The Political Landscape

• In this chapter we will cover…
  1. The Roots of American Government: Where Did the Ideas Come From?
  2. Characteristics of American Democracy
  3. The Changing Political Culture and Characteristics of the American People
  4. Political Culture and Views of Government
Government: What Is It?

• Governments
  – Made up of individuals and institutions through which policies are made and affairs of state are conducted
  – Actions are binding on its citizens
  – Citizens are members of the political community with rights and obligations
  – Politics is the study of who gets what, when, and how.
The Roots of American Government: Where Did the Ideas Come From?

- Aristotle and the Greeks articulated the idea of natural law.
- Society should be governed by ethical principles that are part of nature and can be understood through reason.
SOCIAL CONTRACT THEORY

Social Contract Theory

• People are the source of power
• People give consent to government to rule
• Government provides protection of natural rights
Social Contract Theory: Hobbes

- Thomas Hobbes
  - Pessimist
  - Man’s basic state – war
  - Strong government necessary to restrain man
  - Men must give up certain rights to government to survive
Social Contract Theory: Locke

• John Locke
  – Optimist
  – Men form governments to preserve property rights and justice for all men
  – If government fails people have a right to revolt

  – Founding Fathers tried to strike a balance between these views
Devising a National Government

At the time of the founding of our nation several forms of governments existed…

– Monarchy → All are based on elite rule and give few rights to the people who live under them.
– Oligarchy
– Aristocracy

The colonists did not want to live under the systems they had suffered under in the Old World so they established a new system: democracy.
The Theory of Democratic Government

- Direct democracy
- Indirect democracy
- Republic
Direct Democracy

• A system in which all come together periodically to discuss policy and abide by majority rule.
  – New England town meeting
Indirect Democracy

A system of government that allows citizens to vote for representatives who will work on their behalf.
Republic

A government rooted in the consent of the governed.
Political Culture

• Attitudes toward the political system and its various parts and our role in the political system.
Characteristics of American Democracy

1. popular consent
2. popular sovereignty
3. majority rule
4. individualism
5. equality
6. personal liberty
7. civil society
Popular Consent

• Governments draw their power from the consent of the governed
Popular Sovereignty

• Right of the majority to govern itself
• Political authority rests with the people who can create, abolish, or alter their governments

• This idea is found in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution
Majority Rule

• Only policies that have the support of a majority of voters will be made into law (50% of the total votes cast plus 1)
Individualism

• Great value is placed on the individual in American democracy in American democracy and culture

• Principal of individualism hold that government is to enable individuals to achieve their highest level of achievement
Equality

• Political equality for all (definition has varied over time)

• Notion of “one man, one vote”
Personal Liberty

• Single most important characteristic of American democracy

• Framers wanted Americans to be free of governmental infringements on freedom of religion and speech, unreasonable searches and seizures, etc.

• Equal protection of the laws
Civil Society

Live in a society of laws
The Changing Political Culture and Characteristics of the American People

Population of the United States:

- 1790’s there were 4 million people in 13 states
- 1900 there were 76 million people in 50 states plus the territories
- Today there are over 293 million people
Figure 1.1 U.S. Population, 1790–2050
Since around 1890, when more and more immigrants came to America, the population of the United States, although largely fueled by new births and increased longevity, has continued to rise.

Changing Demographics

• Not only are we bigger we are also more diverse.
• In colonial times most Americans were Anglo-Saxon.
• In 2000, the U.S. population was made up of...
  – whites 69.1%
  – African Americans 12.1%
  – Hispanics 12.5%
  – Asian 3.6%
**Figure 1.2** Race and Ethnicity in America: 2000 and Beyond

![Graph showing projected U.S. population by race and ethnicity from 2000 to 2050.](image)

- **White, Non-Hispanic**
- **Hispanic**
- **Black**
- **Asian and Pacific Islander**
- **American Indian and Alaska Natives**

*Persons of Hispanic origin can be of any race.*

Changing Age Composition in the United States

What are the political implications of a declining percentage of the population age 0–17 years? How will Generations X and Y politicians respond to more elderly people and fewer young people in the population?

How will the allocation of governmental resources be affected by the increasing percentage of elderly in the population? What social programs will suffer? Which social programs will expand or remain constant?

In 1900, the average person was only expected to live to age 47.

In 2000, the average person was expected to live to age 77.

California Population

• Consistent pattern of rapid population growth

• Increase due to high birth rates and immigration

• Most populous states; 12% of the nation’s peoples
• Most diverse state
  – Whites on the decline
    • 1990 – 60% white
    • Est. 2010 – 45% white
  – Hispanics increasing
    • 1990 – 24%
    • Est. 2010 – 34%
  – Asians increasing
    • 1990 – 10%
    • Est. 2010 – 16%
  – Blacks slightly declining
    • 1990 – 6.4%
    • 2010 – 5.3%

• Politically California has moved toward the center
Political Ideology

• More or less consistent set of values that are reflected in the political, economic, and moral make-up of society

• Most Americans:
  – Conservative
  – Liberal

  – Be careful of labels
Ideology of Americans

- **Conservativism** – thought to believe that a government is best that governs least and that big government can only infringe on individual, personal, and economic rights.
Ideology of Americans

- **Liberalism** – thought to favor government involvement in the economy and the provision of social services and to take an activist role in protecting women, the elderly, minorities, and the environment.
Political Culture and Views of Government

- High expectations
- Americans often do not know what government does for them
- Mistrust of politicians
- Voter apathy