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American Citizens and Political Culture

Chapter 2

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In this chapter we will learn about

- Our roots as immigrants and the role of immigration in American politics
- Demographic trends that help us see what Americans are like in terms of crucial variables such as age, race, income level, and education, and the ways these trends affect American political life
- American political beliefs—those that pull us together as a nation and those that drive us into partisan divisions

Who are we?

- The United States is incredibly diverse and constantly changing.
- Population trends include rising percentages of senior citizens, ethnic minorities, immigrants, and non-English speakers in the American population.

Where do we come from?

- You are an American citizen if you are
 - Born in the United States, whether or not parents are citizens (*jus soli* – “the right of the soil”)
 - Born to American parents abroad (*jus sanguinis* – “the right by blood”).
- Immigrants: citizens or subjects of other countries who move to another country to live or work
- Naturalization: the legal process of acquiring citizenship for someone who has not acquired it by birth

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Sample naturalization exam questions

- Who elects the president of the United States?
- Who said “Give me liberty, or give me death?”
- In what year was the Constitution written?
- In what month is the new president inaugurated?

Nonimmigrants

- Those seeking asylum
 - Asylum: protection or sanctuary, especially from political persecution
 - Refugees: individuals who flee an area or country because of persecution on the basis of race, nationality, religion, group membership, or political opinion
- Nonpermanent resident students, workers, visitors
- Illegal immigrants avoid U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services regulations
 - Often obey laws, pay taxes, but strain some states

U.S. immigration policy

- We control immigration because
 - We prefer to admit those able to help the United States
 - We historically have limited immigration of some groups
- Immigration law today is controlled by the Department of Homeland Security
 - Post-September 11 security worries
 - Illegal immigration through Mexican border

What we believe: the ideas that unite us

- Political culture: the broad patterns of ideas, beliefs, and values about citizens and government held by the citizens of a country
 - Values: central ideas, principles, or standards that most people agree are important
 - Often take it for granted or aren't aware of it
 - Shared and handed down

Faith in rules and individuals

- Focus on fair rules and processes rather than results, and on individuals being responsible for their own success
- Procedural guarantees: government assurance that the rules will work smoothly and treat everyone fairly, with no promise of particular outcomes
- Other democracies concentrate on substantive guarantees: assuring outcomes are fair

Faith in rules and individuals, cont'd.

- Individualism: belief that what is good for society is based on what is good for individuals
- Individuals, not government, are responsible for their own well-being

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Core American values

- **Democracy:** representative democracy is a fair way to make decisions
- **Freedom:** procedural view that no unfair restrictions will be placed on you
- **Equality:** Americans believe in equality of treatment, access, and opportunity but not in equality of result

What we believe: the ideas that divide us

- Ideologies: sets of beliefs about politics and society that help people make sense of their world
- Our political culture means the range of ideological debate is narrow compared to other democracies

What we believe: the ideas that divide us, cont'd.

- Conservatives: people who generally favor limited government and are cautious about change
- Liberals: people who generally favor government action and view change as progress

Ideological dimensions

- The economic dimension
 - Conservatives prefer little government involvement in economy
 - Liberals see a positive government role
- The social order dimension
 - Economic security has led Americans to become more concerned with quality of life and moral issues
 - Division over limited versus more active government control of individual lives

Relationship between the ideological dimensions

- The two dimensions do not dovetail neatly
- Leaves different mixes of ideological groups
 - Economic liberals
 - Social liberals
 - Economic conservatives
 - Social conservatives
 - Libertarians
 - Communitarians

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The citizens and American political beliefs

- The United States has grown more democratic since Madison's time.
- More groups may vote and assert political rights.
- Participation is not high, however.
- Is low turnout a concern?
- Is there a civic crisis in American democracy?