



## Chapter 7

# Citizen Participation in a Democracy

### *How can you make a difference in a democracy?*

#### ■ 7.1 Introduction

In 1831, a young French aristocrat, Alexis de Tocqueville, began a nine-month tour of the United States. He wanted to learn about American democracy. As he toured the country, he was struck by the vitality of the American people and their engagement in public life.

When he returned home, Tocqueville published a book about American political life called *Democracy in America*. In this book, he wrote that “Americans . . . constantly form associations” to get things done. They formed groups to build hospitals, schools, and churches and to carry out many other civic projects. He argued that this collective action taught Americans political skills and helped to strengthen democracy.

Many years later, in the 1990s, political scientist Robert D. Putnam looked at the role of associations in modern American life. He described quite a different country from the one Tocqueville had visited a century and a half earlier. Far fewer Americans, he found, were taking part in the kind of cooperative efforts that Tocqueville had admired.

Although Americans still joined organizations, they did so mainly as “checkbook” participants. They gave money, but not time or energy, to civic causes. “We remain . . . reasonably well-informed spectators of public affairs,” Putnam wrote, “but many fewer of us actually partake in the game.”

A group of volunteers participating in civic engagement

### Speaking of Politics

#### **citizenship**

The status of being a citizen, a person who by birth or naturalization enjoys certain rights and has certain duties in a nation-state.

#### **lawful permanent resident**

An immigrant who is legally authorized to live and work in the United States permanently, but is not a U.S. citizen. Also known as a resident alien.

#### **undocumented immigrant**

A person who has come to the United States to live and work without the required legal papers.

#### **naturalization**

A legal process through which a person not granted citizenship by birth can become a citizen of a country. A naturalized citizen enjoys most or all of the rights of native-born citizens.

#### **ideology**

A basic set of political beliefs about the roles of government and the individual in society.

#### **liberalism**

An ideology favoring an active role for government in efforts to solve society's problems.

#### **conservatism**

An ideology favoring a limited role for government and more private initiative by nongovernmental groups in efforts to solve society's problems.

#### **civil society**

Associations and other voluntary groups that form a middle layer in society between government and individual families. Civil society includes groups that people join because of family, faith, interests, or ideology.

In 2000, Putnam summarized his findings in the book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. The title underscored his concern that the United States was becoming a nation of disengaged citizens. He pointed to a sharp decline in bowling-league membership as a symbol of this change. Increasingly, Americans were choosing not to join bowling leagues, or any other group, but instead went "bowling alone." Putnam feared the impact this lack of social engagement might have on democracy and civic life.

Are Putnam's fears justified? Are we becoming spectators rather than players in public affairs? Keep these questions in mind as you read about the rights and responsibilities of **citizenship** and the ways that Americans today engage in the civic and political life of their communities.

## 7.2 Citizenship, Civic Rights, and Civic Responsibilities

The U.S. Constitution, as originally written, did not define citizenship. It made reference to citizens and listed some of their rights, particularly in the Bill of Rights. But it did not say how citizenship was to be determined. At the time the Constitution was

adopted, it was generally assumed that state citizens would become U.S. citizens. It was also assumed that a person born in the United States was a citizen.

In 1857, however, the Supreme Court handed down a decision that shook up these assumptions. In the case of *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, the Court held that Dred Scott, an enslaved African American born in Virginia, was not a citizen and therefore could not sue for his freedom in federal court. Chief Justice Roger Taney argued that the framers never meant to include slaves under the protections of the Constitution. But if Dred Scott was not a citizen, what was he? And what did this decision mean for other African Americans? What rights could they claim under U.S. law?

### The Fourteenth Amendment Defines Citizenship

The Fourteenth Amendment was adopted in part to address these issues and reverse the Dred Scott decision. Ratified in 1868, just three years after the Civil War, this amendment clarified who was a citizen under the Constitution. It begins with these words:

*All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside.*

—Fourteenth Amendment, 1868

## The Struggle for Civil Rights, 1857–1964

African Americans' struggle for civil rights began long before the Civil War and continued through the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and beyond. This landmark legislation opened doors not only for African Americans, but also for women and members of other minority groups.

1850                      1860                      1870                      1880                      1890                      1900                      1910



**1857**  
Dred Scott decision by the Supreme Court denies citizenship to African Americans.

**1868**  
Fourteenth Amendment extends citizenship rights to African Americans.



**1896**  
*Plessy v. Ferguson* decision upholds "separate but equal" laws allowing segregation.

The purpose of the Fourteenth Amendment was to extend the rights of citizenship to former slaves. At the same time, it clearly states that all persons born on American soil are to be considered U.S. citizens, no matter where their parents were born. It also says that states cannot discriminate against citizens or deprive them of their rights without due process of law.

### African Americans' Long Struggle for Civil Rights

Although the Fourteenth Amendment was designed to extend the rights of citizenship to African Americans, its immediate effects were limited. In the late 1800s, southern states passed laws, known as **Jim Crow laws**, that enforced segregation and denied legal equality to blacks. It would take many decades for the courts and Congress to overturn these laws and protect the civil rights of African Americans. The timeline below shows several key events in this long struggle.

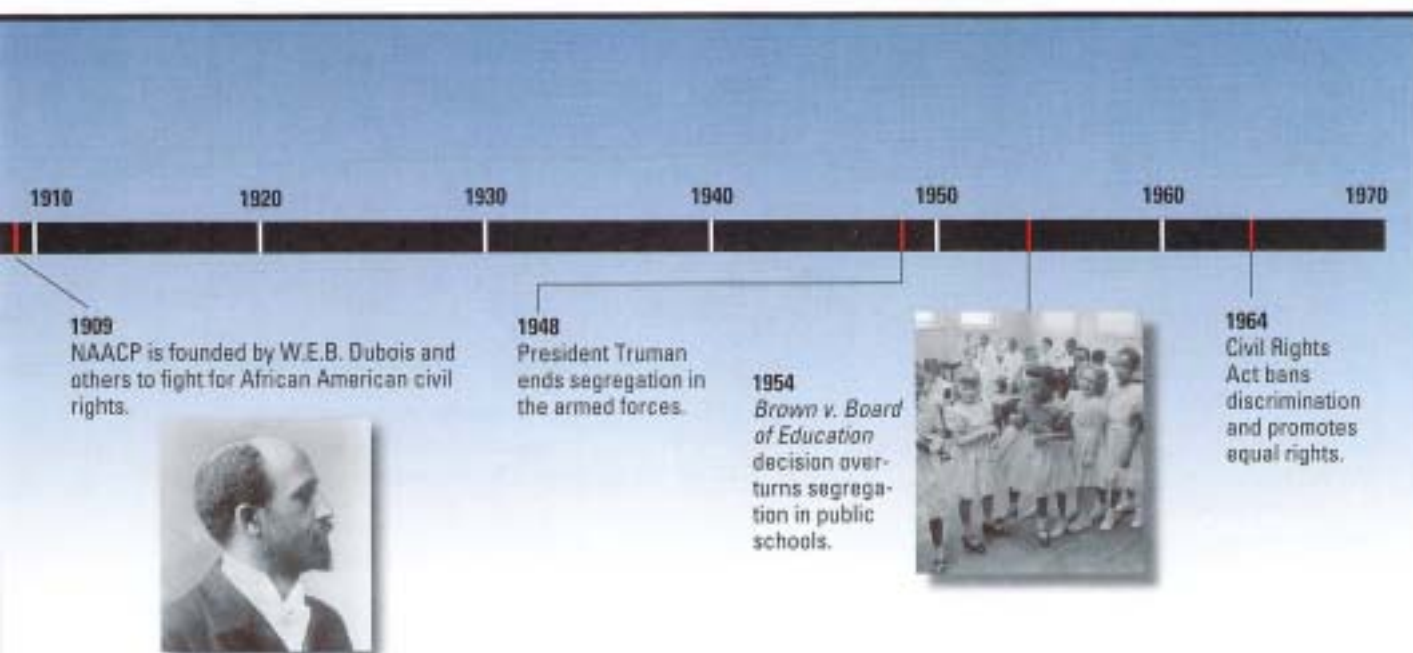
An early setback in the struggle for equal rights occurred when the Supreme Court heard *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896. The case centered on Homer Plessy, a black man who had been arrested in Louisiana for sitting in a whites-only railroad car. Plessy challenged his arrest in court. He argued that Jim Crow laws that segregated blacks from whites violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

The decision went against *Plessy*. The Court held that separate facilities for blacks and whites were legal as long as they were equal. This "separate but equal" doctrine was soon applied to almost every aspect of life in southern states. In most cases, however, the facilities provided for black Americans were far inferior to those enjoyed by whites.

Despite this decision, African Americans continued to fight for equal rights. They formed organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Urban League, and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) to protest racial discrimination in its many forms.

In 1954, the NAACP won a major victory in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. The case focused on the rights of a young African American, Linda Brown, who was prohibited from attending a white school near her home in Topeka, Kansas. In its decision, the Supreme Court concluded that "separate but equal" facilities were by their very nature unequal. This decision paved the way for the desegregation of public schools and the launching of the modern civil rights movement.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the civil rights struggle touched all aspects of American life. The most prominent leader of the movement, Martin Luther King Jr., helped to make Americans aware of the great



## Impact of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

**Migration** The Civil Rights Act forced southern states to dismantle their segregation laws. The result has been a dramatic shift in black migration patterns. For most of the 20th century, blacks migrated out of the South in search of better lives. In recent years, that pattern has been reversed.

Top Six States with African American Net Migration Gains



Educational Attainment by African Americans Age 25 and Older



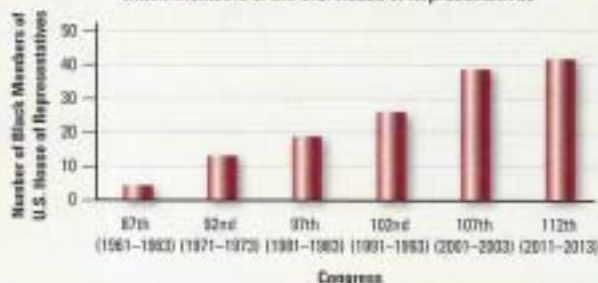
**Education** The Civil Rights Act gave the federal government the power to enforce school desegregation. Graduation rates for blacks have risen ever since.

**Income** With more education and better job opportunities, blacks saw their incomes rise. Median income is the middle income in a series of incomes ranked from least to greatest.

Median Income of African Americans (in 2010 dollars)



Black Members of the U.S. House of Representatives



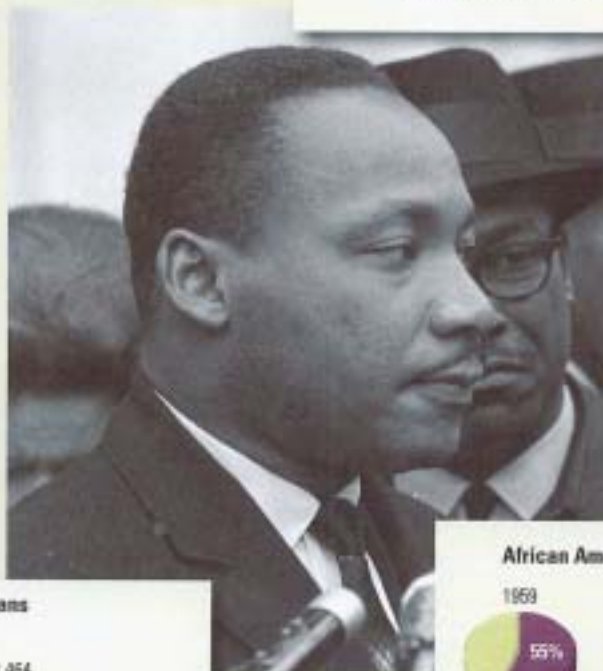
### Political Participation

The Civil Rights Act's ban on racial discrimination in voter registration was strengthened by the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Since then, blacks have increased their political participation as both voters and office-holders.

African Americans Living in Poverty



**Poverty** By banning racial discrimination in labor unions and employment, the Civil Rights Act helped pull many black families out of poverty.



injustices imposed on people of color. In 1963, King responded to those who argued that blacks should be more patient in their demand for equal rights by writing his famous “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”

Just over a year later, on July 2, 1964, President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law. This landmark legislation banned discrimination in most areas of American life on the basis of race, sex, religion, or national origin. It also committed the U.S. government to protecting the rights of all Americans, regardless of skin color or country of birth. The improvements in the economic, political, and social aspects of African Americans’ lives show the far-reaching effects of this law.

### Rights and Responsibilities

Since the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the United States has experienced a huge increase in immigration, both legal and illegal. Once in this country, most **lawful permanent residents** enjoy most of the same rights as native-born Americans. These include the rights listed in the Bill of Rights, from freedom of speech to freedom from cruel and unusual punishment.

American citizens, whether native born or naturalized, enjoy additional rights. The most important are the right to vote, to hold public office, and to claim certain social and economic benefits. Some forms of welfare payments, for example, are available only to citizens. Most jobs in the federal government are limited to citizens only.

Similarly, all people living in the United States have certain legal responsibilities. They are required to obey laws, pay taxes, and cooperate with public officials. All males who are 18, whether they are citizens, lawful permanent residents, or **undocumented immigrants**, must register for military service. This is true even though the United States currently has an all-volunteer army.

Everyone has personal responsibilities, or duties that relate to an individual’s private life, such as taking care of one’s own health. Personal responsibilities apply to helping one’s family and friends, too. Comforting an upset friend and caring for a sick parent are examples of personal responsibility.

Citizens also have civic responsibilities. They are expected to be informed about and participate in public affairs. Volunteering to serve the public good is



Personal responsibilities and civic responsibilities are not mutually exclusive. Some actions, such as cooperating with classmates on a project, are classified in both categories because they benefit both a person individually and their community or government.

another civic responsibility. Sometimes the obligation of citizenship requires that personal desires be subordinated to the public good. For example, a woman might have to miss work to attend jury duty or a man might feel obligated to research candidates in an election even though he would prefer to play soccer.

Political engagement is a choice, not a legal requirement. However, democracies function best when citizens choose good leaders and pay close attention to what those leaders do once elected. As Tocqueville observed almost two centuries ago, “The greatness of America lies not in being more enlightened than any other nation, but rather in her ability to repair her faults.” It is up to all of us as citizens to make sure such repairs are made when needed.

### 7.3 Becoming an American Citizen

By 2010, nearly 40 million Americans, or about 13 percent of the U.S. population, were foreign born. Every year, hundreds of thousands of immigrants become U.S. citizens. They usually receive their citizenship at a large ceremony, along with many other new citizens. For most, the occasion is filled with emotion.

For Alberto Olivarez, the citizenship ceremony was a bit different, though no less emotional. In 2006, Olivarez, a Mexican-born teacher at an elementary school in Brighton, Colorado, took his oath of citizenship alone, standing before an audience of students and their parents in his school gymnasium. Like Olivarez, many in the audience were immigrants or children of immigrants.

Olivarez's wife and three children sat on the stage with him as he pledged to "support and defend the Constitution of the United States." With this oath, Olivarez became a U.S. citizen, just as he had expected. What came next, however, surprised him. The school principal explained to the audience that Olivarez's citizenship automatically made his three young sons American citizens as well. Upon hearing this news, Olivarez burst into tears. It was a benefit of citizenship he had never imagined.

### American Citizens: Native Born and Naturalized

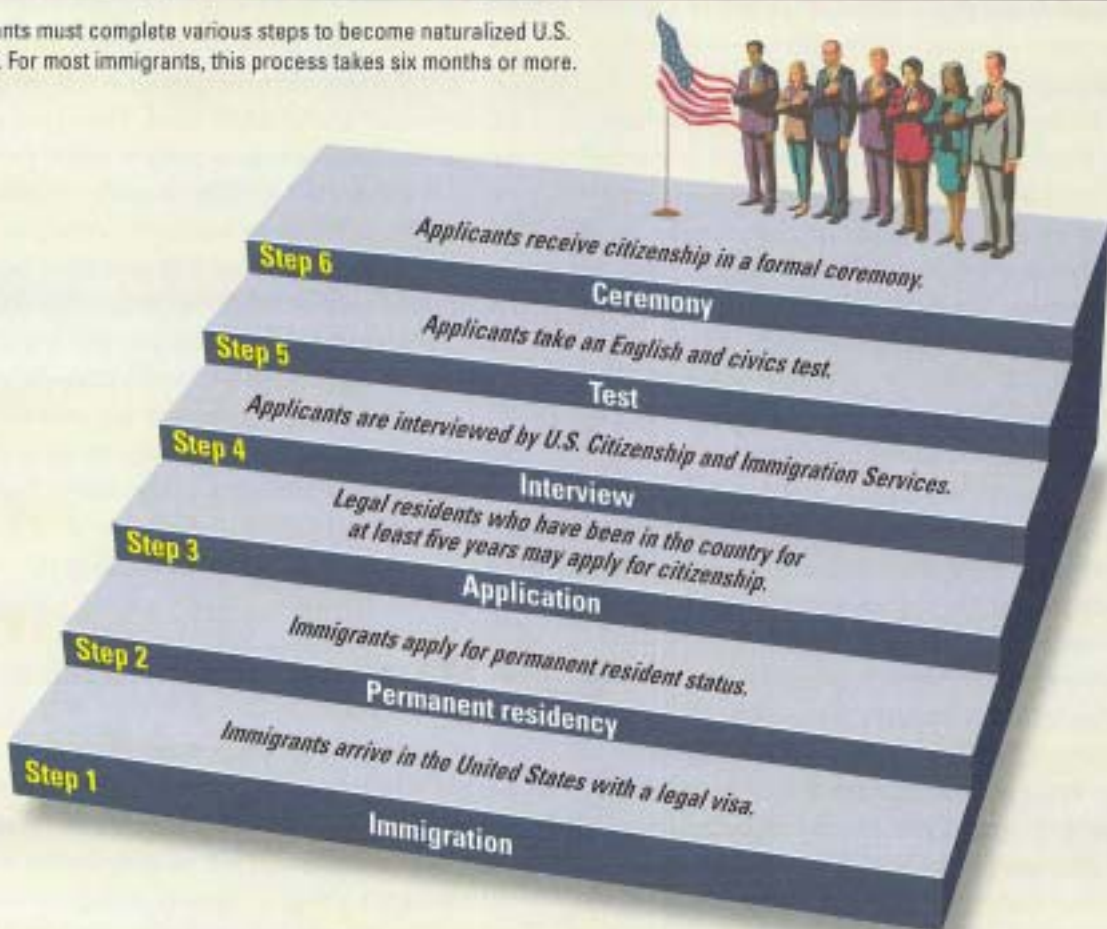
There are two ways to become a U.S. citizen. The most common way is by birth. Most Americans are born in the United States, though some are born in another country to parents who are U.S. citizens. Either way, citizens by birth automatically enjoy all the rights, privileges, and protections of citizenship.

The other way to become a citizen is through **naturalization**. This is the path that Alberto Olivarez and other naturalized citizens have taken. Naturalization is a multistep legal process that, when completed, gives the applicant virtually all the rights and responsibilities of a native-born citizen.

In 2011, nearly 700,000 people became U.S. citizens through naturalization. The largest group of new citizens came from Mexico, but tens of thousands also came from India, the Philippines, China, Columbia, Cuba, and other countries.

### Steps to Citizenship: The Naturalization Process

Immigrants must complete various steps to become naturalized U.S. citizens. For most immigrants, this process takes six months or more.



Immigrants must meet several requirements to be eligible for naturalization. They must be at least 18 years old and lawful permanent residents of the United States. In most cases, such immigrants, also known as **resident aliens**, must have lived in this country for at least five years to be eligible for naturalization.

After meeting those requirements, the next step is to complete an application for naturalization. If the application is approved, the applicant has an interview with an immigration official. At this meeting, applicants are tested on their ability to speak, read, and write English. They also take a civics test to show basic knowledge of American history and government. Sample questions from the test appear at the end of this chapter.

The final step in the naturalization process is the citizenship ceremony. Here, applicants answer a few more questions. Then they take the oath of allegiance to the United States and receive a certificate of naturalization.

Naturalization gives new citizens the right to vote and run for any public office except that of vice president or president. The Constitution says that only native-born citizens can hold these offices. Critics of this rule argue that it is no longer necessary or fair because it excludes qualified foreign-born officials. However, supporters of the clause highlight its importance in preventing foreign influence over the U.S. government.

### **The Status of Lawful Permanent Residents**

Immigrants do not need to become citizens to stay in the United States legally, however. They may remain here indefinitely as lawful permanent residents. In 2011, the U.S. government granted permanent residency to more than 1 million people.

Immigrants seeking permanent resident status also go through an application process with the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services. Preference is given to immigrants whose job skills are needed by U.S. businesses or who are related by birth or marriage to a U.S. citizen. Those who successfully complete the application process receive an identification card known as a **green card**. A green card provides proof that its holder has a legal right to live and work in the United States.

Resident aliens enjoy most of the rights of citizens. These include the right to travel freely

outside the country. However, if resident aliens plan to be away for more than a year, they must apply for a reentry permit. Without this permit, they may be refused reentry to the United States. Resident aliens may also lose their permanent resident status and be deported if they are convicted of criminal activity.

## **7.4 Political Culture in the United States**

Citizens and residents of the United States operate within a **political culture**. This is a society's framework of shared values, beliefs, and attitudes concerning politics and government. It is the political environment in which Americans exercise their rights and responsibilities.

Political culture can take many forms and be expressed in many ways. The strong surge of patriotism after the 9/11 terrorist attacks of 2001 was an expression of American political culture. At the time, many Americans flew the flag to show their love of country. In quite a different way, the civil rights protests of the 1950s and 1960s were also an expression of American political culture. The millions of Americans who supported the civil rights movement shared the belief that all citizens should enjoy equal rights and opportunities.

### **Americans' Shared Political Values**

Although Americans often disagree on specific issues, they share a number of core beliefs and values. These beliefs, some of which are listed below, shape our political culture. Keep in mind that individuals may vary in terms of their attachment to these core values.

*Liberty.* Americans believe that they are entitled to the greatest amount of liberty possible as long as they do no harm to others. They firmly believe that citizens should be able to express their views openly, without fear of punishment by the government.

*Equality.* Americans embrace equality of opportunity, without regard to race, religion, or gender. They believe that all citizens should enjoy the right to vote, to receive an education, to have a job, and to succeed in life.

*Democracy.* Americans support a democratic system of government. They believe that political authority comes from the people and that public officials should be accountable to the voters. The



importance of majority rule and the protection of minority rights are important related beliefs.

**Individualism.** Americans believe in personal freedom and personal responsibility. As a general rule, they believe that every citizen is responsible for his or her own actions and well-being. This contrasts with the more collective view in some countries, where greater emphasis is placed on the government's role in meeting people's needs.

**Free enterprise.** Americans support capitalism and a free-market economy in which private businesses compete with relatively limited regulation by government. They accept the fact that such a system creates winners and losers in terms of wealth and economic status.

**Justice and the rule of law.** Americans believe that society should be governed by a system of laws that are fairly and equally applied. They believe that the rights of ordinary citizens should not be arbitrarily restricted or infringed on by government.

**Patriotism.** Americans feel great pride and loyalty toward their country. Many believe that the United States is the greatest nation in the world. They also take pride in the values of American democracy.

**Optimism.** In general, Americans are upbeat and optimistic. They see themselves as "can-do" people. They tend to believe that their lives and life in general will be better in the future.

**Civic duty.** Americans believe that for democracy to flourish, citizens should vote and participate in civic and political affairs. Many also see volunteering for military service or giving back to their communities through volunteer activities as an aspect of civic duty.

## Two Widely Held Ideologies: Liberalism and Conservatism

Although Americans share a common political culture, they do not all hold to the same **ideology**, or basic political beliefs. For example, they often disagree on the role government should play with respect to economic policy and moral values. The most widely held ideologies in U.S. politics today are held by Americans who define themselves as liberals or conservatives.

**Liberalism** is an ideology that favors an active role for the government in solving society's problems. Liberals generally support government efforts to regulate business and the economy. They support policies designed to reduce economic inequality and to help the poor. They also favor the use of government regulation to protect the environment and improve the health care system.

As their name suggests, liberals strongly defend liberty and resist government efforts to interfere in people's personal lives. On a political spectrum, with

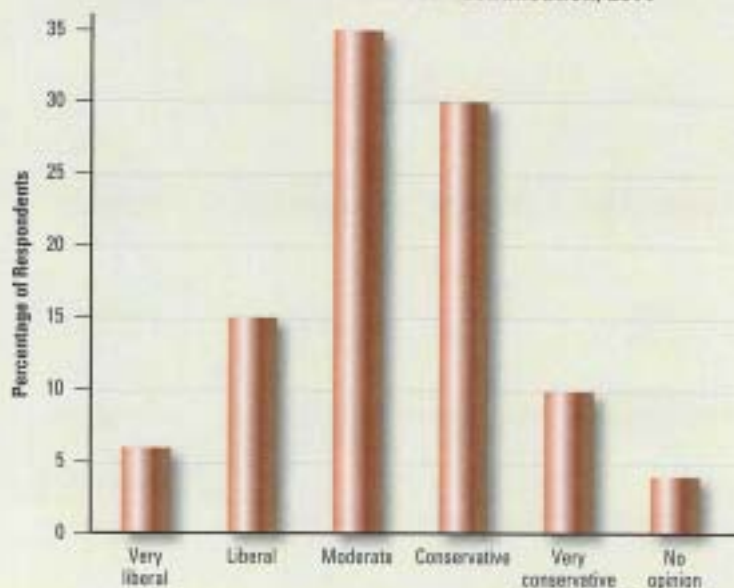
Despite their many differences, most Americans share some basic political values, including a love of country.



## Where Americans Lie on the Political Spectrum

The political spectrum runs from the liberal left to the conservative right. This graph shows the percentages of Americans who identified themselves as liberal, conservative, or moderate in 2011. A majority of Americans put themselves somewhere in the moderate middle.

Liberal and Conservative Self-Identification, 2011



Source: The Gallup Organization.

moderates in the middle, liberals are said to be “left of center.” They tend to associate themselves with the Democratic Party.

**Conservatism**, on the other hand, is an ideology that calls for a limited role for government in economic affairs. Conservatives generally oppose government regulation of business. Most want to limit the size of government, reduce taxes, and cut back on government programs. Instead, they look to private initiative, or efforts by nongovernmental groups such as religious congregations, charities, service organizations, and businesses, to deal with many of society’s problems.

In contrast to liberals, conservatives are more likely to support government action on moral issues. Conservatives are said to be “right of center” on the political spectrum. They generally associate themselves with the Republican Party.

Over the past few decades, more Americans have identified themselves as conservatives than as liberals. Since the late 1960s, the percentage of self-identified conservatives has varied from 30 to 40 percent. The percentage of people calling themselves liberal has remained more constant, at around 20 percent. This graph compares the percentages of liberals, conservatives, and moderates in 2011.

### Three Other Ideologies: Socialism, Libertarianism, and Environmentalism

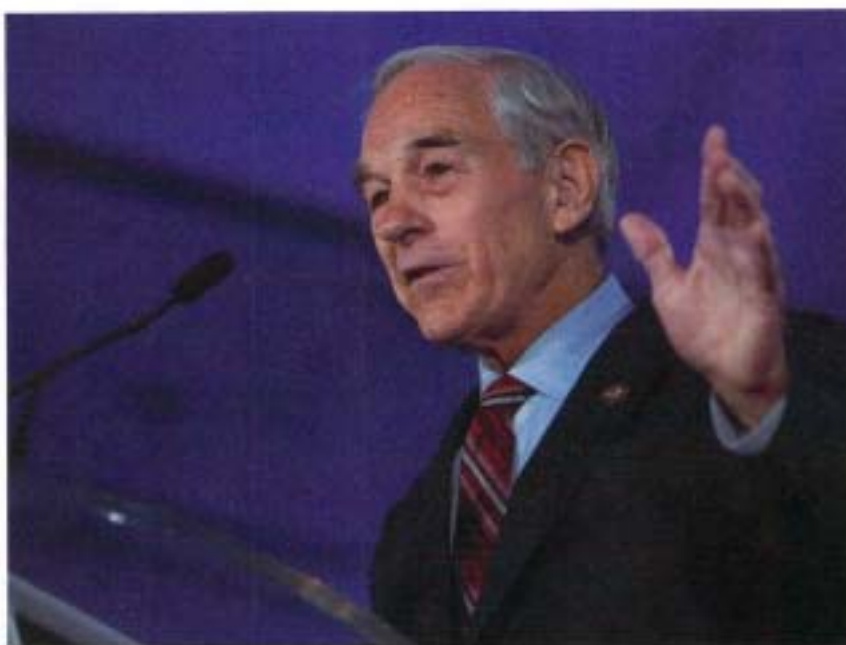
Three other ideologies—socialism, **libertarianism**, and **environmentalism**—also play a role in American politics. Although these ideologies have fewer followers than liberalism and conservatism, they have inspired and motivated many people over the years.

**Socialism.** The oldest of these ideologies is socialism. The main goal of socialism is to limit economic inequality by ensuring a fair distribution of wealth. In a socialist system, the government owns or controls most of the economic resources needed for the production of goods and services. In theory, a socialist government manages the economy in a way that benefits the majority of citizens.

In 1901, reformers and workers who believed in socialism formed the Socialist Party of America. The party’s greatest electoral success came in 1912 when its presidential candidate, Eugene Debs, won nearly a million votes. That was just 6 percent of the total votes cast, but it was a substantial showing for a socialist candidate. After World War I, however, membership in the Socialist Party declined.

Socialism never became as popular in the United States as it did in other countries, in part because it

Liberalism and conservatism are the dominant political ideologies in the United States. The significance of the two-party system has created factions within the Democratic and Republican parties. For example, politician Ron Paul ran for U.S. president in 1988 as Libertarian. He joined the Republican Party before running for president in 2008 and 2012, but maintained his libertarian views as a Republican.



conflicted with America's political culture. A strong faith in capitalism and the free enterprise system made most Americans leery of socialists' call for government control of economic resources.

Most American socialists today support what is known as **democratic socialism**. This is an ideology that advocates socialism as a basis for the economy and democracy as a governing principle. In countries that have adopted this ideology, elected leaders supervise a "mixed economy" of public and private industry.

**Libertarianism.** Modern libertarianism is an ideology based on a strong belief in personal freedom. A 2012 statement of libertarian principles began with these words:

*As Libertarians, we seek a world of liberty; a world in which all individuals are sovereign over their own lives and no one is forced to sacrifice his or her values for the benefit of others.*

—National Platform of the  
Libertarian Party, 2012

Libertarians tend to be conservative on economic issues and liberal on social issues. For example, they favor lower taxes and a free-market economy, while opposing bans on abortion or gay marriage. Libertarians want a small government and resist government regulation of any kind.

Formed in 1971, the Libertarian Party has attracted a small but loyal following. According to

Pew Research Center, 9 percent of Americans had libertarian beliefs in 2011. Libertarian candidates regularly run for office in local, state, and national elections. So far their success has been limited to the local level, where they have won election to such positions as mayor, city council member, and sheriff.

**Environmentalism.** This last ideology, environmentalism, unites Americans who are deeply concerned about conservation and protection of the environment. Environmentalists advocate policies designed to reduce pollution and preserve natural resources. In contrast to libertarians, they support government regulation of industry and the economy to achieve those ends.

Many members of conservation organizations such as the Sierra Club and Friends of the Earth identify themselves as environmentalists. So do members of the Green Party of the United States. "Greens" are committed to what they call "ecological and economic sustainability." By this they mean meeting the needs of the world's people today without damaging the ability of future generations to provide for themselves. As their party platform states,

*We support a sustainable society which utilizes resources in such a way that future generations will benefit and not suffer from the practices of our generation. To this end we must practice agriculture which replenishes the soil; move to*

*an energy efficient economy; and live in ways that respect the integrity of natural systems.*

—Green Party of the United States  
Platform, 2012

Like the Libertarian Party, the Green Party has been most successful in electing candidates at the local level. The party is stronger in Europe, however, and has won national offices in a number of countries.

### The Moderates in the Middle: Centristism

Most Americans don't fit neatly into any ideological camp. They consider themselves moderates, or middle-of-the-road voters. These are people who sit at the center of the political spectrum, between the ideologies of left and right.

In recent years, U.S. politics have become more polarized, meaning that political parties have adopted more extreme policies. The Republican Party has grown more conservative, and the Democratic Party more liberal. This polarization is especially evident in the current Congress, which remains divided on a number of issues.

These strong divisions often push voters to be drawn to **centristism**. Many surveys show that moderates, along with people who describe themselves as slightly conservative or slightly liberal, make up the largest group of U.S. voters.

In contrast to people with a strong ideological point of view, centrists may hold a mix of liberal, conservative, and perhaps environmental views. Centristism is not an ideology with its own political party. As a result, during election time, centrists often cross party lines, depending on the candidates and issues of the day.

## 7.5 How Americans Engage in Civic Life

For most Americans, voting is the first thing that comes to mind when they hear the words "civic duty." In a democracy, voting is one of the most basic and important ways to engage in civic life.

There are many other ways to be an active citizen, however. You can read newspapers or watch the news on television to stay informed about current events. You can talk to friends about political issues or put a political bumper sticker on your car to demonstrate your support. You can become a volunteer with a community group or follow a political figure using social media. By doing any of these things, you are engaging in civic life.

### Civil Society: The "Social Capital" of Democracy

At the start of this chapter, you read about Robert D. Putnam's work on civic engagement. Putnam concluded that Americans today are less likely to participate in civic associations than they were in the past. He further believes that such participation is crucial to democracy.

Putnam argues that social clubs and civic organizations are building blocks of what political scientists call **civil society**. This term refers to a middle layer of voluntary associations and institutions that exists between government on the one hand and individuals and families on the other.

Many political scientists argue that a strong civil society is essential in a democracy. The organizations that make up civil society, they point out, are nourished by citizen involvement. This involvement helps to expand a society's **social capital**. Putnam

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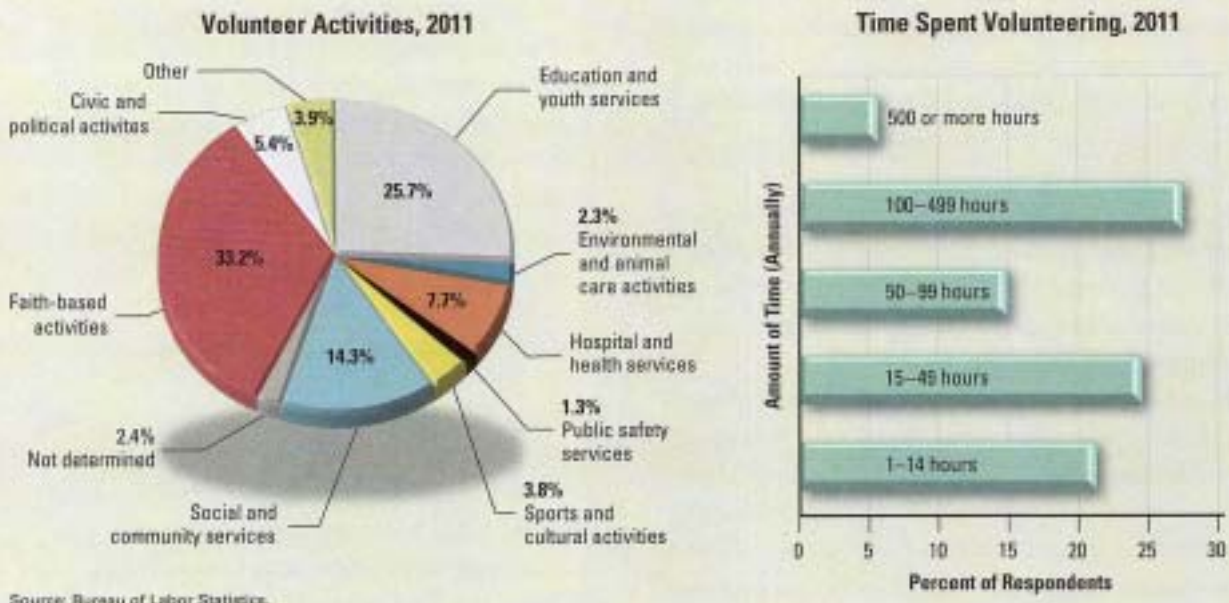


"Harold, would you say you are left of center, right of center, center, left of left, right of left, left of right, or right of right, or what?"

Liberals are considered left of center, while conservatives are on the right. But there are other positions along the political spectrum, and many Americans are not quite sure where they fit.

## Volunteering in the United States

Americans who volunteer their time do so in various types of activities. Just over a third volunteer mainly through religious organizations. Over 30 percent of volunteers devote 100 hours or more a year to volunteer activities.



defines social capital as “connections among individuals” that are forged through their participation in voluntary associations.

To understand how social capital works, consider this simple example. In many communities, parents of school-age children join the local Parent Teacher Association. Through their PTA, parents work together to improve their children’s schools.

While working on PTA projects, parents form new social networks and exchange information about their community. Through these networks, they may create new groups to work on other local issues. In this way, the connections forged within the PTA help to generate new energy and ideas that benefit the larger community. This is social capital in action.

Of course, the PTA is only one of thousands of volunteer organizations that one might choose to join. As the graphs above show, Americans get involved in many types of volunteer activities and for varying amounts of time. All of these efforts help to strengthen civil society and build social capital.

### Putting Social Capital to Work in Texas

Social capital promotes civic engagement not only in local communities, but also in state and national affairs. Such was the case in Texas in 2006 when various citizen groups rose up to oppose the construction of new coal-fired power plants across the state. Coal is a fossil fuel that produces large amounts of air pollution and greenhouse gases. The power company that planned to build these plants assured the public that they would not pollute the air. But many Texans believed otherwise.

The first protests against the power company’s plan were organized by citizens living in communities where the new plants were to be built. They argued that the coal-burning plants would harm air quality and give rise to health problems.

As opposition grew, local business leaders began to get involved in the issue. They feared that increased pollution from the plants would harm local economies by discouraging tourism and other business activity. Local public officials—including the mayors of Dallas, Houston, and other cities—began to voice their concerns.

## Forms of Civic Engagement

Civic engagement takes many forms, from writing letters to organizing protests. These photographs illustrate just some of the ways citizens can make their voices heard.



### Attend a Public Meeting

Find out what's going on in your community by attending a public meeting. You might be surprised to discover how many decisions affecting your life are made close to home.



### Volunteer in a Political Campaign

Get involved in a political campaign. Share the excitement of election night as volunteers wait for the votes to be counted.



### Circulate a Petition

Take part in a petition drive for a cause you care about. Often you can even sign a petition online.



### Organize a Fundraiser

Raise money for a worthy cause. The challenge is to help people feel good about both asking for donations and giving them.



### Organize a Demonstration

Put your passion to work by organizing a demonstration. Sometimes actions really do speak louder than words.



### Get Involved in a Service Project

Find a way to give back to your community. You will feel good about yourself while making a difference.

In 2006 and 2007, Texas citizens fought to prevent new power plants from being built around the state. They feared that emissions from coal-fired plants, like the one shown here, would harm the environment.



In time, local protest groups banded together to form larger organizations with names like Stop the Coal Rush, the Texas Clean Sky Coalition, and Texas Business for Clean Air. Civic activists sent e-mails and letters to newspapers and public officials. They attended hearings to oppose the power company's

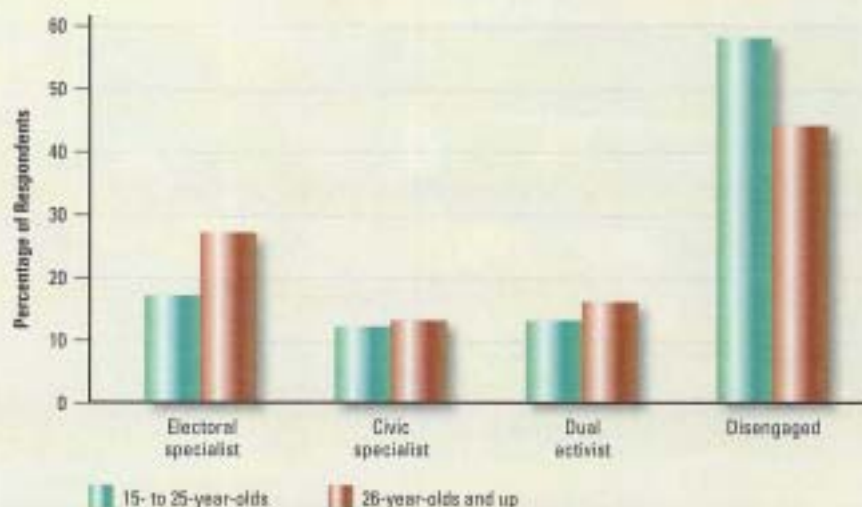
application for building permits. They also created Web sites and held fundraisers to raise money and get their message out.

These efforts peaked in February 2007 with a large rally at the state capitol in Austin. The next day, activists met with their state representatives and other public

## Categories of Civic Engagement

Political scientists at CIRCLE, the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, have classified people into four broad categories of civic engagement. As this graph shows, civic engagement increases with age.

Levels of Civic Engagement, 2006



Source: Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org).

officials to argue their case. Before lawmakers could act, however, the company that was planning to build the power plants announced that it was being sold.

The organized efforts of Texans to stop the new power plants from being built were nonetheless effective. The new buyers of the power company immediately announced their intention to scale back the project and explore alternatives to building more coal-fired power plants.

#### **Four Categories of Civic Engagement: Which One Fits You?**

As the Texas story illustrates, civic engagement can have a real impact, especially when people work together toward common goals. But just how engaged are most Americans?

To answer that question, political scientists survey Americans about their civic and political activities. Using those data, scholars at the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) have determined that most people fall into one of four broad categories of civic engagement.

*Electoral specialists.* This category includes those whose main engagement is through the election process. People in this group vote, volunteer in political campaigns, and try to persuade others to vote as well.

*Civic specialists.* People in this group focus on improving their communities and helping others. They join local civic groups, support nonprofit organizations, and take part in fundraising activities for worthy causes.

*Dual activists.* This category is made up of people who engage in both electoral and civic activities. They may be found passing out leaflets in a political campaign one day and volunteering in a homeless shelter the next.

*The disengaged.* This group is made up of people who are not significantly engaged in civic life. They don't vote or pay attention to civic affairs.

The graph shows that Americans young and old fall into all four groups. What about you? Which category best matches your level of civic engagement? And are you satisfied with your answer?

## Summary

Civic participation is essential in a democracy. Citizens who get involved in civic and community groups help to strengthen civil society. At the same time, they tend to become more engaged in the political process.

**Rights and responsibilities of Americans** U.S. citizens have many rights. Over time, many of these rights have been extended to lawful permanent residents. Both groups also share many responsibilities, including obeying the law, paying taxes, and, for males, registering for military service.

**Becoming a citizen** There are two types of U.S. citizens: native born and naturalized. Naturalization is a process that takes many months. Naturalized citizens receive most of the benefits enjoyed by native-born citizens.

**Political culture** Most Americans share a common set of beliefs and values about politics and government. This political culture helps to unite Americans, even when they differ over ideology. The two most prominent political ideologies in this country are liberalism and conservatism.

**Civic engagement** Citizens can engage in civic life in many ways. When they do so, they help to build a stronger civil society.



## Could you pass the citizenship test?

To become citizens of the United States, immigrants must take a civics test to show their knowledge of American history and government. An official asks them ten questions from a list of 100 possible test items. Applicants must answer six of the questions correctly to pass the test. But what do they need to know? The questions on these pages come from a sample test issued by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). How many questions can you answer correctly?

### Naturalization Test

The questions below were taken from a test used by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, or USCIS.

#### American Government

##### *Principles of American Democracy*

1. What is the supreme law of the land?
2. What do we call the first ten amendments to the Constitution?
3. What is one right or freedom from the First Amendment?
4. How many amendments does the Constitution have?
5. What is the economic system in the United States?

##### *System of Government*

6. Name one branch or part of the government.
7. The House of Representatives has how many voting members?
8. What stops one branch of government from becoming too powerful?
9. Under our Constitution, some powers belong to the federal government. What is one power of the federal government?

10. Under our Constitution, some powers belong to the states. What is one power of the states?
11. Who makes federal laws?
12. What is the highest court in the United States?

##### *Rights and Responsibilities*

13. What is one responsibility that is only for United States citizens?
14. Name one right only for United States citizens.
15. What do we show loyalty to when we say the Pledge of Allegiance?

#### American History

##### *Colonial Period and Independence*

16. What is one reason colonists came to America?
17. Why did the colonists fight the British?



Citizenship ceremonies are often large events. This photograph shows a ceremony that occurred in Idaho in 2009. That year, over 740,000 people were naturalized in the United States.

18. There were 13 original states. Name three.
19. What happened at the Constitutional Convention?

#### 1800s

20. Name one war fought by the United States in the 1800s.
21. Name one problem that led to the Civil War.
22. What did the Emancipation Proclamation do?
23. What did Susan B. Anthony do?

#### Recent American History and Other Important Historical Information

24. Who did the United States fight in World War II?
25. During the Cold War, what was the main concern of the United States?
26. Who was President during the Great Depression and World War II?
27. What did Martin Luther King, Jr. do?

#### Geography

28. Name one of the two longest rivers in the United States.
29. Name one state that borders Canada.
30. Name one U.S. territory.
31. Name one state that borders on Mexico.

#### Symbols

32. Why does the flag have 13 stripes?
33. Why does the flag have 50 stars?

#### Holidays

34. When do we celebrate Independence Day?
35. Name two national U.S. holidays.

#### Answer Key

1. the Constitution
2. the Bill of Rights
3. speech, religion, assembly, press, petition the government
4. 27
5. capitalist economy; market economy
6. Congress, legislative, President, executive, the courts, judicial
7. 435
8. checks and balances; separation of powers
9. print money; declare war; create an army; make treaties
10. provide schooling and education; provide protection (police); provide safety (fire departments); give a driver's license; approve zoning and land use
11. Congress, Senate and House (of Representatives), (U.S. or national) legislature
12. the Supreme Court
13. serve on a jury; vote in federal election
14. vote in a federal election; run for federal office
15. the United States, the flag
16. freedom; political liberty; religious freedom; economic opportunity; practice their religion; escape persecution
17. because of high taxes (taxation without representation); because the British army stayed in their houses (boarding, quartering); because they didn't have self-government
18. New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia
19. The Constitution was written; The Founding Fathers wrote the Constitution
20. War of 1812; Mexican-American War; Civil War; Spanish-American War
21. slavery; economic reasons; states' rights
22. freed the slaves, freed slaves in the Confederacy; freed slaves in the Confederate states; freed slaves in most Southern states
23. She fought for women's rights, fought for civil rights
24. Japan, Germany, and Italy
25. Communism
26. (Franklin) Roosevelt
27. fought for civil rights; worked for equality of all Americans
28. Missouri (River); Mississippi (River)
29. Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Alaska
30. Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Northern Mariana Islands, Guam
31. California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas
32. because there were 13 original colonies; because the stripes represent the original colonies
33. because there is one star for each state; because each star represents a state; because there are 50 states
34. July 4
35. New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Day, Presidents' Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Columbus Day, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas