

For Alberto Olivarez, the citizenship ceremony was a bit different, though no less emotional. In 2006, Olivarez, a Mexican-born teacher at an elementary school in Brighton, Colorado, took his oath of citizenship alone, standing before an audience of students and their parents in his school gymnasium. Like Olivarez, many in the audience were immigrants or children of immigrants.

Olivarez's wife and three children sat on the stage with him as he pledged to "support and defend the Constitution of the United States." With this oath, Olivarez became a U.S. citizen, just as he had expected. What came next, however, surprised him. The school principal explained to the audience that Olivarez's citizenship automatically made his three young sons American citizens as well. Upon hearing this news, Olivarez burst into tears. It was a benefit of citizenship he had never imagined.

American Citizens: Native Born and Naturalized

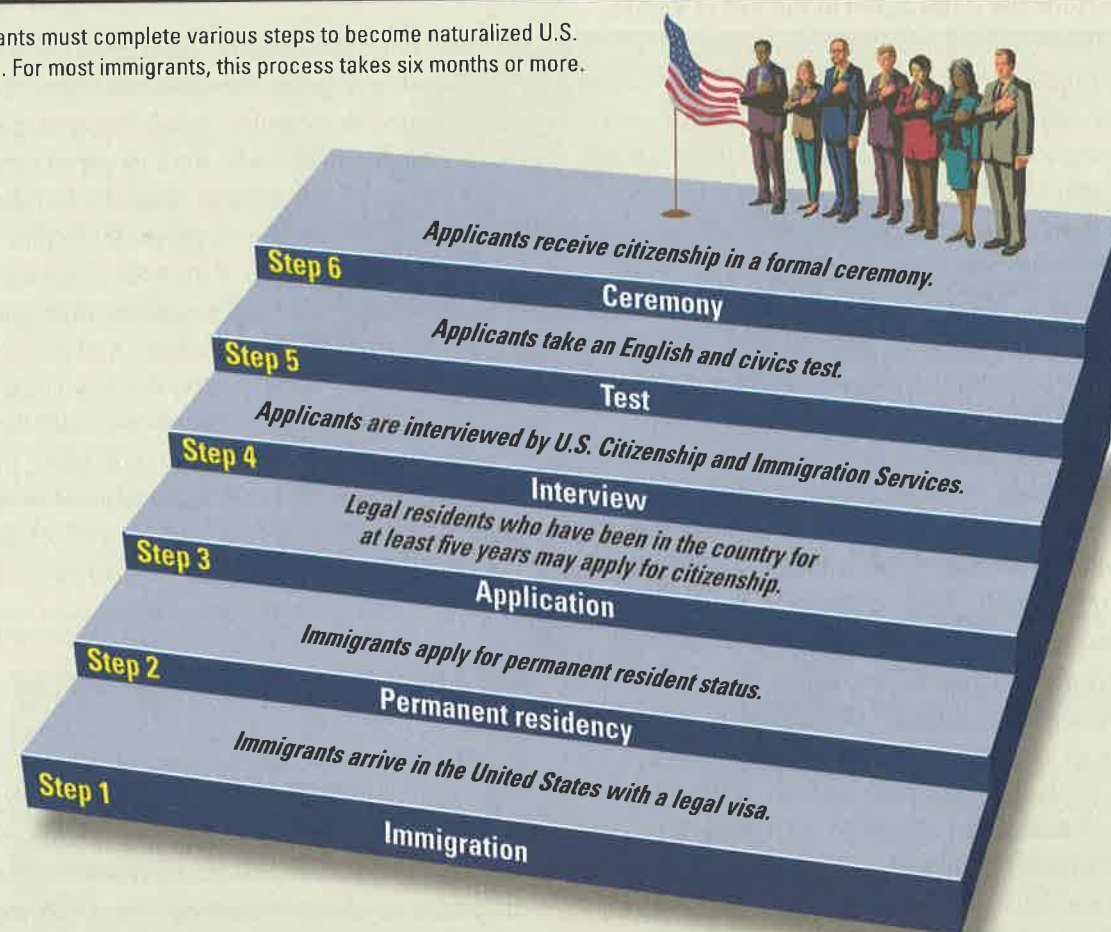
There are two ways to become a U.S. citizen. The most common way is by birth. Most Americans are born in the United States, though some are born in another country to parents who are U.S. citizens. Either way, citizens by birth automatically enjoy all the rights, privileges, and protections of citizenship.

The other way to become a citizen is through **naturalization**. This is the path that Alberto Olivarez and other naturalized citizens have taken. Naturalization is a multistep legal process that, when completed, gives the applicant virtually all the rights and responsibilities of a native-born citizen.

In 2011, nearly 700,000 people became U.S. citizens through naturalization. The largest group of new citizens came from Mexico, but tens of thousands also came from India, the Philippines, China, Columbia, Cuba, and other countries.

Steps to Citizenship: The Naturalization Process

Immigrants must complete various steps to become naturalized U.S. citizens. For most immigrants, this process takes six months or more.



Immigrants must meet several requirements to be eligible for naturalization. They must be at least 18 years old and lawful permanent residents of the United States. In most cases, such immigrants, also known as **resident aliens**, must have lived in this country for at least five years to be eligible for naturalization.

After meeting those requirements, the next step is to complete an application for naturalization. If the application is approved, the applicant has an interview with an immigration official. At this meeting, applicants are tested on their ability to speak, read, and write English. They also take a civics test to show basic knowledge of American history and government. Sample questions from the test appear at the end of this chapter.

The final step in the naturalization process is the citizenship ceremony. Here, applicants answer a few more questions. Then they take the oath of allegiance to the United States and receive a certificate of naturalization.

Naturalization gives new citizens the right to vote and run for any public office except that of vice president or president. The Constitution says that only native-born citizens can hold these offices. Critics of this rule argue that it is no longer necessary or fair because it excludes qualified foreign-born officials. However, supporters of the clause highlight its importance in preventing foreign influence over the U.S. government.

The Status of Lawful Permanent Residents

Immigrants do not need to become citizens to stay in the United States legally, however. They may remain here indefinitely as lawful permanent residents. In 2011, the U.S. government granted permanent residency to more than 1 million people.

Immigrants seeking permanent resident status also go through an application process with the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services. Preference is given to immigrants whose job skills are needed by U.S. businesses or who are related by birth or marriage to a U.S. citizen. Those who successfully complete the application process receive an identification card known as a **green card**. A green card provides proof that its holder has a legal right to live and work in the United States.

Resident aliens enjoy most of the rights of citizens. These include the right to travel freely

outside the country. However, if resident aliens plan to be away for more than a year, they must apply for a reentry permit. Without this permit, they may be refused reentry to the United States. Resident aliens may also lose their permanent resident status and be deported if they are convicted of criminal activity.

7.4 Political Culture in the United States

Citizens and residents of the United States operate within a **political culture**. This is a society's framework of shared values, beliefs, and attitudes concerning politics and government. It is the political environment in which Americans exercise their rights and responsibilities.

Political culture can take many forms and be expressed in many ways. The strong surge of patriotism after the 9/11 terrorist attacks of 2001 was an expression of American political culture. At the time, many Americans flew the flag to show their love of country. In quite a different way, the civil rights protests of the 1950s and 1960s were also an expression of American political culture. The millions of Americans who supported the civil rights movement shared the belief that all citizens should enjoy equal rights and opportunities.

Americans' Shared Political Values

Although Americans often disagree on specific issues, they share a number of core beliefs and values. These beliefs, some of which are listed below, shape our political culture. Keep in mind that individuals may vary in terms of their attachment to these core values.

Liberty. Americans believe that they are entitled to the greatest amount of liberty possible as long as they do no harm to others. They firmly believe that citizens should be able to express their views openly, without fear of punishment by the government.

Equality. Americans embrace equality of opportunity, without regard to race, religion, or gender. They believe that all citizens should enjoy the right to vote, to receive an education, to have a job, and to succeed in life.

Democracy. Americans support a democratic system of government. They believe that political authority comes from the people and that public officials should be accountable to the voters. The

importance of majority rule and the protection of minority rights are important related beliefs.

Individualism. Americans believe in personal freedom and personal responsibility. As a general rule, they believe that every citizen is responsible for his or her own actions and well-being. This contrasts with the more collective view in some countries, where greater emphasis is placed on the government's role in meeting people's needs.

Free enterprise. Americans support capitalism and a free-market economy in which private businesses compete with relatively limited regulation by government. They accept the fact that such a system creates winners and losers in terms of wealth and economic status.

Justice and the rule of law. Americans believe that society should be governed by a system of laws that are fairly and equally applied. They believe that the rights of ordinary citizens should not be arbitrarily restricted or infringed on by government.

Patriotism. Americans feel great pride and loyalty toward their country. Many believe that the United States is the greatest nation in the world. They also take pride in the values of American democracy.

Optimism. In general, Americans are upbeat and optimistic. They see themselves as "can-do" people. They tend to believe that their lives and life in general will be better in the future.

Despite their many differences, most Americans share some basic political values, including a love of country.



Civic duty. Americans believe that for democracy to flourish, citizens should vote and participate in civic and political affairs. Many also see volunteering for military service or giving back to their communities through volunteer activities as an aspect of civic duty.

Two Widely Held Ideologies: Liberalism and Conservatism

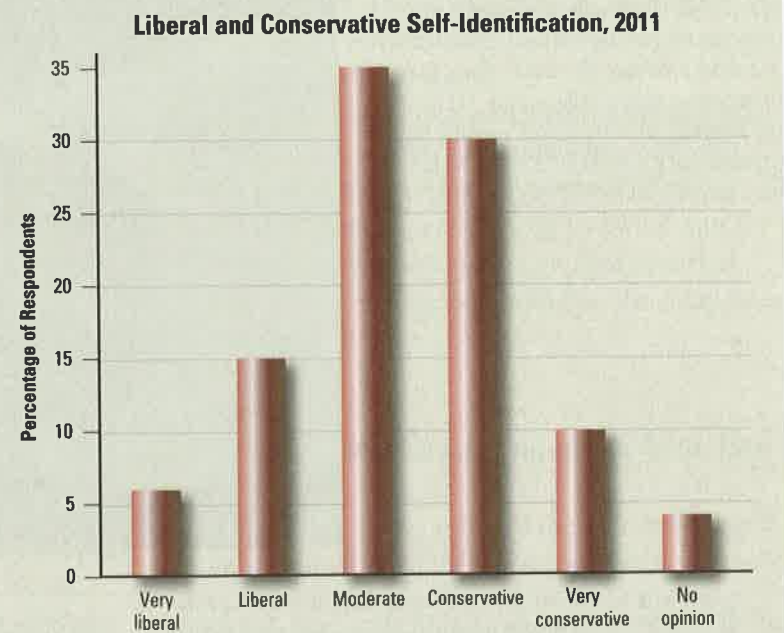
Although Americans share a common political culture, they do not all hold to the same **ideology**, or basic political beliefs. For example, they often disagree on the role government should play with respect to economic policy and moral values. The most widely held ideologies in U.S. politics today are held by Americans who define themselves as liberals or conservatives.

Liberalism is an ideology that favors an active role for the government in solving society's problems. Liberals generally support government efforts to regulate business and the economy. They support policies designed to reduce economic inequality and to help the poor. They also favor the use of government regulation to protect the environment and improve the health care system.

As their name suggests, liberals strongly defend liberty and resist government efforts to interfere in people's personal lives. On a political spectrum, with

Where Americans Lie on the Political Spectrum

The political spectrum runs from the liberal left to the conservative right. This graph shows the percentages of Americans who identified themselves as liberal, conservative, or moderate in 2011. A majority of Americans put themselves somewhere in the moderate middle.



moderates in the middle, liberals are said to be "left of center." They tend to associate themselves with the Democratic Party.

Conservatism, on the other hand, is an ideology that calls for a limited role for government in economic affairs. Conservatives generally oppose government regulation of business. Most want to limit the size of government, reduce taxes, and cut back on government programs. Instead, they look to private initiative, or efforts by nongovernmental groups such as religious congregations, charities, service organizations, and businesses, to deal with many of society's problems.

In contrast to liberals, conservatives are more likely to support government action on moral issues. Conservatives are said to be "right of center" on the political spectrum. They generally associate themselves with the Republican Party.

Over the past few decades, more Americans have identified themselves as conservatives than as liberals. Since the late 1960s, the percentage of self-identified conservatives has varied from 30 to 40 percent. The percentage of people calling themselves liberal has remained more constant, at around 20 percent. This graph compares the percentages of liberals, conservatives, and moderates in 2011.

Three Other Ideologies: Socialism, Libertarianism, and Environmentalism

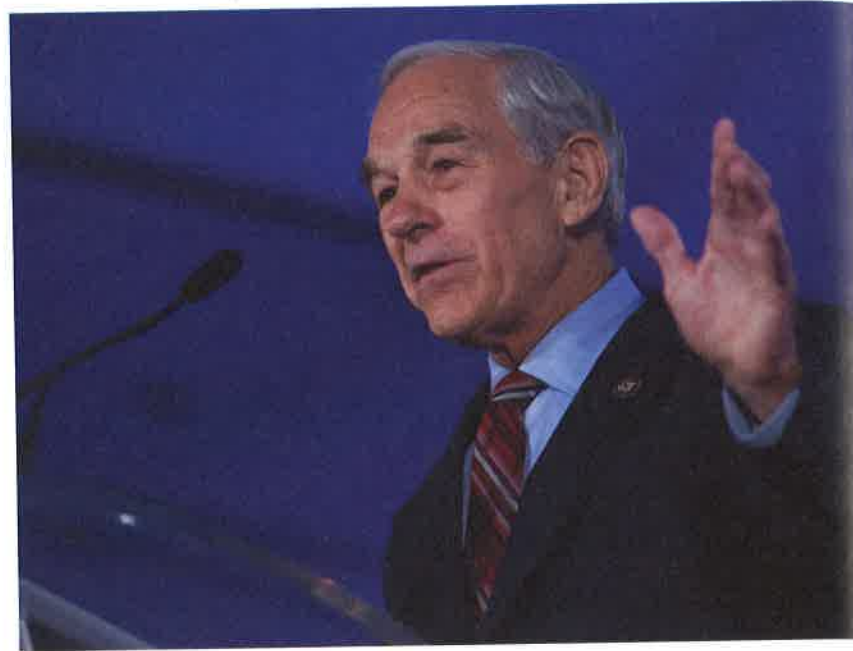
Three other ideologies—socialism, **libertarianism**, and **environmentalism**—also play a role in American politics. Although these ideologies have fewer followers than liberalism and conservatism, they have inspired and motivated many people over the years.

Socialism. The oldest of these ideologies is socialism. The main goal of socialism is to limit economic inequality by ensuring a fair distribution of wealth. In a socialist system, the government owns or controls most of the economic resources needed for the production of goods and services. In theory, a socialist government manages the economy in a way that benefits the majority of citizens.

In 1901, reformers and workers who believed in socialism formed the Socialist Party of America. The party's greatest electoral success came in 1912 when its presidential candidate, Eugene Debs, won nearly a million votes. That was just 6 percent of the total votes cast, but it was a substantial showing for a socialist candidate. After World War I, however, membership in the Socialist Party declined.

Socialism never became as popular in the United States as it did in other countries, in part because it

Liberalism and conservatism are the dominant political ideologies in the United States. The significance of the two-party system has created factions within the Democratic and Republican parties. For example, politician Ron Paul ran for U.S. president in 1988 as Libertarian. He joined the Republican Party before running for president in 2008 and 2012, but maintained his libertarian views as a Republican.



conflicted with America's political culture. A strong faith in capitalism and the free enterprise system made most Americans leery of socialists' call for government control of economic resources.

Most American socialists today support what is known as **democratic socialism**. This is an ideology that advocates socialism as a basis for the economy and democracy as a governing principle. In countries that have adopted this ideology, elected leaders supervise a "mixed economy" of public and private industry.

Libertarianism. Modern libertarianism is an ideology based on a strong belief in personal freedom. A 2012 statement of libertarian principles began with these words:

As Libertarians, we seek a world of liberty; a world in which all individuals are sovereign over their own lives and no one is forced to sacrifice his or her values for the benefit of others.

—National Platform of the Libertarian Party, 2012

Libertarians tend to be conservative on economic issues and liberal on social issues. For example, they favor lower taxes and a free-market economy, while opposing bans on abortion or gay marriage. Libertarians want a small government and resist government regulation of any kind.

Formed in 1971, the Libertarian Party has attracted a small but loyal following. According to

Pew Research Center, 9 percent of Americans had libertarian beliefs in 2011. Libertarian candidates regularly run for office in local, state, and national elections. So far their success has been limited to the local level, where they have won election to such positions as mayor, city council member, and sheriff.

Environmentalism. This last ideology, environmentalism, unites Americans who are deeply concerned about conservation and protection of the environment. Environmentalists advocate policies designed to reduce pollution and preserve natural resources. In contrast to libertarians, they support government regulation of industry and the economy to achieve those ends.

Many members of conservation organizations such as the Sierra Club and Friends of the Earth identify themselves as environmentalists. So do members of the Green Party of the United States. "Greens" are committed to what they call "ecological and economic sustainability." By this they mean meeting the needs of the world's people today without damaging the ability of future generations to provide for themselves. As their party platform states,

We support a sustainable society which utilizes resources in such a way that future generations will benefit and not suffer from the practices of our generation. To this end we must practice agriculture which replenishes the soil; move to

an energy efficient economy; and live in ways that respect the integrity of natural systems.

—Green Party of the United States Platform, 2012

Like the Libertarian Party, the Green Party has been most successful in electing candidates at the local level. The party is stronger in Europe, however, and has won national offices in a number of countries.

The Moderates in the Middle: Centristism

Most Americans don't fit neatly into any ideological camp. They consider themselves moderates, or middle-of-the-road voters. These are people who sit at the center of the political spectrum, between the ideologies of left and right.

In recent years, U.S. politics have become more polarized, meaning that political parties have adopted more extreme policies. The Republican Party has grown more conservative, and the Democratic Party more liberal. This polarization is especially evident in the current Congress, which remains divided on a number of issues.



Liberals are considered left of center, while conservatives are on the right. But there are other positions along the political spectrum, and many Americans are not quite sure where they fit.

These strong divisions often push voters to be drawn to **centristism**. Many surveys show that moderates, along with people who describe themselves as slightly conservative or slightly liberal, make up the largest group of U.S. voters.

In contrast to people with a strong ideological point of view, centrists may hold a mix of liberal, conservative, and perhaps environmental views. Centristism is not an ideology with its own political party. As a result, during election time, centrists often cross party lines, depending on the candidates and issues of the day.

7.5 How Americans Engage in Civic Life

For most Americans, voting is the first thing that comes to mind when they hear the words "civic duty." In a democracy, voting is one of the most basic and important ways to engage in civic life.

There are many other ways to be an active citizen, however. You can read newspapers or watch the news on television to stay informed about current events. You can talk to friends about political issues or put a political bumper sticker on your car to demonstrate your support. You can become a volunteer with a community group or follow a political figure using social media. By doing any of these things, you are engaging in civic life.

Civil Society: The "Social Capital" of Democracy

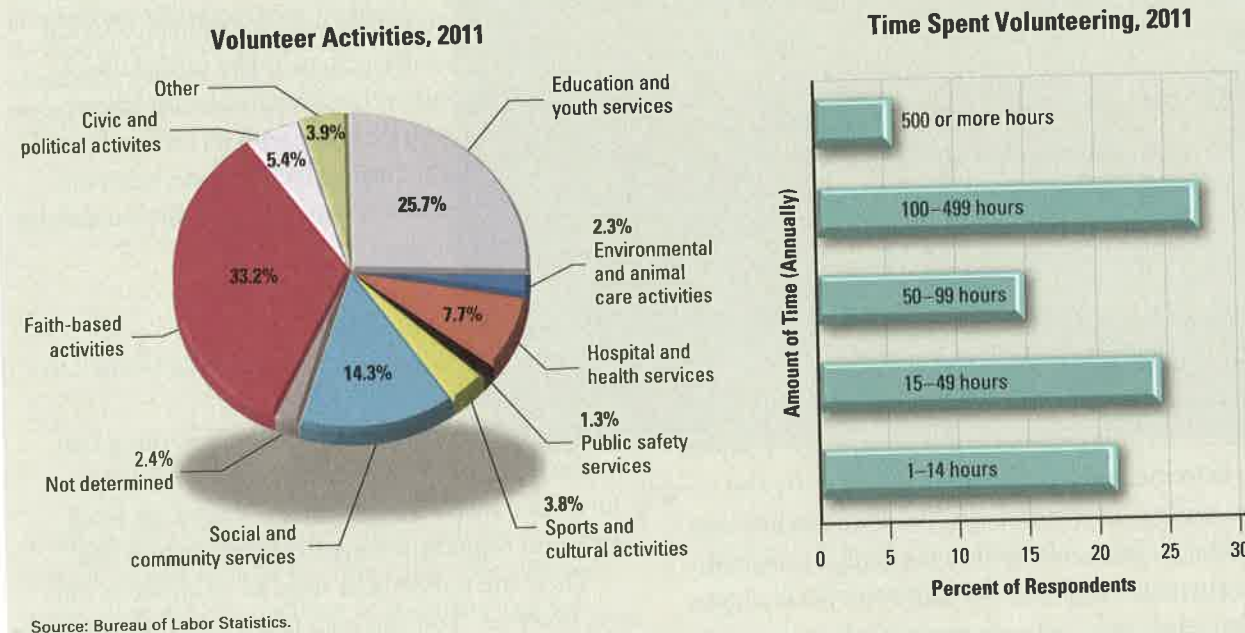
At the start of this chapter, you read about Robert D. Putnam's work on civic engagement. Putnam concluded that Americans today are less likely to participate in civic associations than they were in the past. He further believes that such participation is crucial to democracy.

Putnam argues that social clubs and civic organizations are building blocks of what political scientists call **civil society**. This term refers to a middle layer of voluntary associations and institutions that exists between government on the one hand and individuals and families on the other.

Many political scientists argue that a strong civil society is essential in a democracy. The organizations that make up civil society, they point out, are nourished by citizen involvement. This involvement helps to expand a society's **social capital**. Putnam

Volunteering in the United States

Americans who volunteer their time do so in various types of activities. Just over a third volunteer mainly through religious organizations. Over 30 percent of volunteers devote 100 hours or more a year to volunteer activities.



defines social capital as “connections among individuals” that are forged through their participation in voluntary associations.

To understand how social capital works, consider this simple example. In many communities, parents of school-age children join the local Parent Teacher Association. Through their PTA, parents work together to improve their children’s schools.

While working on PTA projects, parents form new social networks and exchange information about their community. Through these networks, they may create new groups to work on other local issues. In this way, the connections forged within the PTA help to generate new energy and ideas that benefit the larger community. This is social capital in action.

Of course, the PTA is only one of thousands of volunteer organizations that one might choose to join. As the graphs above show, Americans get involved in many types of volunteer activities and for varying amounts of time. All of these efforts help to strengthen civil society and build social capital.

Putting Social Capital to Work in Texas

Social capital promotes civic engagement not only in local communities, but also in state and national affairs. Such was the case in Texas in 2006 when various citizen groups rose up to oppose the construction of new coal-fired power plants across the state. Coal is a fossil fuel that produces large amounts of air pollution and greenhouse gases. The power company that planned to build these plants assured the public that they would not pollute the air. But many Texans believed otherwise.

The first protests against the power company’s plan were organized by citizens living in communities where the new plants were to be built. They argued that the coal-burning plants would harm air quality and give rise to health problems.

As opposition grew, local business leaders began to get involved in the issue. They feared that increased pollution from the plants would harm local economies by discouraging tourism and other business activity. Local public officials—including the mayors of Dallas, Houston, and other cities—began to voice their concerns.

Forms of Civic Engagement

Civic engagement takes many forms, from writing letters to organizing protests. These photographs illustrate just some of the ways citizens can make their voices heard.



Attend a Public Meeting

Find out what’s going on in your community by attending a public meeting. You might be surprised to discover how many decisions affecting your life are made close to home.



Volunteer in a Political Campaign

Get involved in a political campaign. Share the excitement of election night as volunteers wait for the votes to be counted.



Circulate a Petition

Take part in a petition drive for a cause you care about. Often you can even sign a petition online.



Organize a Fundraiser

Raise money for a worthy cause. The challenge is to help people feel good about both asking for donations and giving them.



Organize a Demonstration

Put your passion to work by organizing a demonstration. Sometimes actions really do speak louder than words.



Get Involved in a Service Project

Find a way to give back to your community. You will feel good about yourself while making a difference.