

PLS 101
American Democracy and Citizenship



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- How often does government affect our lives?
- Consider the government regulations that affect us on a daily basis.



How unique is our system of government when compared to other democracies?

- The nature of political parties – 2 party system versus multi-party system
- Control over basic government services (e.g., police, education)
- The nature of voters - rise of the independent voter in the U.S.





How unique is our system of government?

- The role of the courts – greater role in the US
- Level of taxation
- Government ownership of industry

Much greater government ownership in
European democracies



Meanings of Democracy

- Democratic Centralism:
 - a government is democratic if it serves the "true interests of the people" whether or not people have any say in those decisions.
- Direct Democracy: all citizens participate
 - e.g., Ancient Greece, New England town meetings



Ways in which Direct Democracy is at work today

- Referendum: when voters are asked to approve or reject a specific issue
- Recall: to remove an elected official before his or her term of office has expired
- Initiative: citizens propose something on the ballot such as an amendment to the constitution



Meanings of Democracy

Representative Democracy (“Republic”)

-- Citizens elect representatives to make important decisions

Which is “better”? Direct Democracy or Representative Democracy?



Arguments for representative democracy

Direct democracy is not practical – people don't have the time, energy, interest, information to decide very difficult issues

People can make bad decisions based on fleeting desires; public opinion can be easily swayed

Direct democracy makes it difficult to reach compromises

Some policies are too important to be decided by a public opinion poll



Initial Conditions for Democracy

- Freedom of speech
- Freedom of the press
- Freedom to organize
- Belief in the legitimacy of our political system
- Others?



Representative Democracy

There are two types of representative Democracy:

- Parliamentary System
 - People elect the legislature and the legislature (e.g., Parliament) chooses a chief executive (e.g., prime minister)
 - Under this system, the executive branch is “wedded” to the legislative branch



Representative Democracy

- Presidential system
 - Each branch of government is elected separately by the people. (Separation of Powers)



Establishing a New Government

3 Fundamental Questions:

1. Who should govern?
2. Where should government authority be vested?
3. How much should government do?
 - This involves the concept of “political ideology”



Political Ideologies

The Tradeoff Between Freedom, Order, Equality

- Which is better? To live under a government that allows individuals complete freedom to do whatever they please or to live under one that enforces strict law and order?
- Which is better: to allow businesses and private clubs to choose their customers and members (e.g., private country clubs) or to pass laws that require them to admit and serve everyone, regardless of their race or gender?

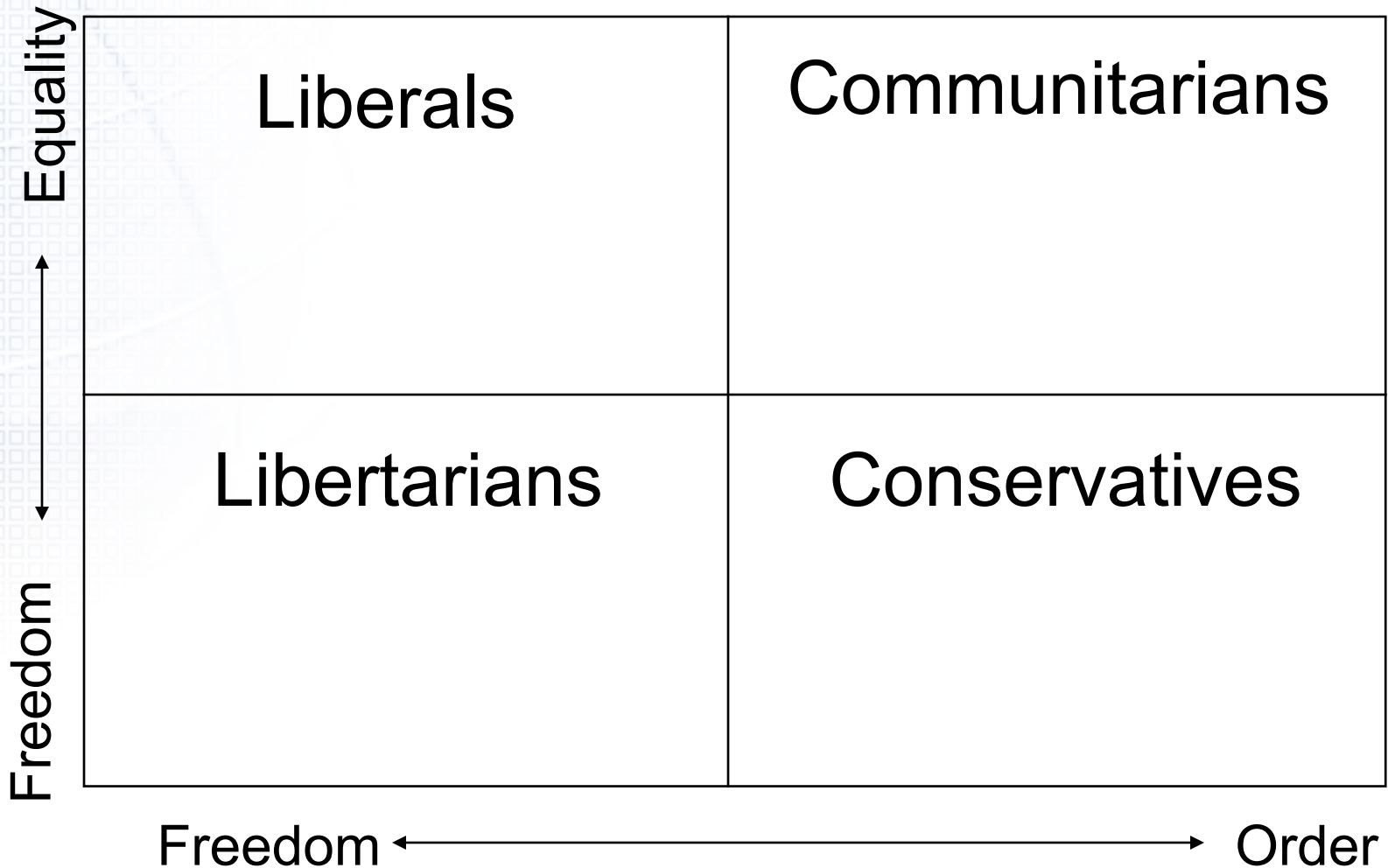


4 Basic Ideologies

- Libertarianism
- Conservatism
- Liberalism
- Communitarianism



Ideologies – A Framework





Majoritarian Model of Democracy

- Basic Assumptions



Pluralist Model of Democracy

- Basic Assumptions