

Thatcher, Margaret Conservative prime minister from 1979 to 1990.
Third Way Term describing recent policies of the Labour left that embrace the free market.

Trades Union Congress (TUC) The UK's largest trade union confederation.
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Official name of the British state.

vote of no confidence Legislative check on government whereby a government deems a measure to be of high importance, and if that measure fails to pass the legislation, either the government must resign in favor of another leader or new parliamentary elections must be called.

WEB LINKS

BritainUSA www.britain-info.org site of the British government in the United States

British Broadcasting Corporation news.bbc.co.uk

British Politics Group www.uc.edu/bpg

British Prime Minister www.pm.gov.uk

Conflict Archive on the Internet cain.ulst.ac.uk on conflict and politics in Northern Ireland, 1968 to the present

Foreign and Commonwealth Office www.fco.gov.uk

London University www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit on constitutional reform

Parliament www.parliament.uk

Scottish Parliament www.scottish.parliament.uk

Welsh Assembly www.wales.gov.uk

UNITED STATES

Head of state and government:

President Barack Obama (since 2009)

Capital: Washington, District of Columbia

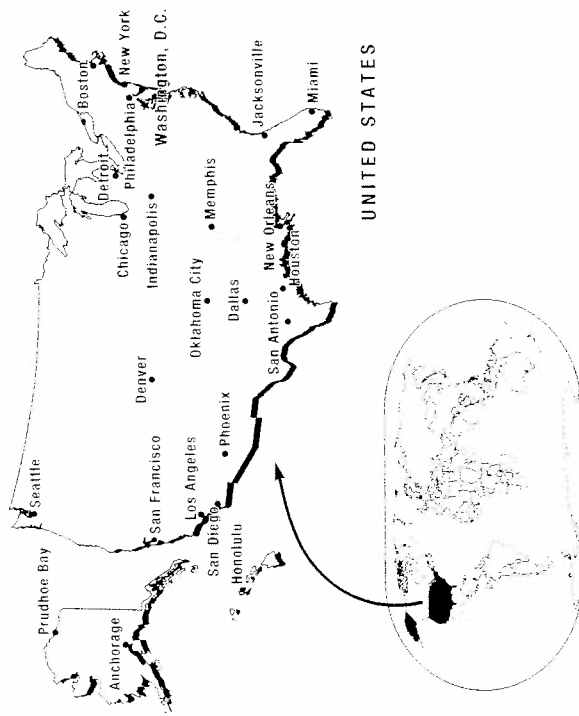
Total land size: 9,631,418 sq km

Population: 304 million

Total GDP at PPP: 13.84 trillion US\$

GDP per capita at PPP: \$45,800

Human development index ranking: 12



INTRODUCTION

Why Study This Case?

Some readers may believe that the United States is the standard against which to measure advanced industrial democracies. After all, the United States is governed by the oldest written constitution still in effect. It is the world's greatest military and economic power. Nevertheless, compared with other advanced capitalist democracies, the United States is best viewed as an anomaly full of paradoxes. It is a large and wealthy nation with a relatively weak state. The United States has a highly legitimate political regime and enjoys widespread adherence to the rule of law despite having a political system that was deliberately designed to prevent decisive and coherent policy making. U.S. citizens are deeply proud of their state but distrust it and its bureaucracy in far greater numbers than the citizens of other industrialized democracies distrust theirs. Its political system has long been dominated by two political parties, but those parties are themselves relatively weak, undisciplined, and fragmented. It has a vibrant civil society but very low voter turnout. The United States is a secular democracy in which religion continues to play a comparatively large role in politics and society. It began as a society of immigrants whose national identity is still in flux because of migration and geographic mobility. The United States has more wealth and more social mobility than any other democracy but is plagued by persistent inequality and the presence of an impoverished underclass that is more characteristic of developing countries. The United States leads the world in medical technology but has more citizens without medical insurance than any other advanced democracy. The United States, blessed with peaceful borders and isolation from major world conflicts, initially favored an isolationist foreign policy but has in recent decades intervened militarily in numerous global conflicts.

It is especially important to understand the unusual workings of the U.S. political system given the country's tremendous power in today's world. The importance of U.S. technology, culture, military power, and economic might is undeniable, and the projection of those strengths is often a source of both admiration and resentment by citizens of other countries.

As the United States enters the twenty-first century, it faces new challenges and new questions about its political system. A bitter dispute over a closely contested presidential election in 2000 raised serious doubts about the integrity of the electoral system and the fairness of the political system. A nation that had become assured of its military might and its sovereignty sud-

denly vulnerable after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 has deeply polarized politics in the United States. Economic and international concerns have led many Americans to believe that their country's political and economic systems must undergo fundamental changes in order to respond to the challenges of the future, which was made clear in the 2008 election of Barack Obama. A question for this case is, How can the oldest constitutional democracy in the world deliver such change?

Major Geographic and Demographic Features

In 2009, the population of the United States was more than 300 million, third in the world after China and India. In terms of land size, the United States ranks third in the world; it is slightly larger than Brazil and China but about half the size of Russia and slightly smaller than Canada. The United States occupies the central portion of the North American continent, between Canada and Mexico, spanning it from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean. It comprises forty-eight contiguous states (and the District of Columbia), Alaska (at the extreme northwest of the continent), and the island state of Hawaii, located about 2,100 miles west of the California coast. In addition, it possesses numerous overseas territories in the Caribbean and the Pacific. U.S. states are extremely diverse in area, population, geography, climate, and culture.

The United States is blessed with stunning geographic and climatic diversity. Almost half its territory is made up of agriculturally rich lowlands that have become the world's breadbasket. Its climatic diversity allows for the production of food year-round. The United States is divided by several major mountain ranges, but its extensive coastline and navigable river systems facilitate trade and commerce. The United States is richly endowed with natural resources, including minerals, gas, and oil.

For an industrial democracy, its population is unusual in some ways. Enriched by immigration, it has continued to grow more than the population of other industrialized democracies and currently has a birth rate higher than both China's and Brazil's. As a result, unlike Japan and some European countries, the United States does not face a labor shortage in the foreseeable future.

The U.S. population is also more geographically mobile than is common to industrialized democracies. Despite a very high level of home ownership, it is estimated that about one in seven Americans moves from one house to another in a given year. In recent decades, this mobility has hurt the old industrial core of the Northeast and the Midwest, whose cities have lost population and wealth, and has favored the Southwest and the West.

Historical Development of the State

AMERICA AND THE ARRIVAL OF THE EUROPEAN COLONIZERS

The origins of the U.S. state can be found in the geographic expansion of European states in the early sixteenth century. A number of European countries began to explore and establish trading missions in the eastern part of the future United States. The French, the Dutch, the Spanish, and the English all attempted to form permanent settlements there.

English citizens migrated to America in search of land, which was becoming scarce in England, and religious freedom. **Puritans**, radical Protestants, constituted a large portion of the early English settlers in North America. English colonists began to establish permanent settlements in the early seventeenth century in present-day Virginia and Massachusetts. The Virginia colony began as a business venture and developed into a slave-based plantation society geared toward the production of tobacco and dominated by white landowners. The Massachusetts colonies were settled largely by Puritans and developed

NATIVE AMERICANS: "ETHNIC CLEANSING" AS THE BASIS FOR WESTERN EXPANSION

Although it is convenient to begin our discussion of the origins of the American political system with the establishment of the English colonies in the seventeenth century, more than 100 Indian tribes inhabited what is now the United States, and each had their own political regimes. With the arrival of Europeans, many Native American societies collaborated with or tolerated the colonists, while others violently resisted.

The chief cause of the declining indigenous population after the arrival of Europeans was disease, against which Native Americans lacked resistance. But Native American societies were also subject to military repression, murder, and forced relocation. One infamous example was the 1830 Indian Removal Act, initiated by President Andrew Jackson, which evicted the Cherokees and other tribes from their lands in the southeastern United States and forced them to relocate on reservations in distant Oklahoma. The forced removal resulted in the death of thousands of Native Americans. The eviction of indigenous peoples by European colonizers in the United States bears numerous similarities to the Afrikaner treatment of blacks in South Africa.

By the late seventeenth century, the British had begun to exert more control over their remote North American colonies. The British government, with the Navigation Act of 1651, sought to force the colonies to conduct their trade using only English ships, thereby creating colonial dependency. By the early eighteenth century, the British government had allowed embryonic democratic institutions, and had imposed royally appointed colonial governments.

The colonies grew very rapidly, fueled by a high birth rate, the importation of enslaved Africans, mostly to the southern colonies, and continued immigration from England as well as other European countries. For Europeans, the lure of a seemingly endless supply of land was irresistible. Indeed, since colonial days America has been viewed by immigrants worldwide as a land of opportunity and promise.

TIME LINE OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

Year	Event
1607	First permanent English settlement in America
1754-63	Seven Years' War, ending the French Empire in America
1775-83	American Revolution
1776	Declaration of Independence
1781	Ratification of the Articles of Confederation
1788	Ratification of the U.S. Constitution
1803	Louisiana Purchase, expanding the U.S. frontier westward
1846-48	Mexican War, further expanding U.S. territory
1861-65	Civil War
1865	Ratification of Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, abolishing slavery
1903-20	Progressive Era
1933-38	Era of the New Deal
1955-65	Civil rights movement
2001-	War on Terror

Between about 1683 and 1763, the English colonists faced numerous foes. They fought indigenous tribes whose land they had taken. They also fought with the growing Spanish and French empires in America, who often allied themselves with Native American tribes and threatened to limit the English settlers' prospects for colonial expansion. In the Seven Years' War (1754–1763), the British effectively defeated the French Empire in North America and weakened the Spanish Empire (with Spain giving up claims to Florida in 1763). At the end of the Seven Years' War, Britain inherited a vast empire in America that would prove both costly and difficult to control.

THE REVOLUTION AND THE BIRTH OF A NEW STATE

The United States was the first major colony to rebel successfully against European colonial rule, leading one scholar to call it “the first new nation.”¹ At its core, the American Revolution was caused by a conflict between two sovereignties: the sovereignty of the English king and Parliament and the sovereignty of the colonial legislatures that had been established in America. Both believed that they had the exclusive right to raise the taxes paid by the colonists. In the 1760s, the British Parliament had passed a number of taxes on colonists that sparked a spiral of petitions, protests, boycotts, and acts of civil disobedience on the part of the colonists. The British responded by disbanding the colonial legislatures and repressing protest with military force. In the Boston Massacre (1770), British soldiers attacked a mob of colonists, further fueling the colonists' opposition to British intervention in colonial affairs. Colonial militias clashed with British military forces, a precursor to the impending revolution.

In 1774, in response to British repression, anti-British colonial elites convened a Continental Congress in Philadelphia, which was made up of delegates from the colonies. It asserted the exclusive right of the colonial legislatures to raise taxes. The Second Continental Congress, meeting in 1775, created a Continental army, with **George Washington** at its command. In 1776, the Congress appointed a committee to draft a constitution and approve the **Declaration of Independence**.

The declaration of a new state and a new regime evoked an attack by a large and powerful British army. In the **American Revolution** (1775–1783), the colonists were greatly outnumbered but were aided by their knowledge of the terrain and an alliance with France, an enemy of England. With the defeat of the British at Yorktown, Virginia, in 1783, Britain granted independence to the thirteen rebellious American colonies.

THE CONSOLIDATION OF A DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC AND THE DEBATE OVER THE ROLE OF THE STATE

A unique theme of the American Revolution was its opposition to a British state perceived as overbearing. Distrust of a strong state is still a feature of

U.S. politics, but it presented special challenges during the revolution. Fighting a war against the British required a central authority transcending the thirteen colonial governments, all of which had begun functioning under new constitutions. The **Articles of Confederation**, approved in 1781, created a loose alliance of sovereign states. It featured a unicameral legislature with a single vote for each state. The Confederation Congress assumed important powers regarding conflicts between states and the regulation of settlement to the west, but it required unanimity for the passage of all legislation, lacked a national executive, and did not have the ability to raise taxes or create a national currency. This weak central state made it difficult for the nation to conduct foreign relations, control inflation, and carry out international trade. In response to those problems, a Constitutional Convention of state delegates was held in 1787 to consider a stronger national state. The resulting constitutional document was a compromise between advocates of a strong federal state and supporters of states' rights. The states ratified the new constitution in 1788, effectively creating a new national state and a new political regime.

The first U.S. Congress met in 1789. It passed legislation that strengthened the state, created a federal judiciary, and imposed a tariff on imports to fund federal expenditures. It also attempted to address the concerns of those who feared the power of a strong central state, by passing twelve amendments to the Constitution, ten of which were ratified by the states and became known collectively as the **Bill of Rights**. The ten constitutional amendments that constitute the Bill of Rights, passed by the first U.S. Congress, in large part aim to protect the rights of individuals against the state.

A major political division in the young American republic was between **Federalists**, led by President Washington's Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton, and **Democratic-Republicans**, led by the future president Thomas Jefferson. Hamilton, who advocated a strong central state, was responsible for consolidating the Revolutionary War debt incurred by the states, imposing a federal excise tax, and creating a federal bank to print and regulate currency. When Jefferson became president in 1801, he moved to reduce the power of the U.S. state by paying off the national debt, repealing the excise tax, and reducing the size of the federal bureaucracy and the military. At the same time, Jefferson was responsible for a massive increase in the territory of the United States when he acquired much of France's remaining North American territory in the **Louisiana Purchase** (1803). The Louisiana Territory extended America's westward borders to the Rocky Mountains and expedited future westward migration.

THE MOVE WEST AND EXPANSION OF THE STATE

With the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, acquisition of Florida from Spain in 1819, and end of the War of 1812 with Britain in 1815, Americans were free

to move westward. This movement came at the expense of Native Americans. As Americans moved westward in search of land to be used for agriculture, the United States used legislation as well as military force to contain, relocate, or exterminate Native Americans. The westward expansion continued with the 1845 annexation of Texas, a Mexican territory prior to a successful separatist movement led by non-Hispanic Americans. The United States declared war on Mexico in 1846 (the Mexican War; also known as the **Mexican-American War**) to protect its acquisition of Texas and to lay claim to vast Mexican territories in present-day Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Colorado, and Wyoming. In all, the rapidly expanding United States gained one third of Mexico's territory through military conquest, further encouraging the flood of migrants westward.

CIVIL WAR AND THE THREAT TO UNITY

The American Revolution had temporarily united the English colonies, and under Washington's leadership and the work of Federalist leaders the foundations of a strong central state were constructed. But the Federalist project was always controversial, and the creation of a unified United States could not eliminate simmering regional differences that threatened to destroy the Union. These differences culminated in the **Civil War** (1861–1865). At its roots were the divergent paths of socioeconomic development in the southern and northern regions of the country. While the North experienced an industrial boom based on its prosperous cities, southern agriculture was still based on slave labor and export-oriented plantations.

In order to gain agreement on a federal constitution, the founders of the republic had largely sidestepped the issue of slavery. Slavery had been abolished in the North after the Revolution, but the Constitution tolerated it. A number of factors brought the issue of slavery to center stage by the mid-nineteenth century. First, the westward expansion of the United States raised the contentious issue of whether new territories would be “slave” states or “free” states. Then, in the first half of the nineteenth century, slavery was banned by England and most of Latin America, and the North increasingly viewed the South as an anachronistic threat to free-market capitalism based on individual liberty and a free labor market. Finally, the early nineteenth century saw the emergence of a rapidly growing abolition movement, largely in the North, which viewed slavery as both undemocratic and anathema to Christian values.

The 1860 election of Abraham Lincoln and the rise to power of the new anti-slavery Republican Party provoked the secession of eleven southern states and the commencement of the Civil War. The southern states formed a rebel state, called the Confederate States of America, and enacted their own constitution, which guaranteed the institution of slavery.

During the war, the North held important advantages over the South in terms of population (it was over twice as large), wealth, and industry. Nevertheless, the South had the advantage of playing defense on difficult terrain, and it hoped to prolong the war enough to wear down the northern invaders. The long and bloody conflict cost more than half a million lives before the South was defeated in 1865 and the Union was preserved. In the same year, the **Thirteenth Amendment** to the Constitution, abolishing slavery, was ratified.

The importance of the Civil War in the development of the U.S. state was immense. The federal government had increased spending and built a huge army in order to subdue the South. The federal government also gained enormous power through its role in reforming the South and reintegrating the southern states into the Union. This use of state power to end race-based slavery and promote democratic values set an important precedent.

THE PROGRESSIVE ERA AND THE GROWTH OF STATE POWER

The U.S. state used its newfound clout to promote democratic reform during the **Progressive Era** (1903–1920). Progressives sought to use state (national) power to restrict the power of big business, attack corruption, and address inequality. Under President Theodore Roosevelt (1901–1909), the federal government attacked monopolistic businesses and enhanced the ability of the Interstate Commerce Commission to regulate trade between states. In order to protect public land from private development, Roosevelt created a vast system of national parks. Under President Woodrow Wilson (1913–1921), laws were passed to curb further the power of large monopolies and to establish the centralized Federal Reserve System as a national lender of last resort. Perhaps the single greatest impetus for the growth of a centralized state was the adoption of the Sixteenth Amendment in 1913, which gave Congress authority to levy a national income tax. In addition, Wilson took the United States into World War I, despite considerable popular opposition, an act that dramatically increased the size and power of the state.

THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND THE NEW DEAL

The stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression devastated the U.S. economy. One quarter of the workforce lost their jobs, the GDP dropped by about one third, and there were massive bankruptcies and bank failures. The economic crisis was a pivotal factor in the 1932 election of the Democratic Party candidate Franklin Roosevelt and the implementation of a set of social democratic welfare policies known collectively as the **New Deal**.

The New Deal policies were aimed at ameliorating the economic crisis, but their long-term impact was to increase dramatically the power of the U.S. state. Despite opposition from conservatives and the Supreme Court, Roosevelt, with a Democratic majority in both houses of Congress, passed a series

of unprecedented measures. Some of the most controversial pieces of legislation guaranteed workers the right to bargain collectively with employers, created state agencies to generate electric power, provided state payments to farmers who agreed to limit production, and heavily regulated the stock market. In order to carry out these policies, a massive extension of the state bureaucracy and the creation of numerous state agencies, such as the Securities and Exchange Commission and the National Labor Relations Board, were needed. Many of those agencies still exist today. The Social Security Act (1935) established the foundation for the U.S. welfare state (though much later and much less comprehensively than in many northern European countries), creating unemployment insurance, retiree pensions, and other social welfare measures.

The New Deal policies increased the role of the state, and the entry of the United States into World War II enhanced state power even further. The military grew rapidly, the state set wages and prices, and it directly intervened in private enterprise to serve the war effort. In wartime, the state trampled on civil liberties, censoring the press and sending thousands of citizens of Japanese ancestry to prison camps. After World War II, in the context of the cold war with the Soviet Union, the state took measures to persecute suspected Communists, firing them from government positions.

STRUGGLING FOR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS: THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND THE WAR ON POVERTY

Despite constitutional protections and the defeat of the South in the Civil War, U.S. democracy suffered from the legacy of slavery. Widespread discrimination against African Americans continued, most notably in the South but also in the North. After World War II (in which African Americans served and made valuable contributions), a growing **civil rights movement**, often backed by the federal government and the federal judiciary, advocated an end to all forms of racial discrimination.

The struggle for civil rights was only one of the popular reform movements that crystallized in the 1960s. During that decade, many U.S. citizens began to view economic inequality, gender discrimination, and environmental degradation by private business as impediments to democracy. In the mid-1960s, popular movements focused on those concerns combined with growing popular opposition to the **Vietnam War**, contributing to an atmosphere of unrest and rebellion.

Partly in response to popular pressure, the U.S. government attempted to address a number of socioeconomic problems. Under President John Kennedy (1961–1963), the federal government played a crucial role in imposing civil rights legislation on recalcitrant southern states. President Lyndon Johnson (1963–1969) announced a **War on Poverty**, with a dramatic increase in fed-

eral spending to combat economic inequality. Johnson launched new programs and founded new state institutions to protect the environment, build low-income housing, fund the arts, and redress racial discrimination. The growing state role in the economy and society continued even under the Republican president Richard Nixon (1969–1974), who imposed wage and price controls to stem inflation and signed into law a measure that provided food stamps to the poorest Americans.

In 1980, President Ronald Reagan (1981–1989) was elected on a neo-liberal platform of ending the trend toward increased state involvement in the economy. Reagan viewed government as “the problem, not the solution,” and rode to power on a wave of conservatism that was critical of the preceding decades of state-led social activism. Reagan cut social spending and reduced taxes while dramatically increasing defense spending. The reform of a welfare state widely viewed as bloated and inefficient continued under the Democratic president Bill Clinton (1993–2001) and the Republican president **George W. Bush** (2001–2008), though during the Bush presidency this occurred alongside massive increases in spending on both defense and domestic policies.

In retrospect, it is clear that the United States was fortunate to build and consolidate its state under extremely favorable conditions. It did not have to contend with hostile neighbors and faced no appreciable external threats to its sovereignty. The development of the U.S. state during its first century also coincided with the steady success of the economy and the steady expansion of its power abroad.

POLITICAL REGIME

Because of their fresh experience with, and deep distrust of, authoritarian colonial rule, the founding fathers established a democratic regime governed by the **rule of law**. This means that government can act and citizens can be punished only as authorized by legal statute, all citizens are equal before the law, and no one is above the law, not even political leaders. Those concepts were framed in a written constitution establishing a democratic regime grounded in rational-legal legitimacy.

But the rule of law by itself was judged insufficient. The power of legitimate government in the hands of a misguided minority or even a well-intentioned majority could still lead to tyranny. Wariness about this possibility led the founders to establish a liberal democratic political system with institutions designed to weaken the power and authority of the state. Those institutions included federalism, the separation of powers, and the Bill of Rights. In a sense, the legitimacy of the state was based on its inherent weakness. But that raised a dilemma: How could a state and its elected govern-

ment manage from a position of weakness the tasks of leading a new and growing nation facing a host of increasingly complex challenges?

The ongoing effort to resolve that dilemma required two regimes in the eighteenth century, a civil war in the nineteenth century, and a dramatic strengthening of central government authority in the twentieth century. In 1777, the Continental Congress established the new nation's first regime under the Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union. The Articles called for a decentralized confederation of highly autonomous states that vested most authority in the individual states. The ineffectiveness and insufficiency of this confederal regime grew increasingly apparent as the new republic faced potential threats of internal rebellion and costly foreign trade disputes. By 1787, the Articles of Confederation had been jettisoned, replaced by an entirely new constitution, which became the codified embodiment of U.S. rule of law. Inaugurated in 1789, the Constitution established a representative democratic regime governed by a presidential system. The following section examines the institutional components of this regime, including the principles of federalism and separation of powers.

Political Institutions

THE CONSTITUTION

In a nation governed by the rule of law, the 1789 document constituting the regime became all important. The Constitution of the United States of America was passed in large part as a compromise: between less and more populous states, between northern merchants and southern planters, between slaveholders and those not holding slaves, and between Federalists (who supported a strong central government) and Anti-Federalists (who advocated states' rights and preferred the decentralized confederal status quo). But the founders and citizens on both sides of the debate shared two characteristics: a fear of too much government in the form of an overbearing central authority, and the recognition that the Articles of Confederation had provided too little government. The constitutional compromise was one of strengthened but nonetheless limited government checked by **federalism**, which divides governing authority between the national and state governments; the **separation of powers**, which prevents any one branch or office of government from dominating; and the Bill of Rights, which protects the freedoms of individual citizens. In an unprecedented way, the U.S. Constitution created, tempered, and buffered three sovereign spheres within a single political system: national, state, and individual.

The U.S. Constitution also stands out as the oldest written constitution still in force. Although it has been regularly interpreted by judicial action and occasionally amended (in total, twenty-seven times), it has been remarkably

durable—indeed, it has proven difficult to even amend. Most of it remains fully in effect after more than 200 years, guiding U.S. politics and policy making under circumstances that could hardly have been imagined by its founders. For better or worse, it has served as the model for constituting the regimes of many newly established countries, and its guiding principles of federalism and separation of powers have become standards for numerous democracies.

ESSENTIAL POLITICAL FEATURES

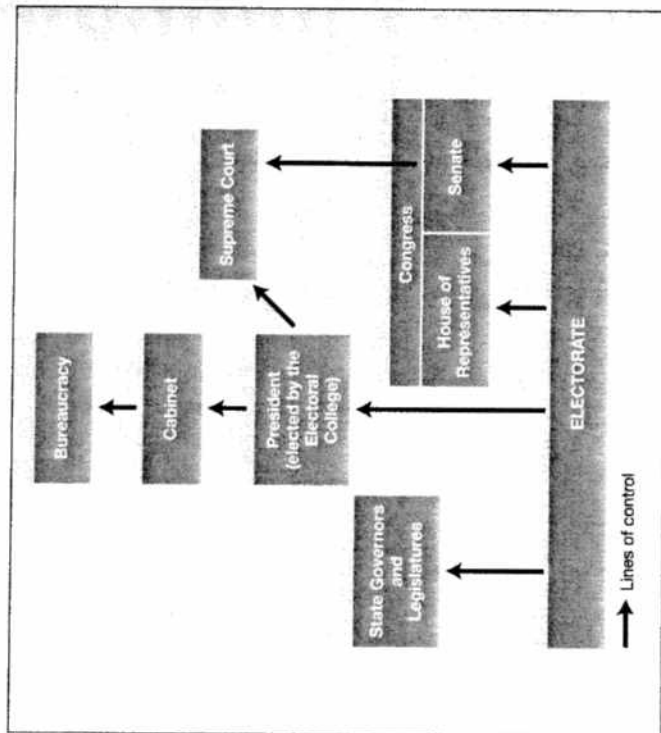
- Legislative-executive system: presidential
- Legislature: Congress
- Lower house: House of Representatives
- Upper house: Senate
- Unitary or federal division of power: federal
- Main geographic subunits: states
- Electoral system for lower house: plurality
- Chief judicial body: Supreme Court

The Branches of Government

At the national level, the power of government is shared by three institutions: a president; a bicameral legislature; and a judiciary, led by the Supreme Court, which has the power to interpret the Constitution. The framers put in place several institutions designed to check and balance the powers of each respective branch of government. For example, the upper chamber of the legislature (the **Senate**) is given the authority to approve or disapprove executive appointments and to ratify or not ratify treaties. Both the Senate and the **House of Representatives** (the House) can refuse to pass legislation and can impeach, convict, and remove from office a president or a federal judge (for grievous offenses). The executive (the president) can veto legislation passed by the legislature and appoint judges to the judiciary. The judges, once appointed, have virtually lifetime tenure and serve without political oversight. Most significantly, they have the power of concrete judicial review, meaning that they can interpret the Constitution and void any act of the other two branches that they deem unconstitutional if that act is brought before them in a court case. Ultimately, the framers sought to give Congress the upper hand, allowing it to override a presidential veto of legislation (with a two-thirds majority) and to overturn a decision of the Supreme Court by amending the Constitution.

The founders also intentionally gave each branch sources of legitimacy. Unlike a parliamentary system, in which executive authority and legislative authority are fused, and only members of parliament are directly accountable to voters, the U.S. system seats its president and members of the legislative chambers in separate elections. Separate branches and separate elections can also allow a third possible check on power: divided government, in which different parties control the executive and legislative branches. Although a single party has often dominated both, the United States has experienced divided

STRUCTURE OF THE GOVERNMENT



government over 40 percent of the time since 1830 and, since the end of World War II, nearly 60 percent of the time. Thus what politicians and analysts often criticize as the tendency for American policy-making "gridlock" is an intended consequence of the system of checks and balances. It fosters a state with weak autonomy and a relatively fragmented policy-making process. This formula has led some observers to argue that the United States would be better served by a parliamentary system, which can respond more decisively to threats or needs and can change the executive quickly when it has lost the support of the legislature.

On the other hand, this system reflects the powerful liberal sentiments of both its founders and U.S. political culture today. For many Americans, inefficiency is a price worth paying to keep state power in check. Moreover, in parliamentary systems, coalitions are often needed to form a majority, or a minority government must deal with its own sort of divided government. Coalitions

tion and minority governments, it is argued, can be far less stable and far less workable than the U.S. system.

THE EXECUTIVE

The U.S. president is both the head of state and the head of government. As such, the presidency is invested with a great deal of formal authority, and key presidents have expanded the power and influence of the office over time, particularly in the past century. The president is indirectly elected by the Electoral College (based on direct popular vote) to a fixed four-year term and may be elected only twice. Until the election of President **Barack Obama**, all U.S. presidents had been white men, and all but one have been Protestant Christians (John Kennedy was Catholic). Obama's election has clearly been a substantial departure from the norm in this regard.

As the head of state and the only leader elected to represent the entire citizenry, the president has traditionally taken the lead role in U.S. foreign policy (although treaties are subject to approval of the Senate). The president is also commander in chief of the military. As head of government, the president—similar to a prime minister—is responsible for managing the day-to-day affairs of the government and makes senior appointments to the executive and judicial branches (again, with approval of the Senate). Moreover, the president can initiate proposals for legislative action and veto legislative bills.

The president also manages an enormous bureaucracy, which has mushroomed over the years so that the civilian workforce now approaches 3 million employees, with the assistance of a **cabinet** composed mostly of the heads of key departments, offices, and agencies. Unlike its parliamentary counterparts, for which the cabinet is the government, the U.S. cabinet has no legal authority or standing; the influence of its officers and the institution, moreover, has varied from president to president. Some presidents come to rely upon a smaller inner cabinet (including, for example, the chief adviser of the National Security Council, a group of officials in the Executive Office of the President) or an informal "kitchen" cabinet of trusted advisers who may not be department heads. The U.S. bureaucracy is technically responsible to the executive branch and is further constrained by the legislature's control of its many budgets. In some respects, U.S. bureaucrats lack both the autonomy and the respect historically accorded to their counterparts in countries like France and Japan (*bureaucrat* and *bureaucracy* remain derogatory terms to most Americans).

With a few exceptions (such as Andrew Jackson in the 1830s and Abraham Lincoln in the 1860s), presidents prior to the twentieth century were relatively weak leaders who exerted little political influence. The White House

and its Oval Office strengthened considerably over the course of the twentieth century, something seen in other executive institutions in the advanced democracies. In recent years, the public has expected, and presidents have sought to deliver, a strong executive offering genuine if not dominant leadership. Predictably, both the legislative and the judicial branches have sought to challenge and check this growing influence.

THE LEGISLATURE

The framers of the Constitution intended Congress to be the dominant branch of the U.S. government. In many ways, despite the growing influence of the presidency and the substantial clout of the Supreme Court, that remains the case. Scholars have argued that the U.S. Congress is "the only national representative assembly that can actually be said to govern."² They note that although most countries today have some form of national legislature, the legislatures in authoritarian systems do little more than affirm and legitimize the decisions of the political leadership. And although the parliamentary democracies of Western Europe and Japan possess the authority to say no to the executive (at the risk, in many cases, of having the parliament dissolved), those assemblies still lack the power even to modify, let alone initiate, legislation. Only the U.S. Congress has that authority.

The Constitution reserves the supreme power—the power to legislate—for Congress. It also gives Congress the power of the purse, that is, sole author-

ity to appropriate funds, to control the way in which its laws are implemented. Whereas the U.S. Congress never accepts the president's annual budget without making its own significant adjustments, governments in Britain and Japan can anticipate their parliaments' acceptance of their budgets without any changes.

Another indication of the framers' understanding of congressional power was their decision to divide the legislature against itself by making it bicameral. The House of Representatives consists of 435 members (a number that has remained unchanged since 1910) who are elected to two-year terms in single-member plurality districts. The number of seats and districts allotted to each state is determined by and distributed according to each state's population after each state is allowed one representative. For example, following the 2000 national census, California saw an increase in its allotment of House seats from fifty-two to fifty-three, and New York dropped from thirty-one to twenty-nine seats based on changes in population; Wyoming retained its single seat. In 1789, there was an average of 1 representative for every 30,000 people; in 1910, the average was over 200,000; since 2000, each member of Congress has represented more than 600,000 citizens on average.

There are 100 members of the Senate, each serving staggered terms of six years with one third of the body elected every two years. Since 1913, senators have also been elected in single-member plurality districts; prior to that, they were elected indirectly by the state legislatures. Each state is allotted two seats regardless of its population, making most senate districts far larger than those in the House. In California, for example, each senator represents approximately 18 million constituents, whereas each of North Dakota's senators represents just over 300,000 constituents.

THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM

The third branch of the U.S. government, the judiciary, was the least defined by the Constitution and initially was quite weak. But given the trust and legitimacy vested in the Constitution and the rule of law, it should not surprise us that the U.S. judiciary has come to play a prominent role in the American political system. Over time, the federal court system devised new tools of judicial authority and significantly broadened the scope of its jurisdiction. In 1789, Congress created the federal court system and authorized it to resolve conflicts between state and federal laws and between citizens of different states.

In the landmark decision of *Marbury v. Madison*, the Supreme Court in 1803 established its right of judicial review: the authority to judge unconstitutional or invalid an act of the legislative or executive branch or of a state court or legislature. Although this power of judicial review can be exercised by federal and state courts, the Supreme Court is the court of last resort, the

DIFFERENT CHAMBERS, DIFFERENT ROLES

Given the differences in size, tenure, and assigned responsibilities, it is not surprising that the two chambers of Congress play different roles. The Senate is authorized to ratify treaties and approve presidential appointments, whereas the House is given exclusive power to originate tax and revenue bills. The Senate tends to be more deliberative, providing a forum for wide-ranging opinions and topics, whereas the House is more centralized and places strict limits on debate. Because they serve a larger and more diverse constituency, senators tend to be less specialized and less partisan and more hesitant to take a position that might offend any major portion of their broad base of voters. House representatives, in contrast, stand for election every two years and are by necessity more attuned to the needs and interests of their more narrowly defined constituencies. House members tend to be more specialized in their expertise and less reliant on a staff. The House is generally more politicized and partisan. Whereas senators are more likely to cross the aisle to form an alliance or vote with members of the opposing party on an important issue, representatives are generally more likely to vote along partisan lines.

court with the final word on the interpretation of the U.S. Constitution. This kind of judicial review is uncommon but not exclusive to the United States; Australian and Canadian courts also have such authority.

Federal judges are given essentially lifetime appointments, affording them substantial autonomy from both partisan politics and the executive and legislative branches of government. But the Court's power is checked by its reliance upon presidential appointments and Senate approval of nominees to the federal bench, as well as by legislative enforcement of its decisions. Nonetheless, the federal courts have played an increasingly influential role, particularly since the second half of the twentieth century, determining important policy outcomes in such areas as school desegregation and abortion and even determining the winner of the 2000 presidential election. In that case, the Court overturned a decision of a state supreme court (Florida's), and in so doing invalidated a partial recount of ballots in that hotly contested election. It is little wonder that appointments to the Supreme Court have become bitter political struggles as partisan forces seek to project their influence on this now prominent third branch of U.S. government.

The Electoral System

Nearly all elections in the United States are conducted according to a single-member district plurality system, in which there is one representative per district, and in which the seat is awarded to the candidate with the most votes (but not necessarily with a majority). This system has favored the emergence of two broadly defined parties and has effectively discouraged the survival of smaller and single-issue parties. Unlike a system of proportional representation, the plurality system in effect wastes votes for all but the dominant candidate, forcing coalitions to emerge to compete in the winner-take-all contests.

One way in which parties have sought to enhance their prospects for electoral success has been through the process of drawing up electoral districts, which are used to determine constituencies for Senate, House, and many state and local elections. State legislatures are required to adjust voting districts every ten years to reflect changes in population, and the dominant party in the legislature is able to control the process. Parties seek to influence electoral outcomes by redrawing the districts in ways that will favor their candidates and voting blocs. Political architects often employ **gerrymandering**, a process named after a Massachusetts governor, Elbridge Gerry, whose fellow party members crafted a district shaped like a salamander. Gerrymandering refers to the manipulation of district boundaries by one political party to favor the candidates of that party (nowadays achieved with the aid of sophisticated computer analyses of demographic data).

Although members of both chambers of Congress are elected directly by a popular vote, the president and the vice president are elected indirectly, by the Electoral College. The founders established the Electoral College as a means of tempering the particular interests (and feared ignorance) of voters. In this system, voters technically do not vote for a presidential candidate but vote instead for a slate of electors from their state, with the electors chosen or appointed by each party from each state. Each state receives a total of electoral votes equal to its combined number of senators and representatives. In addition, the federal District of Columbia has 3 votes, for a sum of 538 electoral votes (100 plus 435 plus 3). But unlike a plurality system, the Electoral College requires a majority (270) of votes to claim victory. If no candidate obtains a majority, the contest is determined by the House of Representatives (as was the case twice in the early nineteenth century).

National Election Results, 1992-2008

Legislative Elections

Year of Election	House of Representatives* Total Seats: 435**		Senate* Total Seats: 100**		Presidential Elections* (party)
	Democrats	Republicans	Democrats	Republicans	
1992	258	176	57	43	Clinton (Democrat)
1994	204	230	48	52	—
1996	206	228	45	55	Clinton (Democrat)
1998	211	223	45	55	—
2000	212	221	50	50	Bush (Republican)
2002	204	229	51	48	—
2004	202	232	44	55	Bush (Republican)
2006	233	202	49	49	—
2008	257	178	56	41	Obama (Democrat)

*House terms of office are fixed at two years, with all seats elected every two years. Senate terms are fixed at six years, with one third of the seats elected every two years. Presidential terms are fixed at four years, with elections held every four years.

**When Democrats and Republicans together comprise less than the total number of seats, the independent representatives account for the difference.

Because all but two states use a winner-take-all formula for awarding electoral votes, winning a plurality of the popular vote in a state earns a candidate all of the state's electoral votes. Thus, winning many states by large margins but losing key electoral-rich battleground states by narrow margins can lead to a popular victory but a loss in the Electoral College. This has happened three times in U.S. history, most recently in the controversial 2000 election between George W. Bush and Al Gore.

Even before the 2000 election, many observers had called for the elimination of the Electoral College, to parallel the elimination of the indirect election of senators nearly a century ago. Critics charge that this "quasi-democratic" vestige of the eighteenth century "undermines both respect for and the legitimacy of electoral results."³ Nor is this the only electoral reform effort being proposed. Long-standing efforts to reform campaign finance are now being joined by bipartisan calls for changes in the logistics of voter registration, the actual mechanics of voting, and the way in which presidential primaries are conducted, along with a number of smaller issues.

One response to the frustration with the existing electoral and political systems has been the proliferation of state initiatives and referenda. Twenty-seven of the fifty states allow citizen-sponsored statewide ballots called initiatives, and legislature-proposed statewide ballots called referenda (with the ballots themselves often called propositions), in which voters are able to make direct decisions about policy. For example, in 2004 Colorado proposed changing their allocation of electoral college delegates from winner-take-all to proportional, though the measure failed to pass. The Constitution also authorizes a national ballot in the form of a national convention as one means of amending federal law, a method that has never been employed.

Local Government

The United States has a federal political system dividing authority between self-governing states and the national government that unites the states (hence, the name United States of America). The Constitution authorizes the national, or federal, government to manage both national commerce and foreign policy. Although the granting of those federal powers marked a significant centralization compared with the earlier Articles of Confederation, the states have retained significant powers, including responsibility for many direct social services (such as health, education, and welfare) and authority over internal commerce.

Over time, however, the national government has managed to increase its influence in many of the areas traditionally subject to state sovereignty. The federal government can review the constitutionality of state legislation, impose federal mandates, and make federal grants to states for such services as education and transportation, contingent upon the states' abiding by federal stan-

dards. States have given up their sovereignty only reluctantly, however, and in recent years groups advocating states' rights have called for limitations on federal power and returning greater political power to the states, or devolving it on them.

This federal structure of national and state authority has allowed states to experiment with a variety of policies in areas such as welfare restructuring, vehicle emissions standards, domestic partnerships, and educational reforms. But it has also resulted in a lack of standardization in those areas and varying levels of benefits and enforcement across the states. Not surprisingly, the greatest tension comes in areas of conflicting or overlapping authority. A tragic example was the government's response to the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina in the southern Gulf Coast in 2005. Although state and local governments have first responsibility to respond to such a disaster, a state governor can invite the federal government to assist, something that, as one observer noted, the Louisiana governor initially refused to do "out of pride or mistrust or a desire to maintain some degree of control."⁴ The lack of a timely response by the federal government further added to the frustration and confusion. These problems persist: as of 2008, tens of thousands of homes remain uninhabitable in New Orleans, public transportation is limited, and the population remains a quarter below its pre-storm level.

POLITICAL CONFLICT AND COMPETITION

Federalism and the separation of powers have had another important consequence: the multiple levels and branches of elected office in the U.S. political system mean that voters in the United States go to the polls far more often than do their counterparts in other democracies. Whereas a typical British or Canadian voter might cast on average four or five votes in as many years, a U.S. voter may go to the polls two or three times as often and cast dozens, if not hundreds, of votes in local, state, and national primary and general elections involving hundreds of candidates for dozens of offices and additional issues presented as initiatives and referenda.

Although this surplus of contests and contestants may be an indication of the health of democracy in the United States, some critics have pointed to it as a cause of "voter fatigue" and one of several reasons for the strikingly lower levels of voter turnout compared with turnout in other democracies. Levels of voter turnout are on average lower in the United States than in all other advanced democracies considered in this volume. Although voter turnout has actually increased in the past two presidential elections—59 percent in 2004 and 62 percent in 2008, the highest level since 1968—only about 40 percent of eligible Americans vote regularly.

Suffrage in the United States, as in other democracies, has expanded over time. Limited originally to white male landholders, the franchise was extended first to nonpropertied white males. It was extended to African American men by the end of the Civil War (though full participation was not possible until Congress passed the **Voting Rights Act** in 1965) and to women in 1920. Most recently, the voting age was lowered from twenty-one to eighteen in 1971.

The Party System

Another factor sometimes blamed for declining rates of voter turnout is the weakness of political parties. Formerly bottom-up organizations linking party members tightly together in purposive grassroots campaigns, political parties in the United States have evolved over time into top-down, candidate-driven national organizations with much looser ties to voters and citizens. American political parties today tend to be weaker and more fragmented than are their counterparts in most other countries.

But with much talk recently about the ideological and even geographic polarization of American voters into "red" (Republican) states and "blue" (Democratic) states, it is clear that the U.S. two-party system has certainly endured even as it has evolved. The U.S. plurality system has fostered a two-party system in which the Democratic and Republican parties have won virtually all votes and political offices since their rivalry began nearly 150 years ago.

THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

The Democratic Party has its roots in the Democratic-Republican Party, which formed in the 1790s with southern agrarian interests as its base. Andrew Jackson led a splinter group to presidential victory in 1828, calling it the Democratic Party and portraying it as the party of the common man. The Democrats dominated the political scene until 1860 and for most of the years between 1932 and 1968.

As a coalition party, like its Republican rival, the Democratic Party is difficult to characterize fully in terms of a set of philosophical principles or even policy preferences. It may be said, however, that the party tends to embrace policies that support minorities, urban dwellers, organized labor, and working women. Although less so than European social democrats, Democrats in the United States generally perceive state intervention designed to temper the market and enhance equality as both legitimate and necessary. As has been the case with social democratic parties in Britain and elsewhere, however, neoliberal trends since the 1980s have weakened the Democratic coalition, causing conflict over traditional New Deal-type social welfare programs providing such benefits as affirmative action. The party has also struggled with

divisive social issues like abortion and gay marriage, which are often opposed by working-class and immigrant communities that would otherwise be drawn to the Democratic Party.

THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

The Republican Party, familiarly called the Grand Old Party (GOP), is in fact not as old as its rival. It first contested elections in 1856 on an anti-slavery platform that also appealed to northern commercial interests. With Lincoln's presidential victory in 1860, the party dominated national politics until the 1930s, when the Great Depression brought that era of its supremacy to an end. By the late 1960s, the GOP had regained the presidency and by the 1990s had obtained congressional majorities as well.

The Republican Party currently brings together a coalition that includes both economic and moral conservatives. It draws support disproportionately from rural dwellers, upper-income voters, evangelical Christians, and voters tending to promote individual freedom over collective equality, such as owners of small businesses and libertarians. Although there are fewer registered Republican voters than Democratic voters, registered Republicans have tended to vote more regularly than do their rivals. Americans identify themselves with both parties in roughly equal numbers, with approximately one third of adults expressing a preference for each of the two parties and most of the remaining one third identifying themselves as independents. As with the Democrats, Republicans are often divided over those who favor greater liberalism in economic and moral issues, as opposed to those whose cultural or religious preferences call for a greater state role in social issues.

THIRD PARTIES

If fully one third of Americans do not identify themselves with either party, is there political space for a third party? Certainly single-member plurality systems in other countries, such as the United Kingdom, have yielded more than two parties. But in the U.S. setting, establishing the kind of presence essential for national viability has proved difficult, if not prohibitive, for smaller parties. Moreover, the dominant parties have all the advantages of incumbency, including the ability to establish and preserve laws discouraging financing third-party candidates and including them on the ballot.

That said, third parties have emerged on the U.S. political scene occasionally as protest voices. In that sense, third parties and their candidates can claim to have had an impact on the political process even if few of them have had any prospect of national electoral success. Among the third-party movements, the Populists of the late nineteenth century and the Progressives of the early twentieth century have been the most successful. More recently, protest voices

have emerged from each side of the political spectrum: Ross Perot's populist United We Stand Party earned nearly 20 percent of the presidential vote in 1992, and Ralph Nader's pro-environment Green Party garnered nearly 3 percent in 2000. In both cases, one can argue that the third-party candidates took crucial votes from the losing candidate. Nader, for example, garnered nearly 100,000 votes in Florida in the 2000 election. If only 1 percent of his supporters had voted for Gore instead, Gore would have won Florida and the national election. This result had the effect of suppressing third-party candidates in the 2008 presidential election, though they are likely to re-emerge in the future.

A factor contributing to the lack of third-party success in the United States is that the dominant parties have routinely embraced key elements of the more successful third-party movements, bringing at least some of the disaffected voters back into the two-party fold, even as they weaken the third parties.

Elections

In the United States, in contrast to countries that have parliamentary systems, terms for all elected offices—and therefore the sequencing of elections—are fixed. Each state determines the conduct of the elections, including the rules for any primary elections: that is, preliminary direct elections that are held in many states and are designed to narrow the field of candidates. Since the 1950s, electioneering in the United States has shifted from campaigning done almost exclusively by party leaders and grassroots party workers to highly centralized and professionalized media campaigns. Election contests today are hugely expensive and marked by media sound bites, talk-show interviews, televised debates, and advertising blitzes, all guided by polls and sophisticated demographic studies.

No campaigns are more illustrative of this American-style electioneering than those for the U.S. presidency. As voters have apparently become less loyal to either party, and in many cases less interested in voting and participating at all, the parties and their candidates have redoubled their efforts (and expenditures) to capture this top political prize. In total, the 2008 presidential candidates raised over \$1.7 billion and spent more than \$1.3 billion, far more than that spent on campaigns in any other country. Campaigns begin early, with an extensive season of primaries, and involve an all-out effort to both promote the candidate and demigrate the opponents, all in an attempt to mobilize new voters and persuade the undecided voters.

Civil Society

Observers since the nineteenth-century French political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville have marveled at the vibrancy of U.S. civil society and the will-

ingness of its citizens to become civically engaged. Recently, however, analysts have pointed to an apparent weakening of that civic commitment, noting low voter turnout and other signs of growing political apathy among U.S. citizens as evidence of a broader, generational decline in social capital.⁵ Others argue, however, that the participation of individuals and the organized groups that represent their interests has perhaps not declined as much as it has simply changed: individual citizens associate with one another and seek to influence politics and policy in a variety of new and nontraditional ways.⁶

But precisely because the U.S. policy-making process is so complex and allows so many points of access—including individual officeholders at the national, state, and local level, legislative committees, regulatory agencies, and the initiative process—it has been difficult for individual citizens to influence the political process. As U.S. political parties have grown weaker and less cohesive, various special-interest groups have emerged and expanded their influence. The remarkable proliferation and enormous influence of these groups in the United States sets this case apart from that of other democracies.

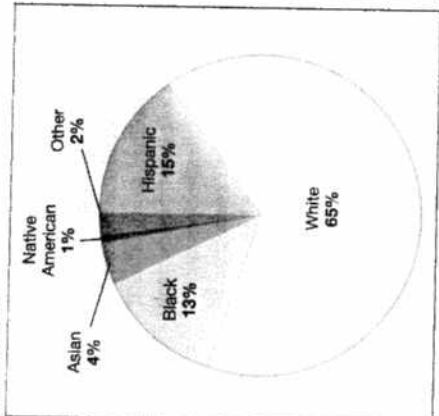
Interest groups are often organized around a single issue or a cluster of issues and therefore typically do not officially affiliate with a particular party or candidate. These organized interests can include a single corporation or business association, public interest groups, and even state or local governments. Perhaps most well known are the political action committees (PACs), political fund-raising organizations authorized by law to raise money for political causes. Although forbidden to support individual candidates, PACs were long permitted to raise unlimited amounts of money in support of political parties. Although a 2002 campaign-finance law banned so-called soft-money, or unregulated donations, even to political parties, organized interests quickly discovered a loophole. Thus was born a new type of tax-exempt organization (known as a 527, for the section of the federal tax code governing its behavior) that can raise unlimited campaign funds as long as the funds are spent on voter mobilization and issue advocacy and do not specifically promote a candidate or a party. Besides seeking to finance campaigns, these interest groups, as well as business corporations and wealthy individuals, exercise their influence through various lobbying techniques, both legal and questionable, to promote the interests of their constituencies.

SOCIETY

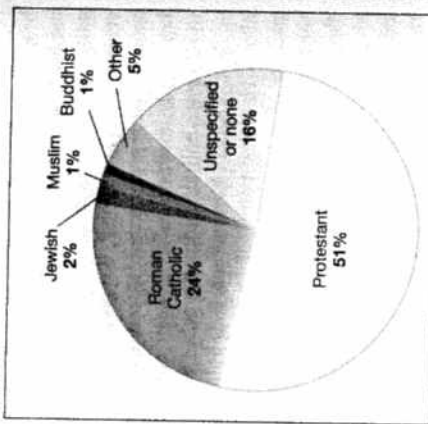
Ethnic and National Identity

The first American colonists were largely English-speaking Protestants, but early in the country's history its society was diversified by the importation of enslaved Africans and a steady stream of immigration from Europe. In the

ETHNIC GROUPS



RELIGION



Source: CIA World Factbook, 2008.

mid-nineteenth century, a wave of Asian immigration was spurred by the California gold rush, and another major migration from southern and eastern Europe began in the 1880s. In the 1920s, Congress reacted to the new immigrants by imposing a series of restrictive immigration quotas that favored immigrants from northern Europe. With the amended Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, Congress abandoned those quotas. As a result, immigration surged again, with the bulk of the new immigrants arriving from Latin America and Asia. The influx of non-European immigrants, especially **Hispanics**, has become an important issue in U.S. politics (see "Current Issues," p. 110). As of 2008, about 13 percent of U.S. citizens were born abroad (in Canada, the figure is 20 percent).

Contrary to the common perception of the United States as a peaceful **melting pot** of cultures, immigrants have always faced resentment and discrimination. The debate about the impact of immigrants on U.S. society has deep roots in American history, with changes depending on which group of immigrants were predominant at the time (Catholics, Asians, Hispanic).

Ideology and Political Culture

Much debate centers around the distinctiveness of U.S. ideology and political culture. There is broad consensus, however, that the attributes discussed below characterize the dominant U.S. ideology.

INDIVIDUALISM AND FREEDOM

Although citizens of other industrial democracies are more likely to view freedom as resulting from government policy, Americans are more likely to view their individual freedom in terms of what the state cannot do to them. As a result, whereas many other democracies attempt to specify in their constitutions what the state should provide its citizens, the U.S. Constitution emphasizes citizens' protections from the state.

Like classic liberal thinkers, Americans tend to eschew collective or societal goals in favor of personal or individual goals. Consequently, the role of private property in U.S. society is especially important, and taxes, which are viewed as the state's appropriation of private property, are highly unpopular. Individualism may be one factor that has weakened political parties in the United States and limited their ideological coherence.

PARTICIPATORY CIVIL SOCIETY

An often-observed feature of U.S. political culture is Americans' participation in a plethora of voluntary groups that can be referred to collectively as civil society. Even in the nineteenth century, Tocqueville noted that Americans were "forever forming associations."⁷ The rich web of civic organizations in the United States exemplifies the notion of self-government and political equality and performs a host of tasks that in other societies might be carried out by the state. In their classic work *The Civic Culture*, Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba found that American citizens, far more than citizens in other democracies, believed that participation in community affairs is part of good citizenship.⁸

Some leading scholars have expressed alarm about what they see as a rapid decline in the amount of participation in traditional civic groups. Moreover, scholars have noted that the nature of civil society is changing in the United States, with less participation in local grassroots organizations and the emergence of national, professionally managed lobbies (such as the National Rifle Association and the Sierra Club). The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and concerns about environmental issues may be reviving civic participation, especially among younger Americans, but there is still a debate about whether civil society is in danger.

POPULISM

Populism, the idea that the masses should dominate elites and that the popular will should trump professional expertise, is a key feature of the U.S. creed. As a result, Americans believe in electing public officials at virtually all levels of society, including some law-enforcement officials and judges, and many states have seen an explosion of public initiatives that give the electorate a direct say in a variety of policy issues.

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY, NOT OUTCOME

A deep-seated aspect of U.S. political culture, rooted in the frontier mentality of early America, is the belief that all Americans have, and should have, an equal opportunity to become prosperous and successful. In the nineteenth century, Tocqueville observed that the United States had a far more egalitarian class structure than did Europe. Although assessments of economic equality and social mobility were certainly exaggerated even in early America—women were second-class citizens, and many others, like African Americans, were excluded altogether—the notions of equality of opportunity and social mobility have endured as part of a fundamental ethos.

Opinion research confirms that Americans today hold true to the notion of equality of opportunity but place less value on equality of actual economic outcomes, believing that success is a function of individual effort. Today the reverse of what Tocqueville observed in the nineteenth century is true: disparities of income are greater in the United States than in most of Europe,

and they are growing quickly. Indeed, Americans tend to oppose state policies aimed at redistributing income to benefit the poor, and compared with their counterparts in other advanced democracies Americans are more likely to blame the poor for not taking advantage of opportunities open to them. For example, Americans far more than Europeans believe that hard work is likely to lead to success.

Despite growing inequality and persistent poverty, Americans evince confidence about their future. Most believe they are better off than their parents, two thirds think that they will achieve the American dream of self-improvement at some point in their lifetime, and 80 percent think that they can start out poor and become rich through their own labors.⁹

ANTI-STATISM

The U.S. public has historically viewed its state with relatively high levels of trust and pride. Paradoxically, a deep-seated liberal distrust of “excessive” state power is also a prominent feature of the political culture. The American Revolution began as a rebellion against a powerful British state that was seen as abusing its authority through the unjust taxation of its citizens. The United States is unique in that anti-statism became a founding principle of the new regime. The founders of the U.S. regime consciously sought to embed in the system myriad checks on the power of the central state (a devolution of much power to state and local governments, a powerful and independent judiciary, separations of powers, and so on). As a result, Americans are skeptical of state efforts to promote social welfare, an outlook that largely explains the relatively small size of the U.S. welfare state. Compared with citizens in other advanced democracies, far fewer Americans believe it is the responsibility of the state to provide basic food and housing for every citizen.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS VALUES

The United States is also unusual among the advanced democracies in the importance it continues to place on religion. A far higher percentage of its citizens belong to a church or other religious organization than do the citizens of other advanced democracies, and Americans are more likely to believe that there are clear guidelines about what is good or evil.

Some scholars have argued that the high levels of religiosity in the United States stem from the early separation of church and state, which in effect turned religious organizations into voluntary civic groups that competed for membership.¹⁰ In the United States, new religious groups (most recently, evangelical denominations) constantly emerge to attract congregants who might be disillusioned with more established denominations. Indeed, one could argue that the absence of a state religion led Americans to associate religion with democracy, whereas in other countries state religions have been viewed

IN COMPARISON ECONOMIC EQUALITY

Do you think economic success is beyond our control? Percent saying no:

Country	Percent
United States	64
Canada	64
United Kingdom	56
France	48
Japan	47
Brazil	41
Mexico	39
Nigeria	35
Russia	33
Germany	31
South Africa	31
China	30
India	18

*Data on Iran not available.

Source: Pew Center for the People and the Press, 2007.

IN COMPARISON | RELIGIOUS VALUES

Must one believe in God to be moral? Percent answering yes:

Country	Percent
Brazil	83
Nigeria	82
South Africa	74
India	66
United States	57
Mexico	53
Germany	39
Japan	33
Canada	30
Russia	26
United Kingdom	22
France	17

*Data on Iran not available.

Source: Pew Center for the People and the Press, 2007.

as inimical to democracy. The importance of religion in the United States has been linked to what has been called **utopian moralism**, the tendency of Americans to view the world in terms of good versus evil. At the same time, the "free market" for religion and anti-statism often complicates the quest for moral clarity. On many moral issues, such as homosexuality, Americans are uncomfortable both with sanctioning behavior they may see as immoral and with restricting personal behavior.

Finally, it is interesting to see how these values have tracked over time in surveys, the findings of which may run counter to our perceptions of conservative American political culture. Surveys on American values over the past twenty years have shown that the public has grown much more tolerant of homosexuality and gender and racial equality and has become slightly less religious, particularly among the young. Americans (unlike most Europeans) continue to believe that personal success is determined by individual actions (rather than events beyond their control), reflecting the central tenet of American individualism.¹¹

POLITICAL ECONOMY

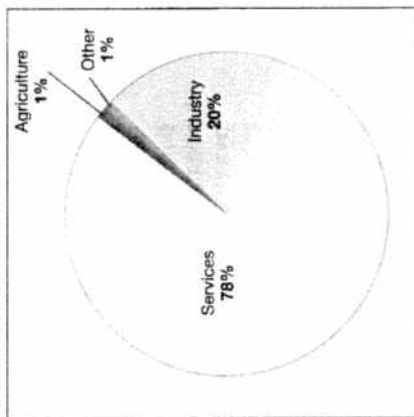
The United States has the world's largest national economy, surpassed only by the combined economies of the European Union. With less than 5 percent of the world's population, the United States contributes 20 percent to its economic output, compared with 11 percent for China, the second-largest producer.¹² In the 1990s, while many of the world's economies struggled the United States enjoyed the longest period of sustained economic growth in its history. Since the 1970s, inflation and unemployment have been relatively low—though this is clearly changing in the face of economic difficulties.

In general, the U.S. state plays a smaller role in the market than do the governments of most other industrialized democracies. The proportion of GDP spent by the state has hovered around 35 percent, less than in most European countries (for example, Sweden's state consumes over 50 percent of GDP); that figure has not varied much over time.¹³ Studies of global economic freedom rank the U.S. economy in the top five globally.¹⁴ The United States also has some of the lowest tax rates among the industrialized democracies. However, what the United States does not provide by way of direct state expenditures it often distributes in the form of various tax breaks for home ownership, children, or student loans, to name a few. As a result, some observe that the notion of a weak U.S. welfare system is misleading; rather, benefits are often in the private sector and supported by a complicated system of tax breaks. Such a system, however, tends to benefit the middle class much more than the poor, who lack the resources to take advantage of tax exemptions and might more easily benefit from public

goods, such as nationalized health care.

Although private enterprise is the main engine of the U.S. economy, the state does play a significant role. Starting with the New Deal reforms of the 1930s, the state's role in the economy increased to prevent a market collapse and promote equity. Since the 1980s, governments have attempted at times to scale back the role of the state in the economy. The Reagan administration, for example, deregulated many sectors of the economy (including telecommunications and the airlines) to make them more competitive; under Clinton, welfare revisions also devolved many of these responsibilities to the states. Government regulation of the economy has become a contentious issue as

LABOR FORCE BY OCCUPATION



some deregulated sectors (like the savings and loan and mortgage industries) have experienced massive bankruptcies and economic scandals, notably in the housing market. Currently, much of the U.S. state's intervention in the economy is aimed at improving the business climate. Over the past forty years, the tax burden has shifted from corporations to individuals while the state has granted huge subsidies to agribusiness and given generous tax breaks to corporations. At the same time, in contrast to many European countries, the state has done little to support trade unions. In spite of a Republican administration, under George Bush the size of the state grew faster than any time since the 1970s, though this has largely to do with military spending.¹⁵

Despite its impressive record of economic growth, the United States faces numerous political and economic challenges in the twenty-first century. Foremost is the persistent and growing inequality. Since the Social Security Act of 1935, the U.S. state has provided a safety net of welfare measures, but the provisions have been less extensive than those of other advanced democracies. The United States spends about 15 percent of its GDP on social expenditures, lower than almost any other advanced democracy (only Ireland's is lower). Legislation in the 1960s expanded welfare measures to include some health-care coverage for the poor and the elderly but stopped short of providing universal health care for all citizens. During the Reagan administration, welfare spending per poor recipient fell by one fifth. Under President Clinton, there was bipartisan support for measures aimed at cutting welfare expenditures, and with some notable exceptions (such as prescription benefits for the elderly), social expenditures have stayed flat or declined. As a result, income inequality in the United States has become a serious and growing problem. While the main measure of inequality, the Gini index, has remained relatively flat in many countries around the world, the United States has seen a dramatic increase over the past two decades. In 1980, the U.S. Gini index stood at 30, where it had been since the late 1960s. By way of comparison, this number is the equivalent of the European Union's Gini index in 2007. Since the 1980s the U.S. Gini number has risen to 45, similar to China and many countries in Africa.¹⁶ The United States has the largest number of millionaires in the world but also a large number of poor for a country of its wealth (hence the high degree of inequality). About 12 percent of the country's citizens lives below the poverty line, including approximately 20 percent of its children (the highest percentage among the advanced democracies). This poverty is particularly concentrated among African Americans and Hispanics, indicating the way in which poverty in the United States is compounded by migration and racism. Persistent racial divisions in the United States remain one of the greatest challenges to reducing inequality.

Related to the problems of inequality and poverty is the growing budget deficit over the past two decades. While U.S. social expenditures are small

compared with those of other advanced democracies, the low level of taxation, growing numbers of elderly, and costs of defense and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have translated into far greater expenses than state revenues. This budget deficit has been funded by borrowing. As a result, the United States has a gigantic national debt of almost \$10 trillion, which is 70 percent of GDP, a level not seen since World War II. If at some point the United States is no longer able to sustain this debt through borrowing (often from foreign sources, such as China), the result could be economic decline and the inability to sustain military commitments abroad.

Finally, the U.S. economy also faces the challenges of globalization that are common to the other cases in this book. Both Democrats and Republicans have pushed for freer world trade, though there has been pressure in the other direction of late. President Clinton signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which has further integrated the economies of the country's largest trading partners: Canada and Mexico. The subsequent administration pushed for expanding free trade agreements with much of Latin America. During the presidential campaign of 2008, however, Democrats in particular singled out NAFTA as a cause of job losses and economic decline, and both parties have frequently pointed to China as a cause of American economic woes. Global economic difficulties and recession currently confronts most countries. How will this affect personal and government debt, growth, inequality, and poverty in the United States? How will it affect economic relations between the United States and the rest of the world? We will get a better sense of this as events unfold in the near future.

FOREIGN RELATIONS AND THE WORLD

The United States remains the most powerful actor in world politics, due in large part to the size of its military and its economy. The United States plays a major role in a number of multilateral institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the United Nations.

The United States spent its first century after independence relatively removed from world affairs. Governing a country blessed with geographic remoteness from most of the world's major conflicts, U.S. presidents generally sought to avoid what President Thomas Jefferson called "entangling alliances." The rapid growth of the population and the economy drove the projection of U.S. power beyond its borders, however, in what some Americans came to view as the nation's **manifest destiny**. In the early nineteenth century, President James Monroe (1821–1825) warned European powers to stay out of the entire Western Hemisphere (this became known as the Monroe Doctrine). Later in the century, the United States extended its borders and

its power through economic and military means, with victories in the Mexican War (1846–1848) and the Spanish-American War (1898) and with the annexation of Hawaii (1898).

By the early twentieth century, the United States was the dominant foreign power in Latin America and expanded its influence there under President Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt, who bragged that he “took” Panama from Colombia in 1903 to build the canal there, preferred economic domination and the threat of U.S. military action (what he called the Big Stick) as a means of influence, rather than officially acquiring territory. Roosevelt’s visit to Panama in 1906, the first-ever foreign trip by a U.S. president, boldly ended the era of isolation.

The long-held preference for avoiding entanglements in Europe was forsaken when the United States belatedly entered World War I. The creation of a national military draft enabled a significant increase in military capability, and the Allied victory resulted in a national sense of pride and confidence. At the same time, revulsion at the deaths of a hundred thousand Americans created a strong popular desire to return to isolationism and avoid future wars. The United States entered World War II only after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, in December 1941. Involvement in World War II was a major turning point in the nation’s foreign policy. The United States created a massive army, and its participation was a decisive factor in the Allied victory against the Axis powers. The controversial U.S. decision to deploy its nuclear arsenal against Japan in 1945 heralded its new status as a global superpower.

Almost immediately after World War II, the United States moved to counter the influence of its wartime ally, the Soviet Union, in a growing conflict that came to be known as the cold war. Under the Marshall Plan (1947–1952), the United States invested heavily in the rebuilding of Western Europe, in large part to immunize the region against Communism. The United States also formed an alliance of industrialized democracies, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), in 1949 to ensure the provision of mutual defense in the event of a Soviet attack. In the second half of the twentieth century, the United States acted frequently through direct invasion or covert action to deter Communist threats (real or perceived) in Asia and Latin America.

The U.S. record in its quest to contain the global spread of Communism was mixed. In the Korean War (1950–1953), it succeeded in protecting South Korea from Communist invasion, and it later helped topple numerous governments it viewed as dangerous (such as Guatemala’s in 1954 and Chile’s in 1973). The United States was unable to prevent a Communist victory in China in 1949, however, though it intervened to preserve the government of Taiwan, and it failed in the Vietnam War (1961–1973), a protracted, costly, and politically unpopular conflict that did not prevent a Communist takeover of Viet-

nam. Similarly, despite an attempted invasion and decades of covert action and economic pressure, the United States failed to overthrow the Communist regime of Fidel Castro in neighboring Cuba.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union effectively brought the cold war to an end and left the United States as the only world power. This post-Soviet era nonetheless produced serious new challenges. As the undisputed global leader, the United States was called upon to help resolve ethnic violence that erupted in the Balkans and elsewhere. America’s cold-war involvement in global conflicts and its enhanced power in the post-cold-war era created considerable global resentment of the United States. In the 1990s, the United States intervened militarily in the Persian Gulf (to repel the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait) and in the Balkans (to stem ethnic violence), both times taking part in international peacekeeping efforts. After the terrorist attacks on the United States of September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush declared a “war” against global terrorism and announced that the United States would use unilateral preemptive force against all possible terrorist threats to the United States. This **Bush doctrine** was viewed by many countries, including some U.S. allies, as a rejection of international law and the United Nations. Some critics viewed it as a dangerous projection of U.S. nationalism and a reassertion of the nineteenth-century view of manifest destiny.¹⁷ As a result, anti-Americanism, a long-standing sentiment that goes back even to the period of isolationism, rose dramatically around the world.

In October 2001, in the first manifestation of the Bush doctrine, the United States led a coalition of forces that invaded Afghanistan and toppled the regime that had harbored Al Qaeda, the organization responsible for the September 11 attacks. The Bush doctrine was further called on in March 2003 with the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. The Bush administration claimed that Iraq was a threat to the United States and the world because of its possession of weapons of mass destruction and because it, too, harbored terrorists (neither of which turned out to be correct). By the end of 2008, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had cost 100,000 civilian lives and the deaths of more than 4,000 U.S. soldiers, and the United States has allocated close to \$1 trillion through 2009 for war and security-related expenditures. Contrary to expectations, however, these conflicts became less of an issue in the 2008 presidential elections, as improvements in Iraqi security and a decline in the American economy shifted public attention. Some political analysts hope that the new administration will be able to facilitate a drawdown of troops from Iraq and improve frayed relations with much of the world, which has grown critical of the unilateralist policies of the Bush administration. However, tense relations with Russia, Iran, and at times China mean that the United States will continue to face challenges in the international system.

CURRENT ISSUES

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND U.S. NATIONAL IDENTITY

The current wave of immigration is a hot political issue. In California, for example, voters in 1994 passed an initiative denying state services to illegal immigrants and their children. Some observers have gone so far as to argue that the very size of Mexican immigration in particular will undermine the fundamental values of the United States, claiming that this group is so large and distinct that it will resist assimilation.¹⁸ Others disagree, noting that since the founding of the United States, various waves of immigrants have been viewed as a threat to American political culture but over time have been assimilated. Even those observers who agree that the current flow of immigration differs in many important respects from those of the past generally disagree with the assessment that Mexican immigration poses a threat to U.S. society.¹⁹ Much evidence points to the fact that Hispanic immigrants are speaking English and otherwise assimilating into U.S. culture: more than 90 percent of second-generation Hispanics are either bilingual or mainly English speakers, and many intermarry with non-Hispanic partners. As one scholar has concluded, "Hispanic immigration is part and parcel of broader American patterns of assimilation and integration. Their story, like that of the Irish, Jews, and Italians before them, is an American story."²⁰

Similarly, the public shows mixed views of immigration. After the September 11, 2001, attack, there was a sharp increase in support for restricting immigration, but this support has steadily declined in recent years.²¹ More generally, several scholarly studies indicate that the relatively weak level of social expenditures in the United States has much to do with its cultural diversity. In short, while citizens may be willing to support immigration, they also appear to be much less willing to redistribute wealth to those who they feel are not like them.²² Indeed, the rise of the welfare state in the United States coincides with heavy restrictions on immigration after World War I and II, and the rollback of the welfare state with the rapid increase in immigration starting in the 1980s. The United States continues to be a melting pot of cultures fed by a steady stream of immigrants, but Americans remain ambivalent and deeply divided about this aspect of their society. If economic difficulties persist over the long term, this may increase pressure for restrictions on immigration, as immigrants become the flashpoint for anxieties about economic security. That said, it is projected that by 2042 minorities in the United States will in fact become the majority population.

BOOM AND BUST IN THE U.S. ECONOMY

The U.S. economy has a bad hangover. Over the course of the 2000s there was an enormous boom in the housing market, facilitated by economic growth

and looser (and often unethical and illegal) practices in the loan markets. While home ownership has long been an important symbolic part of the American economy, in recent years a large market grew for speculative residential property. Buyers purchased larger homes and/or second homes on the prospect that they could quickly sell, or "flip," these properties for a substantial profit. In addition, rising housing prices gave many Americans the ability and incentive to borrow against the growing equity in their homes. All of this fed into a bubble economy, where psychological perceptions that one could get rich quick began to override warning signs that the market could not sustain such expansion and growth. By 2006, the bubble began to burst, taking much of the consumers' confidence with it. As of late 2008, home sales had reached a ten-year low, prices had fallen by as much as a third in some markets, and many homeowners found themselves saddled with loans for more than their houses were worth—the first national housing crash since the Great Depression. This decline in the housing market has in turn affected, for example, credit and employment as consumers cut back their spending and financial institutions cut back their loans or went under. This has had a ripple effect on the global economy, which depends on the United States for much of its exports, leading to economic difficulties worldwide, from Europe to Asia.

What is the long-term repercussion of the bubble? Some speculate that it may take several years before the United States can clear these financial problems, leading to reduced growth worldwide. It may also affect the role that the United States plays in the international community, severely restricting its ability to influence international relations through economic or other means. Could the housing market be the first sign in the decline of the United States as the dominant economic force in the global economy? If so, what might be the implications for international growth and globalization?

NOTES

1. Seymour Martin Lipset, *The First New Nation: The United States in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), p. 2.
2. This quotation and its subsequent elaboration are drawn from Theodore J. Lowi et al., *American Government: Power and Purpose*, 7th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), p. 162.
3. Lowi et al., *American Government*, p. 454.
4. Nicholas Lehman, "Insurrection," *New Yorker*, 26 (September 2005), pp. 66–67.
5. Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).
6. See, for example, the recent Pew Internet and American Life Project, www.pewinternet.org (accessed 27 January 2006).
7. Quoted in "Degrees of Separation," *Survey: America, Economist*, 14 (July 2005).

8. Alan Abramowitz, "The United States: Political Culture under Stress," in Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, eds., *The Civic Culture Revisited* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), p. 179.
9. "Degrees of Separation."
10. Lipset, *The First New Nation*, pp. 180–81.
11. *Trends in Core Values and Political Attitudes 1987–2007*, Pew Center for the People and the Press, <http://people-press.org> (accessed 2 August 2008).
12. See IMF World Economic Outlook database, 2008, www.imf.org.
13. Graham K. Wilson, *Only in America? The Politics of the United States in Comparative Perspective* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1998), p. 61.
14. Heritage Foundation, Index of Economic Freedom 2008, www.heritage.org (accessed 19 February 2009).
15. Richard Kogan, *Federal Spending, 2001 Through 2008*, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, March 2008, www.cbpp.org/3-5-08bud.htm (accessed 2 August 2008).
16. For details, see the CIA World Factbook, www.odci.gov (accessed 5 August 2008).
17. This is the argument of Anatole Lieven, *America, Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
18. Samuel P. Huntington, *Who are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004).
19. Tamar Jacoby, ed., *Reinventing the Melting Pot: The New Immigrants and What It Means to Be American* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).
20. Robert A. Levine, "Assimilation, Past and Present," *Public Interest* (Spring 2005), p. 108.
21. "Fewer Americans Favor Cutting Back Immigration" Gallup, July 10, 2008, www.gallup.com (accessed 19 February 2009).
22. Alberto Alesina and Edward Glaeser, *Fighting Poverty in the US and Europe: A World of Difference* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006).

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

- American Revolution** Conflict between Britain and the American colonists that resulted in U.S. independence (1775–1783).
- Articles of Confederation** A weak, confederal regime that governed the colonies after 1781. It was replaced by the U.S. Constitution after 1790.
- Bill of Rights** Ten amendments to the Constitution passed by the first United States Congress in 1789.
- Bush doctrine** President George W. Bush's declaration that the United States would use military force to preempt potential terrorist threats to U.S. security.
- Bush, George W.** President of the United States from 2001 to 2009.
- cabinet** The appointed officials that serve the executive in overseeing the various state bureaucracies.
- civil rights movement** The movement (1955–1965) designed to address the legacy of slavery by ending various forms of racial discrimination.
- Civil War** Conflict between the Southern, slave-holding states and the North.

- The victory of the North preserved the unity of the United States and resulted in the abolition of slavery.
- Declaration of Independence** The declaration of independence from Britain, issued by the Continental Congress in 1776.
- Democratic-Republicans** Early opponents of a strong federal state, led by Thomas Jefferson.
- federalism** A system in which significant state powers, such as taxation, lawmaking, and security are devolved to regional or local bodies.
- Federalists** Early advocates of a strong federal state in the United States, led by Alexander Hamilton.
- gerrymandering** Dividing up electoral districts in such a way as to favor one political party or marginalize certain groups.
- Hispanics** Residents of the United States who trace their ancestry to Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America.
- House of Representatives** The lower house of the U.S. congress (legislature).
- Louisiana Purchase** The 1803 purchase of territory from France that greatly expanded U.S. territory westward.
- manifest destiny** View held by many Americans throughout U.S. history that the U.S. was destined to lead the world.
- melting pot** The diversity of cultures that has historically characterized U.S. society.
- Mexican-American War** The 1846 conflict between Mexico and the United States that resulted in the U.S. acquisition of much of the current Southwest of the United States.
- New Deal** A set of policies between 1933 and 1938 that used state intervention to stimulate the economy and to counter the effects of the Great Depression.
- Obama, Barack** President of the United States, elected in 2008.
- populism** A key feature of U.S. ideology, the idea that the masses should dominate elites, and that the popular will should trump those with professional expertise.
- Progressive Era** The period from 1903–1920 when progressives sought to use the state to limit the power of private business.
- Puritans** Radical protestants, who comprised a large portion of the original American colonists.
- rule of law** All citizens are equal before the law and no one is above the law, including political leaders.
- Senate** The upper house of the United States Congress (legislature).
- separation of powers** A system in which there are significant and independent sources of power within the executive, legislative, and judicial systems.

Thirteenth Amendment The Constitutional amendment that abolished slavery.

utopian moralism The tendency of Americans to view the world in terms of good versus evil.

Vietnam War The protracted, costly, and ultimately unsuccessful attempt to defeat Communism in Southeast Asia (1959–1975).

Voting Rights Act 1965 legislation that eliminated barriers that had been imposed by some states to prevent African Americans from voting. It was seen as a major victory in the struggle for civil rights.

War on Poverty President Lyndon Johnson's use of state spending to combat inequality.

Washington, George Commander of the U.S. forces during the Revolutionary War, and first president of the United States.

WEB LINKS

C-SPAN www.cspan.org public service media focused on U.S. politics
 Library of Congress <http://thomas.loc.gov>
 National Archives www.archives.gov repository for government documents
 Project Vote Smart www.vote-smart.org on elections, elected officials, and candidates
 Real Clear Politics www.realclearpolitics.com politics blog
 Roll Call www.rollcall.com news source focused on Congress
 University of Michigan www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/psusp.html US politics resources

4 FRANCE

Head of state: President Nicolas Sarkozy
(since May 17, 2007)

Head of government:
Prime Minister François Fillon
(since May 17, 2007)

Capital: Paris

Total land size: 547,030 sq km

Population: 64 million

GDP at PPP: 2.047 trillion US\$

GDP per capita at PPP: \$33,200

Human development index ranking: 10

