

# Chapter 1

## Should We Care about Politics?

# 1-1 Introduction

- ▶ Should we care about what happens politically?

# 1-1 Introduction

**TABLE 1.1** Is It Relevant?

Here's a list of activities that may or may not constitute ways we can interact with the political process. Select the ones you believe have something to do with your relationship with government or politics.

1. Voting in a congressional election
2. Watching the *Daily Show* on Comedy Central
3. Joining AAA (American Automobile Association) for towing services
4. Trying to drive 10 miles over the speed limit to avoid getting a ticket
5. Making a \$10 contribution to a candidate for mayor
6. Attending a private college or university
7. Camping out at Yosemite
8. Buying a Diet Coke
9. Buying a lottery ticket
10. Flushing the toilet

They're all "Yes" answers. Surprised? Here are the reasons why:

1. Easy question: voting is the most obvious way we participate in politics.
2. Political and social satire get us to think about what government is doing.
3. Even though it may not be why we join, organizations like AAA lobby elected officials over legislation.
4. Government officials write a lot of rules we live under, like speed limit laws, and enforce them with agents like police officers who determine whether 10 miles over the limit is bending the law too much.
5. Another easy one: money plays a big role in politics.
6. Whether it's adhering to national antidiscrimination policy on admission or hiring decisions, or administering federally subsidized student loans, even private schools find it hard to escape the influence of government.
7. National parks like Yosemite are preserved through government actions.
8. Almost every state imposes a sales tax on food items. If you live in Delaware or New Hampshire and you answered "no," go ahead and give yourself credit because they have no sales tax.
9. Lotteries are established and supported by state governments, and the proceeds are often used to pay for government programs.
10. You can't even find privacy from government actions here. Most places have a sewer system that wouldn't be there if not for the government.

**Score Yourself:** If you got 8–10 correct, you pay more attention than most people to politics and government. Odds are you know what C-SPAN is (and if you don't, go to [www.cspan.org](http://www.cspan.org)). If you got 5–7 correct, you have a pretty good feel for the role of government in our lives. If you got fewer than 5 correct—keep reading!

# 1–2 Democracy and Everyday Life

- ▶ Democracy assumes:
  - Participation
  - Willing consent to be governed
  - Protection of basic rights from government interference

# 1–3 Making Democracy Practical

- ▶ Small communities may establish **direct democracy**.
- ▶ As a practical matter, the United States has a **representative democracy or republic**.

# 1-4 Buying in to Authority

- ▶ Accepting the political “rules of the game”
- ▶ **Authority**
  - The right to act in an official capacity by virtue of holding an office
  - Not automatic

# 1–5 Inheriting Legitimacy

## ▶ Legitimacy

- Widespread acceptance of officials and institutions
- Partly inherited and partly earned

## ▶ Inherited legitimacy

- Law
- Tradition

# 1–6 Earning Legitimacy

- ▶ Legitimacy may be earned – or squandered – by how officials act in office



# 1-7 Power Surge

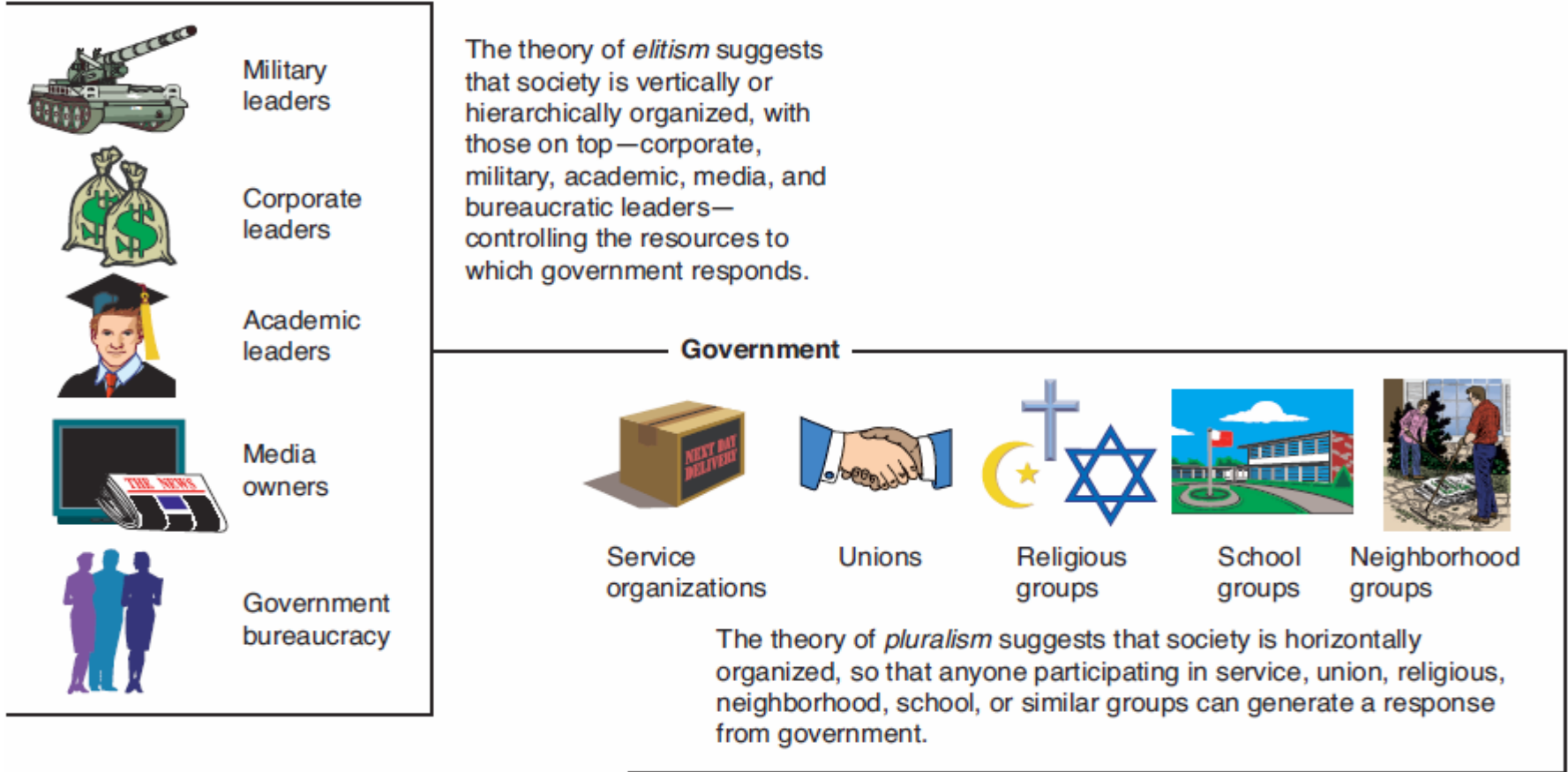
- ▶ **Power:** The ability to make others act in a way that they might otherwise not have done.
- ▶ **Politics:** the study of who gets what, when, and how
- ▶ **Resources:** The tools of power

# 1–7 Power Surge

Two views of who exercises power

- ▶ **Elitism:** Government responds to a small, centralized, non-elected hierarchy
- ▶ **Pluralism:** Government responds to many voices expressed through group membership

# 1-7 Power Surge



**FIGURE 1** Elitism vs. Pluralism

# 1-7 Power Surge

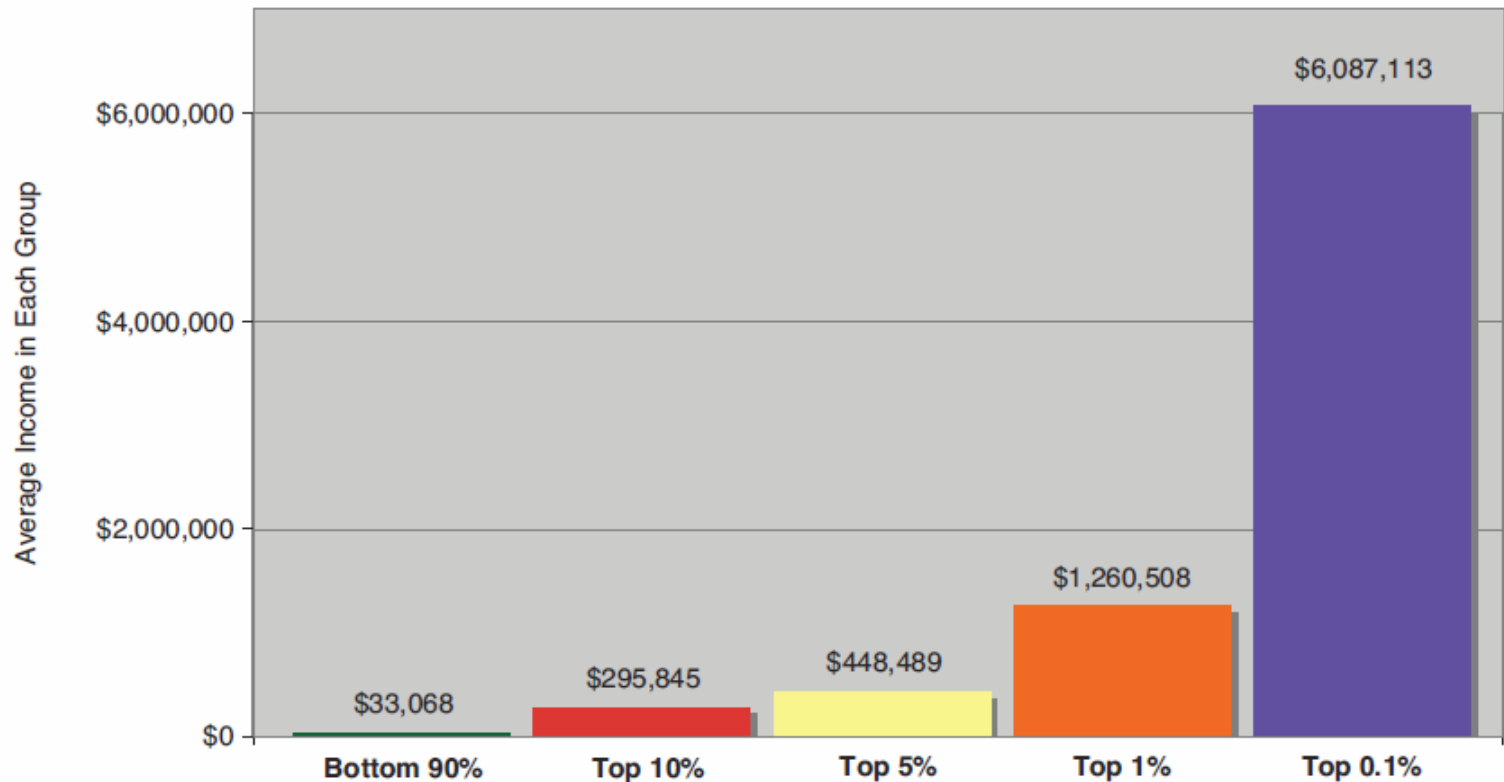
**TABLE 1.2** Normative or Empirical?

The painting contains three shades of blue oil paint.	<b>Empirical:</b> the artist or art expert can factually distinguish paint shades.
The painting would be more dramatic if it contained nine shades of blue paint.	<b>Normative:</b> this is an opinion, not a statement of fact.
The painting would be more effective if it were displayed in a brighter light.	<b>Normative:</b> this is an opinion, not a statement of fact.
The United States may be classified as a republic rather than as a direct democracy because elected representatives make decisions on behalf of the public.	<b>Empirical:</b> this is based on facts as opposed to value judgments.
The United States is better suited to being a republic than a direct democracy because of the vast size of the country.	<b>Normative:</b> this is an opinion, not a statement of fact.

# 1–8 It's Not Fair!

- ▶ **Equality of opportunity:** emphasis on comparable advantages
  - **Political Equality**
- ▶ **Equality of outcome:** leveling social and economic inequities
  - **Economic Equality**
  - **Social Equality**

# 1-8 It's Not Fair!

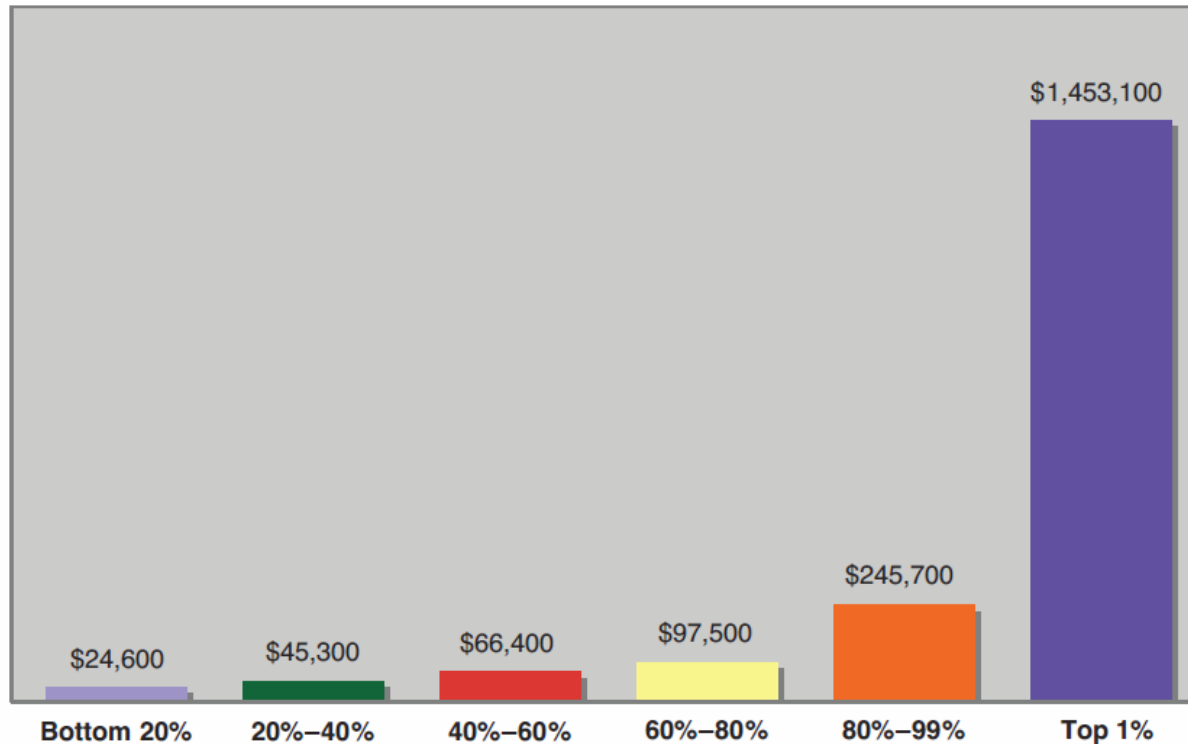


**FIGURE 1.1** The Top Overshadows Everyone<sup>T9</sup>

The top 10 percent of the population dwarfs the bottom 90 percent in average income, and the top one-tenth of 1 percent overshadows everyone.

Source: Emmanuel Saez, "U.S. Income Inequality Persists amid Overall Growth in 2014," Washington Center for Equitable Growth, June 29, 2015. <http://equitablegrowth.org/research-analysis/u-s-income-inequality-persists-amid-overall-growth-2014/>.

# 1-8 It's Not Fair!



**FIGURE 1.2** Income Inequality in America<sup>T10</sup>

If income were distributed equally across the population, then there would be no income classes. Each of the bars in this figure would be the same size. In reality, we're very far from this equal outcome in the United States.

Source: Congressional Budget Office, "The Distribution of Household Income and Federal Taxes, 2011."  
<https://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/113th-congress-2013-2014/reports/49440-Distribution-of-Income-and-Taxes.pdf>.

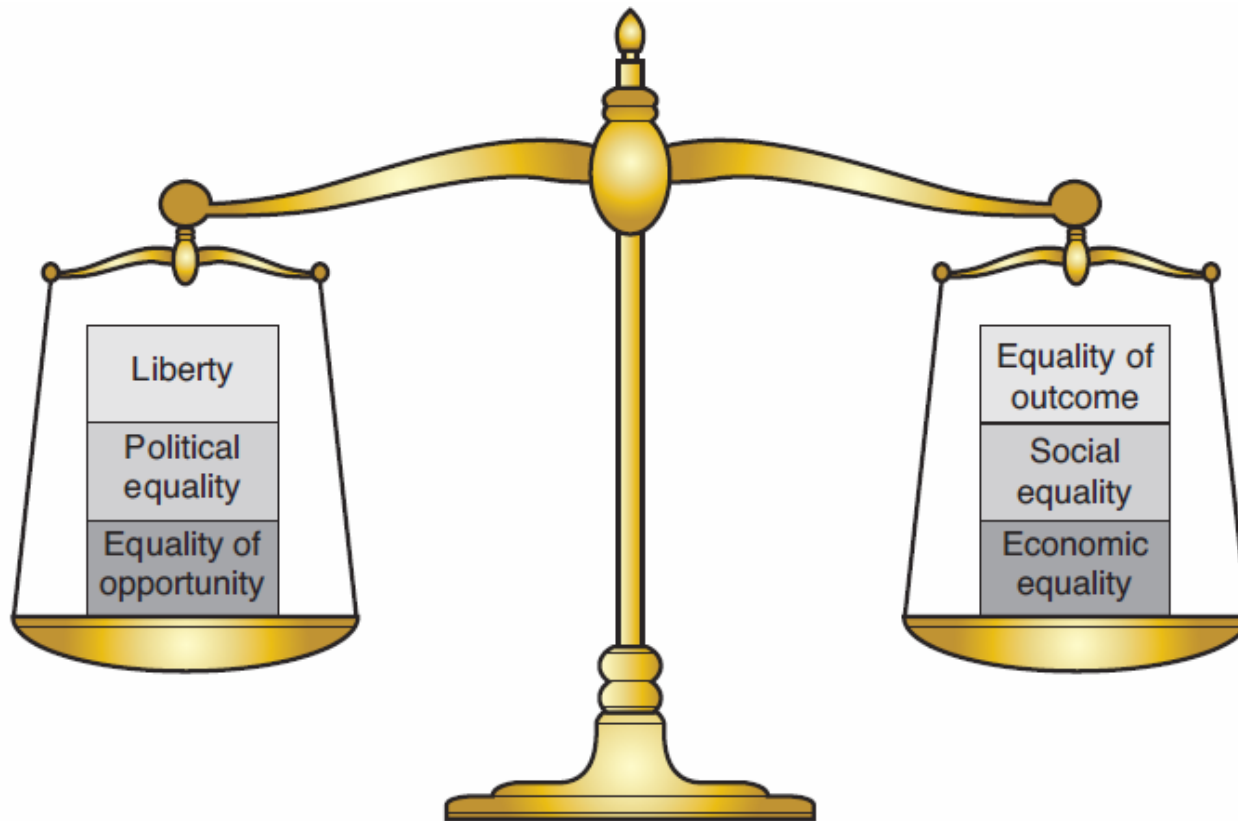


# 1–10 Equal and Free?

- ▶ **Liberty:** the ability to pursue your ends and objectives, tempered by socially defined boundaries and limited government impediments



# 1-10 Equal and Free?



**FIGURE 1.3** Balancing Liberty and Equality



# 1-11 Whose Choice?

- ▶ **Social responsibility:** concern for protection of the rights of individuals in a community
  - Trade-offs with liberty