17 Politics and Government

Learning Objectives

Remember the definitions of the key terms highlighted in boldfaced type throughout this chapter.

Understand the political spectrum and the difference between economic and social issues.

Apply sociology's major theoretical approaches to politics and government.
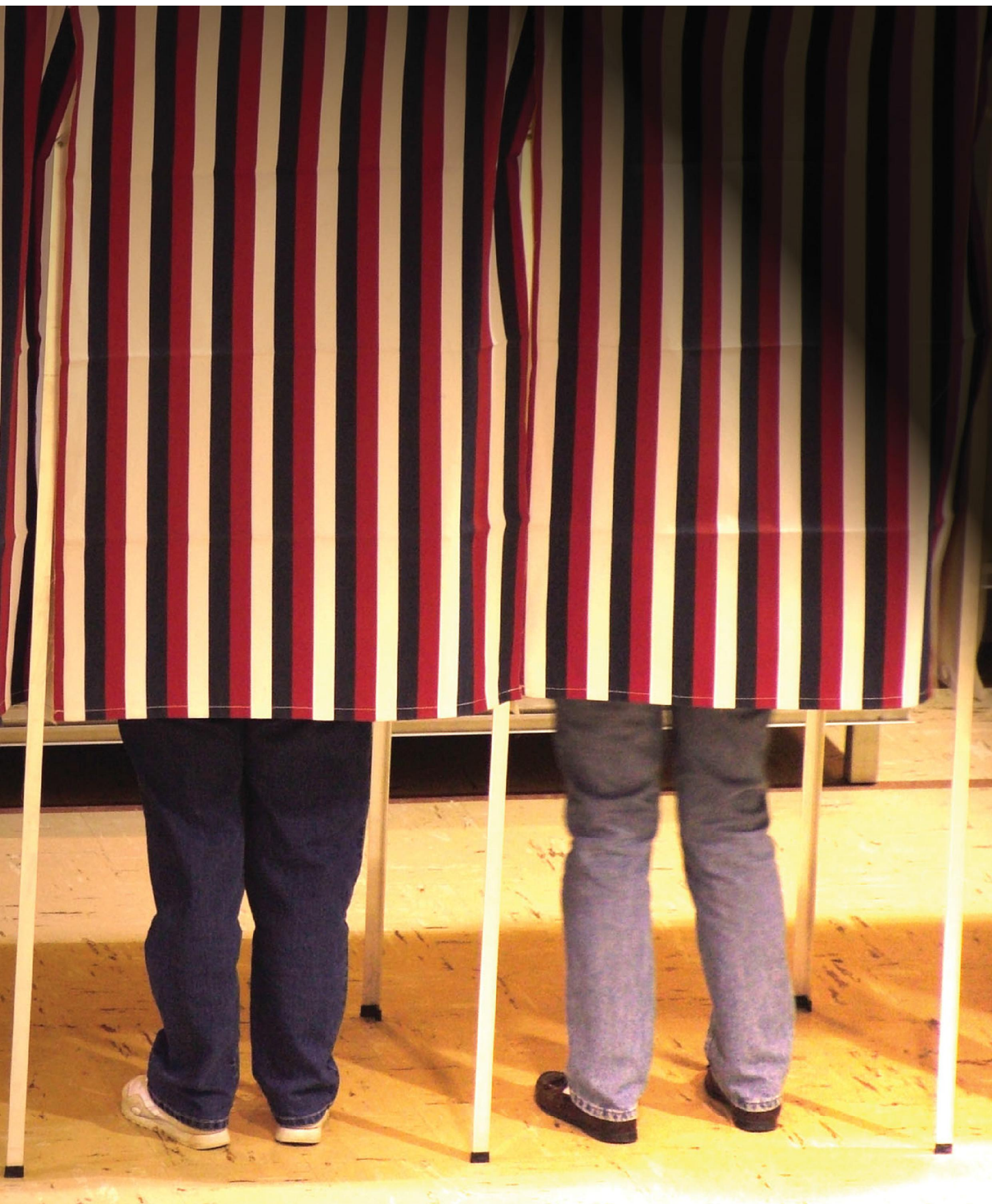
Analyze the causes and consequences of war and terrorism.

Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of various types of political systems.

Create a vision of how the world can reduce violent conflict and pursue peace.

Politics is the social institution that distributes power, sets goals, and makes decisions. This chapter explores politics and explains the operation of government. In addition, the chapter analyzes the character and causes of war and terrorism. ▪

The sun has barely come up and already several thousand people have gathered at a major intersection in Manama, the capital city of Bahrain. Some have come from their homes, some have come from nearby college campuses, some have been sleeping there all night. Many people hold cell phones, checking the latest news on what is planned for the day. And over the whole scene drifts the sound of music—rap music—written by a young Tunisian known as "El Général." "Mister President," the song goes, "your people are dying. . . I see injustice everywhere."

The year 2011 may well go down in history as the year in which rage mixed with rap to produce revolution. And added to this mix is one more key element—young people. The majority of the people in the streets of Bahrain, as elsewhere across the Middle East, are under thirty. Equipped with the handheld computer technology that has defined their generation, these young people are full of ambition and hope and tired of unemployment, hunger, and having little or no voice in their political systems.

It started in Tunisia at the end of 2010 when a popular uprising forced that nation's dictator from power. The movement spread to Algeria, Jordan, Yemen, Egypt (forcing out that country's longtime leader), Sudan, Palestine, Iraq, Iran, Bahrain, and Libya. We cannot predict the eventual outcome of this movement, but the goal of young people across the Middle East is clear—they are out to change the world (Ghosh, 2011; Zakaria, 2011).

How power is exercised within a society—who has it and how it is used—is the focus of this chapter. What we call **politics**—or more formally, the "polity"—is *the social institution that distributes power, sets a society's goals, and makes decisions.* We will examine the political system in the United States and, from various points of view, assess the extent to which our society is truly democratic. Then we will turn our attention to the world as a whole, including a focus on revolution, as well as the international use of power in the form of war and terrorism.

Power and Authority

🔵 **Understand**

The sociologist Max Weber (1978, orig. 1921) claimed that every society is based on **power**, which he defined as *the ability to achieve desired ends despite resistance from others.* The use of power is the business of **government**, *a formal organization that directs the political life of a society.* Governments demand compliance on the part of a population; yet Weber noted that most governments do not openly threaten their people. Most of the time, people respect, or at least accept, their society's political system.

No government, Weber explained, is likely to keep its power for long if compliance comes *only* from the threat of brute force. Even the most brutal dictator must wonder if there can ever be enough police to watch everyone—and who would watch the police? Every government, therefore, tries to make itself seem legitimate in the eyes of the people. This fact brings us to Weber's concept of **authority**, *power that people perceive as legitimate rather than coercive.* How do governments transform raw power into more stable authority? Weber pointed to three ways: traditional authority, rational-legal authority, and charismatic authority.

Traditional Authority

Preindustrial societies, said Weber, rely on **traditional authority**, *power legitimized by respect for long-established cultural patterns.* Woven into a population's collective memory, traditional authority means that people accept a system, usually one of hereditary leadership, simply because it has always been that way. Chinese emperors in centuries past were legitimized by tradition, as were aristocratic rulers in medieval Europe.

politics the social institution that distributes power, sets a society's goals, and makes decisions

government a formal organization that directs the political life of a society

power the ability to achieve desired ends despite resistance from others

authority power that people perceive as legitimate rather than coercive

The power of tradition can be so strong that, for better or worse, people typically come to view traditional rulers as almost godlike.

Traditional authority declines as societies industrialize. Hannah Arendt (1963) pointed out that traditional authority remains strong only as long as everyone shares the same beliefs and way of life. Modern scientific thinking, the specialization demanded by industrial production, and the social changes and cultural diversity resulting from immigration all combine to weaken tradition. Therefore, a U.S. president would never claim to rule "by the grace of God," as many rulers in the ancient world did. Even so, some upper-class families with names like Bush, Kennedy, Roosevelt, and Rockefeller are so well established in our country's political life that their members may enter the political arena with some measure of traditional authority (Baltzell, 1964). Around the world, there are still hereditary rulers who claim a traditional right to rule. But this claim is increasingly out of step with modern society. Some traditional rulers persist by relinquishing most of their power (as in the United Kingdom) or at the other extreme by keeping their people cut off from the world and in a state of total subjugation (as in North Korea).

Traditional authority is also a source of strength for *patriarchy,* the domination of women by men. This traditional form of power is still widespread, although it is increasingly challenged. Less controversial is the traditional authority parents have over their children. As children, most of us can remember challenging a parent's demand by asking "Why?" only to hear the response "Because I said so!" Answering this way, the parent makes clear that the demand is not open to debate; to respond otherwise would ignore the parent's traditional authority over the child and put the two on an equal footing.

Rational-Legal Authority

Weber defined **rational-legal authority** (sometimes called *bureaucratic authority*) as *power legitimized by legally enacted rules and regulations.* Rational-legal authority is power legitimized in the operation of lawful government.

As Chapter 7 ("Groups and Organizations") explains, Weber viewed bureaucracy as the type of organization that dominates in rational-thinking, modern societies. The same rational worldview that promotes bureaucracy also erodes traditional customs and practices. Instead of looking to the past, members of today's high-income societies seek justice through the operation of a political system that follows formally enacted rules of law.

Rationally enacted rules also guide the use of power in everyday life. The authority of deans and classroom teachers, for example, rests on the offices they hold in bureaucratic colleges and universities. The police, too, depend on rational-legal authority. In contrast to traditional authority, rational-legal authority comes not from family background but from a position in government organization. A traditional monarch rules for life, but a modern president or prime minister accepts and gives up power according to law, which shows that presidential authority lies in the office, not in the person.

Charismatic Authority

Finally, Weber claimed that power can turn into authority through charisma. **Charismatic authority** is *power legitimized by extraordinary personal abilities that inspire devotion and obedience.* Unlike traditional and rational-legal authority, charismatic authority depends less on a person's ancestry or office and more on personality.

Charismatic leaders have surfaced throughout history, using their personal skills to turn an audience into followers. Often they make their own rules and challenge the status quo. Examples of charismatic leaders can be as different as Jesus of Nazareth and Adolf Hitler. The fact that they and others, such as India's liberator, Mahatma Gandhi, and the U.S. civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., succeeded in transforming the society around them certainly shows the power of charisma. And it probably explains why charismatics are highly controversial and why few of them die of old age.

Because charismatic authority flows from a single individual, the leader's death creates a crisis. Survival of a charismatic movement, Weber explained, requires the **routinization of charisma**, *the transformation of charismatic authority into some combination of traditional and bureaucratic authority.* After the death of Jesus, for example, followers institutionalized his teachings in a church, built on tradition and bureaucracy. Routinized in this way, the Roman Catholic Church has lasted for 2,000 years.

Politics in Global Perspective

● **Understand**

Political systems have changed over the course of history. Technologically simple hunting and gathering societies, once found all over the planet, operated like large families without formal governments. Leadership generally fell to a man with unusual strength, hunting skill, or personal charisma. But with few resources, such leaders might control their own people but could never rule a large area (Nolan & Lenski, 2010).

Agrarian societies are larger with specialized jobs and material surpluses. In these societies, a small elite gains control of most of the wealth and power, so that politics is not just a matter of powerful

Types of Authority

traditional authority power legitimized by respect for long-established cultural patterns

rational-legal authority power legitimized by legally enacted rules and regulations (also known as *bureaucratic authority*)

charismatic authority power legitimized by extraordinary personal abilities that inspire devotion and obedience

Monarchy is typically found in societies that have yet to industrialize. The recent political unrest throughout the Middle East indicates growing resistance to this form of political system in today's world. Even so, King Abdullah and members of his royal family strengthen their control of Saudi Arabia through their support of Arabic heritage and culture.

During the Middle Ages, *absolute monarchs* in much of the world claimed a monopoly of power based on divine right. Today, claims of divine right are rare, although monarchs in a number of nations—including Saudi Arabia and Oman—still exercise almost absolute control over their people.

With industrialization, however, monarchs gradually pass from the scene in favor of elected officials. All the European nations with royal families today are *constitutional monarchies,* meaning that their monarchs are little more than *symbolic* heads of state; actual governing is the responsibility of elected officials, led by a prime minister and guided by a constitution. In these nations, nobility formally reigns, but elected officials actually rule.

individuals but a more complex social institution in its own right. This is the point in history when power passed from generation to generation within a single family and leaders start to claim a divine right to rule, gaining some measure of Weber's traditional authority. Leaders may also benefit from rational-legal authority to the extent that their rule is supported by law.

As societies grow bigger, politics takes the form of a national government, or *political state.* But the effectiveness of a political state depends on the available technology. Centuries ago, armies moved slowly on foot, and communication over even short distances was uncertain. For this reason, the early political empires—such as Mesopotamia in the Middle East about 5,000 years ago—took the form of many small *city-states.*

More complex technology brings about the larger-scale system of *nation-states.* Currently, the world has 195 independent nation-states, each with a somewhat distinctive political system. Generally, however, these political systems fall into four categories: monarchy, democracy, authoritarianism, and totalitarianism.

Monarchy

Monarchy (with Latin and Greek roots meaning "one ruler") is *a political system in which a single family rules from generation to generation.* Monarchy is commonly found in the ancient agrarian societies; the Bible, for example, tells of great kings such as David and Solomon. In the world today, twenty-six nations have royal families;[1] some trace their ancestry back for centuries. In Weber's terms, then, monar-chy is legitimized by tradition.

Democracy

The historical trend in the modern world has been toward **democracy**, *a political system that gives power to the people as a whole.* More accurately, because it would be impossible for *all* citizens to act as leaders, we have devised a system of *representative democracy* that puts authority in the hands of leaders chosen by the people in elections.

Most high-income countries of the world, including those that still have royal families, claim to be democratic. Industrialization and democratic government go together because both require a literate populace. Also, with industrialization, the legitimization of power in a tradition-based monarchy gives way to rational-legal authority. Thus democracy and rational-legal authority go together, just like monarchy and traditional authority.

But high-income countries such as the United States are not truly democratic for two reasons. First, there is the problem of bureaucracy. The U.S. federal government has 2.8 million regular employees and several million more government workers paid for by special funding. Add to these workers 1.6 million uniformed military personnel and 66,000 legislative and judicial branch personnel, which add up to more than 4.4 million federal government workers in all. Another 19.8 million people work in almost 89,500 local governments across the country. Most people who run the government are never elected by anyone and do not have to answer directly to the people.

The second problem with our nation's claim to being democratic involves economic inequality, since rich people have far more politi-

[1]In Europe: Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Belgium, Spain, and Monaco; in the Middle East: Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait; in Africa: Lesotho, Swaziland, and Morocco; in Asia: Brunei, Tonga, Thailand, Malaysia, Cambodia, Bhutan, and Japan (U.S. Department of State, 2011).

monarchy a political system in which a single family rules from generation to generation

democracy a political system that gives power to the people as a whole

Rosa Canellas Perez lives in Madrid, the capital of Spain, a high-income nation with extensive political freedom.

Nguyen Hung Anh lives near Hanoi, Vietnam, a middle-income nation that restricts political freedom and closely monitors the movements, actions, and speech of its people.

2011
- Free
- Partly free
- Not free

Window on the World

GLOBAL MAP 17–1 Political Freedom in Global Perspective

In 2010, a total of 87 of the world's 195 nations, containing 43 percent of all people, were politically "free"; that is, they offered their citizens extensive political rights and civil liberties. Another 60 countries, which included 22 percent of the world's people, were "partly free," with more limited rights and liberties. The remaining 48 nations, home to 35 percent of humanity, fall into the category of "not free." In these countries, government sharply restricts individual initiative. Between 1980 and 2010, democracy made significant gains, largely in Latin America and Eastern Europe.

Source: Freedom House (2011).

cal power than poor people. All of the most visible voices in today's political debates—from President Obama (who has made millions on book sales) and the Clintons (who have earned lots of money since Bill left the presidency) to John McCain (whose wife is very wealthy) and Sarah Palin (who has become a highly paid media celebrity)—are among the country's richest people. And in the game of politics, "money talks." Given the even greater resources of billion-dollar corporations and their super-rich CEOs, how well does our "democratic" system hear the voices of "average people"?

Still, democratic nations do provide many rights and freedoms. Global Map 17–1 shows one assessment of the extent of political freedom around the world. According to Freedom House, an organization that tracks political trends, eighty-seven of the world's nations (with 43 percent of the global population) were "free," respecting many civil liberties, in 2011. This represents a gain for freedom: Just seventy-six nations were considered free two decades earlier (Freedom House, 2011).

Democracy and Freedom: Capitalist and Socialist Approaches

Despite the problems just described, rich capitalist nations such as the United States claim to operate as democracies. Of course, socialist countries such as Cuba and the People's Republic of China make the same claim. This curious fact suggests that perhaps we need to look more closely at *political economy,* the interplay of politics and economics.

"Soft Authoritarianism" or Planned Prosperity? A Report from Singapore

Jake: If people have plenty to eat and a comfortable place to sleep, they'll be happy.

Serena: I think being free is more important than being well-off economically.

Noor: Let me tell you a little about Singapore, where I live. . . .

Singapore is on the tip of the Malay peninsula and has a population of 5.1 million. To many of its people, the tiny nation seems an Asian paradise. Surrounded by poor societies grappling with rapidly growing populations, rising crime rates, and dirty, sprawling cities, Singapore stands apart with its affluence, cleanliness, and safety. Visitors from the United States sometimes say it seems more of a theme park than a country.

Since gaining its independence from Malaysia in 1965, Singapore has startled the world with its economic development and its high per capita income. In contrast to the United States, Singapore has scarcely any social problems such as crime, slums, unemployment, or children living in poverty. There are hardly any traffic jams, and you won't find graffiti on subway cars or litter in the streets.

The key to Singapore's orderly environment is the ever-present government, which actively promotes traditional morality and regulates just about everything. The state owns and manages most of the country's housing and has a hand in many businesses. It provides tax breaks for family planning and for the completion of additional years of schooling. To limit traffic, the government slaps hefty surcharges on cars, pushing the price of a basic sedan up to around $40,000.

Singapore has tough anticrime laws that mandate death by hanging for drug dealing and permit police to hold a person suspected of a crime without charge or trial. The government has outlawed some religious groups (including Jehovah's Witnesses) and bans pornography outright. To keep the city clean, the state forbids smoking in public, bans eating on its subways, imposes stiff fines for littering, and even regulates the use of chewing gum.

In economic terms, Singapore does not fit the familiar categories. Government control of many businesses, including television stations, telephone service, airlines, and taxis, seems socialist. Yet unlike most socialist enterprises, these businesses operate efficiently and very profitably. Singapore's capitalist culture applauds economic growth (although the government cautions people against being too materialistic), and hundreds of multinational corporations are based here.

Singapore's political climate is as unusual as its economy. Freedom House (2011) characterizes Singapore as "partly free." The law provides for elections of political leaders, but one party—the People's Action party—has dominated the political process since independence and controls almost all the seats in the country's parliament.

Singapore is not a democratic country in the conventional sense. But most people in this prospering nation are quite happy with their way of life. Singapore's political system offers a simple bargain: Government demands loyalty from its people; in return, it gives them security and prosperity. Critics charge that this system amounts to a "soft authoritarianism" that controls people's lives and stifles political dissent. But most of the people of Singapore know the struggles of living elsewhere and, for now at least, consider the trade-off a good one.

What Do You Think?

1. What aspects of political life in Singapore do you like? Why?
2. What aspects of political life in Singapore do you not like? Why?
3. Would you say that, overall, Singapore offers a better life than the United States? Why or why not?

The political life of the United States, Canada, and the nations of Europe is largely shaped by the economic principles of capitalism, described in Chapter 16 ("The Economy and Work"). The pursuit of profit in a market system requires that "freedom" be defined in terms of people's right to act in their own self-interest. Thus the capitalist approach to political freedom translates into personal liberty, the freedom to act in whatever ways maximize profit or other personal advantage. From this point of view, political "democracy" means that individuals have the right to select their leaders from among those running for office.

However, capitalist societies are marked by a striking inequality of income and wealth. If everyone acts according to self-interest, the inevitable result is that some people have much more power to get their way than others. In practice, a market system creates unequal wealth and transforms wealth into power. Critics of capitalism claim that a wealthy elite dominates the economic and political life of the society.

By contrast, socialist systems claim they are democratic because their economies meet everyone's basic needs for housing, schooling, work, and medical care. Despite being a much poorer country than the United States, for example, Cuba provides basic medical care to all its people regardless of their ability to pay.

But critics of socialism counter that the extensive government regulation of social life in these countries is oppressive. The socialist governments of China and Cuba, for example, do not allow their people to move freely across or even within their borders and tolerate no organized political opposition.

These contrasting approaches to democracy and freedom raise an important question: Can economic equality and political liberty

go together? To foster economic equality, socialism limits the choices of individuals. Capitalism, on the other hand, provides broad political liberties, which in practice mean much more to the rich than to the poor.

Authoritarianism

Some nations prevent their people from having any voice at all in politics. **Authoritarianism** is *a political system that denies the people participation in government.* An authoritarian government is indifferent to people's needs, offers them no voice in selecting leaders, and uses force in response to dissent or opposition. The absolute monarchies in Saudi Arabia and Oman are authoritarian, as is the military junta in Ethiopia. Sometimes, as the recent political movements in the Middle East illustrate, people stand up and oppose heavy-handed government. But not always. The Thinking Globally box looks at the largely peaceful "soft authoritarianism" that thrives in the small Asian nation of Singapore.

Totalitarianism

October 30, Beijing, China. Several U.S. students are sitting around a computer in the lounge of a Chinese university dormitory. They are taking turns running Google searches on keywords such as "democracy" and "Amnesty International." They soon realize that China's government monitors the Internet, filtering the results of online searches so that only officially approved sites appear. One Chinese student who is watching points out that things could be worse—in North Korea, she explains, the typical person has no access to computers at all.

The most intensely controlled political form is **totalitarianism**, *a highly centralized political system that extensively regulates people's lives.* Totalitarianism emerged in the twentieth century as technological advances gave governments the ability to rigidly control their populations. The Vietnamese government closely monitors the activities of not just visitors but also all its citizens. Similarly, the government of North Korea, perhaps the most totalitarian in the world, keeps its people in poverty and uses not only police to control people but also surveillance equipment and powerful computers to collect and store information about them.

Although some totalitarian governments claim to represent the will of the people, most seek to bend people to the will of the government. As the term itself implies, such governments have a *total* concentration of power, allowing no organized opposition. Denying the people the right to assemble and controlling access to information, these governments create an atmosphere of personal isolation and fear. In the final decades of the Soviet Union, for example, ordinary citizens had no access to telephone directories, copying equipment, fax machines, or even accurate city maps. Much the same is true in North Korea today.

Socialization in totalitarian societies is intensely political with the goal of obedience and commitment to the system. In North Korea, pictures of leaders and political messages are everywhere, reminding citizens that they owe total allegiance to the state. Government-controlled schools and mass media present only official versions of events.

Totalitarian governments span the political spectrum from fascist (as in Nazi Germany) to communist (as in North Korea). In all

authoritarianism a political system that denies the people participation in government

totalitarianism a highly centralized political system that extensively regulates people's lives

cases, however, one party claims total control of the society and permits no opposition.

A Global Political System?

Chapter 16 ("The Economy and Work") described the emergence of a global economy in which large corporations operate with little regard to national boundaries. Is globalization changing politics in the same way? On one level, the answer is no. Although most of the world's economic activity is international, the planet remains divided into nation-states, just as it has been for centuries. The United Nations (founded in 1945) was a small step in the direction of global government, but to date its political role in the world has been limited.

On another level, however, politics has become a global process. For some analysts, multinational corporations have created a new political order because of their enormous power to shape events throughout the world. In other words, politics is dissolving into business as corporations grow larger than governments.

Also, the Information Revolution has moved national politics onto the world stage. E-mail, text messaging, and Twitter networks mean that few countries can conduct their political affairs in complete privacy. The recent "WikiLeaks" controversy shows that just about anyone can easily transmit information—even that guarded by governments—so that it can become available to anyone and everyone (Gellman, 2011).

At the same time, computer technology brings the world scene into even local politics. Most of the young people who participated in the political opposition that swept the Middle East in 2011 were well aware of the greater political voice available to most people elsewhere. In addition, they used cell phone networks to spread information and organize events. No wonder, as the Middle East drama unfolded, China clamped down on Internet use, creating what some analysts called the "Great Firewall of China" (Xia 2011; Zakaria, 2011).

Finally, as part of the global political process, several thousand *nongovernmental organizations* (NGOs) seek to advance global issues, such as human rights (Amnesty International) or an ecologically sustainable world (Greenpeace). NGOs will continue to play a key part in expanding the global political culture.

To sum up, just as individual nations are losing control of their own economies, governments cannot fully manage the political events occurring within their borders.

Politics in the United States

● **Understand**

After fighting a war against Britain to gain political independence, the United States replaced the British monarchy with a representative democracy. Our nation's political development reflects a cultural history as well as its capitalist economy.
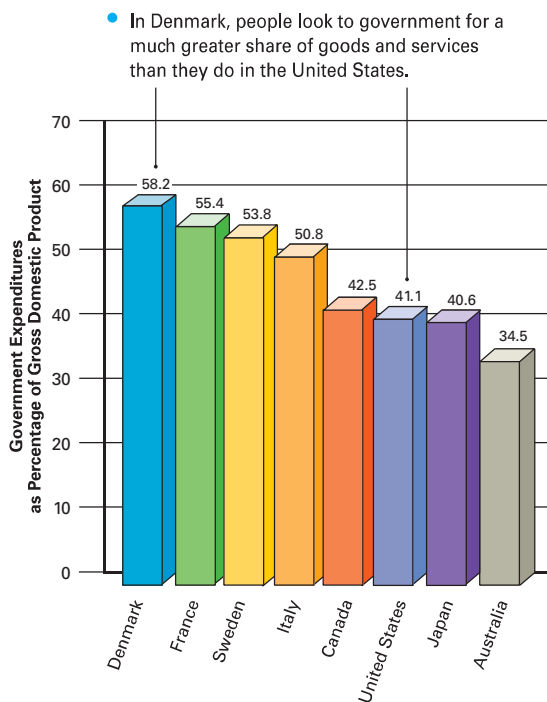
Global Snapshot

FIGURE 17–1   The Size of Government, 2011

Government activity accounts for a smaller share of economic output in the United States than in other high-income countries.

Source: OECD (2011).

U.S. Culture and the Rise of the Welfare State

The political culture of the United States can be summed up in one word: individualism. This emphasis is found in the Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees freedom from undue government interference. It was this individualism that the nineteenth-century poet and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson had in mind when he said, "The government that governs best is the government that governs least."

But most people stop short of Emerson's position, believing that government is necessary to defend the country, operate highway systems and schools, maintain law and order, and help people in need. To accomplish these things, the U.S. government has grown into a vast and complex **welfare state**, *a system of government agencies and programs that provides benefits to the population.* Government benefits begin even before birth (through prenatal nutrition programs) and continue during old age (through Social Security and Medicare). Some programs are especially important to the poor, who are not well served by our capitalist economic system. But students, farmers, homeowners, small business operators, veterans, performing artists, and even executives of giant corporations all get various subsidies

and supports. In fact, a majority of U.S. adults look to government for at least part of their income.

Today's welfare state is the result of a gradual increase in the size and scope of government. In 1789, the presence of the federal government amounted to little more than a flag in most communities, and the entire federal budget was a mere $4.5 million ($1.50 for each person in the nation). Since then, it has risen steadily, reaching $3.8 trillion in 2011 ($12,418 per person) (U.S. Office of Management and Budget, 2011).

Similarly, when our nation was founded, one government employee served every 1,800 citizens. Today, about one in six workers in the United States is a government employee, which is a larger share of our workforce than is engaged in manufacturing (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Despite this growth, the U.S. welfare state is still smaller than those of many other high-income nations. Figure 17–1 shows that government is larger in most of Europe, especially in France and the Scandinavian countries such as Denmark and Sweden.

The Political Spectrum

Who supports a bigger welfare state? Who wants to cut it back? Answers to these questions reveal attitudes that form the *political spectrum,* beliefs that range from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. About one-fourth of adults in the United States fall on the liberal, or "left," side, and one-third say they are conservative, placing themselves on the political "right"; the remaining 40 percent claim to be moderates, in the political "middle" (Horwitz, 2008; NORC, 2011:213).

The political spectrum helps us understand two types of issues: *Economic issues* focus on economic inequality; *social issues* involve moral questions about how people ought to live.

Economic Issues

Economic liberals support both extensive government regulation of the economy and a larger welfare state in order to reduce income inequality. The government can reduce inequality by taxing the rich more heavily and providing more benefits to the poor. Economic conservatives want to limit the hand of government in the economy and allow market forces more freedom, claiming that this produces more jobs and makes the economy more productive.

Social Issues

Social issues are moral questions about how people ought to live, ranging from abortion and the death penalty to gay rights and the treatment of minorities. Social liberals support equal rights and opportunities for all categories of people, view abortion as a matter of individual choice, and oppose the death penalty because it has been unfairly applied to minorities. The "family values" agenda of social conservatives supports traditional gender roles and opposes gay marriage, affirmative action, and other "special programs" for minorities. At the same time, social conservatives condemn abortion as morally wrong and support the death penalty.

Of the two major political parties in the United States, the Republican party is more conservative on both economic and social issues, and the Democratic party is more liberal. But both political parties

favor big government when it advances their particular aims. During the 2008 presidential campaign, for example, Republican John McCain supported bigger government in the form of a stronger military; Democrat Barack Obama also favored enlarging government to expand the social "safety net" that would provide, for example, health care coverage for all. The fact that both political parties look to government to advance their goals is certain one reason that, no matter who is living in the White House, government keeps increasing in size along with the national debt.

Class, Race, and Gender

Most people hold a mix of conservative and liberal attitudes. With wealth to protect, well-to-do people tend to be conservative on economic issues, but their extensive schooling and secure social standing lead most to be social liberals. Low-income people display the opposite pattern with most being liberal on economic issues but supporting a socially conservative agenda (Ohlemacher, 2008).

African Americans, both rich and poor, tend to be more liberal than whites (especially on economic issues) and for half a century have voted Democratic (95 percent cast ballots for the Democratic candidate, Barack Obama, in 2008). Historically, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Jews have also supported the Democratic party (Kohut, 2008).

Women tend to be somewhat more liberal than men. Among U.S. adults, more women lean toward the Democrats, and more men vote for Republican candidates. In 2008, for example, 56 percent of women but just 49 percent of men voted for Barack Obama. Figure 17–2 on page 402 shows how this pattern has changed over time among college students. Although there have been shifts in student attitudes—moving to the right in the 1970s and moving to the left beginning in the late 1990s—college women have remained more liberal than college men (Astin et al., 2002; Sax et al., 2003; Pryor et al., 2007).

Party Identification

Because many people hold mixed political attitudes, with liberal views on some issues and conservative stands on others, party identification in this country is weak. Surveys conducted in 2011 show that about 49 percent favor or lean toward the Democratic party, 39 percent favor or lean toward the Republican party, and about 12 percent favor some other party or say they are "independent" (Pew, 2011). This lack of strong party identification is one reason each of the two major parties gains or loses power from election to election. Democrats held the White House in 1996 and gained ground in Congress in 1996, 1998, and 2000. In 2002 and 2004, the tide turned as Republicans made gains in Congress and kept control of the White House. In 2006, the tide turned again, with Democrats gaining control of Congress and winning the White House in 2008. By the 2010 elections, however, Republicans had picked up seats in Congress, gaining a majority in the House of Representatives.

There is also an urban-rural divide in U.S. politics: People in urban areas typically vote Democratic and those in rural areas Republican. The Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life box on page 403 takes a closer look at the national political scene, and National Map 17–1 on page 403 shows the county-by-county results for the 2008 presidential election.

Special-Interest Groups

For years, a debate has raged across the United States about the private ownership of firearms. Organizations such as the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence support stricter gun laws; other organizations, including the National Rifle Association, strongly oppose such measures. Each of these organizations is an example of a **special-interest group**, *people organized to address some economic or social issue*. Special-interest groups, which include associations of

Lower-income people have more pressing financial needs, and so they tend to focus on economic issues, such as job wages and benefits. Higher-income people, by conrast, provide support for many social issues, such as animal rights.
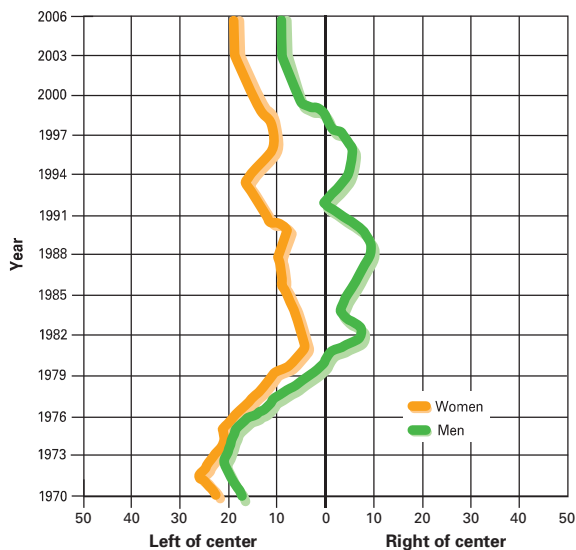
Student Snapshot

FIGURE 17–2   Left-Right Political Identification of College Students, 1970–2006

Student attitudes moved to the right after 1970 and shifted left in the late 1990s. College women tend to be more liberal than college men.

Sources: Astin et al. (2002), Sax et al. (2003), and Pryor et al. (2007).

older adults, fireworks producers, and environmentalists, are strong in nations where political parties tend to be weak. Special-interest groups employ *lobbyists* to work on their behalf, trying to get members of Congress to support their goals. Washington, D.C., is home to about 13,000 lobbyists (Center for Responsive Politics, 2011).

A **political action committee (PAC)** is *an organization formed by a special-interest group, independent of political parties, to raise and spend money in support of political goals.* Political action committees channel most of their funds directly to candidates likely to support their interests. Since they were created in the 1970s, the number of PACs has grown rapidly to more than 4,600 (Federal Election Commission, 2010).

Because of the rising costs of political campaigns, most candidates eagerly accept support from political action committees. In the congressional elections in 2010, a non–presidential election year, 23 percent of all campaign funding came from PACs, and senators seeking reelection received, on average, almost $300,000 each in PAC contributions. For members of the House, the average contribution was almost $200,000. In presidential elections, contributions are far greater. In 2008, Barack Obama and John McCain together received and spent more than $1 billion on their presidential campaigns (Pickler & Sidoti, 2008; Center for Responsive Politics, 2008, 2011). Supporters of this pattern of large contribution and great spending claim that PACs represent the interests of a vast assortment of businesses,

📖 **Read** "Is Congress Really for Sale?" by Paul Burstein on mysoclab.com

unions, and church groups, thereby increasing political participation. Critics counter that organizations supplying cash to politicians expect to be treated favorably in return, so in effect, PACs are attempting to buy political influence ("Abramoff Effect," 2006; Federal Election Commission, 2010).

Does having the most money matter? The answer is yes—in the 2010 elections, in 95 percent of the congressional races, the candidate with the most money ended up winning the election. Concerns about the power of money have led to much discussion of campaign financing. In 2002, Congress passed a modest campaign finance reform, limiting the amount of unregulated money that candidates are allowed to collect. Despite this change, both presidential races since then set new records for campaign spending (Center for Responsive Politics, 2009). It seems unlikely that this pattern will change any time soon. In 2010, the Supreme Court rejected limits on the election spending of corporations, unions, and other large organizations (Liptak, 2010).

Voter Apathy

A disturbing fact of U.S. political life is that many people in this country do not vote. In fact, U.S. citizens are less likely to vote today than they were a century ago. In the 2000 presidential election, which was decided by a few hundred votes, only half the people eligible to vote went to the polls. In 2008, participation rose to 63 percent (the highest turnout since 1960), still lower than in almost all other high-income countries (Center for the Study of the American Electorate, 2009).

Who is and is not likely to vote? Research shows that women are slightly more likely than men to cast a ballot. People over sixty-five are much more likely to vote than college-age adults (almost half of whom have not even registered). Non-Hispanic white people are just slightly more likely to vote (66 percent voted in 2008) than African Americans (65 percent), and Hispanics (50 percent) are the least likely of all to vote. Generally speaking, people with a bigger stake in U.S. society—homeowners, parents with young children, people with more schooling and good jobs—are more likely to vote. Income matters, too: People earning more than $75,000 are twice as likely to vote (79 percent in 2008) as people earning less than $10,000 (50 percent) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

Of course, we should expect some nonvoting because, at any given time, millions of people are sick or away from home or have recently moved to a new neighborhood and have forgotten to reregister. In addition, registering and voting depend on the ability to read and write, which discourages tens of millions of U.S. adults with limited literacy skills. Finally, people with physical disabilities that limit mobility have a lower turnout than the general population (Schur & Kruse, 2000; Brians & Grofman, 2001).

Conservatives suggest that apathy is really *indifference to politics* among people who are, by and large, content with their lives. Liberals and especially radicals on the far left of the political spectrum counter that apathy reflects *alienation from politics* among people who are so deeply dissatisfied with society that they doubt that elections make any real difference. Because disadvantaged and powerless people are least likely to vote, and because the candidacy of Barack Obama raised the level of participation among minorities, the liberal explanation for apathy is probably closer to the truth.

Jorge: Just about everyone I know in L.A. voted Democratic. I mean, *nobody* voted for McCain!

Harry: If you lived in my county in rural Ohio, you'd see the exact opposite. Obama did not do well there at all.

As this conversation suggests, the reality of everyday politics in the United States depends on where you live. Political attitudes and voting patterns in rural and urban places are quite different. Sociologists have long debated why these differences exist.

Take a look at National Map 17–1, which shows the county-by-county results for the 2008 presidential election. The first thing that stands out is that the Republican candidate, John McCain, won 72 percent of U.S. counties—2,250 out of 3,115 ("McCain" counties appear in red on the map). Democrat Barack Obama won in 865 counties ("Obama" counties appear in blue).

How did Obama win the election when McCain won so many more counties? Obama won 53 percent of the popular vote, doing well in counties with large populations. Democrats do very well in large cities, for example, where Obama won 70 percent of the popular vote in 2008. Rural counties, with relatively small populations, tend to lean Republican. McCain received 53 percent of the rural vote in 2008. In many states, it is easy to see the rural-urban divide. In Ohio, for example, Obama won enough votes in and around Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati to carry the entire state even though most of the state's counties went for McCain.

The national pattern has led many political analysts to distinguish urban "blue states" that vote Democratic and rural "red states" that vote Republican. Looking more closely, at the county level, there appears to be a political divide between "liberal, urban America" and "conservative, rural America."

What accounts for this difference? Typically, rural counties are home to people who have lived in one place for a long time, are more traditional and family-oriented in their values, and are more likely to be religious. Such people tend to vote Republican. By contrast, urban areas are home to more minorities, young and single people, college students, and lower-income people, all of whom are more likely to vote Democratic.

What Do You Think?

1. Can you find your county on the map? Which way did most people vote? Can you explain why?

2. In most elections, more Republicans than Democrats claim they are concerned about "moral values"; more Democrats than Republicans say they care about "the economy and jobs." Can you explain why?

3. How might Democratic candidates do better in rural areas? How might Republican candidates do better in urban areas?

Popular Vote by County

For Obama

For McCain

Results for Alaska shown by election district
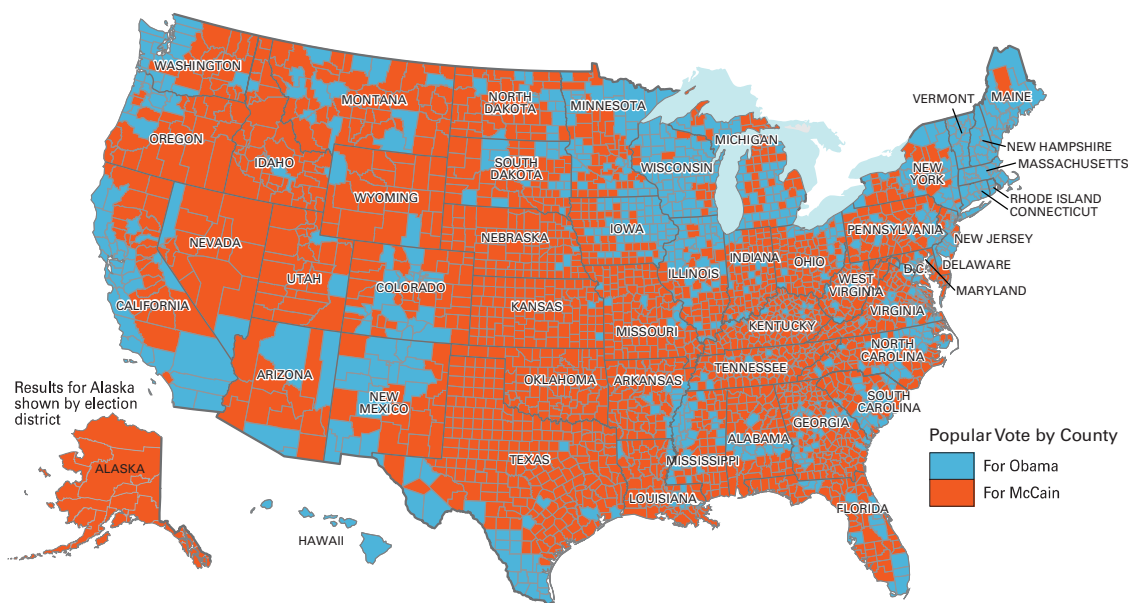
Seeing Ourselves

NATIONAL MAP 17–1 The Presidential Election, 2008: Popular Vote by County

Barack Obama won the 2008 presidential election with 53 percent of the total popular vote, but he received a majority of the vote in only about one-fourth of the nation's counties. Obama and other Democrats did well in more densely populated urban areas, while John McCain and other Republicans did well in less populated rural areas. Can you explain why urban areas are mostly Democratic and rural areas are mostly Republican? What other social characteristics do you think distinguish the people who vote Democratic from those who vote Republican?

✳ **Explore** patterns of voting in presidential elections in your local conmmunity and in counties across the United States on **mysoclab.com**

Source: U.S. Department of the Interior (2009).

Should Convicted Criminals Vote?

Although the right to vote is at the very foundation of our country's claim to being democratic, all states except Vermont and Maine have laws that bar people in prison from voting. Thirty states do not allow people on probation after committing a felony to vote; thirty-five states do the same for people on parole. Two states ban voting even after people have completed their sentences, and ten others do so subject to various appeals to restore voting rights. Overall, 5.3 million people (including 1.4 million African American men) in the United States do not have the right to vote (Sentencing Project, 2011).

Should government take away political rights as a type of punishment? The legislatures of most of our fifty states have said yes. But critics point out that this practice may be politically motivated, because preventing convicted criminals from voting makes a difference in the way elections in this country turn out. Convicted felons (who tend to be lower-income people) show better than a two-to-one preference for Democratic over Republican candidates. Even taking into account expected voter apathy, one recent study concluded that if these laws had not been in force in 2000, Democrat Al Gore would have defeated George W. Bush for the presidency (Uggen & Manza, 2002).

Theories of Power in Society

🟣 **Apply**
....

Sociologists have long debated how power is spread throughout the U.S. population. Power is a very difficult topic to study because decision making is complex and often takes place behind closed doors. Despite this difficulty, researchers have developed three competing models of power in the United States. The Applying Theory table provides a summary of each.

The Pluralist Model: The People Rule

The **pluralist model**, closely linked to structural-functional theory, is *an analysis of politics that sees power as spread among many competing interest groups.* Pluralists claim, first, that politics is an arena of negotiation. With limited resources, no organization can expect to achieve all its goals. Organizations therefore operate as *veto groups,*

One of the most significant political forces to develop in recent years is the Tea Party movement. Supporters claim that government has grown too big, too expensive, and now threatens the freedom of ordinary people. Do you see government as a "problem" the way many people on the right side of the political spectrum do? Or do you see it as the "solution" the way many people on the left side of the political spectrum do? Why?

realizing some success but mostly keeping opponents from achieving all their ends. The political process relies heavily on creating alliances and compromises among numerous interest groups so that policies gain wide support. In short, pluralists see power as spread widely throughout society, with all people having at least some voice in the political system (Dahl, 1961, 1982; Rothman & Black, 1998).

The Power-Elite Model: A Few People Rule

The **power-elite model**, based on social-conflict theory, is *an analysis of politics that sees power as concentrated among the rich.* The term *power elite* was coined by C. Wright Mills (1956), who argued that a small upper class holds most of society's wealth, prestige, and power.

Mills claimed that members of the power elite head up the three major sectors of U.S. society: the economy, the government, and the military. The power elite is made up of the "super-rich" (corporate executives and major stockholders); top officials in Washington, D.C., and state capitals around the country; and the highest-ranking officers in the U.S. military.

Further, Mills explained, these elites move from one sector to another, building power as they go. Former Vice President Dick Cheney, for example, has moved back and forth between powerful positions in the corporate world and the federal government. Colin Powell moved from a top position in the U.S. military to become secretary of state. More broadly, when presidents pick cabinet officials, most of these powerful public officials are millionaires. This was true in the Bush administration as it is in the Obama administration. Power-elite theorists say that the United States is not a democracy because the influence of a few people with great wealth and power is so strong that the average person's voice cannot be heard. They reject the pluralist idea that various centers of power serve as checks and balances on one another. According to the power-elite model, those at the top are so powerful that they face no real opposition (Bartlett & Steele, 2000; Moore et al., 2002).

The Marxist Model: The System Is Biased

A third approach to understanding U.S. politics is the **Marxist political-economy model**, *an analysis that explains politics in terms of the operation of a society's economic system.* Like the power-elite model, the Marxist model rejects the idea that the United States operates as a political democracy. But whereas the power-elite model focuses on just the enormous wealth and power of certain individuals, the Marxist model goes further and sees bias rooted in the nation's institutions, especially its economy. As noted in Chapter 4 ("Society"), Karl Marx claimed that a society's economic system (capitalist or socialist) shapes its political system. Therefore, the power elites do not simply appear out of nowhere; they are creations of the capitalist economy.

From this point of view, reforming the political system—say, by limiting the amount of money that rich peo-

Politics

	Pluralist Model	Power-Elite Model	Marxist Political-Economy Model
Which theoretical approach is applied?	Structural-functional approach	Social-conflict approach	Social-conflict approach
How is power spread throughout society?	Power is spread widely so that all groups have some voice.	Power is concentrated in the hands of top business, political, and military leaders.	Power is directed by the operation of the capitalist economy.
Is the United States a democracy?	Yes. Power is spread widely enough to make the country a democracy.	No. Power is too concentrated for the country to be a democracy.	No. The capitalist economy sets political decision making, so the country is not a democracy.

ple can contribute to political candidates—is unlikely to bring about true democracy. The problem does not lie in the people who exercise great power or the people who do not vote; the problem is rooted in the system itself, or what Marxists call the "political economy of capitalism." In other words, as long as the United States has a mostly capitalist economy, the majority of people will be shut out of politics, just as they are exploited in the workplace.

🟡 **Evaluate** Which of the three models is most accurate? Over the years, research has shown support for each one. In the end, how you think our political system ought to work is as much a matter of political values as of scientific fact.

Classic research by Nelson Polsby (1959) supports the pluralist model. Polsby studied the political scene in New Haven, Connecticut, and concluded that key decisions on various issues—including education, urban renewal, and the electoral nominating process—were made by different groups. Polsby concluded that in New Haven, no one group—not even the upper class—ruled all the others.

Robert Lynd and Helen Lynd (1937) studied Muncie, Indiana (which they called "Middletown," to suggest that it was a typical city), and documented the fortune amassed by a single family, the Balls, from their business manufacturing glass canning jars. Their findings support the power-elite position. The Lynds showed how the Ball family dominated the city's life, pointing to that family's name on a local bank, a university, a hospital, and a department store. In Muncie, according to the Lynds, the power elite boiled down, more or less, to a single family.

From the Marxist perspective, the point is not to look at which individuals make decisions. Rather, as Alexander Liazos (1982:13) explains in his analysis of the United States, "The basic tenets of capitalist society shape everyone's life: the inequalities of social classes and the importance of profits over people." As long as the basic institutions of society are organized to meet the needs of the few rather than the many, Liazos concludes, a democratic society is impossible.

Clearly, the U.S. political system gives almost everyone the right to participate in the political process through elections. But the power-elite and Marxist models point out that at the very least, the

U.S. political system is far less democratic than most people think. Most citizens may have the right to vote, but the major political parties and their candidates typically support only positions that are acceptable to the most powerful segments of society and consistent with the operation of our capitalist economy.

Whatever the reasons, unhappiness with government in the United States is not limited to a small number of people in the Tea Party (a movement that seeks a smaller government). Only about 60 percent of U.S. adults report having "some" or "a great deal" of confidence that members of Congress and other government officials will do what is best for the country (NORC, 2011:334–336).

CHECK YOUR LEARNING What is the main argument of the pluralist model of power? What about the power-elite model? The Marxist political-economy model?

Power beyond the Rules

🔵 **Understand**

In politics, there is always disagreement over a society's goals and the best means to achieve them. A political system tries to resolve these controversies within a system of rules. But political activity sometimes breaks the rules or tries to do away with the entire system.

Revolution

Political revolution is *the overthrow of one political system in order to establish another*. Reform involves change *within* a system, either through modification of the law or, in the extreme case, through a *coup d'état* (in French, literally, "blow to the state"), in which one leader topples another. Revolution involves change in the type of system itself.

No political system is immune to revolution, nor does revolution produce any one kind of government. Our country's Revolutionary War (1775–83) replaced colonial rule by the British monarchy with a representative democracy. French revolutionaries in 1789 also overthrew a monarch, only to set the stage for the return of monarchy in the person of Napoleon. In 1917, the Russian Revolution replaced

The year 2011 brought sweeping change to many countries in northern Africa and the Middle East. In Libya, a popular protest movement seeking the overthrow of longtime ruler Moammar Gadhafi turned into a civil war. Support for change also comes from high-income nations where large ethnic populations now reside. In London (*at right*), for example, hundreds of people with roots in Libya demonstrated in support of political change.

monarchy with a socialist government built on the ideas of Karl Marx. In 1979, an uprising in Iran overthrew an unpopular dictator but led to the rule of unpopular religious clerics. In 1991, a new Russian revolution dismantled the socialist Soviet Union, and the nation was reborn as fifteen independent republics, the largest of which—known as the Russian Federation—has moved closer to a market system and given a slightly greater political voice to its people.

Despite their striking variety, revolutions share a number of traits (Tocqueville, 1955, orig. 1856; Skocpol, 1979; Tilly, 1986):

1. **Rising expectations.** Common sense suggests that revolution would be more likely when people are severely deprived, but history shows that most revolutions occur when people's lives are improving. Rising expectations, rather than bitterness and despair, make revolution more likely. Driving the recent uprisings across the Middle East are people who may be living better than their families did generations ago but not as well as they see people living in other parts of the world.

2. **Unresponsive government.** Revolutions become more likely when a government is unwilling to reform itself, especially when demands for reform by powerful segments of society are ignored. In Egypt, for example, the government led by Hosni Mubarak had done little to benefit the people or reform its own corruption over many decades.

3. **Radical leadership by intellectuals.** The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) claimed that intellectuals provide the justification for revolution, and universities are often the center of political change. Students played a critical role in China's prodemocracy movement in the 1990s, the uprisings in Eastern Europe, and the recent uprisings across the Middle East.

4. **Establishing a new legitimacy.** Overthrowing a political system is not easy, but ensuring a revolution's long-term success is harder still. Some revolutionary movements are held together mostly by

hatred of the past regime and fall apart once new leaders are installed. This fact is one reason that it is difficult to predict the long-term outcome of recent political changes in the Middle East. Revolutionaries must also guard against counterrevolutionary drives led by overthrown leaders. This explains the speed and ruthlessness with which victorious revolutionaries typically dispose of former leaders.

Scientific analysis cannot declare that a revolution is good or bad. The full consequences of such an upheaval depend on the personal values of the observer and, in any case, typically become evident only after many years. For example, nearly two decades after the revolutions that toppled their governments in the early 1990s, the future of many of the former Soviet states remains uncertain.

Similarly, it is far from clear that the "prodemocracy" movement that has transformed parts of the Middle East will result in a long-term trend toward democracy. For one thing, polls show that just 60 percent of Egyptians, for example, claim that democracy is the best form of government. In addition, in the vacuum created by deposing an authoritarian ruler, many organizations—some more democratic than others—quickly compete for power (Bell, 2011).

Terrorism

The terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, involving four commercial airliners, killed nearly 3,000 innocent people, injured many thousands more, completely destroyed the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, and seriously damaged the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. Not since the attack on Pearl Harbor at the outbreak of World War II had the United States suffered such a blow. Indeed, this event was the most serious terrorist act ever recorded.

Terrorism refers to *acts of violence or the threat of violence used as a political strategy by an individual or a group.* Like revolution, terrorism is a political act beyond the rules of established political systems.

According to Paul Johnson (1981), terrorism has four distinguishing characteristics.

First, terrorists try to paint violence as a legitimate political tactic, even though such acts are condemned by virtually every nation. Terrorists also bypass (or are excluded from) established channels of political negotiation. Therefore, terrorism is a strategy used by a weaker organization against a stronger enemy. Terrorism can also be carried out by a single individual in support of some larger cause or movement as illustrated by the 2009 killing of thirteen people at the Fort Hood army base in Texas by a U.S. Army major (Gibbs, 2009).

In recent decades, terrorism has become commonplace in international politics. In 2009, there were about 11,000 acts of terrorism worldwide, which claimed 15,000 lives and injured more than 58,000 people. Most of those killed were in Iraq, but major terrorist attacks took place in many nations, including Afghanistan, India, and the Philippines (U.S. Department of State, 2010).

Second, terrorism is used not just by groups but also by governments against their own people. *State terrorism* is the use of violence, generally without support of law, by government officials as a way to control the population. State terrorism is lawful in some authoritarian and totalitarian states, which survive by creating widespread fear and intimidation among the population. The dictator Saddam Hussein, for example, relied on secret police and state terror to protect his power in Iraq.

Third, democratic societies reject terrorism in principle, but they are especially vulnerable to terrorists because they give broad civil liberties to people and have less extensive police networks. In contrast, totalitarian regimes make widespread use of state terrorism, but their extensive police power gives individuals few opportunities to commit acts of terror against the government.

Fourth and finally, terrorism is always a matter of definition. Governments claim the right to maintain order, even by force, and may label opposition groups that use violence as "terrorists." Political differences may explain why one person's "terrorist" is another's "freedom fighter" (Jenkins, 2003).

Although hostage taking and outright killing provoke popular anger, taking action against terrorists is difficult. Because most terrorist groups are shadowy organizations with no formal connection to any established state, identifying the parties responsible may be difficult. In addition, any military response risks confrontation with other governments. Yet as the terrorism expert Brian Jenkins warns, the failure to respond "encourages other terrorist groups, who begin to realize that this can be a pretty cheap way to wage war" (quoted in Whitaker, 1985:29).

In 2011, military forces of the United States finally tracked down and killed Osama bin Laden, the man behind the September 11, 2001, terror attacks that killed nearly 3,000 innocent people. Some people cheered the event; many felt a sense of relief. But few think that we are much closer to finding an end to global terrorism. What was your reaction to the death of bin Laden?
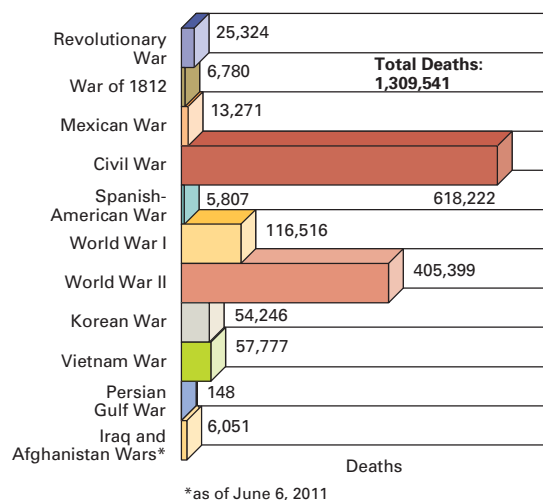

FIGURE 17–3   Deaths of Americans in Eleven U.S. Wars

Almost half of all U.S. deaths in war occurred during the Civil War (1861–65).

Sources: Compiled from various sources by Maris A. Vinovskis (1989) and the author.

War	Deaths
Revolutionary War	25,324
War of 1812	6,780
Mexican War	13,271
Civil War	618,222
Spanish-American War	5,807
World War I	116,516
World War II	405,399
Korean War	54,246
Vietnam War	57,777
Persian Gulf War	148
Iraq and Afghanistan Wars*	6,051

Total Deaths: 1,309,541

*as of June 6, 2011

War and Peace

🔴 **Analyze**

Perhaps the most critical political issue is **war**, *organized, armed conflict among the people of two or more nations, directed by their governments.* War is as old as humanity, but understanding it is crucial today because humanity now has weapons that can destroy the entire planet.

At almost any moment during the twentieth century, nations somewhere in the world were engaged in violent conflict. In its short history, the United States has participated in eleven large-scale wars. From the Revolutionary War to the Iraq War, more than 1.3 million U.S. men and women have been killed in armed conflicts, as shown in Figure 17–3, and many times that number have been injured. Thousands more died in "undeclared wars" and limited military actions in the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Lebanon, Grenada, Panama, Haiti, Bosnia, Afghanistan, and elsewhere.

The Causes of War

Wars occur so often that we might think that there is something natural about armed confrontation. But there is no evidence that human beings must wage war under any particular circumstances. On the contrary, governments around the world usually have to force their people to go to war.

Like all forms of social behavior, warfare is a product of *society* that is more common in some places than in others. The Semai of Malaysia, among the most peace-loving of the world's peoples, rarely resort to violence. In contrast, the Yąnomamö (see the box on page 56) are quick to wage war.

If society holds the key to war or peace, under what circumstances do humans go to battle? Quincy Wright (1987) cites five factors that promote war:

Television shows such as *NCIS: Los Angeles* portray the international drama of terrorism and counter-terrorism. How accurately do you think the mass media portray these issues? Why?

were freed from the obligation to serve. Today, by contrast, there is no draft, and fighting is done by a volunteer military. But not every member of our society is equally likely to volunteer.

One study revealed that the military has few young people who are rich and also few who are very poor. Rather, it is primarily working-class people who look to the military for a job, to earn some money to go to college, or simply to get out of the small town they grew up in. In addition, the largest number of young enlistees comes from the South, where local culture is more supportive of the military and where most military bases are located. As two analysts put it, "America's military seems to resemble the makeup of a two-year commuter or trade school outside Birmingham or Biloxi far more than that of a ghetto or barrio or four-year university in Boston" (Halbfinger & Holmes, 2003:1).

Throughout our nation's history, women have been a part of the U.S. military. In recent decades, women have taken on greater importance in the armed forces. For one thing, the share of women is on the rise, now standing at 15 percent of all military personnel. Just as important, although regulations continue to keep many military women out of harm's way, more women are now engaging in combat. Battle experience is significant because it is widely regarded as necessary for soldiers to reach the highest levels of leadership (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2011).

Is Terrorism a New Kind of War?

In recent years, we have heard government officials speak of terrorism as a new kind of war. War has historically followed certain patterns: It is played out according to basic rules, the warring parties are known to each other, and the objectives of the warring parties—which generally involve control of territory—are clearly stated.

1. **Perceived threats.** Nations mobilize in response to a perceived threat to their people, territory, or culture. Leaders justified the U.S.-led military campaign to disarm Iraq, for example, by stressing the threat that Saddam Hussein posed to the United States.

2. **Social problems.** When internal problems generate widespread frustration at home, a nation's leaders may divert public attention by attacking an external "enemy" as a form of scapegoating. Although U.S. leaders claimed that the war in Iraq was a matter of national security, there is little doubt that the onset of the war diverted attention from the struggling national economy and boosted the popularity of President George W. Bush.

3. **Political objectives.** Poor nations, such as Vietnam, have used wars to end foreign domination. Powerful countries, such as the United States, may benefit from a periodic show of force (recall the deployments of troops in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Afghanistan) to increase global political standing.

4. **Moral objectives.** Nations rarely claim that they are going to war to gain wealth and power. Instead, their leaders infuse military campaigns with moral urgency. By calling the 2003 invasion of Iraq "Operation Iraqi Freedom," U.S. leaders portrayed the mission as a morally justified war of liberation from an evil tyrant.

5. **The absence of alternatives.** A fifth factor promoting war is the absence of alternatives. Although the goal of the United Nations is to maintain international peace by finding alternatives to war, the UN has had limited success in preventing conflict between nations.

Social Class, Gender, and the Military

In World War II, three-fourths of the men in the United States in their late teens and twenties served in the military, either voluntarily or by being *drafted*—called to service. Only those who had some physical or mental impairment

Government and military leaders assembled in the White House to oversee the action that resulted in the death of Osama bin Laden. The mission strained tensions between the United States and Pakistan, where the mission was carried out without the knowledge of that nation's leaders. Such events show how politically sensitive it is to act against individuals such as bin Laden who are living in another sovereign nation.

Terrorism breaks from these patterns. The identity of terrorist individuals and organizations may not be known, those involved may deny their responsibility, and their goals may be unclear. The 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States were not attempts to defeat the nation militarily or to secure territory. Carried out by people representing not a country but a cause, the terrorist acts were not well understood in the United States. In short, these attacks were expressions of anger and hate, an effort to destabilize the country and create widespread fear.

Conventional warfare is symmetrical with two nations sending their armies into battle. By contrast, terrorism is an unconventional form of warfare, an asymmetrical conflict in which a small number of attackers uses terror and their own willingness to die to level the playing field against a much more powerful enemy. Although the terrorists may be ruthless, the nation under attack must exercise restraint in its response to terrorism because little may be known about the identity and location of the parties responsible.

The Costs and Causes of Militarism

The cost of armed conflict extends far beyond battlefield casualties. Together, the world's nations spend more than $1.5 trillion annually for military purposes (SIPRI, 2010). Spending this much diverts resources from the desperate struggle for survival by hundreds of millions of poor people.

Defense is the U.S. government's single largest expenditure, accounting for 20 percent of all federal spending and amounting to more than $768 billion in the 2012 budget. In recent years, the United States has emerged as the world's only superpower, accounting for about 43 percent of the world's military spending. Put another way, the United States spends nearly as much on the military as the rest of the world's nations combined (SIPRI, 2010; U.S. Office of Management and Budget, 2011).

For decades, military spending went up as a result of the *arms race* between the United States and the Soviet Union, which ended with the collapse of the USSR in 1991. But some analysts (those who support power-elite theory) link high military spending to the domination of U.S. society by a **military-industrial complex**, *the close association of the federal government, the military, and defense industries.* The roots of militarism, then, lie not just in external threats to our security but also in the institutional structures here at home (Marullo, 1987; Barnes, 2002b).

A final reason for continuing militarism is regional conflict. During the 1990s, for example, localized wars broke out in Bosnia, Chechnya, and Zambia, and tensions today run high between Israel and Palestine and between India and Pakistan. Even limited wars have the potential to grow and draw in other countries, including the United States. India and Pakistan—both nuclear powers—moved to the brink of war in 2002 and then pulled back. In 2003,

the announcement by North Korea that it, too, had nuclear weapons raised tensions in Asia. Iran continues to develop nuclear technology, raising fears that this nation may soon have an atomic bomb.

Nuclear Weapons

Despite the easing of superpower tensions, the world still contains approximately 7,500 operational nuclear warheads, representing a destructive power of several tons of TNT for every person on the planet. If even a small fraction of this stockpile is used in war, life as we know it would end. Albert Einstein, whose genius contributed to the development of nuclear weapons, reflected, "The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything *save our modes of thinking,* and we thus drift toward unparalleled catastrophe." In short, nuclear weapons make unrestrained war unthinkable in a world not yet capable of peace.

The United States, the Russian Federation, Great Britain, France, the People's Republic of China, Israel, India, Pakistan, and probably North Korea all have nuclear weapons. The danger of catastrophic war increases with **nuclear proliferation**, *the acquisition of nuclear weapons technology by more and more nations.* A few nations stopped the development of nuclear weapons—Argentina and Brazil halted work in 1990, and South Africa dismantled its arsenal in 1991. But by 2015, there could be ten new nations in the "nuclear club" and as many as fifty nations by 2025 (Grier, 2006). Such a trend makes even the smallest regional conflict very dangerous to the entire planet.

Mass Media and War

The Iraq War was the first war in which television crews traveled with U.S. troops, reporting as the campaign unfolded. The mass media provided ongoing and detailed reports of events; cable television made available live coverage of the war twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

Media outlets critical of the war—especially the Arab news channel Al-Jazeera—tended to report the slow pace of the conflict, the casualties to the U.S. and allied forces, and the deaths and injuries suffered by Iraqi civilians, information that would increase pressure to end the war. Media outlets supportive of the war—including most news organizations in the United States—

One reason to pursue peace is the rising toll of death and mutilation caused by millions of land mines placed in the ground during wartime and left there afterward. Civilians—many of them children—maimed by land mines receive treatment in this Kabul, Afghanistan, clinic.

Uprisings Across the Middle East: An End to the Islamic "Democracy Gap"?

The wave of popular political protest that swept across the Middle East in 2011 is the largest global political movement in the two decades since change swept through the former Soviet Union and the nations of Eastern Europe. What's going on? Why are so many nations in this part of the world erupting with political opposition?

Is there a "democracy gap" in the Middle East? Is there a lack of democracy in Islamic nations? Making any assessment of global democracy is more difficult than it may appear. For one thing, in a world marked by striking cultural diversity, can we assume that democracy and the related ideas about political freedoms are the same everywhere? The answer cannot be a simple "yes," because with their various political histories, concepts such as "democracy" and "freedom" mean different things in different cultural settings.

What have researchers found? Freedom House is an organization that monitors political freedom by tracking people's right to vote, to express ideas, and to move about without undue interference from government in nations around the world. Freedom House classifies nations in one of three categories: "not free," partly fee," and "free."

Freedom House reports that many of the nations that are classified as "not free" have populations that are largely Islamic. Around the world, 48 of 195 nations had an Islamic majority population in 2011.

In 2011, a young boy waves a flag to celebrate the success of the political movement in Egypt that forced that nation's president to resign.

Just 10 (21 percent) of these 48 countries had democratic governments, and Freedom House rated only two (4.2 percent)—Indonesia and Mali—as "free." Of the remainder, 18 (37.5 percent) were considered to be "partly free" and 28 (58.3 percent) were classified as "not free." Of the 147 nations without a majority Islamic population, 105 (71 percent) had democratic governments, and 83 (56.5 percent) were rated as "free." When you put these facts together, countries without Islamic majorities were three times more likely than countries with Islamic majorities to have democratic governments. Based on this finding, Freedom House concluded that countries with an Islamic majority display a "democracy gap."

This relative lack of democracy was found not just in the Middle East but also in all world regions that contain Islamic-majority nations, including Africa, central Europe, and Asia. But the pattern was especially strong among the sixteen Islamic-majority states in the Middle East and North Africa that are ethnically Arabic—as of early 2011, none is an electoral democracy.

What explains this "democracy gap"? Freedom House points to four factors. First, countries with Islamic-majority populations are typically less devel-

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tended to report the rapid pace of the war and the casualties to Saddam Hussein's forces and to downplay harm to Iraqi civilians as minimal and unintended. In short, the power of the mass media to provide selective information to a worldwide audience means that television and other media are almost as important to the outcome of a conflict as the military forces that are doing the actual fighting.

Pursuing Peace

How can the world reduce the dangers of war? Here are the most recent approaches to peace:

Deterrence

The logic of the arms race linked security to a "balance of terror" between the superpowers. The principle of *mutual assured destruction* (MAD) means that the side launching a first-strike nuclear attack against the other will face greater retaliation. This deterrence policy kept the peace during more than fifty years of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. But this strategy fueled an enormously expensive arms race and had little effect on nuclear proliferation, which represents a growing threat to peace. Deterrence also does little to stop terrorism, the internal military conflict that recently divided Libya, or to prevent war started by a powerful nation (such as the United States) against a weaker foe (such as the Taliban regime in Afghanistan or Saddam Hussein's Iraq).
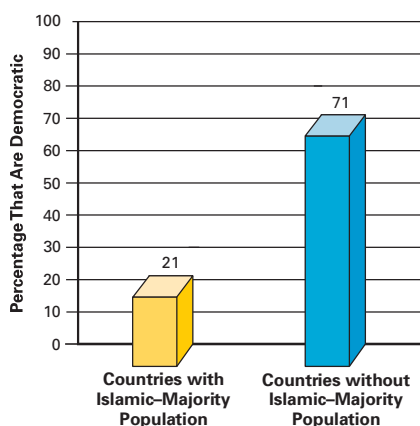
High-Technology Defense

If technology created the weapons, perhaps it can also protect us from them. Such is the claim of the *strategic defense initiative* (SDI). Under SDI, satellites and ground installations would destroy enemy missiles soon after they were launched (Thompson & Waller, 2001). In response to a survey taken shortly after the 2001 terrorist attacks, two-thirds of U.S. adults expressed support for SDI ("Female Opinion," 2002). However, critics claim that the system, which they refer to as "Star Wars," would be, at best, a leaky umbrella. Others worry that building such a system will spark another massive arms race. In recent years, the Obama administration has turned away from further development of SDI in favor of more focused defense against short-range missiles that might be launched from Iran.

Diplomacy and Disarmament

Some analysts believe that the best path to peace is diplomacy rather than technology (Dedrick & Yinger, 1990). Teams of diplomats working together can increase security by reducing, rather than building, weapons stockpiles.

But disarmament has limitations. No nation wants to be weakened by letting down its defenses. Successful diplomacy depends on everyone involved making efforts to resolve a common problem (Fisher & Ury, 1988). Although the United States and the Soviet Union

oped economically with limited schooling for their people and widespread poverty. Second, these countries have cultural traditions that rigidly control the lives of women, limiting their economic, educational, and political opportunities. Third, although most other countries restrict the power of religious elites in government, and some (including the United States) even recognize a "separation of church and state," Islamic-majority nations support a political role for Islamic leaders. In just two recent cases—Iran and Afghanistan under the Taliban—Islamic leaders have actually taken formal control of the government; more commonly, religious leaders do not hold office but exert considerable influence on political outcomes.

Fourth and finally, the enormous wealth that comes from Middle Eastern oil also plays a part in preventing democratic government. In Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and other nations, this natural resource has provided astounding riches to a small number of families, money that they can use to shore up their political control. In addition, oil wealth permits elites to build airports and other modern facilities without encouraging broader economic development that raises the living standards of the majority.

For all these reasons, Freedom House concludes that the road to democracy for Islamic-majority nations is likely to be long. But it is worthwhile remembering that, looking back to 1950, very few Catholic-majority countries (mostly in Europe and Latin America) had democratic governments. Today, however, most of these nations are democratic.

What is the future for democracy in Islamic-majority nations? Keep in mind that 42 percent of the world's Muslims live in Nigeria, Turkey, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, and the United States, where they already live under democratic governments. But perhaps the best indicator that change is under way is the widespread demands for a political voice now rising from people throughout the Middle East. The pace of political change is increasing.

Join the Blog!

How do you think the political conflict in the Middle East will turn out? Will the Islamic "democracy gap" just described disappear? What role should the United States play in this process? Go to MySocLab and join the Sociology in Focus blog to share your opinions and experiences and to see what others think.

Sources: Karatnycky (2002), Freedom House (2011), and Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life (2011).

Democracy and Islam

Today, democratic government is much less common in countries with Islamic-majority populations. Fifty years ago, the same was true of countries with Catholic-majority populations.

succeeded in negotiating arms reduction agreements, the world now faces increasing threats from nations such as North Korea and Iran.

Resolving Underlying Conflict

In the end, reducing the dangers of war may depend on resolving underlying conflicts by promoting a more just world. Poverty, hunger, and illiteracy are all root causes of war. Perhaps the world needs to reconsider the wisdom of spending thousands of times as much money on militarism as we do on efforts to find peaceful solutions (Sivard, 1988; Kaplan & Schaffer, 2001).

Politics: Looking Ahead

🟡 Evaluate

Change in political systems is ongoing. Several problems and trends are likely to be important as the twenty-first century unfolds.

One troublesome problem in the United States is the inconsistency between our democratic ideals and our low turnout at the polls. Perhaps, as conservative pluralist theorists say, many people do not bother to vote because they are content with their lives. On the other hand, liberal power-elite theorists may be right in their view that people withdraw from a system that concentrates wealth and power in the hands of so few people. Or perhaps, as radical Marxist critics claim, people find that our political system gives little real choice, limiting options and policies to those that support our capitalist economy. In any case, the current high level of apathy certainly undermines our nation's claims to being democratic.

A second issue is the global rethinking of political models. The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union encouraged people to think of politics in terms of the two opposing models, capitalism and socialism. Today, however, people are more likely to consider a broader range of political systems that links government to the economy in various ways. "Welfare capitalism," as found in Sweden, or "state capitalism," as found in Japan and South Korea, are just two possibilities. In all cases, promoting the broadest democratic participation is an important goal. The Sociology in Focus box helps us understand the current political transformation in the Middle East by looking at the recent political history of the world's Islamic countries.

Third, we still face the danger of war in many parts of the world. Even as the United States and the Russian Federation dismantle some warheads, vast stockpiles of nuclear weapons remain, and nuclear technology continues to spread around the world. In addition, new superpowers are likely to arise (the People's Republic of China and India are likely candidates), regional conflicts are likely to continue, and there is no end in sight to global terrorism. We can only hope for—*and vote for*—leaders who will find nonviolent solutions to the age-old problems that provoke war, putting us on the road to world peace.

Seeing Sociology in Everyday Life

How important are you to the political process?

Historically, as this chapter explains, young people have been less likely than older people to take part in politics. But, as a study of the 2008 election suggests, that trend may be changing as evidence builds that young people intend to have their voices heard.

Hint In the 2012 presidential campaign, thousands of young people will serve as volunteers for the candidates of both major political parties, telephoning voters or walking door-to-door in an effort to increase public interest, raise money, and get people to the polls on Election Day. Many celebrities—including musicians and members of the Hollywood entertainment scene—will also speak out in favor of a candidate, and, if the past is any indication, most of them will favor the Democratic party. But voting is most important of all, and your vote counts as much as that of any celebrity. Are you registered to vote? Will you turn out next Election Day?

Thousands of young people will volunteer to assist the 2012 presidential candidates in their campaigns. In what ways can young people help their candidates simply by using the telephone?

You don't need to be a campaign worker to make a difference. What is the easiest—and in the end, the most important—way to be a part of the political process?

Stephanie Joanne Angelina Germanotta, better known as Lady Gaga, recently participated in the National Equality March in Washington, D.C., in support of changing the law to permit openly gay and lesbian people to serve in this country's armed forces. Can you identify other celebrities who have tried to shape public opinion?

Seeing Sociology in *Your* Everyday Life

1. Analysis of recent election results, including how gender, race, income, religion, and other variables shaped people's choices, can be found at http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION. Visit this site and develop a profile of the typical Democratic voter and the typical Republican voter. Which variables best predict differences in voting preference?

2. Freedom House, an organization that studies civil rights and political liberty around the world, publishes an annual report, "Freedom in the World." Find a copy in the library, or examine global trends and the political profile of any country on the Web at http://www.freedomhouse.org.

3. What do you think a more democratic United States would look like? What about a more democratic world? For more about political democracy, go to the "Seeing Sociology in *Your* Everyday Life" feature on mysoclab.com, where you will also find suggestions about ways that you can advance the cause of democracy.

Politics: Power and Authority

Politics is the major social institution by which a society distributes power and organizes decision making. Max Weber claimed that raw power is transformed into *legitimate authority* in three ways:

- Preindustrial societies rely on tradition to transform power into authority. **Traditional authority** is closely linked to kinship.
- As societies industrialize, tradition gives way to rationality. **Rational-legal authority** underlies the operation of bureaucratic offices as well as the law.
- At any time, however, some individuals transform power into authority through charisma. **Charismatic authority** is based on extraordinary personal qualities (as found in Jesus of Nazareth, Adolf Hitler, and Mahatma Gandhi). **pp. 394–95**

politics (p. 394) the social institution that distributes power, sets a society's goals, and makes decisions

power (p. 394) the ability to achieve desired ends despite resistance from others

government (p. 394) a formal organization that directs the political life of a society

authority (p. 394) power that people perceive as legitimate rather than coercive

traditional authority (p. 394) power legitimized by respect for long-established cultural patterns

rational-legal authority (p. 395) power legitimized by legally enacted rules and regulations; also known as *bureaucratic authority*

charismatic authority (p. 395) power legitimized by extraordinary personal abilities that inspire devotion and obedience

routinization of charisma (p. 395) the transformation of charismatic authority into some combination of traditional and bureaucratic authority

Politics in Global Perspective

Monarchy is common in agrarian societies.
- Leadership is based on kinship.
- During the Middle Ages, absolute monarchs claimed to rule by divine right. **p. 396**

Democracy is common in modern societies.
- Leadership is linked to elective office.
- Bureaucracy and economic inequality limit true democracy in high-income countries today. **pp. 396–99**

Authoritarianism is any political system that denies the people participation in government.
- Absolute monarchies and military juntas are examples of authoritarian regimes. **p. 399**

Totalitarianism concentrates all political power in one centralized leadership.
- Totalitarian governments allow no organized opposition, and they rule by fear. **p. 399**

Political Freedom

The world is divided into 195 politically independent nation-states, 87 of which were politically "free" in 2010. Another 60 countries were "partly free," and the remaining 48 countries were "not free." Compared to two decades ago, slightly more of the world's nations are "free." **p. 397**

A Global Political System?

The world remains divided into 195 independent countries, but
- multinational corporations have created a new political order because their enormous wealth gives them power to shape world events
- in an age of computers and other new information technology, governments can no longer control the flow of information across their borders **p. 399**

monarchy (p. 396) a political system in which a single family rules from generation to generation

democracy (p. 396) a political system that gives power to the people as a whole

authoritarianism (p. 399) a political system that denies the people participation in government

totalitarianism (p. 399) a highly centralized political system that extensively regulates people's lives

Politics in the United States

The Rise of the Welfare State

U.S. government has expanded over the past two centuries, although the welfare state in the United States is smaller than in most other high-income nations. **p. 400**

The Political Spectrum
- The political spectrum, from the liberal left to the conservative right, involves attitudes on both economic issues and social issues.
- Affluent people tend to be conservative on economic issues and liberal on social issues.
- Party identification in the United States is weak. **pp. 400–401**

✳ Explore the **Map** on **mysoclab.com**

welfare state (p. 400) a system of government agencies and programs that provides benefits to the population

special-interest group (p. 401) people organized to address some economic or social issue

political action committee (PAC) (p. 402) an organization formed by a special-interest group, independent of political parties, to raise and spend money in support of political goals

Special-Interest Groups
- Special-interest groups advance the political aims of specific segments of the population.
- **Political action committees** play a powerful role in electoral politics. **pp. 401–2**

Voter Apathy
- Voter apathy runs high in the United States.
- Only 63% of eligible voters went to the polls in the 2008 presidential election. **p. 402**

Read the **Document** on **mysoclab.con**

Theories of Power in Society

The pluralist model
- claims that political power is spread widely in the United States
- is linked to structural-functional theory **p. 404**

The power-elite model
- claims that power is concentrated in a small, wealthy segment of the population
- is based on the ideas of C. Wright Mills
- is linked to social-conflict theory **p. 404**

The Marxist political-economy model
- claims that our political agenda is determined by a capitalist economy, so true democracy is impossible
- is based on the ideas of Karl Marx
- is linked to social-conflict theory **pp. 404–5**

Watch the **Video** on **mysoclab.com**

pluralist model (p. 404) an analysis of politics that sees power as spread among many competing interest groups
power-elite model (p. 404) an analysis of politics that sees power as concentrated among the rich
Marxist political-economy model (p. 404) an analysis that explains politics in terms of the operation of a society's economic system

Power beyond the Rules

Revolution radically transforms a political system.
Revolutions
- occur during periods of rising expectations and when governments are unwilling to reform themselves
- are usually led by intellectuals
- must establish a new legitimacy in the eyes of the people **pp. 405–6**

Terrorism employs violence in the pursuit of political goals and is used by a group against a much more powerful enemy.
- State terrorism is the use of violence by government officials as a way to control the population.
- Who or what is defined as terrorist depends on one's political perspective.
- Terrorism is an unconventional form of warfare. **pp. 406–7**

political revolution (p. 405) the overthrow of one political system in order to establish another
terrorism (p. 406) acts of violence or the threat of violence used as a political strategy by an individual or a group

War and Peace

Causes of War
Like all forms of social behavior, war is a product of society. Societies go to war when
- people perceive a threat to their way of life
- governments want to divert public attention from social problems at home
- governments want to achieve a specific political or moral objective
- governments can find no alternatives to resolving conflicts **pp. 407–8**

Militarism in the World Today
- The U.S. military is composed mainly of members of the working class.
- Military spending rose dramatically in the second half of the twentieth century because of the *arms race* between the United States and the former Soviet Union.
- Some analysts point to the domination of U.S. society by a **military-industrial complex**.
- The development and spread of nuclear weapons have increased the threat of global catastrophe. **p. 409**

Pursuing Peace
The most recent approaches to peace include
- deterrence
- high-technology defense
- diplomacy and disarmament
- resolution of underlying conflict

In the end, pursuing peace means ending poverty, hunger, and illiteracy and promoting social justice for all people. **pp. 410–11**

war (p. 407) organized, armed conflict among the people of two or more nations, directed by their governments
military-industrial complex (p. 409) the close association of the federal government, the military, and defense industries
nuclear proliferation (p. 409) the acquisition of nuclear weapons technology by more and more nations