

# 2

## The Ideas That Shape America

### IN THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL:

Learn about the seven key American ideas: ♦ Liberty, self-rule, individualism, limited government, the American dream, equality, and faith in God. ♦ Review the arguments that surround each of them. ♦ Explore the essential question: How do ideas affect politics?



**LIEUTENANT RUSSELL BURGOS** hunkered down in his bunker as mortars ripped through the night. A year ago he had been a political science professor; now he was fighting in Iraq. Burgos's unit was operating in the Sunni Triangle, where the fighting was fiercest. "A mortar attack in the middle of the night," he mused, "is an odd place to reconsider a course syllabus." But that is exactly what he found himself doing. Experiencing war made him see politics and societies in new ways.

As shells fell on the American base, Burgos thought about something that his classes had been missing: the study of ideas. The United States entered the war because of what key decision makers believed. American leaders spent enormous energy insisting that the United States was in Iraq as liberators rather than as conquerors or occupiers; explaining American ideas seemed crucial to both civilian and military leaders. In the war zone, Burgos saw the same thing. All around him, men and women were fighting and dying over ideas—ideas like freedom, democracy, equality, power, and faith in God.

Strangely enough, Burgos wrote later, ideas—and especially how ideas affect politics—had barely come up in his own political science classes. Yet ideas helped explain why the United States launched the war, how it fought the war, and why everyone up and down the chain of command acted as they did. Burgos ended up rethinking his approach to politics.<sup>1</sup>

*Who are we?* Our ideas tell us—and they tell the world. The United States is a nation built on ideas. You will see ideas at work in every chapter of this book, for they touch every feature of government and politics. They affect the way Americans define their national ideals, their political goals, and their nation itself. As you read about these ideas—and as you continue through this book—think about other important ideas that should be added to the list alongside the seven we discuss in this chapter. If you come up with a compelling example, we may quote you in the next edition.

## A Nation of Ideas

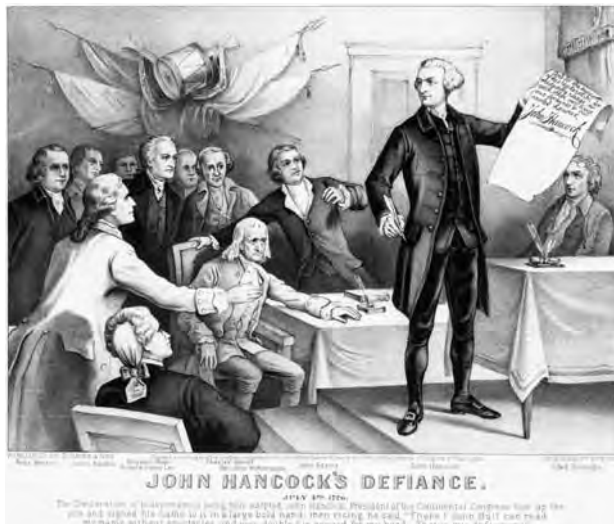
As the colonies broke away from England, on July 4, 1776, American leaders issued a Declaration of Independence explaining their revolutionary actions. Its second paragraph describes the animating idea that inspired them:

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.*

● Lieutenant Russell Burgos hands out supplies to Iraqi children in 2004.

● **Ideas have Consequences.**

*John Hancock of Massachusetts defiantly signs the Declaration. According to legend, he signed it in big, bold letters so King George could read Hancock's name without his spectacles—and “double the reward for my head.”*



Most people have heard that line so often that it has lost its force, but it is one of the most powerful ideas in history. It explains the role of government—securing each individual's rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The Declaration states that that is why people form governments—*“to secure those rights.”* And, although the men and women who fought the revolution would fall far short of this ideal, they left the nation an inspiring goal. Every American generation argues about how it can best achieve the Declaration's shimmering ideal and “secure” the rights of every citizen.

Political scientists often describe the United States as a unique nation, different from every other. That view is known as **American exceptionalism**. Of course, every nation is distinctive in some way. The United States is exceptional, in large part, because of seven key ideas that guide our politics. Most of them can be traced back to the Declaration of Independence.

What are the seven big ideas? Liberty, self-rule, individualism, limited government, the American dream, equality, and faith in God. These ideas touch almost everything we do as a nation. They are the foundation of U.S. national government and lie at the core of what makes America unique.

There is an unusual twist to these ideas. Americans rarely agree on what they mean. Instead, we constantly argue about them. The Declaration of Independence declares that all men are created equal, but many of the men who signed it owned slaves. Our stamps and coins say “in God we trust,” but Americans passionately disagree about whether the Constitution permits prayer in schools or menorahs in public parks. All our foundational ideas have (at least) two sides and spark ardent disputes. To reveal the real truth about American politics, we should post signs at all the airports that say: *“Welcome to the great argument that is the USA.”*

Now let's consider the first key idea.

## ● Liberty

As the Revolutionary War broke out, the royal governor of Virginia promised freedom to any slave who joined the British. Eighty thousand slaves ran for the British lines. Some of them fought in black units with their motto—“liberty for the slaves”—sewn onto their uniforms.<sup>2</sup>

### American

**Exceptionalism:** View that the United States is unique, marked by a distinct set of ideas such as equality, self rule, and limited government.

## 564 BY THE NUMBERS

### *American Ideas*

The declaration of independence talks about protecting *life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness*. Rank order of American citizens in self-reported happiness compared to citizens of other nations, according to three recent studies: **15, 19, 23**

Number of times the word “rights” appears in the Declaration of Independence: **10**

Number of times the word “rights” appears in the original Constitution: **0**

Number of times the word “rights” appears in amendments to the Constitution: **15**

Increase in inequality in US since 1970: **30%**

Increase in inequality in Canada since 1970: **5%**

Decrease in inequality in Germany since 1970: **10%**

Proportion of Americans who say it is more important to be free to pursue my own goals rather than making sure that no one is in need: **58%**

Proportion of Spaniards and French people, respectively, who say this: **30%, 36%**

Proportion of Italians, Poles, and Americans, respectively, who agree that “it is the role of the government to take care of people who cannot care for themselves: **66, 56, 23**

Percent of Americans who belong to a church or religious organization: **57%**

Percent of British, Swedes and French who belong to a church: **22%, 9%, 4%**

Percentage of Americans who agree that “everyone who works hard will get ahead,” 2005: **86%**

Percentage agreeing in 2011: **61%**

Percent of young people who say it is very important for them to achieve the American dream: **55%**

Percent of baby boomers who say this: **33**

The slave men and women who fought for the British saw their hopes vanish when their side surrendered at the battle of Yorktown in 1781—effectively the end of the Revolutionary War. After the battle the Redcoats, as the English soldiers were known, began to withdraw, rowing out to the warships bobbing in the harbor for their long retreat. One desperate group of slaves dashed past the sentries on the wharf, dove into the sea, and swam toward the long rowboats that were ferrying the defeated British troops out to the naval vessels.

As the desperate black men tried to clamber aboard the small boats, British troops pushed them away. Fearful that the swimmers would swamp the craft, the troops pulled out axes and hacked off the slaves’ hands and fingers. And *still* they kept coming, trying to surge aboard, thrashing after their fading dream of liberty. The image is unforgettable: these men were so desperate for freedom that, even as the Redcoats swung their bloody hatchets, they kept clutching for the boats that might carry them to freedom.

see for yourself 2.1



Go online to hear President Roosevelt deliver this speech.

**Freedom:** The ability to pursue one's own desires without interference from others.

**Negative liberty:** Freedom from constraints or the interference of others.

**Positive liberty:** The freedom and ability to pursue one's goals.

## “The Land of the Free”

No idea comes up more often in American history than freedom or liberty (we use the words interchangeably in this book). Three central symbols of the American Revolution were the Liberty Tree, the Liberty Pole, and the Liberty Bell. The national anthem declares America “the land of the free.” During the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, young high school students spilled out of Baptist churches and marched toward dogs and high-pressure fire hoses, singing “everyone shout freedom, freedom, freedom!” The Statue of Liberty is inscribed, “Give me your huddled masses . . . yearning to breathe free.” Americans have tried to spread their faith in freedom to countries across the globe; as President George W. Bush put it, “The best hope for peace in our world is the expansion of freedom in all the world.”

What is **freedom**? *It means that the government will protect your life, your liberty, and your property from the coercion of others (including government) in order to permit you to pursue the goals you define for yourself.*

## The Two Sides of Liberty

Everyone agrees that freedom is a basic American value. But, in practice, Americans disagree about what it means—and what governments should do to ensure it. There are two different views: negative liberty and positive liberty.<sup>3</sup>

The more familiar view is **negative liberty**: *Freedom is the absence of constraints.* Society's responsibility, from this perspective, is to make sure that others (especially government officials) do not interfere with individuals pursuing their own goals. The government protects your right to believe what you wish, to say what you like, to profess any faith, and to go into whatever business you care too—all without constraints or fear of punishment.

Negative liberty firmly limits government action. Public officials violate your freedom when they collect taxes from you to feed the hungry or punish you for smoking marijuana—or tobacco. Negative Freedom is the right to act as you want.

The alternative is **positive liberty**: *the freedom to pursue one's goals.* From this perspective, individuals cannot really be free—they cannot pursue their desires—if they lack the basic necessities of life. Protecting liberty means insuring



● During the revolution, radicals met under trees they called Liberty Trees or erected poles they called liberty poles. In this engraving, rebellious colonists raise a Liberty Pole while a Tory gentleman turns away in disgust. He'd better watch out. People who supported the British were often forced to kiss the Liberty Pole—and sometimes hung an effigy from it.

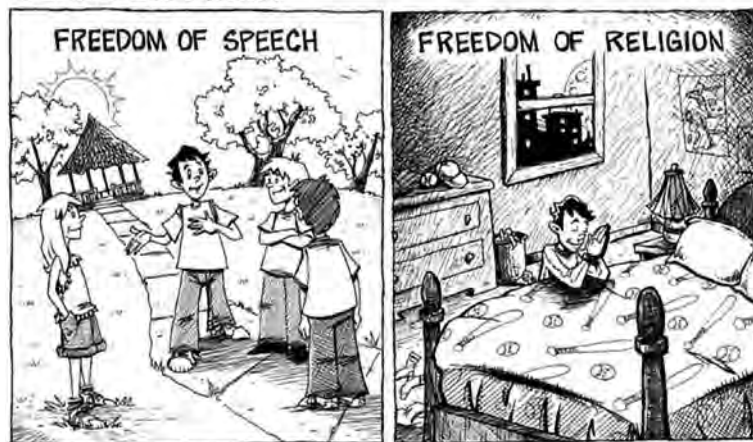
that every citizen has education, food, shelter, and health care. After all, how can people truly be free if they are hungry or homeless? This view justifies government action as a way to give all people an honest chance to achieve their desires.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt forcefully expressed this view in 1941. As the United States prepared for World War II, he proclaimed that the nation was fighting for four freedoms: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear.

The first two—freedom of speech and religion—were traditional, negative liberties: No one could infringe these individual rights. However, “freedom from want” was something new, a positive update of the original American idea of freedom. Freedom from want means helping needy people who have fallen on hard times. Roosevelt was suggesting that social welfare policies like unemployment insurance and Social Security were part of the all-American idea of freedom. A morally upstanding nation helps all its citizens achieve a minimal level of well-being—so that all of its citizens can be truly free. Contemporary ideas of positive freedom include efforts to insure that all people are well educated or to stop them from smoking. The theory: A lack of education or addiction or disease will make it difficult for them to pursue their goals.

Which side is correct? That depends on your values. Beneath these two visions of liberty lie different approaches to the good society. The negative view

COUNTERTHINK



ART • DAN BERGER

CONCEPT • MIKE ADAMS



www.NewsTarget.com

● A conservative cartoonist celebrates negative freedom (no one interferes with freedom of speech or religion) but mocks positive freedom (the idea that society should provide everyone with basic needs like health care). Beginning with Franklin Roosevelt in 1933, liberals disagree with this cartoon's perspective and embrace “freedom from want.” Source: www. NewsTarget.com

**Libertarians:** People who believe in minimal government—small army, no social programs, no social or moral legislation.

emphasizes personal autonomy: a free society taxing me so that needy people can get food or decent health care violates my freedom of property. Strong proponents of negative liberty are known as **libertarians** and oppose most forms of government action. The positive account follows Roosevelt: membership in a free society means sharing enough wealth so that everyone enjoys freedom from want. The two views reflect different values, different visions of society, and different definitions of liberty.

### The Idea of Freedom Is Always Changing

Once upon a time, Americans permitted slavery. And racial segregation. Women lost all their legal rights the day they were married; their possessions—even their very bodies—passed into the custody of their husbands. Chinese immigrants were denied any hope of becoming Americans no matter how long they lived in the country. And gay couples could be prosecuted as sexual criminals. The ideal of freedom moved Americans to reverse each of these prejudices.

Scholars disagree about how to interpret the results. Some see American history as a steady march toward greater liberty. Yes, they admit, American history is full of oppression. However, our faith in freedom leads oppressed groups to fight for their rights. The American promise, writes Samuel Huntington, is the “promise of disharmony” as a steady parade of groups—African Americans, women, immigrants, and many others—successfully challenge the nation to live up to its ideals.

Other political thinkers, like Rogers Smith, warn against seeing anything like a steady rise of freedom. The outcome in the fight is never inevitable. Instead, freedom is won and lost . . . and won and lost again. Americans fought their bloody civil war to end slavery—only to watch new forms of racial segregation and oppression take hold and last almost for another century. Native Americans have never fully been restored to their place on the land or in society. Gay rights, immigrant rights, the rights of people with disabilities, and many others are still part of an ongoing battle for freedom; no one can say how those conflicts will end. Nor should we ever take liberty for granted.<sup>4</sup>

What Do You Think?

### 2.1 Negative vs. Positive Liberty

In this section, we note that Americans often disagree about the meaning of “freedom.” Is freedom the “absence of constraints” (negative liberty) or the freedom to pursue one’s goals with equal opportunity (positive liberty)?

**Do you believe in negative liberty?** Government should not interfere with individuals. Freedom means leaving every person alone to do what she wishes—without interference.

**Or do you believe in positive liberty?** Freedom simply is not a meaningful concept if you or your family are chronically hungry. A decent society has to lift everyone to a basic minimum. That’s what living in a democracy should be about.

**Do your beliefs fall somewhere in between?** The truth is that very few people would build a society around a pure form of negative or positive liberty. Think about how you might combine these two concepts. You might find it easier to answer this question after reading about the other major ideas. If you are not ready to choose, you might want to read on—and then return to this question.

**THE BOTTOM LINE**

- Liberty—or the freedom to pursue your goals—is perhaps the greatest American value.
- There are two different views of what liberty means. *Negative liberty* emphasizes a lack of constraints on individuals, even if it is to help others. *Positive liberty* requires the community to help everyone satisfy their basic needs.
- Liberty has grown with time. Some scholars see it as an inevitable growth that reflects the American ideal; others, as a constant battle that can always go either way.

## Self-Rule

As the American Revolution began, mobs gathered in the towns and cities and insisted that they were now the legitimate political power. The People, they declared, would seize authority from royal governors (appointed by the tyrannical king) and exercise power themselves. “The mob has begun to think for itself,” complained one wealthy New Yorker. “Poor reptiles, before noon they will bite” (meaning *revolt*).<sup>5</sup>

Patriotic crowds ignored the critics and skeptics. At mass meetings, the people voted for laws, enforced decrees, and even issued wedding licenses. They dispatched boisterous pro-American toughs, who used sticks and stones to discourage individuals from acknowledging British institutions. Here is a powerful image of democracy: American people bypassing government officials and running the country themselves from the town commons. The people ruled.

### Power from the People

The most famous phrase in the U.S. Constitution comes in the very first sentence. “*We the people . . . establish this Constitution for the United States of America.*” The men who wrote the document were making a statement. *Here, political power flows from the people.* This summarizes the principle of **self-rule**.

That principle sounds simple. The United States is the world’s longest-running democracy—of course, the people rule. But from the very beginning, a great debate arose about how to achieve self-government. The Constitution was meant to settle the issue—but we are still arguing about it 225 years later.

How do we achieve self-rule? Americans have long vacillated between two very different paths—a *democracy* and a *republic*.

### One Side of Self-Rule: Democracy

**Democracy** means that citizens participate directly in making government decisions. (*Demos* is the Greek word for “the people.”) In early New England, citizens governed directly in town meetings—without relying on elected officials. To this day, some towns are still run this way: How high should taxes be? How much should the town pay their schoolteachers? Is this the year to rebuild the town hall? Eligible voters (originally, white men) all have their say before voting to decide the matter.

**Selfrule:** The idea that legitimate government flows from the people.

**Democracy:** A government in which citizens rule directly and make government decisions for themselves.





● Town Meeting

**Referendum:** An election in which citizens vote on an issue.

**Initiative:** A process in which citizens propose new laws or amendments to the state constitution.

**Sunshine laws:** Laws that permit the public to watch policymakers in action or access the records of the proceedings.

Many states still reach for this democratic ideal—let the public make decisions without relying on elected officials. California, for example, puts most important questions (and many unimportant ones) directly to the voters. In the 2010 election, California voters weighed in on 14 items ranging from legalizing marijuana (voted down) to whether to increase car license registration by \$18 to fund state parks (also voted down). People vote directly on an issue through a **referendum**—twenty-seven states and the District of Columbia allow them. **Initiatives** permit the public to circulate a petition that proposes a new law or amendment to the Constitution. And almost every city and state has **sunshine provisions** that open government meetings to the public.

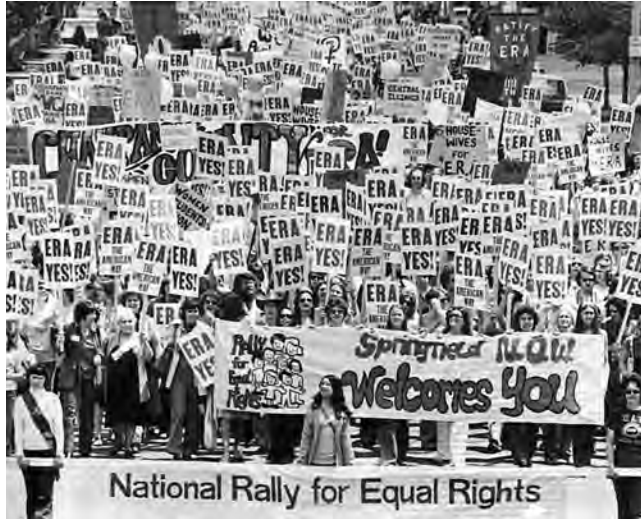
Thomas Jefferson, who drafted the Declaration of Independence and served as the third U.S. president, was the most vocal proponent of maximizing democracy. “The will of the majority,” wrote Jefferson, is a “sacred principle” and “the only sure guardian of the rights of man.” If the people cannot govern themselves, asked Jefferson, how can they possibly be trusted with the government of others?<sup>26</sup>

You can see the enduring democratic urge in the American impulse to take to the streets with demonstrations, rallies, and protests. The accompanying photo illustrates the extraordinary richness of this American legacy. Examples from the past fifty years include the massive Latino demonstrations against immigration restrictions in 2006; the march on Washington for jobs and freedom which was electrified by Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream” speech in 1963; student protests against the war in Viet Nam; Americans rallying for and against abortion rights; the Nation of Islam’s “Million Man March” on Washington (1995); the “Million-Pound” marches held around the country, protesting fat discrimination; Tea Party protesters against taxes and big government that sprang up in 2009; the Occupy Movement that began in New York in 2011; and rallies in Chicago to protest the continuing war in Afghanistan (in 2012).

Thomas Jefferson’s dream of direct democracy lives on. Idealists through American history return to the democrat’s first principle: the people should exercise power as much as possible.

### Another Side of Self-Rule: A Republic

Most of the men who drafted the Constitution did not agree with Jefferson about democracy. The states had tried to create direct democracy right after the



● Americans take to the streets to express their views. Here women demonstrate in support of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1975. There were also demonstrations against the amendment. And for almost any cause in every era.

American Revolution. George Washington thought the result was chaos. “We have probably had too good an opinion of human nature,” he grumbled. James Madison put it most famously: “Democracies have [always] been spectacles of turbulence and contention, . . . as short in their lives as violent in their deaths.” The problem, said Madison, was that in direct democracy the majority often gets carried away. They race after their self-interest without paying attention to the rights of the minority. Direct democracy, he concluded, offers no barrier to lynch mobs crying for blood.<sup>7</sup>

The alternative is a **republic**. In this form of government, the people rule indirectly through their elected representatives. The constitutional framers made an important contribution to the theory of self rule: Classical democratic theory was wrong in expecting that popular government would only work if the people were virtuous; the people are often not virtuous at all. “If men were angels,” wrote Madison, “no government would be necessary.” The great challenge, he argued, was to devise government institutions that would protect individual rights even if a majority of the people were selfish and corrupt.

As a result, American government is organized to check the majority. House members are elected every two years, presidents every four, and senators every six years; Supreme Court justices are selected by the president (and approved by the Senate) for lifelong terms. The House, the Senate, the president, and the Court all put the brakes on one another. And all of them face 50 different state governments, each with its own politics, powers, and programs.

Notice how the people’s influence varies from office to office. We vote for our House members every two years; in theory, they should reflect the public most closely, since they have to answer to the voters every other year. In contrast, we do not vote for Supreme Court justices; they hold their office for life. Their positions are organized to stand above popular sentiments, to blunt the political passions and desires, and to protect Constitutional rights. (It doesn’t always work that way, as you’ll soon see, but that is the theory).

## A Mixed System

Which view of self-rule holds in the United States? Both do. We can say that the United States is a *democratic republic* because it includes elements of a democracy

**Republic:** A government in which citizens rule indirectly and make government decisions through their elected representatives.

and a republic. There are plenty of opportunities for direct participation. At the same time, American government operates through elected and unelected officials who answer (sometimes indirectly) to the public.

The sheer number of elected officials—500,000—reflects our hybrid form of government. That’s one elected government official for every 600 people in the country. Few other nations come close to this ratio. We elect representatives, reflecting our origins as a republic; but the enormous number of opportunities to serve in elective office move us closer to a democracy.

While our government combines elements of both democracy and republic, the debate continues about which way we should tilt. Which stance do you prefer? Jefferson’s faith in direct democracy and the people? Or Madison’s warning that men are not angels and that government is best pursued indirectly, with the people electing some representatives who, in turn, select others? Radicals, romantics, and idealists (both liberal and conservative) are usually fired up by Jeffersonian democracy. Moderates generally take the safer republican course marked out by Madison and George Washington.

You may have noticed that these two principles—the democratic and the republican—are also the names of the two major political parties. However, to complicate matters, the party labels don’t really reflect the principles. Many Republican Party members are committed democrats, and vice versa. We always spell the parties with capital letters—Democrats and Republicans—so as not to confuse them with the two pathways to self-rule.

#### THE BOTTOM LINE

- Self rule is a powerful and enduring idea guiding American government. Lincoln put it best: “government by the people, of the people, for the people.”
- There are two great pathways to government by the people: a *democracy* and a *republic*. Americans have always balanced these two ideals.

## Limited Government

Back in 1691, while America was still a British colony, the king appointed Benjamin Fletcher to be governor of New York and all of New England. The Connecticut legislature did not want to cede its power to Governor Fletcher and immediately selected a new commander for the local militia—a direct challenge to the new governor’s authority. Fletcher could not ignore this intransigence, so on a beautiful October day he sailed to Hartford, the capital of Connecticut, with a small detachment of troops. He assembled the Connecticut militia and had an officer read the royal proclamation declaring his authority over the state.

As the officer read the order, the Connecticut militiamen began to beat their drums in defiance. Fletcher tried to restore order by ordering his soldiers to fire their muskets in the air; in the ensuing quiet he threatened to punish them for their insolence. In response, the commander of the Connecticut militia stepped forward, put his hand on the hilt of his sword, and issued his own warning: “If my drummers are again interrupted, I’ll make sunlight shine through you. We deny and defy your authority.” Outnumbered and in no mood for bloodshed, Fletcher

beat a quick retreat to his vessel and sailed ignominiously back to New York City. Since the king and his ministers were more than 3,000 miles away, they never even heard about this little rebellion against their authority.<sup>8</sup>

## The Origins of Limited Government

The tale of Governor Fletcher illustrates an enduring idea: Americans distrust their national government and have consistently sought to limit its power. Even 80 years before the revolution, Connecticut had grown used to electing its own leaders and going its own way. The people saw the king as a distant figure with no right to interfere in their affairs. That image runs through American history: central government as a remote, unfeeling, untrustworthy authority that threatens our freedoms.

Why did Americans develop this distrust? The answer lies in how the people secured their rights in the first place. In most nations, the central government—made up of kings or aristocrats, or both—grudgingly granted the people rights like the vote or jury trials. Sometimes the people rebelled (as in France), sometimes they negotiated with kings (England), and sometimes monarchs expanded rights to modernize their nations (Thailand). All these countries share a common experience: Kings or the central governments that replaced them were the source of rights and liberties. No wonder people in these nations instinctively look to the government for help in solving their problems.

The United States was dramatically different. Americans enjoyed political rights like voting long before they even had a central government. As Governor Fletcher's humiliation illustrates, for most of colonial history the king was too far away to meddle in colonial affairs. Experience taught Americans to see the central government, not as a potential source of rights, but as a threat to their life, liberty, and happiness.

Perhaps this is why Americans are slow to trust their national government. When new programs are proposed, they often hit resistance. Whether it is national health insurance, a cap on carbon emissions to stop global warming, or an ID card to enhance homeland security, the proposal runs up against deep suspicion of government. The French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville was struck by this lack of trust. Any visitor from Europe, he wrote back in 1831, would be amazed that the American government is so "feeble and restricted." Fifty years later, the English ambassador to the United States summarized the American spirit: "The less of government the better."<sup>9</sup>

We saw one result in the previous chapter. The United States has a low tax rate compared to most nations. Yes, you read that right. Americans complain bitterly about government taxes (our deep dislike of government again), even while U.S. tax rates are among the lowest in the industrial world. Take another look at Comparing Nations 1.2 in the first chapter. The American tax rate ranks 27th.

## And Yet . . . the United States Has a Big Government

Here is the paradox lying at the heart of the limited-government idea. People across the political spectrum demand government action. Many **conservatives** seek to use federal authority to crack down on drugs, root out obscenity, limit marriage to heterosexual couples, get tougher on crime, or enhance homeland security. Back in the 1920s, conservatives in both parties banded together with feminists and public health reformers to outlaw all sales of alcohol from coast to coast—a remarkably ambitious government effort to change people's everyday behavior.

### Conservatives:

Americans who believe in reduced government spending, personal responsibility, traditional moral values, and a strong national defense. Also known as right or right wing.

**Liberals:** People who value cultural diversity, government programs for the needy, public intervention in the economy and a person's right to choose their own lifestyle on social and moral issues. Also known as left or left wing.

Most **liberals** reject the idea that public officials should interfere in people's private lives. But they are all for active government when it comes to economic policy or corporate regulation. They call for government-subsidized transportation, tighter regulations on banks, national health insurance, and school lunch programs (there's the freedom from want, again).

A substantial band of **libertarians** break with both liberals and conservatives and challenge America to live up to ideals of limited government. Government, say the libertarians, should protect public safety, private property, and national borders—and do little else. No great army or navy, no public schools, no regulating banks, no telling people they can't use drugs, no helping people who are hungry, or homeless, or need health care, no laws against discrimination. This perspective has never gained much traction, however; every crisis—from a food poisoning outbreak to bank failures to terrorist attacks—inspires widespread demands for government action. However, libertarians do reflect a deep American suspicion of government that goes back to colonial times.

### Limits on Government Action

In short, Americans often say they do not like government and then demand government action for causes they care about. Their calls for action generally face two hurdles: the desire to limit government and the Constitution.

When the framers designed our political system, they organized suspicion of government right into the system. The federal Constitution includes an intricate system of checks and balances on power, which we will explore in the next chapter. The Constitution carefully limits what Congress may do—although Americans vigorously debate exactly where those boundaries actually are.

We will encounter these limits in almost every chapter of this book, with one big exception. When we turn to national security—the power over war and peace—you will see that constitutional limits have faded and presidential powers have swelled.

Finally, although it is difficult for government officials to undertake new tasks, the barriers are not insurmountable. During times of crisis, people turn to the government and demand action. Skilled leadership can also negotiate sweeping changes. And once programs go into effect, they often prove popular.

Ironically, the limits on change that make it hard to introduce new programs also make it difficult to repeal them once they are up and running. For example, Social Security was passed in 1935 during the economic crisis of the Great Depression; Medicare passed in part because of a great electoral landslide (in 1964) and in part because of the adroit maneuvering of President Lyndon Johnson. Both are now extremely popular policies; in fact, they are so popular that they are known in Washington as “the third rails” of American politics—touch them and die.

American distrust of government has been organized into institutions like Congress and the presidency. New programs are often difficult to pass. But once they pass, the same checks make them difficult to repeal, especially if they grow popular.

### When Ideas Clash: Self-Rule and Limited Government

When Barack Obama ran for president in 2008, he promised to do something about global warming. Obama and his opponent that year, Senator John McCain (R-Arizona), focused on this issue during their three election debates and gave



● **Incompetent government?** Residents of New Orleans wait for assistance 10 days after the Hurricane Katrina struck. The slow government response infuriated residents—and shocked many Americans.



● President George W. Bush at Ground Zero following the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001

voters a clear choice. Democrats proposed “cap and trade,” a plan that uses market strategies to address the problem of carbon emissions. Republicans rejected fears about climate change. They promised instead to reduce our dependence on foreign oil by stimulating domestic production. As vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin put it, “Drill, baby, drill!” The cry echoed loudly across the Republican convention hall in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Democrats and Republicans offered very different policies. And in the 2008 election, the people made a clear choice: Obama and Biden over McCain and Palin. Does that mean that the winners could act on their signature issues? No! There were too many barriers in Congress.

Note the clash between two ideas that we have discussed: self-rule and limited government. Self-rule says: Since the Democrats won the election they should put their policies into place. Jefferson put this point plainly: “The will of the majority,” is a “sacred principle” and “the only sure guardian of the rights of man.” So President Obama should be able to do what he promised. Most democratic nations more faithfully follow this path to government by the people.

But another value, limited government, says: Not so fast. We don’t like government doing lots of things, so we make it very difficult for elected officials to follow through on their promises and actually get things done. Even a president who wins a national election by a large margin must still convince the majority in the House of Representatives and 60% of the Senate to vote his way—or, in this case, no cap and trade. Ultimately the main Democratic plan to combat global warming won over a majority in both chambers, but it never got near 60% needed for the Senate. (You’ll learn the details of this example in Chapter 13, when we examine Congress.)

Even when Congress does pass a law—which, as you can see, is no easy thing—the program may still face challenges in the courts for violating constitutional limits on government power.

see for yourself 2.2



Go online and listen to the Republican Convention chant.

What Do You Think?

2.2 Self Rule vs. Limited Government

Many observers think we are leaning too far away from government action—making it nearly impossible to get things done. These reformers seek an easier path to government action. However, that prospect raises fears of more government. Which should we emphasize, self rule or limited government? It's time to make your own choice.

**I'm with Thomas Jefferson.** It should be easier for elected officials to enact the programs they promised. If they cannot do so, elections become less meaningful. Self rule requires us to follow the people's mandate. If the majority does not like the results, it can express its displeasure in the next election.

**I'm with James Madison.** The checks and balances that make large-scale reforms difficult protect the US from overbearing government. The barriers to government action **should** be high. If the public really wants something, it will probably happen over time. Limited government is more important. Don't change the process.

**Not sure?** This is a formidable question. You may very well change your mind—maybe more than once—as you continue to read this book.

see for yourself 2.3



Go online to see what happened to cap and trade, as reported by NPR.

The result is an important question for political scientists—and for all Americans: How should we balance self-rule and limits on government? Erecting too many boundaries means that we undermine self-government. But if voters get everything the winning candidates promise them, the result could be a host of new programs and policies—meaning a more active government and higher taxes.

**THE BOTTOM LINE**

- Americans *distrust their government* far more than the people in most other democracies. The Constitution builds that distrust into our governing rules by providing for *limited government*. The result is a very durable status quo.
- In other countries, when politicians are elected promising a program, they can usually deliver. In the United States, winners confront multiple barriers to fulfilling the promises they made on the campaign trail. That's the anti-governmental strain in American thinking.
- However, once programs do go into effect, they often prove popular and difficult to change.

**Individualism**

Political scientist John Kingdon was visiting his niece in Norway. She was expecting a baby and Professor Kingdon asked what she would do about her job. Casually, she replied that she would receive a full year's leave at 80% of her normal pay, and that her company was required to give her job back after the leave. "Who pays for all this?" asked Professor Kingdon. "The government, of course," his niece replied. She was surprised the question had even come up. "Is it any different in the United States?" she asked innocently.<sup>10</sup>

As Kingdon explained, it is completely different in the United States: advocates fought for years to win the Family and Medical Leave Act (1993), which requires employers with more than fifty workers to allow up to twelve weeks of *unpaid* leave for pregnancy, adoption, illness, or military service. In 2012, the Supreme Court struck down part of the law by ruling that a state government employee who had been denied leave could not sue the state for cash.

Norwegians, through their government, take care of new parents. In fact, they take pretty good care of all their citizens. To pay for an array of public services, tax rates are much higher than ours. Almost half of a Norwegian's income goes to taxes.

Americans generally value **individualism**: *the idea that individuals, not the society or the community or the government, are responsible for their own well-being*. We, as a society, do not pay for maternity leave. Instead, we expect private individuals and families to handle birth, or adoption, or care giving.

**Individualism:** The idea that individuals, not the society, are responsible for their own well-being.

## Community vs. Individualism

The idea of individualism is a source of controversy in every nation. There are two ways to see any society: as a single *community*, or as a collection of *individuals*. Clearly every nation is both, but government policies can be designed to emphasize the community or to focus on individuals. Let's take a closer look at the two principles.

Countries that emphasize the community are called **social democracies**. Social democrats believe that members of a society are responsible for one another. They use government as a source of mutual assistance. The public interest is best served, from this perspective, if everyone has a decent life. The government provides citizens with the basics: good health insurance, retirement benefits, generous unemployment packages, and—as we saw in the Norwegian case—maternity benefits.

**Social democracy:** A government whose citizens are responsible for one another's well being and use government policy to assure that all are comfortably cared for.

In exchange, people pay high taxes. The effect of high taxation is to make it difficult for most citizens to get very rich. At the same time, the extensive welfare state makes it far less likely that people will live in poverty. Communal societies are far more equal—not in opportunity, but in outcome. Most Western European nations are social democracies.

Social democracies are based on *solidarity*, the idea that people have a tight bond watch out for one another. Some societies exhibit a very strong sense of solidarity; in general, this tendency increases during wars, economic depressions, or other crises that get everyone to pull together. Scholars have found that more homogeneous societies—where people look alike, share the same values, and practice the same religion—exhibit higher rates of solidarity than very diverse societies. They point out that even long-established social democracies in Europe (populated primarily by Christians) have seen their sense of solidarity falter with the arrival of Muslim immigrants. Growing diversity challenged national solidarity.

American politics includes a streak of solidarity. When Franklin Roosevelt first suggested Social Security payments for retired people, he described an 84-year-old neighbor who had nowhere to live. He argued that we as a society had to take care of people like his neighbor. Martin Luther King put it eloquently: "I am inevitably my brother's keeper because I am my brother's brother." However, the commitment to solidarity rises and falls in the United States; today, it appears weaker than it has often been in the past.

Some groups in the United States are more likely to express high levels of solidarity within their group. Immigrants often feel this way. From Irish in the 19th



century to Latinos today, historians have chronicled a sense of shared fate among first- and second-generation Americans. African Americans, too, have traditionally displayed very high levels of solidarity. Political scientist Michael Dawson found that the legacy of slavery and discrimination created a lingering sense of linked fate among African Americans. Drawing on an old blues song, he calls it the legacy of standing “behind the mule.”<sup>11</sup> Labor unions, which fought for many years for the right to organize, often tout the slogan, “solidarity forever.” Although solidarity has been promoted across the political spectrum in the past, today’s liberals are more likely than conservatives to emphasize a communal approach to public policy.

Now let us turn to individualism. In this view, people and their families are responsible for their own welfare. The economist Milton Friedman famously wrote that “The world runs on individuals pursuing their separate interests.” Leaving people free to choose their interests, Friedman continued, and the public interest of the whole society will emerge.<sup>12</sup> Rather than taxing people and using funds to aid the less well-off, this perspective opts for low taxes and a green light for private entrepreneurs. People who work hard will get ahead, and society will grow and prosper.

Individualists value the chance to get ahead (and get rich!) more than they value a society where everyone is equal. In social democracies, government regulations aim to protect workers. In contrast, individualists oppose government controls and believe that private companies should be able to expand or contract their work force as they see fit (as long as they hire and fire without discriminating). American business leaders often express disdain for social democracies, which regulate every aspect of business—from requiring maternity leaves to restricting layoffs. Individualism points toward limited government, faith in economic markets, and a strong emphasis on *negative liberty*.

Opinion polls confirm what political theorists have long suspected: Americans tend to lean more to individualism than to social democracy—much more so than most other nations. In one prominent cross-national study, for example, people



● Columbus, Ohio: Students from Central State University give the black power salute during a meeting on the steps of the State House. About 500 students from the university staged demonstrations to press demands for more money for the school.

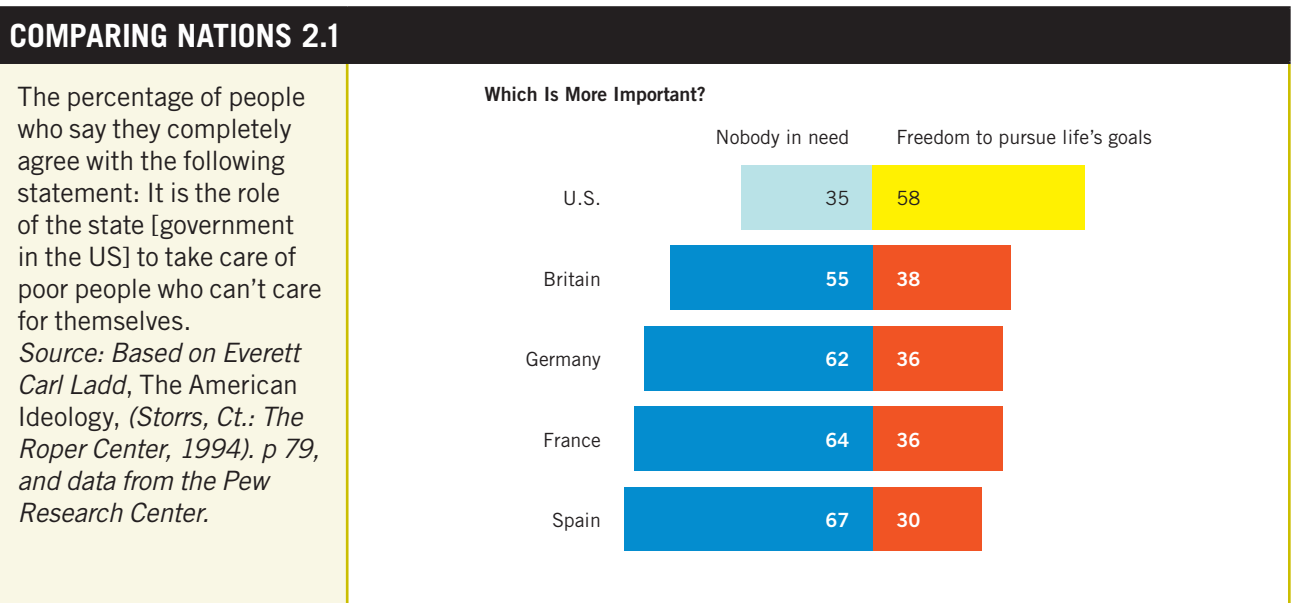
in many nations were asked whether “it is the responsibility of the government to take care of very poor people who cannot take care of themselves.” Over 60% of the public strongly agreed in England, France, and Italy; 70% agreed in Spain. In contrast, only 23% of Americans agreed. In another survey, people were asked which is more important: being free to pursue life’s goals (individualism), or making sure that nobody in society is in need (community). Once again the American majority (58%) chose freedom, whereas nations like Germany and Spain chose taking care of those in need. Western European nations prefer community-oriented social democracies by roughly 2 to 1; Americans lean more heavily toward individualism by the same margin, 2 to 1.

### The Roots of American Individualism: Opportunity and Discord

Americans lean toward individualism and away from social democracy. Why? Two famous explanations look to the past. One finds the answer in golden opportunities. A second emphasizes social and racial discord.

**Golden Opportunity.** For centuries, most Europeans and Asians lived as serfs or peasants working small plots of land. Powerful rulers kept them firmly in their place—there was no chance for individuals to get ahead by working hard. Peasants, all in the same dismal situation, would have to revolt as a group. Their shared conditions fostered a sense of solidarity. In early America, by contrast, there appeared to be endless land. With hard work and a little luck, anyone (at least any white male) could gain a decent living and perhaps even a fortune. Stories about early settlers clearing their own land were later reinforced by images of rugged individuals on the Western frontier. Hard workers relied on themselves—not the government.

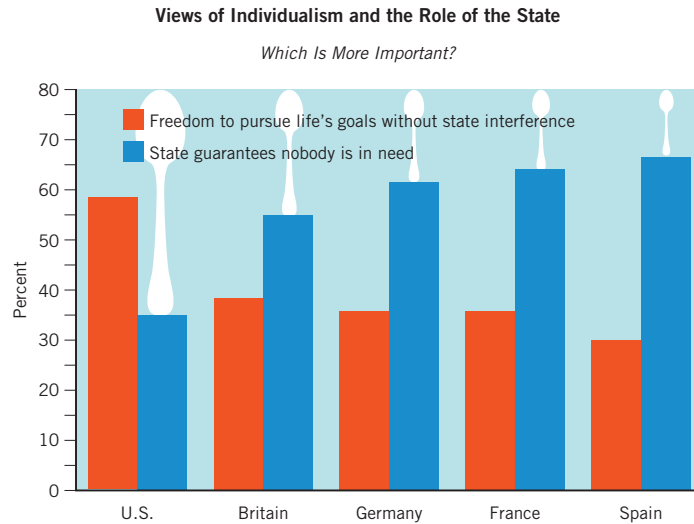
There is a lot of myth in these stories. Frontier life was less about brave individualism and more about people helping one another out. Settlers couldn’t build a barn, a church, or a meetinghouse without their neighbors’ help. But the image of hardy individuals on the frontier remains a powerful ideal in American politics. And there was an important truth at its core: Few societies have ever offered so many individuals as much opportunity to rise and prosper as early America did.<sup>13</sup>



## COMPARING NATIONS 2.2

Americans stand out from other nations: They worry about the poor less and about individual freedom more.

Source: *Pew global attitudes November 17, 2011.*



PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q15a & Q61.

**Social Conflict.** An entirely different explanation for American individualism emphasizes the enormous differences within the society: The country is too big and the population too diverse to develop a sense of solidarity. What, after all, did Calvinist Yankees in New England have in common with Roman Catholics in Baltimore or Anglican planters in Virginia—much less Spanish speakers in Florida or Texas? Moreover, a nation that included four million black slaves by 1860 had a terrible divide running through its heart. Amid the misery and guilt over slavery, it was difficult for black and white people to feel solidarity with one another.

By the 1830s there was another still another source of division. Immigrants were arriving by the tens (and later hundreds) of thousands—people with different languages and what seemed like strange customs. Each generation of immigrants added to the American cacophony. For example, Irish Catholics (who arrived in the 1830s and 40s) seemed strange and threatening to the old English Protestants



● *Depiction of the Oklahoma Land Rush of 1889*

who had immigrated a century earlier. Could Catholics, with their allegiance to a foreign pope, really understand or uphold American values? Fifty years later, newly-arriving Italians, Poles, and Chinese seemed just as peculiar to the Irish, who by then had settled in. All these divisions made solidarity far more difficult to feel than in more stable, homogeneous populations.

Both explanations are on target. Unprecedented economic opportunity and vast social divisions each make the United States different from other nations. Together they can limit feelings of solidarity and lead to a philosophy of individualism.

### Who We Are: Individualism and Solidarity?

It is not correct to conclude that Americans are individualists alone. Rather, the two themes always compete in American politics. Individualism is more robust and more often in evidence. But a sense of solidarity also unites the American population. We often pull together as a nation. We often take care of our neighbors and pass government programs to improve the lives of people we do not know. The United States may have deep divisions, but it is remarkable how quickly they can disappear. A substantial majority of Americans today are children, grandchildren, or great-grandchildren of immigrants—many of whom were once regarded as strange and different.

All this raises another question to ponder: Where would you draw the line between solidarity and individualism? The answer directly relates to one of this book's central questions: *who are we?* Take the test just below to learn where you stand on the continuum between rugged individualist and strong solidarity.

#### THE BOTTOM LINE

- American politics includes both individualism and solidarity.
- Different leaders, parties, groups, and individuals weigh the two values in different ways. However, compared to other nations, the United States is very much at the individualist end of the spectrum.

## The American Dream

Benjamin Franklin perfected a classic American literary form—tips for getting rich. Anyone, he assured his readers, could be successful by following a formula: Be frugal (“a penny saved is a penny earned”), hard working (“no gains without pains”), steady (“little strokes fell great oaks”), bold (“God helps those who help themselves”), and—most important—morally upright (“leave your vices, though ever so dear.”)<sup>14</sup>

Franklin was summarizing what later became known as the American dream: *if you are talented and work hard, you can achieve financial success*. A popular historian, James Trusloe Adams, was the first to actually call it an American dream: “a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement.”<sup>15</sup> The idea scarcely changes across generations. “The American dream that we were all raised on is a simple but powerful one,” averred President Bill Clinton, more than two centuries after Ben Franklin. “If you work hard and play by the rules, you should be given a chance to go as far as your God-given abilities will take you.” President Ronald

**What Do You Think?**

**Individualism vs. Solidarity**

Please score yourself on the following ten statements: 0 = Disagree strongly 1 = Disagree 2 = Agree 3 = Agree strongly	1. It is the responsibility of the government to take care of poor people who cannot take care of themselves.	<b>0 1 2 3</b>
	2. Everyone should have health insurance in case they become ill.	<b>0 1 2 3</b>
	3. In fact, everyone should have the <i>same</i> health insurance. It doesn't make sense for some people to get better care than others just because they can afford it.	<b>0 1 2 3</b>
	4. I'd be willing to pay <i>a little more</i> in taxes so no person in America goes hungry or homeless.	<b>0 1 2 3</b>
	5. I'd be willing to pay <i>a lot more</i> in taxes so that everyone in America has a pretty decent life.	<b>0 1 2 3</b>
	6. I agree with Dr. Martin Luther King: "I am inevitably my brother's keeper because I am my brother's brother {and sister's sister} . . . the betterment of the poor enriches the rich."	<b>0 1 2 3</b>
	7. I don't believe big companies should be permitted to fire people without providing two months' salary and some retraining.	<b>0 1 2 3</b>
	8. Most Americans want the same things out of life.	<b>0 1 2 3</b>
	9. We should think about others as much as we think about ourselves.	<b>0 1 2 3</b>
	10. It is wrong to step over others to get ahead in life.	<b>0 1 2 3</b>
<b>Scoring</b>	0–5 You are truly a rugged individualist! 5–14 You are largely an individualist. 15–20 You are a moderate who sees both sides of the issue. 20–24 You are a social democrat. 25–30 You are a true blue believer in solidarity!  Now, speak with someone who scored very differently from you. Try to explain how and why you came to hold your views.	

Reagan put it even more plainly: "What I want to see above all is that this country remains a country where someone can always get rich."<sup>16</sup>

**Spreading the Dream**

The legacy of the Revolutionary War, according to historian Gordon Wood, was the spread of the American dream to all classes. National leaders originally imagined that they were establishing a classical republic, like Athens, in which a few outstanding men would govern the people. But the American Revolution geared

society to ordinary, obscure people. What did the common people care about? “Making money and getting ahead,” writes Wood. Yes, it was vulgar, material, crass, and even anti-intellectual. But the Revolution made the common people the basis of government and gave them an unprecedented chance to make their fortunes. That had never happened on such a scale before.<sup>17</sup>

By the 19th century, the race to get ahead had turned fast and reckless. “Go ahead is our maxim and our password,” wrote New York politician Phillip Hone in 1837. “We go ahead with a vengeance, regardless of consequences.” Tocqueville was struck by the same thing. “The great mass of citizens do not want to talk about anything but private business. . . . The love of money [and] even base greed,” he continued, had made the United States a commercial nation through and through. “That is the characteristic trait which now distinguishes the Americans . . . from all other nations.”<sup>18</sup>

Enabling the dream of success remains an important part of any policy debate. Will a proposal help small business? Will it create jobs? Will it stifle entrepreneurs? Immigrants come in large numbers—far more than to any other country, as we saw in the last chapter—partially to pursue the dreams of success. Politicians from both parties eagerly try to spread the idea to other nations (which are not always enthusiastic about receiving it—as we saw in our discussion of solidarity).

### Challenging the Dream

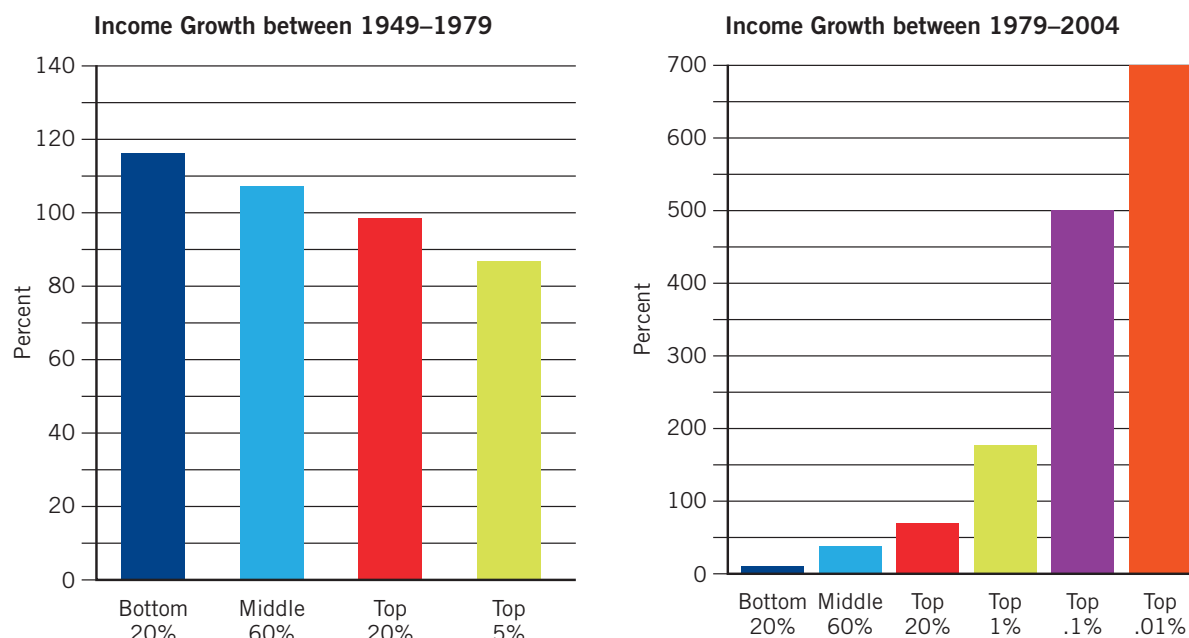
Like every important idea, the American dream generates conflict. Critics raise two questions: Has the system become rigged to favor some (usually the wealthy) over others? And is the pursuit of wealth an undesirable value or one that crowds out other important values?

**Is the System Tilted Toward the Wealthy?** Some critics question whether the dream is still open to everyone or whether it has grown biased toward the rich and powerful. When Tocqueville was writing, in the 1830s, the United States offered more opportunities to get ahead than perhaps any nation in history. Vast open lands (open, that is, once Native Americans had been forced off) offered a fresh start for the ambitious and resourceful. Most workers relied on themselves; at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century only one in ten white men worked for someone else. That era passed a long time ago but there have been many eras of golden opportunity to rise up.

In the years after World War II, middle-class incomes rose faster than incomes at the top. Then, starting around 1979, this trend changed. Money began to flow to the wealthiest more than to the other classes. Figures 2.1 and 2.2 compare the two periods.

Today, the top 1% of Americans own more than the bottom 90%. Three million people enjoy more wealth than 270 million others. Sixty million Americans at the bottom of the charts own almost nothing—1/10th of one percent of the national wealth. Many social scientists now argue that the chance of moving up—from poverty to wealth—is fading in the United States. Studies suggest that someone in the bottom fifth of the income distribution is twice as likely to move up at least one category (or quintile) in Canada, Denmark, or France than in the United States. Critics—both liberal and conservative—increasingly challenge the system for not offering real equality opportunity.<sup>19</sup>

**Does the American Dream Promote the Wrong Values?** A second critique questions the chase for wealth as a human value. Environmentalists criticize the damage caused by big houses, sprawling suburbs, gas-guzzling cars, and opulent



● **Figures 2.1 and 2.2** Between 1949 and 1979, those on the bottom saw their earnings grow faster than those on the top, but look how that changed after 1979. Now those on the bottom have very little income growth while the wealthy have very rapid growth. Is this a bad thing? Americans disagree. Source: Robert Frank, *Falling Behind*. University of California Press, 2007

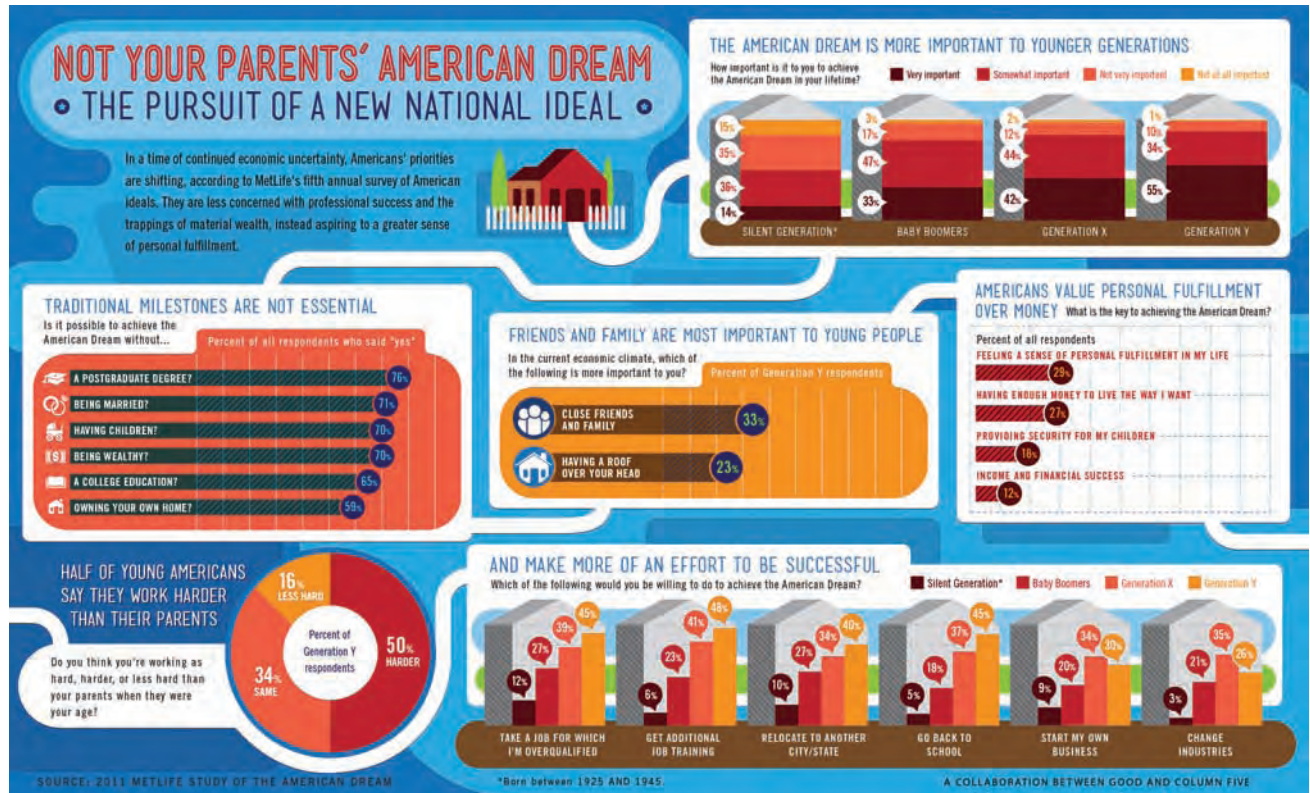
lifestyles. Others cite the harm to old-fashioned communal ideals. “These dark days will be worth all they cost us,” said President Franklin Roosevelt during the depths of the Great Depression, “if they teach us that our true destiny is . . . to minister . . . to our fellow man.” Repeatedly, he urged Americans to rethink their basic values before an upturn in the stock market “dulled their moral sense.”

President Lyndon Johnson put civil rights in the same larger context. “Should we double our wealth and conquer the stars, and still not be equal to this issue [race], then we will have failed as a people and as a nation. For with a whole country as with a person, ‘What is a man profited, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?’” Voices like these have questioned the pursuit of economic success to the exclusion of community and social justice.<sup>20</sup>

The criticism, however, rarely sticks for long. Ralph Waldo Emerson, a 19th century essayist and lecturer, summed up the usual view when he questioned the motives of his iconoclastic friend, Henry David Thoreau. “I cannot help counting it a fault in him that he had no ambition,” said Emerson at Thoreau’s funeral. “Instead of engineering for all America, he was the captain of a huckleberry-party.”<sup>21</sup>

Many people would rather go out in the woods like Thoreau and pick huckleberries than join the “rat race” for greater material benefits. The capitalists who celebrate wealth often have to wrestle with economic populists who would rather share it. During difficult economic times—like those accompanying the “great recession,” which began in the fall 2008—faith in the American dream lags.

Despite critics and challenges, Americans usually celebrate the gospel of success. The nation’s politics, economics, and culture accommodate the dreams of wealth. In comparison with other wealthy nations, our taxes are relatively low, we regulate business less, we take fewer vacations, and we place more stress on getting ahead. As Figure 2.3 shows, younger people are far more likely than their parents or grandparents to believe they can achieve the American dream in their lifetime. They also believe they work harder than their parents did.



● Figure 2.3 Not your parents American dream

### THE BOTTOM LINE

- The American dream is a belief that anyone who works hard can get ahead and grow wealthy.
- Critics argue that hard work is no longer enough. They make two criticism: The poor and middle class are falling farther behind the wealthy because of bias in the political economy; other values are more important than wealth.
- Despite the critics, the dream remains a powerful American idea.

## Equality

When Tocqueville arrived in the United States, he was amazed by the equality. In one of his first letters home, he reported watching servers in a tavern sit down at the next table to eat and drink alongside the guests. People who declared bankruptcy were not shunned, as they would have been in France, but were treated the same as any other businessperson who had suffered a temporary setback. Here was a society where people from all ranks shook hands, discussed politics, and chased money. Everyone seemed to be equals.

Tocqueville distilled this thought into the first sentence of his great book *Democracy in America*: “No novelty in the United States stuck me more vividly . . . than the equality of condition.” In a world that was still full of aristocrats and inherited privilege, American society itself embodied the great idea at the heart of the Declaration of Independence: “All men are created equal.”<sup>22</sup>



**Equality:** The belief that every citizen should enjoy the same privileges, status, and rights before the laws.

**Social equality:** Belief that all individuals enjoy the same status in society.

**Political equality:** Belief that every citizen has the same political rights and opportunities.

**Economic equality:** A situation where there are only small differences in wealth between citizens.

**Equality** means that *every citizen enjoys the same privileges, status, and rights before the laws*. There are three different kinds of equality to consider when analyzing the concept: *social, political, and economic*.<sup>23</sup>

### Three Kinds of Equality

**Social equality** means that all individuals enjoy the same status in society. There are no American barons or archdukes who inherit a special place when they are born. In contrast, Tocqueville had grown up as a nobleman in France and always knew his social equals from his “inferiors.” He felt more at home with a gentleman than with a mere merchant or farmer.

This aspect of American society has not changed. Except for slavery, there have never been fixed social classes. Few American politicians boast of noble origins or good family lineage. On the contrary, for the past 150 years candidates have flaunted (or invented) their working class roots. Even very wealthy politicians often claim to have risen up from humble origins (for many years, they boasted about the log cabins they supposedly grew up in). Mitt Romney, the Republican presidential candidate in 2012, touted “middle-class” roots and values despite his multi-million dollar fortune.\* An old cliché in American politics—one with a lot of truth to it—is the saying that any little boy or girl could grow up to be the president—or a millionaire. You don’t have to be born into the “right” family.

**Political equality** means that every citizen has the same political rights and opportunities. Americans enjoyed universal white, male *suffrage*—or the right to vote—much earlier than did most nations. Over time the opportunity to vote spread. Today there are lively debates about whether we still ensure everyone an equal opportunity to affect the political process.

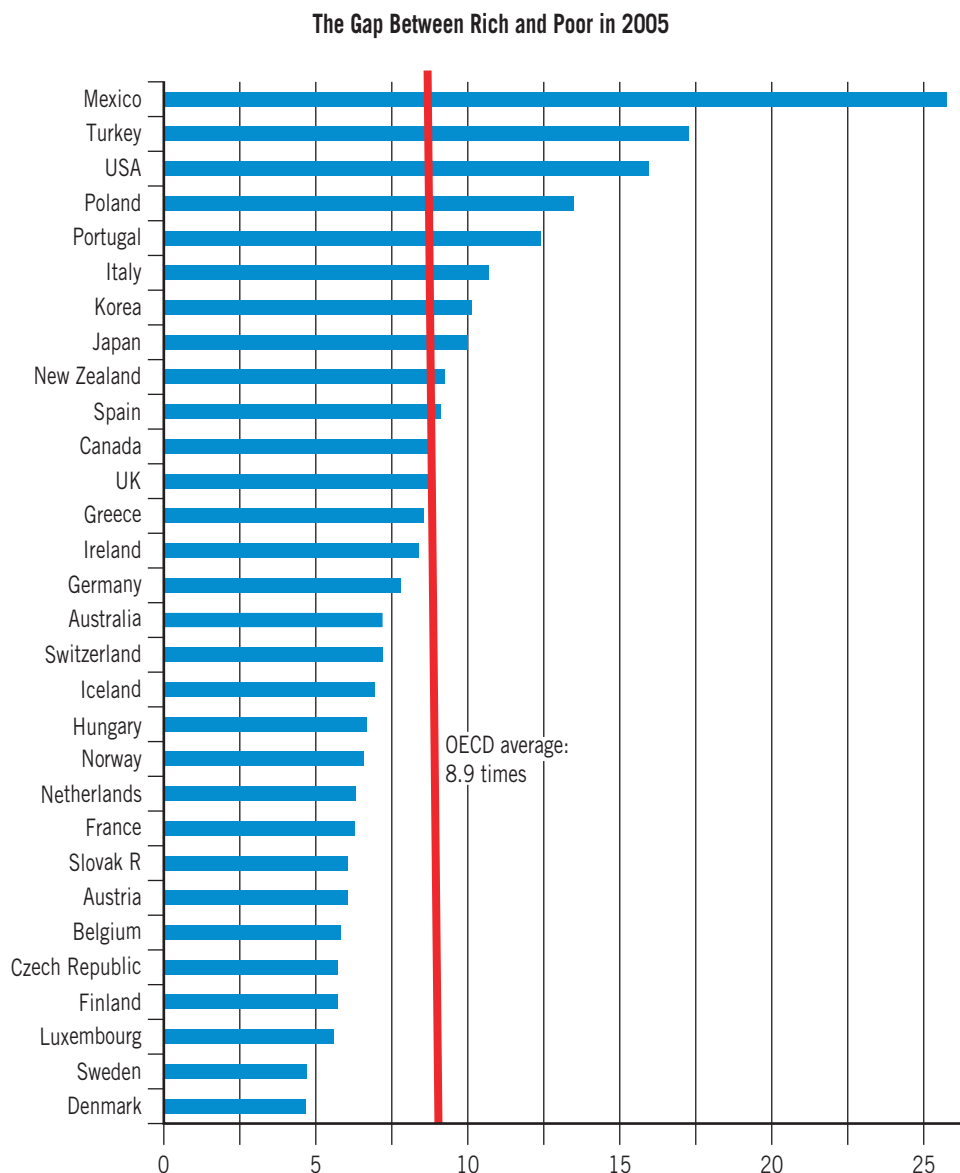
Some reformers suggest, for example, that if everyone is to have the same chance to influence the political process, we should remove money from elections. Otherwise, the wealthy will have more influence than everyone else. Others counter that individuals who are excited by candidates should be allowed to contribute to them. The Supreme Court intervened in 2010 by ruling that campaign donations are a form of free speech—which the government cannot usually restrict. (We’ll explore the issue when we study civil liberties in Chapter 6, and campaign finance in Chapter 12.)

The quest for political equality raises a range of other issues: Does everyone enjoy an equal right to a fair trial—or have the costs of going to court elevated this basic right beyond the reach of many people? Does the voting system make it too difficult for some people to register and cast their ballots? Should states forbid convicted criminals from voting even after they have served their sentence? All these questions reflect the fundamental issue of political equality: Does every citizen have an *equal opportunity* to influence the political process and are they all treated the same way before the law?

**Economic equality** focuses on differences in wealth. Back in the early 19th century, Tocqueville observed that in New England people lived in remarkably similar ways, and that in the future, “there will be no exceptional wealth or irremediable poverty.” President Washington noticed the same thing when he toured New England: “Few opulent . . . and no poor.” At the time, the region truly was exceptional in this way.<sup>24</sup>

Today the United States has changed dramatically—toward inequality. Figure 2.4 shows the Gini coefficient, which is one measure of economic inequality, in 14 countries. In 1970, the United States was similar to most other wealthy

\*To be updated for publication based on November 2012 election results.



Average incomes of richest 10%, multiple of average incomes of poorest 10%

Source: *Growing Unequal?* The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2008.

● **Figure 2.4** *The Gap Between the Rich and the Poor.* The income gap between rich and poor is well above the OECD average (indicated by the vertical line) in Mexico, Turkey, the United States, Poland, and Portugal.

democracies, appearing between Japan and France on the equality tables. Today, in contrast, American society has become far less equal than nations like Japan, Sweden, or even Pakistan. We are now closer to the inequality levels of less-developed nations, like Argentina or South Africa, than to the wealthier but more egalitarian nations of the world. Should we adopt public policies to limit inequality? That is one of the great political debates today—as we’ll see in the next section.

### How Much Economic Inequality Is Too Much?

Another illustration of national differences arises from the “salary gap.” In 1965, the **median** (or typical) American chief executive officer (CEO) made 26 times more than a typical worker in his or her company. In Japan today the figure is

**Median:** A statistical term for the number in the middle or the case that has an equal number of examples above or below it.

roughly the same. But in contemporary United States, the CEO makes (depending on the study) between 300 and 500 times the average employee. Is this a problem for the idea that “all men are created equal”?

People in many countries would answer yes. Too much inequality, they say, divides society. In Japan, cultural norms encourage individuals to avoid attracting attention through great wealth or ostentation. In Western Europe, high taxes make it more difficult to grow very wealthy (or very poor). These are policies pursued by societies that want to achieve what once impressed foreign visitors about America—the absence of great extremes of wealth or poverty. In fact, Tocqueville warned Americans that they might be vulnerable to economic inequality: “The friends of democracy should keep their eyes anxiously fixed in [the] direction [of] . . . the manufacturing aristocracy we see rising up.”<sup>25</sup>

But, as we have seen in our discussion of the American dream, our public policies (and public opinion) often endorse the race to wealth. Great riches are the glittering prize of the American dream. Why not let the winners—basketball stars, successful musicians, bank CEOs, and breakthrough entrepreneurs—enjoy fabulous success? The debate rages today. Activists charge that the richest one percent take advantage of everyone else; critics on the other side dismiss them as un-American agents of “class warfare.” In fact, this is an old debate stretching back through time.

### Opportunity or Outcome?

Many Americans accept high levels of economic inequality, contending that these are not fatal to our hopes for an egalitarian society. That’s because of an important distinction between *equal opportunity* and *equal outcome*.



● LeBron James makes \$44.5 million dollars for playing basketball. Is that too much for a superstar—even one as good as James? Should we change the rules so they get less and poor people more? Today these are hotly debated political questions. Where you stand depends on different ideas about equality.

**Equal Opportunity.** The idea that every American has an equal chance. In politics, this means each person gets one vote and the process is transparent and open to all. In economics, it means that every individual gets a fair shot at achieving the American dream. Whether you're white or black, Anglo or Latina, male or female, rich or poor, you have a similar opportunity to influence the political process and to win economic success.

**Equal opportunity:** The idea that every American has an equal chance to win economic success.

**Equal Outcomes.** In contrast, is the idea that a society guarantees not just an opportunity but also the results. Some nations reserve a minimum number of seats in the national legislature (whether it be a parliament or Congress) for women or members of specific ethnic groups. And, as we have already seen, others keep their taxes high and offer extensive social benefits, knowing that this arrangement will keep successful people from getting too far ahead of everyone else.

Today, the United States aims for equal opportunity. The winners fly private jets; the losers may end up with nothing. Still, there are questions—and hard political choices—about equal opportunity. How do we give people an honest chance to affect the governing process? How much education is enough to give someone a fair chance at making it in the marketplace? Do we need to provide early childhood reading programs? Offer English language programs for everyone who is not fluent? Guarantee basic nutrition? Remove lead paint that might leave children mentally impaired? And what should we do about past injustice? Does the long legacy of slavery, segregation, and repressive policies toward American Indians require our society to offer special forms of compensation to groups that suffered generation after generation of mistreatment?

These questions return us to the same policy debates we introduced during the discussion of positive and negative liberty. Should we ensure the basics—or simply protect individual rights and let every person run the great race alone? As you can see, debates about equality lead back to debates about freedom (positive or negative) and individualism.

The economic side of the debate raises a powerful challenge for contemporary America: Might the gap between rich and poor grow so large that it undermines equality of opportunity? As the gap continues to widen, liberals warn that growing disparities are creating a land of billionaires and hungry children with grim future prospects. Conservatives respond that the effort to redistribute wealth from rich to poor violates the American gospel of success. Robbing the rich to help the poor, they insist, will not help either group. The have-nots, they conclude, should work harder and develop better habits.

Over time, the United States has gone from the most equal society in the world to one that is considerably less equal than other wealthy nations. The past 35 years, in particular, have seen a very sharp spike in inequality. American politics has come to emphasize other ideas—negative liberty, individualism, the American dream of getting ahead—over equality. Still, we live in a dynamic and fluid society. As the Occupy Wall Street movement gathered steam beginning in 2011, political debates shifted back to concern over the wealth gap. We will explore the Occupy movements at length in later chapters. Their powerful theme of the “99 percent” against the wealthiest 1 percent has restarted a classic American debate about economic equality.

**THE BOTTOM LINE**

- Equality means that every citizen enjoys the same privileges, status, and rights before the law.
- Equality applies to social status, political rights, and economic conditions.
- Today, America generally aims for *equal opportunity* rather than *equal outcome*.
- A great debate now rages over what the society must provide to ensure equal opportunity.

## Religion

In the 1630s, a large contingent of Puritans sailed to New England with an ambitious aim: to establish a biblical commonwealth that would serve as a Christian model for the rest of the world. As we saw in the last chapter, Governor John Winthrop called their settlement “a city upon a hill” and expected “the eyes of all people on us.” How did they fare? If anyone was really watching, they soon saw unexpected complications.

For example, Quakers from Pennsylvania—whom the New England Puritans despised for lacking discipline—began sailing north to convert the New Englanders. If the Quakers succeeded, they would subvert the whole idea of a model Puritan society. New England’s women, the ministers worried, might be especially vulnerable to Quaker heresies. The authorities banned the Quakers under threat of having an ear cut off (one each for the first and second offense), their tongues pierced by hot pokers (third offense), and finally death. Quaker martyrs piously and joyfully challenged the Puritan authorities. Four were hung before English authorities ordered an end to the punishment.

The story reflects enduring American themes: the importance of religion, the intense competition between sects, and a missionary fervor about saving the world. Even today, politicians of every stripe repeat the idea of a “city on a hill” line (although few realize that it is a quotation from the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament.)

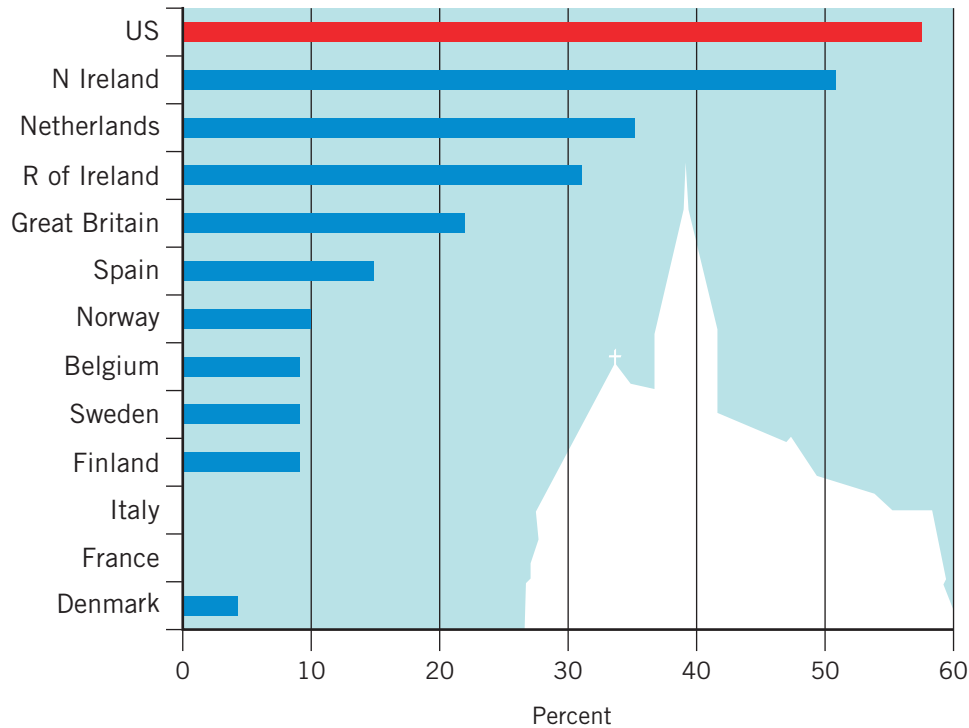
### Still Religious A Religious Country

Religion plays an enduring role in American politics and society. The centrality of religion may not surprise you. But it is a powerful example of American exceptionalism, helping inspire a sense that this nation is unlike any other. As most nations grow wealthier, their religious fervor wanes. Citizens in advanced countries, from Britain and France to Japan and South Korea, tell pollsters that God is not very important in their lives (Figure 2.5). In contrast, Americans maintain high (and by some measures, rising) levels of religiosity. Some 95 percent of Americans say they believe in God, almost 60 percent belong to a church, and nearly 40 percent attend church regularly (Figure 2.6). To find higher levels you have to go to poorer nations such as India, Egypt, and Indonesia.<sup>26</sup>

### So Many Religions

Americans have a lot of religions to choose from. One recent survey found 16 different Christian denominations with more than a million members each. That is

**Percentage Of The Population That Belongs To Church Or Religious Organization**



Source: Pew Center for Religion.

**Figure 2.5** Look how American religiosity stands out. As nations grow wealthy, religion nearly always loses its importance. The United States is the great exception.

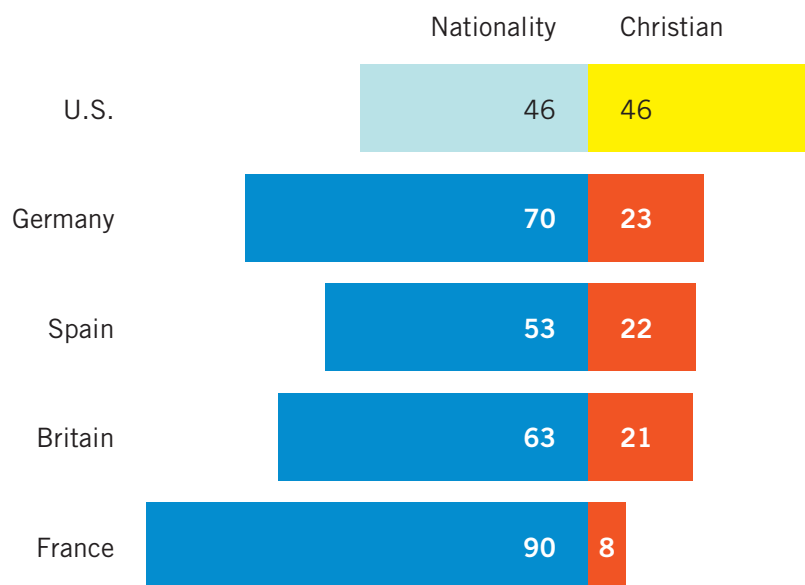
just the beginning. Jews number some 6.6 million, Muslims nearly 3 million, and seven other non-Christian groups have over 100,000 adherents each (two of the fastest growing are Wiccans and Pagans).<sup>27</sup> In contrast, many other nations have a single major faith, often supported by the government through tax dollars.

Why so many religions? From the start, different colonies began with distinct religious affiliations. Puritans settled in Boston, Quakers in Philadelphia, Catholics in Baltimore, and Anglicans in Williamsburg, Virginia. Religious diversity was locked into place by the First Amendment. By forbidding the federal government from boosting any official faith, the Constitution kept the field open for any new preacher with a religious idea that might attract a following. Since none can win official recognition, each religious institution is only as strong as the congregation it can muster.

This open market explains why new religions spring up all the time. It does not explain why Americans respond. One of the great mysteries of our political culture is why Americans continue to worship, while citizens in other wealthy nations show a declining interest in religion.

Religious observance is not the same throughout the United States. Texas and Georgia (proud members of the “Bible belt”) have very high religiosity, Florida and Missouri are in the middle and Colorado and Wisconsin are not especially religious places. Generational change is also at work: while Americans under 30 continue to report high rates of religious faith, an unusual number do not affiliate with any particular denomination. Most believe in God but not organized religions.<sup>28</sup>

### What Do You Consider Yourself First?



● **Figure 2.6** For many Americans, religion is as important as national identity. This chart shows that American Christians take their faith as seriously as being American—in contrast to European Christians, who emphasize their country over their religion.

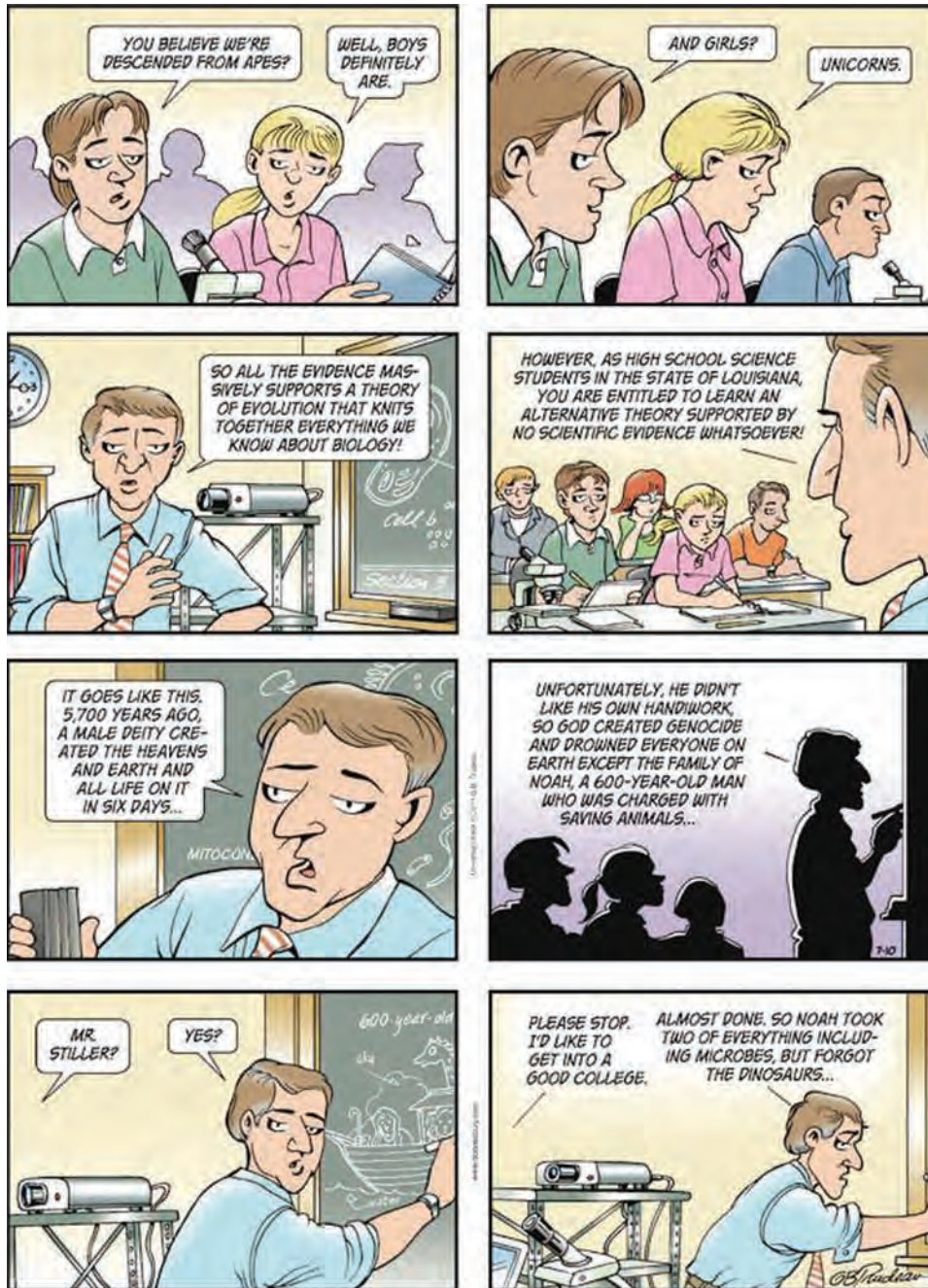
Asked of Christians only.  
PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q35chr.

## The Politics of Religion

How is religion relevant to politics? The First Amendment declares, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Thomas Jefferson described “a wall of separation between church and state.” And yet America’s energetic religious life—marked through our history by great evangelical revivals—injects three different kinds of political issues into American politics.

First, there is the question of what exactly the Constitution forbids. Even the Founders disagreed. Presidents George Washington and John Adams held national days of prayer; President Jefferson thought that practice violated the First Amendment. The argument about what is permissible continues to this day. May teachers lead prayers in public school? May students in the bleachers organize prayers before football games? May judges post the Ten Commandments in a courthouse? May cities put up a menorah in a public park to celebrate Chanukah? Questions like these (explored in Chapter 6) spark intense debates about just where to draw the line between church and state.

Second, religious faith often inspires people to throw themselves into political issues. A religious revival sparked the abolitionist fight against slavery, beginning in the 1830s; abolitionists condemned slavery as a sin. More than a century later, the civil rights movement spilled out from Baptist and Methodist churches across the South with religious rhetoric, religious symbols, and religious zeal. The opponents of racial equality—arguing for slavery and segregation—also framed their response in religious terms. In American politics, both sides often invoke God. The controversies swirling around the politics of peace, abortion, the environment, gay marriage, and many other issues have all, to varying extents, made the same leap from pulpit to politics. Today, conservatives are more likely to take their



● What Constitutes Religious Teaching?

faith into the political arena, but this trend has not always been true. Over time religion has inspired people all across the political spectrum.

Third, religious fervor sometimes fosters a missionary sense in American politics. As the nation expanded westward, Americans declared their “manifest destiny”—God had given an entire continent to his chosen people. (The term was coined in the 1830s by John O’Sullivan, a newspaper editor affiliated with President Andrew Jackson.<sup>29</sup>) Many foreign policies also express a special American mission in the world. During the Cold War, American leaders constantly invoked God as a way of contrasting the United States with communism.





● Through the years, preachers move politics. *Malcolm X converted to Islam and preached a rousing Black Nationalism.*

Congress added “Under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance (in 1954) and “in God We Trust” to paper money (1955). A half century later, President George Bush invoked “God’s gift of freedom” to explain America’s mission in Iraq. John Winthrop’s idea—a model for the world—echoes from one generation to the next. (We discuss the missionary theme in American foreign policy in Chapter 18).

Political scientists often write about liberty, democracy, and equality. Religion usually slips below the radar screen, but it is a constant element in American politics. Ignoring religion means constantly being surprised as intense religious feelings sweep past the separation between church and state. Running in the 2012 Republican primaries, former Senator Rick Santorum blurted out that John F. Kennedy’s 1960 campaign speech—in which Kennedy soothed fears about becoming the first Catholic president by stressing the separation of church and state—made him “want to throw up.” An outcry led Santorum to wish “he had that line back,” but he continued serving up a milder version of the same point: The United States had become too secular; it must not banish religion from the public square.

Santorum and his followers are the latest in a long line of Americans who infuse politics with a strong religious sense. We will keep an eye on this distinctive and important feature in the chapters that follow.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

- Religion plays an enduring role in American politics and society. This is unusual—almost unique—among wealthy countries.
- Americans have an unusually large number of faiths to choose from, although younger people are less likely to affiliate with a organized religion.
- Religious politics raise question about the role—and the extent—of religion in politics. They inspire political participation on a host of issues—from civil rights to abortion. And they foster a missionary sense in American foreign policy.

## How Do Ideas Affect Politics?

Most political scientists agree that the seven ideas of this chapter are central to U.S. society. But how do these ideas influence our politics? There are two familiar answers. Ideas influence our culture, or they operate through our institutions. There is still another possibility to bear in mind, however: Perhaps they have a life all their own.

### Ideas in American Culture

Each nation has a unique **political culture**, constructed over the years by a people and its leaders. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz described culture as the stories a people tell about themselves. Ideas such as liberty, the fear of government, individualism, or the American dream add up to a portrait of American political culture. They are the stories we tell about ourselves.

A culture shapes the way people think about politics and government. When Tea Party activists rallied against President Obama's health plan, they drew on a shared set of traditions, references, and values (like direct democracy, negative liberty, and the American dream) that would make no sense to people in, say, Denmark or Mexico. Occupy Wall Street seized on overlapping parts of the American legacy—direct democracy, equality, and positive liberty—to promote a very different set of political aims.

Culture develops slowly over time, shaped by history and experience. There is no country, wrote Tocqueville, where the law can foresee everything or where institutions should take the place of *mores*. What he meant by *mores*, he explained, was “the sum of ideas that shape the habits of the mind [and] . . . the habits of the heart.”<sup>30</sup> From this perspective, an already existing culture—colonial Americans' shared beliefs, stories, and mental habits—inspired the founding generation to develop a Constitution that limits the power of government.

Why did the Framers add a Bill of Rights to the Constitution? Their abiding faith in individualism. Why are there so many checks and balances in our national government? The old American fear of too much government. Why do we regulate and tax less than other nations? The American dream's gospel of success. This shared culture leads men and women to fight for policies that reflect freedom

**Political culture:** The orientation of citizens of a state toward politics.



● Occupy Wall Street Protesters, 2012

or democracy; policies that reflect social-democratic solidarity are more difficult to win because they resonate more softly through American culture. American hopes and fears often seem peculiar to people in other nations—just as their hopes and fears may not make sense to us.

We can see these cultural differences in every corner of our politics, past and present. In many European nations, socialist and communist parties sprang up in the 20th century. Today, the president of France is a member of the Socialist Party who quietly drew on members of the Communist party to win the election. Socialists compete for control in France, Italy and Spain. But in the United States the socialist movement has had comparatively little traction. After all, how would it fit into the culture that produced Benjamin Franklin's dream of getting ahead?

Cultures change slowly. To be sure, the American dream has expanded to include African Americans, Asians, Latinos, and women—all excluded from basic rights a century ago. But they pursue a vision of success that looks quite similar to the one that a much smaller circle of Americans found alluring a century or two ago.

### The Ideas in Political Institutions

A different perspective suggests that political institutions, more than political culture, drive events. According to this view, the Constitution's drafters were guided less by cultural values; rather, they were looking for organizational arrangements that would regulate political behavior.

James Madison explained the *institutional perspective*. Past political theory expected republican citizens to virtuously seek the public interest. But, Madison continued sardonically in the *Federalist Papers*, "enlightened statesmen will not always be at the helm."<sup>31</sup> The Constitution would not ask people to be virtuous; instead, it developed a government that would operate smoothly even if citizens were greedy and their leaders corrupt. The institution—the rules and organizations built into the government—would shape popular behavior.

Many political scientists follow Madison's argument. It is our governing institutions, starting with the Constitution, that shape American political behavior. Institutions, they say, even influence our values. Government organizations and programs create their own self-reinforcing political dynamics. Each new organization and public policy readjusts the political world.

From an institutional perspective, the barriers to winning new programs emerge not from a dislike of government, but from the way the government is organized in the first place. A look at Congress reveals checks, balances, fragmented power, and multiple barriers to getting anything done. Similar limits affect government in the states and cities. U.S. government is slow to act, according to this view, because we have *designed* it to be slow to act. When Americans criticize their policymakers for inaction, perhaps they miss the point: gridlock is a consequence of the frustrating institutions we have inherited.

### Culture or Institutions?

While historians and sociologists tend to emphasize political culture, many political scientists are skeptical about its explanatory power. How, they ask, can something as static as national culture explain the fluid, fast-changing American political scene?

For example, the cultural perspective suggests that the United States has never passed national health insurance, supplied and paid by the federal government, because Americans don't trust government. The institutional perspective

counters that it is less a matter of popular belief and more the way we've designed the government. After all, they continue, Harry Truman won the election of 1948 in part by promising national health insurance. No deep-seated fear of government reared its head while Americans were voting. If we had been operating with a Canadian or English legislature, we would have had the program when Truman won the election. But Congress—using the checks and balances central to our national government's institutions—buried the proposal.

In fact, continue institutionalists, when government actually manages to create universal programs—such as Social Security or Medicare—they generally turn out to be extremely popular. If Americans are habitually suspicious of government, why are programs like Social Security so cherished?<sup>32</sup> The way to understand our politics, conclude institutionalists, is to study the laws and organizations which make policy.

Students of culture respond that cultural values are not meant to explain every possible political action. Events, leaders, movements, and government agencies all introduce change. But culture forms the boundary of those changes. It limits the possibilities, shapes our perceptions, and influences our reactions. When terrorists launch an attack, for example, the American response—and the debate about that response—is deeply influenced by the values and ideas we share.

### Culture and Institutions, Together

Do the ideas described in this chapter add up to a political culture that shapes the attitudes of American men and women? That cultural argument seems intuitive to many people. On balance, however, most political scientists underscore the importance of institutions.

As a political-science student, you can decide for yourself on the relative power of culture and institutions as you read this book. But you don't have to choose one or the other. We believe that culture and institutions together play a role in American politics. They reinforce each other. Yes, national institutions make it difficult to pass national health insurance; and, yes again, opponents invoke powerful cultural norms—like individualism and liberty—to persuade Americans that the legislation threatens their values. For us, the most interesting question is how ideas, culture, and institutions (along with interests and individuals—"the four I's" in the introductory chapter) all interact to shape American politics.

You will see evidence of the seven ideas we have described in every chapter that follows. Finally, the ideas have a power of their own—above and beyond the culture and institutions they have helped to shape. Ideas of liberty, democracy, or the American dream can move people to act. That's exactly what Lieutenant (and Professor) Russell Burgos was thinking as the mortars came flying into his post in Northern Iraq.

#### THE BOTTOM LINE

- The ideas discussed in this chapter have their own independent power.
- The ideas shape American culture, which in turn affects our politics.
- Ideas operate through political institutions. We have to study those institutions to appreciate how ideas shape politics and policies.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY

◆ Seven important ideas influence American politics. Each idea has at least two different sides—differences that spur intense political debates.

◆ The seven key American ideas are freedom, self rule, limited government, individualism, the American dream, equality, and religion.

◆ *Freedom* means that the government will protect your life, liberty, and property from the coercion of others (including government) so that you can pursue the goals you define for yourself. In one view, freedom requires *positive government* action to make sure that everyone has the basics to permit them to pursue their goals. In another view, the government guarantees only *negative freedom*—the freedom to pursue your goals. You are free to succeed or to fail on your own, but there are no guarantees about food, or homes, or health care.

◆ *Self rule* means that people govern themselves through clearly defined procedures like elections. In a democracy, citizens participate directly in making government decisions. In a republic, the people rule indirectly through their elected representatives. The American system is a combination of the two, a democratic republic.

◆ Americans value *limited government*: they distrust government and place limits on the authority it can exercise.

◆ *Individualism* means that individuals—not society or the community or government—are

responsible for their own well-being. For those who favor community or social democracy, the public interest is best served when members of a society use government to take care of one another.

◆ The *American dream* holds that if you are talented and work hard, you will succeed and grow wealthy. Critics argue that the system is rigged or that the dream promotes the wrong values. However, the dream remains a powerful force in American politics.

◆ *Equality* allows each citizen to enjoy the same privileges, status, and rights before the law. Some define equality as a matter of *opportunity*—the idea that every American has an equal chance. Others promote equal *outcome*—a guarantee of results. There are three kinds of equality to consider: Social equality means that all individuals enjoy the same status in society. Political equality guarantees every citizen the same rights and opportunities to participate in politics. Economic equality minimizes the gap between citizens' wealth and earnings.

◆ *Religion* plays an enduring role in American politics and society. The great question is how we limit government interference without limiting religion itself.

◆ These seven ideas mark Americans' beliefs as a people. They can shape politics through national culture, through political institutions, and through their own influence on Americans themselves.

### KEY TERMS

American Exceptionalism, 00  
 Conservatives, 00  
 Democracy, 00  
 Economic equality, 00  
 Equal opportunity, 00  
 Equality, 00  
 Freedom, 00  
 Individualism, 00

Initiative, 00  
 Liberals, 00  
 Libertarians, 00  
 Median, 00  
 Negative liberty, 00  
 Political culture, 00  
 Political equality, 00  
 Positive liberty, 00

Referendum, 00  
 Republic, 00  
 Self rule, 00  
 Social democracy, 00  
 Social equality, 00  
 Sunshine laws, 00

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence boldly explains exactly why “governments are instituted among men.” Why? Why are governments formed? Do you agree with that assertion about government’s most basic function?
2. Liberty is often described as the most important American idea. Define it. Describe the two different views of liberty. Which do you think is more accurate?
3. Review the seven principal “American ideas” we have identified in this chapter. Are there new foundational ideas bubbling up in American politics today? If so, what are they?
4. The Declaration of Independence asserts that all men are endowed by their creator with the inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Over time, Americans have extended that idea to more and more people, such as former slaves and women. Are there groups in our society who are *not* getting the full benefits of this ideal?
5. What is the difference between a democracy and a republic? Which principle does contemporary

American government reflect, or does it reflect both? If you were a Founder, which of these principles would you emphasize?

6. George Washington declared “national days of prayer” during his presidency. Thomas Jefferson rejected this practice, saying that it violated the First Amendment. Who was right, in your view—and what *does* the First Amendment say about this?
7. There are three forms of equality—social, political, and economic. Define each.
8. There are two approaches to economic equality: opportunity and outcome. Describe each.
9. When it comes to religion, the United States is different from most wealthy societies. How? What do we mean by the rise of the “nones”?
10. Ideas operate through both culture and institutions. Explain.

Bonus: You’ve studied seven key ideas. Chose and describe another that you would add to the list of important American ideas.

### ENDNOTES

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- <sup>4</sup>Samuel Huntington, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); Rogers Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).
- <sup>5</sup>Quoted in James A. Morone, *The Democratic Wish: Popular Participation and the Limits of American Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 54.
- <sup>6</sup>Thomas Jefferson, “Response to the Citizens of Albemarle,” February 12, 1790; First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1801. Jefferson’s first inaugural is the best summary of what we now call

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- <sup>7</sup>James Madison, Federalist 10; Roger Sherman quoted in James Madison’s *Notes on the Federal Convention*. Vol. I.
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- <sup>9</sup>Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 60, 89; James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth* (London: Macmillan, 1888), vol. III, p. 267.
- <sup>10</sup>John Kingdon, *America The Unusual* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), p. XXX.
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- <sup>13</sup>The original statement of this theory is Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1955).
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- <sup>15</sup>James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1938). Available from Google Books at <http://books.google.com/>

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- <sup>22</sup>Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. I., *op. cit.*, p.
- <sup>23</sup>On Tocqueville's youth, see Hugh Brogan, *Alexis de Tocqueville: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), chap 1.
- <sup>24</sup>Borgan, 352.
- <sup>25</sup>Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. II, *op. cit.*, p. 558.
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- <sup>28</sup>Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, call the religiously unaffiliated the “the nones.”
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