CHAPTER 4

American Political Culture

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

4-1 Explain the concept of political culture and its key components in the United States.

4-2 Discuss how the United States differs from other countries in its political culture.

4-3 Identify the key sources of political culture in the United States.

4-4 Evaluate how conflicts in American political culture affect public confidence in government and tolerance of different political views.

THEN

In 1835, a French political official, Alexis de Tocqueville, visited the United States to conduct research on its prison systems. Based on two years of travel across the country, de Tocqueville wrote a two-volume study titled *Democracy in America* that continues to be one of the defining texts of American political culture. De Tocqueville argued that democracy endured in the United States because of geography, laws, and "the manners and customs of the people."[1] He concluded that the attitude of Americans about the merits of democracy was fundamental to its success here.

NOW

In the 21st century, several issues divide Americans: how to address the rapidly growing national debt, how to battle terrorists, how to determine the appropriate scope of responsibility and power for the federal government, and so forth. But the political parties and interest groups (both of which we will discuss later in this textbook) that disagree about these issues share a common belief in preserving the principles of American constitutionalism—liberty, equality of opportunity, and so on—even if they differ over how to put those principles into practice. The Tea Party movement that has developed in recent years, for example, derives its name from a historic event in American politics, and its adherents say they seek to return American democracy to its founding principles. People in the United States may have very different views today of what democracy means for policymaking, but they continue to display the same veneration for democracy that de Tocqueville identified more than 175 years ago.

The United States, the United Kingdom, and France are all western nations with well-established representative democracies. Millions of people in each country (maybe including you) have been tourists in one or both of the other two countries. Ask any American who has spent time in either country what it is like and you will probably hear generalizations about the "culture"—"friendly" or "cold," "very different" or "surprisingly like home," and so on.

But "culture" also counts when it comes to politics and government. Politically speaking, there are at least three major differences among and between countries: constitutional, demographic, and cultural. Each difference is important, and the differences tend to feed each other. Arguably, however, the cultural differences are not only the most consequential, but also often the trickiest to analyze. As we will see, that holds true not only for cross-national differences between America and other countries, but also when it comes to deciphering political divides within America itself. And the differences usually endure over time.

4-1 Political Culture

political culture A patterned and sustained way of thinking about how political and economic life ought to be carried out.

Constitutional differences tend to be fairly obvious and easy to summarize. The United States and France each have a written constitution, while the United Kingdom does not. The United States separates powers between three equal branches of its national government. By contrast, the United Kingdom has a parliamentary system in which the legislature chooses a prime minister from within its own ranks. And France has a semi-presidential or quasi-parliamentary system divided into three branches: the president selects a prime minister from the majority party in the lower house of the parliament, and the prime minister exercises most executive powers.

Demographic differences are also straightforward. America is a large land with more than 300 million citizens. The dominant language is English, but millions of people also speak Spanish. About one-sixth of its population is Hispanic. More than 80 percent of its adults identify themselves as Christians, but they are divided between Catholics (about a quarter) and more than a dozen different Protestant denominations. By comparison, France and the United Kingdom are each home to about 60 million people and have small but growing immigrant and foreign-born subpopulations. Most French (more than 80 percent) are Catholic; most British belong to the Church of England (Anglican, the official state religion) or the Church of Scotland. But in neither country do many people go to church.

The differences among these three democracies go much deeper. Each country has a different **political culture**—a patterned and sustained way of thinking about how political and economic life ought to be carried out. Most Americans, British, and French think that democracy is good, favor majority rule, and believe in respecting minority rights. And few in each nation would say that a leader who loses office in an election has any right to retake office by force. Even so, their political cultures differ. Cross-national surveys consistently find that Americans are far more likely than the French or British to believe that everybody should be equal politically, but far less likely to think it important that everybody should be equal economically. For example, in one large survey in the early post–Cold War era, the French and British were more than twice as likely as Americans to agree that "it is government's responsibility to take care of the very poor," and less than a third as likely as Americans to agree that "government should *not* guarantee every citizen food and basic shelter."[2]

When it comes to ensuring political equality or equality before the law, Americans are more committed from an

early age. For instance, a classic study compared how children aged 10 to 14 in the United States, Great Britain, and France responded to a series of questions about democracy and the law. They were asked to imagine the following:

> *One day the President (substitute the Queen in England, President of the Republic in France) was driving his car to a meeting. Because he was late, he was driving very fast. The police stopped the car. Finish the story.*[3]

The children from each country ended the story quite differently. French children declared that the president would not be reprimanded. British children said the queen would not be punished. But American children were most likely to say that the president would be fined or ticketed, just like any other person should be.

Cross-national differences wrought by political culture seem to be even sharper between the United States and such countries as Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and the Philippines. Why do these countries, whose constitutions are very much like the American one, have so much trouble with corruption, military takeovers, and the rise of demagogues? Each of these nations has had periods of democratic rule, but only for a short period of time, despite having an elected president, a separately elected congress, and an independent judiciary.

Some have argued that democracy took root in the United States but not in other countries that copied its constitution because America offered more abundant land and greater opportunities for people. No feudal aristocracy occupied the land, taxes remained low, and when one place after another filled up, people kept pushing west to find new opportunities. America became a nation of small, independent farmers with relatively few landless peasants or indentured servants.

However, as Alexis de Tocqueville, the perceptive French observer of American politics, noted in the 1830s, much of South America contains fertile land and rich resources, but democracy has not flourished there. The constitution and the physical advantages of the land cannot by themselves explain the persistence of any nation's democratic institutions. Nor can they account for the fact that American democracy survived a Civil War and thrived as wave after wave of immigrants became citizens and made the democracy more demographically diverse. What can begin to account for such differences are the customs of the people—what de Tocqueville called their "moral and intellectual characteristics,"[4] and what social scientists today call political culture.

Japan, like the United States, is a democracy. But while America is an immigrant nation that has often favored open immigration policies, Japan remains a Japanese nation in which immigration policies are highly restrictive and foreign-born citizens are few. America, like Saudi Arabia, is a country in which most people profess religious beliefs, and many people identify themselves as orthodox believers. But America's Christian majority favors religious pluralism and church–state separation, while Saudi Arabia's Muslim majority supports laws that maintain Islam as the state religion. In Germany, courts have held that non-Christian religious symbols and dress, but not Christian ones, may be banned from schools and other public places. In France, the government forbids wearing any religious garb in schools. In the United States, such rulings or restrictions would be unthinkable.

The Granger Collection, NYC

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859) was a young French aristocrat who came to the United States to study the American prison system. He wrote the brilliant Democracy in America (2 vols., 1835–1840), a profound analysis of our political culture.

The Political System

The American view of the political system contains at least five important elements:

- ***Liberty:*** Americans are preoccupied with their rights. They believe they should be free to do pretty much as they please, with some exceptions, as long as they don't hurt other people.
- ***Equality:*** Americans believe everybody should have an equal vote and an equal chance to participate and succeed.

Underwood & Underwood/CORBIS

Increased immigration to the United States in the early 20th century prompted popular support for creating a shared political culture. All schoolchildren, whatever their national origin, were taught to salute the American flag.

- ***Democracy:*** Americans think government officials should be accountable to the people.
- ***Civic duty:*** Americans generally feel people ought to take community affairs seriously and help out when they can.[5]
- ***Individual responsibility:*** A characteristically American view is that, barring some disability, individuals are responsible for their own actions and well-being.

By vast majorities, Americans believe that every citizen should have an equal chance to influence government policy and to hold public office, and they oppose the idea of letting people have titles such as "Lord" or "Duke," as in England. By somewhat smaller majorities, they believe people should be allowed to vote even if they can't read or write or vote intelligently.[6] Though Americans recognize that people differ in their abilities, they overwhelmingly agree with the statement, "Teaching children that all people are really equal recognizes that all people are equally worthy and deserve equal treatment."[7]

At least three questions can be raised about this political culture. First, how do we know that the American people share these beliefs? For most of our history there were no public opinion polls, and even after they became commonplace, they were rather crude tools for measuring the existence and meaning of complex, abstract ideas. There is in fact no way to prove that values such as those listed above are important to Americans. But neither is there good reason for dismissing the list out of hand. One can infer, as have many scholars, the existence of certain values by a close study of the kinds of books Americans read, the speeches they hear, the slogans to which they respond, and the political choices they make, as well as by noting the observations of insightful foreign visitors. Personality tests, as well as opinion polls—particularly those asking similar questions in different countries—also supply useful evidence, some of which will be reviewed in the following paragraphs.

Second, if these values are important to Americans, how can we explain the existence in our society of behavior that is obviously inconsistent with them? For example, if white Americans believe in equality of opportunity, why did so many of them for so long deny that equality to African Americans? That people act contrary to their professed beliefs is an everyday fact of life: People believe in honesty, yet they steal from their employers and sometimes underreport their taxable income. Besides values, self-interest and social circumstances also shape behavior. Gunnar Myrdal, a Swedish observer of American society, described race relations in this country as "an American dilemma" resulting from the conflict between the "American creed" (a belief in equality of opportunity) and American behavior (denying African Americans full citizenship).[8] But the creed remains important because it is a source of change: as more and more people become aware of the inconsistency between their values and their behavior, that behavior slowly changes.[9] Race relations in this country would take a very different course if instead of an abstract but widespread belief in equality there were an equally widespread belief that one race is inherently inferior to another.

The late political scientist Samuel P. Huntington put it this way: "Critics say that America is a lie because its reality falls so far short of its ideals. America is not a lie, it is a disappointment. And it can be a disappointment only because it is also a hope."[10]

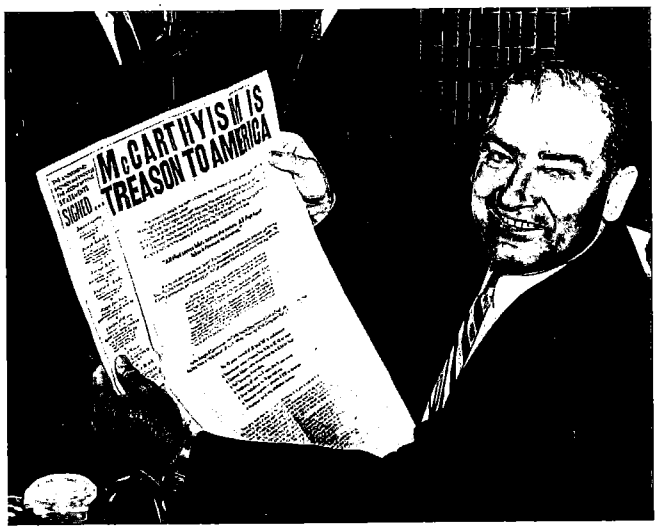
Third, if there is agreement among Americans on certain political values, why has there been so much political conflict in our history? How could a people who agree on such fundamentals fight a bloody civil war, engage in violent labor-management disputes, take to the streets in riots and demonstrations, and sue each other in countless court battles? Conflict, even violent struggles, can occur over specific policies even among those who share, at some level of abstraction, common beliefs. Many political values may be irrelevant to specific controversies: There is no abstract value, for example, that would settle the question of whether steelworkers ought to organize unions. More important, much of our conflict has occurred precisely because we have strong beliefs that happen, as each of us interprets them, to be in conflict. Equality of opportunity seems an attractive idea, but sometimes it can be pursued only by curtailing another value that most people hold dear: personal liberty. The states went to war in 1861 over one aspect of that conflict—the rights of slaves versus the rights of slave-owners.

Indeed, the Civil War illustrates the way certain fundamental beliefs about how a democratic regime ought to be organized have persisted despite bitter conflict over the policies adopted by particular governments. When the

southern states seceded from the Union, they formed not a wholly different government but one modeled, despite some important differences, on the U.S. Constitution. Even some of the language of the Constitution was duplicated, suggesting that the southern states believed not that a new form of government or a different political culture ought to be created, but rather that the South was the true repository of the existing constitutional and cultural order.[11]

Perhaps the most frequently encountered evidence that Americans believe themselves bound by common values and common hopes is the persistence of the word *Americanism* in our political vocabulary. From the 19th century onward, *Americanism* and *the American dream* have been familiar terms not only in Fourth of July speeches but also in everyday discourse. For many years, the House of Representatives had a committee called the House Un-American Activities Committee. There is hardly any example to be found abroad of such a way of thinking: There is no "Britishism" or "Frenchism," and when Britons and French people become worried about subversion, they call it a problem of internal security, not a manifestation of "un-British" or "un-French" activities.

We have ended slavery, endorsed civil rights, and expanded the scope of free discussion, but these gains have not ended political conflict. We argue about abortion, morality, religion, immigration, and affirmative action. Some people believe that core moral principles are absolute, while others feel they are relative to the situation. Some people believe all immigrants should become like every other American, while others argue that we should, in the name of diversity and multiculturalism, celebrate group differences.



Topham/The Image Works

In the 1950s Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin was the inspiration for the word "McCarthyism" after his highly publicized attacks on alleged communists working in the federal government.

Much depends on how we define a good citizen. Some people define a good citizen as a person who votes, pays his or her taxes, obeys the law, and supports the military; others describe a good citizen as skeptical of government and ready to join protest movements and boycott products he or she does not like. These competing opinions reflect differences in age and education. Older people are more likely to take the first view, while younger people who are college educated are more likely to take the second.[12]

But these conflicts, though they affect every American, should not obscure the underlying level of agreement or the reality of a widely shared political culture.

The Economic System

Americans judge the economic system using many of the same standards by which they judge the political system, albeit with some very important differences. As it is in American politics, liberty is important in the U.S. economy. Thus Americans support the idea of a free-enterprise economic system, calling the nation's economy "generally fair and efficient" and denying that it "survives by keeping the poor down."[13] However, there are limits to how much freedom they think should exist in the marketplace. People support government regulation of business in order to keep some firms from becoming too powerful and to correct specific abuses.[14]

Americans are more willing to tolerate economic inequality than political inequality. They believe in maintaining "equality of opportunity" in the economy but not "equality of results." If everyone has an equal opportunity to get ahead, then it is all right for people with more ability to earn higher salaries and for wages to be set based on how hard people work rather than on their economic needs. Hardly anyone is upset by the fact that Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, and Donald Trump are rich men. Although Americans are quite willing to support education and training programs to help disadvantaged people get ahead, they are strongly opposed to anything that looks like preferential treatment (e.g., hiring quotas) in the workplace.[15]

The leaders of very liberal political groups, such as civil rights and feminist organizations, are more willing than the average American to support preferential treatment in the hiring and promoting of minorities and women. They do so because, unlike most citizens, they believe that whatever disadvantages minorities and women face are the result of failures of the economic system rather than the fault of individuals. Even so, these leaders strongly support the idea that earnings should be based on ability and oppose the idea of having any top limit on what people can earn.[16]

This popular commitment to economic individualism and personal responsibility may help explain how Americans think about particular public policies, such as welfare and civil rights. Polls show that Americans are willing to help people "truly in need" (this includes older adults and the disabled) but not those deemed "able to take care of themselves" (this includes, in the public's mind, people "on welfare"). Also, Americans dislike preferential hiring programs and the use of quotas to deal with racial inequality.

At the core of these policy attitudes is a widely (but not universally) shared commitment to economic individualism and personal responsibility. Some scholars, among them Donald Kinder and David Sears, interpret these individualistic values as "symbolic racism"—a kind of plausible camouflage for antiblack attitudes.[17] But other scholars, such as Paul M. Sniderman and Michael Gray Hagen, argue that these views are not a smokescreen for bigotry or insensitivity but a genuine commitment to the ethic of self-reliance.[18] Since there are many Americans on both sides of this issue, debates about welfare and civil rights tend to be especially intense. What is striking about the American political culture is that in this country the individualist view of social policy is by far the most popular.[19]

Views about specific economic policies change. Americans are now much more inclined than they once were to believe that the government should help the needy and regulate business. But the commitment to certain underlying principles has been remarkably enduring. In 1924, almost half of the high school students in Muncie, Indiana, said that "it is entirely the fault of the man himself if he cannot succeed" and disagreed with the view that differences in wealth showed that the system was unjust. More than half a century later, the students in this same high school were asked the same questions again, with the same results.[20]

POLICY DYNAMICS: INSIDE/OUTSIDE THE BOX

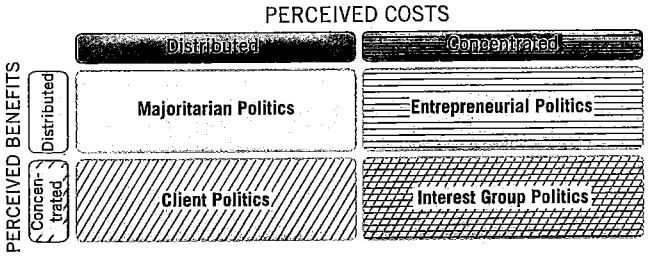
Bilingual Education: Majoritarian or Client Politics?

Hispanics are the largest and fastest-growing minority group in America. The nation's 54 million Hispanics represent about 17 percent of the total U.S. population. They comprise more than a third of the population in several states, including California, New Mexico, and Texas. By 2050, about 1 in 4 U.S. residents will be Hispanic.

Some analysts have asserted that Hispanic immigrants to the United States, the vast majority of who come from Mexico, will remain strangers to American political culture. But all the evidence suggests that, if anything, Hispanic immigrants over time are far more likely to embrace and emulate, rather than to reject or refashion, American political culture.

To assist immigrants in their transition, the federal government began in the late 1960s to promote bilingual education, or teaching children in their native language as well as in English. Proponents of bilingual education make a case for majoritarian politics: Everyone supports the education system through taxes (primarily state and local), and everyone benefits from bilingual schooling in the long run because it helps immigrants to succeed professionally and advance American productivity.

Critics of bilingual education programs, however, say they benefit only the groups who participate, and that even those benefits are questionable, if people do not learn English quickly. In 1998, California voters approved Proposition 227, which removed bilingual education from most public schools in the state (a proposal to overturn the proposition will go before voters in 2016), and the 2002 No Child Left Behind federal law encouraged English instruction and testing over time. The future of bilingual education in the United States will depend largely on whether the programs are viewed as having a narrow or broad public interest.



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau; Pew Hispanic Research Center, *An Awakened Giant: The Hispanic Electorate is Likely to Double by 2020*, November 14, 2012; Jack Citrin, et al., "Testing Huntington: Is Hispanic Immigration a Threat to American Identity?" *Perspectives on Politics* 5 (March 2007): ; Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2004); David Nieto, "A Brief History of Bilingual Education in the United States," *Perspectives on Urban Education* (Spring 2009): 61–72.

4-2 How We Compare: Comparing America with Other Nations

Americans like their own country more than people in European democracies like theirs. In Figure 4.1, we see that 71 percent of Americans are proud to be American compared to only 21 percent of Germans who are proud to be German. There are other differences as well: A majority of the French, Germans, and Italians think success in life is determined by forces outside an individual's own control; Americans deeply disagree. Most Americans think children should be taught the value of hard work and that a belief in God is necessary for morality; most western European countries have the opposite view.

Americans have very different views about important things than do Europeans. Following are some examples drawn from politics, the economy, and religion.

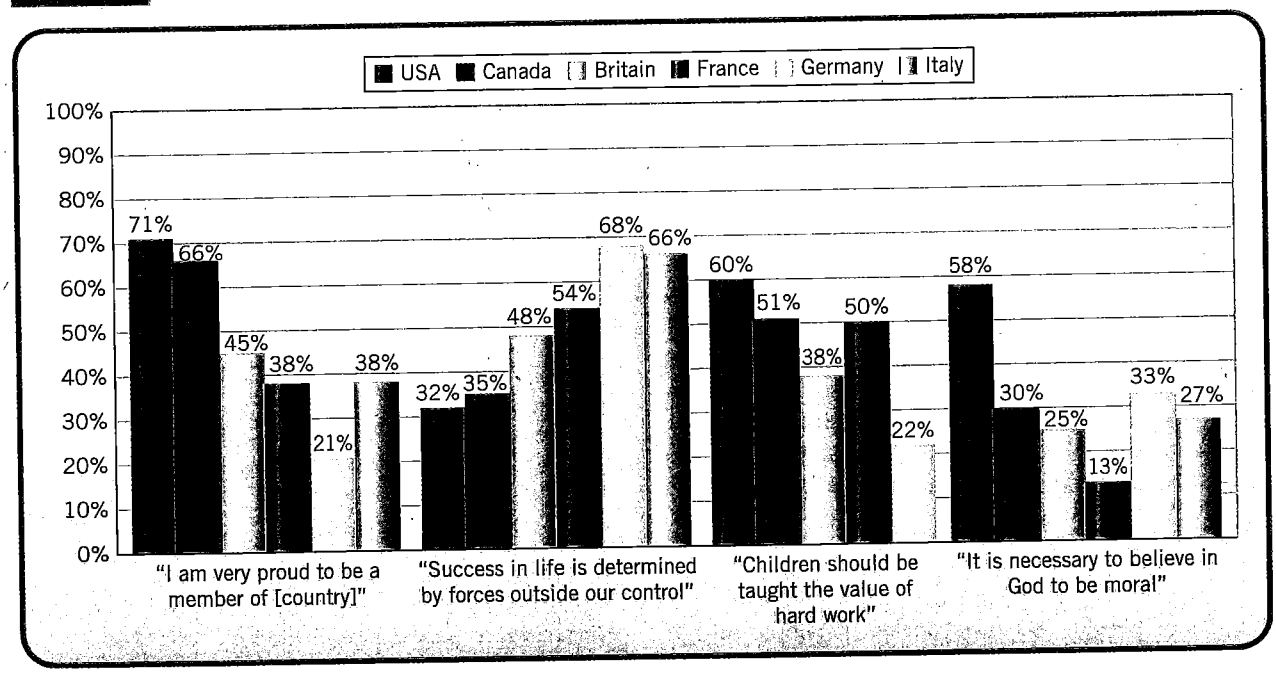
The Political System

Sweden has a well-developed democratic government, with a constitution, free speech, an elected legislature, competing political parties, and a reasonably honest and nonpartisan bureaucracy. But the Swedish political culture is significantly different from ours; it is more deferential than participatory. Though almost all adult Swedes vote in national elections, few participate in politics in any other way. They defer to the decisions of experts and specialists who work for the government, rarely challenge governmental decisions in court, believe leaders and legislators ought to decide issues on the basis of "what is best" more than on "what the people want," and value equality as much as (or more than) liberty.[21] Whereas Americans are contentious, Swedes value harmony; while Americans tend to assert their rights, Swedes tend to observe their obligations.

The contrast in political cultures is even greater when one looks at a nation, such as Japan, with a wholly different history and set of traditions. One study compared the values expressed by a small number of upper-status Japanese with those of some similarly situated Americans. Whereas the Americans emphasized the virtues of individualism, competition, and equality in their political, economic, and social relations, the Japanese attached greater value to maintaining good relations with colleagues, having decisions made by groups, preserving social harmony, and displaying respect for hierarchy. The Americans were more concerned than the Japanese with rules and with treating others fairly but impersonally, with due regard for their rights. The Japanese, on the other hand, stressed the importance of being sensitive to the personal needs of others, avoiding conflict, and reaching decisions through discussion rather than the application of rules.[22]

A classic study of political culture in five nations found that Americans, and to a lesser degree citizens of the

FIGURE 4.1 Attitudes in the United States and Other Democracies



Note: Data from Italy is not available for "Children should be taught the value of hard work."

Source: © 2006 by Andrew Kohut and Bruce Stokes. Reprinted by permission of Henry Holt and Company, LLC and the Pew Research Center.

United Kingdom, had a stronger sense of **civic duty** (a belief that one has an obligation to participate in civic and political affairs) and a stronger sense of **civic competence** (a belief that one can affect government policies) than the citizens of Germany, Italy, and Mexico. More than half of all Americans and one-third of all Britons believed the average citizen ought to "be active in one's community," compared to only a tenth in Italy and a fifth in Germany. Moreover, many more Americans and Britons than Germans, Italians, or Mexicans believed they could "do something" about an unjust national law or local regulation.[23] A more recent study of citizen participation in politics found that while America lagged behind Austria, the Netherlands, Germany, and the United Kingdom in voter participation, when it came to campaigning, attending political meetings, becoming active in the local community, and contacting government officials, Americans were as active—or substantially more active—than citizens elsewhere.[24]

Today the American people have less trust in government than they once did. But even so, popular confidence in political institutions remains higher here than in many places abroad. In cross-national surveys conducted in the United States and 16 other democracies, Americans expressed more confidence in public institutions (the police, the armed forces, the legal system, and the civil service) than the citizens of all but four other countries (Denmark, Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Norway), and greater confidence in private institutions (the church, major companies, the press, trade unions) than the citizens of any other nation.[25] Even the most disaffected voters believe the United States needs to change only certain policies, not its system of government.[26] At the same time, Americans also believe very strongly in an individual work ethic and the belief that hard work will lead to success. As Figure 4.2 shows, nearly three-quarters of Americans linked hard work and success in a 2014 Global Attitudes Survey by the Pew Research Center, compared to a global median of about 50 percent for the 44 nations surveyed.

civic duty A belief that one has an obligation to participate in civic and political affairs.

civic competence A belief that one can affect government policies.

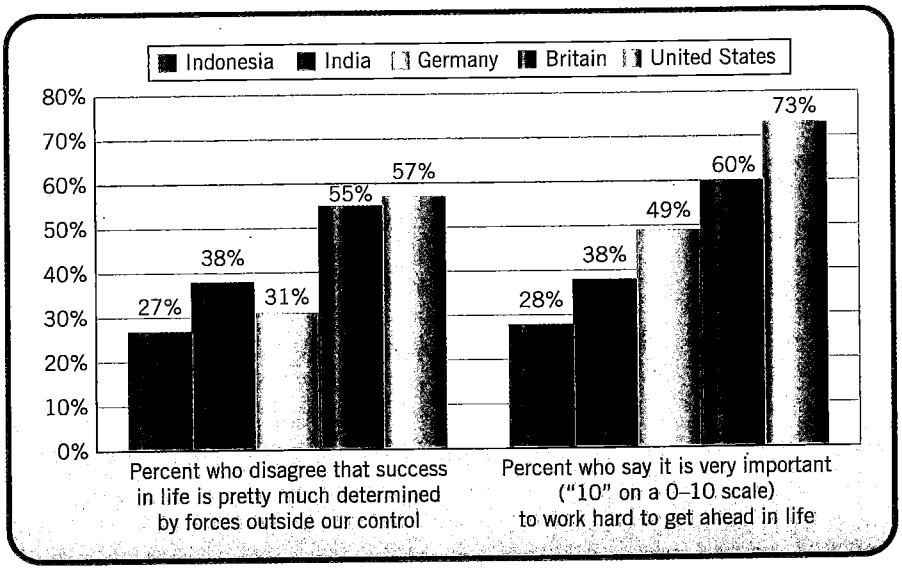
The Economic System

The political culture of Sweden is not only more deferential than ours but also more inclined to favor equality of results over equality of opportunity. Sidney Verba and Gary Orren compared the views of Swedish and American trade union and political party leaders on a variety of economic issues. In both countries, the leaders were chosen from either blue-collar unions or the major liberal political party (the Democrats in the United States, the Social Democrats in Sweden).

The results are quite striking. By margins of four or five to one, the Swedish leaders were more likely to believe in giving workers equal pay than their American counterparts. Moreover, by margins of at least three to one, the Swedes were more likely than the Americans to favor putting a top limit on incomes.[27]

Just what these differences in beliefs mean in dollars-and-cents terms was revealed by the answers to another

FIGURE 4.2 The Importance of Individualism in the United States



Source: Pew Research Center, "How Do Americans Stand Out From the Rest of the World?" March 12, 2015, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/03/12/how-do-americans-stand-out-from-the-rest-of-the-world/.

question. Each group was asked what should be the ratio between the income of an executive and that of a menial worker (a dishwasher in Sweden, an elevator operator in the United States). The Swedish leaders said the ratio should be a little over two to one. That is, if the dishwasher earned $200 a week, the executive should earn no more than $440 to $480 a week. But the American leaders were ready to let the executive earn between $2,260 and $3,040 per week when the elevator operator was earning $200.

Americans, compared to people in many other countries, are more likely to think that freedom is more important than equality and less likely to think that hard work goes unrewarded or that the government should guarantee citizens a basic standard of living. These cultural differences make a difference in politics. In fact, there is less income inequality in Sweden than in the United States—the Swedish government sees to that.

The Civic Role of Religion

In the 1830s, de Tocqueville was amazed at how religious Americans were in comparison to his fellow Europeans. From the first days of the new Republic to the present, America has been among the most religious countries in the world. The average American is more likely than the average European to believe in God, to pray on a daily basis, and to acknowledge clear standards of right and wrong.[28]

Religious people donate more than three times as much money to charity as secular people, even when the incomes of the two groups are the same, and they volunteer their time twice as often. And this is true whether or not religious people go to church or synagogue regularly. Moreover, religious people are more likely to give money and donate time to nonreligious organizations, such as the Red Cross, than secular people.[29] It is clear that religion in America has a large effect on our culture.

Jonathan Ernst/Reuters

The 114th Congress opens with a prayer.

Religion also affects our politics. The religious revivalist movement of the late 1730s and early 1740s (known as the First Great Awakening) transformed the political life of the American colonies. Religious ideas fueled the break with England, which, in the words of the Declaration of Independence, had violated "the laws of nature and nature's God." Religious leaders were central to the struggle over slavery in the 19th century and the temperance movement of the early 20th century.

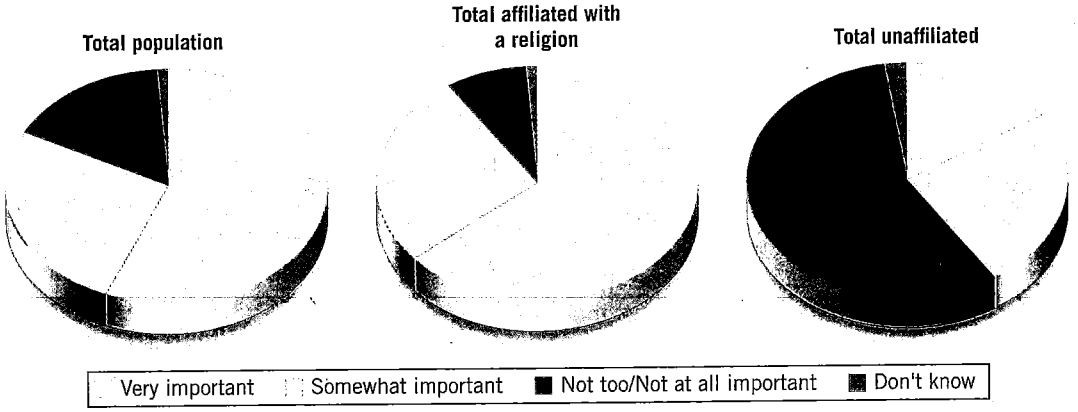
Both liberals and conservatives have used the pulpit to promote political change. The civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s was led mainly by black religious leaders, most prominently Martin Luther King, Jr. In the 1980s, a conservative religious group known as the Moral Majority advocated constitutional amendments that would allow prayer in public schools and ban abortion. In the 1990s, another conservative religious group, the Christian Coalition, attracted an enormous amount of media attention and became a prominent force in many national, state, and local elections.

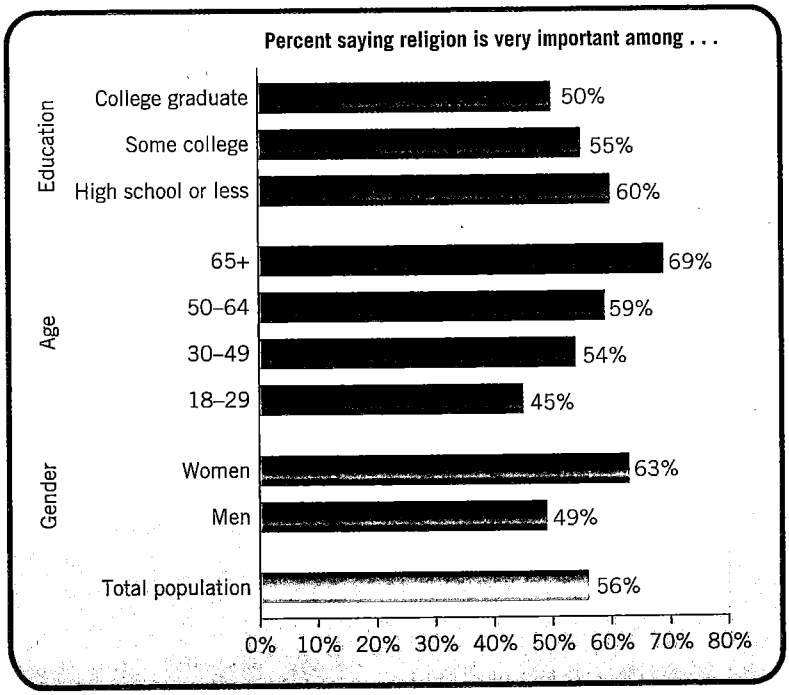
Candidates for national office in most contemporary democracies mention religion rarely if they mention it at all. Not so in America. During the 2000 presidential campaign, for example, both Democratic candidate Al Gore and Republican candidate George W. Bush gave major speeches extolling the virtues of religion and advocating the right of religious organizations that deliver social services to receive government funding on the same basis as all other nonprofit organizations. President Barack Obama opted to keep the White House "faith-based" office that Bush had established, expanded the office to cabinet centers at every federal cabinet department, and made frequent references to religion in public addresses throughout his first term.

The general American feeling about religion became apparent when a federal appeals court in 2002 tried to ban the Pledge of Allegiance because it contained the phrase "under God." There was an overwhelming and bipartisan condemnation of the ruling. To a degree that would be almost unthinkable in many other democracies, religious beliefs will probably continue to shape political culture in America for many generations to come. The Supreme Court, by deciding that the man who brought the case was not entitled to do so, left the Pledge intact without deciding whether it was constitutional.

Finally, even Americans who do not consider themselves "religious" or are unaffiliated with any organized religious group are not uniformly secular. For instance, while people age 65 and older are much more likely (69 percent) to say religion is very important to them than people under age 30 (45 percent), more than 80 percent of the population says religion is very or somewhat important in their lives. One-quarter of all Americans not affiliated with a religion say religion is somewhat important in their lives (see Figure 4.3).

FIGURE 4.3 Americans' Beliefs About Religion





Source: Pew Research Center, "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Beliefs and Practices," June 1, 2008, http://www.pewforum.org/2008/06/01/chapter-1-religious-beliefs-and-practices/.

CONSTITUTIONAL CONNECTIONS

"A Religious People"

Justice William O. Douglas was the U.S. Supreme Court's longest-serving member, beginning his term in 1939 and ending it in 1975. When Douglas died in 1980, he was widely remembered as the Court's most consistently liberal voice, a major force in legalizing abortion rights, and a proponent of the "wall-of-separation" doctrine regarding church–state relations (see Chapter 5). In *Zorach v. Clauson* (1952), however, Douglas held that a New York City policy permitting public school students to be released during the school day to receive religious instruction off school grounds was not only constitutional but consistent with Americans' best "traditions" as "a religious people":

> *We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being. We guarantee the freedom to worship. . . . We make room for a wide variety of beliefs. . . . When the state encourages religious instruction or cooperates with religious authorities, it follows the best of our traditions.*

Source: *Zorach v. Clauson*, 343 U.S. 306 (1952).