

Chapter 3: The United States



THE BASICS

The United States

Size	9,158,960 sq. km
Population	301 million
GNP per capita	\$44,000
Ethnic composition	77.1% white, 12.9% black, 4.2% Asian, 1.5% Native American, 4.3% Other. (Note: The United States does not keep separate statistics on Hispanic-Americans, who can be of any race.)
Religion	56% Protestant, 28% Roman Catholic, 2% Jewish, 4% other, 10% none
Capital	Washington, D.C.
Head of State	President George W. Bush (2001–2008)

Thinking about the United States

- Federalism
- Checks and balances (separation of powers)
- Political culture and civil society

The Making of the American State

- Evolution of the state
 - Manifest Destiny
 - Civil War
 - Industrialization
 - Emergence as a world power

TABLE 3.1 Key Turning Points in U.S. History

YEAR	EVENT
1781	Victory over the British in the Revolutionary War
1787	Constitutional Convention
1861–65	Civil War
1890	Passage of first antitrust act
1917	Entrance into World War I
1933	Beginning of the New Deal
1941	Entrance into World War II
1945	End of World War II; start of cold war
1964	Start of the “Great Society”
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The Making of the American State

- The Constitutional order
 - widespread acceptance of constitution's legitimacy
 - Competing self-interests
 - Presidential system
 - Constitutional protections of minorities

The Making of the American State

- Since the founders
 - Civil War and Reconstruction
 - Industrialization and regulation of the economy
 - Social welfare system

The American People and Politics

- The American political culture
 - Regime legitimacy
 - Belief in a weak state
 - Individualism
 - Paradoxical civic culture

TABLE 3.2: Declining Trust in the United States

Question: How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right—just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?

YEAR	PERCENT SAYING "ALL OR MOST OF THE TIME"	PERCENT SAYING "SOME OF THE TIME"
1964	76	22
1968	61	36
1972	53	45
1976	33	63
1980	25	73
1984	46	51
1988	44	54
1992	23	75
1996	25	71
2000	40	59
2001	64	35
2002	46	52
2006	32	64

Source: Adapted from Steffen W. Schmidt, Mack C. Shelly, and Barbara A. Bardes, *American Government Today* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 2008), 211.

The American People and Politics

- Parties and elections
 - Persistent two-party system
 - Political cleavages: gender, age, religion, race, sexual orientation

TABLE 3.3: The 2004 Election

DEMOGRAPHIC GROUP/ISSUE POSITION	PERCENT VOTING FOR BUSH
Men	55
Women	44
Under 30 years old	45
Over 60 years old	54
White	58
Black	11
Hispanic/Latino	44
White Evangelical or Born-Again Christian	78
Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual	23
Moral values mattered most	80
The economy or jobs mattered most	18
Terrorism mattered most	86
Health care mattered most	23
Approve of the war in Iraq	85

Source: Results of the 2004 election poll, adapted from *The New York Times*.
4 November 2004, p. 4.

TABLE 3.4: Recent Presidential Elections in the United States
(Percentage of the Popular Vote)

YEAR	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	MAJOR INDEPENDENTS
1964	61.1	38.5	–
1968	42.7	43.3	13.5
1972	37.3	61.3	1.4
1976	50.1	48.8	1.0
1980	41.0	51.0	7.0
1984	40.8	59.2	–
1988	46.0	54.0	–
1992	43.2	37.7	19.0
1996	49.2	42.8	8.0
2000	48.3	48.1	3.6
2004	48.0	51.0	1.0

Democrats: Johnson 1964, Humphrey 1968, McGovern 1972, Carter 1976 and 1980, Mondale 1984, Dukakis 1988, Clinton 1992 and 1996, Gore 2000, Kerry 2004

Republicans: Goldwater 1964, Nixon 1968 and 1972, Ford 1976, Reagan 1980 and 1984, G.H. Bush 1988 and 1992, Dole 1996, G.W. Bush 2000 and 2004

Major independents: Wallace 1968, Schmitz 1972, McCarthy 1976, Anderson 1980, Perot 1992 and 1996, Nader 2000 and 2004

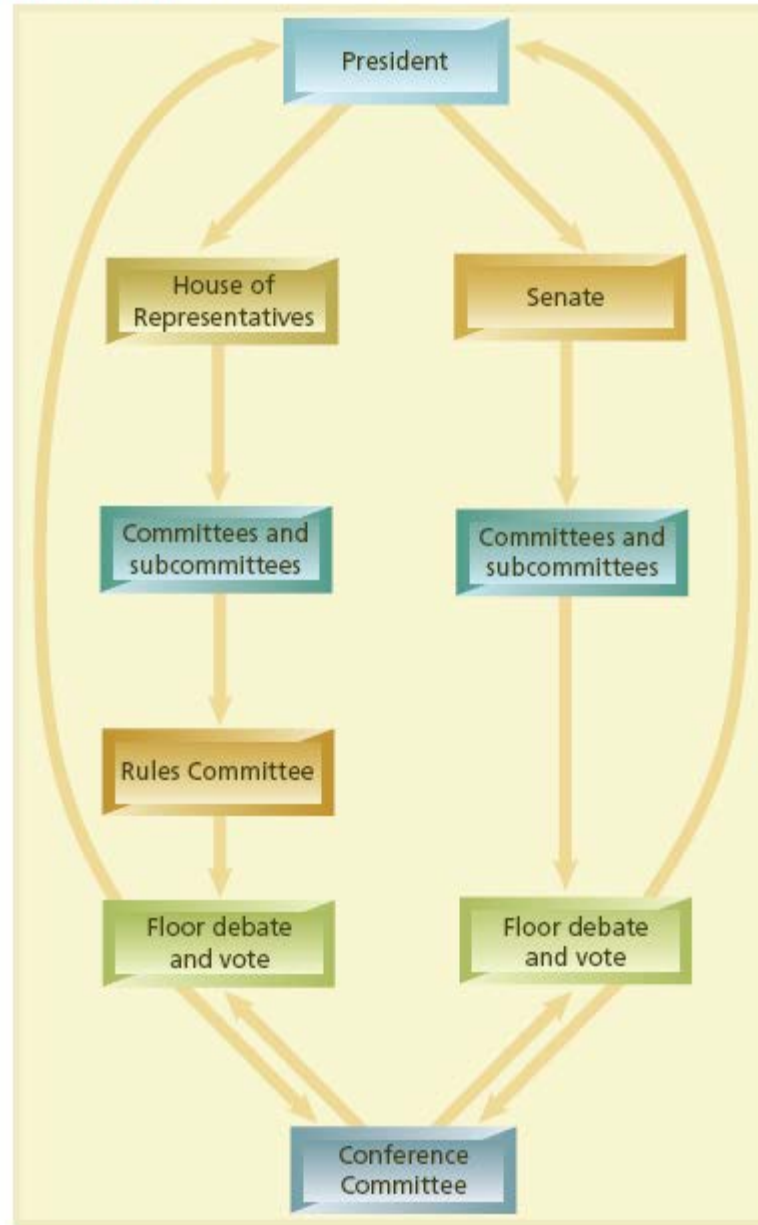
The American People and Politics

- Social movements
 - The new left: civil rights and anti-Vietnam war
 - The new right: traditional values and market economics
 - NIMBY

The Weak American State

- The legislative process: complex and slow
- The rest of the weak state
 - Bureaucracy: expertise not highly regarded politically
 - Judicial review: checks on everyone's exercise of power
 - Federalism: many centers of authority; national standards difficult

FIGURE 3.1 The President and Congress



Public Policy

- government does less than most liberal democracies
- government regarded as inefficient and often corrupt

Feedback

- explosion in the number and type of media
- decline in quality of political reporting
- most people rely on television news for political information
- fewer people watch broadcast news
- spindoctoring by candidates
- Conclusion: American Exceptionalism

Learning Objectives

After mastering the concepts presented in this chapter, you will be able to:

- Gain general knowledge of the history of the US political system.
- Understand the concept of separation of powers.
- Define civic culture and civil society and assess the importance of both in the American political system.
- Recognize factors contributing to the criticism of the US as a weak state.
- Define patterns of political compromise in the US politics

Learning Objectives

After mastering the concepts presented in this chapter, you will be able to:

- Understand the nature of consensus policy making
- Recognize the specification of federalism and unitarianism as political forms of state.
- Comprehend the definition of incrementalism in the American political decision making.
- Describe the individualistic political culture in the USA.
- Classify political party system and recognize specifications of the American two-party system.
- Understand the power of judicial review.
- Identify ‘New Left,’ New Right’ and other patterns of American political ideologies.