KEY TERMS

authority The ability to exercise power, such as the power to make and enforce laws, legitimately. 4

autocracy A form of government in which the power and authority of the government are in the hands of a single person. 7

bicameral legislature A legislature made up of two chambers, or parts. The United States has a bicameral legislature, composed of the House of Representatives and the Senate. 10

capitalism An economic system based on the private ownership of wealth-producing property, free markets, and freedom of contract. The privately owned corporation is the preeminent capitalist institution. 13

conservatism A set of beliefs that includes a limited role for the national government in helping individuals and in the economic affairs of the nation, support for traditional values and lifestyles, and a cautious response to change. 14

democracy A system of government in which the people have ultimate political authority. The word is derived from the Greek demos (people) and kratos (rule). 8

dictatorship A form of government in which absolute power is exercised by a single person who has usually obtained his or her power by the use of force. 7

direct democracy A system of government in which political decisions are made by the people themselves rather than by elected representatives. This form of government was practiced in some areas of ancient Greece. 8

divine right theory A theory that the right to rule by a king or queen was derived directly from God rather than from the consent of the people. 7

equality A concept that holds, at a minimum, that all people are entitled to equal protection under the law. 12

government The individuals and institutions that make society's rules and that also possess the power and authority to enforce those rules. 4

ideologue An individual who holds very strong political opinions. 17

ideology Generally, a system of political ideas that are rooted in religious or philosophical beliefs concerning human nature, society, and government. 13

institution An ongoing organization that performs certain functions for society. 3

liberalism A set of political beliefs that includes the advocacy of active government, including government intervention to improve the welfare of individuals and to protect civil rights. 13

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QUICK REVIEW

1. Resolving conflicts over how society should use its scarce resources and who should receive various benefits is the essence of ____. It has been called the process of determining “who gets what, when, and how” in a society.
   a. authority
   b. government
   c. political culture
   d. power
   e. politics

2. A(n) ____ is a system of government in which the power and authority of the government are in the hands of a single person.
   a. constitutional monarchy
   b. autocracy
   c. theocracy
   d. aristocracy
   e. parliamentary democracy

3. True or False: In a representative democracy, the people participate directly in government decision making.

4. ____ is best described as a voluntary agreement among individuals to create a government and to give that government adequate power to secure the mutual protection and welfare of all individuals.
   a. A social contract
   b. Political culture
   c. Equality
   d. Multiculturalism
   e. Capitalism

5. True or False: Within the traditional political spectrum, liberals hold the most extreme position on the left.

SUMMARY & OBJECTIVES

LO1 Explain what is meant by the terms politics and government. 1 Politics can be defined as the process of resolving social conflict—disagreements over how the society should use its scarce resources and who should receive various benefits. 2 Government can be defined as the individuals and institutions that make society’s rules and that also possess the power and authority to enforce those rules. Government serves at least three essential purposes: (a) it resolves conflicts, (b) it provides public services; and (c) it defends the nation and its culture against attacks by other nations.

LO2 Identify the various types of government systems. 3 In an autocracy, the power and authority of the government are in the hands of a single person. Monarchies and dictatorships, including totalitarian dictatorships, are all forms of autocracy. In a constitutional monarchy, however, the monarch shares governmental power with elected lawmakers. 4 Democracy is a system of government in which the people have ultimate political authority. Government exists only by the consent of the people and reflects the will of the majority. What we now call direct democracy exists when the people participate directly in government decision making. In a representative democracy, the will of the majority is expressed through smaller groups of individuals elected by the people to act as their representatives. A republic is essentially a representative democracy in which there is no king or queen; the people are sovereign. Forms of representative democracy include presidential democracy and parliamentary democracy.

5 An aristocracy is a government in which a small privileged class rules. Other forms of government characterized by “rule by the few” include plutocracy (the wealthy exercise ruling power) and
meritocracy (rulers have earned the right to govern because of their special skills or talents). Thocacy is a form of government in which there is no separation of church and state. The government rules according to religious precepts.

LO3 Summarize some of the basic principles of American democracy and the basic American political values. In writing the U.S. Constitution, the framers incorporated two basic principles of government that had evolved in England: limited government and representative government. Our democracy resulted from a type of social contract among early Americans to create and abide by a set of governing rules. Social-contract theory was developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by such philosophers as John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The fundamental principles of American democracy are (a) equality in voting, (b) individual freedom, (c) equal protection of the law, (d) majority rule and minority rights, and (e) collectively voluntary consent to be governed. From its beginnings as a nation, America has been defined less by the culture shared by its diverse population than by a patterned set of ideas, values, and ways of thinking about government and politics—its political culture. The rights to liberty, equality, and property are fundamental political values shared by most Americans. Generally, assumptions as to what the government’s role should be in promoting basic values, such as liberty and equality, are important determinants of political ideology. When it comes to political ideology, Americans tend to fall into two broad camps: liberals and conservatives. Liberals, or progressives, often identify with the Democratic Party, and conservatives tend to identify politically as Republicans. People whose views fall in the middle of the traditional political spectrum are generally called moderates. On both ends of the spectrum are those who espouse radical views. Many Americans do not adhere firmly to a particular political ideology. They may not be interested in all political issues and may have a mixed set of opinions that do not fit neatly under a liberal or conservative label.

LO4 Describe how the various topics discussed in this text relate to the “big picture” of American politics and government. The U.S. Constitution is the supreme law of the land. It sets forth basic governing rules by which Americans agreed to abide. Some of the most significant political controversies today have to do with how various provisions in this founding document should be applied to modern-day events and issues. Generally, those who acquire the power and authority to govern in our political system are the successful candidates in elections. The electoral process is influenced by interest groups, political parties, public opinion, voting behavior, campaign costs, and the media. Those persons who have been selected for public office become part of one of the institutions of government. They make laws and policies to decide “who gets what, when, and how” in our society. Interest groups, public opinion, and the media not only affect election outcomes but also influence the policymaking process.

Quiz Answers: 1. e; 2. b; 3. False; 4. a; 5. False

liberty The freedom of individuals to believe, act, and express themselves as they choose so long as doing so does not infringe on the rights of other individuals in the society. limited government A form of government based on the principle that the powers of government should be clearly limited either through a written document or through wide public understanding, characterized by institutional checks to ensure that government serves public rather than private interests. moderate A person whose views fall in the middle of the political spectrum. monarchy A form of autocracy in which a king, queen, emperor, empress, tsar, or tsarina is the highest authority in the government; monarchs usually obtain their power through inheritance. natural rights Rights that are not bestowed by governments but are inherent within every man, woman, and child by virtue of the fact that he or she is a human being. parliament The name of the national legislative body in countries governed by a parliamentary system, such as Britain and Canada. political culture The set of ideas, values, and attitudes about government and the political process held by a community or a nation. politics The process of resolving conflicts over how society should use its scarce resources and who should receive various benefits, such as public health care and public higher education. According to Harold Lasswell, politics is the process of determining “who gets what, when, and how” in a society. power The ability to influence the behavior of others, usually through the use of force, persuasion, or rewards. progressivism An alternative, more popular term for the set of political beliefs also known as liberalism. public services Essential services that individuals cannot provide for themselves, such as building and maintaining roads, providing welfare programs, operating public schools, and preserving national parks. radical left Persons on the extreme left side of the political spectrum who would like major changes to the political order, usually to promote egalitarianism (human equality). radical right Persons on the extreme right side of the political spectrum. The radical right includes reactionaries (who would like to return to the values and social systems of some previous era) and libertarians (who believe in no regulation of the economy and individual behavior, except for defense and law enforcement). representative democracy A form of democracy in which the will of the majority is expressed through smaller groups of individuals elected by the people to act as their representatives.