



This is “Citizens and Politics”, chapter 5 from the book [A Primer on Politics \(index.html\)](#) (v. 0.0).

This book is licensed under a [Creative Commons by-nc-sa 3.0](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/) license. See the license for more details, but that basically means you can share this book as long as you credit the author (but see below), don't make money from it, and do make it available to everyone else under the same terms.

This content was accessible as of December 29, 2012, and it was downloaded then by [Andy Schmitz](http://lardbucket.org) in an effort to preserve the availability of this book.

Normally, the author and publisher would be credited here. However, the publisher has asked for the customary Creative Commons attribution to the original publisher, authors, title, and book URI to be removed. Additionally, per the publisher's request, their name has been removed in some passages. More information is available on this project's [attribution page](http://2012books.lardbucket.org/attribution.html?utm_source=header).

For more information on the source of this book, or why it is available for free, please see [the project's home page](http://2012books.lardbucket.org/). You can browse or download additional books there.

## Chapter 5

---

### Citizens and Politics

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

People participate in politics in a variety of ways. At the most basic level, they vote. They may read or watch news or information about politics. They may get involved in a campaign, by giving money or volunteering their time. They might even run for office. They might join an interest group, or even get out and protest something they don't like, or rally for something they do. Depending on the system of government in the state in which they live, they will have more or fewer opportunities for participation.

## 5.1 Political Culture

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this section, you will learn:

1. What political culture is.
2. What political socialization is.

How people participate, and how much they participate, may be determined in part by political culture. **Political culture**<sup>1</sup> is a broadly shared system of beliefs on the nature of government and citizens' roles within government. "Broadly shared" means these are ideas that large numbers of people agree upon. These values influence the way decisions are made and what people think should happen in public life. The idea of political culture therefore attempts to explain why people behave the way they do - in terms not so much of their specific desires, but rather in terms of what they believe about what government should be like and how it should be run.

Political culture, and hence public opinion, starts with what is called **political socialization**<sup>2</sup>—all of the elements and influences that go into making any one person's outlook on political life. The influences are fairly obvious once you stop and think about them—your parents, friends and neighbors, education, media, where you work. Some of this appears to be formed by your experiences in your late teens and college years. That is, for example, why so much advertising is targeted at young adults. People in that age group haven't entirely made up their minds about things, and so advertisers pursue them in hopes of snaring potential longtime, loyal customers.

1. A broadly shared set of beliefs about the nature of politics and government.
2. Factors that influence a person's development and opinions.

So, college will have a big impact on how you think about politics and government. You may largely disagree with what I think, for example, but odds are you will be nudged a little bit one way or another by the experience of reading this book. The

opinions of your professors and the people you meet in college will necessarily make you think a little bit differently about the world.

What you believe about government and citizens' roles within it makes up political culture, an idea that annoys some political scientists because it's hard to measure (and therefore you can't really crank out fancy equations to demonstrate it). Nonetheless, political culture can tell us something about what people think before they vote or make other political decisions. It can't necessarily tell us how people will decide, but it can tell us something about what items and choices will make their way onto the public agenda.

How do aspects of American political culture color the way our government operates? Some elements of American political culture include the following:

- Liberty: U.S. citizens believe they are free to make choices in most aspects of life.
- Equality: Everyone is regarded as equal before the law.
- Individualism: Americans tend to think individuals are responsible for themselves. Especially other individuals.
- Democracy: We expect to vote on things.
- Justice: If someone has been wronged, there should be recompense. People who have broken the law should be punished.
- The rule of law: Aside from speed limits, we expect to obey the law, even when no one is looking.
- Nationalism: Americans tend to be remarkably proud of their country, and to think it is somehow different and special. This is sometimes called **American exceptionalism**<sup>3</sup>. This thought can go so far as to mean that the United States has a special mission to spread freedom and democracy (and capitalism). As Ronald Reagan once said, echoing Puritan pioneer John Withrop, who was quoting the Bible, America is a "shining city on the hill." This level of chest-pounding, cheerleading self-celebration is sometimes quite annoying to non-U.S. citizens (something to keep in mind when you travel overseas). The United States has done some good things in its time, but if you stop to think about it, every country is special and different. But many Americans will tell you that the U.S. is the best place on earth, even when they've never lived anywhere else.
- Optimism: We expect things to get better.
- Idealism: The belief that a better political system can and will be created.

3. The idea that the United States is different than the rest of the world, with a special mission to spread freedom and democracy across the globe.

Every nation has some kind of political culture. People in other nations tend to have less faith in government than do Americans (though that may be changing in an era when so many candidates say “the system is broken” as their opening line). Europeans tend to value public consensus and state support for the individual a little more than do U.S. citizens; in India and the United Kingdom, social and economic class play a bigger role in politics than they do in the U.S.

In the case of the U.S., whereas we might agree broadly that liberty, opportunity and fairness is what we believe in, when it comes to specifics we rapidly break down into different camps as to how these ideas will be translated into policy. For example, consider the notion of equality. What does it mean for us to be equal? We believe everyone should get to vote over a certain age, although for a long time and in different parts of the country this wasn’t always true. For example the Founding Fathers thought only property owning males should get to vote. Gradually, this franchise was extended to every citizen over the age of 18.

But what else could equality mean? We generally favor equality of opportunity, at least in name if not in practice. Some Americans would prefer equality of outcome, and point to income disparities between the rich and the poor to suggest that equality of opportunity must be reflected in equality of result for it to be meaningful. Others oppose equality of result, and suggest that people need to make their own way, so that hard work and initiative are rewarded.

Regionally, we still find a great deal of variation in terms of political culture. The politics of Chicago, Seattle, and Atlanta are quite different, as are the politics of urban and rural settings. (People from the east who visit Seattle are surprised to see Seattleites waiting at crosswalks for the light to change, even when there are no cars coming. Some are even more surprised when they get tickets for jaywalking.) As a result, government operates in different ways in each setting, with different expectations and frequently outcomes.

The political scientist Daniel Elazar identified three types of American political culture (others have found more):

- Moralistic: Society matters slightly more than does the individual; government’s role is to create a good society in which the community can flourish. Typical of the Midwest and parts of the West.
- Individualistic: Government is limited to helping individuals advance; it isn’t always clean; it shouldn’t get involved in private matters. Common in the Northeast.

- Traditionalist: Government preserves the existing social order; social and family connections tend to dominate politics. Common in the South.

These are generalizations, of course. Within every state are pockets of different sets of belief and, as with ideology, people may have a mixed set of beliefs about politics.

Another related factor that can influence political outcomes is what has been called the **political landscape**<sup>4</sup>. This includes a variety of social and demographic factors—age, race, gender, average level of education, average incomes, percentage of home ownership, level of employment, major employers. So, for example, an area with a higher percentage of senior citizens will vote more often and be more concerned about issues such as Social Security. In some communities, senior citizens may be less likely to vote for school funding measures. Some wealthier areas of the U.S. (but not all) are more likely to vote Republican; some (but not all) poorer areas may vote Democrat more often. Urban areas tend to vote Democrat; rural areas are more likely to vote Republican. Homeowners tend to vote more often than renters. Areas with higher percentages of immigrants may be more concerned about immigration issues; U.S. states on the border with Mexico, for example, will have populations who feel quite differently about immigration issues. For the United States, those two issues—increasing diversity plus an aging population—will continue to inform politics for some years to come.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Political culture can tell us what gets on the agenda, not necessarily what decisions will be made.
- Political culture varies across nations and within nations.
- Political socialization includes all of the influences in a person's life.

### EXERCISES

1. What political culture best describes the way you feel about politics and government?
2. What influences have shaped your beliefs about politics and government?

4. Demographic and social factors that may influence how people in a particular state or region feel about politics.

## 5.2 Media

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this section, you will learn:

1. How media influences politics.
2. How media covers politics.
3. How the news business works.

One of the sources of political socialization, and also a reflection of political culture and public opinion, is mass media. Clearly, **mass media**<sup>5</sup>—including TV, radio, print publications and the internet—have a huge impact on our lives, and hence on politics. Nothing seems to consume us so much as the various forms of media, which raises the question of whether we are, as the late Neil Postman put it, “entertaining ourselves to death,” or simply doing that thing which makes us human—communicating with other humans.

Media are a way in which political officials communicate with citizens, and media also reflect feedback from citizens to those officials. “The news” is how most people find out what’s going on in government. An elected official can have a town-hall meeting in her or his district or community, for example, but will only meet with a handful of constituents. At election time, local candidates may knock on the doors of a lot of constituents, but that happens only every two to four years, and the meetings are brief. Elected officials may even mail out newsletters to constituents, but even that is only occasional.

News media provide daily coverage of the events and ideas of government. Done well, citizens get a chance to see, hear and read about what their elected officials are saying and doing, and what issues have moved to the forefront of the political discussion. Done poorly, reports may miss important issues or misunderstand factors that might be leading to one decision or another.

5. Systems of delivering information to a broad audience who may be distant from the source of the information.

The idea of free speech has a long tradition in American politics. Freedom of speech has been identified as one of the hallmarks of a democratic society, and yet the job of news media is seen differently in different parts of the world. So in democratic societies, news media are relatively unencumbered in how and what they decide to cover. In some societies, reporters are allegedly free, but may be bullied, arrested or even killed for trying to tell what they perceive to be the truth. In other countries, news media are seen as simply another arm of the state, there to help the state tell people what they think they should know, and how they should understand that information.

### **The Roots of Free Speech in the United States**

By making freedom of speech and of the press one of the very first things added to the Constitution, the Founding Fathers clearly signaled their belief that freedom of communication is of paramount importance to a functioning republic. It should be easy to see why. You have to be able to discuss things openly and without fear of retribution in order to do politics on any level. The Framers believed that an open marketplace of ideas would best allow this, and that somehow, the truth inevitably would win out. As with so much of what they wrote, the idea of free speech was soon trampled by actual practice. The Federalist Party-dominated Congress soon passed the Alien and Sedition Laws, by which pro-Jeffersonian Republican newspapers could be penalized for criticizing the Federalists and President John Adams.

But journalism, the practice of gathering and reporting the news, was different then. It was expected that publications had a particular approach to politics, and wrote about it that way. It wasn't until the 20th century that newspapers, and eventually television and radio, would try to cover the news objectively—without a slant one way or the other. So while publishers such as William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer actively pushed for war with Spain in the 1890s, the expectation today is that reporters won't take sides. This was called “yellow journalism,” for the yellowish tint of the newsprint they used. Today's journalism is supposed to be colorless, and sometimes is.

Court cases stretching across the 20th century helped establish that the standard of press freedom implied by the First Amendment in fact means what it says: Congress and other governments can't make laws that restrict the ability of people to say what they want, and for reporters to write or broadcast what they want. Political speech is in fact the most protected form of speech in the United States, so that anyone may write or say nearly anything about the president, no matter how false, and not suffer legal consequences. (Unless of course you suggest violence against the president or other elected official, in which case you will get a visit from members of the Secret Service. It won't be a friendly chat.) This allows an internet

blogger such as Matt Drudge to reprint any wild rumor about the president, even things that are clearly false.

And yet despite all this free speech—and the United States may have the most expansive view of free speech of any country in the world—speech is in fact restricted in a number of ways. A so-called strict constructionist view of the Constitution then would suggest that the phrase in the First Amendment, “Congress shall make no law...” means precisely that: no law. But an entire body of law is devoted to libel, for example—no one has the liberty to simply make things up about someone if it in some way damages that person (although the distinction between public and private figures allows people more leeway to make up things about politicians).

For example, broadcast television is regulated by the Federal Communications Commission. The airwaves over which TV (and radio) signals travel are in finite supply, and therefore regarded as a public possession used only under license. As a consequence, TV and radio transmissions are regulated as to objectionable content, (which means you can kill all the people you want on television, but no sex!). Gradually, the FCC has relaxed its rules, so that broadcast stations are no longer required to give equal time to opposing viewpoints, and the number of local stations that can be owned by the networks has slowly grown. Broadcast stations once were required to air a minimum amount of news coverage, which also is no longer true. Local television stations continue to air local news in part because it’s cheap to produce and so earns the stations a fair return on their investment.

Despite the restrictions, which are substantial, when it comes to content, we have news media that largely are restricted only by market forces. Mass media are largely paid for by advertising. The more people who watch, read or subscribe, the more they are able to sell ads, and the more they can charge for those ads. Media outlets go so far as to certify the number of listeners, viewers and subscribers, so as to convince advertisers that they are buying real eyes and ears.

Not having to rely on the government for funding gives them considerable leeway to cover politics. As with most things in life, some do it well, some do not. Letting the market manage the output of media gives it some freedom, but it also tends to put pressure to produce coverage that is sensational and focused on entertainment value (which draws ratings and advertisers) rather than meaningful content. Reporters face enormous pressure from management to break “big” stories, which often simply aren’t there.

## Where the News Comes From

Most Americans' news comes from half a dozen major TV networks, one wire service, a few magazines, and handful of newspapers, some radio, and, increasingly, the internet. A lot of this seems to be piggybacking off what traditional journalists have already reported. **Bloggers**<sup>6</sup> (a contraction of the term web log) litter the internet like trash in a park after the Fourth of July, but the great majority of them only regurgitate what they've read in mainstream media. Very few actually do original reporting and break stories that haven't already been reported elsewhere.

The concentration of media interests can lead to a sameness of coverage, and to the exclusion of certain viewpoints. In fact, only about two dozen major companies control the great bulk of the nation's mass media. In the case of some organizations, such as Rupert Murdoch's News Corp., parent of Fox, conservative viewpoints tend to be pushed. MSNBC presents news from a liberal standpoint. CNN, while endlessly and annoyingly touting the quality of its coverage, tries to carve out a middle ground.

Most Americans - 50-80 percent, depending on the estimate - get their information from television, which, unfortunately, rarely covers politics on a meaningful level. TV's ability to take you there makes it great at covering events—natural disasters, sports, items with visual appeal. But its time-bound structure and its need for visual elements makes it not very good at covering ideas, which is what most of politics is about. Much coverage of presidential elections, and elections in general, is about who is ahead, not who is saying what. That's when politics is covered at all. In another study, researchers found that the total amount of political coverage was declining in all media, particularly state and local politics. As a couple of political scientists put it some years ago, "TV and the American electorate are partners in failure." Local TV news is particularly weak at covering local politics. Coupled with the decline of newspapers, people increasingly lack access to information about what city councils and even state Legislatures are up to. And that information is no less important than it ever was.

Television coverage tends to focus more on the flash, on what can make good pictures, and on who's ahead in any given race, than on any sort of useful coverage about what people actually stand for, or whether one promised agenda or another will have positive or negative effects. Even with the need to be visual and brief, however, it should be possible to present coherent coverage of politics. Watch, for instance, the News Hour on PBS and compare that with what passes for news on the networks. Odds are, you won't recognize it.

6. Writers who post their work on the internet, typically commenting on news that's been reported elsewhere.

The emphasis on splash and flash can have other impacts. When broadcast news and entertainment programming tend to overdramatize routine events, this can make the world appear more troubled than it actually is. Even casual watching of local TV news in most markets would make one think that your community is under siege by the forces of darkness. And yet crime in America has been on a downward trend since the 1970s. Yet TV will probably never report that most teenagers don't commit crimes, that most African-Americans are typical middle class citizens with jobs and homes, and that most Americans don't use drugs.

Entertainment television is particularly fascinating. Think about a typical murder show such as "Murder She Wrote." It takes place in a tiny town where someone dies every week. Why does anyone live in that town? It's an actuarial nightmare. About three out of 100 Americans will be crime victims in a given year, and yet television averages 10 crimes a night. Businessmen are most often represented as committing crimes, and yet in real life most crime is committed by males under the age of 25. Politicians are represented as corrupt at least half the time, and yet the second half of the 20th century was one of the least corrupt periods in American history.

There is quite a bit of debate over the effect of media sex and violence, although a number of studies have been done and none have been conclusive. One has to wonder about a program such as Mighty Morphin Power Rangers, a mid-1990s kid franchise that apparently featured 28 minutes of the Ranger kicking the crap out of the bad guys, followed by two minutes of telling young viewers, "You know kids, violence isn't the answer." Which message do you think gets through?

And yet virtually every American home has a television, and at least one half have cable. Estimates suggest that Americans watch an average of 3-7 hours of television a day. That means the TV is on in a typical home from the time a person gets home to the time when they fall asleep at night.

Up to a quarter of Americans still get most of their information from newspapers, which tend to do a better job of covering politics than do broadcast media. Estimates of how many people still read a newspaper vary; it could be as much as 75 percent when you count both print and online editions. For newspapers, that's part of the problem. Online editions still don't generate enough revenue for newspapers to afford to be able to employ the number of reporters it takes to really cover something such as politics. This has been a particular problem for local papers, which usually provide the only meaningful coverage of local politics.

Newspapers still have an impact on "opinion leaders" (and this class will help make you one). A relatively small number of people who pay attention to politics tend to

have an outsized impact on what other people think. It may be around 30 percent actually pay attention, and then spell out the details for the other 70 percent.

But are they effective? A test was done in Cincinnati in the mid-1940s, in which people were surveyed about the United Nations, which was then brand new. About 30 percent of respondents understood what it was. There followed a widespread, substantial information campaign to inform people about the U.N.—media stories, advertising, public forums. Following the campaign, a second survey was done, and about 30 percent of the people understood the U.N.

### **How News Media Actually Work**

I will often ask students about what news sources they watch or read, and what they think of them. Many of them will answer that the news media are biased and lie just to get ratings, so they don't read, watch or listen to anything. To which I respond, if you don't read, watch or listen to anything, how do you know they're biased?

The complaint is common. The United States has gone from a nation where people had complete faith in public institutions to a nation where people have almost none. Frankly, neither seems a very realistic view point. Conservatives claim there's a liberal bias; liberals point to the obvious conservative bent of something such as Fox News. Radicals complain that the media tends to support the establishment (as though we should be surprised that reporters who are Americans in fact reflect what typical Americans are like).

Reporters do tend to be slightly more liberal than average voters; however the people who own the media are overwhelmingly conservative. Aside from the editorial pages, which tend to reflect the politics of ownership (and generally don't hide that fact), most newsrooms don't get dictats from above as to what they will cover and how they will cover it. Reporters at all levels try to present what seems to be the truth. If there's a criticism to be leveled at journalism and journalists, it's that so few political reporters know much about politics, and so don't ask the right questions of their sources. Consequently, they tend to make errors of omission rather than sins of commission.

We should understand something about how this all works. First, most reporters in the United States have gone to college and got a degree in journalism or communications. They've all been educated in the same tradition—go out and get the story, try to tell the truth, don't take sides. Reporters at any kind of news organization—TV, radio, print, internet—get assigned to stories by their editors, and they go out and interview people who might know something about the topic, as well as getting reaction from people who might be affected by what's happening

in the news. So what a typical reporter is relying on is what people tell them. Reporters are biased—who isn't?—but most of them try to work against that bias and tell the whole story.

Particularly with newspapers, the different parts and functions of a publication can be a little confusing, as readers may lump everybody together as though it was a single living organism with one goal in mind. The editorial page, or management's commentary in some broadcast news programs, is where the management of the publication expresses its opinion. People get hired to do just that. Columns, which appear on the same page, often with the writer's picture, are the opinion of that person. Most newspapers attempt to run a variety of columnists to express a variety of viewpoints. Print stories have headlines, which aren't written by the reporter, and may make a story appear slanted in a different direction than the reporter intended. Reporters work with editors, who make assignments and sometimes even help reporters do a better job. They get a limited amount of time to report, write and file a story, before it ends up in print, on the air, or in the internet.

The problem reporters run into is that most news is based on what people tell them. Good sources, which reporters cultivate, may be people who are willing to talk as opposed to people who actually know something. Meanwhile, not that many people actually lie, people will say things they don't really know for sure, because they think it's OK if you're making a valid point. Reporters have been trained to interview and to write, but they may not know as much about the particular subject to know when they're being snowed. As a consequence, too many people are covering too many things about which they don't know enough. A classic example was the coverage of the Tet Offensive in the Vietnam war. This was probably the turning point in American attitudes about the war, as it was widely portrayed as a disaster for the Americans and South Vietnamese. And yet, in reality, it was a military disaster for the Viet Cong, who ceased to be a factor in the war after that point.

Conversely, the U.S. military played the major media like puppets in their coverage of the first Gulf War, except for moments when publications such as Newsweek predicted extraordinary Allied casualties when soldiers inevitably had to storm the Iraqis' sand forts (anyone with a smattering of military history would see that the easy answer was to go around them, which we did). The few casualties that did occur were flown into Dover, Delaware, at midnight, so as to avoid the Vietnam-era spectacle of so many flag-draped caskets coming home. Patriot missiles, which may not have actually hit anything, were portrayed as technological marvels, as were smart bombs, which actually only hit about 25 percent of their targets.

At the end of the war, General Norman Schwarzkopf literally thanked the media for their help in perpetuating so many myths about where the Allies might strike (such as a rumored sea landing in Kuwait City, which pushed the Iraqis to move units to an area where U.S. forces had no intention of landing). It didn't hurt that the Iraqi government was as inept as the U.S. military was media savvy. At one point in the war, a U.S. missile took out a building that the Iraqis claimed was a chemical weapons factory. The Iraqis claimed that it produced infant formula, which might have been plausible until they released video of workers, scampering over the wreckage, in coveralls that read, in English, "Baby Milk Factory." In a country where they nearly all speak Arabic?

Coverage of the second Gulf War was even more restricted and uneven; virtually no one reported on casualties among Iraqi civilians during "Operation Shock and Awe." No network TV cameras showed the Iraqis who were unhappy as the statue of Saddam Hussein was toppled. Saddam Hussein was a bad man, but if you're supposed to be supplying fair and balanced coverage, then you're supposed to show us that stuff, too.

Lacking knowledge, reporters too often fail to think critically about what they're told, except for the many reporters who simply assume that people in positions of authority are always lying. Neither of these approaches is likely to provide citizens and voters with useful information on which to base opinions and decisions. The problem is not, as many press critics claim, the news media's adherence to the standard of objectivity, the idea that news reporting will be unbiased. For one thing, hardly anybody in the business talks about objectivity, as most people recognize that it's not possible to be completely objective. It is possible, however, to be fair, and fairness is a much more reasonable standard. What would be better still would reporting that tests hypotheses, as opposed to merely relaying them. Sometimes that happens, sometimes it doesn't.

Another set of critics wants to see more interpretation and slant on the news, which usually has to do with how the critic feels about one subject or another. Even if we could argue that objectivity is the standard, or fairness, those approaches don't have to be bland, and they have the virtue of letting the reader/viewer make up her or his own mind.

That leads to the chief fault of media consumers—too many people look for sources of news that confirm what they already believe. Anything that runs against that must be biased and is therefore evil and wrong, etc.

Similarly, the criticism that journalists tend to reflect middle class American values shouldn't be surprising to anyone who can think beyond the end of his or her nose.

Most working journalists are, like most Americans, of middle class backgrounds. The fact that their work should reflect the culture and socioeconomic stratum of which they are a part shouldn't surprise anyone.

Journalists and politicians, naturally, have a mutually antagonistic and yet beneficial relationship. Having been on both sides of that fence, neither side truly understands the other in a useful way. The journalists frequently grasp neither politics nor policy, whereas the politicians have no appreciation or understanding what journalists are up against or what it is they hope to do. Even when they employ public relations people, often as not the PR types aren't any better at working with the press than are their bosses, and sometimes worse. Politicians nonetheless find journalists useful for "leaks," a time-honored process in which elected and appointed officials test-market ideas or send signals by surreptitiously "leaking" major news to selected reporters. This doesn't always work. In 1988, George H.W. Bush was thinking of naming Indiana Sen. Dan Quayle as his vice presidential running mate. Quayle was not unintelligent, but he was not a good impromptu speaker. Bush's aides thought he was a poor choice, and so leaked the idea to the press. Apparently, no one took it seriously and it wasn't reported as the Bush aides hope it would be, and Quayle got the nomination.

Despite the media's many faults, there is often enough information there to actually get a picture of what's going on. Perhaps the best thing about American media is that there's an awful lot of it. With a little bit of work, one can find quite a bit of information from a variety of sources, and that's probably what's required of anyone who wants some real understanding of what's going on in the country. You simply have to consult a number of sources, and force yourself to look openly at things you think you oppose and critically at things you think you believe.

### **The News: Fair and Balanced?**

This view of news as an attempt to provide an objective truth is a 20th century phenomenon and largely an American invention. Going back to the founding of the country, and in lots of the rest of the world, newspapers were expected to have a point of view—liberal, conservative, or something else. Reporters in such situations may be more likely to tell people what they want to hear, but also, sometimes, to explain what's wrong with somebody else's idea. Objective news coverage is more likely to give credence to ideas that make no sense in the process of telling both sides of the story.

Trade-offs are inevitable in news coverage from a point of view, however. Consider Fox News, which despite its self-proclaimed status as "fair and balanced" regularly presents favorable coverage of conservative viewpoints while trashing liberal ones.

Although there's nothing wrong with championing either viewpoint, from an informational standpoint, Fox may not be doing its viewers any favors. They probably could chuck the hyperbole and still do a good job covering news from a conservative viewpoint. But as it stands, in two different studies, Fox viewers were among the least informed people in the United States, and the more they watched, the more wrong they were about world and national events.

A third view of media, more common in authoritarian states, is that the media should be a tool of the state. In China, for example, major media are owned by the state and are expected to support and further the ends of the state (occasional Chinese protests to the contrary notwithstanding). A reporter who wrote critically of the performance of the Communist Party in running the country would have a short career. In recent years, Vietnamese journalists briefly did such things, before the communist government cracked down on them.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Mass media are in fact a critical link between government and citizens.
- Freedom of speech and the press was regarded as essential to a functioning republic by the U.S. Founding Fathers.
- Reporters at legitimate news organizations gather information by interviewing people and then try to tell stories based on that information.
- In other countries, news media may be regarded as a tool of the state.

### EXERCISES

1. Which news media do you read, watch or listen to? Try something else, something you don't normally see, and make note of what's different about their approach to and coverage of the news.
2. Take a look at a local newspaper or a local TV newscast over several days. How much coverage of local politics do they include? What kinds of things do they cover more?

## 5.3 Interest Groups

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this section, you will learn:

1. What an interest group is.
2. The ways in which interest groups try to influence public policy.

A major source of information for journalists, and another way in which people can get involved in politics, is interest groups. **Interest groups**<sup>7</sup> are formal coalitions of individuals and organizations who unite in pursuit of common policy goals. People tend to think of them as interest groups when they share or don't mind those goals, and "special interest groups" when they disagree with them.

Interest groups are not new. In fact they are as old as politics. Plato and Aristotle warned about them, and James Madison had them in mind when he wrote the Constitution. Madison referred to them as factions. He warned that factions could be dangerous because they tend to pursue their issues to the exclusion of all else. Historically, Madison said, factions could undermine government as they single-mindedly pursued their own interests. Nonetheless, he also recognized that factions are an unavoidable fact of political life, and that limiting factions would in fact limit the very liberty the Constitution was trying to create. His answer was to divide power in the government by way of federalism and by checks and balances—dividing power between different branches and levels of government. His genius was to create a system of government in which power is so divided that it's difficult for a single group to dominate the whole government, and that purposefully pits factions against each other in the practice of that government. The question remains, however, if this works, and interest groups continue to play influential roles in states around the world.

7. Coalitions of like-minded individuals and businesses who unite in pursuit of particular political and policy goals. James Madison, architect of the U.S. Constitution, called them factions.

The public tends to view interest groups (except for the ones they belong to) with suspicion and mistrust. Depending on who you talk to, people will say that this

group or another has too much influence, be it the gun lobby or religious conservatives or abortion rights activists.

Some political scientists say that interest groups aren't all bad. In this view, interest groups are in fact a sign of a healthy political society, a sign that competition (what Madison intended) is alive and well. By that measure, you should be really concerned is when everyone is happy with a decision, because that may mean something's not right. Elected officials can be heard to say that when everyone is equally unhappy with something they've done, they've probably done about as well as they can hope to.

Groups have a few things in common. The people who belong to groups tend to have time, money and desire. Groups without resources tend to be less organized and less successful, so the rich tend to be overrepresented and the poor tend to be underrepresented. There are welfare rights lobbies, and student lobbies, and neither tends to be successful because they don't have money. They also represent two groups of people—students and poor people—who tend to vote less often. Contrast that with senior citizen lobbies. As they represent retired people, they're not all wealthy, but senior citizens have one thing in common: They vote. Elected officials know that, and behave accordingly. A state legislator came to one of my classes once and began his presentation by saying, "I don't care what you think. I just finished talking to a group of senior citizens, and I listened to what they had to say. They vote. You guys don't vote, so why should I listen to you?" A number of the students were incensed at his comments, but some of them got his point: If you want to be heard, you have to go out and get involved, and that includes voting.

And yet not all groups are successful, even ones with money. As one lobbyist said, "I've seen large organizations with plenty of money with fairly pathetic public affairs efforts." Having money is not enough; a successful interest group hires the right people and presents the right message.

## How Groups Work

Groups attempt to influence policy in a number of ways:

**Lobbying is a basic form of political activity.** Representatives of groups attempt to contact elected officials, often directly, to tell their side of a story. The terms lobby and **lobbyist**<sup>8</sup> might come from the habit of British members of Parliament to meet in the lobby of the House of Commons before and after debate. It might also come from the interest group representatives who would try to chase down President Ulysses S. Grant in the lobby of the Willard Hotel in Washington, D.C., where he liked to enjoy a cigar and a brandy.

8. People hired or assigned to contact elected officials to present information about issues that are important to the client or group they represent.

Some lobbyists work for particular organizations or businesses; others, contract lobbyists, may have multiple clients. A good lobbyist tells the legislator both sides of an issue, so that the legislator can go home and anticipate the inevitable objections to his or her position. Consequently, good lobbyists are known for not lying. If a legislator were to catch a lobbyist in a lie, then the lobbyist would lose all access to the legislator. End of game; you lose. Lobbyists certainly try to persuade elected officials of the rightness of their position, but they try to do that through information.

**Advertising and public relations campaigns which are directed at convincing voters and elected officials of one position or another.** These range from “what a great company we are” (especially firms that don’t sell directly to consumers, who nonetheless purchase television ads), to campaigns directed at specific issues (such as recent campaigns singing the praises of “clean coal” and other energy initiatives). Ads such as these will sometimes target particular markets and the members of Congress who represent that market (“call Congressman Smith and tell him to stop attacking our freedom!”).

**Get out the vote campaigns seek to get people to vote on ballot measures, or for or against certain candidates.** Groups that can deliver votes obviously will have lots of clout. Groups send information to members at election time, often with a “report card” on people in office, detailing who voted in the direction of the group’s interests and who didn’t. Groups attempt to mobilize members to both vote and to make campaign contributions to approved candidates.

**Making campaign contributions.** Groups give a lot of money to candidates and, increasingly, spend money on their own. People do give money to candidates in hopes of swaying their decisions. But a lot of that money goes to people who already agree with the donor, in which case the issue could be whether certain groups overrepresented in Congress (or state legislatures)?

**Engaging in legal action.** Interest groups with enough money can hire lawyers, who can file suits to block unfavorable laws or the try to compel government to adhere to the law as written.

### **Are Interest Groups Effective?**

**So, do interest groups have too much power?** They have power, but how much is too much? Some factors seem to limit groups’ influence. Groups rarely are coherent monoliths when it comes to policy. People join for lots of reasons, and politics often is not one of them. They join for fellowship, for group discounts and benefits (this is why the American Association of Retired Persons has more than 35 million

members). As a consequence, groups often are unable to deliver the votes they promise. Interest group leaders often turn out to be a rather imperfect mirror of their memberships' diverse desires.

The larger the group, the more diverse it is, and group diversity poses special challenges. The National Federation of Independent Businesses claims 350,000 members, but it probably has less clout than the National Association of Manufacturers, which has 14,000 members (typically larger firms with more money). A diverse membership may help deliver votes, but it makes it harder for the group to take strong stands on issues about which their members do not have a consensus.

Numbers by themselves aren't enough. Political scientists once theorized that cities would be a powerful lobby at the federal level. The United States has thousands of cities, staffed by people who understand politics, with an umbrella group, the National League of Cities. But they can't make campaign contributions, and despite similar issues they lack a common agenda.

A specific agenda can help a lot. Consider the National Rifle Association. It has fewer than 5 million members, and isn't wealthy compared to a number of other organizations. It is, however, narrowly focused on issues involving gun ownership rights and the Second Amendment. Opinion polls consistently show that most Americans favor gun control laws, yet that feeling is neither organized or intense. As a consequence, the NRA has been very successful in its efforts to limit gun control, because the group is largely unified around the issue.

That speaks to another limit on interest groups: They can't afford to watch every issue all the time. Successful interest groups stick to their knitting, as they say in business, and try to focus their resources on issues that matter most to their leaders and members.

**So, do we have too many interest groups, or too much government?** The number and intensity of groups seems to have risen over time, and it has paralleled the increasing size and scope of government. The nation's rising wealth also has meant people have more at stake, and more resources to do something about it. State and federal regulation has increased in the post-World War II era, and a couple things haven't changed since the start.

The Iron Law of Public Policy: Every government action creates winners and losers in the marketplace. Intelligent business people act accordingly. Robert A. Leone, *Who Profits: Winners, Losers and Government Regulation*, New York, Basic Books, 1986.

This leads to Sell's Second Law of Political Economy: Politics is economic competition carried on by other means. A lot of what happens in government is about interests attempting to tilt the rules of the game in their favor. Ask yourself who really benefitted from President Bush's Medicare senior citizen prescription drug buying plan. Senior citizens, who do get drug coverage. But also large pharmacy chains stores, as they can best afford to subscribe to the plan and offer the group discounts. They can make it up in volume. Who loses? Smaller chains and independents, who can less afford the discounts and lacked the political clout to forestall the plan.

**Should we do anything about groups?** That's a tricky question. If you limit the ability of groups to participate in the political process, in some sense you limit freedom. On the other hand, without some limits, it's clear from history that the wealthy and powerful can at times dominate the discourse of society. Where do you strike a balance?

Madison's original idea was to create a competitive political marketplace, where groups would keep each other in check. Does this still work? Everybody is represented somewhere in the political spectrum, but is everybody's interest represented all the time? You may be represented by a labor union or the business lobby or a group concerned with one social issue or another. But who represents your interest when the car dealers try to weaken lemon laws, or when tax burdens are shifted from one group to another? The answer isn't always obvious. Meanwhile, interest groups (including congressional campaign committees, who get most of their money from other interest groups), spent more than \$280 million on the 2010 congressional elections. That was five times more than was spent on the 2006 elections. Court decisions such as *Citizens United*, which opened the door for private groups and corporations to spend all the money they wanted on politics, further muddy the water. In the first half of 2012, interest groups had spent \$170 million on the presidential and congressional campaigns. The billionaire Koch brothers promised to spend \$100 million to ensure that President Obama was not re-elected. If the voices with the most money speak the loudest, are other voices being heard? Meanwhile, interest groups representing the private prison industry helped push for three-strikes-you're-out legislation in various states, which has raised the prison population and increased the need for prisons. The private education industry has helped back the push for charter schools across the country.

Following the financial meltdown and the Great Recession of 2007-2008, many people called out for reform of the financial sector. For the most part, it didn't happen, despite the substantial evidence that a lack of regulation had contributed to the enormous size of the problem. The financial services industry in 2009 and 2010 deployed 3,000 lobbyists in Washington, D.C.—five for each member of Congress. They spent \$1.3 billion battling against further regulation, and largely

succeeded. It's their right to do this under U.S. law, and it's not immediately obvious how this could be addressed. But it's a question worth asking.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Interest groups have always been a part of politics.
- Interest groups attempt to influence public policy through activities such as lobbying, voter mobilization, and campaign contributions.
- Interest groups are not all equally effective. Successful groups tend to be more narrowly focused on a smaller set of issues.

### EXERCISES

1. What interest groups do you belong to? What issues matter to you right now that would tend to connect you to an interest group (even if you're not an active member)?
2. If you decided to limit the influence of interest groups, what steps would you take? What would be the trade-offs involved?

## 5.4 Public Opinion

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this section, you will learn:

1. How public opinion is demonstrated.
2. How much public opinion matters.

Media coverage sways public opinion, and interest groups often hope to. The people tend to matter as well. For all the influences on public opinion, the people do have minds of their own.

Public opinion is made evident in a number of ways. Voting is the obvious way, as it's the only poll that truly counts for something. But it also shows up in direct participation, direct communication, survey research, and protests. Public opinion seems to matter. For example, studies show that, broadly speaking, Congress tends to follow the will of the American people. Most elected officials understand that they ignore the passions of their constituents at their own peril. So while an official may try to persuade voters to in one direction, most try to keep an ear to what people are saying back home.

### How Citizens Get Involved

Citizens can get involved in a variety of ways.

#### Direct Participation

As distant as government may seem sometimes, there are many ways for people to participate in politics. Campaigns in the United States and elsewhere are always looking for volunteers (and for anybody who's really interested in politics, there's probably no better way to get your foot in the door). Local governments also have advisory boards of many types (such as planning, building, arts and parks

commissions), which rely on citizen volunteers to staff them. Citizens on such panels do research and hear requests from the public, and report to city councils on what they think should happen next.

### Direct Communication

People talk to their elected officials—in person, by telephone, by letter and by e-mail. Elected officials say that letters tend to have more impact, because e-mails are too easy to send. A stamped letter tends to say the person cares deeply about this particular issue. Elected officials often have open forums where voters come and say what they think (which, officials will privately say, can be a challenge when folks show up who are obsessed with a particular issue, or who just want to complain). You can also show up at a hearing, at city hall or at the state Legislature, and have your say. In a typical legislative committee meeting, when there's a hearing on a particular bill or topic, there's a sign-up sheet and if you're there, you get your three minutes to speak your mind. In any case, democratic systems tend to be remarkably open to citizen input.

### Survey Research

Another way in which public opinion is evidenced is **survey research**<sup>9</sup>, or opinion polling. A survey is just asking a lot of people the same questions. Done correctly, this can be a fairly accurate gauge of what people are thinking. Scientific survey research involves random sampling of a population, and some fancy math to extrapolate those results to the public at large. A random sample means that everyone in the target population has an equal chance of being chosen. Survey research firms generate random lists of telephone numbers of voters in a state, district or even an entire country. What you should look for in reports about survey research is 1. a specified margin of error (you don't get one without doing the fancy math), and 2. the sample size. The margin of error is a way of judging how confident we are that the results of the survey are in range of what the entire population thinks. If this information is included in the survey, you have some assurance that it's a scientific survey, and not, say, one taken by a congressman by mass-mailing his district.

Legislators and members of Congress infrequently survey people back home, usually by doing a mass mailing to all the registered voters in the district. The problem with those sorts of surveys is that they are not random samples, but self-selecting samples. The only people who respond to such surveys are those with really strong feelings about an issue, and what we know about them is that there tend to be fewer of them than the mass of folks in the middle. So the answers may not be indicative of what the general population thinks. Public officials who

9. Asking a group of people the same question to judge their attitudes on a given topic. A scientific survey is one in which there is a random sampling of a population, with a calculation to indicate the margin of error.

conduct such surveys only seem to pay attention to the surveys when they confirm what the official already thinks.

A good survey also avoids question bias—questions should not lead the respondent to an answer. I had some rather substantial arguments when I was a legislative staffer over that one. The people I worked for tended to want to write questions that more or less said “do you agree with this or are you stupid?” The surveys were by no means scientific, but it seemed like we would needlessly aggravate people who read the survey and didn’t agree with the conclusions we were trying to get them to reach.

News organizations will often partner with survey research firms to find out what people are thinking about particular topics, such as whether they support a particular policy initiative or who they’re going to vote for. Political campaigns survey voters to find out what’s working and what isn’t, and which groups they’re connecting with. Surveys also depend upon people telling the truth. Most of the time, they do. In Nicaragua in 1990, however, voters told pollsters that they would re-elect the Sandanistas to power. When election time rolled around, the opposition coalition managed a convincing victory. Voters were simply not used to being asked such questions as the pollsters posed, and apparently feared retaliation by the Sandanista-led government.

### **Protest**

Protest is yet another form of measuring public opinion, and clearly not one to be underestimated. The classic example in American politics has to be the Vietnam War. Although we tend to dwell on the many tragic aspects of the war, it was in fact a triumph of democracy. Was there ever another nation as powerful as the U.S. that changed its foreign policy so radically as a result of public protest? People—many, many young people—marched; sat in (sit-ins, which predate the Occupy movement, involved occupying public spaces in hopes of disrupting somebody’s activities, to make a point); and generally advocated an exit from Vietnam. This did not produce immediate results, but the public dissent clearly made it harder for elected officials to continue the war.

Protest can be non-violent, such as much of the Civil Rights movement, or violent, from the WTO riots in Seattle in 1999, all the way to acts of terrorism.

Non-violent protest goes at least back to the 19th century American writer Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). In his 1849 essay *Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau wrote that if one viewed a law as unjust, one should not obey it. Thoreau was unhappy over slavery and the Mexican-American War, and advocated resisting what he saw as

government-sponsored injustice, for example, by not paying your taxes. (He spent a night in jail for this, before someone paid his taxes and he was released.)

Thoreau was a big influence on Mohandas K. (Mahatma) Gandhi (1869-1948), who led one of the most successful non-violent protest movements in history. Gandhi was born in India, which had been effectively conquered by the British earlier in the 19th century. Gandhi went to Great Britain and studied to be a lawyer, and ended up working South Africa. After getting thrown off a train for refusing to move to a third-class coach (he had a first-class ticket), Gandhi pondered how he should respond. He recognized that he couldn't fight his oppressors; they were too many. If he simply went along, he was empowering them. Finally, he decided, the best answer was to simply resist the injustice he was facing as a person of color in South Africa by disobeying what were clearly unjust laws. Over the next several years, he developed what he called "satyagraha," a Sanskrit word meaning "truth-force," or devotion to truth.

Gandhi established the basic tenets of non-violent resistance. It is active, not passive: One actively resists injustice without being violent. Violence only begets more violence, Gandhi reasoned; non-violence disarms one's oppressor because the oppressor can point to nothing that justifies his use of violence. Using these tactics, Gandhi was able to win some consideration for the many Indians the British had imported to South Africa, before he returned to India in 1915. There he began to lead the movement that would eventually win India's independence from Great Britain, again relying exclusively on non-violent tactics. Gandhi and his followers marched to the sea to make salt (the British held the monopoly on making salt in India); they spun cloth in protest of British control of the textile industry; they resisted British rule whenever possible. Finally, in 1947, the British gave up and went home.

It may seem odd that Gandhi chose this method; the British had about 100,000 soldiers maintaining control over a nation of at around 400 million people (at that time). Clearly, they could have violently ousted the British, especially during World War I and II when the British were largely occupied elsewhere. But Gandhi seems to have recognized that the Indian state would be better off if born in peace rather than violence. Today it stands to as a relatively peaceful and democratic society, despite its occasional clashes with Pakistan and China. For example, it is one of the only liberated ex-colonies to never have suffered a military coup. Although Gandhi was assassinated (by a Hindu nationalist who thought he was being too kind to Moslems), Gandhi succeeded in winning independence for India and Pakistan (part of which is now Bangladesh) without any shots being fired.

Gandhi and Thoreau were big influences the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who led the U.S. Civil Rights movement until his assassination in 1968. Dr. King, in following their lead, organized Americans of all races to protest the unfair treatment of people of color in the U.S. Beginning with a boycott of city buses in Montgomery, Alabama, (where African-Americans had to sit in the back) in 1955-1956, King led a series of peaceful, direct-action “campaigns” to protest everything from school segregation to lack of voting rights for African-Americans in the south. That meant arrests, beatings, attacks by police dogs and fire hoses. A key moment—and a good example of how non-violent resistance can work—was a march from Selma to Montgomery to protest the lack of voting rights in 1965. On March 7, a day that became known as “Bloody Sunday,” 600 marchers were attacked by Alabama state troopers using horses, tear gas and billy clubs. National television cameras were there and the nation, including President Lyndon Johnson, watched. Under court order and with protection of federal troops, the march eventually proceeded, but the important detail is that the event helped push support for the Voting Rights Act of 1965, outlawing a century of political discrimination against African-American citizens. Like Gandhi, King seems to have understood that non-violent resistance would win more support and more converts than would violence.

Contrast this with the 1999 WTO riots in Seattle. The World Trade Organization, which tries to set the terms of trade between nations, drew representatives of states from around the world, and perhaps 40,000 protestors as well. Most of them were peaceful, but those who weren’t did \$20 million in property damage and lost sales in downtown Seattle. One of my students’ parents had to be rescued by police when demonstrators attacked her car as she drove to work. What did this accomplish? The protestors had plenty of legitimate complaints about globalization, issues that at least deserve to be discussed (environmental degradation, the unequal impacts of trade around the world), and the protest did help put those issues on the map. On the other hand, violent actions tend to take sympathy away from the protestors. Protestors have claimed that they changed the course of history, but more than a decade later, it’s hard to tell what’s different when it comes to world trade.

The Occupy movement seems to have learned from this, and has maintained a non-violent stance throughout its brief history. Occupy, which began in New York in September 2011 with Occupy Wall Street, has grown into a global movement protesting all manner of social and economic injustice and inequality. Like other recent protest movements, Occupy has had the benefit of using social media such as Facebook and Twitter to spread its message and coordinate activities. Occupy has probably helped frame the debate over economic policies in the U.S. and around the world, but tangible results are few (although it’s early in the game). The other problem that Occupy faces is coming up with a coherent agenda. The Civil Rights movement had the luxury of having a narrowly focused agenda: changing laws that restricted people’s rights. Changing people’s attitudes has proven much more

difficult. Dr. King, despite his great skills as a leader and orator, had some of the same troubles when he moved his work from civil rights to economic justice. Laws are easy to change; people's beliefs not so much. As one elected official who met with Occupy people told one of my classes, "They're angry. They have a right to be angry. But they don't have a plan." This doesn't mean that the Occupy movement can't or won't accomplish what it wants to, but it won't be a quick or a simple task.

Economic change is somewhat easier to accomplish if economic results can be demonstrated via a lack of change. The Rev. Jesse Jackson had success, for example, in getting Coca-Cola to hire and promote more African-Americans when he was able to point out how important that market segment is to Coke's success. The Occupy movement might have more success by organizing more boycotts of firms whose practices it doesn't like. Moral arguments in such a case might be loftier, but money talks.

Not all non-violent protest is successful. In 1989, thousands of Chinese young adults (mostly students, the shock troops of every revolution), gathered in Tiananmen Square in the heart of Beijing, the Chinese capital. As many as 500,000 people may have assembled there at the peak of the demonstrations. The protests were uniformly peaceful, with demonstrators calling for the usual litany of economic and political opportunity and reform. They even went so far as to build a papier-mâché replica of the Statue of Liberty. But Chinese officials who opposed the protests won out over those who favored it, and on June 4 Chinese army units forcibly removed the demonstrators from the square. Casualty estimates range from hundreds to thousands; no official number was ever released.

Sometimes protests grow violent, and sometimes they start out that way. And there's violence, and then there's violence. Trashing businesses isn't in the same league with blowing things up and killing people. Sadly, **terrorism**<sup>10</sup> has become a tool of politics in recent decades.

Consider the Middle East. Some people of Jewish descent had long dreamed of returning to their historical homeland of Israel, having been forcibly ejected by the Romans in the Second Century BCE. They had been persecuted nearly everywhere they went, so reconstituting the state of Israel seemed like a chance to be left alone. But the former territory was occupied by Palestinian Arabs, ruled first by the Turkish Ottoman Empire and then by the British. Jews began to move there, nonetheless, and in 1917 the British government more or less guaranteed the Jews access to territory there. Friction resulted—between Arabs and Jews, and between Jews and the British, and in 1948, the new state of Israel declared its independence. A series of wars between Israel and its neighbors ensued, and the territory that would have been Palestine became, instead, Israel after the Arabs attacked Israel in

10. A political tactic by which a group commits acts of violence against non-military citizens, in hopes that they will put pressure on their government to make a change.

1948. This left a dispossessed population of Palestinian Arabs, who, unfortunately, turned to violent forms of protest against the Israelis. That has led to 60 years of intermittent warfare and frequent violence, with little to show for it but the gravesites.

The airborne terrorist strikes of September 11, 2001, are, in a way, only one chapter in a long-running clash between parts of the east and parts of the west. U.S. involvement in the Middle East is unpopular with some Arab Moslems, particularly U.S. support for Israel. But what could move people to such horrible acts?

Terrorism is politically driven, targets civilians rather than military targets, and aims to change political attitudes and decision-making. Terrorism seems to occur when one group of people can see no way of achieving their objectives other than inflicting pain on the people with whom they disagree. Usually, then, the terrorists must feel some degree of powerlessness, as the perceived oppressor has a distinct military advantage over the group that feels oppressed. Terrorists aim to spread fear among citizens, who then will put pressure on their government to change policy.

Terrorism is not new; people we might describe as terrorists have been assassinating political leaders since the 1800s. The targeting of civilians is new, as is the potential access to weapons that can kill a lot of people. But while acts of terrorism have killed more than 4,000 people in the last few decades, little has changed in terms of policy and leaders in the states where the terrorists have made their targets. In some ways, like war, terrorism is as much the failure of politics as it is a way of achieving change.

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- People participate in politics in a variety of ways, including direct participation and communication.
- Surveys, media reports, and interest groups are all ways that public opinion is relayed to candidates and elected officials.
- Non-violent resistance is an active method protesting unjust laws.
- Terrorism is a method of political protest that seeks to spread fear among citizens, who will put pressure on leaders to change policy.

## EXERCISES

1. Have you ever actively engaged in a political protest? What issues might make you do so?
2. Survey other students about their attitudes about a political issue. Check your results against those of existing scientific surveys on the same topic.

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.