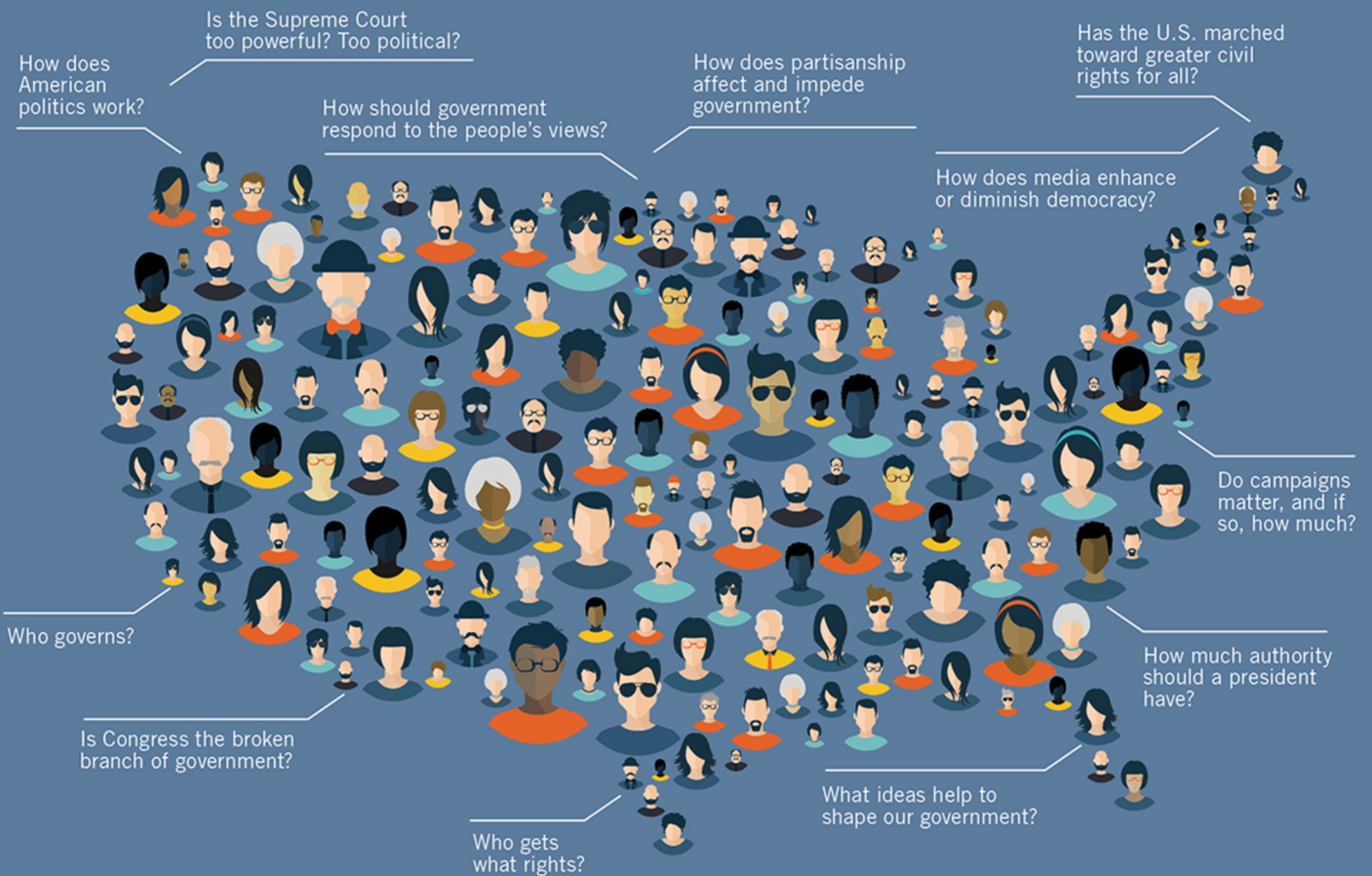


JAMES A. MORONE  
ROGAN KERSH

BRIEF THIRD EDITION

# BY THE PEOPLE

DEBATING AMERICAN GOVERNMENT



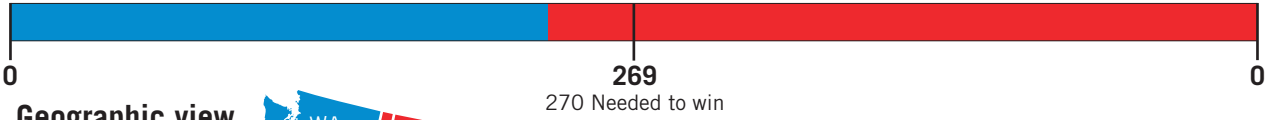
# Electoral College Votes in the 2016 Presidential Election

**Clinton**

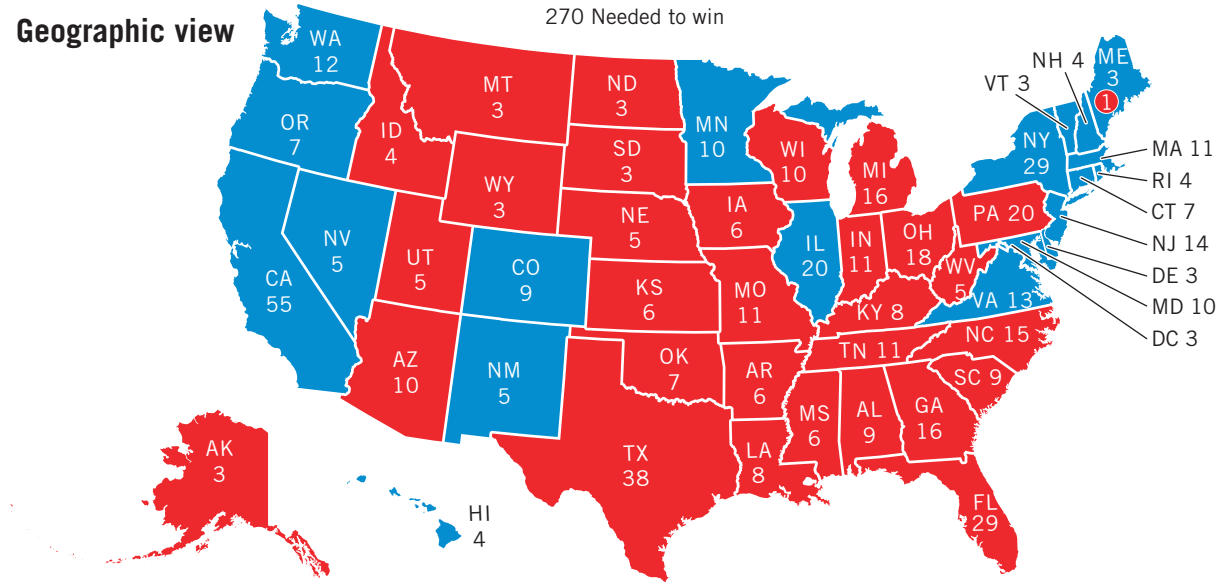
Electoral Votes **232**

**306** **Trump**

Electoral Votes

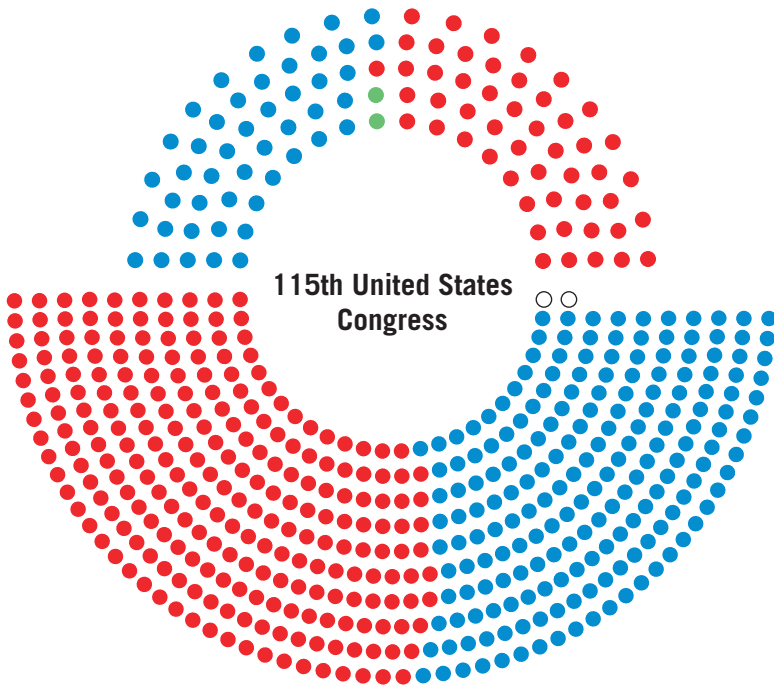


## Geographic view



Senate

House of Representatives



	House	Senate
<b>Democrats</b>	193	47
<b>Republicans</b>	240	51
<b>Women</b>	83	21
<b>Men</b>	352	79

■ Republicans ■ Democrats  
■ Independents  Undecided

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Many teachers and colleagues inspired us. We dedicate this book to four who changed our lives. Their passion for learning and teaching set the standard we aim for every day—and on every page that follows.

Richard O'Donnell

Murray Dry

Jim Barefield

Rogers Smith

*The title of the book comes from the Gettysburg Address. Standing on the battlefield at Gettysburg, President Abraham Lincoln delivered what may be the most beautiful presidential address in American history—defining American government as a government “of the people, by the people, for the people.” Here is the full address.*

**F**our score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

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# Preface

**AT FIRST, THEY CAME IN SMALL** numbers: one child, two children, a few huddled together. Then a surge: In the spring and summer of 2014, tens of thousands of unaccompanied minors crossed the Mexican border into the United States. The exhausted children—mostly from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador—faced poverty and violence at home. Together, this was a humanitarian tragedy. But it was also a political problem.

Conservative critics of the Barack Obama administration slammed the White House for not acting sooner to stem the tide and for being “soft on immigration.” Donald Trump launched his long-shot presidential bid, a year later, with a tough attack on undocumented migrants. From the left, another set of voices condemned the president for not providing services to children whose families were so desperate they would send them alone across dangerous ground to an uncertain destiny. Whatever course the administration took, it faced angry rebukes.

As partisans traded insults and pundits criticized the government’s mistakes, something remarkable happened: Americans of all backgrounds—urban and rural, church and secular, liberal and conservative—came together to help the children. College students and local residents joined to hand out medical kits and food packets. Lawyers flew in to offer free legal assistance in securing asylum. Church leaders created makeshift shelters and organized short-term housing among the congregants. One bishop in San Antonio, Texas, said the crisis had deepened his prayer life. This is a classic story that runs right through American history: People pull together in the face of troubled times.

## Help or Clash?

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That’s the United States in a nutshell. People pitch in. This is a nation of joiners and helpers and activists. It always has been. Visitors in the nineteenth century were astonished by the nation’s civic spirit. To this day Americans form book groups, organize car washes to raise money for good causes, stack sandbags during floods, send checks to the Red Cross, support the military, and insist that the government help those who need help. “We are inevitably our brother’s keeper because we are our brother’s brother,” wrote Martin Luther King. “Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.”<sup>1</sup>

But that’s only one side of the story. Stream a news show and what do you see? Fights! A few years ago, one of us (Jim) was about to go on a news show to discuss the fallout after singer Janet Jackson inadvertently (and very briefly)

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<sup>1</sup>*Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) 181.

went X-rated during the Super Bowl halftime show. Jim was scheduled alongside another commentator who was very agitated about Jackson's behavior and believed that it signaled the decline of America. Jim told the producer that, after exploring our different views, it would be great if we could find some common ground. No way, retorted the producer, who explained her ideal closing shot: You'll be shouting over each other on a split screen while the host coolly ends the segment by saying, "We'll have to leave it there for now, but feelings run high and we'll be hearing a lot more on this topic." Unfortunately, searching for common ground does not draw an audience like people screaming onscreen.

The producer was demonstrating another side of America: rugged individualists who push their own views and self-interests. Individualism is also an all-American story. Its origins lie in a frontier culture that expected everyone to watch out for themselves. This is the America that resents anyone—especially the government—telling people what to do.

Which is the real America? They both are. Sometimes this is a land of cooperation, sometimes a nation of competition. American politics, as you'll see, reflects both views.

## By the People?

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This brief edition of *By the People* was created for those who want a shorter, streamlined, and less expensive version of the more comprehensive edition. Although we have condensed the longer book's story of American government—there is less history and policy here—we think we have preserved the book's essential features, engagements, insights, and tone.

We picked the book's title—*By the People*—because Lincoln's phrase raises the deepest question in American politics: Who has the power? Or to put it more pointedly, do the people rule in this day and age? Democracy is a constant struggle; it is an aspiration, a wish, a quest. In every chapter we'll ask how well Americans are living up to Lincoln's ideal. Does the new media (Chapter 7) or the contemporary Congress (Chapter 10) or the bureaucracy (Chapter 12) or state government (Chapter 3) support or subvert government by the people? We'll present the details—and let you decide whether we should press for reform or leave things alone.

We'll be straight with you: We won't pretend there was a golden age in some imaginary past. After all, the United States has been home to political machines that enthusiastically stole votes, maintains an Electoral College designed to distort the people's vote for president, and governs through an elaborate system of checks and balances that blunts the popular will. (Again, you'll soon see two sides to each of these features of American government.) At the same time, you'll read about bold popular movements and unexpected electoral surges that changed the face of the nation. In many ways, these are the

most exciting moments in American history. They spring up at unexpected times, inspiring ordinary people to achieve great things. Does Donald Trump's election signify such a surge? Or are the protest movements that have sprung up the larger agent of change? Read on and you'll be able to answer those questions—and many more.

## Who Are We?

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Here's Jim's very first political memory: My parents were watching TV, and as soon as I walked into the room I could see that my mother was trying hard not to cry. "What's going on?" I asked my parents nervously. My dad—a proud Republican who had fought in World War II—said, "Well, the U.S. had a racial problem, but that man there, he's going to get us past it." "That man there" was Martin Luther King Jr., giving one of the most famous speeches in American history: "I have a dream," said King, that "my four little children will one day live in a country where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." My mother had been born in Poland and her near tears reflected pride in her new nation—and the uplifting aspirations of that August day.

Both of us grew up thinking about the dream—and about the nation that dreams it. America is constantly changing, constantly new. In every chapter we'll ask the same question: Who are we? We'll explore a lot of different answers.

Four themes are especially important in this book. **Race** touches everything in the United States, from the Constitution (Chapter 2) to the political parties (Chapter 9). The nation rose up out of both freedom and slavery; race quickly became one of the great crucibles of American liberty. Likewise, **immigration** includes some of history's saddest passages involving the mistreatment of recent arrivals. And yet we are a nation of immigrants that continues to welcome the world's "huddled masses yearning to breathe free"—the famous words long associated with the Statue of Liberty. More than a fifth of all the emigrants around the globe come to the United States every year. Race and immigration are tied up in another powerful topic: **gender and sexuality**. From women in Congress to same-sex marriage, from teen pregnancy to abortion, we'll show how negotiating an answer to "Who are we?" always puts an emphasis on questions of gender and sexuality. Finally, we're especially interested in **American generations**, and more specifically the attitudes and contributions of today's young people, the millennial generation. If you're one of them, the future belongs to you. This book is an owner's manual for the government that you're going to inherit. We'll have much to say about you as we go along.

The most important thing about all these categories is not their history, or the ways they've influenced voting behavior, or how the courts treat them—although we'll cover all those topics. Rather, what matters most about American politics are the opportunities to get involved. As you'll see, groups and individuals can and do make a difference in a nation that is always evolving. We hope our book inspires you to actively participate in making the American future.

## How Government Works

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We won't oversell the role of individuals. People's ability to advance political change is always shaped by the way the government is organized and operates. From the very start, this book emphasizes the unusual structure of American government.

Begin with a Constitution full of checks and balances, add a multilayered federalism, develop a chaotic public administration (President Franklin Roosevelt cheerfully called the uproar a three-ring circus), spin off functions to the private sector (especially during wars), complexify Congress (thirty-one different committees and subcommittees tried to claim jurisdiction over just one national health insurance proposal), and inject state and federal courts into every cranny of the system. Then throw the entire apparatus open to any interest group that shows up. The twenty-first century adds a 24/7 news cycle with commentary all the time and from every angle.

Turn to foreign policy, where high principles contend with tough-minded realism in a fractious world. When the most formidable military in human history is mustered into action, watch presidential power expand so rapidly that it sets off international debates about whether the great republic is morphing into an empire.

## In Short

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As you read this book, you'll repeatedly encounter four questions:

- *Who governs?* This is the question of democracy and power—or, as we phrased it earlier: Is this government by the people? And if and where it falls short, how might we refresh our democracy?
- *How does American politics work?* Our job is to make you think like a political scientist. What does that involve? You'll learn in the next chapter—and throughout the book.
- *What does government do?* You can't answer the first two questions if you don't know what the courts or the White House or Congress or interest groups actually do—and how they do it.
- *Who are we?* Americans endlessly debate America's identity. We are students, businesspeople, Hispanics, seniors, Texans, environmentalists, gays, Republicans, Democrats, Christians, Muslims, military families—and the list goes on. Sometimes it adds up to one united people; at other times we're left to wonder how to get along. Either way, American politics rises up from—and shapes—a cacophony of identities and interests.

## Changes to the Third Edition

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In this new edition, we have:

- Analyzed recent seismic events that have shaken up our institutions, ideas, and interests alongside new and updated statistics and figures in each chapter to track slower moving, but influential, trends.

- Analyzed the raucous 2016 primary and general election season.
- Explored the Black Lives Matter movement that reached into campuses where students engaged in an active questioning of First Amendment rights.
- Assessed the Tea Party's breaching of the Republican Party and changes within both parties.
- Considered the ramifications of the unexpected death of a justice that left the fate of a deeply divided Supreme Court in the hands of the first Republican majority in eight years.
- Examined the dissolution of nation-states in the Middle East with the outbreak of a Sunni-Shia regional war.
- Added an entirely new section on how federalism evolved during the Obama administration, using the term progressive federalism to indicate the increased tendency to set goals at the national level but rely on states to implement these goals, whether related to education, health-care, or other policy areas.
- Provided updated and new statistics on the growing income gap and its political ramifications including a new graph showing that the middle class is losing ground relative to upper and lower classes, an analysis of current views of the American Dream, and assessment of the NAFTA and TTIP debates.
- Incorporated new data on millennial trends regarding party affiliation, attitudes, and involvement in the types of participation.
- Added coverage of government-sponsored cyberwarfare.
- Revised terrorism coverage extensively alongside new discussions of the role of the media and the handling of recent terrorist attacks in light of bureaucratic pathologies and updated discussions on contact with forbidden groups, the reauthorization of the Patriot Act, and the ending of the NSA's collection of telecommunication data.
- Added new section on in-depth analysis of how far we have come in granting civil rights by examining voting rights, income, poverty rates, health, life expectancy, and incarceration rates. This highlights the Supreme Court ruling on the Voting Rights Act and voter turnout.

## Getting Involved

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*By the People* is a new approach to courses in American government. The book displays U.S. politics and government in all its glory, messiness, and power. Like every textbook, this one informs our readers. But, as we hope you can already see, we don't describe government (or ideas about government) as inert and fixed. What's exciting about American politics, like the nation itself, is how fast it changes. And the constant, endless arguments about what it is and what it should be next. Our aim is to get you engaged—whether you

already love politics, are a complete newcomer to government, or whether you are a newcomer to the United States itself. In the pages that follow, we'll bring American government to life. Get ready to start a great debate . . . about your future.

One final word: We've been working out the story line for this book throughout our teaching careers. We've taught everything from very large lectures to small seminars. Like all teachers, we've learned through trial and error. We've worked hard to pack this book with the stories, questions, and features that our own students have found effective. That spirit—the lessons we've learned in the classroom—animates everything that follows.

## Ensuring Student Success

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Oxford University Press offers instructors and students a comprehensive ancillary package for qualified adopters of *By the People*.

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- Enables students to experience how politics works, seeing the trade-offs required to produce meaningful policies and outcomes
- Is optimized to work on any mobile device or computer
- Ends with Assessments to connect the activity to classroom discussions

**Interactive Media Activities include:**

- NEW—Individualism vs. Solidarity
- Passing Immigration Reform
- Electing Cheryl Martin
- Building the USS *Relief*
- Intervening in Bhutan
- The Fight Against Warrantless Wiretapping
- Balancing the Budget
- NEW—Redistricting in “Texachusetts”
- NEW—Saving the Electric Car
- Election Reform
- NEW—Fact-checking the Media
- NEW—Passing the Thirteenth Amendment
- NEW—Negotiating with China

**NEW—A Closer Look Media Tutorials:** Available on Dashboard and on the *By the People*, Third Edition, Free and Open Companion Website ([www.oup.com/us/morone](http://www.oup.com/us/morone)), these activities are designed to teach key concepts and help students master important, High-interest class material. Each tutorial runs

3–5 minutes and ends with assessment opportunities students to test what they know. Topics include:

- **The Constitution: A Brief Tour**
- **Civil Rights:** How does the Fourteenth Amendment ensure equal rights for all Citizens?
- **Federalism:** What does it mean to Incorporate the Bill of Rights?
- **Political Participation:** What affects voter turnout?
- **Media:** How is the news shaped by agenda setting, framing, and profit bias?
- **Interest Groups:** What is a Political Action Committee (PAC), and what makes some PACs Super PACs?
- **Congress:** Why do we hate Congress but keep electing the same representatives?
- **The Judiciary:** How do judges interpret the Constitution?
- **Polling:** How do we know what people know?
- **Campaigns and Elections:** How does gerrymandering work?

**Companion website at [www.oup.com/us/morone](http://www.oup.com/us/morone):** This open-access companion website includes a number of learning tools to help students study and review key concepts presented in the text, including learning objectives, key-concept summaries, quizzes, essay questions, web activities, and web links.

**Ancillary Resource Center (ARC):** This convenient, instructor-focused website provides access to all of the up-to-date teaching resources for this text while guaranteeing the security of grade-significant resources. In addition, it allows Oxford University Press to keep instructors informed when new content becomes available. Register for access and create your individual user account by visiting [www.oup.com/us/morone](http://www.oup.com/us/morone).

The following items are available on the ARC:

- **Instructor’s Manual and Test Bank:** includes chapter objectives, detailed chapter outlines, lecture, suggestions and activities, discussion questions, and video and web resources. The test bank includes multiple-choice, short answer, and essay questions.
- **Computerized Test Bank:** utilizes Diploma, a test-authoring and management tool. Diploma is designed for both novice and advanced users and enables instructors to create and edit questions, compose randomized quizzes and tests with an intuitive drag-and-drop tool, post quizzes and tests to online courses, and print quizzes and tests for paper-based assessments.

- **Downloadable and customizable PowerPoint slides:** includes one set for in-class presentations and the other for text images
- **Access to thirty CNN videos** correlated to the chapter topics of the text. Each clip is approximately five to ten minutes long, offering a great way to launch your lecture
- **Clicker questions** to be used in conjunction with any classroom response system

**Course Cartridges** containing student and instructor resources are available through Angel, Blackboard, Canvas, D2L, Moodle, Respondus, or whatever course management system you prefer.

**Now Playing: Learning American Government Through Film:** Through documentaries, feature films, and YouTube videos, *Now Playing: Learning American Government Through Film* provides a variety of suggested video examples that illustrate concepts covered in the text. Each video is accompanied by a brief summary and discussion questions. It is available in both a student and an instructor version and can be packaged with *By the People*, Third Edition, for free.

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Adopters of *By the People* can package *any* Oxford University Press book with the text for a twenty percent savings off the total package price. See our many trade and scholarly offerings at [www.oup.com](http://www.oup.com), then contact your local OUP sales representative to request a package ISBN. In addition, the following items can be packaged with the text for free:

- *Now Playing: Learning American Government Through Film:*  
ISBN 9780190233358
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We also encourage the following texts for packaging:

- Very Short Introduction Series:
  - Valelly, *American Politics*
  - Crick, *Democracy*
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- Lindsay, *Investigating American Democracy: Readings on Core Questions*
- Niven, *Barack Obama: A Pocket Biography of Our 44th President*
- Wilkins, *Questioning Numbers: How to Read and Critique Research*

## Acknowledgments

---

When he signed us up to write this book, publisher John Challice looked us each in the eye and said, “You know, this is going to be so much work—you’re going to be married to us.” He was right. Yes, it was a lot of work. And yes, the Oxford team has been like a family that carried us through the process.

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*By the People's* long journey to completion grew infinitely more enjoyable once Sara Pesek joined me for the trip—through this book and everywhere else, from Australia to Ze Café in midtown New York City. Sara's insights into public policy made for the liveliest newlyweds' conversations (if you're a politics junkie) imaginable; my biggest bouquet of thanks to her for that rarest of gifts: a loving, fully joined partnership.

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The revisions for this edition were joyfully interrupted by Jim's wedding. If you detect a smile between the lines, it's because we were celebrating my new family. Rebecca Henderson leapt into my life filling it with talk and ideas and dreams (and much more). And Harry, my wonderful son, takes me hiking and talks me through high ridges that I couldn't imagine trying without him. If this edition reads happier than the last—it's the spirit of Harry and Rebecca on the pages.

## Manuscript Reviewers

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We have greatly benefited from the perceptive comments and suggestions of the many talented scholars and instructors who reviewed the manuscript of *By the People*. They went far beyond the call of duty in sharing thoughts and making corrections. Their insight and suggestions contributed immensely to the work.

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Finally, thanks to you for picking up this book. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we did writing.

Jim Morone and Rogan Kersh



BRIEF THIRD EDITION

# BY THE PEOPLE

DEBATING AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

# Ideas That Shape American Politics

1



In this chapter,  
you will:

**ARMY CAPTAIN RUSSELL BURGOS** hunkered down in his bunker as mortars ripped through the night. A year ago he had been a political science professor; now he was fighting in Iraq. Burgos's unit was operating in the Sunni Triangle, where the fighting was fiercest. "A mortar attack in the middle of the night," he mused, "is an odd place to reconsider a course syllabus." But that is exactly what he found himself doing. Experiencing war made him see politics and societies in new ways.

As shells fell on the American base, Burgos thought about something that his classes had been missing: the study of ideas. The United States entered the war because of what key decision makers believed. All around him, men and women were fighting and dying over ideas—ideas such as freedom, democracy, equality, power, and faith in God.

Strangely enough, Burgos wrote later, ideas had barely come up in his own political science classes. Yet ideas helped explain why the United States launched the war, how it fought the war, and how it explained the war to both friends and enemies.<sup>1</sup>

*Who are we?* Our ideas tell us—and they tell the world. The United States is a nation built on ideas. You will see ideas at work in every chapter of this book, for they touch every feature of government and politics. They affect the way Americans define their national ideals, their political goals, and their nation itself. As you read about these ideas—and as you continue through this book—think about other important ideas that should be added to the list alongside the seven we discuss in this chapter. If you come up with a compelling example, we may quote you in the next edition.

- Learn about four key questions.
- Learn about the seven key American ideas: liberty, self-rule, limited government, individualism, the American dream, equality, and faith in God.
- Explore the essential question: How do ideas affect politics?

---

● *Army Captain Russell Burgos hands out supplies to Iraqi children in 2004.*

## The Spirit of American Politics

We address four questions throughout this book to help make sense of American politics and government. By the time you finish reading, you will understand the debates sparked by each question—and you will be able to participate knowledgeably yourself.

### Who Governs?

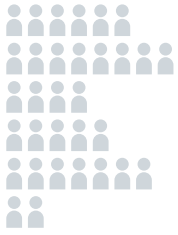
As Benjamin Franklin left the Constitutional Convention in 1787, a woman stopped him. “What kind of government have you given us?” she asked. According to legend, the wise old Franklin responded, “A republic, madam—if you can keep it.” The United States organized itself around a ringing declaration of popular rule: Governments derive “their just power from the consent of the governed.” In a **republic**, the people are in charge. Franklin knew, however, that popular governments are extremely difficult to “keep.” All previous republics—such as Athens, Rome, and Florence—had collapsed. His point was that the people must be vigilant and active if they are to maintain control.

**Republic:** A government in which citizens rule indirectly and make government decisions through their elected representatives.

Who governs? Do the people rule? Some of us would answer “yes—and today more than ever.” After all, candidates like Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders defied party leaders in the 2016 election and each went a long way. Others are not so sure. What if the people are not in charge—then who is?

Over the years, political scientists have developed theories to answer the question of where the power really lies in American politics. Four theories are especially important:

- *Pluralism* suggests that people can influence government through the many interest groups that spring up to champion everything from fighting global warming to banning abortions. Pluralists suggest that interest groups give most people a voice. Competing and bargaining, interest groups are a prime mover in many government decisions.
- *Elite theory* counters that power actually rests in the hands of a small number of wealthy and powerful individuals—especially corporate executives and top government officials. The Tea Party, Black Lives Matter, and many other movements all have charged that elites were not sharing power with common people.
- *Bureaucratic theory* argues that the real control lies with the millions of men and women who carry out the day-to-day operations of modern government. Here the power of most Americans to weigh in on policy-making is sidelined, as bureaucratic experts establish policy regardless of elections and interest groups.
- *Social movement theory* emphasizes the power citizens can wield when they organize and rise up in protest—regardless of who is in control of day-to-day politics.



## BY THE NUMBERS

# American Ideas

Rank of Americans in self-reported happiness compared to citizens of more than 100 other nations, according to the latest World Happiness Project: **15**

Rank of Swiss, Mexicans, and Afghans, respectively: **1, 14, 153**

Number of times the word *rights* appears in the Declaration of Independence: **10**

Number of times the word *rights* appears in the original Constitution: **0**

Number of times the word *rights* appears in amendments to the Constitution: **15**

Percentage of Americans who say the gap between the rich and everyone else has increased in the last 10 years: **65**

Percentage of Italians, Poles, and Americans, respectively, who agree that “it is the role of the government to take care of people who cannot care for themselves”: **66, 56, 23**

Percentage of Americans who say that religion is “very important” to them: **50**

Percentage of Spaniards, British, and French who say the same: **22, 17, 13**

Percentage of Americans who agreed that “most people who work hard will get ahead” in 2000: **74**

Percentage of Americans who agreed in 2016: **62**

Percentage of 18–29 year-olds agreeing “The American dream is dead,” 2016: **48**

These theories represent very different answers to the vital question: Who rules in America? Have we remained a republic, governed by the people? We will often return to this question—and ask you to consider which of these theories best describes power in the United States today. (And, yes, you’ll be able to mix, match, and create your own.) However, to answer a question like who is in charge you have to know how the political system actually works.

## How Does American Politics Work?

Consider a classic definition of politics: *who gets what, when, and how.*<sup>2</sup> Every society has limited amounts of desirable goods such as money, prestige, and power. Politics helps determine how those resources are distributed—to which people, in what amounts, under which rules. A second definition is even simpler: Politics is how a society makes its collective decisions. Every nation has its own way of deciding. This book explains how collective decisions are made in the United States. The key to understanding our political decision making lies in four “Is”: ideas, interests, individuals, and institutions such as Congress, the Supreme Court, and the media.



● *The U.S. Capitol, Washington, DC. Tourists see an impressive monument to democracy. Political scientists see an institution with complicated rules that give advantage to some individuals and groups.*

**Institutions:** The organizations, norms, and rules that structure government and public action.

Rush Limbaugh and Rachel Maddow. Political scientists, on the other hand, stress **institutions**—*the organizations, norms, and rules that structure political action*. Congress, the Supreme Court, and the Department of Homeland Security are all institutions.

Think about how institutions influence your own behavior. You may compete in a classroom by making arguments. If the debate gets heated and you shove someone, however, you are in trouble. But if you play basketball after class, things are quite the opposite. There, a little shoving is fine, but no one wants to play hoops with someone who is always arguing. Different institutions—the classroom, the gym—have different rules, and most people adopt them without a second thought. Note how the different institutional rules give some people advantages over others. Smart students who think quickly have an advantage in one institution (the classroom), while fast, athletic students have an advantage in another (the gym). Political institutions work in the same way. The U.S. Senate, the Chicago City Council, the Nevada legislature, the state courts in Florida, the governor’s office in Wisconsin, the Marine Corps, the Department of Agriculture, and thousands of other institutions all have their own rules and procedures. Each institution organizes behavior. Each gives an advantage to some interests over others. By the time you finish this book, you will know to ask the same question every time you encounter a political issue. Which institutions are involved, and how do they influence politics?

**Rational-choice theory:** An approach to political behavior that views individuals as rational, decisive actors who know their political interests and seek to act on them.

**Interests.** For many social scientists, interests are the center of the story. Political action often flows from individuals, groups, and nations pursuing their own self-interest. In the chapters that follow, we explore three types of interests: we examine whether rational self-interest motivates people’s political actions and opinions (known as **rational-choice theory**); we trace the political

**Ideas.** Powerful ideas shape American politics. As you will see later in this chapter, we stress seven essential ideas: liberty, democracy (or self-rule), individualism, limited government, the American dream, equality, and faith in God. At first glance, they may all look simple; as you will quickly learn, however, each has at least two very different sides. Each idea provokes long, loud controversies about what values and policies Americans should pursue.

**Institutions.** When most people talk about politics, they think about individuals: President Donald Trump, senators such as Marco Rubio (R-FL), governors like Jerry Brown (D-CA) and Nikki Haley (R-SC), or commentators such as



influence of interests and groups; and we consider the ideal of a public interest shared by everyone in society.

**Individuals.** Finally, individuals influence political outcomes. This book puts special emphasis on how ordinary people change their world. Our hope is simple: We want to inspire you, our reader, to get involved.

## What Does Government Do?

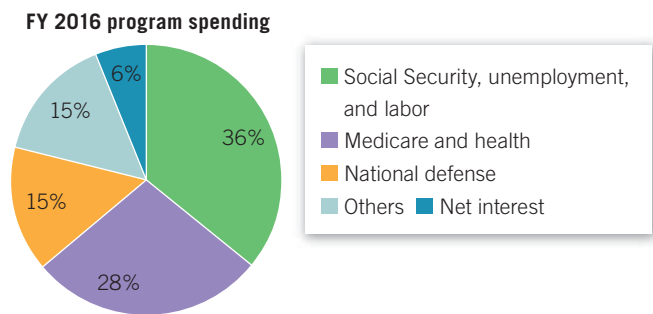
Back in 1787, the Constitution’s creators stated the basic goals of the new government: “Establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty.” Their list remains remarkably accurate, even as the size of our government has expanded dramatically.

Americans have a very active civil society. People come together voluntarily to achieve a goal through groups, such as a Bible study circle, a group of recycling volunteers, a business association, or a student government. In the abstract, at least, Americans prefer voluntary groups to government action. Polls consistently reflect public disapproval for all aspects of government: bureaucrats, the mainstream media, lobbyists, and Congress. Today, only about 24 percent of Americans trust the national government “to do the right thing most of the time.”<sup>3</sup>

You can get a good idea of the federal government’s priorities by looking at its major budget categories. Figure 1.1 shows you how the federal government spends its \$4.1 trillion annual budget. Many people are surprised when they examine the federal budget for the first time. More than 61 percent of all federal government spending goes to just four programs: the military, Social Security (which provides a steady income for people over the age of sixty-five, as well as for people with disabilities and other groups), Medicare (which provides healthcare for people over sixty-five), and Medicaid (which provides healthcare for some poor people; about half of Medicaid spending also goes to people over sixty-five). America’s national government devotes most of its resources to the military and to seniors.

All four of these big-ticket items are immensely popular programs. Although every politician is for smaller government, very few have the courage to take on any of these four programs—no matter how much they cost. In short, Americans dislike government in the abstract. However, by and large, they support many of the things that government actually does.

The government sets the rules for society. Drive on the right side of the street. Stop at red lights. No tobacco for children. No rat hairs or bug parts in restaurant food. No discrimination



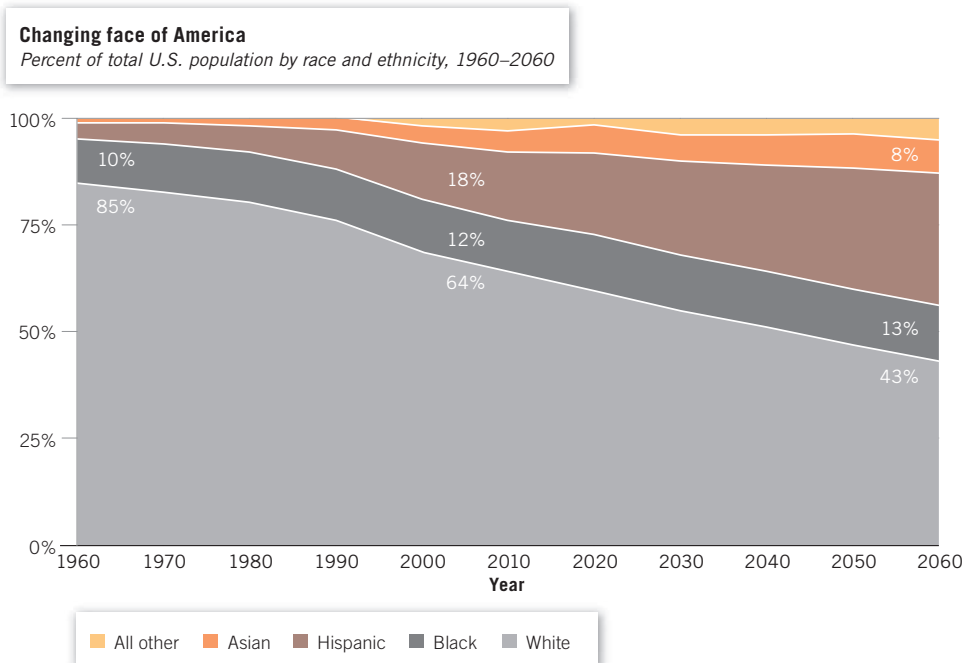
● FIGURE 1.1 The U.S. federal budget. (Christopher Chantrill)

against women when hiring. Sometimes the rules make sense to most people; other times they trigger fierce debates. In either case, governments affect what we do almost every minute of every day. As you read this book, think about what government should do, what it should stay out of, and why.

## Who Are We?

In a rapidly changing, diverse, immigrant nation, this may be the deepest question of all. The United States is a nation of immigrants, a country where individuals come to reinvent themselves. The nation is always changing—the latest shift sees people who consider themselves the majority (Caucasians) becoming a minority of the population in the next thirty years (see Figure 1.2). American politics constantly addresses the most fundamental question about a people: Who are we?

We begin every chapter of this book by showing how the topics in the chapter help explain who we are. All the features of American politics—foundational ideas, the Constitution, presidents, justices, media personalities, bureaucrats, interest groups, and more—are part of the struggle to define and redefine the nation.



● **FIGURE 1.2** Race and ethnicity in America—yesterday, today, and tomorrow. (U.S. Census Bureau)

The most important answer to that question is *you*. If you are part of the so-called “millennial” generation, defined as including those aged 16–34, you are the future of American politics. To us, that is a comforting thought. Studies of the millennial generation (or Generation Y) show that you are, on average, more responsible, harder-working, and more law-abiding than the generations that came before (including ours). You tend to volunteer more, donate a higher share of your income to charity, and start more entrepreneurial organizations with social impact. You might just be the generation that finally redeems the endless American quest for racial harmony and gender equality. You are also a generation at home in a rapidly changing and diverse world.

We do have one concern, however. Compared to previous generations, millennials are less interested in politics, public service, or even news events. Will this generation take up the challenge of “keeping up the republic”? If a whole generation is reluctant to get involved, American democracy will suffer.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

- » We explore American government by asking four questions: Who governs? How does American politics work? What does government do? And who are we?
- » In a republic, power rests with the people. However, this is a difficult form of government to maintain.
- » American political decisions are shaped by four “I” factors: ideas, institutions, interests, and individuals.
- » Americans tend to dislike their national government—but like the benefits that government programs provide.
- » Because the nation is so diverse—and so rapidly changing—the answer to the question of who we are is constantly being rewritten.
- » Every feature of American politics influences this constant debate over defining the nation and its people.

## A Nation of Ideas

As the colonies broke away from England, on July 4, 1776, American leaders issued a Declaration of Independence explaining their revolutionary actions. Its second paragraph describes the idea that animated them:

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.*