individuals from the masses enter governing circles. However, social stability requires that movement from nonelite to elite positions be a slow, continuous assimilation rather than a rapid or revolutionary change. Only those nonelites who have demonstrated their commitment to the elite system itself and to the system’s political and economic values can be admitted to the ruling class.

**America’s Most Wealthy**  
Wealth is not always a measure of power. But *Forbes* magazine annually lists the richest people and the sources of their wealth. [www.forbes.com](http://www.forbes.com)

Elites share a general consensus about the fundamental norms of the social system. As individuals, they focus on maintaining or enhancing their position as elite. As a group, they agree on the basic rules of the game and on the importance of preserving the political and social system in which they thrive. The system has clearly worked well for them. The stability of the system, even its survival, depends on this consensus by those who have been most successful within the system. Political scientist David Truman writes that elites have “a special stake in the continuation of the system in which their privileges rest.”<sup>4</sup> However, elite consensus does not prevent elite members from disagreeing or competing with each other for preeminence. But this competition takes place within a narrow range of issues; elites agree on more matters than they disagree on. Disagreement usually occurs over *means* rather than *ends*.

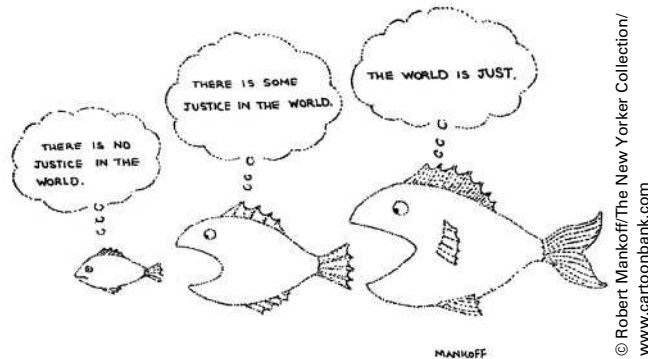
In the United States, the bases of elite consensus are the sanctity of individual liberty, private property, and limited government. Political historian Richard Hofstadter wrote about U.S. elite struggles:

The fierceness of political struggles has often been misleading; for the range of vision embodied by the primary contestants in the major parties has always been bounded by the horizons of property and enterprise. However much at odds on specific issues, the major political traditions have shared a belief in the rights of property, the philosophy of economic individualism, the value of competition; they have accepted the economic virtues of capitalist culture as necessary qualities of man.<sup>5</sup>

## IN BRIEF

## ELITE THEORY

- Society is divided into the few who have power, called elites, and the many who do not, called masses.
- Elites are not typical of the masses who are governed. Elites are drawn disproportionately from the upper socioeconomic strata of society. The movement of nonelites to elite positions is necessary but must be slow and continuous to maintain stability and avoid revolution. Only nonelites who have accepted the basic elite consensus enter governing circles. Elites share a consensus on the basic values of the social system and the preservation of the system. They disagree only on a narrow range of issues.
- Public policy reflects not the demands of the masses but the prevailing values of the elite. Changes in public policy will be incremental rather than revolutionary.
- Elites may act out of narrow self-serving motives and risk undermining mass support, or they may initiate reforms, curb abuse, and undertake public-regarding programs to preserve the system and their place in it.
- Active elites are subject to relatively little direct influence from the apathetic masses. Elites influence the masses more than the masses influence elites.



© Robert Mankoff/The New Yorker Collection/  
www.cartoonbank.com

Elitism implies that public policy does not reflect demands of “the people” so much as it reflects the interests and values of elites. Changes and innovations in public policy come as elite values slowly evolve to adapt to new challenges to system stability, often caused by new technologies or external events. However, elite interest in preserving the system means that changes in public policy normally will be *incremental* rather than revolutionary. Public policies are often modified but seldom replaced.

Elites may act out of narrow self-serving interests or enlightened, “public-regarding” motives. Occasionally elites abuse their powers and position and undermine mass confidence in their leadership. This threatens the system and requires a punitive response by other members of the elite who are more focused on preserving the system. Unethical business executives get fired for violating the rules, politicians are impeached for breaking their oath to uphold the law, and union officials are expelled for corruption. At other times, elites initiate reforms designed to preserve the system and restore mass support. Elitism does not necessarily mean

that the masses are exploited or repressed, although these abuses are not uncommon, especially outside democracies. Elitism means only that the responsibility for mass welfare rests with elites, not with masses.

Finally, elitism assumes that the masses are largely passive, apathetic, and ill-informed. Mass sentiments are manipulated by elites more often than elite values are influenced by the sentiments of the masses. More communication between elites and masses flows downward than upward. Masses seldom make decisions about governmental policies through elections or through thoughtful evaluation of political parties' policy alternatives. For the most part, these “democratic” institutions—elections and parties—have only symbolic value: They help tie the masses to the political system by giving them a ritual role to play on Election Day. Elitism contends that the masses have at best only an indirect influence over the decision-making behavior of elites.

Naturally, elitism is frequently misunderstood in the United States because the prevailing myths and symbols of the U.S. system are drawn from democratic theory rather than elite theory. So let us sum up here what elitism is *not*. Elitism does not mean those who have power are continually locked in conflict with the masses or that powerholders always achieve their goals at the expense of the public interest. Elitism in a democracy is not a conspiracy to oppress the masses, although that myth is common among extremists on the right and left. Elitism does not imply that powerholders constitute a single impenetrable monolithic body or that they always agree on public issues. Elitism does not pretend that power in society does not shift over time and that new elites do not emerge to compete with old elites. Power need not rest exclusively on the control of economic resources but may rest instead upon other leadership resources—organization, communication, or information. Lastly, elitism does not imply that masses have no impact on the attitudes of elites, only that elites influence masses more than masses influence elites.

## THE MEANING OF DEMOCRACY

While the term **democracy** has been used in different ways throughout history, at its core it refers to popular participation in the allocation of values in a society. (The Greek roots *demos* and *kratos* translate to “people” and “rule,” respectively.) The ruled and the rulers are the same. The Founders looked to classical understandings of the concept of democracy, where the term was used by the Greek political philosopher Aristotle<sup>6</sup> as describing a corrupt form of government in which the masses ruled in their self-interest and not in the interest of the country. The term *demos* was more a synonym for “mob.” The modern term *democracy* conflates its negative original meaning with the positive form of government called *polity* (or in Latin, republic). We can account for at least some of the ironic gap between the United States as an elite-run political system and the ideals of democracy in the common misunderstanding of the term “democracy” itself. Chapter 2 will clarify this further.

The underlying value in almost any modern understanding of democracy is individual dignity. Traditionally, democratic theory has valued popular participation in politics as an opportunity for individual self-development through civic virtue: Responsibility for governing our own conduct develops character, self-reliance, intelligence, and moral judgment—in short, dignity. The ancients of

Athens and Rome saw political participation as virtuous, or necessary to becoming a good person. The classic democrat would reject even a benevolent despot who could govern in the interest of the masses, as that would deny the opportunity to participate. As the English political philosopher John Stuart Mill asked, “What development can either their thinking or active faculties attain under it?” Thus the argument for citizen participation in public affairs depends not on its policy outcomes but on the belief that it is essential to the full development of human capacities. Ideally, democracy means individual participation in the decisions that affect our lives. Mill argued that people can know truth only by discovering it for themselves.<sup>7</sup>

Procedurally, a democratic society achieves popular participation through majority rule and respect for the rights of minorities. Self-development presumes self-government, and self-government comes about only by encouraging each individual to contribute to the development of public policy and by resolving conflicts over public policy through majority rule. Minorities who have had the opportunity to influence policy but whose views have not won majority support accept the decisions of majorities because of the fairness and openness of the democratic procedure. In return, majorities permit minorities to attempt openly to win majority support for their views. Freedom of speech and press, freedom to dissent, and freedom to form opposition parties and organizations are essential to ensure meaningful individual participation. This freedom of expression is also critical in ascertaining the majority’s real views.

Classical liberal theory became the modern expression of democratic theory for the Founders and their European influences. Originally, democratic equality came out of the Biblical idea of humans created in the image of the divine and thus having intrinsic rights and dignity. Human beings, by virtue of their existence, are entitled to life, liberty, and property. A “natural law,” or moral tenet, guarantees every person liberty and the right to property, and this natural law is morally superior to human law. John Locke, the English political philosopher whose writings most influenced the United States’ founding elites, argued that even in a “state of nature”—that is, a world of no governments—an individual possesses inalienable rights to life, liberty, and property. Locke meant that these rights are independent of government; governments do not give them to individuals, and no government may legitimately take them away.<sup>8</sup>

U.S. State Department Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor  
Official U.S. government definitions of democracy and individual rights. [www.state.gov/g/drl/](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/)

## IN BRIEF

## DEMOCRATIC THEORY

Democratic theory proposes:

- Popular participation in the decisions that shape the lives of individuals in a society.
- Government by majority rule, with recognition of the rights of minorities to try to become majorities. These rights include the freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and petition as well as
- the freedoms to dissent, to form opposition parties, and to run for public office.
- A commitment to individual dignity and the preservation of the classical liberal values of life, liberty, and property.
- A commitment to equal opportunity for all individuals to develop their capacities through political participation.

Locke believed that a government's purpose is to protect individual liberty. People form a "social contract" with one another to establish a government to help protect their rights; they tacitly agree to accept government authority to protect life, liberty, and property. Property has been of particular importance as it provides economic self-sufficiency, rather than a child-like, feudal dependence on the government. Implicit in the social contract and the democratic notion of freedom is the belief that social control over the individual must be minimal. Classical liberal theory sees government as a major threat to human freedom, and governmental authority must be limited. These beliefs call for removing as many external restrictions, controls, and regulations on the individual as possible without harming the freedom of other citizens.

Another vital aspect of classical democracy is a belief in the equality of all people. The Declaration of Independence states that "all men are created equal." Even the Founding Fathers believed that all persons had **equality before the law**, regardless of their personal circumstances. A democratic society's legal system cannot judge a person by social position, economic class, creed, or race. The law should treat all fairly without advantage. Political equality is expressed in the concept of "one person, one vote."

In the United States, the notion of equality has come to include **equality of opportunity** in many aspects of life: social, educational, economic, and, of course, political. Each person should have a reasonably equal chance to develop his or her capacities to the fullest potential. There should be no artificial barriers to the pursuit of happiness or success in life, however each individual may define it. All persons should have the opportunity to make of themselves what they can, to develop their talents and abilities to their fullest, and to be rewarded for their skills, knowledge, initiative, and hard work. Democratic theory has always stressed equality of opportunity over "equality of outcome," which by seeking conformity of result denies the individual right to choose one's goals and happiness.

## ELITISM IN A DEMOCRACY

Democracy requires popular participation in government. To our nation's Founders, whose classical educations included an ambivalence about the wisdom of democracy, it meant the people would have representation in government. The Founders believed government rests ultimately on the *consent* of the governed. Their notion of republicanism envisioned decision making by representatives of the people, rather than direct decision making by the people themselves. These representatives would be expected to use their prudence and wisdom to make decisions based on what was in the best interests of the masses. The Founders were profoundly skeptical of direct democracy, in which the people initiate and decide policy questions by popular vote. They had read about direct democracy in the ancient Greek city-state of Athens, and they were fearful of the "follies" of democracy. James Madison wrote,

Such democracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security of the rights of property and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths.<sup>9</sup>

**Freedom House**  
Dedicated to  
expanding free-  
dom worldwide.  
Provides measures  
of freedom and  
classifies nations  
as "free," "partly  
free," and "not  
free." [www.  
freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)

## ISSUES WITH DIRECT DEMOCRACY

Even if it were desirable, mass government is not feasible in a large society. Abraham Lincoln’s rhetorical flourish—“a government of the people, by the people, for the people”—has no real-world meaning. What would “the people” look like if all U.S. citizens were brought together in one place?

Standing shoulder to shoulder in military formation, they would occupy an area of about sixty-six square miles. The logistical problem of bringing [300] million bodies together is trivial, however, compared with the task of bringing about a meeting of [300] million minds. Merely to shake hands with that many people would take a century. How much discussion would it take to form a common opinion? A single round of five-minute speeches would require five thousand years. If only one percent of those present spoke, the assembly would be forced to listen to over two million speeches. People could be born, grow old and die while they waited for the assembly to make one decision.

In other words, an all-American town meeting would be the largest, longest, and most boring and frustrating meeting imaginable. What could such a meeting produce? Total paralysis. What could it do? Nothing.<sup>10</sup>

The U.S. Constitution has no provision for national popular referenda. Only a century later did political support develop in some states for more direct involvement of citizens in policy-making through initiative and referendum. Today voters in only about half the states can express their frustrations with elite governance directly through these mechanisms. The **initiative** is a device whereby a specified number or percentage of voters, through the use of a petition, may have a proposed measure placed on the ballot for adoption or rejection by the electorate of a state. This process bypasses the legislature and allows citizens to propose both state laws and state constitutional amendments. The initiative measures that pass sometimes may hold the elite more accountable and enhance democracy; other times they may circumvent elite efforts to protect democratic values (more on this in Chapter 12). The **referendum** is a device by which the electorate must approve decisions of the legislature before these become law or become part of the state constitution or by which the electorate must approve of proposals placed on the ballot by popular initiative. Voters in 18 states can **recall** elected officials—petition for an election to decide whether or not an incumbent official should be ousted from office before the end of his or her term.<sup>11</sup>

## REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY AND ELITES

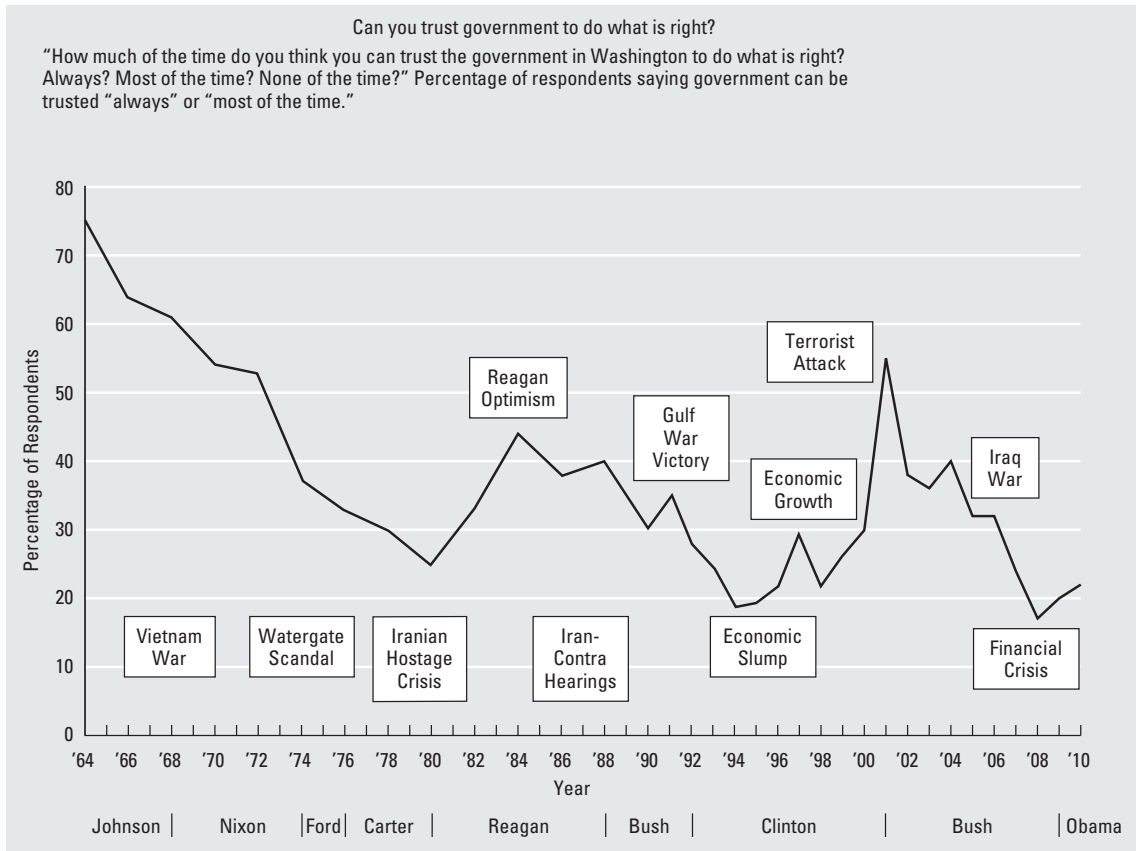
The Founders were most fearful that unrestrained *majorities* would threaten liberty and property and abuse minorities and individuals, “the weaker party and the obnoxious individual.” James Madison framed this concern in *Federalist Paper #10* (see Chapter 2). The Founders recognized the warning found in the classical understanding of the term democracy—that government by majority rule can threaten the life, liberty, and property of minorities and individuals. They saw the notion that a majority must be right simply because it is a majority as logically flawed and historically disproved. The solution to the practical problem of popular government is rule not by the masses but with the consent of the masses through the development

**FOCUS**

**MASS DISTRUST OF THE U.S. ELITE**

How much trust do the masses have in U.S. leadership? Public opinion polls show a generally declining willingness of the people to “trust the government in Washington to do what is right” (see figure). Defeat and humiliation in war or foreign affairs undermines mass support for a nation’s leadership, as seen in the Vietnam War, Iran hostage crisis, or Iraqi occupation,

while success such as the Gulf War victory in 1991 can produce greater trust. U.S. adults traditionally “rally ’round the flag” when confronted with serious national threats, such as following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, when mass trust in government skyrocketed to levels not seen since the 1960s.



**Mass Support for American Government**

Source: Prepared by the authors from National Election Surveys, University of Michigan, data. Data from 1996 onward from various polls reported in *The Polling Report*, Washington, D.C.