

CHAPTER 1

The Democratic Republic

▣ LEARNING OUTCOMES

The five **Learning Outcomes (LOs)** below are designed to help improve your understanding of this chapter. After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- **LO1** Define the terms *politics*, *government*, *order*, *liberty*, *authority*, and *legitimacy*.
- **LO2** Distinguish the major features of direct democracy and representative democracy.
- **LO3** Describe majoritarianism, elite theory, and pluralism as theories of how democratic systems work.
- **LO4** Summarize the conflicts that can occur between the principles of liberty and order, and between those of liberty and equality.
- **LO5** Discuss conservatism, liberalism, and other popular American ideological positions.

▣ SUMMARY OVERVIEW

To many Americans, **politics** is seen as a “game.” *Winners* and *losers* are increasingly defined, the stakes grow higher in modern times, and the players are more divided. This game is defined as a struggle over power or influence within organizations or informal groups that can grant benefits or privileges. Wherever organized groups of people are found, the game of politics is inevitably played.

The preeminent **institution** within a society is called the **government**, because it makes decisions that resolve conflicts, and allocates benefits and privileges in society. Governments originally formed to keep **order** and maintain security, but expanded their role considerably over time. Concerned about too much governmental power, people imposed limitations on it, mostly through guaranteeing individual liberties and civil rights enshrined by law.

Normally, people accept a government’s ability to exercise **authority**. This acceptance is called **political legitimacy**. A government’s continued existence depends on acceptable levels of both legitimacy and authority.

Many different types of government exist, with varying degrees of power over their societies. In most of the world today, democracies are favored, based in some form or another upon rule by the people. The United States has moved in a direction favoring more and more **direct democracy**, although the writers of the U.S. Constitution feared this trend going too far. They crafted a **democratic republic** where people control the elections of government officials, who in turn make national policy, all limited by the provisions of the Constitution. Around the world, representative democracy evolved, where **majority rule** is tempered by individual rights, free and competitive elections occur, and guaranteed freedom of speech and press help to preserve the people’s voice in the system.

American democracy has not been as easy to define as the word **democracy** implies. Scholars rely on three definitions: **majoritarian theory**, **elite theory**, and **pluralism**. Each only goes so far to explain the system. **Majoritarianism** presupposes the government ought to do what the majority of people want, but its critics contend that Americans are too ill-informed or uninterested in politics for this to work. **Elite theory** argues that a small number of elites exercise power in their own self-interest, although few advocate this as a good idea today. **Pluralists** theorize American politics as bargaining and compromise between interest groups, because no one interest group can dominate the process. Pluralism's opponents cite the lack of concern for the underrepresented poor, and the potential that national policy will only benefit the largest groups. Despite criticisms of each theory, they help explain the American political system when considered altogether.

The writers of the U.S. Constitution depended on the values of American **political culture** to maintain the government they envisioned. A surprisingly strong consensus on the rights to **liberty**, **equality**, and **property** still exist today, thanks in part to **political socialization**—the process by which political beliefs and values are transmitted to new immigrants and to children. The dominant American culture, rooted in western European civilization, also favors individualism and Judeo-Christian ethics, all of which reinforce Constitutional principles.

However, long-standing controversies exist over conflicting political values and where to draw the line between them. One involves liberty and order—to what degree does expanding freedom threaten the established social or political order? Another involves liberty and equality. Americans favor both, but the closer the country gets to full equality, complaints get louder over the methods used to get there, citing threats to personal freedom. Other controversies involving the role of government, property rights, and **capitalism** have similar points of contention, where one value appears to threaten another.

American political freedom has engendered a wide range of ideologies. A traditional political spectrum, with **socialism**, **liberalism**, **conservatism**, and **libertarianism** arranged from left (favoring political change) to right (opposing it), has given way to a four-cornered ideological grid, measuring the degree of economic and cultural liberty each ideology represents. Although flawed philosophically (all were born from politics and constrained by the U.S. Constitution), they shape and define the American democratic republic today.

▣ CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

- A. Why Is Government Necessary?
- B. Limiting Government Power
- C. Authority and Legitimacy

II. DEMOCRACY AND OTHER FORMS OF GOVERNMENT

- A. Types of Government
- B. Direct Democracy as a Model
- C. The Dangers of Direct Democracy
- D. A Democratic Republic
 - 1. Principles of Democratic Government.
 - 2. Constitutional Democracy.

III. WHAT KIND OF DEMOCRACY DO WE HAVE?

- A. Democracy for Everyone
- B. Democracy for the Few
- C. Democracy for Groups

IV. FUNDAMENTAL VALUES

- A. Liberty versus Order
- B. Liberty versus Equality
 - 1. Economic Equality.
 - 2. Property Rights and Capitalism.
- C. The Proper Size of Government
 - 1. Big Government and War.
 - 2. Big Government and the Great Recession.
 - 3. Republican Overreach.

V. POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES

- A. Conservatism
 - 1. Modern Conservatism.
 - 2. Conservative Values.
- B. Liberalism
 - 1. Modern Liberalism.
 - 2. Liberal Values.
- C. The Traditional Political Spectrum
- D. Problems with the Traditional Political Spectrum
- E. A Four-Cornered Ideological Grid
 - 1. Economic Liberals, Cultural Conservatives.
 - 2. Libertarians.
 - 3. The Liberal Label.

▣ TEACHING TOOLS

- **LO1** Define the terms *politics*, *government*, *order*, *liberty*, *authority*, and *legitimacy*.

Lecture Launcher

This Lecture Launcher explores possible contradictions between politics being a high-stakes game and general political apathy of the American people. Ask students, either individually or via a show-of-hands poll, if politics does NOT matter to them personally. Then select a respondent and ask why he/she responded that way. Answers should revolve around ideas such as: “It doesn’t matter to me,” “I have no interest,” “It’s boring,” or “It makes no difference in my life.” Bring up the *United States v. Windsor* (2013) Supreme Court case that challenges the constitutionality of the Defense of Marriage Act (which makes it illegal for Congress to recognize any form of marriage that isn’t between one man and one woman), and mention the accompanying rallies by LGBTQ groups during the arguments. Ask the class if politics mattered to the people at those rallies. Answers will likely be in the affirmative. Then ask the class why politics matters to some people but not others. Answers should be based on the impact of politics on affected individuals.

Finally, ask students one more question: “Do you think politics can be a high-stakes game”? Answers should create a sufficient segue into the opening paragraph of this chapter.

Critical Thinking Question

According to the text, politics occurs when groups of individuals make decisions through formal or informal rules. Could that also mean that politics is hardwired into human beings outside of these group situations and/or rules? Why or why not?

In-Class Activity

This activity analyzes one statement in this chapter: “Authority without legitimacy is a recipe for trouble.” Ask students to complete this statement: “Authority without legitimacy is a recipe for trouble, because....” Then ask selected students to share their responses. When they have done so, ask them if the current political situations in Russia and China (illiberal democracy and one-party rule, respectively) support or refute their completed statements about authority and legitimacy.

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- **LO2** Distinguish the major features of direct democracy and representative democracy.

Lecture Launcher

This Lecture Launcher analyzes criticisms of direct democracy. Share the following blog posting from *The Economist* with your class: “When Democracy Threatens Freedom” (http://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2009/12/when_too_much_democracy_threat). After reading the posting, or summarizing the main points, ask the class if they find themselves agreeing with the opinions expressed in the article, and why (or why not).

Critical Thinking Question

Given how the founders of the U.S. Constitution were as fearful of direct democracy as they were, as well as how much more direct democracy exists in the United States today than in the past, do you think the founders’ fears about democracy were justified? Why (or why not)?

In-Class Activity

This is an in-class simulation designed to illustrate some differences between direct and representative democracy. Divide the class into two equal groups; announce that each group represents a small town, and they are all its inhabitants. Announce to one group that they may only make all decisions by majority vote, and announce to the other group that they must elect a town council and mayor, who have the sole power to make decisions for that town by majority Council/Mayor vote. Assign both groups the following tasks:

- establishing ground rules for conducting discussion (suggest Robert’s Rules of Order if the groups are stuck on how to run meetings or fail to establish rules of their own),
- establishing residency rules for newcomers into their town,
- assigning tax rates for every individual in the town, and
- deciding on the color of planters that line the Main Street of your town (or you may choose two or more optional tasks, proposed and decided by the respective groups).

Once all tasks are accomplished (or until sufficient time has elapsed), ask each group to share which tasks were easiest and which were most difficult to accomplish, as well as any problems or frustrations each group had in their decision-making process. Responses shared should fall roughly in line with the characteristics of direct and representative democracy.

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- **LO3** Describe majoritarianism, elite theory, and pluralism as theories of how democratic systems work.

Lecture Launcher

This Lecture Launcher underscores the incomplete nature of both democracy and its definitions. Ask students this question: “If democracy means majority rule, and if Americans are indifferent to the point of apathy, is the United States really a democracy”? After sufficient discussion ensues, then ask this question: “If the United States government is run by elites out to further self-interests, is the United States really a democracy”? After a decent discussion ensues, ask this question: “If democracy is the competition between competing interest groups, but those groups ignore the many to favor a few large interest groups, is the United States really a democracy”? Finally, ask this question: “Do each of the aforementioned questions hold a piece of the puzzle as to what American democracy really is”? Answers should lean toward the affirmative.

Critical Thinking Question

Consider this excerpt from Vaclav Havel’s speech to the United States Congress on February 21, 1990: “As long as people are people, democracy, in the full sense of the word, will always be no more than an ideal. One may approach it as one would the horizon in ways that may be better or worse, but it can never be fully attained. In this sense, you, too, are merely approaching democracy.” Given the criticisms of majoritarian, elite, and pluralist democracy, do you think Havel was correct? Why (or why not)?

In-Class Activity

Ask students to complete the sentence in at least a paragraph: The most comprehensive and complete definition of American democracy can be found in [majoritarian/elitist/pluralist] theory because.... Ask students to defend their answers.

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- **LO4** Summarize the conflicts that can occur between the principles of liberty and order, and between those of liberty and equality.

Lecture Launcher

This Lecture Launcher analyzes a classic clash between conflicting American values, through the vehicle of a conservative website addressing the same-sex marriage issue before the US Supreme Court in 2013. Ask students to consider the following article, found here:

(<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2011/07/same-sex-marriage-and-threats-to-religious-freedom-how-nondiscrimination-laws-factor-in>). After giving students a chance to read it, or by addressing the key points, ask the question: “Is the conflict between same-sex marriage and religious freedom more important than issues of same-sex marriage and perceived threats to social order? Why (or why not)?”

Critical Thinking Question

In 2013 the U. S. Supreme Court had to decide whether or not to declare the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) unconstitutional. DOMA currently forbids the federal government from recognizing any kind of marriage except between a man and a woman. Could it safely be said that, no matter which way the Supreme Court decides, liberty or equality will be threatened? Why (or why not)?

In-Class Activity

Divide the class into 3–5 groups, and ask them to complete the following statement, by group consensus, in at least a paragraph: “Liberty is _____ important to the American people than order, because _____.” Ask each group to appoint a secretary to write the answer down, as well as a presenter to report each group’s answer to the class. Give them sufficient time to formulate responses. Ask each presenter to read their paragraph to the class after all groups have finished compiling them, and either take a few questions from the class about each, or ask questions of your own about why they came to the conclusions they made about liberty and order.

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- **LO5** Discuss conservatism, liberalism, and other popular American ideological positions.

Lecture Launcher

This Lecture Launcher explores a relatively new topic about brain composition and political ideology. Ask students to consider the information in this article: (<http://2012election.procon.org/view.resource.php?resourceID=004818>). Then ask this question: “Have the conclusions in this article adequately explained why Americans have the political ideologies they have? Why (or why not)?”

Critical Thinking Question

What contradictions exist in each of the four major ideologies in this chapter, and do they seriously detract from what each represents? Why (or why not)?

In-Class Activity

Convene a panel discussion that attempts to answer this question: “Which political ideology is best suited for the future needs of Americans”? Assign four students to advocate for one of the four ideologies in this chapter, or allow volunteers to select one, provided that all four ideologies are represented on the panel. After each panelist contributes to the discussion, allow the remainder of the class adequate time to pose questions to each of the panelists, or allow the panelists to question one another, as time, circumstances, and overall quality of the panelists permit.

▣ KEY TERMS

authoritarianism	A type of regime in which only the government itself is fully controlled by the ruler. Social and economic institutions exist that are not under the government's control.
authority	The right and power of a government or other entity to enforce its decisions and compel obedience.
Bill of Rights	The first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution.
capitalism	An economic system characterized by the private ownership of wealth-creating assets, free markets, and freedom of contract.
civil liberties	Those personal freedoms, including freedom of religion and of speech, that are protected for all individuals in a society.
conservatism	A set of beliefs that includes advocacy of a limited role for the national government in helping individuals, support for traditional values and lifestyles, and a cautious response to change.
conservative movement	An American movement launched in the 1950s that provides a comprehensive ideological framework for conservative politics.
democracy	A system of government in which political authority is vested in the people.
democratic republic	A republic in which representatives elected by the people make and enforce laws and policies.
direct democracy	A system of government in which political decisions are made by the people directly, rather than by their elected representatives.
elite theory	The argument that society is ruled by a small number of people who exercise power to further their self-interests.
equality	As a political value, the idea that all people are of equal worth.
government	The preeminent institution within a society. Government has the ultimate authority to decide how conflicts will be resolved and how benefits and privileges will be allocated.
initiative	A procedure by which voters can propose a law or a constitutional amendment.
institution	An ongoing organization that performs certain functions for society.
legislature	A governmental body primarily responsible for the making of laws.
legitimacy	Popular acceptance of the right and power of a government or other entity to exercise authority.
liberalism	A set of beliefs that includes advocacy of positive government action to improve the welfare of individuals, support for civil rights, and tolerance for political and social change.

libertarianism	A political ideology based on skepticism or opposition toward most government activities.
liberty	The greatest freedom of the individual that is consistent with the freedom of other individuals in the society.
limited government	A government with powers that are limited either through a written document or through widely shared beliefs.
majoritarianism	A political theory holding that in a democracy, the government ought to do what the majority of the people want.
majority rule	A basic principle of democracy asserting that the greatest number of citizens in any political unit should select officials and determine policies.
order	A state of peace and security. Maintaining order by protecting members of society from violence and criminal activity is the oldest purpose of government.
pluralism	A theory that views politics as a conflict among interest groups. Political decision making is characterized by bargaining and compromise.
political culture	The patterned set of ideas, values, and ways of thinking about government and politics that characterizes a people.
political ideology	A comprehensive set of beliefs about the nature of people and the role of government.
political socialization	The process by which people acquire political beliefs and values.
politics	The struggle over power or influence within organizations or informal groups that can grant or withhold benefits or privileges.
popular sovereignty	The concept that ultimate political authority is based on the will of the people.
property	Anything that is or may be subject to ownership. As conceived by the political philosopher John Locke, the right to property is a natural right superior to human law (laws made by government).
recall	A procedure allowing the people to vote to dismiss an elected official from office before his or her term has expired.
referendum	An electoral device whereby legislative or constitutional measures are referred by the legislature to the voters for approval or disapproval.
representative democracy	A form of government in which representatives elected by the people make and enforce laws and policies, but in which the monarchy may be retained in a ceremonial role.
republic	A form of government in which sovereign power rests with the people, rather than with a king or a monarch.
socialism	A political ideology based on strong support for economic and social equality. Socialists traditionally envisioned a society in which major businesses were taken over by the government or by employee cooperatives.

totalitarian regime

A form of government that controls all aspects of the political, social, and economic life of a nation.

universal suffrage

The right of all adults to vote for their representatives.