

Chapter Summary

In any form, democracy is both an imperfect system and a complex idea that entails a few basic prerequisites: participation by the people, the willing consent of the people to accept and live by the actions of government, and the recognition that everyone has basic rights that government can't take away. Prerequisites for democracy might not always hold if people choose not to participate, or if they end up unknowingly participating without giving consent.

For a democracy, or any political system, to function effectively, there has to be agreement on the rules, as well as on the way the system will be organized, and citizens have to accept the basic principles it's based on. Representative democracy depends heavily on holding free elections and keeping elected officials accountable to the voters.

Americans generally respect the authority of a victorious candidate to assume the jurisdiction to act with the authority of the office to which he was elected. Unlike authority, which is granted by virtue of holding an office, legitimacy is partly inherited and partly earned. One source of legitimacy evolves over time and is rooted in the way we come to accept an office and by extension its occupant as being rightful and appropriate. The German sociologist Max Weber suggested this kind of legitimacy is rooted in tradition and law—that after hundreds of years, for instance, we have come to accept the presidential winner as the legitimate occupant of that office for a period of four years, under a plan set up long ago in the Constitution.

The legitimacy an official inherits is usually at its peak at the start of a term of office and is often the reason for the “honeymoon” or grace period we tend to give new officials. Political figures can undermine their legitimacy through their actions because, unlike authority, legitimacy is partly earned. When the legitimacy of authority figures is brought into question, doubts about their right to act as they did will naturally arise.

Elected officials can use their authority and legitimacy to exercise power, although their ability to do so is hardly automatic. Power is about getting others to act the way you want them to, even if they prefer to act otherwise, in order to determine who gets what, when, and how. The tools of power are resources, which can encompass a wide range of things, such as a politician's personal charm, the information supplied to members of Congress by a lobbyist, or the promise of campaign money.

Power relationships are among the most fundamental relationships found at every level of politics from the White House to school boards. Quite often, a mutually beneficial exchange of resources gets others to act in a way they might not have intended. In the American political system, the exercise of power is about mutual benefit.

Some people believe that the resources that most influence political officials are concentrated in the hands of a few, giving a small group disproportionate power to determine political

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outcomes. Others point to the way Americans like to join groups and feel that the resources held by groups with broad memberships greatly influence the decisions that come out of the political process. Pluralism and elitism present divergent and mutually exclusive ways of understanding who holds power. It may be tempting to say that they both describe our political system, but you shouldn't lose sight of the fact that pluralism and elitism assume the system is structured in entirely different ways.

Individuals in American society make choices between liberty and equality. These are normative choices that involve judgments about what to value and what to willingly trade-off to achieve those values.

In the United States, many value political equality on the assumption that ensuring everyone the same right to vote and equal rights under the law promotes equal opportunity. In truth, people have neither equality of opportunity nor equality of outcome in America. One place where equal opportunity breaks down is in the unequal economic and social outcomes of women and historically disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups because unequal outcomes are supposed to be a product of our different talents, interests, and abilities, not our physical or ethnic differences.

When wealth is more equitably distributed across the population there is less disparity between economic classes. If wealth were equally distributed across the population, there would be no economic classes. In reality, we're very far from equal outcomes in the United States. The upper one-fifth of the population controls over four-fifths of the wealth. In contrast, the bottom one-fifth accounts for less than .02 percent of the wealth, or less than 1/400 the net worth of the top group.

Whether you should personally care about politics is a normative judgment. It's also a personal matter that you'll probably approach differently from your friends. You'll make a judgment that depends in part on how much you think politics matters in your life. No one else can make that judgment for you.

Multiple Choice Questions

Question 1.

In theory, democracy requires participation by the people and the recognition that everyone has basic rights. In practice, in the United States

Options

- A. most people participate all the time.
- B. some groups have been denied basic political freedoms.
- C. people do not participate all the time, but they are always aware of when their actions have political consequences.

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D. people of color, women, and young people have traditionally had a greater say over political decisions than other groups.

Question 2.

A political system in which everyone has a personal say in what government does is called a

Options

- A. direct democracy.
- B. representative democracy.
- C. republic.
- D. social democracy.

Question 3.

Q: Which of the following is partly inherited and partly earned?

Options

- A. power
- B. legitimacy
- C. custom legitimacy
- D. authority

Question 4.

The jurisdiction to propose legislation, grant clemency to prisoners, and negotiate a state's budget are all examples of a governor's

Options

- A. authority.
- B. power.
- C. legitimacy.
- D. resources.

Question 5.

The public's reaction to George W. Bush following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 illustrates

Options

- A. inherited authority.
- B. inherited legitimacy.
- C. earned legitimacy.
- D. earned authority.

Question 6.

Power might be exercised through the use of each of the following *except*:

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Options

- A. authority.
- B. coercion.
- C. promises.
- D. threats.

Question 7.

A person who subscribes to the theory of pluralism believes that power can be exercised by

Options

- A. bureaucrats.
- B. corporate leaders.
- C. military leaders.
- D. voters.

Question 8.

When Thomas Jefferson wrote, “all men are created equal,” he was referring to

Options

- A. equality of opportunity.
- B. equality of outcome.
- C. equality of outcome for white males of European heritage.
- D. economic equality.

Question 9.

Nations like Norway and Sweden, where government policies attempt to reduce disparities between rich and poor, might be said to value

Options

- A. elitism.
- B. equality of opportunity.
- C. equality of outcome.
- D. political equality.

Question 10.

Absolute liberty:

Options

- A. would require absolute equality.
- B. would demand social responsibility
- C. would result in chaos.
- D. would require choices.

Question 11.

The concern for the rights of others in society is called

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Options

- A. equality of opportunity.
- B. equality of outcome.
- C. liberty.
- D. social responsibility.

Question 12.

People tend to feel strongly about the trade-offs between liberty and social responsibility when

Options

- A. they engage in power relationships.
- B. they act like pluralists.
- C. they make normative judgments.
- D. their personal liberty is at issue.

Question 13.

Following his re-election victory, the president experienced a bit of a “second honeymoon” with approval ratings in the low _____, hardly a ringing endorsement in absolute terms, but stronger numbers than Obama had registered since his first year in office.

Options

- A. 20 percent range
- B. 30 percent range
- C. 40 percent range
- D. 50 percent range

Question 14.

In 2011, women were paid _____ of what men in comparable jobs were paid—a difference that amounts to over \$700,000 dollars for the average fulltime woman worker over the course of her working life.

Options

- A. 42 percent
- B. 62 percent
- C. 82 percent
- D. 92 percent

Question 15.

In 2011, the bottom 20 percent of American households combined for only 3.2 percent of all income, while the top 20 percent received more than _____.

Options

- A. 50 percent
- B. 40 percent

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- C. 30 percent
- D. 20 percent

Answers to Multiple Choice Questions

Question 1.

Answer: B

Question 2.

Answer: A

Question 3.

Answer: B

Question 4.

Answer: A

Question 5.

Answer: C

Question 6.

Answer: A

Question 7.

Answer: D

Question 8.

Answer: A

Question 9.

Answer: C

Question 10.

Answer: C

Question 11.

Answer: D

Question 12.

Answer: D

Question 13.

Answer: D

Question 14.

Answer: C

Question 15.

Answer: A

True-False Questions

Question 1.

A democracy is said to exist in societies where the actions of regular citizens, like voting and joining groups, mask the real power exercised by elites.

Options

- A. True
- B. False

Question 2.

President Obama's initial 70% approval rating serves as an example of how the legitimacy an official inherits typically peaks during the honeymoon period at the start of a term of office.

Options

- A. True
- B. False

Question 3.

Political and social satire provide a means for interacting with democracy by encouraging people to think about what government is doing.

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Options

- A. True
- B. False

Question 4.

Even if the inevitable problems caused by unreliable mechanical vote counting methods are evenly distributed throughout the nation, the overall outcome of the election will be adversely affected.

Options

- A. True
- B. False

Question 5.

In order for a statement to be classified as being empirical, it must be based on the assessment of data or the analysis of information, without regard to value judgments.

Options

- A. True
- B. False

Question 6.

Power is exercised when resources other than money are used to achieve a desired outcome.

Options

- A. True
- B. False

Question 7.

In the American political system, the exercise of power is about mutual benefit, which means that lawyers with expertise and computer firms that make contributions to congressional candidates can be influential if they have resources that are desired by others in the political process.

Options

- A. True
- B. False

Question 8.

Next to money, information is the lifeblood of many interest groups and it has also become one of the foremost tools of power in today's world because members of Congress and bureaucrats can't survive without it.

Options

- A. True

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B. False

Question 9.

One way in which a political system can be characterized by pluralism is to have the government respond to the many voices expressed through group membership.

Options

- A. True
- B. False

Question 10.

As interest groups compete with each other for public attention, it's possible that they shape the way government officials listen and respond.

Options

- A. True
- B. False

Question 11.

Americans typically support government programs to help underprivileged kids have access to higher education because education is considered the gateway to opportunity.

Options

- A. True
- B. False

Question 12.

A majority of the world's representative democracies typically reject any form of equality of outcome that values using government policy to minimize social class distinctions found in society.

Options

- A. True
- B. False

Question 13.

Choices between liberty and equality are normative choices that involve judgments about what to value and what to willingly trade off to achieve those values.

Options

- A. True
- B. False

Question 14.

The dual questions of when to give up liberty to protect the rights of others and whether

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government or private individuals should make the decision have a very short history in America's political debates.

Options

- A. True
- B. False

Question 15.

The great diversity of America is both a strength and a complicating factor for the nation's politics.

Options

- A. True
- B. False

Answers to True-False Questions

Question 1.

Answer: B

Question 6.

Answer: B

Question 11.

Answer: A

Question 2.

Answer: A

Question 7.

Answer: A

Question 12.

Answer: B

Question 3.

Answer: A

Question 8.

Answer: A

Question 13.

Answer: A

Question 4.

Answer: B

Question 9.

Answer: A

Question 14.

Answer: B

Question 5.

Answer: A

Question 10.

Answer: A

Question 15.

Answer: A

Key Concept Review Challenges

Question 1.

Even though people often speak of America as a democracy, it is best understood as a _____ because we elect representatives to make decisions on our behalf. In that respect, our country is a representative democracy rather than a _____, where people would make decisions on their own behalf. A representative democracy is far more practical for a nation as large as the United States, but it is also more complex and can be controversial inasmuch as there can be strong differences of opinion about what representatives should do in our name.

Question 2.

For a republic to function effectively, there has to be agreement on the _____ on which it's based. Americans typically respect the authority of elected representatives to act in an official capacity by virtue of holding an office, and for the most part, grant _____ to elected officials even when they disagree with them. However, political figures can undermine their legitimacy through their actions because, unlike authority, legitimacy is partly earned.

Question 3.

Elected officials can use their authority and legitimacy to exercise power, although their ability to do so is hardly automatic. _____ is about getting others to act the way you want them to, even if they prefer to act otherwise, in order to determine who gets what, when, and how. The tools of power are _____, which can encompass a wide range of things, such as a politician's personal charm, the information supplied to members of Congress by a lobbyist, or the promise of _____.

Question 4.

Who gets to exercise power is an important—and open—question. Those who subscribe to the theory of _____ believe that a permanent, unelected elite of corporate and academic leaders, military chiefs, media operators, and bureaucrats holds the resources that matter in government decision-making. Those who subscribe to the theory of _____ believe that ordinary individuals can exercise power in a republic because the resources that matter to people in government are widely distributed in society.

Question 5.

Many Americans value _____, or trying to give people a fair start in life, knowing that people of different interests and abilities will end up in different places. Equality of opportunity comes at the expense of _____ and produces economic and social disparities in the name of protecting individual initiative. Many value political equality on the assumption that ensuring everyone the same right to vote and equal rights under the law

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promotes _____ .

Question 6.

In truth, we have neither equality of opportunity, nor equality of outcome in America, although we are much more likely to support government actions that promote the former. One place where equal opportunity breaks down is in the unequal economic and social outcomes of _____ and historically disadvantaged _____ and _____ groups because unequal outcomes are supposed to be a product of our different talents, interests, and abilities, not our physical differences.

Question 7.

There are also important trade-offs to be made between equality of opportunity and liberty, which is the ability to pursue our objectives, tempered by socially defined boundaries and limited government impediments. Liberty is consistent with _____ because it supplies the freedom to make individual choices. Absolute liberty would generate chaos, so liberty is bounded by _____, or the concern for the rights of others in society. We turn to _____ to draw the boundaries that determine where individual liberty stops and the needs of society start. But we won't all draw that boundary in the same place, which can lead to political disputes over whether government should create boundaries or leave matters of social responsibility to individuals.

Question 8.

Just when it appeared the Obama era would be short-lived, a reaction on the political left against the _____ of the very wealthy took hold across the country in late 2011 as people took to the streets in solidarity with those who had built a permanent occupation in a park in New York's financial district.

Question 9

In 2011, _____ were paid only 82 percent of what men in _____ were paid--a difference that amounts to over \$700,000 dollars for the average fulltime woman worker over the course of her working life.

Question 10.

In 2011, the top 20 percent of American households combined for more than _____ of all income.

Question 11.

In 2011, the bottom _____ of American households combined for only 3.2 percent of all income.

Question 12.

Following his re-election victory, the President Obama experienced a bit of a "second honeymoon" with _____ in the low 50 percent range--hardly a ringing endorsement in absolute terms but stronger numbers than he had registered since his first year in office.

Answers to Key Concept Review Challenges

Question 1.

Even though people often speak of America as a democracy, it is best understood as a republic because we elect representatives to make decisions on our behalf. In that respect, our country is a representative democracy rather than a direct democracy, where people would make decisions on their own behalf. A representative democracy is far more practical for a nation as large as the United States, but it is also more complex and can be controversial inasmuch as there can be strong differences of opinion about what representatives should do in our name.

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Many Americans value equality of opportunity, or trying to give people a fair start in life, knowing that people of different interests and abilities will end up in different places. Equality of opportunity comes at the expense of equality of outcome and produces economic and social disparities in the name of protecting individual initiative. Many value political equality on the assumption that ensuring everyone the same right to vote and equal rights under the law promotes equal opportunity.

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where equal opportunity breaks down is in the unequal economic and social outcomes of women and historically disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups because unequal outcomes are supposed to be a product of our different talents, interests, and abilities, not our physical differences.

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There are also important trade-offs to be made between equality of opportunity and liberty, which is the ability to pursue our objectives, tempered by socially defined boundaries and limited government impediments. Liberty is consistent with equal opportunity because it supplies the freedom to make individual choices. Absolute liberty would generate chaos, so liberty is bounded by social responsibility, or the concern for the rights of others in society. We turn to government to draw the boundaries that determine where individual liberty stops and the needs of society start. But we won't all draw that boundary in the same place, which can lead to political disputes over whether government should create boundaries or leave matters of social responsibility to individuals.

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In 2011, the top 20 percent of American households combined for more than 50 percent of all income.

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In 2011, the bottom 20 percent of American households combined for only 3.2 percent of all income.

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Following his re-election victory, the President Obama experienced a bit of a “second honeymoon” with approval ratings in the low 50 percent range—hardly a ringing endorsement in absolute terms but stronger numbers than he had registered since his first year in office.

Glossary Quiz

1. The right to act in an official capacity by virtue of holding an office like president or member of Congress.
2. A government created by the people over whom it rules.
3. Democracy without representation, where each eligible individual participates in decision-making.
4. Losing or being denied the legal right to vote by intentional or unintentional means.
5. A form of equality of outcome that values using government policy to minimize the economic disparities found in society.
6. The theory that government responds to a small, stable, centralized hierarchy of corporate and academic leaders, military chiefs, people who own big media outlets, and members of a permanent government bureaucracy. People who subscribe to this position believe the actions of regular citizens, like voting and joining groups, simply mask the real power exercised by elites.
7. Any statement based on the assessment of data or the analysis of information, without regard to value judgments.
8. One of several ways of understanding equality, this way values giving people comparable advantages for succeeding in life, regardless of the unequal outcomes that may result.
9. One of several ways of understanding equality, this way values leveling the social and economic inequities among people, rather than attempting to give people comparable advantages for succeeding in life.
10. Widespread public acceptance of the official standing of a political figure or institution.
11. The ability to pursue your ends and objectives, tempered by socially defined boundaries and limited government impediments.
12. Any statement that invokes a judgment or evaluation. Think of the word *norm*, which implies a standard for evaluating something.
13. The theory that government responds to individuals through their memberships in groups, assuring that government is responsive to a wide range of voices. People who subscribe to this position believe that the wide distribution of resources in society drives the decisions government officials make.

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14. Establishing political and legal rights on the basis of the individual, so that everyone has the same right to vote and is equal under the law. An alternative would be to grant political rights to elite individuals based on wealth or social standing.
15. The process of determining who gets what, when, and how.
16. The ability to make others act in a way that they otherwise might not have done.
17. A form of democracy in which eligible individuals choose others to make decisions on their behalf.
18. Any nation with provisions for the selection of representatives who make decisions on behalf of those who select them. James Madison said a republic was “a government in which the scheme of representation takes place,” as compared to direct democracy.
19. Anything of value to others that can be used to sway another individual.
20. A form of equality of outcome that values using government policy to minimize social class distinctions found in society.
21. Concern for the protection of the rights of individuals in a community or society, at the expense of some degree of personal liberty.

Answers to Glossary Quiz

1. authority
The right to act in an official capacity by virtue of holding an office like president or member of Congress.
2. democracy
A government created by the people over whom it rules.
3. direct democracy
Democracy without representation, where each eligible individual participates in decision-making.
4. disenfranchised
Losing or being denied the legal right to vote by intentional or unintentional means.

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5. economic equality

A form of equality of outcome that values using government policy to minimize the economic disparities found in society.

6. elitism

The theory that government responds to a small, stable, centralized hierarchy of corporate and academic leaders, military chiefs, people who own big media outlets, and members of a permanent government bureaucracy. People who subscribe to this position believe the actions of regular citizens, like voting and joining groups, simply mask the real power exercised by elites.

7. empirical

Any statement based on the assessment of data or the analysis of information, without regard to value judgments.

8. equality of opportunity

One of several ways of understanding equality, this way values giving people comparable advantages for succeeding in life, regardless of the unequal outcomes that may result.

9. equality of outcome

One of several ways of understanding equality, this way values leveling the social and economic inequities among people, rather than attempting to give people comparable advantages for succeeding in life.

10. legitimacy

Widespread public acceptance of the official standing of a political figure or institution.

11. liberty

The ability to pursue your ends and objectives, tempered by socially defined boundaries and limited government impediments.

12. normative

Any statement that invokes a judgment or evaluation. Think of the word *norm*, which implies a standard for evaluating something.

13. pluralism

The theory that government responds to individuals through their memberships in groups, assuring that government is responsive to a wide range of voices. People who subscribe to this position believe that the wide distribution of resources in society drives the decisions government officials make.

14. political equality

Establishing political and legal rights on the basis of the individual, so that everyone has the same right to vote and is equal under the law. An alternative would be to grant political rights to elite individuals based on wealth or social standing.

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15. politics

The process of determining who gets what, when, and how.

16. power

The ability to make others act in a way that they otherwise might not have done.

17. representative democracy

A form of democracy in which eligible individuals choose others to make decisions on their behalf.

18. republic

Any nation with provisions for the selection of representatives who make decisions on behalf of those who select them. James Madison said a republic was “a government in which the scheme of representation takes place,” as compared to direct democracy.

19. resources

Anything of value to others that can be used to sway another individual.

20. social equality

A form of equality of outcome that values using government policy to minimize social class distinctions found in society.

21. social responsibility

Concern for the protection of the rights of individuals in a community or society, at the expense of some degree of personal liberty.