

# **Critical Thinking for a Better Civic Life**

**by**

**Michael W. Collier**

**Eastern Kentucky University Libraries**

**Richmond, Kentucky**

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## About the Author

**Dr. Michael W. Collier** is a retired Associate Professor of Homeland Security at Eastern Kentucky University (EKU), Richmond, Kentucky. In his decade at EKU, he taught undergraduate and graduate courses in critical thinking, intelligence studies, policy and legal analysis, ethics, strategic planning, leadership, and management. He was also the EKU Homeland Security Program Coordinator and the Co-Director and Principal Investigator for the Bluegrass State Intelligence Community Center of Academic Excellence, where EKU was the lead university of a federally funded multi-school consortium with a goal of preparing the next generation of national security and intelligence professionals. At EKU, he won multiple University Critical-Thinking Teacher-of-the-Year Awards, in addition to the 2017 Distinguished Faculty Award in the EKU College of Justice & Safety.

Before arriving at EKU, Dr. Collier spent a decade at Florida International University (FIU), Miami, Florida, first as a doctoral student and later as the Director of Research and Academic Programs at FIU's renowned Latin American and Caribbean Center, a Title VI federally funded language and area studies center. At FIU, he taught undergraduate and graduate courses in research methodology and Latin American and Caribbean security and politics.

In a two-decade first career as a U.S. Coast Guard officer, Dr. Collier, with almost 10 years of sea duty, was a specialist in deep-water cutter operations and training and a sub-specialist in law enforcement and military intelligence. He served senior officer tours as Coast Guard and Police Attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá, Colombia; Commanding Officer, *USCGC Thetis* (WMEC 910) homeported in Key West, Florida; and Deputy Director of Intelligence (J2A), Joint Interagency Task Force East (later South) in Key West, Florida. He retired from the U.S. Coast Guard as a Commander in 1996.

Dr. Collier holds a Ph.D. in International Relations from FIU (2000), with a major in Foreign Policy and Security Studies and specializations in Comparative

Politics and Research Methodology; an M.S. of Strategic Intelligence from the U.S. Defense Intelligence College (1986) (now National Intelligence University), Washington D.C., with concentrations in Soviet Studies and Latin American Studies; and a B.S. from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy (1974), New London, Connecticut, with concentrations in Management and Economics. His previous books include *Political Corruption in the Caribbean Basin*, *Constructing a Theory to Combat Corruption* (Routledge, 2005), *Terrorism Preparedness in Florida, Improved Since 9/11, But Far From Ready* (FIU, 2005, with Coleen Vincent), *Security Analysis, A Critical-Thinking Approach* (EKU, 2023), and *Critical Belief Analysis for Security Studies* (EKU, 2024, with Barnet Feingold). He also published numerous professional and scholarly articles and made scores of professional and scholarly presentations. Originally from Higginsville, Missouri, he now lives in Williamsburg, Virginia.

# Dedication

For my students who made me think harder!

## Preface

*To be American in 2020 was to live in a country diminished in the world, unwilling to control the spread of disease, or face up to our racism, and looking over the precipice of abandoning the very democracy that was supposed to be the solid core of our national Identity.*

- Ben Rhodes, Former Deputy U.S. National Security Advisor

Since 2020 the situation in the United States described above has not improved. **Democracy** in the United States continues in decline. This is a major concern of many U.S. citizens. There are a myriad of political, economic, and social factors contributing to U.S. democracy's decline over the past two decades. This book focuses on two key factors related to the decline. First, I identify the lack of **critical thinking**, which includes how citizens gather truthful information pertaining to politics and government and then use this information with good logic and reasoning to create knowledge and make useful decisions about civic life. Second, I focus on the poor condition of U.S. **civic education**, which teaches citizens about the details and inner workings of the U.S. government and civic life. The most important decisions citizens make in civic life concern casting their votes for their preferred political candidates for governmental offices. Citizens hope their elected governmental officials will act in the best interests of not only the citizen, but also in the best interests of the citizen's family, community, and state and national governments. This is not always the case!

There are several different frameworks for critical thinking. This book uses a critical-thinking framework initially created by the California-based Foundation for Critical Thinking.<sup>1</sup> I have added a few tweaks to this framework as will be explained in Chapter 2. As a bonus, critical thinking, as presented in this book, is applicable to all decision-making demands in a person's civic, personal, and professional lives.

**Civic life** has varying definitions. At civic life's heart are activities where a citizen interacts with the political and governmental systems affecting their lives. These interactions are often referred to as **civic engagement**—this definition will be expanded in Chapter 1. Some civic life definitions include **community participation** where citizens interact with their community (food banks, sports leagues, festivals, etc.), religious organizations, and workplace groups, among others. This book does not address the larger community participation aspects of civic life but deals mainly with the key factors of critical thinking and civic education guiding U.S. citizen interactions with our political and governmental systems.

In describing and offering actions to improve U.S. civic life, this book uses a combination of material from history, recent politics, logic, and reasoning, including a few scholarly theories. It goes into detail about improving critical thinking and civic education that could help arrest the decline in U.S. democracy and influence a better country-wide civic life. I have attempted to present this material for a broad readership. However, at times the material may seem too far “in-the-weeds.” For that I apologize. Upper-division undergraduates (juniors, seniors), college graduates, graduate students, those without college degrees but well-read in politics and government, or curious individuals who just desire to learn more, should have little problem with this material.

The book provides a logical progression for material presented. Chapter 1 better defines why civic life and critical thinking are vital to U.S. democracy. Chapter 2 provides historical information on human thinking and the latest comprehensive framework for applying critical thinking in all decision-making situations. Chapter 3 presents aspects of **information literacy**—skills related to finding, assessing, using, and documenting information. Identifying misinformation and disinformation is a major theme of this chapter. Chapter 4 identifies issues surrounding potential information biases, poor logic, and bad arguments frequently encountered in political and governmental narratives.

Chapter 5 discusses basic civic education content that informed U.S. citizens should understand. It does not present the detailed structure or innerworkings of the *U.S. Constitution* or U.S. governmental organizations but provides a short history of democracy, insights on key issues in U.S. democracy, and how democracy can slide into decline (as has recently occurred). Chapter 6 develops the general context of world and U.S. politics by presenting a method to identify the political culture(s) at work in a situation. Understanding the influences of political cultures is important in citizens explaining and predicting political events worldwide. Chapter 7 provides techniques to analyze points of view, assumptions, and beliefs as part of a comprehensive approach to critical thinking. Chapter 8 develops a step-by-step sample voting analysis using the elements of the critical-thinking framework introduced in Chapter 2. Chapter 9 concludes the book with an argument for how we can move forward and improve critical thinking and civic education leading to improved democracy and a better U.S. civic life.

A short word on definitions used in the book. At times I use the word **thinker** (researcher, analyst, etc.) to define the person engaged in a critical-thinking project. I also at times use the word **agent** (actor, person, decision-maker, citizen, etc.) to define the person or groups of people who are the subjects of an analysis. A thinker is often the person on the outside of a civic event and is “looking in” to explain or predict the behaviors or decisions of agents. There are also times when the thinker is the agent and goes inside the civic event. This is for those who use critical thinking to make their own civic decisions. Chapters 2 and 8 provide examples of civic decisions where the thinker is also the agent.

The formatting for this book may be unfamiliar to some readers. **Endnotes** containing supporting references and additional comments on topics are at the end of each chapter. Words **bolded** in the text (less the headings) indicate key concepts or phrases the reader should hopefully master. The book does not include a final list of references or index.

This book includes material from my learning, teaching, and research in critical thinking and comparative politics over the last four decades. Like most U.S. citizens, I was never taught comprehensive critical thinking in my elementary, secondary, undergraduate, or graduate (master's and Ph.D.) education. I did become a Ph.D. specialist in social science research methodology, which I used in my own research and taught for over 20 years at both the college undergraduate and graduate levels. It was not until I joined the faculty of Eastern Kentucky University in 2008 and engaged with its Teaching and Learning Center (for faculty development) that I was introduced to comprehensive critical thinking. This influenced me to develop a synthesized analytic approach combining comprehensive critical thinking with social science research techniques. This synthesis drives the content in this book.

At times the text references two of my recent books and sends readers to them for more in-depth material on a topic. *Security Analysis, A Critical-Thinking Approach*<sup>2</sup> (2023) provides guidance to intelligence and security policy analysts and goes deeper into critical thinking and associated social research techniques. *Critical Belief Analysis for Security Studies*<sup>3</sup> (2024) was co-authored with my friend and colleague Barnet Feingold and has much more material on critical belief analysis than is presented in Chapter 7. Both books are available for free online download through the Eastern Kentucky University Libraries.

To remain somewhat neutral in the U.S. political sphere, in the text I do not employ the words Democrat, Republican, or Independent (the three main U.S. political movements). Instead, I use the general terms liberal, centrist, and conservative at times to refer to those advancing certain U.S. political ideologies. I also tend not to use the names of political candidates or governmental officials, except in chapter-opening quotes and in a few situations not considered politically controversial. I do use examples from both past and recent U.S. politics. If you are well informed in politics, it should be obvious which political movements/parties and candidates/officials are involved in these examples.

I have done my best to provide attribution to the ideas and works of others included in this book. Ultimately, all mistakes in fact, examples, sources, and analytic techniques are mine alone. Nothing in this book should be used to assert or imply U.S. government authentication or endorsement of any material presented. Nothing in this book intentionally touches on classified material.

I hope you find this book both intellectually stimulating and entertaining. Its purpose is not to tell you “what to think,” but instead provides techniques for teaching students and adults out of school a systematic process for “how to think critically.” If more U.S. citizens learn “how to think critically,” and become more civically informed and engaged, it would greatly strengthen and improve both U.S. democracy and U.S. civic life.

Michael W. Collier, Ph.D.  
Williamsburg, Virginia

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Foundation for Critical Thinking, <https://www.criticalthinking.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> Michael W. Collier, *Security Analysis, a Critical-Thinking Approach* (Richmond, KY: Eastern Kentucky University Libraries Encompass, 2023), <https://encompass.eku.edu/ekuopen/6/> or <https://manifold.open.umn.edu/projects/security-analysis>.

<sup>3</sup> Barnet D. Feingold and Michael W. Collier, *Critical Belief Analysis for Security Studies* (Richmond, KY: Eastern Kentucky University Libraries Encompass, 2024), <https://manifold.open.umn.edu/projects/critical-belief-analysis-for-security-studies>.

*Critical Thinking for a Better Civic Life* investigates the substandard conditions in U.S. countrywide teaching of civic education and critical thinking. This situation has helped degrade U.S. democracy and civic life. The book explains how democracies in both the U.S. and worldwide have risen over time and why many are now in decline. The book presents a comprehensive critical-thinking framework applicable to elementary, secondary, and post-secondary curricula. It includes material for assessing truthful information, misinformation, biases and logic fallacies, political cultures, assumptions, and beliefs. This framework is an expansion of the scientific method and can be used in all inductive and deductive research and analysis. The critical-thinking framework has the added benefit of being used in decision-making in a person's civic, personal, and professional lives.

# Chapter One

## What is the Problem?

*And the lies were only the start  
Reckless without a clue  
Talk's cheap, when it's not true  
All the experts do is nod  
Is this what we will be known for?  
What even matters anymore?  
You know that this is  
[shout] BRAIN-DEAD NATION!  
Acting like it's nothing at all  
[shout] BRAIN-DEAD NATION!  
Waiting for democracy's fall  
- Firago, Brain-Dead Nation (2020)<sup>1</sup>*

The above song lyrics from Firago, a Chicago-based rock band, capture the sentiments of many U.S. citizens. These rockers quite pithily offer how lies, recklessness with the truth, and experts “nodding” (remaining silent) can result in democracy’s downfall. Lies, misinformation, and disinformation pollute recent U.S. political discourse. Political, corporate, and community leaders, plus citizens who do not speak up about unjust, illegal, or immoral government decisions or actions make matters worse. Political leaders, and the citizens who support them, have largely become entrenched in their own political tribes, degrading interparty communications, cooperation, and compromise, while tossing metaphorical hand grenades at the opposing side. The U.S. legacy of governing through constructive

interparty political negotiations on major societal issues has all but become a thing of the past. Instead, U.S. politics have become coarser and nastier.

U.S. government institutions, which make up the structure of our democracy, are under siege by one side of the political spectrum or the other.<sup>2</sup> Citizens have seen their political rights and civil liberties decline in recent years. If democracy is truly “rule by the people,” it is the “people” who can act to reverse its decline and strengthen it for future generations.

One measure of the levels of democracy in the world is published annually by the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Freedom House who rates individual countries and territories’ political rights and civil liberties.<sup>3</sup> The Freedom House index ratings are presented on a scale of 0 (worst) to 100 (best). This rating index allows Freedom House to characterize countries and territories as *free*, *partly free*, and *not free*. Most scholars agree that the Freedom House index ratings are a useful measure for a country or territory’s level of democracy. Figure 1.1 displays the Freedom House combined political rights and civil liberties index ratings for the United States from 2007 to 2024.

**Figure 1.1 U.S. Democracy Trends 2007-2024**

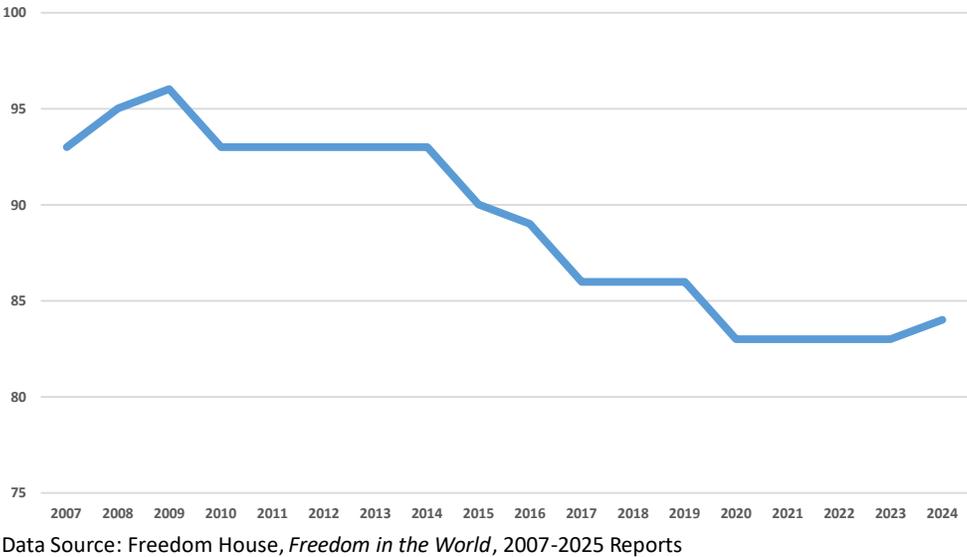


Figure 1.1 provides empirical evidence to the decline in U.S. democracy. The U.S. ratings of 95 and 96 in 2008 and 2009, respectively, are the highest

scores the United States received since the Freedom House rating scale was first published in 1973. This placed the United States in company with the strongest world democracies (scores 95-100).<sup>4</sup> These high ratings were in the last years of the early-2000s conservative U.S. presidential administration (2000-2008). These ratings fell slightly during the following liberal administration (2009-2016). During 2010-2014 the U.S. ratings stabilized at 93, similar to the ratings for the United States in the decades prior to 2008. In the last two years of the liberal administration (2015-2016) the U.S. ratings saw a sharp decline. This decline is likely explained by the tensions between a liberal president and the conservative control of Congress after 2014. The following four year (2017-2020) conservative administration saw a continued decline in U.S. democracy—bottoming out at the end of this administration with a rating of 83. During this period there were multiple conservative-led challenges to U.S. political institutions. The U.S. ratings remained at 83 for the first three years of the following liberal administration (2021-2024), rising one point to 84 in the last year of this administration. The ratings remained low in 2021-2024 due to a combination of the post-Covid 19 pandemic recovery and the fact the conservative-leaning U.S. Supreme Court and conservative-led state governments continued to restrict political rights and civil liberties—including citizen voting rights and female reproductive rights. The latest conservative administration (2025-2028) is expected to generate even lower U.S. democracy ratings because of conservative-led challenges to all levels of U.S. political institutions (legislative, executive, and justice systems). It would not be surprising if the U.S. ratings for 2025 and later fall well below 80. If the U.S. rating should drop below 70, it would change categories from *free* to *partly free*.<sup>5</sup>

The solutions to reverse declining U.S. democracy as shown in Figure 1.1 are highly complex and often controversial. This book advances one key idea to strengthen “rule by the people:” **a strong democracy must be supported by an informed and engaged citizenry!** Being “informed” means citizens (the people) must access and digest information, recognize factual truth, disregard mistruths, and employ good logic and reasoning in their civic decision-making. This is

currently not the case. In many civic issues citizens are not informed, including being intentionally misinformed at times. Citizens are also not always equipped (taught) to make optimal decisions. With the continuing stream of misinformation in today's society, citizens are often affected by **confirmation bias** leading them to believe only information they agree with and that supports their preexisting worldviews (more on confirmation bias and other cognitive biases in Chapter 4). This book offers citizens a solution to being misinformed and lacking analytic skills—increased teaching and learning of critical thinking and civic education.

**Critical thinking**—the ability to use truthful facts, good logic, and good reasoning to construct a valid argument or make a good decision—is a skill required by all citizens. However, this is a set of skills largely missing in most U.S. citizens. While some individual critical-thinking skills may be included in U.S. education programs, U.S. citizens are seldom taught the comprehensive approach to critical thinking demanded in today's decision environment as detailed at the end of Chapter 2. Critical thinking is normally not taught in elementary schools or secondary schools (middle and high schools). It is hardly taught, except in a few specific curriculums, in post-secondary college and university programs, neither at the undergraduate nor graduate levels. Thus, without comprehensive critical thinking skills U.S. citizens are ill-prepared to participate in not only civic life, but also in their own personal and professional decision-making.

To be “engaged” means citizens should participate in civic activities, the foundation of civic life. The most important behavior in civic life is voting—and far too many citizens do not vote in local, state, and national elections. Other important civic activities include running for public office, engaging in political organizing, joining in political volunteer work (canvassing for candidates, etc.), protesting (for or against) government policies or officials, working in voting polls, and participating in a myriad of other activities directed at the civic good.<sup>6</sup> These activities are often labeled **civic engagement**. The first step in fostering civically engaged citizens starts with obtaining a good understanding of the institutions,

structures, and workings of government. In other words, citizens need a good grounding in **civic education**—the study of the rights and duties of citizenship (see Chapters 5 and 6).

**Civic education**, both in school and in post-school learning, is key to preparing citizens for a good civic life. Apparently, the interest in offering civic education courses in U.S. secondary schools, and in requiring pre-graduation civics and U.S. history proficiency examinations, is declining across the country.<sup>7</sup> A 2018 survey found two-thirds of existing U.S. citizens could not pass the United States Citizenship Test, the test administered to those seeking U.S. citizenship through the naturalization process.<sup>8</sup> The Citizenship Test assesses whether a person has a basic knowledge of the institutions and structures of the federal government and an elementary understanding of U.S. history. This 2018 survey found those 65 years-of-age or older passed the Citizenship Test at a higher rate (79 percent passed), than those 45 years-of-age or younger (19 percent passed).<sup>9</sup> This is a sorry testament to recent U.S. civic education effectiveness and to the future ability of younger generations to participate in civic life.

U.S. citizens should be asking: “How do we elect governing officials with character and integrity?” “How do we ensure governing leaders use truthful facts, combined with good logic and reasoning, to drive their policies and decisions?” “How do we ensure governmental leaders act in the best interests of the communities they serve?” “What role do individual citizens play in influencing good government?” To answer these and other important questions requires fostering a more informed and engaged citizenry. Employing critical thinking and becoming more civically informed should strengthen U.S. democracy and improve U.S. civic life. The alternative is to watch further decline in U.S. democracy and remain as Firago highlights at the start of this chapter—a Brain-Dead Nation!

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Firago. “Brain Dead Nation” (official video). Posted on *You Tube*, June 12, 2020. Firago is a dance-rock band based in Chicago, Illinois.

<sup>2</sup> The term **institution** refers to patterns of rules (constitutions, laws, regulations, and rules, both formal and informal), and not just the people and infrastructure (buildings, equipment, etc.) that make up an entity. **Structure** is a pattern of rules, institutions, and their intended or unintended consequences (outcomes).

<sup>3</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2025 Report*, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/scores> (accessed May 2025).

<sup>4</sup> In Chapters 5 and 6 strong democracies are defined as polyarchies. I define strong democracies as being those with Freedom House ratings of 95 or higher. In 2024 (2025 *Freedom in the World* report), using this rating scale there were only 22 strong democracies out of 208 world countries and territories rated.

<sup>5</sup> Freedom House.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Delli Carpini, “Definition of Civic Engagement,” *The Pew Charitable Trusts*, reprinted in <https://www.apa.org/education/undergrad/civic-engagement> (accessed November 27, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> Center for American Progress, “The State of Civics Education,” February 21, 2018, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/state-civics-education/> (accessed December 14, 2022).

<sup>8</sup> Alexa Lardieri, “2 of 3 Americans Wouldn’t Pass U.S. Citizenship Test,” *U.S. News and World Report*, October 12, 2018, <https://www.usnews.com/news/politics/articles/2018-10-12/2-of-3-americans-wouldnt-pass-us-citizenship-test> (accessed September 16, 2022).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

# Chapter 2

## Human Thinking Across the Ages

*What we think, we become.*

- Buddha

The above quote from South Asian religious leader Siddhartha Gautama (commonly known as Buddha) captures how thinking influences human conditions. Living in the 6<sup>th</sup>- or 5<sup>th</sup>-century BCE (Before Common Era, ex-B.C.), he is considered the founder of Buddhism. As one of the world's great religions, Buddhism remains the religion of many people in Southeast Asia and Mongolia and is a major influence in Chinese (Taoism) and Japanese (Shinto) religions. This chapter reviews how human thinking evolved across the ages, helping provide context and leading us to a better understanding of today's world. The chapter also presents an introduction to comprehensive critical thinking as the most recent addition to human thinking.

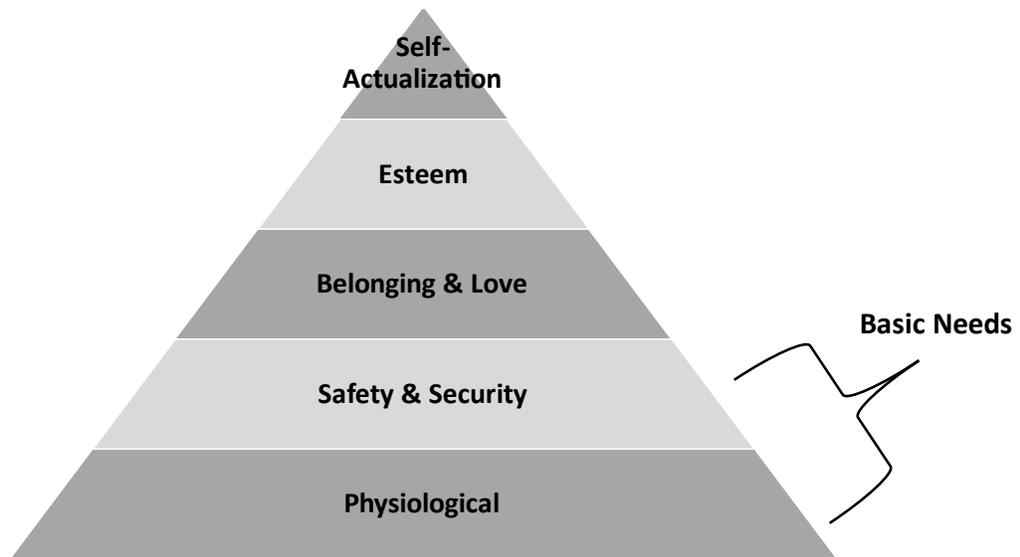
### Evolution of Human Thinking

Early human thinking focused primarily on basic survival. Archeologists and anthropologists estimate *Homo erectus* populated portions of present-day Africa around 1 million to 2 million BP (Before Present, meaning "years ago"). *Homo erectus* then spread across present-day Europe and Asia. This era was generally known as the Stone Age.<sup>1</sup> *Homo erectus* is seen as the first of the nomadic hunter-gathers, who migrated to where they could find food, water, and shelter. The Stone Age hunter-gathers walked upright on two legs and knew how to make crude tools and weapons from wood, stone, and bone and how to control fire for

cooking and heating. *Homo erectus* had a larger brain than its hominin ancestors and as a result was able to engage in more complex thought.

Around 100,000 BP, *Homo sapiens* (modern humans), descendants of *Homo erectus*, emerged from present-day eastern Africa and eventually displaced *Homo erectus* and their other descendants (*Homo heidelbergensis*, *Homo neanderthalensis*, *Homo longi* (Denisovans?), and others).<sup>2</sup> *Homo sapiens* learned to organize in clans or tribes and knew how to make war on hostile neighbors. Modern human languages did not emerge until around 50,000 BP. Languages allowed *Homo sapiens* to make plans, more effectively organize, and solve problems. *Homo sapiens* initially migrated to present-day Europe and Asia, eventually populating the present-day Pacific Islands starting around 30,000-50,000 BP, and arriving in present-day North and South America around 12,000 to 20,000 BP. These modern humans concentrated their thinking on achieving basic needs as defined by U.S. psychologist Abraham Maslow in his theory of the Hierarchy of Human Needs in Figure 2.1. Maslow's theory offers needs lower on the pyramid must be attained before the human seeks needs higher on the pyramid. Basic needs are at the base of his pyramidal structure and include both physiological needs (food, water, warmth, rest), plus security and safety needs.

**Figure 2.1** Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs



Human thinking advanced slowly in the Neolithic period starting around 12,000 BP. Approximately 10,000 to 12,000 BP, humans began to domesticate animals (herding) and develop agriculture (farming). Animals and edible plants were available to hunter-gathers previously, but in the Neolithic period animals and plants began being produced systematically by herders and farmers yielding larger and more consistent food supplies. The domestication of animals and the start of agriculture allowed humans to transition from lives as nomadic hunter-gathers to living permanently in one location. This sparked the establishment of settlements of groups of humans—forerunners of today's towns and cities. These early herders and farmers initially settled in the Fertile Crescent, which included the coastal regions and along rivers in the Levant and adjacent regions—present-day southern Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, and Jordan; areas along the Euphrates and Tigris rivers in present-day Iraq; and along the Nile River and in the Nile Delta in present-day Egypt. The domestication of animals and agricultural techniques spread across the world in the following centuries. Around 5,500 BP the wheel was invented, first used to make pottery (potter's wheel) and later employed to facilitate improved means of transportation. During the Bronze Age

(3,300 to 1,200 BCE), humans learned to smelt minerals for making implements and weapons—primarily combining copper and tin to create bronze. The Bronze Age also saw the invention of writing. In the Iron Age (starting around 1,200 BCE), humans began to smelt iron and later steel for making implements and weapons. The Iron Age continued into the Middle Ages (Dark Ages, Medieval period) lasting from roughly 500 to 1,500 CE (Common Era, ex-A.D.). Except for gunpowder, arriving in Europe from China around 1,300 CE, there were few significant human intellectual advancements in the Middle Ages. In Maslow’s Figure 2.1 hierarchy, humans during these periods focused not only on basic needs, but also on fostering belonging and love (intimate relationships, friends, neighbors) and seeking esteem (prestige, feelings of accomplishment).

Human thinking accelerated in the Age of Enlightenment, a philosophical and intellectual movement taking place across Europe in the 1500s to 1700s CE. Similar movements were also taking place in Asia. The European Enlightenment included the emergence of a range of new ideas centered on the value of human happiness, the pursuit of evidence and knowledge, and ideals of liberty, toleration, fraternity, and democratic government. The Age of Enlightenment was preceded and accompanied by the Renaissance (1400s to 1600s CE), which helped humans transition from the Middle Ages to the current Modern Age. The Renaissance marked the rise of classical cultures, including the flourishing of the arts, literature, music, etc., and advancement of mathematics, science, and technology. Famous Renaissance artists included Donatello (1386-1466), Michelangelo (1475-1564), and Raphael (1483-1520). Famous Renaissance mathematicians and scientists included Nicolas Copernicus (1473-1543), Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), Rene Descartes (1596-1650), and Sir Isaac Newton (1646-1726). The Protestant Reformation also occurred in the 1500s-1600s CE where the Latin Christian (Roman Catholic) church was challenged by the emergence of Protestant Christian churches. Humans from the 1400s to 1700s CE sought the pinnacle of Maslow’s Figure 2.1 hierarchy as they strove not only for the figure’s lower needs, but also to achieve higher self-actualization needs (achieving one’s

full potential, including creative activities), which has continued in today's Modern Age.

With the development of larger seagoing sailing vessels, the Age of Discovery was spurred in the late 1400s to 1700s CE by Europeans and the Chinese seeking increased access to world maritime trade routes, especially to obtain spices and other commodities desired in Europe and China. The Chinese traveled as far as present-day India, Middle East, and eastern Africa for trade. This period also led to the discovery and colonization by Europeans in areas in present-day Africa, Asia, Pacific Islands, North America, and South America. Early Age of Discovery Portuguese and Spanish-funded maritime explorers included Bartolomeu Dias (1450-1500)—first to discover the Cape of Good Hope (southern point of present-day Africa), Christopher Columbus (1451-1506)—first to cross the Atlantic (after the Vikings did so around 1000 CE), Vasco da Gama (1460-1524)—first to reach India and the Spice Islands from Europe by ship, and Ferdinand Magellan (1480-1521)—first to organize and lead an expedition to circumnavigate the globe. These and the waves of following Age of Discovery explorers brought European products, culture, thinking, and existing technology to a larger world, while also introducing Europeans to the products, cultures, and thinking of other civilizations.

The study of formal thinking structures is usually traced to the teachings of Greek philosophers Socrates (470-399 BCE), Plato (428-347 BCE), and Aristotle (384-322 BCE). They sought to understand how premises (propositions) are assertively used in sentences to create good arguments. In other words, they studied how to combine facts, logic, and reasoning to generate supportable arguments.<sup>3</sup> Today, the work of these Greek philosophers, usually called **formal logic**, is still taught and used widely in the fields of philosophy, history, journalism, and computer programming. Figure 2.2 provides some basic examples of selected formal logic. Formal logic teaching generally supports the **inductive approach to research**, which starts with the information (data, facts, evidence) already collected, or about to be collected, and then working from the information,

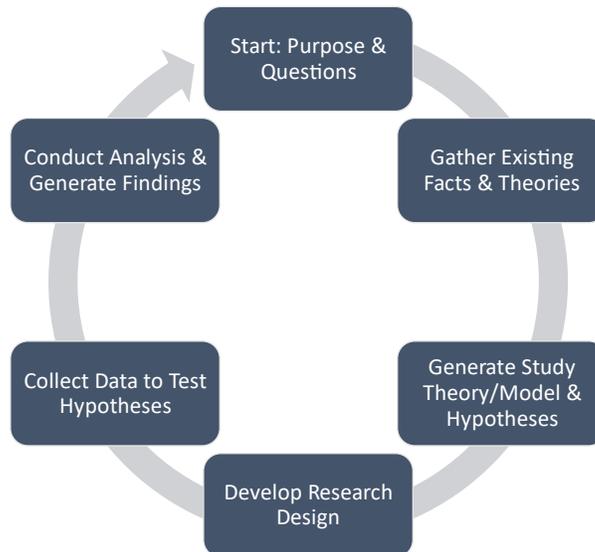
applies logic and reasoning resulting in findings and conclusions. In academia, theories developed using the inductive approach are called **grounded theories**. Formal logic is still used to prepare written and verbal presentations using the structure of logical argumentation (see Chapter 4).

**Figure 2.2**      **Examples of Selected Basic Formal Logic<sup>4</sup>**

1. **Modus Ponens (Law of Detachment):** If P implies Q and P is true, then Q must be true. For instance: If it rains (P implies Q), and it is raining (P is true), then the ground is wet (Q is true).
2. **Modus Tollens (Law of Syllogism):** If P implies Q and Q is false, then P must be false. For example: If the sun is shining (P implies Q), and it is not shining (Q is false), then it is not daytime (P is false).
3. **Disjunctive Syllogism:** Given a disjunction (A or B) and one of the disjuncts (A) being false, we can conclude that the other disjunct (B) must be true. For instance: It's either snowing or raining (A or B), but it's not snowing (A is false), so it must be raining (B is true).

The **scientific method** was the next major advancement in early thinking. No one person or group of people invented the scientific method, but instead it was the culmination of centuries of attempts to find out how the natural world works. Aristotle (384-322 BCE) is credited as one of the first to promote how a combination of observation and reasoning were required to understand natural phenomena. Figure 2.3 depicts the latest version of the scientific method.

**Figure 2.3** The Scientific Method



With the advances in mathematics, science, and technology during the Renaissance, the scientific method was continually refined until during the late-1700s to early-1800s CE humans greatly expanded their knowledge and sparked the emergence of the **Industrial Age**. New inventions facilitated by scientific methods, such as the harnessing of waterpower for large manufacturing endeavors, building of inland canals, invention of the steam engine and cotton gin, and many additional technological advances, reduced reliance on beasts-of-burden, allowed mass production of items previously made by hand, and vastly improved worldwide transportation. The scientific method creates knowledge by combining **empiricism** (observation of data, facts, evidence) with **rationalism** (human abilities to reason). Today, the scientific method mainly supports the **deductive approach to research**, which starts with the existing knowledge and theory on an issue, develops new hypotheses/alternatives to verify or improve the theory, then carries out additional data collection and data analysis to test the hypotheses/alternatives, which lead to new or refined theories in addition to practical findings and conclusions (see Figure 2.3). Today, most U.S. elementary and secondary school curriculums teach the basics of the scientific method as

applied to the natural sciences. Students are mainly taught the scientific method as it applies to their academic mathematics and natural science studies (biology, chemistry, physics, etc.), but not necessarily how it may be used to foster critical thinking in the social sciences and their personal lives.

Another advancement in human thinking came during the mid-1900s CE as scientists embracing **behaviorism** argued the scientific method could also be applied in social science—the study of human thinking, behavior, and conditions. Prior to the mid-1900s, most human behavioral research was based on qualitative historical analyses employing the historical or inductive method, formal logic, and logical argumentation (see Chapter 4). In these mainly intuitive analyses, scholars would use logical reasoning, case studies, and analogies to identify broad political, economic, and social patterns, which they could then use to describe, explain, and/or predict human thinking and behavior. During the 1950s and 1960s; however, cognitive psychology theories developed initially by Austrian neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) were expanded and adopted by social scientists. This provided the initial theories (i.e., rationalism) later applied to social science research. Additionally, emerging computing technology allowed social scientists to test their theories using statistical procedures applied to large empirical databases, which is substantially more difficult when all statistical procedures are done by hand. The behaviorist approach, which adopted both psychological-based social theory and quantitative analysis using computers, began to flourish by the late-1960s. The behaviorist approach won the resulting historicism versus behaviorism scholarly debate on which approach was better as more and more social researchers sought to make their work more scientific.

The recent rise of the **Information Age**, which is now overshadowing the Industrial Age, calls for well-developed critical-thinking skills. The Information Age began in the 1950s and 1960s with the advancement of computers. With the rise of the global Internet in the 1970s and 1980s, humans were able to compile and access increased information and analyze large data sets, plus transfer the

information, data, and analytic results anywhere in the world within seconds. This revolution in information handling and analysis calls for even stronger critical-thinking skills because of the complexity of the analyses and the fact the Internet contains a significant amount of misinformation and disinformation. People need critical-thinking skills to sort through the truths and mistruths found on the Internet, which are also transferred through public media by television, radio, web sites, social media, and more (see Chapter 3).

The realization of the need for more modern critical-thinking approaches began to grow in the professional and educational communities early in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century.<sup>5</sup> However, it became a key focus of the professional and academic communities in only the last few decades. In 1982, Maltese physician and psychologist Edward de Bono presented a BBC 10-week series entitled "de Bono's Thinking Course."<sup>6</sup> In these programs, de Bono explained how thinking skills could be improved by attention and practice. This resulted in a series of books and other published material adopted for critical-thinking training in mainly business and some academic programs. In the 1990s, University of California Berkeley academics Richard Paul and Linda Elder launched the Foundation for Critical Thinking and the Center for Critical Thinking to promote critical-thinking education, including their critical-thinking framework consisting of the elements of thought presented below.<sup>7</sup> Paul and Elder promoted their work across professional and academic circles. They published several books, pamphlets, posters, and other training aids to facilitate the teaching of their framework. The Paul and Elder framework was adopted by some universities and professional institutions, including the U.S. intelligence community. By the 2000s, several business and professional communities were publishing their own critical-thinking techniques based largely on the Paul and Elder framework but specialized for specific business or professional applications. While the last few decades have seen a growing interest in teaching and employing critical-thinking skills, the topic is still not widely covered in most academic and professional forums.

## Overview of the Critical-Thinking Process

Although there are a number of textbook definitions for critical thinking, a good general definition offers critical thinking as a “...mode of thinking—about any subject, content, or problem—in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully taking charge of the structures inherent in thinking and imposing intellectual standards upon them.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, **critical thinking entails “[t]hinking about your thinking while you are thinking in order to make your thinking better....”**<sup>9</sup> Critical thinking must be both *active* and *systematic*. An active thinker selects the critical-thinking framework to use (there are several) and reflects on the use of the framework throughout their thinking. A systematic thinker follows a framework’s process and records their work for later review so others may evaluate the **validity** of the thinking results. To achieve validity, thinkers must strive to reduce bias in their findings. The main contribution of critical thinking is the reduction of biases in problem-solving and decision-making. Figure 2.4 below provides a basic outline of the process of critical thinking presented in this book. The details of this process are covered in this and following chapters.

## Figure 2.4 The Process of Critical Thinking

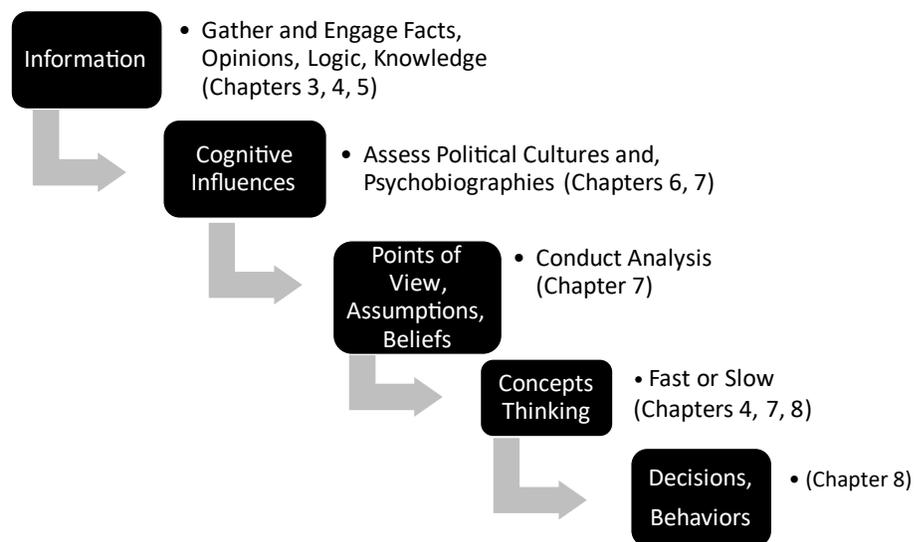


Figure 2.4 reveals the critical-thinking process that starts with the agent collecting information, which is then put through several agent cognitive influences. An agent's cognitive influences create points of view, assumptions, beliefs, which inform the following thinking process—leading to decisions and behaviors. Figure 2.4 notes the chapters in this book that go into greater detail on each step in the critical-thinking process.

Critical thinking is not only important for helping create an informed citizenry, but most employers seek these skills in their employees. Having skills in critical thinking and problem-solving increasingly are found in job advertisements in both the public and private sectors. The National Association of Colleges and Employers' *2018 Job Outlook Survey* found 99.2 percent of employers surveyed deemed critical thinking and problem-solving as essential and rated them at the top of all other desired skills and competencies sought in new hires.<sup>10</sup> Employers want employees who can solve problems through evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing information. They seek employees who can be reflective, foster understanding, guide sound decision-making, and manage actions. Employees are sought who can combine facts, logic, and reasoning and not just apply intuition,

emotions, and feelings to their thinking. Employers seek employees who are open-minded and flexible in their thinking to foster the creativity and innovation required in the future of both the public and private sectors. Thus, critical thinking is required to support an informed citizenry across U.S. political, economic, and social realms.

**Humans are not born with critical-thinking skills—they must be taught.**

These skills cannot be gained in a single class or single course. This means critical-thinking basic techniques must be introduced early to elementary students, more advanced critical-thinking techniques added over time, and the techniques exercised and thinking evaluated across the entire elementary and secondary curriculums—just as with the skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic. An emphasis on critical thinking should then be continued through post-secondary education. Without instruction and experience in critical thinking, human thought when “left to itself, is biased, distorted, partial, uninformed, or downright prejudiced.”<sup>11</sup> As discussed earlier in Chapter 1, critical thinking has historically not been taught as a problem-solving and decision-making tool in U.S. elementary, secondary, or even most post-secondary curriculums. Those who should be teaching critical thinking to meet today’s citizen and workforce demands are generally not familiar with critical-thinking frameworks and techniques. Informed citizens must have critical-thinking skills.

People without critical-thinking skills usually develop several non-critical-thinking tendencies. These non-critical-thinking tendencies are the result of a lifetime of influences from sources discussed in Chapter 3. These influences often highlight how thinking should be fun, exciting, easy, spontaneous, free, chic, popular, patriotic, and beneficial to the thinker—in fact, none of these characteristics define good thinking. Figure 2.5 lists the tendencies of poor thinking that many people develop because of their lack of critical-thinking instruction and experience. Overcoming these poor-thinking tendencies presents severe challenges in today’s society. Do any of these sound common in your thinking?

## Figure 2.5 Poor-Thinking Tendencies<sup>12</sup>

- Given a question or problem, immediately jump to a finding or conclusion.
- Fail to complete good information searches.
- Satisfice (settle) on the first conclusion appearing good enough.
- Confuse thinking hard with just discussing the information.
- Rely on imprecise or inappropriate analogies lacking background and context.
- Fail to use a systematic process to structure the analysis.
- Identify incorrect patterns and false causality in data.
- Fail to consider all alternatives, resulting in a narrow range of options.
- Avoid addressing the exact question or problem.
- Generate unmitigated and unrecognized biases (see Chapter 4).
- Commit informal logic fallacies (see Chapter 4).
- Fail to construct good arguments (see Chapter 4).

Figure 2.5 poor-thinking tendencies are not what is needed in a modern informed citizenry living in the Information Age. If we want citizens to be both informed and good thinkers, they should be able to develop the characteristics for good thinking summarized in Figure 2.6. Citizens should be able to depend on the U.S. education system to develop such good thinkers—something it does not universally do now.

## Figure 2.6 Characteristics of a Good Critical Thinker<sup>13</sup>

- Raises vital, specific questions and problems, formulating them clearly and precisely.
- Gathers and assesses relevant information and effectively interprets it.
- Comes to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards.
- Thinks open-mindedly within alternative systems of thought, recognizing and assessing as needed, their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences.
- Communicates effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems and making complex decisions.

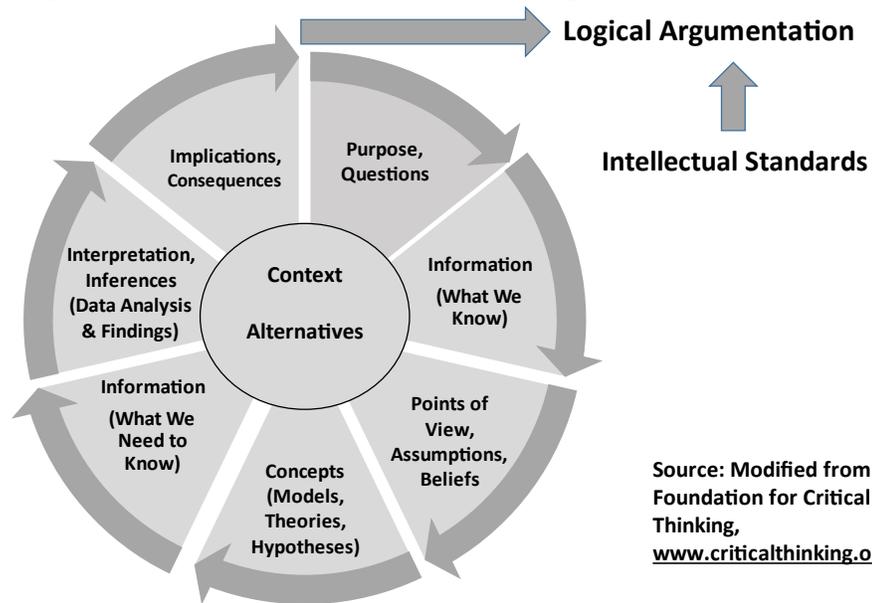
In summary, as a society we have neither prepared most citizens to handle the mass of information and data now available in the Information Age, nor to think critically about it. The next section presents a comprehensive critical-thinking framework for achieving the characteristics in Figure 2.6.

### A Comprehensive Critical-Thinking Framework

Critical thinking is essential to becoming an informed citizen. The remainder of this chapter provides a comprehensive critical-thinking framework that can be taught and used to improve thinking in our civic, personal, and professional lives. As highlighted previously, humans are not born with critical-thinking skills—they must be taught. To teach critical thinking requires a coordinated curriculum that can travel across school grades and across different schools. There are several existing critical-thinking frameworks, some more useful than others, in addition to frameworks focused on specific professional fields. Whatever framework is

selected, it must be teachable and structured to allow easy student, citizen, or professional recall. One of the most successful and easily taught critical-thinking frameworks is shown in Figure 2.7. This framework was originally created by the California-based Foundation for Critical Thinking. The Figure 2.7 framework consists of individual **elements of thought** that I placed in the order of the steps in the scientific method.<sup>14</sup> The original elements, those in the Figure 2.7 wedge (triangular) shapes, were established by University of California Berkeley scholars Richard Paul and Linda Elder, the founders of the Foundation for Critical Thinking.<sup>15</sup> State University of New York Buffalo scholar Gerald Nosich, an associate of the Foundation for Critical Thinking, added the content and alternatives elements in the Figure 2.7 central circle.<sup>16</sup> I added beliefs to the original points of view and assumptions elements. Added steps for logical argumentation and intellectual standards are not elements but important in the framework. Figure 2.7 is an improvement on the scientific method and is extremely flexible. It may be used for both inductive and deductive research. It may also be employed in thinking projects throughout a citizen's civic, personal, and professional lives.

**Figure 2.7** A Comprehensive Critical-Thinking Framework



Maneuvering within Figure 2.7 normally starts with the elements of purpose and questions and moves clockwise around the circle through other elements—a sequence consistent with the scientific method (see Figure 2.3). This process may seem linear as one step follows another; however, the proper use of the elements is anything but linear! Paul and Elder offer how in the best critical-thinking efforts the thinker will continually reconsider and readdress all the elements as the overall analysis or thinking project proceeds.<sup>17</sup> Thus, all the elements are not only interrelated but also should be considered several times in a single thinking project.

The context and alternatives elements in the Figure 2.7 central circle overlap the other elements. This is because context and alternatives apply to all the other elements. Context is developed mainly in the first information element but also applies to the other elements as well. Alternatives for all the elements are developed throughout the thinking project. For example, an analysis may have alternative purposes and questions, alternative information, alternative points of view, assumptions, beliefs, and so on.

Figure 2.7 includes two information elements: (1) “what we know,” and (2) “what we need to know.” This is consistent with deductive research or the scientific method for depicting how an initial information search (Chapter 3) will uncover existing facts and theories previously applied to similar research question(s) driving the study. As the study develops conceptual models (theories), and possible alternative hypotheses, a continuing search for information usually is required to populate the conceptual model(s) with information or to test the hypotheses.

The final steps in the Figure 2.7 critical-thinking process are not elements but include logical argumentation and intellectual standards. The final thinking results are organized using the logical argumentation template detailed in Chapter 4. While logical argumentation provides an outline for the thinking results, this outline is also used to create the final project’s written document or verbal presentation. To assess the quality of the final documents and presentations, they undergo a check using the intellectual standards. At this point the critical-thinking effort is complete. However, in many cases. Just as with the scientific method, the critical-thinking process in Figure 2.7 may generate additional problems or questions to investigate, which requires the thinker to re-enter the critical-thinking framework and repeat the thinking process—often multiple times.

Figure 2.7 was designed to explain, predict, and/or recommend actions in human thinking, human decision-making, human behavior, and human conditions—meaning it is very social science specific. However, in a natural science thinking project (biology, chemistry, physics, etc.) the elements and final steps would still apply. Not all the Figure 2.7 elements will play a role in every thinking project. But to use Figure 2.7 properly, each element should be considered and its actual use based on a conscious determination by the thinker. This is part of the “thinking about your thinking” approach mentioned above.

Below is a deeper description of each Figure 2.7 element of thought and final steps. This material is presented at the difficulty level that should be

understandable by advanced secondary school and college-level students, plus out-of-school adults. For critical-thinking instruction for younger students, each element would likely require simplification to meet student understanding levels.

## The Elements-of-Thought

**Purpose and Questions elements.** Every research or thinking project should begin with a broad purpose, which is usually so broad it cannot be studied by itself. For example, it would take years, if not decades, to study a general-purpose statement such as: “How do we eliminate world inequality?” This would require a study of the many world governing, economic, and social systems, including their ideologies and applications in every world country. It would also require a study of existing world programs to eliminate inequality. Instead, the thinker must narrow the purpose’s scope to address specific research questions able to be studied within the time and resources available. For example, a good research question may entail: “How do we reduce inequality in my hometown?”

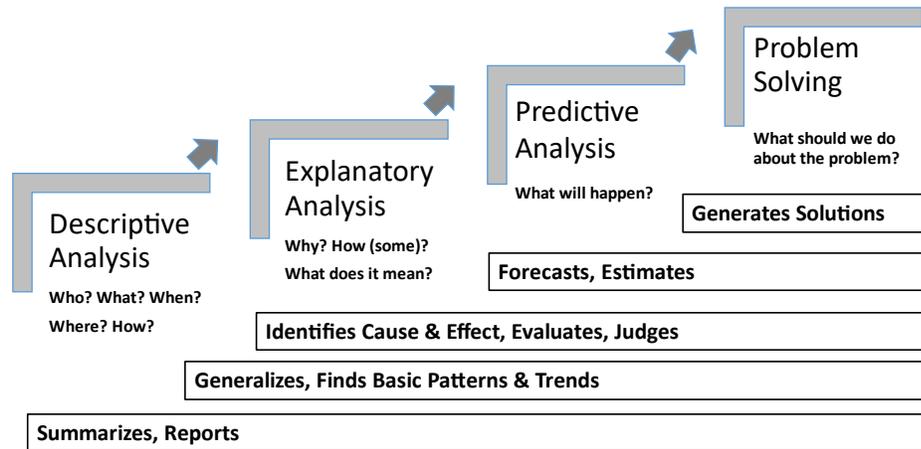
The employment of specific research questions is not generally taught in U.S. elementary and secondary schools, resulting in students new to social science research methods and critical thinking initially struggling to develop good purpose statements and questions. Generating specific research questions is sometimes not even taught in undergraduate post-secondary programs. Instead, students are allowed to address broad questions (like the above example purpose statement), where they find a half-dozen or so references, with some references likely not even addressing the research question, and create a 5–10-page research paper summarizing the limited information found. These projects usually offer limited actual analysis, generally provided in the final few paragraphs of the paper—analysis that is usually no more than opinions based in intuition, emotions, and/or feelings. Sound familiar? Such a research paper is not based on critical thinking.

Critical thinking requires the thinking project to start with a broader purpose statement and narrower specific research question, which then drives a deeper search into information sources (next element). Just learning the critical-thinking process will create significant cognitive dissonance (mental anguish) in the student (see Chapter 4) as their old way of doing research is replaced with the new critical-thinking process—this replacement of the old with the new generates learning.

Figure 2.8 presents a visual representation for developing specific research questions across the research spectrum. The thinker must first decide on the type of research to be conducted—descriptive, explanatory, predictive, or problem solving. As the thinker moves to the right on Figure 2.8, the research usually becomes more complex, and the steps shown to the right usually depend on the types of research to its left to be completed first. Descriptive research is generally taught in elementary and secondary schools and in the early years of undergraduate education. This is the domain of organizing data and telling a story. Historians and journalists are experts in descriptive research. Descriptive studies address specific research questions asking who, what, where, when, and how. Explanatory research asks questions of why and how (how questions calling for an explanation), in addition to asking what does it (this) mean questions. This is the realm of theory and is usually conducted by advanced undergraduate and graduate students, college faculty, and professional researchers, but is learnable by most citizens. Predictive research tries to determine the future. It asks questions about what will happen (in the future). While college faculty and professional researchers conduct some predictive studies, the real experts are those trained as intelligence analysts—it is also learnable by most citizens. Finally, problem-solving research asks what we should do about the specific problem. This is the realm of policy analysts and informed citizens and is the most complex of all analyses as it usually requires a combination of supporting descriptive, explanatory, and predictive research, leading to alternative solutions or

recommendations. The bars under Figure 2.8 steps indicate the general purpose of the different research types.<sup>18</sup>

**Figure 2.8** The Research Spectrum



Developing purposes and good research questions is a significant challenge to most students, even at the college undergraduate and graduate levels. This is because during their previous schooling they were allowed to conduct broad research projects as discussed above. Unfortunately, any research project will quickly “run off the rails” if they are not grounded in good specific research question(s).

**Information (first attempt) and Context elements.** Once the research question(s) are developed, the next step is to search for both existing information (data, facts, evidence), and existing studies and theories pertaining to the question(s). This search requires **information literacy skills** discussed in detail in Chapters 3 and 4. Informed citizens must have well-developed information literacy skills, including being able to identify misinformation, disinformation, and outright untruths (lies). This also requires evaluating the logic and reasoning used by sources, including identifying cognitive biases, logic fallacies, and the quality of the resulting arguments (see Chapter 4). A good thinking project requires a deep

search of the many sources that could include information pertaining to the research question(s). This is no small task and will usually take the most time in a thinking project.

During the initial information search, the thinker should attempt to identify information within similar historical, structural, and current situations to establish the general context of the thinking project. Establishing the context of the current issue is important in two ways. First, to ground the thinking process in its contextual parameters. Second, to help thinkers avoid utilizing analogies in their primary thinking processes—this is one of the poor-thinking tendencies highlighted in Figure 2.5. Analogies tend to assess past similar cases of the issue at hand and utilize these past cases to guide decisions on the current issue. Past cases of similar issues; however, usually have different contexts to the current issue and to use them in decision-making on a current issue is dangerous. For example, in the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, when Soviet Union nuclear weapons were identified in Cuba, U.S. President John F. Kennedy’s senior military advisors were initially using analogies based on Soviet past actions in Eastern Europe to predict Soviet actions in the Missile Crisis. The context differed between these past cases and the current case in two main ways. First, the Missile Crisis included a direct threat to the United States from nearby Cuba. Second, the case included possible use of nuclear weapons. Neither of these contextual differences existed in any of the past Soviet-East European cases. The president avoided nuclear war because he discounted the initial analysis by analogy of his military advisors and directed his advisors’ analysis through a classic critical-thinking process.<sup>19</sup>

**Points of View, Assumptions, and Beliefs element.** Using material gleaned from the initial information search, thinkers next assess the points of view, assumptions, and beliefs shaping the decision-making and behaviors of case participants, including the points of view, assumptions, and beliefs influencing their own thinking. This analysis provides in-depth knowledge of the structural, historical, ideological, political, economic, social, cultural, religious, linguistic,

personal, and security factors at play in the case. Chapter 7 discusses points of view, assumption, and belief analyses in greater detail and provides techniques for assessing these highly important aspects of a critical-thinking project.

**Conceptualization element.** The thinker next conceptualizes (models) the behavior of the persons or situation under study. Critical thinking requires the conceptualization of the problem by identifying and defining concepts, employing theories and models, and generating hypotheses or alternative scenarios. It starts with conceptualizing terms that allow people to think more clearly and share their thoughts with others. Conceptual theories may already exist or may be created by modeling, which combines facts, assumptions, logic, and reasoning to help people understand a situation. Hypotheses are simply statements of relationships between various components (factors, variables, steps) of a theory or model (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of establishing causality). Hypotheses are tested with empirical data to determine if they support the theory or model (in **interpretation and inference element**). Alternative scenarios identify different behaviors or outcomes that may occur. Most thinking projects require several different models to fully understand the issue under study. The conceptualization element depends greatly on the **alternative element** discussed in the next section.

People inherently use concepts in their daily thinking. **Concepts** are intellectual constructs that enable people to identify, organize, interpret, and compare ideas resulting from their experiences and thought processes.<sup>20</sup> Concepts lead to words and symbols, which—when combined with grammar create languages. Grammar provides rules for using words and symbols. Clearly people think and share their thoughts using language, but the constructs of language vary by the people who use them and the environment where they live. For example, the English language has only a few words for “snow,” but Native Americans (First Nations) living in the Arctic have over 50 words in their languages for different types of snow. These many words for snow developed to provide

specific descriptors and serve Artic dwellers better in their harsh living environment.<sup>21</sup>

Defining words and symbols is an important part of language. **Definitions** allow the conceptualization of ideas or thoughts, especially in creating a generalized idea of a thing or class of things. Agreed-upon definitions lead to clarity among people using the same language. Defining concepts usually includes designating the concept, identifying dimensions of the concept, and agreeing to indicators or attributes of the concept. When definitions are not agreed upon, it prohibits joint understanding and often results in conflict. In Chapter 6, we discuss the conflicting definitions of the term “socialism,” which different groups change as needed to advance their own agendas.

Thinkers employ modeling to expand individual concepts by combining known facts, assumptions, logic, and reasoning to assist them in conceptualizing a situation. Once a model is created, it is later populated in the **interpretation and inference element** with historical or current facts helping the thinker generate findings for their investigations. Modeling also may assist in uncovering assumptions (see above section) and developing alternatives (see next section), in addition to identifying problems with logic and reasoning (see Chapter 4), which might otherwise go unnoticed. Modeling can create theories, and both models and theories can generate hypotheses or alternative scenarios to be tested or to generate other insights that can lead to a better understanding of a particular situation. Overall, modeling can improve the rigor and precision of thinking projects. Models provide a representation of an object, idea, or system. That is, when analysts cannot interact directly with the object, idea, or system; models can provide insights to improve understanding.<sup>22</sup> There are many modeling techniques, often learned in graduate studies, including physical modeling, geospatial modeling, temporal (time) modeling, process modeling, structural causal modeling, agency (decision) modeling, and many others.

Covering the many modeling techniques is beyond the scope of this book. For those interested in a more comprehensive coverage of modeling, see

Chapters 7 and 9 of *Security Analysis, A Critical-Thinking Approach*.<sup>23</sup> Instead, for our purposes in this book, we will look at one commonly used conceptualization technique, matrix analyses using tables of data.

Matrix analysis modeling is an inductive and/or deductive qualitative or quantitative technique considered one of the most powerful, versatile, and flexible techniques used in thinking projects. Both qualitative and quantitative information may be included in a matrix model analysis. It may be used to address past, current, and future events. Inductively, it is a handy, clear method for sorting information. It may assist in assessing and selecting from a list of alternatives. Deductively, it can be used for testing theories or developing other models and hypotheses. Matrix model analyses are analytically illuminating, because even when the analysis does not point to one solution or decision-making option, it helps sharpen analytic judgements.

Matrix models may project solutions or decisions from a dense body of information. Matrix model analysis may be considered a jigsaw puzzle, allowing the isolation of the pieces of the problem or decision. Each puzzle piece may be assessed in-depth and then the entire puzzle reassembled in a logical order.

Matrix model analyses may allow:

1. Separation of elements of a problem.
2. Categorization of information by type.
3. Comparison of one type of information with another.
4. Comparison of information of the same type.
5. Uncovering correlations or patterns among the information.

A matrix model is simply a table grid with the number of cells needed for addressing whatever issue is being analyzed. It consists of rows and columns. For a matrix model analysis, the top row of each column usually lists the options, alternatives, hypotheses, scenarios, or recommendations being tested or investigated. In the first column (left-most), the evaluation factors, evidence, or

assumptions are usually listed. The status of evaluation factors, evidence, or assumptions are entered into the matrix cells. Then each cell under options/alternatives and evaluation factors are populated with information (see Figure 2.10 below). This may simply be “yes” or “no” notations, whether the factors are consistent or inconsistent (**C** or **I**) with a hypothesized result, or a combination of qualitative and quantitative assessments for each option/alternative. The **C** or **I** may also use a double designation (**CC** or **II**) if the factors are very consistent or very inconsistent, respectively. In a matrix model the comparisons for all options/alternatives are easily made as they are all shown in one table. Figure 2.9 shows a typical matrix model often called a matrix output model—because use of the model results in an output of an answer to the research questions under study. In the **interpretation and inference element** (see below) the matrix model is populated with information and findings generated.

<b>Figure 2.9 Example Output Matrix Model</b>			
<b>Perspective: Thinker</b>			
	<b>Options/Alternatives</b>		
<b>Evaluation Factors, Evidence, Assumptions</b>	<b>Option A</b>	<b>Option B</b>	<b>Option C</b>
1.			
2.			
<b>Decision</b>			

**Alternatives element.** Working in conjunction with the conceptualization (modeling) element, the thinker establishes additional evaluation factors and the range of alternative hypotheses or scenarios for the analysis, i.e., differing options

to explain or predict the human behavior or decision-making under study or development of differing policy recommendations. There are several techniques for generating alternative evaluation factors, hypotheses, and recommendations. Some will flow from the modeling in the conceptualization element, and others will flow from a variety of techniques, including the initial information search; informed brainstorming; points of view, assumptions, and beliefs analyses; and the synthesizing of **creative thinking** into the critical-thinking framework.

Creative-thinking techniques generate those “out-of-the-box” alternatives, which should be both unique and useful.<sup>24</sup> The creative-thinking alternatives are tested along with alternatives generated by the conceptualization element and other techniques. There are numerous commercial texts on conducting brainstorming (mainly in the business and management literature). There are also several commercial texts in the same literature on creative thinking. Daniel Forsett’s book, *Kick-Start Creative Thinking, Instant Techniques to Innovative Ideas and Ingenious Problem Solving*, is a good starter-text for those wishing to learn creative-thinking techniques.<sup>25</sup> Chapter 8 of *Security Analysis, a Critical-Thinking Approach* provides a more in-depth discussion of using brainstorming and creative thinking as part of the alternatives element.<sup>26</sup> Do not forget that the alternatives element should be applied to all the other elements of thought.

**Information (second attempt) element.** Referring to Figure 2.7, the information element is usually addressed a second time (what we need to know) to generate data needed to populate the conceptualized model and thus test the alternative hypotheses or scenarios developed. An even deeper investigation of the material may be needed to complete the conceptual model and to populate the model with information in the **interpretation and inference element**. Re-engagement of the Chapter 3 information literacy techniques is normally required to complete this second attempt with the information element. Field data collection (interviews, focus groups, personal observations, surveys. etc.) may also be required.

**Interpretation and inference element.** With the alternative evaluation factors, hypotheses, scenarios, or policy recommendations generated, and the second information element completed, the next step is to test each hypothesis, scenario, or recommendation to determine the best options or alternatives to answer the research question(s) or solve the problems guiding the thinking project. There are numerous qualitative, comparative, and quantitative techniques for testing and evaluating alternative hypotheses, scenarios, and policy recommendations. You might not realize it, but you have been learning mathematical techniques since elementary school that are useful in completing the interpretation and inference element. Statistical inference techniques usually taught initially in college programs are widely used in generating inferences. There are also several non-mathematical or non-statistical techniques for making interpretations and inferences as seen in this section’s example. Analytic findings (best answers or solutions) emerge from this element.

The interpretation and inference element is where the previously developed conceptual model is populated with the latest information resulting in the initial analytic findings. Figure 2.10 provides an example of a decision matrix model for an analysis of the research question of “Which U.S. immigration policy to support?” Evaluations presented in Figure 2.10 assess three alternative policies being considered within public discourse. Each individual citizen would have a different matrix and populate it with different assessments based on their previous experience and critical-thinking efforts. However, no matter the decision the citizen makes, by following the process of the critical-thinking framework presented in this chapter, the thinker (citizen) would better understand not only their own perspectives on the issue, but also the perspectives of others—a major goal of being an informed citizen.

<b>Figure 2.10</b>	<b>“Which U.S. Immigration Policy to Support?” Matrix Model</b>
<b>Perspective:</b> Thinker	

Evaluation Factors, Evidence Assumptions	Options/Alternatives		
	No Immigration	Controlled, Legal Immigration	Open Immigration (No Rules)
1. International Law (follows)	I	C	I
2. Economic Issues (fosters growth)	II	C	II
3. Crime Issues (not increase crime)	C	C	II
<b>Decision</b> (least inconsistencies)	3	0*	5

Hypothetical Data/\* Likely Decision/Findings

In the Figure 2.10 example, a **C** (Consistent) or **I** (Inconsistent) is assigned to each evaluation factor under each option. This indicates whether the thinker finds the option consistent or inconsistent with the evaluation factors they selected as the most important for their decision. For example, a **C** under “International Law (follows),” indicates if the option follows all the international laws (conventions, treaties, etc.) which the U.S. has signed. This analysis assumes the thinker desires international law to be followed. The “Decision” row lists the number of **I** (inconsistency) assessments for each option (**I** = 1, **II** = 2). The rules for matrix model analyses using **C/I** assessments determine the best outcome (decision) by selecting the alternative with the least inconsistencies. Figure 2.10 analysis assumes each evaluation factor carries the same weight in the final decision. However, seldom are all the evaluation factors of equal weight. When this is the case, the thinker would need to make their final decision by adjusting their assessments for the evaluation factors with more weight. For a more in-depth discussion on matrix analysis use, including how to address different evaluation factor weights, see Chapter 9 of *Security Analysis, a Critical-Thinking Approach*.<sup>27</sup>

Figure 2.10 is a simple example of immigration policy analysis. An actual analysis would be much more complex. The simple example is used here for teaching purposes. In Chapter 8 there is a more complex example of citizen voting decision-making using critical thinking.

**Implications and Consequences element.** This is the final element addressed in critical-thinking projects by assessing the practicality of the findings. This is an important element often left out of political and governmental decision-making. **Implications** claim or imply (cognitively/mentally) a related behavior, decision, or condition generated by the findings.<sup>28</sup> Implications address ideas because they directly or indirectly indicate, allude, hint, suggest, intimate, or entail viewpoints, assumptions, or beliefs resulting from the thinking. For example, if a state is assessed as a strong democracy, it implies the state's political power resides in the people (citizens) and not in a single leader or a powerful ruling elite minority.

There are three general types of implications: *possible*, *probable*, and *necessary* (certain).<sup>29</sup> A *possible* implication is one that may not be expected but still has a slight probability of occurring. For example, a recurring police patrol along a normally quiet street would not be expected to cause a violent conflict, but it is still possible violence may occur. A *probable* implication may be expected and thus has an increased probability of occurring. If the police patrol purposely enters a neighborhood with a high violent crime rate, then a violent conflict *probably* could be expected. A *necessary* implication is all but certain (approaches 100 percent probability) to result in either a positive or negative consequence. When the police patrol enters a neighborhood with a high violent crime rate, including police Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) members, to serve a warrant on a hang-out of known violent criminals, violent conflict will almost certainly follow.

Consequences are the result of actions flowing from the implications. Thinking through the implications of a situation may lead to **positive (intended) consequences** that solve the problem or otherwise support the purpose of the analysis. Failure to think through the implications may result in negative or **negative (unintended) consequences** that work against the interests of the thinker or decision-maker.<sup>30</sup> Consequences flowing from implications result in

behaviors, decisions, or conditions that are acted upon. For example, if a state takes action to become a democracy, it can expect the positive consequences to include fair voting, less domestic conflict and violence, and an improved quality of life for citizens. Consequences, either positive or negative, are thus what will likely happen and foster a series of outcomes. In the police patrol examples above, if violent conflict were to occur, the negative consequences could be police officers and violent offenders are injured or killed, innocent civilians are injured or killed, property damage occurs, and possible escalation into larger community unrest may be likely. Once the implications and consequences of a situation are understood, customers for the analysis can decide if certain positive consequences are desired or if they can devise actions to mitigate the effects of negative unintended consequences or discard the alternative and select another.

**Cascading threat modeling** is often used to support the thinking about the implications and consequences elements. Cascading threat modeling is used widely in emergency management, infrastructure protection, cyber security, and other security areas. This type of modeling is particularly applicable to risk assessment, where the models help in assessing threats, vulnerabilities, and consequences. Cascading threat analyses take a systems approach, which usually consider natural systems (earthquakes, hurricanes, wildfires, floods, etc.) and how they interact with man-made systems (communications, transportation, electrical, water systems, etc.). For example, hurricanes may cause cascading damage to electrical, communication, and transportation systems, while also causing property damage and flooding that affects the livability of homes and businesses.<sup>31</sup>

Cascading threat models assume a disaster or other action will unleash a sequence of events—often resulting in a series of negative (or positive) consequences. “Toppling dominoes” is a good metaphor to visualize a series of sequential events. Lines of dominoes standing on end will topple if one end domino falls contacting and felling the next, which contacts and fells the next, and so on. The dominoes, representing sequences of events, may be arrayed in one

long line or may have side-branches, much the same as sequential events occur in the real world. Scenarios with a long sequence of events have individual parts that often are referred to as first order, second order, third order, etc., consequences. Creating cascading threat models entails three main steps described below. Box 2.11 provides a cascading threat model example.

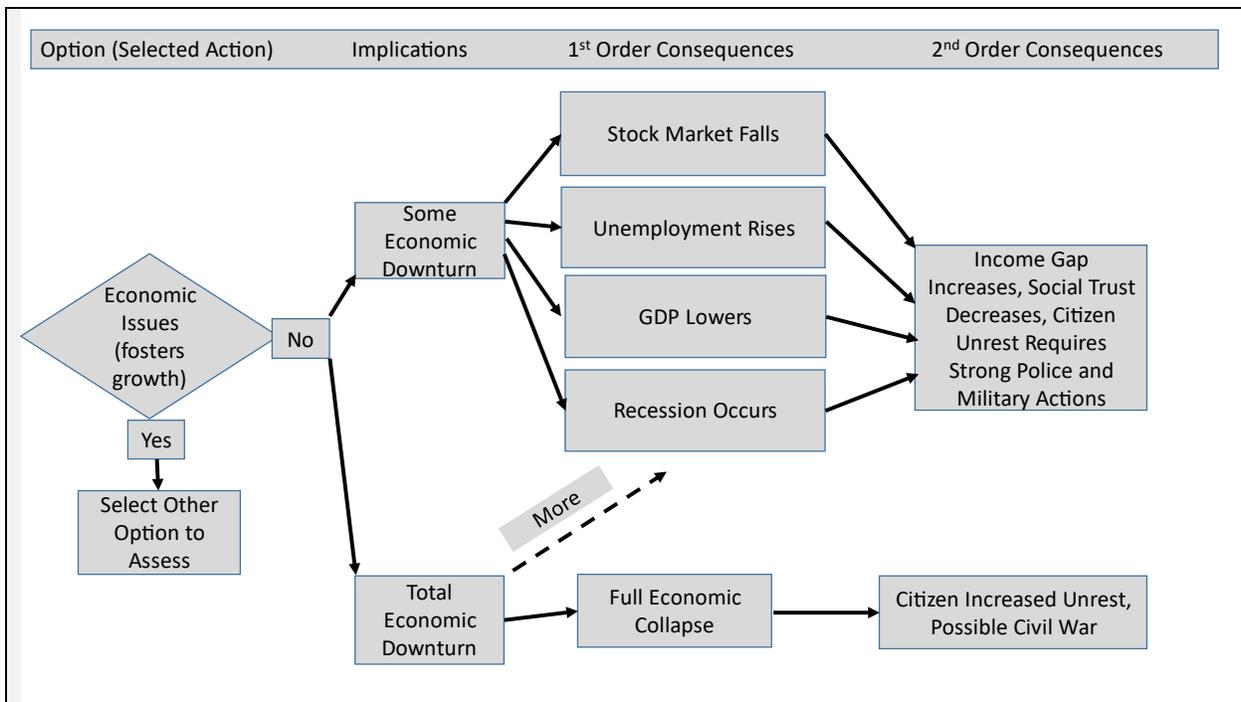
*Step 1:* After completing the critical-thinking interpretation and inference analysis, assess implications and consequences of resultant findings or recommendations, starting with a group informed-brainstorming effort. List and address every combination of Figure 2.10 alternatives and evaluation factors. The informed brainstorming should be supported by historic inputs from past research on similar cases, generic inputs from group members with experience in the field, and creative-thinking inputs. Focus on using both divergent (consider many alternatives) and convergent (focus on one or a few alternatives) thinking techniques to develop a list of implications and consequences for each option/alternative and evaluation factor combination.

*Step 2:* Create (model) a set of events trees that list the contentions being assessed followed by their implications and related consequences. As an events tree unfolds, continue the informed brainstorming to refine the list of implications and consequences.

*Step 3:* Assess insights from the events trees and design mitigations for each negative or unintended consequence for the contention selected for action. If the consequences are negative, the thinker should consider their original contentions.

**Figure 2.11**

**Cascading Threat Model: Immigration Policy Example**



This analysis assesses the Economic Issues (fosters growth) evaluation factor in Figure 2.10 as to whether immigration policy would affect the U.S. economy. Insights from the Figure 2.11 analysis includes that if the U.S. economy does not grow the implications would be failures along a continuum from some economic downturn to total economic downturn. The 1<sup>st</sup> order consequences imply that some economic downturn would *probably* lead to the stock market falling, unemployment rising, GDP (gross domestic product) lowering, and a recession occurring. It also implies if there is total economic downturn, there would *probably* be more of the same results as for some economic downturn, but full economic collapse would *probably* occur. If the 1<sup>st</sup> order consequences occurred, it would *probably* lead (cascade) to the 2<sup>nd</sup> order consequences that would include an increasing income gap between the elites and general citizens, social trust would decrease, and resultant citizen unrest could require stronger police and military actions to maintain civic order. If a total economic downturn occurred, all the 1<sup>st</sup> order consequences for a partial failure would *probably* also occur (“more” dashed arrow), but the results in each case could likely be far worse. Total economic downturn would *probably*

result in 2<sup>nd</sup> order consequences of additional increasing citizen unrest and a *probable* civil war.

After considering the implications and consequences of options/alternatives resulting from the interpretation and inference element, other options or alternatives may seem more practical than those selected as the initial finding. The back-and-forth consideration of the interpretation and inference element results and implications and consequences element should lead to the thinker's final findings.

## Logical Argumentation

When the thinker's final findings are generated, the next step is to create a **logical argument** for documenting and presenting the written or oral results. This process requires the thinker to demonstrate not only the final findings but also detail the other options/alternatives analyzed and show why they were not selected. Chapter 4 provides details on how to create a logical argument. For a more in-depth look at preparing written reports and verbal briefings see Chapter 11 of *Security Analysis, a Critical-Thinking Approach*.<sup>32</sup>

## Intellectual Standards

Before presenting the logical argument written or verbal results to policy-makers and decision-makers, and to support the findings to potential audiences (citizens, media, other organizations, etc.), the written documents and verbal briefings resulting from the logical argumentation work should undergo a quality check using the intellectual standards. The latest draft of a critical-thinking-based written report or verbal briefing should undergo a self-review using the **intellectual standards**<sup>33</sup> detailed in Figure 2.12. The intellectual standards check on the quality of the critical thinking used in the thinking project and the quality

of the draft written report or verbal briefing. Both the entire draft and each analytic finding in the logical argument should be examined using the Figure 2.12 intellectual standards checklist. Depending on the type of written report or briefing, other standards the analyst may consider include whether the draft report or briefing is *reasonable, consistent, falsifiable, testable, well organized, authenticated, effective, and/or factual*.<sup>34</sup> As a result of the self-review, the thinker may find a need to revisit some of the **elements of thought** used to reach the findings and make revisions to the draft.

**Figure 2.12** Checklist for Intellectual Standards<sup>35</sup>

\_\_\_\_\_ **Clarity**

- Could you elaborate?
- Could you illustrate what you mean?
- Could you give me an example?

\_\_\_\_\_ **Accuracy**

- How could we check that?
- How could we find out if that is true?
- How could we verify or test that?

\_\_\_\_\_ **Precision**

- Could you be more specific?
- Could you give me more details?
- Could you be more exact?

\_\_\_\_\_ **Relevance**

- How does that relate to the problem?
- How does that relate to the research question(s)?
- How does that help us with the issue?

\_\_\_\_\_ **Depth**

- What factors make this difficult?

What are some of the complexities of this question?

What are some of the difficulties we need to deal with?

**Breadth**

Do we need to look at this from another perspective?

Do we need to consider another point of view?

Do we need to look at this in other ways?

**Logic**

Does all of this make sense together?

Does your first paragraph fit in with your last one?

Does what you say follow from the evidence?

**Significance**

Is this the most important problem to consider?

Is this the central idea to focus on?

Which of these facts are most important?

**Fairness**

Is my thinking justifiable in context?

Am I considering the thinking of others?

Is my purpose fair given the situation?

Are concepts clear?

Am I distorting concepts to get what I want?

At this point, from the thinking project's purpose and question(s) to the logical argumentation reports or briefings and intellectual standards self-review, the thinker will have traversed the entire critical-thinking framework. To be a proficient critical thinker a person must practice the techniques in this chapter for all major decisions in their civic, personal, and professional lives. The remaining chapters in this book expand upon the comprehensive critical-thinking framework in Figure 2.7 and apply it to civic life issues.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive coverage of human development see: Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (W.W. Norton & Company: New York, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Ongoing archeological research frequently updates the classifications of ancestors and descendants of *Homo erectus*.

<sup>3</sup> See Patrick J. Hurley, *A Concise Introduction to Logic*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed. (Belmont, CA: Thompson Wadsworth, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> 10 Examples of Formal Logic, <https://ejemplos.cc/en/formal-logic/> (accessed August 28, 2025).

<sup>5</sup> See Philip C. Abrami, Robert M. Bernard, Eugene Borokhovski, David I. Waddington, C. Anne Wade, and Tonje Persson, “Strategies for Teaching Students to Think Critically: A Meta-Analysis,” *Review of Educational Research*, June 2015, Vol, 85, No. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Broadcast – BBC Programme Index, <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk> (accessed September 16, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> Foundation for Critical Thinking, <https://www.criticalthinking.org/> (accessed September 26, 2022).

<sup>8</sup> Richard Paul and Linda Elder, *Critical Thinking, Tools for Taking Charge of Your Professional and Personal Life*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, NY: Pearson Education, Inc., 2014), 19.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 367.

<sup>10</sup> National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), “Job Outlooks 2018 Survey,” (Bethlehem, PA: NACE, December 11, 2017), <http://www.nacweb.org/career-readiness/competencies/employers-rate-career-competencies-new-hire-proficiency/> (accessed June 21, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> Paul and Elder.

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<sup>12</sup> Modified from Morgan D. Jones, *The Thinker's Toolkit, 14 Powerful Techniques for Problem Solving*, Revised ed. (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998), 8-46.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>14</sup> Foundation for Critical Thinking.

<sup>15</sup> Paul and Elder.

<sup>16</sup> Gerald Nosich, *Learning to Think Things Through: A Guide to Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, NY: Pearson Education, Inc., 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Paul and Elder, 96-97.

<sup>18</sup> Modified from Katherine Hibbs Pherson and Randolph H. Pherson, *Critical Thinking for Strategic Intelligence*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage/CQ Press, 2017), 50.

<sup>19</sup> See Richard Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in Time, The Uses of History for Decision Makers* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 1-16.

<sup>20</sup> Paul and Elder, 360.

<sup>21</sup> David Robson, "There really are 50 Eskimo words for 'snow,'" *The Washington Post*, January 14, 2013, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/there-really-are-50-eskimo-words-for-snow/2013/01/14/e0e3f4e0-59a0-11e2-beee-6e38f5215402\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/there-really-are-50-eskimo-words-for-snow/2013/01/14/e0e3f4e0-59a0-11e2-beee-6e38f5215402_story.html) (accessed January 15, 2021).

<sup>22</sup> Robert M. Clark, *Intelligence Analysis, A Target Centric Approach*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE/CQ Press, 2017), 66.

<sup>23</sup> Michael W. Collier, *Security Analysis, a Critical-Thinking Approach* (Richmond, KY, Eastern Kentucky University Libraries Encompass, 2023), <https://encompass.eku.edu/ekuopen/6/> or <https://manifold.open.umn.edu/projects/security-analysis>.

<sup>24</sup> Russell Carpenter, Charlie Sweet, and Hal Blythe, *Introduction to Applied Creative Thinking, Taking Control of Your Future* (Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> Daniel Forsett, *Kick-Start Creative Thinking, Instant Techniques to Innovative Ideas and Ingenious Problem Solving* (Amazon Kindle ebook, 2012).

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<sup>26</sup> Collier.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Paul and Elder, 93.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 117.

<sup>31</sup> Fred May, Cascading Disaster Models in Postburn Flash Flood,” in *The Fire Environment—Innovations, Management, and Policy*, eds. Bret Butler and Wayne Cook, Proceedings RMRS-P-46CD, March 2007 (Fort Collins, CO: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station, 2007).

<sup>32</sup> Collier.

<sup>33</sup> Paul and Elder, 127-166.

<sup>34</sup> Nosich.

<sup>35</sup> Paul and Elder, 141-142.

# Chapter 3

## Information and Misinformation

*Information is the currency of Democracy.*

- Former U.S. President Thomas Jefferson

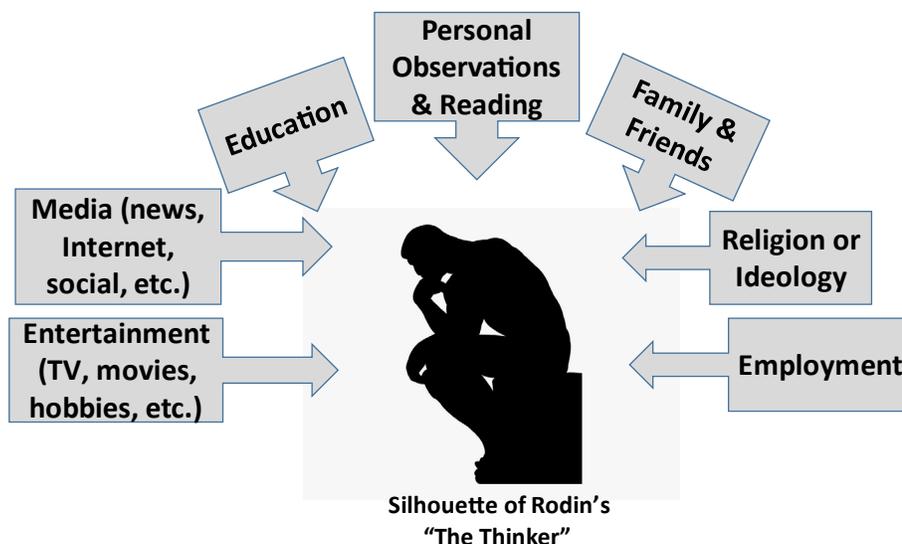
In the above quote, the third U.S. President Thomas Jefferson highlights how democracy requires information. At the heart of democracy and our civic life, being informed citizens require they become “critical consumers of information.” This chapter discusses issues regarding the search for and assessment of information. Chapter 4 will then address the combining of good information with good logic and reasoning to construct arguments based in knowledge (information plus logic).

The ability to assess truthful information is a major factor in critical thinking. Unfortunately, the last few decades have seen an avalanche of misinformation at work in U.S. politics. Misinformation is defined as “incorrect or misleading information.”<sup>1</sup> There has always been some misinformation in U.S. politics—usually due to an occasional inadvertent misstating of facts, statements made when the official lacks good information, or attempts to exaggerate or bolster the facts with untruthful or out of context information to serve an agenda. However, the last few years have seen an explosion of political misinformation as some politicians have made lying to U.S. citizens as a regular part of the discourse. Political candidates, political parties, and elected officials increasingly present a different reality of situations than is actually occurring. This chapter will assist citizens in locating and assessing information and determining if it is trustworthy or just a string of political lies.

## Where Our Information Comes From

How people obtain and process information varies by the individual. Thinking starts with influences that provide information and often tell people how to process the information. Figure 3.1 identifies several of the main sources and influences of how people gain information.

**Figure 3.1** Where Our Information Comes From



Education is usually the primary influence on a person's information base. The more education people receive, combined with the quality of the education, leads them to develop different perspectives on the world. Family and friends are a second major influence on a person's information base. People may attend education programs for 6-8 hours a day, 5 days a week, for 9-10 months a year, over 12 or more years, but the remainder of their waking time they are mainly influenced by family and friends. Personal observations, including a person's own experiences and reading engagement, are also influences on a person's information base. Religion and political ideology (liberal, conservative, etc.) are also influences. What a person learns in their employment (workplace) and from

the media and entertainment industries additionally influence a person's information base and how they process this information (think). Every person experiences a different combination of the Figure 3.1 influences and thus develops varying perspectives on the world—both valid and faulty.

Since the advent of the Internet, how people nationwide receive and process information has changed greatly. Over the past few decades the Internet, in particular social media sites accessible on the Internet, have become a major source of U.S. citizen information. The Internet, and especially social media, have been described as “boiling cauldrons of hate and lies.” Thus, those who rely primarily on the Internet for their information see as much or more misinformation than truthful information. See more on Internet information below.

People gather and use information in different ways. The type of people this creates can be categorized along an information-seeking spectrum as follows:

**Low Information (Politically Disengaged) People:** Those who minimize their political information engagement: typically, do not read; pay only limited attention to the news media; often wait until just before an election to become “informed;” and are not proficient or care little about key issues nor strive to be critical thinkers. Low information people are those most afflicted by **confirmation bias**—or the refusal to consider perspectives other than their own. (Mentally Lazy U.S. Citizens—estimated  $\pm 30\%$  of U.S. voters.)<sup>2</sup>

**Moderate Information People:** Those who engage with some political information and read and listen to some professional and popular literature and news media (however often from one ideological view); think they are fully informed about key issues (but usually are not); and think they are critical thinkers (but likely are not). **Confirmation bias** is very prevalent in these people. (Many U.S. Citizens—estimated  $\pm 50\%$ .)

**High Information People:** Those who engage with diverse political information and read widely in professional and scholarly literature and popular news media; strive to understand multiple perspectives of issues; constantly seek to learn more about key issues; are the most likely to develop the tools to be critical thinkers. (Not Enough U.S. Citizens—estimated  $\pm$  20%.)

High information people often become “information addicts” in not only politics but all spheres of human knowledge. These people frantically seek a continuing vast volume of written and verbal information. Information addicts include, among others, knowledge professionals such as scholars, scientists, journalists, lawyers, intelligence analysts, technocrats, some government and military officials, some politicians, and some corporate leaders. Information addicts are intellectually curious and are always learning, including seeking additional education and training opportunities, spending hours watching network and cable television news channels, and voraciously reading and researching in a myriad of information sources. One major problem with information addicts is how some often limit their information sources to those of a particular ideological view, meaning they generate only a very narrow perspective of the world they seek to understand. To be a balanced information addict, and eventually a good critical thinker, requires the person to consume information from a wide array of sources, including from differing ideologies and different perspectives on the world. Information addicts are usually the most open to critical thinking.

Most people fall along the information-seeking spectrum below high information people. Most of these people can be considered “information moderates,” who spend some time seeking additional information, both written and verbal, mostly from a variety of information sources. Information moderates usually seek to become critical consumers of information (even if they do not know it) and are normally motivated to learn more about the world—hopefully from a number of perspectives. Like the information addicts, information

moderates often limit their information sources to those of a particular ideological view, getting a very narrow perspective of the world. Information moderates usually seek to become better informed citizens and may at least partly be open to learning critical thinking.

Other people are intellectually lazy and can be classified as “information cynics,” who ignore, or outright avoid, learning from written and verbal information sources. Information cynics figure they already know what they need to know and if not will get the needed information from a single news source, family and friends, or co-workers. They fail to read or understand historical and current texts. The information cynics are usually anchored on one perspective of the world and resist information from other perspectives (**confirmation bias**). Information cynics are the least likely to become good critical thinkers. This book’s audience is high and moderate information people. It is unlikely those wishing to remain low information people would have an interest in learning critical thinking or increasing their civic education information base—the main topics of this book.

All people require the skills known as **information literacy**, meaning they become proficient in locating, assessing, using, and documenting their information. A recent movement teaches students “media literacy” a small slice of the larger information literacy—but a good place to start. Some information literacy skills are taught in secondary and post-secondary education programs, but except for trained academic and professional researchers, people are often ill-prepared for the level of information literacy needed to be informed citizens. This chapter addresses information literacy skills related to locating and assessing information from a variety of sources. This chapter is for those desiring to be critical consumers of information in their civic, personal, and professional lives. For example, buying a new automobile requires a medium amount of information search, combined with a simple critical-thinking effort (see Chapters 2 and 8), which is likely all that is required to buy an acceptable automobile. However, for larger thinking projects, such as generated in the workplace or in their civic and

personal lives, like deciding what political candidates would best serve a person’s interests (see Chapter 8), a much deeper information gathering effort and more complex critical-thinking process is required. Being information literate is a key to being both a good critical thinker and an informed citizen.

## Epistemology: The Study of Knowledge

People use information, combined with logic and reasoning, to create **knowledge** and decide what to think or how to act (behave). The academic field of **epistemology**, the study of knowledge, helps us understand basic information gathering and later decision-making. Epistemology investigates where knowledge (information combined with logic and reasoning) originates.<sup>3</sup> Academics normally offer seven categories of knowledge depicted in Figure 3.2. If a person could go back and classify every piece of knowledge they possess, it could likely be placed in one or more of the below seven categories. Any individual’s knowledge base is usually a combination of material from all these categories.<sup>4</sup> An initial step in analyzing how a person’s information base influences their behaviors is to uncover the most significant sources of their knowledge on the problem or decision under study.

<b>Figure 3.2 Categories of Knowledge</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Authority</b>	Knowledge provided by an expert or someone in authority (president, dictator, minister, teacher, journalist, parent, cult leader, etc.) where a person tends to accept it without challenge.
<b>Faith</b>	Knowledge a person accepts with little or no supporting evidence and a person tends to accept it without challenge.

	Religious and political ideologies are major sources of faith knowledge.
<b>Common Sense</b>	Knowledge externally presented as if “everybody just knows it” and a person accepts it without challenge.
<b>Intuition</b>	Knowledge with no conscious reason for knowing and a person accepts it without challenge.
<b>Empiricism</b>	Knowledge gained from a person’s observations, experiences and gathering of data, facts, evidence, etc., with the five senses or with technical measurement instruments (thermometers, gauges, etc.) where a person may challenge it through additional observations.
<b>Rationalism</b>	Knowledge generated through humans’ innate abilities to use logic and reasoning and it may be challenged through additional use of logic and reasoning.
<b>Science</b>	Knowledge gained through combining empiricism and rationalism and a person may challenge it with repeated use of the scientific method and critical-thinking frameworks.

Figure 3.2 knowledge categories are not presented in a hierarchical order; however, the science category is generally considered the highest form of knowledge. When a person’s decision-making is mainly driven by the first four knowledge categories (authority, faith, common sense, and intuition) their conclusions are likely no more than opinions driven by emotions and feelings, which if used in decision-making may result in unsuccessful outcomes. This is not always the case, but these four categories generally lack the ability to challenge the knowledge presented. The last three knowledge categories (empiricism, rationalism, and science) are more likely to lead to rational thinking and successful decision-making outcomes, which can confirm or challenge existing knowledge.

The Figure 3.2 knowledge categories can be full of misinformation. This chapter and the following Chapter 4 discuss techniques for identifying misinformation. Additional discussion of each category of knowledge is presented below:

**Authority** knowledge occurs when an expert or someone in authority provides the knowledge that a person tends to accept without challenge. This category of knowledge may not be capable of being replicated, which means it often cannot be studied. Much of what is read and heard in the open public media falls into this category. For example, high-ranking people or other pundits often give their opinions on an issue in a government report, speech, newspaper editorial, television interview, non-academic journal, or other communication; however, there may exist little empirical data, reasoning, or systematic analysis to support the opinions. In some cases, the authority figure will distort the data to support their intended message or agenda, or to deceive the intended audience. Even though some of these opinion pieces may be from highly informed sources, it does not ensure that the message will pass the scrutiny of the scientific method or the critical-thinking framework. Therefore, a person must be extremely careful about using opinion-based knowledge gained from so-called authorities.

**Faith** knowledge is at play when a person accepts the knowledge presented with little or no supporting evidence. Most people think of faith knowledge as mainly religious teaching; however, this category also encompasses a wider range of knowledge sources driven by ideologies in politics, economics, and social matters. Faith knowledge is often based on “sacred texts” that lack empirical (factual) support. Faith knowledge sources often include stories, myths, folktales, rumors, conspiracy theories, political ideologies, cult messages, and other sources of knowledge that lack a solid empirical basis. Faith knowledge is often a means groups use to pass on the stories, myths, and folktales that define the values, ethics, and expected behaviors of their community. For example, the folktale of

lumberjack Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox in the woodlands of the northern United States and southern Canada advances community values of personal strength and superhuman labor. Rumors and conspiracy theories usually lack supporting evidence and pander to the **confirmation bias** tendencies in those who believe them (see Chapter 4).

Political ideologies try to establish community values and define government policy and human behavior. Those following a specific political ideology are highly subject to **confirmation bias**. Cults usually offer a more or less consistent and tempting belief system not based in evidence and encompass social groups holding a specific ideology (religious, political, etc.) or having common interests in a particular personality, object, or goal. The word “cult” is considered pejorative and often leads to negative consequences. For example, in 1978, Jim Jones’s Peoples’ Temple religious cult resulted in a mass suicide of over 900 cult members in Guyana—men, women, and children. In 1993, David Koresh’s Branch Davidians religious cult was involved in a violent clash with U.S. federal law enforcement in Waco, Texas, resulting in the deaths of 4 federal agents and 85 cult members, including several women and children. Faith knowledge differs from authority knowledge as it usually offers a consistent, enticing belief system for its members. Because there is often little empirical basis for faith knowledge, it cannot be challenged as it cannot be replicated to test for validity. Religious and political ideologies’ roles in thinking about democracy and civic life are addressed in more detail in Chapter 6.

**Common-sense** knowledge is usually obtained through externally plausible sources and is presented as if “everybody just knows it.” Common-sense knowledge is usually tied to a person’s overall beliefs, which differ for people with competing belief systems (see chapters 6 and 7). Common-sense knowledge will likely differ based on beliefs emerging from a person’s culture and the context of a situation. For example, in the Sikh religion it is common-sense that men do not cut their hair or beard, something not common-sense in a Christian religion.

Common-sense knowledge is often contradictory and usually too general to be challenged or studied. As one saying holds, “Common sense is not all that common!” Chapter 7 provides an expanded discussion of how beliefs influence thinking.

**Intuition** knowledge has no conscious reason for knowing. It usually originates in internal belief systems, sometimes where implicit connections are made through material gained from other knowledge categories—primarily authority, faith, and common-sense categories. Intuition often employs biased facts and poor logic and reasoning. Moreover, intuition is often without a strong empirical basis; that is, people just seem to know (think) it is true. For example, Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin used his intuition to conclude there was no chance the Germans would attack the Soviet Union in June 1941—he turned out to be very wrong, resulting in an eventual 25,000,000 Soviet casualties in World War II. Intuition knowledge usually cannot be replicated, thus cannot be challenged or assessed for validity.

**Empiricism** knowledge is gained from a person’s observations, experiences and gathering of data, facts, evidence, etc., with the five senses or with technical measurement instruments (thermometers, gauges, etc.). It can be challenged as additional observations are usually possible. To brute-empiricists, only the empirical data matters. Like Sgt. Joe Friday said, “Just the **facts**, ma'am, just the facts.” (Sgt. Joe Friday was the lead character in the 1950’s and 1960’s TV detective program *Dragnet*.)

**Rationalism** knowledge is generated through humans’ innate abilities to use logic and reasoning that allows a person to reason separately from their actual experiences with the real world. This is the realm of theory-building.

**Science (includes social science)** knowledge is gained through combining empiricism and rationalism. This category argues that empiricism and rationalism alone may not always be correct; however, if the two are used in tandem, it is more likely to generate knowledge with fewer biases. The scientific method allows the assessment of research validity. Social science **positivists** assume the scientific method may be used to study human behavior, human decisions, and human conditions.<sup>5</sup> In Chapter 2, this book takes a positivist approach as it combines the scientific method with a robust critical-thinking framework.

## Locating Information and Knowledge

The above discussion reveals a person's knowledge base is generated by a number of influences (Figure 3.1) and can be placed in a number of epistemological categories (Figure 3.2). A major contributor to our information and knowledge bases can be found in a myriad of **open-source** (publicly available) information channels. Open source means any of the material normally available to a public audience, including books, magazines, movies, television, videos, newscasts, web sites, pod casts, etc., etc. A critical consumer of information must know how to access and search the vast open-source material available. Open-source material is organized and found in hundreds of private, commercial, government, and academic databases, both online and on paper. Small local libraries up to large university research libraries offer access to a significant amount of open-source material. A significant amount of material is also available through the Internet. People should keep in mind that not all world knowledge is online. On many occasions the person must search for paper sources in physical libraries, archives, public records, church records, corporate records, etc., to locate relevant open-source material. Not all open-source materials are of the same quality. Some open-source material is valid (factual, meets scientific standards) and other material is faulty (misinformation that is not factual,

primarily supported by opinions). Most libraries, archives, and record centers have reference specialists to assist in searching databases and locating specific information for the thinker (citizen, researcher) to assess.

## Searching Open Sources

When searching open-source databases and assessing items found, three general categories of information and knowledge should be sought:

**Facts** (data, evidence, information) that directly concern the topic. A person should try to confirm and corroborate the facts uncovered by separate, independent sources. Facts may be found in raw reporting by those personally observing the event, such as in media stories where the journalist personally observed the events being reported. When the facts are reported by an actual observer, or if the facts are accessible readily from the source, it is usually classified as a **primary source**. Articles published by the observer, plus official documents or reports are usually considered primary sources. **Secondary sources** are generated by others using primary sources (or other secondary sources), including most statistical studies. (**Empiricism**)

**Logic and reasoning lacking facts**, such as statements or propositions that cannot be factually verified but employ theory (logic and reasoning) such that they may be considered knowledge. Logic and reasoning lacking facts are often classified as assumptions, which are included in critical thinking. See Chapter 7 for more detail on assumptions. (**Rationalism**)

**Facts, combined with logic and reasoning**, which normally are found in statements of causality, arguments, and contentions (theses, judgements, findings, conclusions, recommendations), or theoretical propositions

(assumptions, axioms, theorems, postulates, laws). Before the material may be classified as scientific knowledge, the statements, arguments, contentions, and propositions must be checked to ensure they do not include cognitive biases and informal logic fallacies (see Chapter 4). **(Science)**

## Prioritizing Open-Source Searches

Open sources vary in the validity (truthfulness, accuracy) of the information they provide. It is therefore recommended that multiple pertinent sources be searched in order of their reputation for validity. Figure 3.3 provides a recommended sequence for open-source searching based on the sources' reputations for validity.

<b>Figure 3.3</b> <b>Prioritizing Open-Source Searches</b>	
<b>Priority/Source</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>1. Government reporting and official records</b>	U.S. government agencies and international governmental organizations (IGOs) produce a number of recurring and special reports on a variety of subjects. Governments also maintain volumes of official (public) records with data on individuals and government programs.
<b>2. Scholarly and professional articles</b>	Academic researcher and professional articles published in academic and professional journals.
<b>3. Scholarly and professional books</b>	Academic researcher and professional books published in the academic and professional press.
<b>4. Legal databases</b>	Databases developed to allow researchers to search legal materials (case transcripts, court documents, law journals, etc.) that also may

	include public records and significant news reporting.
<b>5. Think tank and non-governmental organization (NGO) reporting</b>	Academic and professional think tank researchers and thousands of NGOs produce research reports published in journals, books, or on the Internet.
<b>6. Popular media: newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and more</b>	Open-source material published by a variety of sources and in a variety of formats for a general public audience.
<b>7. Internet</b>	Last place to search for open-source material as it includes a plethora of web sites, blogs, social media, etc., that can be rife with misinformation and disinformation.

Additional discussion of each source of open material is presented below.

**Government reporting and official records.** U.S. government agencies and international governmental organizations (IGOs) produce a number of recurring and special reports on a variety of subjects. IGOs are organizations or agencies where countries are the members (United Nations, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, etc.). IGOs issue generally valid reports. Most of these agencies and organizations employ professional researchers who can normally be trusted to provide objective and valid reporting. For example, U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) and U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports normally can be considered bipartisan and objective. People still should be wary of governmental reporting as at times it may slant toward supporting a particular government or IGO’s programs or ideology. Government reporting often is a good source of statistical data to support a thinking project.

Governments also maintain a plethora of official (public) records. These include both data on individuals and on government programs. These records can usually be considered valid primary sources. But beware of any reporting using

government crime data. There is no U.S. single database on crime and no mandatory national crime reporting requirements, so any reports based on crime data are usually lacking complete information. Additionally, government crime report analysis is often focused on a partisan attempt to make the crime statistics comply with their political view. There is no “honest broker” on crime reporting and thus any studies using crime data are likely rife with bias.

**Scholarly and professional articles.** After governmental reporting, scholarly and professional articles are usually excellent sources of information. Scholarly articles are produced by academic researchers and published in academic journals. Most of the articles are refereed by panels of other academics (known as “peer review”). If not refereed, then the editors of the particular journal provide quality control on articles. Scholarly articles should be searched before scholarly books, as the scholarly publishing process usually first publishes the latest research results as journal articles before later expanding and/or including the material in books. Professional articles normally are published in journals or magazines. These articles usually are written by professional researchers or leaders in their professional field. For example, *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, *National Geographic*, and *Popular Mechanics*, among others, are good sources of professional articles. Thinkers must still assess the validity of scholarly articles, even if passing a refereed review, and of professional articles as they may still lack validity as they support particular programs or ideologies. It is sometimes difficult to identify what is scholarly or professional literature from popular media reporting. Figure 3.4 provides a template for assessing these differences.

<b>Figure 3.4 Classifying Scholarly/Professional and Media Reporting</b>		
	<b>Scholarly, Professional Literature</b>	<b>Popular Media</b>
<b>Audience</b>	Scholars, researchers, professional practitioners.	General public.

<b>Authors</b>	Experts in the field (i.e., scholars, researchers, professionals). Articles are signed, often including author's credentials and affiliations.	Journalists or freelance writers. Articles may or may not be signed.
<b>References</b>	Includes a bibliography, references, footnotes, endnotes and/or works cited section.	Rarely include references or sources.
<b>Editors</b>	Editorial board of outside scholars (known as "peer review"), or professional editorial staff with subject expertise.	Editors and staff may or may not possess subject expertise.
<b>Publishers</b>	Often a scholarly or professional organization or academic press.	Commercial, for-profit publisher.
<b>Writing Style</b>	Assumes a level of knowledge in the field. Usually contains specialized language (jargon). Articles are often lengthy.	Easy to read – aimed at the layperson (written at 7 <sup>th</sup> grade level). Articles are usually short and often entertain as they inform.
<b>General Characteristics</b>	Primarily print with few pictures. Tables, graphs, and diagrams are often included. Usually little if any advertising. Often have "journal," "review," or "quarterly" as part of the title. Successive	Contain advertising and photographs. Often printed on glossy paper. Often sold at newsstands or bookstores. Usually restarts pagination with each issue. Usually have broad subject focus.

	issues may have continuous pagination. Usually have a narrow subject focus.	
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Source: Created from numerous materials.

**Scholarly and professional books.** There are a deluge of scholarly and professional books. Scholarly books may be historical or scientific (including social science). Historical books provide past details on a topic and are good sources for background and contextual information. Scientific books focus on presenting one or more theories and the facts, logic, and reasoning supporting the theories and their findings or conclusions. Some books will be combinations of historical and scientific studies. Some scholarly books provide edited compilations of scholarly journal articles or chapters in the same subject area. Some scholarly books are an expansion of ideas in a previously published scholarly journal article. For example, Harvard University political scientist Samuel Huntington took his journal article published in 1993 in *Foreign Affairs* magazine, “The Clash of Civilizations,” and later expanded it into an entire book of the same title—one of the most discussed articles/books of the last few decades on world conflict.<sup>6</sup> Professional books usually provide detailed descriptive material, lessons learned, and/or “how to” or other recommendations on a topic. Just as with scholarly and professional articles, books may contain biases in support of specific programs or ideologies.

**Legal databases.** Most research topics are embedded in a legal structure. Even if not lawyers, thinkers should understand and consider the legal structure applying to their thinking project. This is especially important in projects where revised or new policies are recommended, which must comply with existing laws and regulations. Legal databases have been developed to allow people to search legal material, public records, and news reporting. Legal material also is available for legislation, statutes, treaties, regulations, court case transcripts, and associated case documents (briefs, pleadings, motions, settlements, and verdicts). Lastly, the databases include law reviews and law journal articles. Westlaw and

Lexis/Nexis are two competitors that organize and manage legal databases and allow access for a fee. Most law firms and large libraries, plus some large businesses and agencies, have subscriptions to either or both.

**Think tank and non-governmental organization (NGO) reporting.** Dozens of academic and professional think tanks and thousands of NGOs produce research reports useful for open-source searching. Academic think tank reports normally do not undergo a refereed or peer review and, at most, are reviewed by local editors. Professional think tank and NGO reports also normally do not undergo a review beyond local editors. All think tank and NGO sources require extra scrutiny to ensure validity in the reporting as they are often rife with ideological slants that degrade validity. Think tanks often focus on a single issue or narrow set of issues. Some are supported by universities, others by contracts, grants, and donations from those interested in the think tank’s issue areas and support its political orientation. Figure 3.5 provides a summary of selected professional think tanks indicating political and ideological orientations that may be useful.

<b>Figure 3.5 Selected Think Tank Political Orientations<sup>7</sup></b>	
<b>Political Orientation</b>	<b>Think Tanks</b>
<b>Left/Liberal</b>	Brookings Institution, Center for American Progress, Inter-American Dialogue, Human Rights Watch, American Civil Liberties Union, Migration Policy Institute, Brennan Center for Justice
<b>Centrist</b>	Atlantic Council, Aspen Institute, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, CATO Institute (libertarian), Center for Strategic and International Studies, Council on Foreign Relations, Freedom House, Rand Corporation, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Congressional Research Service

<b>Right/Conservative</b>	American Enterprise Institute, Claremont Institute, Heritage Foundation, Hoover Institution, Center for Immigration Studies
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NGOs include individuals or groups that organize around an issue area but do not represent federal, state, or local governments. There are hundreds of thousands of NGOs. A local book club, scout troop, or homeowner’s association are considered NGOs. Many NGOs provide a combination of advocacy, research, and service in a related issue area. NGO political orientations often are highlighted by their title or by a quick review of their reporting or activities. Some NGOs, such as the American Civil Liberties Union, may be classified as both a think tank and an NGO, because it provides in-depth research, advocacy, and service (e.g., filing lawsuits) in the area of civil liberties. Those searching open sources should assess the political orientation and validity of information accessed, whether from a think tank or NGO.

**Popular media: newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and more.**

Popular media has a major advantage in collecting some information because news reporters of larger media companies might be on location and have observed national and world events firsthand. The major weaknesses of popular media concern the sheer volume of information and how popular media often suffers from severe misinformation and validity problems. Figure 3.4 provides the general characteristics of popular media. Validity problems are often seen in material found in newspapers (including online news), magazines, television, radio, and other sources. Validity problems begin with the popular media’s political orientation and include their approach to using factual data and the accuracy and depth of their analyses.

Figure 3.6 provides a summary of the quality and political orientation of selected popular media. In general, centrist media sources of high- and medium-quality are the most useful to people seeking truthful information. The low-

quality media sources listed should be avoided or accessed with extreme caution due to their proliferation of misinformation. If accessed, high- and medium-quality sources with left/liberal or right/conservative political orientations should undergo strict validity checks for bias. Highly biased information should not be considered as valid open-source material.

<b>Figure 3.6 Selected Popular Media Bias Analysis<sup>8</sup></b>	
<b>Political Orientation</b>	<b>Media Sources by Quality</b>
	<b>High Quality: Good Use of Facts, Advanced/Complex Analyses</b>
<b>Left/Liberal</b>	<i>The Atlantic, Slate, Vox, The Guardian, Axios</i>
<b>Centrist</b>	<i>The Wall Street Journal (news), AP, NPR (news), PBS, BBC, Politico, Bloomberg, Reuters, USA Today, Time, Foreign Policy</i>
<b>Right/Conservative</b>	<i>The Wall Street Journal (opinion), The Economist, The Hill</i>
	<b>Medium Quality: Good Use of Facts, Generally Fair Analyses</b>
<b>Left/Liberal</b>	<i>Local Newspapers (liberal cities/states), The New Yorker, The New York Times (opinion), MSNBC (opinion), CNN (opinion), Mother Jones, Huffington Post, Vanity Fair, BuzzFeed (news), Slate</i>
<b>Centrist</b>	<i>Local Television News, The New York Times (news), MSNBC (news), CNN (news), The Washington Post, NPR (opinion), News Nation, Network News: ABC, CBS, NBC</i>
<b>Right/Conservative</b>	<i>Local Newspapers (conservative cities/states), Fox News/Business (non-political news), The Washington Times, National Review, The Federalist</i>

	<b>Low Quality: Poor or Made-Up Facts, Inaccurate/Unfair Analyses</b>
<b>Left/Liberal</b>	Occupy Democrats, U.S. Uncut, Forward Progressives, David Wolfe, Palmer Report, Splinter
<b>Centrist</b>	<i>National Enquirer</i>
<b>Right/Conservative</b>	Fox News/Business (political news and opinion), Brietbart, InfoWars, Red State, <i>The New York Post</i> , <i>Newsmax</i> , Daily Caller, One America Network

**Internet sites.** Because of often-severe misinformation and validity problems with material posted on Internet sites, especially on blogs and social media, they are usually the last place a thinker should search for information. Often government reporting, scholarly and professional articles/books, legal databases, think tank and NGO reporting, or popular media sources described above may be accessed on the Internet and could include the biases previously discussed. This warning on using Internet sites is for material beyond these sources, because anyone can set up an Internet site and post any written, voice, or video material they choose. A particular problem with Internet-based blogs and social media, of which there are thousands, is the presentation of **misinformation** (lies, fake news) and **disinformation** (propaganda, deception).

In the United States, civil liberties conventions allow virtual unregulated publishing on the Internet. There are some Internet sites considered in a “gray area,” such as Wikipedia, because anyone can access it and change or update the site’s articles to support their personal perspective or ideological slant. Thus, there is no real method for validity control on Wikipedia. The best a person can use this site for is to determine if the Wikipedia article triangulates (see discussion below) with other information found on a topic and then use the reference list included with most Wikipedia articles as sources to expand the information search on a topic. The bottom line when dealing with Internet-based information

is to “**question everything,**” in other words, be suspect of all open-source Internet material until its validity is determined.

## **Assessing Information**

Assessing information in search of the truth is often difficult and frustrating. Social science offers we may never actually find the truth, but it is essential to strive for the truth and get as close as possible. Policies and actions based on the truth (or as close as we can get) are likely to be the most successful, while those based on untruths (misinformation) are more likely to end in failures. There are a multitude of techniques for generating misinformation to affect political policies and actions. Below are discussions of some general techniques for thinkers to assess the validity of information and hopefully uncover misinformation.

## **Corroborate, Corroborate, Corroborate**

The best strategy for identifying and avoiding misinformation is to **corroborate** all information with multiple sources. In academic research this is called **triangulation**, a term taken from maritime navigation whereby bearings and ranges are taken on different geographic points to fix the mariner’s exact position. Triangulation of facts, data, and evidence based on different multiple sources is the best way to ensure the truth (validity) of the information collected.

It is not always possible to corroborate or triangulate information as at times there may only be one legitimate source. In this case the reputation of the source must also be evaluated. The logic entails if the source has been truthful in the past, it is assumed they will likely be truthful in the present and future. For example, in the 4-year (2017-2020) U.S. presidential administration, the president was found to have made false or untruthful public statements over 30,000 times—a poor reputation for being truthful. In addition to source reputation, the

thinker also needs to consider the context of the information (supporting structure of facts and logic—see Chapter 4) and evaluate if the information makes sense considering the issue at hand. If the thinker is a specialist in the issue at hand, they will be more likely to identify whether misinformation has been presented. In any case, if the thinker’s “gut” says the information is too good to be true or otherwise suspect, then it should be investigated as possible misinformation.

For example, it is common for some politicians and U.S. citizens to offer “undocumented immigrants are substantially raising the crime levels in the United States.” In fact, numerous academic and professional studies have confirmed undocumented immigrants commit crimes at a far lower level than native-born U.S. citizens (see Chapter 7).<sup>9</sup> This is mainly because undocumented immigrants do not want to be arrested and deported. This is just one piece of misinformation used to create fear (fearmongering) of undocumented immigrants in the eyes of U.S. citizens. More on this topic below and in Chapter 7.

## **Gaslighting**

When a flow of misinformation tries to purposely convince an audience of a reality that does not exist it is called **gaslighting**. This is also considered disinformation and/or propaganda. The term gaslighting is taken from a 1944 U.S. film *Gaslight* where a man tried to convince his wealthy wife that she was losing her mind and needed to be institutionalized. With his wife out of the way, the man could then access her fortune. The man created confusion in his wife’s thinking in several ways, including by random sudden adjustments (up or down) of their home’s interior gas lights.<sup>10</sup> With the increase of cascading U.S. political misinformation in the last decade, gaslighting has been a term widely used in U.S. public discourse to indicate the spread of false realities.

For example, the above political statements about undocumented immigrants and crime rates are only a part of a political gaslighting campaign to convince U.S. citizens to fear undocumented immigrants. Other misinformation in this campaign paints undocumented immigrants as presenting a major national security (criminal) threat, taking U.S. citizen jobs, not paying taxes, abusing public assistance programs, and bringing diseases into the United States. Multiple academic and think tank studies have shown none of these claims are true relative to similar information for native-born U.S. citizens (see details in Chapter 7). However, through the **repetition** informal logic fallacy (see Chapter 4) these falsehoods about undocumented immigrants have been repeated so many times that partisan anti-immigration politicians, news media, and citizens are convinced they are true and will continually repeat this false reality—in other words, they have been gaslit. The gaslighting campaign to paint U.S. immigrants in a bad light and by creating fear of immigrants among U.S. citizens was used to justify building a “wall” along the Mexico-U.S. border, deploying the U.S. military to secure the U.S. border, and increasing, with military support, detention and deportation of undocumented immigrants. Policies and actions based on gaslit misinformation are often costly to U.S. taxpayers and likely to fail in the end.

Below are some questions to ask if the thinker believes they are being gaslit:

1. Does the source try to convince others that their points of view are wrong or insignificant and the source’s point of view is the reality?
2. Does the source try to downplay or sweep under the rug harmful behavior resulting from their point of view?
3. Does the source never assume blame or take responsibility?
4. Does the source make others feel out of touch with reality?
5. Does the source make others feel anxious?<sup>11</sup>

## Circular Reporting

While reviewing information from open sources, a thinker must be aware of potential **circular reporting**. This is a special type of misinformation and can occur when there is only one unverified or unreliable source for a piece of information, which then gets repeated through several open-source or official reporting channels without other confirming evidence. Circular reporting is most noticeable in popular media and Internet reporting; but, at times, it has been known to creep its way into government and other normally reputable reporting. “Echo chamber” is a term often used for when misinformation is amplified by circular reporting among popular media and official sources with partisan ideological orientations.

For example, in 2025, the U.S. president claimed Harvard University was offering remedial mathematics courses, which was later exaggerated to claim Harvard was teaching middle-school mathematics to its incoming students. Using circular reporting, the U.S. Department of Education also highlighted the same claim, in addition to other U.S. departments and partisan public media. It appears the president’s intent was to question the quality of Harvard’s curriculum and to disparage the university that was resisting his administration’s ongoing assault of placing restrictions on academic freedoms and the trying to cancel Harvard’s government grant funding. In fact, the original statement by the president was based on false premises that became a case of circular reporting as it was repeated by other government departments and the media.

The true reality found Harvard did advertise their remedial mathematics that had been taught for years. But the U.S. president took this advertisement out of context to serve his own political purposes. Many incoming Harvard students, as is also the case in other well-respected universities,<sup>12</sup> come from high schools that do not teach advanced mathematics, not allowing these students to easily transition into a rigorous first-year calculus course. Even though Harvard incoming students average a score of 750 (out of 800) on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) math section, some still need assistance to successfully complete a tough

university calculus course. Harvard defines remedial courses and acted on their definition in two main ways. First, they offer a summer pre-calculus course to incoming freshmen to help prepare them for first-year calculus. Second, they offer a first semester calculus course that meets five days a week, instead of the normal three days, to give the students additional instruction; however, the five-day and three-day a week courses have the exact same homework and exams.<sup>13</sup> Thus, thinkers should assess whether their sources are taking information out of context and if the multiple sources found are a result of circular reporting.

## **Omission of Information**

At times the **omission of information** can be considered misinformation. When a source provides a broad general statement without additional supporting information it should be suspected as misinformation. When the source is asked for specific supporting information, they will often resort to a **red herring** informal logic fallacy (see Chapter 4) whereby they will change the subject or go off on another tangent or even attack those asking for specific details. In effect, the source of the broad general statement refuses to provide specific supporting information to their original statement. This type of misinformation is found frequently in political discourse. It is common to find where a politician states they plan to cancel an existing policy or program but cannot outline the details of the replacement policy or program. The politician subsequently refuses to provide specifics on the new policy or program. This is a case of misinformation. For example, a source may sing the benefits of a Mexico-U.S. border wall to prevent illegal migration. However, they will not mention, nor refuse to address, how the wall can be breached with tall ladders or portable electric saws or avoided by transiting around the wall by boat, over by airplane, or under by tunnelling. Thus, the potential ineffectiveness of a border wall is never mentioned by those supporting such a policy that would cost U.S. taxpayers millions of dollars.

It is also common for the partisan (left/right) media and Internet sites rated as low quality (sometimes even medium quality)—see Figure 3.6—to publish stories that only support their partisan political views. This is a form of misinformation when the consumer (thinker) is not provided with complete arguments on important current events not necessarily supportive of the source’s partisan perspectives. Chapter 4 provides discussion on making good arguments, including how to recognize when arguments are structurally flawed, especially by partisan politicians and media reporting that omits information.

## Lying with Numbers

U.S. novelist Mark Twain is attributed with popularizing the saying there are “Lies, Damned Lies, and Statistics.”<sup>14</sup> This statement implies the pervasive power of numbers (statistics) to support or bolster weak arguments. Not all statistics are lies, but if the statistics are made up, taken out of context, or misinterpreted, then misinformation is spread. To determine if numbers are valid, the thinker must know how the numbers were collected and analyzed. There are three types of lying with numbers most common in U.S. political discourse. First are broad statements by politicians similar to “Many people have told me....” The thinker should immediately ask “how many people” and “who were they (demographics, political partisanship, etc.)” What the politician is attempting to do with such broad statements is imply what the “many people told him or her” would be the same trend if a larger audience was polled, even up to and including the entire country. This is called the **part-to-the-whole** informal logic fallacy (see Chapter 4).

Second is when data from government or other sources are misreported. For example, in spring 2025, 238 immigrants, mainly Venezuelans, were deported from the United States to a maximum-security prison in El Salvador. The U.S. government reported these were all undocumented immigrants who were the “worst of the worst” and included criminals, terrorists, gang members, murders,

rapists, savages, and monsters. Even when asked by journalists and Congress for more data on the deportees, it was never provided by the government. It turns out the original government statement was far from true. A study conducted by U.S. media outlets *ProPublica* and *The Texas Tribune*, plus several Venezuelan researchers,<sup>15</sup> investigated the background of each deportee and found over half, 130 to be exact, of the 238 immigrants had never been convicted of a criminal act in the United States. These 130 were only guilty of being undocumented in the United States—an offense only deemed a misdemeanor civil matter (not criminal) by the U.S. justice system. The study showed that U.S. government officials knew only 32 of the 238 deportees had been convicted of U.S. crimes and that most of these were nonviolent offenses, such as retail theft (shoplifting) or traffic violations. The study also found the government knew that only six of the immigrants were convicted of violent crimes: four for assault, one for kidnapping, and one for a weapons offense—but none for terrorism, murder, or rape. It turns out a few of those deported were temporarily in the United States legally as they were involved in immigration court proceedings. The lesson here is that even U.S. government statements can convey misinformation if it suits their political purposes.

Third are statistical studies most frequently seen in political discourse as survey or polling results. The validity of statistical surveys or polls is governed by a combination of the theories of sampling and probability. The tenets of these theories are often violated. For those not familiar with these theories there are several basic questions to ask in determining the validity of surveys and polls:<sup>16</sup>

1. What was the population and sample size used? Was the survey (or poll) trying to generalize its findings to the entire country, a state, or another political division (city, county, etc.)? When a sample of a population is small the survey cannot usually generalize its results (trends) to a larger population but only to those surveyed. This is also a **part-to-the-whole** informal logic fallacy (see Chapter 4).

2. Were the survey questions clear and without bias? Survey questions can often be evaluated as “leading questions,” which lead respondents toward the answer the survey-taker wants them to choose. Examples: “The majority of Americans support Candidate A. Do you?” This question leads the respondent to agree with the majority. Or “Do you think Candidate A's new policy on climate change is terrible?” This question assumes the policy is terrible and leads the respondent to agree. Or “Don't you not like the government's policy on gun control? This is called a double negative question where two negatives are presented in a sentence thus making it positive. This question not only leads the respondent to agree with the question, as if the respondent answers yes they are effectively agreeing with the government policy. Unfortunately, in most surveys the consumer (thinker) is not given access to the survey questions so they may assess the potential biases.
3. In selecting the survey sample was an Equal Probability of Selection Method (EPSM) used? The only true EPSM is to select a simple random respondent sample from a total known population. Sometimes stratified and systematic sampling techniques are considered to meet EPSM criteria, but these are not frequently used in political surveys. What is used most in political surveys is random telephone calling. These insert bias into the survey results in two main ways. First, not everyone has a telephone so some members of the population may be missed—this violates EPSM. Second, telephone surveys allow the person who answers the call to determine if they will participate or not. This results in a “self-selected” (non-random) survey also violating EPSM and adding bias to the results. The theories of sampling and probability cannot determine how much the bias in a random telephone survey affects the findings, so it is usually ignored—but it is still there.
4. What is the size of the sample? Assuming ESPM, there are specific respondent sample sizes needed to generate acceptable confidence

levels and confidence intervals in survey results. In social science, which includes political surveys, a 95 percent confidence level and 5 percent confidence interval are usually the goal. A 95 percent confidence level means it is acceptable for the survey findings to be wrong 1 out of 20 times (i.e., seeks to be correct 19 out of 20 times). The 5 percent confidence interval indicates whatever results the survey generates, the actual truth is 5 percent either side of the results. For example, if a survey of voter preferences found 60 percent of voters preferred Candidate A with a confidence interval of 5 percent, then the actual voter preference is somewhere between 65 percent and 55 percent (60 percent  $\pm$  5 percent). Confidence intervals are often called the survey's "margin-of-error (MOE)." Again, assuming ESPM, as a standard rule surveys of a population of 1 million or even the total U.S. population of 330 million should strive for a sample size of at least 400 respondents if a 95 percent confidence level and 5 percent confidence interval are the goals. To obtain a 95 percent confidence level with a 3 percent confidence interval, most studies take a sample of 1,500 respondents.

The problems discussed above with survey research should make thinkers suspicious about the results of all political surveys. Unless the survey meets the criteria above, it should be disregarded. Overall, the above discussion should drive home when assessing any numerical or statistical information, the thinker must consider where the information came from and how it was analyzed. The number of respondents and who they are, the context of the situation, and the statistical methods used are all important to assess. Repeating Mark Twain, there are "Lies, Damned Lies, and Statistics."

## **False Causality**

To bolster their arguments, sources may offer how their information presents a case of **causality** (cause and effect). In other words, do conditions or changes in one or more factors (independent variables) cause conditions or changes in another factor (dependent variable). For example, in Chapter 6 it is shown a “strong democratic country will also normally have a free-market economy.” This is not an instance of strict causality but merely a correlation revealing most strong democratic states do have free-market economies. Otherwise, this statement violates the rules of causality detailed below. Additional instances of correlations in political discourse are seen in Chapter 6, but the adage “Correlation does not mean causation” is usually true. It is critical to assess the rules of causation whenever direct or implied statements of causation seep into information and knowledge. These rules often are misused in political discourse resulting in misinformation. The rules of causation include:

1. There must be time-ordering. The independent variable(s) condition or change must occur before the condition or change in the dependent variable, even if only a nanosecond before.
2. There must be co-variation. The independent and dependent variables must move together. Once the independent variable(s) move up or down (increases or decreases or changes conditions), the dependent must follow by also moving up or down or changing conditions. If variables move together in the same direction, it is a direct relationship. If one moves up and the other moves down, it is an indirect relationship.
3. There must not be a spurious relationship. There cannot be a third variable that causes both the independent and dependent variables to move or change conditions together. The classic (but unverifiable) example is a German story offering how one year an increase in storks caused an increase in human births. On its face, this was not a good

causal relationship because storks do not play a role in human births (except in fairy tales). In this case, it was the result of an unusually cold winter in Germany that presented good conditions for both stork and human breeding. Thus, the cold winter was a third variable that created a spurious relationship. Identifying spurious relationships can be challenging even for experienced thinkers.

4. There must be a theory. This is a decidedly positivist view; but there needs to be a theory that explains the relationships among the independent and dependent variables before they may be included in any cause-effect statements.<sup>17</sup> For example, Democratic Peace Theory offers the proposition that two democracies have never gone to war with each other (an empirical fact). Underlying this proposition is a **causal mechanism**, whereby when two democracies have a conflict, their similar democratic values allow them to cooperate and compromise and avoid violent conflict. Thus, this Democratic Peace Theory proposition meets the rules of causality.

Assessing information for instances of false causality is important in any political analysis.

## **Counterfeit and Hidden Agendas**

Misinformation is often spread by the process of **counterfeit** and **hidden agendas (traditions)**. In politics, counterfeit agendas concern a source who makes statements about policy or actions they plan to implement but never intend to follow through with their implementation. This commonly occurs when political candidates or elected leaders promise policy and actions in speeches or in their writings but intend to never carry them out. This is a case of misinformation. In

these instances, the candidate or leader has hidden agendas, meaning there are other goals or motives driving their speech, writing, and decision-making they do intend to implement. The motivation for counterfeit agenda statements is usually to gain votes or convince legislators and citizens of their plans. The employment of counterfeit and hidden agendas highlights the analytic rule of “watch what they do and not what they say.”

For example, in the 2024 U.S. presidential election, one candidate promised potential voters a reduction in inflation and lower prices to improve citizen cost of living. Once elected, this same candidate took initial actions resulting in an increase in inflation, higher prices for many products, and proposed cutting of social assistance programs affecting citizen supplemental nutrition and health care programs—overall increasing cost of living. This is an extreme example of the employment of counterfeit and hidden agendas, but one common in political discourse. Thinkers must be sensitive to this type of misinformation.

## **Deception Detection**

Politics is often considered a “contact” sport. To gain an advantage by misleading the public or opponents, political candidates and elected leaders can resort to **deception** (disinformation). In assessing any political information, the thinker must always be aware of deception, which can be defined as “[i]nformation...intended to manipulate the behavior of others by inducing them to accept a false or distorted perception of reality...”<sup>18</sup> Lying, omission, and distortion of information are common in deception campaigns. In other words, deception can entail any of the techniques for spreading misinformation discussed above and is very similar to gaslighting.

Deception has been used across history. Chinese General Sun Tzu (544-496 BCE) highlighted deception operations throughout his treatise *The Art of War*.<sup>19</sup> Operation Fortitude was the World War II Allies’ highly successful plan to deceive

the Germans on the exact location of their 1944 European D-Day invasion landing.<sup>20</sup> Political campaigns have been known to use deception to influence final vote totals by misinforming parts of the citizenry.

A more recent case of deception occurred in the months before the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. In a June 2002 speech at the U.S. Military Academy (West Point) graduation ceremony, the U.S. president outlined his administration's "preemption doctrine," a commitment to "confront the worst threats to the United States before they emerge by taking the battle to the enemy." This was the start of a deception effort to generate U.S. domestic and international support for the later invasion of Iraq. Over the next several months, the president and his advisors hinted at the possibility of a preemptive strike against Iraq in speeches and interviews. The president's September 2002 speech to the United Nations (U.N.) General Assembly can be interpreted as suggesting the U.S. would act to stop Iraq's transgressions (supporting terrorism with weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and cruelly abusing its own people) if the U.N. failed to do so.

By making frequent references to preemptive intervention, the president and his advisors gaslit U.S. domestic and international audiences as they created the illusion that preemption was a widely accepted solution to the threat posed by Iraq. Eventually, both the U.S. Congress and the U.S. public supported military engagement with Iraq. In October 2002, a U.S. Congressional resolution authorized the use of U.S. military force in Iraq. The resolution passed the House (296-133) and Senate (77-23). By March 2003 (just before the war start), surveys revealed that 70 percent of the U.S. public supported U.S. military intervention in Iraq. The U.S. also convinced the United Kingdom (U.K.), Poland, Spain, and Australia, to join in the coalition to attack Iraq. In November 2002, the U.N. Security Council unanimously passed a resolution declaring Iraq would face "serious consequences" if it failed to comply with previous resolutions mandating WMD disarmament and U.N. weapons inspections. While this U.N. resolution did not condone the later war, the U.S. president twisted its meaning to imply U.N. support of an Iraq invasion.

The spread of disinformation about the threat from Iraq was a classic deception campaign. The U.S./Coalition invasion forces did invade and defeat the Iraqi military, but no direct Iraqi links to terrorism were found. No Iraqi WMD were found. Over the 6-year Iraqi war and occupation, it cost the U.S. \$100 billion and resulted in U.S./Coalition losses of 9,000 dead and 32,000 wounded. Iraq lost 16,600 military dead (wounded number unknown) and an estimated 250,000 civilians killed.<sup>21</sup>

Even when an opponent has a well-known history of deception, a thinker may overlook this deception. When the stakes are high, such as winning a war or a presidential election, a thinker must consider the possibility of opponents using deception. The possibility of deception should not be discounted even when there is no obvious evidence of deception. If deception is well done, the thinker should not expect to see any indicators of deception. The timing of the information and the *bona fides* (reputation) of the sources might be a first indicator deception is taking place. Political deception can destroy trust in the government, undermine democracy, and lead to poor decision-making.

People should routinely check their information sources for deceptive efforts by opponents. Items to consider include:

1. Does the opponent have the Motive, Opportunity and Means (MOM) to conduct deception efforts?
2. Would the potential deception be consistent with Past Opponent Practices (POP)?
3. Is there concern regarding the Manipulability of Sources (MOSES)?
4. What can be learned from the Evaluation of Evidence (EVE)? (see next section)<sup>22</sup>

## **Checklist for Assessing Information Quality**

Skills in information literacy require people to assess the truthfulness (validity) of information found. As can be seen from the above discussions, there is potential for bias and misinformation in almost every information source. Assessing the quality of information found is a key factor affecting the validity of any thinking project. How much confidence a thinker places in their findings depends largely on the accuracy and quality of the information used in the project. Triangulation of information should be a goal of every project. At times; however, use of multiple sources for data collection to check and recheck information is not possible. In any case, having multiple sources of information on an issue is not a substitute for having good information that has been thoroughly assessed.

Examining the quality of the information used throughout a project helps the thinker avoid anchoring their analysis on weak information. Thinkers must strive to understand the context and conditions under which critical information used in their thinking was collected and reported. Thinkers should determine “what is known with some certainty” and “what is not known with some certainty,” and continually assess motivations, ideologies, and biases, plus check for inadvertent errors that may arise in the observation, interpretation, and reporting of the information. General Colin Powell, former Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff and U.S. Secretary of State, reportedly would ask his intelligence staffs: “What do we know?” “What do we not know?” and “What do we think?” This is good advice to follow for any thinker or decision-maker.

Thinkers should assess and annotate the quality of all information used in a project. It is always a good idea when searching for information to make notes regarding the information’s content, strengths, and weaknesses, which allow later review by others. It is important to determine the quality of all information used in a thinking project (facts, data, evidence, logic, reasoning, etc.). Figure 3.7 provides a checklist for assessing any information.

**Figure 3.7** Checklist for Assessing Information<sup>23</sup>

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**Getting Started:**

\_\_\_ Systematically review all information for accuracy (truthfulness). Assess existence of potential misinformation sources discussed above and in Chapter 4. Specifically look for:

\_\_\_ Lack of Corroboration

\_\_\_ False Causality

\_\_\_ Gaslighting

\_\_\_ Counterfeit/Hidden Agendas

\_\_\_ Circular Reporting

\_\_\_ Deception

\_\_\_ Omission of Information

\_\_\_ Cognitive Biases (Chapter 4)

\_\_\_ Lying with Numbers

\_\_\_ Informal Logic Fallacies (Chapter 4)

\_\_\_ Assess violations of good argumentation (Chapter 4).

\_\_\_ Assess violations of the scientific method (directly affects validity).

**Also Consider:**

\_\_\_ Reality Check: what is accurate and inaccurate about the content of this information?

\_\_\_ Private Gain or Public Good: who is benefiting politically, financially, or in other ways from the distribution of this information?

\_\_\_ What's Left Out: what information is omitted that affects the point of view of this information?

\_\_\_ Values Check: how does this information align with or contradict accepted values?

\_\_\_ Read Between the Lines: what ideas are implied but not stated directly in the information (i.e., what assumptions)?

\_\_\_ Stereotype Alert: consider the ways the information uses stereotypes to influence the thinker's emotions.

\_\_\_ Solutions Too Easy: does the information hope to attract the thinker's attention by simplifying more complex ideas or concepts?

**Finally:**

\_\_\_ Identify information that appears the most critical or compelling in constructing good arguments or solutions. Look for sufficient and strong corroboration of critical or compelling reporting.

\_\_\_ Consider whether ambiguous information has been interpreted and caveated [noted] properly in sources.

\_\_\_ Indicate a level of confidence (high, medium, or low) that can be placed on sources used in the thinking project.

\_\_\_ Record/Save for Later: is the overall worth or value of the material such that it should be used in the current (or later) project? Use Figure 3.8 as needed.

Figure 3.8 provides a template for recording information quality after using Figure 3.7. Small thinking projects may only have two or three items of critical information. Larger thinking projects may uncover hundreds of items of information with facts, statements, propositions, and assumptions. It is not intended that all these items in larger projects would be recorded in Figure 3.8. Instead, only record the most critical information to be further assessed and used to generate the project’s findings. Figure 3.8 is intended to be used throughout the thinking project, adding new critical information as it is uncovered and assessed and deleting non-critical information as the project progresses.

<b>Figure 3.8</b>	<b>Template for Quality of Information Checks*</b>			
Source	Critical Information Provided	Corroboration of Information	Confidence Level (H, M, L)	Comments

\* Add additional rows as needed.

The main lesson of this chapter is to “**question everything**” until the information is assessed as valid (truthful). The material above provides the thinker techniques for assessing information truth and validity. Following in Chapter 4 are discussions on cognitive biases (heuristics) and informal logic fallacies and their debilitating effect on the quality of information and knowledge. The end of Chapter 4 includes material on constructing good arguments often violated in open-source material.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Merriam-Webster online dictionary “misinformation,” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/misinformation>.

<sup>2</sup> Categories of Information People and their percentage of the population are author’s subjective compiled view based on a number of differing media reports addressing the subject.

<sup>3</sup> H. Russell Bernard, *Social Research Methods, Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 8-9.

<sup>4</sup> The epistemological origins of knowledge vary depending on the social science or philosophy references consulted. This list is a synthesis of several sources on epistemology and was originally published in Michael W. Collier, “A Pragmatic Approach to Developing Intelligence Analysts,” *Defense Intelligence Journal* 14, no. 2 (2005), 19.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard, 14-18.

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> James Barham, “Top Influential Think Tanks Ranked 2024,” October 2023, <https://academicinfluence.com/inflection/study-guides/influential-think-tanks>

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Also see The Best Schools, “The 50 Most Influential Think Tanks in the United States,” August 2020, <https://thebestschools.org/features/most-influential-think-tanks/> (accessed October, 29, 2020).

<sup>8</sup> Figure 3.6 compiled from a thematic content analysis by the author of several Internet sources evaluating news bias. For additional information see <https://mediabiasfactcheck.com>. Also see Adfontes, “Home of the Media Bias Chart,” <https://adfontesmedia.com/> (accessed May 2025).

<sup>9</sup> See Ted Hesson and Mica Rosenberg, “Trump says migrants are fueling violent crime, Here is what research shows,” *Reuters*, July 16, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-focuses-migrants-crime-here-is-what-research-shows-2024-04-11/> (accessed August 18, 2025).

<sup>10</sup> *Gaslighting* (1944) followed a 1938 British play and a 1940 British movie with similar plots. In late-1880s Britain, natural gas lights were used for street and home and business interior lighting.

<sup>11</sup> Modified from Maura Hohman, “Ask these 5-word questions if you think someone is gaslighting you, therapist {Niro Feliciano} says,” *Today*, May 21, 2025.

<sup>12</sup> The author found himself in this same situation. I took all the advanced mathematics courses my rural high school offered and obtained a decent SAT math score. On entering the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, they offered a summer math refresher course where the faculty identified those of us not ready for college calculus. In our first semester as freshmen those of us not ready for calculus took a Precalculus course (nicknamed Football Math) that prepared us for calculus in our second semester and eventual success in the Academy’s intensive STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) curriculum.

<sup>13</sup> Melissa Goldin, “President claiming Harvard University offers remedial mathematics,” May 30, 2025, *Associated Press*.

<sup>14</sup> Twain attributed this saying to British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, but there is no record of it in Disraeli’s writings or public statements. It has been found in British political discourse in the mid- to late-1800s.

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<sup>15</sup> Perla Trevio (*The Texas Tribune*), Mica Rosenberg (*Propublica*), et al., “Trump administration knew most Venezuelans deported from Texas to a Salvadorean prison had no U.S. convictions,” May 30, 2025, *The Texas Tribune*.

<sup>16</sup> For a deeper understanding of survey theory see Chapter 3 of Michael W. Collier, *Security Analysis, a Critical-Thinking Approach* (Richmond, KY, Eastern Kentucky University Libraries Encompass, 2023),

<https://encompass.eku.edu/ekuopen/6/> or

<https://manifold.open.umn.edu/projects/security-analysis>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. A deeper understanding of causality is included in Chapter 3 of Collier *Security Analysis, a Critical-Thinking Approach*.

<sup>18</sup> Baron Whaley, “The Prevalence of Guile: Deception through Time and across Cultures and Disciplines,” essay prepared for the Foreign Denial and Deception Committee, DNI, Washington DC, February 2, 2007, reprinted in Robert M. Clark and William L. Mitchell, *Deception, Counterdeception and Counterintelligence* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage-CQ Press, 2019), 9.

<sup>19</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B Griffith (London: Oxford University Press, 1963).

<sup>20</sup> Colonel Michael J. Donovan, USMC, “Strategic Deception: Operation Fortitude” (Strategic Research Project, U.S. Army War College, 2002), 11-12,

[https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a404434.pdf#:~:text=OPERATION%20OVERLORD%2C%20a%20cross-](https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a404434.pdf#:~:text=OPERATION%20OVERLORD%2C%20a%20cross-channel%20invasion%20of%20Hitler%27s%20%22Fortress,British%20planners%20had%20been%20developing%20the%20deception%20plan)

[channel%20invasion%20of%20Hitler%27s%20%22Fortress,British%20planners%20had%20been%20developing%20the%20deception%20plan](https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a404434.pdf#:~:text=OPERATION%20OVERLORD%2C%20a%20cross-channel%20invasion%20of%20Hitler%27s%20%22Fortress,British%20planners%20had%20been%20developing%20the%20deception%20plan) (accessed October 20, 2020).

<sup>21</sup> For a more in-depth analysis of the start of the 2003 Iraq War see Chapter 7 of Barnet D. Feingold and Michael W. Collier, *Critical Belief Analysis for Security Studies* (Richmond, KY, Eastern Kentucky University Libraries Encompass, 2024),

<https://manifold.open.umn.edu/projects/critical-belief-analysis-for-security-studies>.

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<sup>22</sup> Sarah Beebe Miller and Randolph H. Pherson, *Cases in Intelligence Analysis, Structured Analytic Techniques in Action* (Los Angeles. CA: Sage-CQ Press, 2015), 75-77.

<sup>23</sup> Modified from Mind over Media, Lesson 5, “Analyzing Propaganda with Critical Questions,” <https://propaganda.mediaeducationlab.com/teachers> (accessed November 9, 2022).

# Chapter 4

## Cognitive Biases, Logic Fallacies, Bad Arguments

*When dealing with people,  
remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but  
with creatures bristling with prejudice and motivated by pride and vanity.*

– Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*

American writer and lecturer Dale Carnegie highlights above how when dealing with people, logic is often subverted by prejudice and self-interests. Most of us can see this situation around us every day. In the last chapter it was explained how when information (hopefully truthful) is combined with logic and reasoning it results in knowledge. Covering formal logic and the totality of scientific reasoning are beyond the scope of this book. Instead, this chapter investigates how frequently encountered cognitive biases (heuristics), informal logic fallacies, and bad arguments may derail the quality of a person's thinking no matter how good the available information may be. When problems occur with logic and reasoning, it causes the overall results of the thinking project to be highly suspected. Below, bad thinking related to cognitive biases is first covered. With this material the reader is also introduced to the psychological theory of Thinking Fast and Thinking Slow. Next the discussion turns to informal logic fallacies highly prevalent in bad human thinking. Finally, logical argumentation, another frequently violated condition encountered in everyday discourse, is explored. The chapter ends with the analysis of a political policy-making case where misinformation, cognitive biases, informal logic fallacies, and bad argumentation all come into play.

## Cognitive Biases

**Cognitive biases** tend to nullify valid arguments in problem-solving and decision-making. One dictionary definition of bias holds it is “a highly personal and unreasoned distortion of judgment.” Bias usually results from a person taking intellectual shortcuts or a failure to thoroughly think through an issue. Bias is a deviation from the truth. Bias and the validity of human thinking are indirectly related, as increasing bias leads to decreasing validity. Bias has two major sources. First, bias may be cognitive in how a person’s brain works, i.e., how the brain has been “programmed” by all the influences in the person’s life (see Figure 3.1). Such biases may be present even if the person is aware of them. Second, bias may be personal, meaning it emerges from a person’s individual belief system (see Chapter 7). Cognitive and personal biases differ for each person. Biases influence mindsets, which subsequently affect the results of thinking.

The work of Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman provides insight on the sources and effects of cognitive biases. Cognitive psychologist Kahneman, and his colleague Amos Tversky, explained how people do not apply the full force of reason to their thinking but instead utilize shortcuts called **heuristics** that bias decision processes.<sup>1</sup> Kahneman won the 2002 Nobel Prize in Economics by demonstrating how economic decisions are influenced by a combination of heuristics and are not simply based on rational monetary considerations (gains or losses) as previously thought. This refuted decades of economic-man theory where decision-making in the face of uncertainty was based on primarily rational choices. Kahneman presents over 40 different heuristics (cognitive biases) in his book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*<sup>2</sup> and argues that one or more of these heuristics affect all human decision-making situations depending on the person and issue under consideration. These heuristics lead to cognitive biases that degrade the results of thinking and decision-making.

Kahneman makes use of an abstract psychological model to explain the influence of heuristics on human thinking. This abstract model offers two

competing brain systems for human thought—**System 1 (fast) Thinking** and **System 2 (slow) Thinking**.<sup>3</sup> Figure 4.1 provides a summary of the two systems of thinking.

<b>Figure 4.1 Summary of Fast and Slow Thinking<sup>4</sup></b>	
<b>System 1 (fast)</b>	<b>System 2 (slow)</b>
<p>The diagram shows a profile of a human head with the brain highlighted. The text 'System 1 Thinking' is written inside the brain. Surrounding the brain are the words: 'Instinctive' (top), 'Quick' (left), 'Automatic' (right), 'Emotional' (bottom left), 'Un Conscious' (bottom), and 'Little/No Effort' (bottom right).</p>	<p>The diagram shows a profile of a human head with the brain highlighted. The text 'System 2 Thinking' is written inside the brain. Surrounding the brain are the words: 'Slower' (top), 'Rational' (left), 'Conscious' (left), 'More Logical' (right), 'Effortful' (bottom right), and 'Complex Decisions' (right).</p>
Uses subconscious values, drives, beliefs, and biologic influences, i.e., “gut feelings.”	Articulates judgments, makes choices, endorses or rationalizes ideas and feelings.
Jumps to conclusions regarding causality and creates stories to justify conclusions.	Confirms causality and creates stories to either confirm or deny conclusions.
Operates effortlessly.	Requires mental effort to engage.
Can be wrong but it is more often right.	Can be right or wrong depending on the level of thinking effort.
Heavily influenced by heuristics (biases).	Examines heuristics’ influences when so inclined.

System 1 (fast) thinking governs most of a person’s everyday decision making and behavior. This type of thinking is not only fast, but also largely effortless, and takes place primarily in the subconscious. A System 1 thinker is good at data recall and looks for patterns and associations in data already known or recently found. That person also looks for situations governed by casualty (but

not always successfully). System 1 thinkers tend to create stories to explain events and strive to avoid cognitive dissonance by making the person's thinking more consistent. System 1 thinking is very intuitive (sometimes called a "gut feeling") and governs most everyday human behavior. For example, System 1 is in action when people do not spend much mental effort deciding what clothes to wear each day. System 1 takes over in immediate crisis situations that lack time for deeper thinking, such as during a person's immediate reactions (to brake, steer away, etc.) when a car unexpectedly pulls in front of them in traffic.

System 1 thinking is correct most of the time. It may not be correct; however, when the decision-making situation is not routine, not an immediate crisis, or calls for complex thinking. System 1 thinkers often jump to conclusions based on poor assumptions. In other words, a person's lack of mental effort drives most of their poor-thinking tendencies (see Figure 2.5). System 1 thinkers may rely too much on unhelpful emotional responses, which can result in bias. Kahneman argues that when System 1 thinking is not correct, one or more heuristics leading to cognitive bias (see Figure 4.2) can usually be identified at work.

For situations requiring more robust and complex thought, System 2 (slow) thinking is required. System 2 thinking requires conscious effort and is very deliberate. System 2 thinkers can handle abstract concepts and are grounded in evidence (data), logic, and reasoning. This system is good for employing advanced mathematics and statistics. System 2 is good for reductive thinking, meaning taking complex conceptual or empirical situations and reducing them to more understandable basic or simple models. The downfall of System 2 thinking includes that it requires significant mental effort, time, and energy—which could lead to analytic or decision-making fatigue. A person's System 2 thinking also can result in carelessness. There are times when System 1 thinkers will defer a decision situation to a System 2 solution. But, because a System 2 thinker's process can be lackadaisical (lazy), it will accept the System 1 solution without taking the time and effort to complete a more robust analysis.

Most people successfully employ a combination of System 1 (fast) and System 2 (slow) thinking in their personal and professional decision-making. It is mainly a person’s System 1 thinking techniques and tendencies that have been developed and used since birth. A person’s ability to conduct System 2 thinking will depend on their level of education, intellectual curiosity, and flexibility in their thought processes.

Critical thinking is one method designed to improve System 2 thinking as it provides systematic techniques for reducing System 1 thinking cognitive and personal biases. System 1 thinking still has its place in everyday human behavior and decision-making. However, to become a good problem-solver or decision-maker, the systematic techniques of critical thinking (see Chapters 2, 8) must be applied to improve System 2 thinking. Additionally, the person must be ready to expend the mental effort required to make System 2 thinking successful.

Figure 4.2 summarizes the most common types of cognitive biases in politics influencing System 1 thinking. Figure 4.2 is taken partly from Daniel Kahneman’s book, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, which contains additional heuristics (cognitive biases) that may be found in human discourse. A summary of Kahneman’s heuristics may be found in Appendix II of *Security Analysis, A Critical-Thinking Approach*.<sup>5</sup>

<b>Figure 4.2 Selected Cognitive Biases Commonly Found in Politics<sup>6</sup></b>	
<b>Cognitive Bias</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Confirmation (Affirmation)</b>	Accepting only evidence that supports a pre-formed point of view and rejecting evidence contrary to this pre-formed point of view (probably the most prevalent and destructive cognitive bias in all societies).
<b>Anchoring</b>	Focusing on one trait or piece of information to the exclusion of alternative information, especially new information.

<b>Cognitive Ease</b>	Accepting material that is easier to compute, more familiar, and easier to read, making them seem truer than material that requires hard thought, are novel, or are hard to see. (Closely related to both confirmation and anchoring biases.)
<b>Coherent stories (Associative coherence)</b>	Making sense of the world by telling logically consistent stories about what is going on, such as making associations between people, events, circumstances, and regular occurrences. The more these events fit into their stories (even if not true), the more normal they seem. Stories often violate both logic and statistical probabilities.
<b>Law of Small Numbers</b>	Offering small samples, often with no source data (i.e., “many people say”), leading to giving the outcomes of small samples more credence than statistics warrant.
<b>Representativeness (Stereotyping)</b>	Explaining the opponent’s decisions or behaviors based on their ideology or other traits (e.g., political views, religion, ethnic group, language, country of origin, etc.).
<b>Trusting Expert Intuition</b>	Becoming confident when an expert’s story comes easily to mind, with no contradiction and no competing story. However, ease and coherence do not guarantee that a story is true.
<b>Fundamental Attribution</b>	Over-emphasizing the personality-based agency explanations (opponent’s internal traits such as motivation, beliefs, decision-making tendencies, etc.) over structural explanations (political culture, laws and regulations, organizational or bureaucratic influences, other outside structural influences, etc.).
<b>Blind-Spot</b>	Being unaware of and failing to consider your own personal biases, even as you recognize biases in others.

**Confirmation (affirmation)** and **anchoring** biases are the most pernicious when combined with a condition known as **cognitive dissonance**. This is when a person experiences mental distress as they hold two competing ideas in their brain at once. Educators purposely create cognitive dissonance in their students, because as the student works through the competing ideas it results in *learning*. More common in politics, when two competing ideas are present in a person's brain, rather than do the hard critical thinking to work out the mental conflict, the person will just reject one of the ideas, usually the newest idea, as they relieve their mental distress by accepting either the older and more familiar idea or the one that most coincides with their existing worldview or situational perspectives. Cognitive dissonance is closely related to the **cognitive ease** bias. When one or more of the cognitive biases in Figure 4.2 are present, the actual thinking is degraded (biased).

## Informal Logic Fallacies

When cognitive biases are combined with logic fallacies the result is a witch's brew of poor information use and flawed logic and reasoning. Logic fallacies result in defective arguments.<sup>7</sup> **Formal logic fallacies** are usually easy to identify due to the recognizable false premises or logic presented.<sup>8</sup> Formal logic fallacies result from invalid evidence, bad assumptions, or poor reasoning, that do not guarantee the truth of a corresponding statement, finding, or conclusion.<sup>9</sup> **Informal logic fallacies**, our focus in this section, also display these same degraded thinking characteristics, but are harder to identify as they are so common in society where bad reasoning often leads to equally bad arguments and decisions. Many people have become desensitized to informal logic fallacies as they are rampant in human discourse and are constantly reinforced as a result of their frequent use in the news media, editorials, entertainment media, marketing and advertising, political discourse, and personal conversations. In these situations, individuals are

trying to convince an audience of the correctness of their points of view, perspectives, findings, or recommendations. Avoiding both formal and informal logic fallacies is critical to ensuring valid findings in written and verbal arguments.

Informal logic fallacies leading to defects in reasoning may be separated into four categories: (1) fallacies of ambiguity, (2) fallacies of relevance, (3) fallacies of presumption, and (4) fallacies of weak induction.<sup>10</sup> These categories are discussed in greater detail below. Just watch the political news for a night or two and it is more likely than not it will be filled with informal logic fallacies that add bias to arguments.<sup>11</sup>

**Fallacies of Ambiguity.** Fallacies resulting in defective arguments due to problems with the wording or sentence structure of a statement.

***Equivocation.*** Fallacies that result from different meanings of a word in an argument or using different definitions of words to support an argument.

*Example—Politician A: “I seek a structure of Democratic-Socialism, where citizens share in the benefits of our strong economy.”*

*Politician B: “See, Politician A is a socialist and will turn our country into an authoritarian state just like the former Soviet Union.”*

(Notice the two Politicians are using different definitions of socialism—Politician A the Democratic-Socialist structure employed in many modern democratic states, and Politician B the Authoritarian-Socialism structure of the former Soviet Union and other authoritarian socialist states. See Chapter 6 for a more in-depth discussion of different definitions of “socialism.”)

***Accent.*** Fallacies committed due to either emphasizing certain words such that their meaning shifts or a statement’s meaning is shifted by using it partly out of context.

*Example—Politician A: “I agree with the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that gives the right to citizens to bear arms, but I also support common-sense gun safety laws, including restricting certain citizens (mentally ill, convicted criminals, minors, etc.) so they do not have access to guns.”*

*Politician B: “See, Politician A does not support the Second Amendment.* (The two politicians have different perspectives of the Second Amendment. Full context is not provided of Politician A’s or B’s views on the Second Amendment.)

**Whole-to-part (division).** Fallacies that assert what is true of something as a whole must also be true of each of its parts.

*Example—NATO is the most powerful defense force alliance on Earth. Estonia is a member of NATO. So, Estonia must have one of the most powerful defense forces on Earth.*

(Estonia is a small European country on the Baltic bordering Russia and does not have powerful defense forces, which is why it joined the NATO alliance.)

**Part-to-whole (composition).** Fallacies that assert what is true of part of something also must be true of the whole thing. Similar to the **law of small numbers** bias in Figure 4.2.

*Example—Saudi Arabia is one of the richest nations on Earth. Saudi Arabia belongs to the Arab League; so, the Arab League is made up of the richest nations on Earth.*

(All members of the Arab League are not rich, nor are all rich nations on earth members of the Arab League.)

**Fallacies of Relevance.** Fallacies in which the reasons given are not pertinent to the truth or falsehood of a statement.

**Appeal to force.** Fallacies resulting from an improper or inappropriate threat.

*Example—Politician: “Country A must contribute its fair share to the security alliance. After all, they are currently allowed to be part of the alliance.”* (Implied threat that Country A may be expelled from the alliance if it does not pay its fair share. This draws on the emotion of being threatened if action stated or implied is not carried out—also known as blackmail!)

**Appeal to fear.** Fallacies that move a person, country, etc., to fear the consequences of not doing what the other person, country, etc., wants.

*Example—Politician: “If you vote for the opposing party our economy will be destroyed, unrestricted immigration will raise crime rates, and we will no longer be a democracy.”* (Draws on the emotion of fear—with no accurate supporting evidence—to convince voters not to vote for the opposing party.)

**Personal attack (Ad hominem attack).** Fallacies created by attacking an opponent’s character or their motives for believing something instead of disproving their argument. There are three types of fallacies of personal attacks: abusive, circumstantial, and *tu quoque* (you too).

**Abusive.** Fallacies where there is a direct attack on an opponent’s character.

*Example—Politician: “The President says better relations with Country Z benefit our country. But, the President is a known liar and con-man so there is not reason to believe him.”*

(The politician attacks the President's character and not the argument of whether there will be benefits by improving relations with Country Z.)

**Circumstantial.** Fallacies where aspects of the opponent's circumstances are given as a reason not to support the argument.

*Example—Politician A: "We must make use of better technology to secure our borders."*

*Politician B: "We cannot believe Politician A because her family owns companies that may provide and install the technology, and thus financially benefit from Politician A's statement. So, we cannot take her argument seriously."*  
(The fact that politician A's family owns technology companies does not refute her argument of how better technology would secure the borders.)

**Tu quoque (You too).** Fallacies caused by dismissing an opponent's viewpoint or behavior on an issue because they were inconsistent on the same thing in the past.

*Example—Country Z invades Country A and seizes portions of Country A territory. Country Z justifies its actions as protecting Country A citizens who speak Country Z's native language. The invasion was after Country Z previously made statements supporting the territorial integrity of Country A on numerous past occasions. Therefore, Country Z's statements and behaviors are inconsistent and must be rejected.*

(Just because a past statement or action was inconsistent with recent actions does not invalidate the current justification by Country Z—but still its recent actions must be evaluated as to whether they are illegal, unethical, or immoral.)

**Mob appeal (Appeal to the people).** Fallacies that play on people's emotions by claiming a viewpoint is correct because many other people agree with it.

*Example—Politician: “My opponent says we must better protect the borders because criminal gang members are entering the country illegally and committing murder, rape, and a host of other crimes. Many candidates in my opponent's political party cite these same conditions. FBI statistics, though, say there are only a handful of crimes conducted by criminal gang members entering the country illegally, while per-capita crime rates are much higher for native-born citizens.”* (Avoid accepting conditions or viewpoints that “many (or some) people say or know” without seeking reliable statistics or other evidence concerning the stated conditions.)

**Accident.** Fallacies wherein a general principle (legal, ethical, or moral) is applied in a situation where the principle does not apply.

*Example—Interrogator: “This terrorist admits he has planted a large “dirty bomb” set to explode in two days in a major city. Normal interrogation techniques have not convinced the terrorist to reveal the city and location of the bomb. Therefore, we need to immediately employ enhanced interrogation techniques, including torturing the terrorist, to hopefully save thousands of citizens.”*

(It is illegal to torture the terrorist even if the lives of thousands of citizens are threatened. But in this case the ethical or moral implications of not ordering the torture must be considered.)

**Stereotyping.** Fallacies arguing that an opponent's decisions or behaviors are based on their ideology or other traits (e.g., political views, religion, ethnic

group, language, country of origin, etc.). Similar to the **representativeness** bias in Figure 4.2.

*Example—Politician: “All communists want to overthrow democracies and destroy capitalism. Since President Z is a communist, he wants to overthrow all democracies and destroy capitalism.”*

(The statement “all communists want to overthrow democracies and destroy capitalism” is invalid.)

**Genetic fallacy.** Fallacies condemning an argument because of where it began, how it began, or with whom it began (type of stereotyping).

*Example—Speaker: “All persons born in Country Z want that country to rule the World. My next door neighbor here in Country A was born in Country Z and has lived here 20 years. Therefore, my next door neighbor wants Country Z to rule the World.”*

(The statement “all persons from Country Z want that country to rule the World” is invalid.)

**Straw person (Strawman).** Fallacies that distort the opponent’s point of view or stance on an issue to make it easier to attack and disprove the opponent’s arguments; thus, the attack is really about a point of view or stance that does not exist.

*Example—Politician A: “Increasing terrorist attacks are causing us to change our views of civil liberties such as free speech and privacy. Our country’s policies and actions should weigh slightly more on the side of improved security to keep our citizens safe, which will likely impinge on their civil liberties. Our citizens will support the slight loss of some civil liberties to gain more personal security.”*

*Politician B: "Politician A is advocating a Machiavellian approach saying the desirable ends (more security) justifies the means (impinging on civil liberties). This could lead to situations where in the interest of more security we will all be the subject of intrusive government surveillance, and we could all be locked up in detention camps if the government decides it needs to protect us."*

(Politician B distorted the original argument and then provides a "worst case" scenario not related to Politician A's original statements about slight changes in civil liberties.)

**Red herring.** Fallacies that introduce an irrelevant point into an argument. Someone may think (or want people to think) it proves their point, but it really does not. Introducing material not related to the core question or argument is included in this fallacy. (This fallacy takes its name from the British practice of dragging a bag of red herring across the fox's trail in a fox hunt to distract the foxhounds off the actual trail of the fox. Red herring is similar to the straw person fallacy.)

*Example—Reporter to President: "Will you start arms control talks with Country Z? President's response: "It would be terribly presumptuous for us to discuss arms control talks with Country Z when we have not yet talked to them about the issue. Most countries see arms control treaties as one way to help reduce violence and conflict in search of peace. I am sure Country Z has aspirations for peace like other countries."*

(The President did not answer the original question but offered a red herring response on a related issue (world peace) that she probably thought did answer the question.)

**Bandwagon.** Fallacies that pressure someone to do something just because many other people are doing it. This is similar to the mob appeal (appeal to the people) fallacy.

*Example—Politician: “All politicians are reading the biography of President A; so, you should read it too if you want to be able to talk with other politicians.”*  
(It may not hurt to read the biography, but you could still talk with other politicians if you did not.)

**Irrelevant conclusion.** Fallacies in which conclusions are reached bearing little resemblance to the supporting argument.

*Example—Politician: “We have put in a lot of hard work in preparing for the upcoming elections. Therefore, we are going to win the election in a landslide.”*  
(A lot of hard work does not always result in the desired outcome, but it increases the probabilities of success.)

**Repetition.** Fallacies based on repeating a message loudly and often in the hope that it will eventually be believed.

*Example—President: “I am not a crook! I am not a crook! I am not a crook! I have never been involved in anything illegal. I am not a crook! I will repeat this statement every day until the charges against me are dropped. I am not a crook!”*  
(Just because a message or idea is repeated frequently does not make it true.)

**Appeal to tradition.** Fallacies that result from encouraging someone to buy a product or do something because it is associated with something old.

*Example—Politician: “We must buy the new rapid fire gatling guns because the gatling gun has been a major part of our success in every war over the last 125 years.”*  
(Just because something worked previously does not mean it is the best choice for the future.)

**Appeal to hi-tech (Latest thing).** Fallacies based on urging someone to buy or support something because it is the “latest thing,” but not necessarily because it is the best thing.

*Example—Politician: “We need to procure the latest laser missile defense systems for our Navy’s ships as they are the most advanced technology available.”* (Just because they are the latest technology does not mean they will work better than existing missile defense systems.)

**Fallacies of Presumption.** Fallacies focusing on how assumptions used in reasoning do not support the argument being made.

**Circular reasoning.** Fallacies supporting a conclusion by simply restating it in the same or similar wording. Someone says P is true because Q is true, and Q is true because P is true. Not to be confused with **circular reporting** discussed in Chapter 3.

*Example—Major: “We know our counterinsurgency doctrine is true, because it was written by our most inspired General. And, we know she is our most inspired General, because she wrote the counterinsurgency doctrine.”* (Notice the argument both assumes and concludes the counterinsurgency doctrine is true, thus using circular reasoning.)

**Complex question (Loaded question).** Fallacies resulting from loaded questions, where the respondent is put in a bad situation no matter the answer, or the answer to the presumed question is false.

*Example—Politician A to Politician B: “When did you stop stealing your campaign funds?”*

(This assumes Politician B was in fact stealing campaign funds, which might not be true.)

**Suppressed evidence.** Fallacies that result from withholding relevant evidence. Similar to **omission of information** discussed in Chapter 3.

*Example—Politician: “If we want to get rid of chemical weapons, just take them to a barren desert and bury them. There will be no chemical weapons after that.”*

(These statements suppress the relevant evidence on the effects of burying chemical weapons on the desert’s ecosystem and the ability to produce more chemical weapons.)

**Either-or (False dichotomy).** Fallacies asserting that we must choose between only two things, when in fact there are a number of different alternatives we could choose.

*Example—General to President: “We either need to conduct a full-on military assault or do nothing in reaction to Country Z’s aggressive actions.”*  
(Statement does not consider alternative diplomatic or lesser military options.)

**Fallacies of Weak Induction.** Fallacies resulting from the use of poor evidence and weak reasoning that do not support the findings or conclusions.

**Appeal to authority (Illegitimate authority).** Fallacies due to an appeal to someone who has no special knowledge or expertise in the area they are discussing or due only to tradition or rumors.

*Example 1—Politician: “We must invade Country Z because Singer A, the most famous singer in the world, says we should.”*

(Singer A is outside their area of expertise.)

*Example 2—Voter: “I must vote for all candidates from Political Party A because my family has voted for all candidates from this party over the past five decades.”*

(This is a play to tradition and does not allow the voter to become an informed citizen or critical thinker.)

*Example 3—Voter: “Politician A reported many studies (no specifics) showing his foreign policy agenda is the best.”*

(No information on exactly what the studies say or if they even exist.)

**Proof by lack of evidence (Appeal to ignorance).** Fallacies claiming something is true simply because nobody has yet given any evidence to the contrary.

*Example—Politician: “Country Z must have laser weapons as we have seen no evidence such weapons are located in Country Z.”*

(If there is no evidence whether a statement is true or false, it is best to suspend judgment regarding its truth.)

**Hasty generalization.** Fallacies using a very limited sample to generalize to a larger group or set of actions. Similar to the part-to-whole fallacy and **law of small numbers** bias in Figure 4.2.

*Example—Admiral: “The shipboard surface-to-air missile exercise failed to destroy a simulated inbound enemy aircraft, so we must remove all of these missiles from the fleet.”*

(Just because one missile failed does not mean they will all fail; more testing is needed.)

**False cause.** Fallacies due to a result of a false causal claim. Some false causal claims are due to myths and superstitions. See **false causality** discussed in Chapter 3.

*Example—Politician: “The crime rate in my home town, located only 100 miles from the U.S. border, has doubled in the last year, showing our immigration policies are not working.”*

(There is no verifiable data or studies that show immigration policies allowing the entry of more immigrants cause rising crime rates.)

**Slippery slope.** Fallacies asserting that if one thing happens, that one or more other things will follow; when there is no evidence to support the follow-on actions. This is a specific type of the false cause fallacy.

*Example—Containment of the spread of Communist Soviet Union influence was a major part of U.S. strategy in the Cold War. The Domino Theory was part of this strategy as it offered: “if one country fell to Communism, then another would fall, then another, and another, just like a line of dominoes would fall in sequence if lined up on-end in a row and one is pushed over.”*

(Domino Theory was seldom questioned. It was a classic example of an invalid slippery slope argument as there was no causal mechanisms supporting this theory. In fact, whether a country fell to communism was related to its internal political, economic, and social conditions, and had little to do with domino-like forces pushing one country over after another.)

**Weak analogy.** Fallacies claiming that some items or events that have only a few similarities are practically the same in almost everything else. This is especially true when trying to analyze current or future behaviors or situations based on past behaviors or situations, because there may be significantly

different contexts between the past and current or future behaviors or situations. (This is why incorporating analogies into analyses is not recommended.)

*Example 1—Politician: “The U.S. Military Academy (West Point) and U.S. Naval Academy (Annapolis) should merge into one institution as they both graduate future military leaders.”*

(Other than both graduating future military leaders, the two academies are very different in terms of their curriculums, service customs, procedures used to socialize cadets, organizational cultures, and the focus of preparing graduates for future careers: one produces U.S. Army soldiers and aviators, the other U.S. Navy sailors and aviators, plus U.S. Marine Corps infantry and aviators.)

*Example 2—U.S. Presidential Advisor during 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, when short and intermediate range nuclear missiles were found in Cuba: “We can expect the Soviets to behave in the exact same ways they did in the Greek Revolution and during their interventions in Czechoslovakia and Hungary as they will in Cuba. The Soviets only understand brute force, so we must attack Cuba!”*

(The U.S. proximity to Cuba and the situation with nuclear weapons make the context of these past situations and the current (1962) Cuban situation completely different. In fact, the president did not take the advisor’s advice, and the crisis was solved peacefully.)

***Post hoc ergo proctor hoc.*** Fallacies stating since A happened before B, A must have caused B. This is similar to the false cause fallacy.

*Example—Politician: “Our political party was born over 100 years ago. Last year we won a war while our political party controlled the executive and legislative branches of government. Therefore, the formation of our political party caused us to win the war.”*

(There are a number of other factors other than political party influencing the outcome of a war. Remember: Correlation does not mean causation.)

**Exigency.** Fallacies offering nothing more than a time limit as a reason for a person to do what someone wants.

*Example—Politician: “We need to pass the defense budget with the new shipbuilding authorizations by tomorrow or we may not get to it for months, since we have summer recess and national elections coming up next.”*

(Shipbuilding plans take years to create and even longer for construction—a few months delay is not much in the larger scheme.)

**Leap of faith.** Fallacies asserting a causal linkage or condition exists with no good supporting reasons or evidence.

*Example—Politician A: “We estimate that terrorist group A will attack our country soon.”*

*Politician B: “What are your reasons and evidence for that finding?”*

*Politician A: “Despite the terrorist group never stating it would attack our country, it does have the capabilities and logistic support to do so. Although it has never attacked us before, they have attacked our allies’ interests. We therefore estimate they will attack us soon, even though we are 4,000 miles away from their normal operating area. They must be planning attacks on our country!”*

(More evidence and reasoning is needed to declare a threat than just that it exists in a distant region or may have done so in the distant past.)

## Logical Argumentation

An additional indicator as to whether information, logic, and reasoning are valid and if a source is using at least the basics of critical thinking is to assess the structure of written or oral arguments. A critical thinker should use a **logical-argumentation framework** (described below) for evaluating the results of their own or others' thinking efforts. If logical argumentation is not present, or is incorrectly applied, it is a major indicator the information, logic, and reasoning are being influenced more by falsehoods, emotions, feelings, unsubstantiated opinions, cognitive biases, and informal logic fallacies, rather than being based in a more comprehensive critical-thinking effort. Whether using natural science techniques, historicist (formal logic) methods, or behaviorist (social science) techniques, most academic disciplines and professions champion the use of logical argumentation combining information (data, facts, evidence) with basic logic and reasoning to reach contentions (theses, key judgments, findings, conclusions, and recommendations). This is also called **evidentiary reasoning**. Logical argumentation is a technique for organizing and presenting the results of a thinking effort—not necessarily for conducting the actual thinking process itself (see Chapters 2, 8). Logical argumentation is meant to persuade others of the validity of the arguments and contentions.

The logical argumentation technique should be familiar to most people as it mirrors methods taught in secondary and post-secondary schools to write research papers and present written and verbal arguments. A primary difference between academic and professional use of logical argumentation concerns how in the professions the logical argument contentions (findings, conclusions, etc.) are placed at the start of a written or verbal presentation (called the bottom-line-up-front) and not left to an ending summary or conclusion as used in most academic work. Lawyers are familiar with this technique as it is how they build their case arguments. Journalists use logical argumentation to organize and present their reporting. Historians use this general technique, organized using chronologies, to allow readers to follow the historical flow of their arguments. Academic debaters

use a similar form of logical argumentation. Natural and social scientists also use logical argumentation to organize and present their deductive research results.

To assist with a logical argumentation presentation, the person should create an **argument map** as shown in Figure 4.3.<sup>12</sup> The argument map format allows the diagramming of an argument. The *contention* (bottom-line-up-front) is placed at the top of an argument map. The contention should be created only after completion of the critical-thinking effort (i.e., consisting of combining information (data, facts, evidence) with logic and reasoning) and then placed into the argument map framework. The argument map could cover the entire thinking project or just support a single, complex finding, all depending on the nature of the thinking project. Using the hierarchical structure shown in Figure 4.3, the *findings* (analyses) supporting the contention, already identified through the critical-thinking process, are presented. Figure 4.3 depicts only one finding; but, in situations where there are more supporting findings (usually the case), the most important should be listed starting on the left and moving right on the argument map. The most important findings are then on the far left of the map. Each finding is supported with *reasons* (information, logic, reasoning), in addition to any individual *objections* related specifically to the finding.

**Figure 4.3** Logical Argumentation (Argument Mapping)

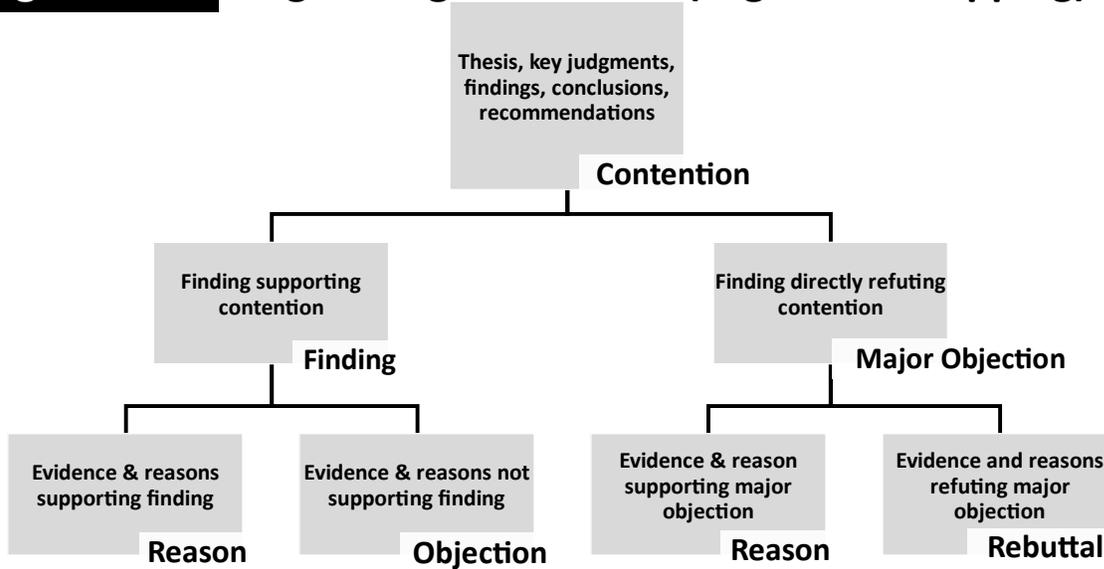


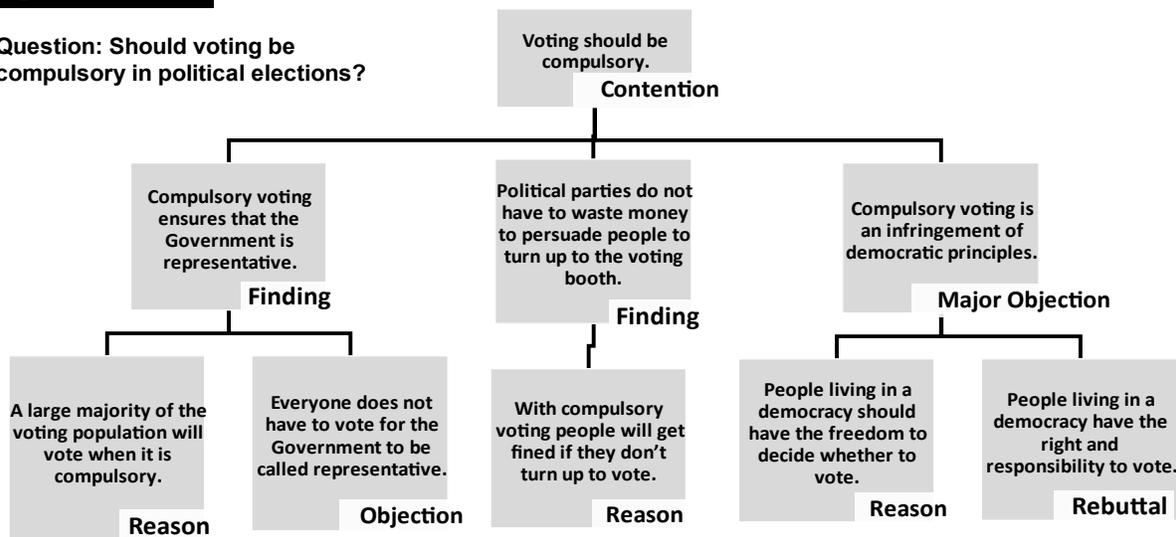
Figure 4.3 *major objections* address objections to the specific contention and are placed to the right on an argument map; again, the importance of major objections also runs left to right. Major objections should address alternative contentions not selected and must be included in the argument map and final report. These objections help moderate the effects of **confirmation bias**, where only evidence and reasons supporting pre-formed points of view may be presented, while overlooking evidence and reasons contrary to these pre-formed points of view. Each major objection will have its own supporting *evidence and reasons*. Additionally, *rebuttals* to either the major objection itself or to the evidence and reasons supporting the major objection help explain why the major objection was not considered further or included in the argument’s findings or contention.

Figure 4.4 is an example of a logical argumentation analysis with a corresponding argument map.<sup>13</sup> In this example, the question asks: “Should voting be compulsory in political elections?” Figure 4.4 is an Australian example, where compulsory voting exists, but could apply to democracies anywhere. The Figure 4.4 contention (recommendation) is that “Voting should be compulsory.”

**Figure 4.4**

## Argument Mapping Example

Question: Should voting be compulsory in political elections?



As presented in Figure 4.4, the contention has two findings and one major objection. The first (and highest priority) finding is “Compulsory voting ensures that the Government is representative.” The second supporting finding is “Political parties do not have to waste money on persuading people to turn up to the voting booth.” The major objection offers “Compulsory voting is an infringement on democratic principles.” The evidence and reasons, objections, and rebuttals to the two findings and major objection are seen in Figure 4.4. While somewhat simplistic, this example reveals the power of a logical argumentation framework to help organize and present the results of a thinking effort.

Logical argumentation is of little use if a good prior critical-thinking effort is missing. This can lead to three main weaknesses. First, the argument can be weak when a person fails to collect all the truthful information (data, facts, evidence) on a situation. This means the person must collect information, assess its truthfulness (see Figure 3.7), and then use the information in their thinking. People may discount information that does not support pre-formed views of the resultant contention (**confirmation bias**). They may leave out information

pertinent to the major objections that does not support their findings. Poor logical argumentation may result when the thinker knows a customer for the analysis has a pre-formed view of the situation and he/she builds an argument to support this pre-formed view (this is bad analysis). The context of the situation may be misunderstood when all truthful information is not collected or included in the argument map.

Second, a logical argument may be weak if a person fails to develop all the alternatives available in the situation under study. Most situations have alternative courses of action. Some alternatives may be found in the information search, some may be identified when conceptualizing (theorizing) the study, and some may be the result of creative-thinking efforts (covered in Chapter 2). Not including all alternatives is also a common problem seen when the thinker is preparing an analysis for a customer with a pre-formed view of the results.

Third, a logical argument may be weak if the person employs several reasoning flaws in reaching their conclusions. They may apply formal logic mistakes or informal logic fallacies (such as *Ad hominin* (personal) attacks). The reasoning may also include an array of cognitive biases, with the most prominent being **confirmation bias** mentioned above. Thus, if a person is not working from a critical-thinking framework, these weaknesses will be noticeable from the presentation of their arguments. Following is an example of how an argument may be assessed for validity using the above tenets.

### **Logical Argumentation: U.S. Politics Example**

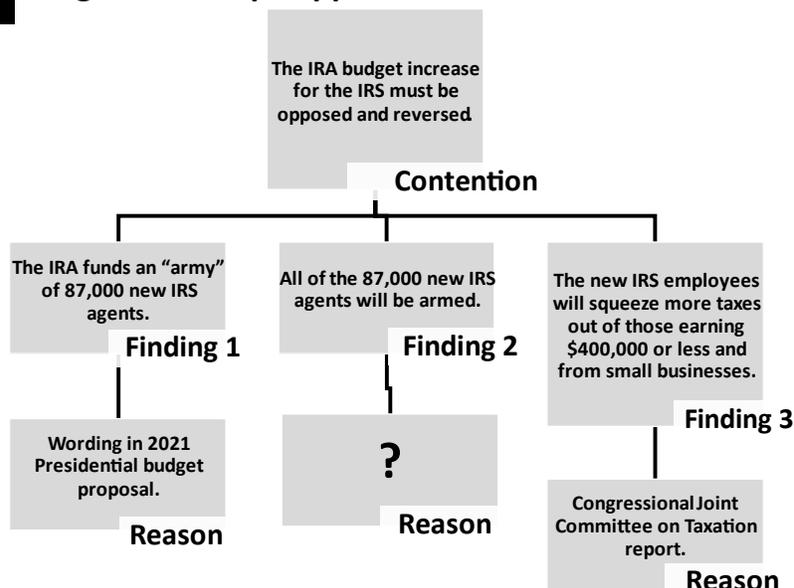
In August 2022, the president signed into law the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). The Act was meant to reduce inflation, address climate change, decrease health care costs, and reduce the federal budget deficit. The Act passed both houses of Congress along strict party lines. Senate budget reconciliation rules allowed a simple majority vote to pass the bill, bypassing the normal Senate 60 percent majority requirement to pass most bills.

One section of the IRA allocated \$80 billion over 10 years to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to improve the agency's performance, including collecting more of the estimated \$600 billion in annual unpaid taxes. Over the previous decade, federal budgets had decreased IRS employees from 92,000 to 76,000, resulting in the agency's degraded abilities to provide good customer service to all taxpayers and to conduct audits, especially on wealthy citizens whose tax returns were highly complex. The current administration estimated wealthy citizens (those making more than \$400,000 a year) were the largest source of unpaid taxes. The IRA \$80 billion additional funding allocated to the IRS was estimated by the administration to increase federal revenue and decrease the federal budget deficit by collecting around \$204 billion in unpaid taxes over 10 years. The additional IRA funding would allow IRS to hire additional employees, including those assigned to auditing (accountants and tax law specialists), customer service representatives, and information technology (IT) specialists. The additional funding would also allow the IRS to upgrade their IT systems, some dating to the 1960s, which would better identify possible tax evaders. Opposition politicians immediately began a campaign to undermine the IRS budget increase.<sup>14</sup>

Figure 4.5 provides the argument map for assessing the opposition's arguments opposing the IRS budget increase. This was not the argument of a single Senator or House member. Instead, senior opposition leaders first developed the main tenets (talking points) of this argument, it was then revised by other Senate and House members and eventually used by opposition party elected officials and supporters down through the federal, state, and local levels, including spreading the argument on partisan Internet, social media, cable news, and other media outlets. As the analysis below reveals, the Figure 4.5 argument is invalid. However, due to the thousands of times the Figure 4.5 argument was repeated, it underwent a process driven by a **repetition** logic fallacy, a condition where false information is repeated often and the audience (opposition supporters) began to believe it is true, even when it was a blatantly flawed argument.

**Figure 4.5**

**Argument Map: Opposition to 2022 Increased IRS Funding**



The Figure 4.5 opposition contention was “[t]he IRA budget increase for the IRS must be opposed and reversed.” This contention rests on three main findings, all of which can be assessed as misinformation (see below). Figure 4.5 is also missing objections to individual findings and major objections with rebuttals to the overall contention. At a minimum, the opposition should have offered a major objection concerning the president’s point of view of how the IRA would increase federal revenue and decrease the federal budget deficit. Any argument with no underlying reasons (or questionable reasons), no individual finding objections, or no major objections with rebuttals, should be suspect from the start. An assessment of each individual finding in Figure 4.5 includes:

*Finding 1* offers, “[t]he IRA funds an “army” of 87,000 new IRS agents. In fact, the IRA did not mention the number of new IRS employees. On the IRA’s passage, The Secretary of the Treasury directed the IRS Commissioner to determine how best IRS could use the \$80 billion to hire additional employees and upgrade IRS IT systems. In addition to countering a 10-year decline in IRS employee numbers, the IRS reportedly faced over the next 5 years an estimated

retirement of 50,000 of their current 76,000 employees. The reason the opposition gave for this finding was traced to a 2021 Presidential budget proposal, also calling for an \$80 billion IRS budget increase that said the IRS would hire 86,852 additional employees with the increased funding. It appears this 2021 budget proposal, which was never passed, did not account for the need not only for additional IRS auditors, but also the IT system and employee hires to improve the degraded IRS customer services and the dire need to upgrade their aging IT systems. This opposition reasoning is a **weak analogy** logic fallacy as it claims that the mid-2022 IRS budget specifics are the same as in early-2021. The weak analogy fallacy is often used when trying to analyze current or future situations based on past situations, but there may be significantly different contexts between the past and current or future situations. This was the case here, as in mid-2022, the new presidential administration had a better understanding of the context of problems within the IRS and thus did not use the 86,852 number from the early-2021 budget proposal. This is why finding 1 is not supported by good evidence and is thus no more than misinformation.

*Finding 2* states, “[a]ll of the 87,000 new IRS agents will be armed.” Several opposition officials claimed (wrongly) the current administration was increasingly stockpiling weapons and ammunition for the IRS, while creating a new armed law enforcement agency they could use to threaten the freedom and civil liberties of U.S. citizens. No evidence or reason was offered supporting this finding by the opposition. In fact, the IRS had a current force of around 2,100 armed criminal investigators (special agents), one of the many U.S. agencies with law enforcement powers. The IRS special agents are involved in criminal investigations, often with other U.S. law enforcement agencies, into financial crimes such as tax evasion, money-laundering, corruption, fraud, organized crime, and other criminal acts. There was no specific mention in the IRA of the hiring of more special agents—although it is logical some may be hired as the IRS expanded. It appeared the main personnel needs of the IRS were for additional

auditors, more customer service representatives, and additional IT personnel. Finding 2 is pure *misinformation (lies)* with no associated evidence or logic—a case with characteristics of **gaslighting**. This also points out how **confirmation bias** can be employed in political arguments. Many opposition supporters were distrustful of U.S. government law enforcement agencies and frequently emphasize how their freedoms and civil liberties are being violated. Pre-programmed to distrust the U.S. government and ready to accept information that supports their existing perspectives, statements such as finding 2 are readily accepted and internalized by those who want to believe this finding, even if it is not true.

*Finding 3* declares, “[t]he new IRS employees will squeeze more taxes out of those earning \$400,000 or less and from small businesses.” In fact, the Secretary of the Treasury directed the IRS Commissioner to not plan for increasing audits on those earning \$400,000 or less. Additional tax enforcement on small businesses is also not mentioned in any of the IRA or IRS literature. The only evidence for this finding is an opposition argument that the wealthy are only responsible for 4 to 9 percent of unpaid taxes. This opposition-cited statistic was credited to the Congressional Joint Committee on Taxation (JCT). However, estimates of the sources responsible for the greatest amounts of U.S. tax evasion differ substantially across government agencies and think tanks. In 2021, Department of the Treasury (DOT) published estimates that the wealthiest top 10 percent of U.S. taxpayers are responsible for 64.2 percent of the tax gap—the difference between taxes paid versus those that should be paid.<sup>15</sup> This equates to \$385 billion of unpaid taxes annually. The top 1 percent of the wealthiest taxpayers account for 28 percent of the tax gap, estimated at \$160 billion of unpaid taxes annually.<sup>16</sup> Citizens must be especially wary of information that cannot be confirmed across multiple sources. The opposition logic supporting this finding appears to be: (1) since the intent of the IRA is to increase IRS tax collection, then (2) the IRS will target those with the highest rates of unpaid taxes

(according to the JCT estimates), i.e., those earning \$400,000 or less (which is contrary to the DOT published estimates and DOT directions to IRS). In addition to playing on the **confirmation bias** of opposition supporters as described in finding 2 above, this finding draws on the **straw-person (strawman)** logic fallacy where misinformation is used to distort the opponent's point of view or stance on an issue to make it easier to attack and disprove the opponent's arguments. The \$400,000 earning level figure was politically sensitive to the president, where he vowed in his presidential campaign and after inauguration that his administration would not increase taxes on any person (or couple) earning \$400,000 or less. By promoting the questionable JCT statistics and using the faulty logic cited above, the opposition party hoped to discredit the president's compliance with the promises he made to U.S. taxpayers, while also protecting their wealthy campaign donors from tax audits (their **hidden agenda**).

Thus, the argument presented in Figure 4.5 is invalid due to a combination of misinformation, application of cognitive biases, and employment of informal logic fallacies not to mention the violations of good logical argumentation. Another problem with the Figure 4.5 argument is its overall intent consisted of an **appeal to fear** informal logic fallacy. This fallacy is intended to move a person to fear the consequences of a situation or behavior. The Figure 4.5 findings of creating a new U.S. government armed force and that the IRS would target for audits those making \$400,000 or less and small businesses are classic appeal to fear tactics. One opposition leader went so far as to tell prospective IRS employees to not take the new IRS jobs, as the opposition would defund them when they regained control of Congress in the future. In fact, when the opposition took control of the House of Representatives in January 2023, the first bill passed by the new opposition majority was to reduce the IRS budget by \$70 billion over 10 years. Even though this bill was passed in the House, it had no chance of passing in the Senate or overcoming a presidential veto. One media report evaluated the Figure 4.5 argument of trying to cast the IRS as a

“Boogyman”—a classic appeal to fear tactic. With Figure 4.5 being an actual U.S. political argument, one that lacked critical thinking and was completely invalid, but one still believed by millions of U.S. citizens, it should make you wonder about the overall quality of U.S. political discourse. Thus it is important that thinkers assess the information, cognitive biases, informal logic fallacies, and structure of the logical argument when conducting System 2 (slow) analyses.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Haber, *Critical Thinking* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2020), 29-31.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> This differs from the more popular abstract theory of “Left Brain and Right Brain,” which science has refuted as new technology for brain scans shows that, depending on a person’s mental activity, both left and right sections of the brain may be engaged in thinking, depending on the type of thinking.

<sup>4</sup> Kahneman.

<sup>5</sup> Michael W. Collier, *Security Analysis, a Critical-Thinking Approach* (Richmond, KY, Eastern Kentucky University Libraries Encompass, 2023),

<https://encompass.eku.edu/ekuopen/6/> or

<https://manifold.open.umn.edu/projects/security-analysis>.

<sup>6</sup> Modified from Kristan J. Wheaton (seminar presentation at the annual conference of the International Association for Intelligence Education, Erie, PA, July 14-16, 2014), supplemented by Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow*.

<sup>7</sup> Material for this section was synthesized primarily from Noel Hendrickson et al., *The Rowman and Littlefield Handbook for Critical Thinking* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), 111-126; and Nathaniel Bluedorn and Hans Bluedorn, *The Fallacy Detective, Thirty-Six Lessons on How to Recognize Bad Reasoning*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Muscatine, IA: Christian Logic, 2003), 205-208.

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<sup>8</sup> See Patrick J. Hurley, *A Concise Introduction to Logic*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Informal logic fallacies include flaws in the evidence or reasoning of an argument and may be found in both inductive and deductive arguments.

<sup>10</sup> Hendrickson et al., 111.

<sup>11</sup> All examples prepared by the author, often modifying examples in Hendrickson et al. and Bluedorn and Bluedorn.

<sup>12</sup> Modified from Reasoninglab, “Argument Mapping,” <https://www.reasoninglab.com/argument-mapping/> (accessed July 25, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> David Lawder, “Republicans call it an ‘army’ but IRS hires will replace retirees, do IT, says Treasury, *Reuters*,” August 19, 2022, <https://www.yahoo.com/news/republicans-call-army-irs-hires-100822880.html> (accessed August 20, 2022).

<sup>15</sup> Natasha Sarin, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Economic Policy, “The Case for a Robust Attack on the Tax Gap.” U.S. Department of the Treasury, Featured Stories, September 21, 2021, ([home.treasury.gov](https://home.treasury.gov)) (accessed January 1, 2023). Statistics cited are from Jason DeBacker et al, “Tax Noncompliance and Measures of Income Inequality,” *Tax Notes Federal*, February 17, 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

# Chapter 5

## Democracy and Its Decline

*Democracy is a very bad form of government...  
but all the others are so much worse.*

- Former U.K. Prime Minister Winston Churchill

Former United Kingdom Prime Minister Winston Churchill, a longtime British statesman, noted historian, and 1953 winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, highlights in the above quote how democracy is a bad form of government. Subsequently he offers how all other forms of government are much worse.

Critical thinking takes place in an issue area. In this book the issue area is civic life where democracy is the key component. The history of world democracy and in particular United States democracy are the main topics of this chapter. Democracy in a larger world context is covered in Chapter 6.

This chapter surveys democracy and presents several insights that are not often taught in most secondary school curriculums. First, we define democracy. Second, we survey the history of democracy. Third, we look at several issues pertaining to U.S. democracy as it developed over the past 250 years. Finally, we introduce how democracies decline, including decline in the United States over the last decade. With the information in this chapter U.S. citizens will be better prepared to employ critical thinking in their civic lives.

Before reading this chapter, the reader may want to review the *U.S. Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution, U.S. Bill of Rights, and The Federalist and Anti-Federalist Papers*<sup>1</sup> as the below material supplements these foundational U.S. documents.

## What is Democracy?

There are several differing definitions of democracy. In the time of the ancient Greeks it simply meant “rule by the people.”<sup>2</sup> A more modern definition sees democracy:

...as a system of government with regular, free and fair elections, in which all adult citizens have the right to vote and possess basic civil liberties such as freedom of speech and association.<sup>3</sup>

Democracy has been around since the Stone Age. When members of groups or clans of ancient hunter-gathers worked together to decide what actions to take (where to hunt, where to live, etc.), this internal consultation was a crude version of democracy. In the 6<sup>th</sup>- to 2<sup>nd</sup>-centuries BCE (Before the Common Era, ex-B.C.) the Greek city-states and Roman Republic experimented with forms of **direct democracy** where free, adult, male citizens would meet to discuss and vote on community issues. The Greek city-state and Roman Republic experiments with democracy later returned to forms of authoritarian rule as existed elsewhere in the ancient world. It was not until the 17<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup>-centuries CE (Common Era, ex-A.D.) that **representative democracy**, as we know it today, began to emerge. Representative democracy entails citizens voting for their representatives, who then meet, discuss, and vote on societal issues. After the American Revolutionary War (1776 to 1783 CE), the United States created the first democratic constitution based on representative democracy. Over the next two centuries representative constitutional democracy spread to other world countries. In 2024, non-governmental organization (NGO) Freedom House assessed how only 84 of the 208 countries and territories rated, or 40 percent, are free democracies—with this percentage seen decreasing over the past several years.<sup>4</sup> Overall, only approximately 20 percent of the entire world population live in free democracies. The remainder of the world consists of partly free and unfree

countries, the majority authoritarian ruled, like what existed before the 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-centuries.

Two main non-authoritarian alternatives have emerged for improving both representative democracies and governance worldwide. First, political scientists have offered the alternative of creating stronger democracies with the resulting governing system called **polyarchy**.<sup>5</sup> This option is discussed further below. Second, over the last two centuries **communism** has become a competing governing alternative. Communism can be defined as "the state of being of or for the community." There are several theories of communism as a governing system. The best known communist theory was initially developed by German philosophers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who called for the end of inequality and formation of classless, stateless societies, which work hand-in-hand with an economic system of **socialism** (see further discussion of Marx's theories in Chapter 6).<sup>6</sup> While some of today's world countries have achieved conditions of polyarchy, none have instituted communist governing systems as theorized by Marx and Engels.

## **A Short History of Democracy before the *U.S. Constitution***

During the 6<sup>th</sup>- to 2<sup>nd</sup>-centuries BCE, Greek city-states, especially Athens, experimented with direct democracy.<sup>7</sup> In these communities, free, adult, male citizens could participate in governing. The citizens would meet frequently in person to discuss and debate societal issues and then vote on their city-state's policies and actions. Because the city-states were relatively small, it was not a burden on citizens to travel to meetings. Women, slaves, foreigners, and minors were not allowed to participate in these early versions of democracy. By some accounts, at least half of the approximately 1,000 Greek city-states participated in direct democracy. In the 4<sup>th</sup>- to 2<sup>nd</sup>-centuries BCE, some Greek city-states formed federal leagues to coordinate and direct their foreign and military affairs. The

early Greek democratic experiment eventually failed as city-states resorted to authoritarian rule (aristocrats, tyrants, dictators, etc.). Greek philosophers Plato (428-347 BCE) and Aristotle (384-322 BCE) opposed direct democracy for several reasons, including the slow speed of democratic city-state crisis (war) decision-making and their assumptions citizens were not necessarily qualified to make important city-state decisions.

The Roman Republic joined the Greeks in experimenting with direct democracy beginning in 509 BCE.<sup>8</sup> At the time, Rome was also a small city-state, and their form of direct democracy was similar to the Greeks. As the Roman Republic expanded to become the Roman Empire, encompassing territory surrounding the entire present-day Mediterranean Sea, direct democracy was hampered by the large population in the Empire and the long distances from Rome where citizens would have to travel to participate in governing meetings. Thus, the Roman Empire began experimenting with representative democracy where citizens were appointed or elected to travel to Rome and vote as representatives from their outlying regions. This governing structure collapsed in 27 BCE when the Romans came under authoritarian imperial rule by emperors. The idea of democratic governance did not disappear with the end of the Greek democracies and Roman Republic but remained alive in European discourse.

With the decline of the Roman Empire and as Europe moved into the Middle Ages (500-1500 CE), authoritarian rule was still the standard across most of the world, including Europe. Authoritarian monarchs, aristocrats, church leaders, dictators, and oligarchies often ruled through consultation with groups of advisors. For example, English King William I (1028-1087), nicknamed William the Conqueror, regularly called aristocratic meetings of nobles, knights, and senior clergy to advise him on matters important to his kingdom.<sup>9</sup> During this same era, the English nobility also began to hold their own councils with subordinate nobles, knights, lords, and local clergy.

The English Parliament traces its origins to just after the signing of the 1215 Magna Carta by King John I (1166-1216). The Magna Carta established several

rights applying to English nobles and stipulated the king would periodically summon into service a Great Council of nobles and senior clergy to provide advice on the administration and direction of the kingdom.<sup>10</sup> In 1236, the Great Council was dubbed the Parliament—from the old-French word meaning “discussion or discourse.”

During his 50-year reign, English King Edward III (1312-1377) transformed the Kingdom of England into one of the most formidable military powers in Europe and directed vital development in legislative and governmental processes.<sup>11</sup> In 1341, Edward III separated the English Parliament into upper and lower chambers, which later evolved into the House of Lords (for nobility, senior church officials) appointed by the king, and the House of Commons (for baronets, knights, lords, and other commoners summoned to Parliament). Over time, the English people (male, freemen) were allowed to elect their representatives to the House of Commons. One legacy of the 11<sup>th</sup>–century CE forward in England was the transition from a centralized crown-dominated kingdom to one with a more decentralized governmental structure to distribute justice and collect taxes. This governing structure was staffed by professional administrators (often nobles, knights, jurists, clerks, and soldiers).<sup>12</sup> Edward III was one of the first to experiment with ceding legislative and judicial power to the Parliament as he allowed major decisions and court cases to be argued and voted on in both houses of Parliament, with the results presented to him for final decision. Not all of Edward III’s successors relied as extensively on Parliament. Over the next approximate 300 years there arose a tug-of-war between English monarchs and their Parliaments over the exact power held by Parliament.

The English monarch and Parliament struggle over power created a national crisis in the mid-1600s CE resulting in the **English Civil Wars** (1642-1660), which altered British governance and the course of democracy forever.<sup>13</sup> The roots of these civil wars included disagreements over both governance and religion. Prior to 1642, Parliament still only acted in an advisory role to the monarch. The Parliament could be summoned or adjourned as the monarch saw fit. The only

true power the Parliament possessed was the ability to increase tax revenues above the normal course of regular revenues available to the monarch. English King Charles I (1600-1649) thought he was only responsible to God and not to the Parliament or citizens of his kingdom. After being crowned king in 1625, he failed to work with and at times often even refused to communicate with Parliament. From 1629 to 1640, he adjourned Parliament and resorted to personal authoritarian rule. During this period, Charles I was forced to limit his finances to only previously approved Parliamentary sources and was forced to resort to some creative financing to fund his regime. The kingdom's population was generally happy with this arrangement as having no Parliament meant no new taxes.

Conflict arose in Scotland and Ireland over Charles I's governing. He decided to reform the Church of Scotland in the late-1630s and make it more like the Church of England. Originally Great Britain (England, Wales, Scotland) consisted of Roman Catholic countries with the Roman Catholic Pope and his delegates (archbishops, bishops) having a significant say in a country's governance. In 1534, King Henry VIII broke with Rome and created the Protestant Church of England (Anglican Church). The monarch was the head of the new Church of England. While its theology was Protestant (but not Calvinist), the new church largely maintained the organizational structure, pageantry, and rituals of the Roman Catholic Church. Thus, the Church of England followed the **Episcopal approach** to church-governance—meaning church authority (doctrines, etc.) and interpretation of church teachings flowed top-down within a strict hierarchy of archbishops, bishops, or other senior church leaders, interpreting sacred texts and directing church activities. This approach allowed limited local church autonomy.

The Church of Scotland; however, had adopted a **Presbyterian approach** (Calvinist) to church-governance—meaning church authority and the ability to interpret church teachings resided in a bottom-up structure starting with the members of the congregations. The congregations hired ministers and elected a council of elders to oversee local church activities, while any hierarchy above

individual churches existed primarily for administrative purposes. The Presbyterian form offered checks and balances in church activities, while ensuring local church autonomy. As the leader and a devout member of the Church of England, Charles I mandated the Church of Scotland adopt a Church of England prayer book, restore the church governing structure of bishops, and adopt other trappings of the Church of England. These mandates caused an armed rebellion among the Scottish.

In Ireland, which had retained their Roman Catholic religion under the loose direction of the Roman Catholic Pope, the people rebelled against the strong-armed rule of Charles I's appointed officials. The Irish felt the policies of Charles I infringed on both their personal and religious rights. With armed rebellions arising in Scotland and Ireland, Charles I was forced by 1640 to fund an Army to put down the rebellions—but he could not raise taxes to fund an Army without the approval of a Parliament, which he was forced to reconvene.

King Charles I summoned the English Parliament, which became known as the Long-Parliament, as it remained in session from 1640 to 1660. The Parliament was not initially interested in overthrowing the monarchy but saw King Charles I's need for Army funding to fight the Scottish and Irish as a chance to negotiate for reforms to Parliament's powers. Rising tensions between King Charles I and the Parliament, mainly the king's refusal to negotiate, resulted in the outbreak of the English Civil Wars in 1642. The war centered on resolving how England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales would be governed. On one side of the war was King Charles I and his supporters (Cavaliers), which included royalists loyal to the monarchy and those who still had strong sentiment for the Roman Catholic Church. Charles I's strongest support was in rural areas. On the opposing side was the Parliament and their supporters (Roundheads), many who were staunch Protestant Puritans and detested the Roman Catholic influences remaining in the Church of England. The Parliamentarians tended to be supported in the cities and towns and by the Royal Navy. The English Civil Wars included three separate phases of fighting, 1643-1646, 1648-1649, and 1649-1651, with battles, skirmishes, and sieges across

England and Wales. In the early years of the English Civil Wars, Europe was also engulfed in the **Thirty Years' War** (1618-1648) initially fought in Central Europe. While there were several causes of this war, it was initially fought between opposing Episcopalian (Roman Catholic) and Presbyterian (Protestant) principalities but later expanded into a geopolitical war encompassing most of central and western Europe. An estimated 8 million soldiers and civilians were killed during the Thirty Years' War.

In 1649, King Charles I was captured by the Scottish and turned over to the Parliamentarians. He was charged with treason and tried by a sham commission made up of selected members of the House of Commons. Charles I was found guilty and beheaded on January 30, 1649. Also In 1649, the Parliament formally banned the monarchy, disbanded the House of Lords, and declared the Commonwealth of England to be ruled by the House of Commons and a Council of State. During the early-1650s, Puritan Parliamentarian Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658), a member of the Council of State, assumed personal rule of the new Commonwealth as the Lord Protector (military strongman) as the Parliament debated the future form of British and Irish governance. Two years after Cromwell's death in 1658, King Charles I's son, Charles II, at the time exiled in mainland Europe, was invited to resume the British and Irish monarchy, retroactive to 1649, provided he agreed to jointly govern with the consent of Parliament. Over the next 250 years, the British House of Commons slowly assumed greater powers to where it now possesses the primary role in United Kingdom governance. Today, the United Kingdom Prime Minister, the head of government, is elected from the members of the House of Commons. The reestablished House of Lords has taken on a more advisory and ceremonial role. The British monarchy remains the United Kingdom head of state and still has certain ceremonial and formal approval duties in the kingdom's governance.

The British were still in the early years of establishing its colonies in North America as the English Civil Wars raged. The first British permanent settlers landed in North America during the spring of 1607.<sup>14</sup> They landed at a site later

named Jamestown, Virginia Colony, where they were initially governed by a king-appointed council. English King James I, Charles I's father, authorized the Virginia Company of London, which mounted the Jamestown expedition. The first council voted Edward-Maria Wingfield as the council president. Wingfield was the only investor in the Virginia Company to sail with the first settlers. As president of the council, Wingfield clashed frequently with the Jamestown military leader, Captain John Smith. Wingfield was eventually deposed by the council and returned to England in summer 1608. Smith was later elected the new council president but subsequently departed the colony in fall 1609, never to return, after being injured in a mysterious gunpowder accident.

King James I and the Virginia Company decided to disband the previous council structure and instead govern the colony through a king-appointed governor. In summer 1610, Baron Thomas West (1577-1618), 3<sup>rd</sup> Baron De La Warr, arrived at Jamestown as the first governor. West was the largest investor in the Virginia Company and had been a soldier, politician, and successful merchant in England. The three ship resupply fleet carrying Governor West included new settlers, provisions, a medical doctor, and 150 mercenary soldiers—all funded by West himself. West departed Jamestown in 1611, having been inflicted with either malaria or scurvy. For the remainder of the British Colonial period in Virginia (1607-1776) the colony was governed by crown-appointed governors, who were advised by a local King/Queen's Council, with council members normally recommended by the governor and appointed by the crown. Usually, the wealthiest and most influential settlers made up the council. Tensions often existed between the governor and their councils, sometimes resulting in the recall of the governor to England, or at times the governor would simply disband the council. These tensions continued and grew at times even more conflictual until the 1776 American Revolution.

In 1619, the Virginia Colony Governor Sir George Yardley directed the election and convening of the Virginia House of Burgesses, the first elected representative legislative body in the New World. There were approximately 2000

British settlers in Virginia at the time, living on both sides of the present-day James River from its mouth on Chesapeake Bay to 30-40 miles upriver (west). As in England, only adult, male, freemen (normally property owners) were allowed to vote for House of Burgesses members. The Virginia House of Burgesses acted in an advisory role to the colony governor. Thus, the governor had two advisory bodies, the King/Queen's Council (appointed and acted much like the then British House of Lords) and the House of Burgesses (elected and acted like the then British House of Commons).

As the North American colonial settler populations grew and expanded farther west and north of Jamestown, by 1634 several counties had been created in Virginia. Outside Jamestown, counties were largely self-governing as they followed a similar structure as existed in English counties (shires). Following crown and governor directions, county officials were generally elected by adult, male, freemen. By 1634, there were several African freemen, having earned their freedom like indentured servants after arriving in Virginia starting in 1619. Counties included an assortment of governing officials in descending order of precedence: County Lieutenant (executive duties), County Commission (legislative duties), County Clerk (official records: births, marriages, deaths, land transactions, etc.), County Sheriff (tax collection and law enforcement), County Justice of the Peace (local magistrate or judge), and County Surveyor. There was also a County Commandant appointed to lead the county's militia. Not all counties fielded all these officials as smaller or less populated adjacent counties sometimes shared officials. The Virginia colony's new landed gentry formed their own untitled aristocracy, who were those predominantly filling the early colony and county governing and militia officer positions during the colonial period.

North of Virginia in the New England colonies different governing structures emerged. New England colony governance began with the 1620 arrival of the Pilgrims and their creation of the *Mayflower Compact*, the first governing document for the new Plymouth Colony. The Plymouth expedition was chartered by King James I and was originally headed for present-day New York (then part of

the Virginia Colony) but was blown off course by bad weather and eventually landed in present-day Plymouth, Massachusetts. This expedition included mainly Church of England separatists, and a few adventurers and tradesmen. The separatists, like the Puritans to follow them, felt the Church of England had not done enough to remove the trappings of the Roman Catholic Church from its organization and services. Landing outside of the Virginia Company charter area, some of the adventurers and tradesmen raised the issue as to whose laws they must follow. To alleviate conflict among the settlers, the *Mayflower Compact* established that Plymouth Colony would be governed based on the principles of liberty and law and order. The compact called for a self-governing structure all settlers would follow where they would create laws, ordinances, acts, and offices for the good of the colony, while at the same time living within the Christian faith. The Plymouth Colony adult, male settlers elected their own governor.<sup>15</sup>

In 1629, King Charles I chartered the Massachusetts Bay Company. Initially the charter allowed about a dozen company stockholders among the 400 Puritan settlers to elect a governor, deputy governor, and seven assistants to enact and enforce the colony's laws.<sup>16</sup> Arriving just north of Plymouth Colony and with the new colony capital in present-day Boston, this group of nine governing officials became known as the General Court. Later the number of assistants in the General Court expanded, and more adult, male settlers were allowed to vote. Those voting had to be members of the Congregational (Puritan) Church. At the local town level, Congregational churches were self-governing as adult, male members were allowed to elect a minister and establish church rules beyond the colony rules enacted by the General Court. This follows the Presbyterian approach to church governance. Starting in 1634, the colony towns were allowed to elect freemen deputies to share power with the General Court in passing laws and approving taxes. Eventually, the General Court and town deputies were both required to approve new laws and taxes. The first colony governor, John Winthrop, later separated the General Court and town deputies into a two-house legislature. By the 1640s, colony government had evolved into an elected

representative system based on the consent of the governed—a situation that did not exist in England at the time.

While sometimes wrongly characterized as a theocracy, the largely Puritan government in the Massachusetts Bay Colony was based on a separation of church and state. While the Puritans accepted this separation, they also believed government could not be totally separated from *God*. The Congregational Church had no legal role in colony government. However, the government was expected by the church to pass laws protecting the church and punishing religious sins such as blasphemy (cursing *God*), heresy (false religious beliefs) and adultery. Thus, the colony's strict laws were driven by the Puritan interpretations of *The Bible* and the teachings of the church. The punishments for violating religious laws included fines, whipping, confinement to stocks, banishment, or death.

Not all Massachusetts Bay Colony settlers agreed with the strict Puritan laws and their interpretations of *The Bible*. Reverend Roger Williams was tried for sedition and heresy, found guilty, and banished from the colony in 1635 for spreading "new and dangerous ideas." Williams travelled southwest of the colony and established the Providence Plantations, which later became the Rhode Island Colony receiving its own royal charter in 1644. Williams created a refuge for people persecuted for their beliefs, including Quakers and Jews. The governance of the new colony offered what Williams called "liberty of conscience," including staunch advocacy for religious freedom, separation of church and state, and fair dealings with Native Americans, plus the colony took a strict anti-slavery stance (against enslaving both Africans and Native Americans). In 1638, Williams founded the first Baptist Church in America.

Another group of Christian dissidents also seeking freedom from the strict Puritan governing policies of the Massachusetts Bay Colony moved in 1638 to Aquidneck Island and established the settlement of Portsmouth (in present-day southeastern Rhode Island). On March 7, 1638, the dissidents signed the *Portsmouth Compact*, which is offered as the first document in American history severing political ties with England (more implied than specific as in the *Compact*

text the king is not mentioned). The purpose of the *Portsmouth Compact* was to establish an independent colony that was Christian in character but non-sectarian in governance. Some have characterized the *Portsmouth Compact* as the first North American instrument for governing as a true democracy. Portsmouth Colony later became part of Rhode Island Colony.

In the 1660s, King Charles II began imposing royal rule over the Massachusetts Bay Colony. An English royal court cancelled the Massachusetts Bay Colony charter allowing self-rule. After following a governance structure based on a representative system and being all but independent of the British king and Parliament for over 30 years, the imposition of royal rule caused political resistance and a rebellion in Boston. In 1689, the Massachusetts Bay Colony settlers agreed to a new charter with then English monarchs King William III and Queen Mary II. A crown-appointed governor was assigned. However, the elected town deputies remained and were allowed to choose a Governor's Council (General Court). The crown-appointed governor was given the power to veto any law passed by the representative General Court and town deputies. Additionally, the requirement was abolished that only allowed freemen to vote who were members of the Congregational Church. A new voter requirement based on male property ownership was instituted.

As more settlers arrived in the North American colonies, each colony established its own governing structure. Most included a crown-appointed governor. The colonies normally fielded an elected representative legislature, which could pass laws, levy taxes, and raise a militia—with approval of the governor. There were many events and causes leading to the 1776-1783 American Revolution, but the most salient was the disagreement over the way the British governed the colonies and the way the colonists thought they should instead be treated as full British citizens. With the support of only an estimated 40-45 percent of the colonies' populations, the American Revolution began.

## The United States' Democratic Experiment

As fighting continued in the American Revolution, the second Continental Congress began work on the governing structure of a new independent North American country consisting of the 13 British colonies in revolt. A committee submitted the draft governing document to the Continental Congress in July 1777, and it was finally ratified by all 13 colonies in March 1781—seven months before the Battle of Yorktown ensured the colonies' victory in the American Revolution. This initial governing document was entitled the *Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union* (hereafter Articles). It was here the term **United States of America** was formally incorporated. The Articles were designed to ensure the states (former colonies) maintained their independence and sovereignty. The Articles established a weak central government with its highest body being a Congress of the Confederation (hereafter Congress). There were no executive, executive agencies, or judicial powers allocated to the central government. The internally elected President of the Congress held the highest national office under the Articles—but held no real authority except trying to administer the Congress (similar to herding cats).

The Articles ended in failure. The Congress' representatives were negligent in attending Congressional sessions, causing important items to often go undebated and missed voting. For example, the 1783 Treaty of Paris ending the American Revolutionary War was not ratified for several months due to the Congress' inability to field a quorum. The Congress was provided no power to tax. Instead, Congress was required to request funding from the states, and the states often failed to honor those requests. The Congress had the power to raise an Army, but its efforts lacked funding and the ability to recruit soldiers within the states. The same was true for funding and recruiting a Navy. Tariffs on domestic and international commerce were the responsibility of the states, with each state having its own tariff rules and enforcement mechanisms. Each state and the Confederation were allowed to issue money—resulting in monetary chaos. With

the decentralized government revealed as ineffective, and with small rebellions breaking out across the states, Alexander Hamilton led an effort, approved by former Commanding General of the Continental Army George Washington, to convene the 1786 Annapolis Convention to discuss amending the Articles. Hamilton and his allies' real intention (**hidden agenda**) was to convene a body to write a federal constitution with a stronger central government, which resulted in the 1787 Philadelphia Convention (Constitutional Convention).

The 1787 Philadelphia Convention drafted the world's first democratic federal constitution.<sup>17</sup> The Convention was in session from May 25, 1787 to September 17, 1787, when the draft constitution was sent to the states for ratification. A total of 55 representatives from 12 states attended the Convention—Rhode Island never sent representatives. The representatives, today considered important members of the U.S. Founding Fathers, were knowledgeable and experienced men from across the Confederation. One notable missing representative was Virginia's Thomas Jefferson who was serving as the Confederation's Minister to France. Jefferson supported a stronger central government and provided his inputs to the Convention through correspondence with John Adams, James Madison, and George Washington (although it sometimes took weeks for correspondence to cross the Atlantic). The Convention began with the election of George Washington as Convention President. The representatives next agreed on the Convention's agenda and rules for the proceedings. The representatives then began discussing, debating, and voting on different governing issues. Often only 30-40 representatives were in attendance on any given day, but the proceedings continued as quorums were present. The Convention discussions and proceedings were kept secret. At the end of the Convention the final draft *U.S. Constitution* was published in newspapers. The best record of the proceedings was kept by James Madison and published after his death in 1836 in a document entitled *Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787*.

There were no guarantees the draft *U.S. Constitution* would be ratified by the required nine states. As critics of the new *Constitution* surfaced, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay wrote 85 articles under the pseudonym “Publius” to explain the need for a constitution, provide insight into the thinking behind various sections of the draft *U.S. Constitution*, and argue for its ratification. These articles were addressed to the citizens of New York and were published first in several New York newspapers and later in newspapers across the Confederation. The articles were later compiled and published as the *Federalist Papers* and are today still an important reference for jurists and constitutional scholars.<sup>18</sup> Simultaneously, several anti-federalist articles were published in newspapers across the Confederation with arguments against the draft *U.S. Constitution*. The loss of state sovereignty to a stronger federal government, and the failure of the draft *Constitution* to guarantee certain rights to individuals and the states (see further discussion below), appeared to be the main arguments of the anti-federalists.

The new *U.S. Constitution* was ratified and enacted in 1788. The required nine states ratified the new *Constitution* by June 21, 1788. By late July 1788, eleven states had ratified the new *Constitution* and planning for the new federal government began. George Washington was elected and inaugurated as the first President of the United States on April 30, 1789. His first cabinet consisted of Vice-President John Adams, Secretary of State John Jay (temporary until Thomas Jefferson returned from France in 1790), Secretary of Treasury Alexander Hamilton, Secretary of War Henry Knox, and Attorney General Edmund Randolph. Jay later served as the first Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. Working with the new U.S. Congress, Washington, his cabinet, and Jay took the lead in building the foundations of the U.S. government based on the prescribed structure in the new *U.S. Constitution*.

## Issues and Challenges in Drafting a Democratic Constitution

Constitutional Convention representatives could draw from an array of historical experiences and philosophical works as their work proceeded. They were aware of the history of British governance and the often-contentious relationships between British monarchs and Parliament. They understood how religious conflicts caused wars killing millions of people in Europe over recent centuries. They were familiar with British Colonial rule since 1607, especially as experienced in their lifetimes. They worked from principles set forth in the 1776 *U.S. Declaration of Independence*. They had the experiences of the thirteen states' individual constitutions, where some had been in existence since near the start of the American Revolution (1776-1783).

The Convention representatives also knew the political philosophical writings of Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu, and Rousseau, among others, who influenced their thinking. English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) in his noted work *Leviathan* (1651) offered a treatise on the basis of legitimate government, including how a country needed a strong central government to avoid evil and civil war. English physician and philosopher John Locke (1632-1704), who grew up during the English Civil Wars (1642-1660), published his ideas on government in several books, including his noted *Two Treatises of Government* (1689). His work is considered the foundation of today's political liberalism and included, among other tenets, the sharing of government power between an executive and legislature, governance by consent of the people, citizen rights and the responsibility of the government to protect those rights, religious toleration, and separation of church and state. French philosopher Montesquieu (1689-1755) in his book *The Spirit of the Law* (1748) authored his theory of separation of powers. Genevan philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) published among other works his *Discourse on Inequality* (1754) and *The Social Contract* (1762), which are part of the foundations of modern political and social thought. Rousseau's books theorized about how to establish a

political community while addressing the problems of commercial society (i.e., the rise of capitalism).

The challenge of the Constitutional Convention representatives was to take their knowledge and experiences and develop a constitution acceptable to all thirteen states. There was no example to follow of a federal democratic governing structure—the *U.S. Constitution* was the first. The crafting of the new *Constitution* required significant discussion and compromise. Some of the major issues and challenges the representatives faced included:

### **Separation of Power**

No one wanted a powerful authoritarian leader for the new federation. The states had just fought the American Revolution rejecting the abusive British imperial monarchy as a form of government. George Washington allegedly turned down an offer to become the U.S. king—but this is more myth than fact. In keeping with Montesquieu’s ideas surrounding separation of powers, the Convention representatives developed a governing structure with three branches—executive, legislative, judicial. Each branch was given its own specific duties and responsibilities, creating a checks-and-balances system on federal power.

The executive branch was headed by an elected president and developed into a structure of departments and agencies carrying out the work of the federal government. The president was both the head of government and head of state. The president’s main powers included approving bills passed by the legislature, vetoing bills he disagreed with, being the commander-in-chief of the Army and Navy, nominating federal judges and senior executive branch officials (except the elected vice-president), and pardoning individuals where federal justice was not considered served. While not a monarch or dictator, the presidential powers in the *U.S. Constitution* are considerable.

The legislative branch consisted of the U.S. Senate (first appointed by state legislatures—after 1913 elected statewide) and an elected U.S. House of Representatives. The legislative branches' main powers included passing bills to establish federal policy and creating the executive branch structure (departments, agencies, programs, etc.), overriding presidential vetoes with a two-thirds majority vote, passing bills to raise taxes and fund the federal government, approval of federal judges and senior executive branch officials nominated by the president (Senate only), ratification of foreign treaties (Senate only), impeaching (House only) and removing (Senate only) elected or appointed officials in all three branches of government for misconduct.

The judicial branch includes the U.S. Supreme Court and "...such inferior Courts as the Congress may ...ordain and establish."<sup>19</sup> Today, the federal court system consists of the 9-member U.S. Supreme Court, 13 subordinate appeals courts, and 94 district and territorial courts. The district and territorial courts are the primary adjudicators of the laws of the United States and are where federal trials are conducted. District and territorial court rulings may be appealed to the appeals courts and U.S. Supreme Court, which is the senior appellate (appeals) court for not only the federal courts but also for state supreme courts. The federal judicial branches' powers were strengthened after the executive and legislative branches acquiesced to the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Marbury v. Madison* (1803) establishing the principle of judicial review, meaning federal courts could strike down laws and federal actions found to violate the *U.S. Constitution* or other U.S. federal laws.

### **Tyranny of the Majority**

As part of designing the separation of powers and in creating a balance of power across government branches in the new *Constitution*, many of the Convention representatives were concerned with the "tyranny of the majority." This is when a voting body has a majority consensus, and the minority voters' inputs are either

steamrolled or ignored. The creation of the U.S. Senate was in part a measure to thwart the tyranny of the majority. States with smaller populations were afraid states with larger populations and more House representatives would overpower the interests of the smaller states. This resulted in what is known as the Connecticut Compromise creating a bicameral Congress with a separate House of Representatives and Senate. The House representatives were elected for 2 years using a proportional measure based on total U.S. population (census taken every 10 years beginning in 1790). The Senate, on the other hand, would have two representatives (senators) from each state, appointed (later elected) for 6 years. Under this structure, the House represented the people, and the Senate represented the states.

Today, Congressional federal elections are decided by a majority vote for candidates in their electoral district (House) and statewide (Senate). Within the House of Representatives items are passed based on a majority vote—creating an aspect of the tyranny of the majority. The Senate; however, took actions to dampen the possible tyranny of the majority. In the early-1800s, Senate rules incorporated the concept of a “filibuster” for senators opposing an issue to delay or end the consideration of a controversial bill or action. Later, the Senate also enacted a three-fifths (60 percent) voting requirement on most bills and appointments. The filibuster and three-fifths vote requirements lessen the chances of a tyranny of the majority in Congressional actions.<sup>20</sup>

## **Voting Rights**

We the People..., as the preamble to the *U.S. Constitution* starts, did not constitute all the people. Following common practices of the British government and North American colony voting, the drafters of the *U.S. Constitution* limited voting and office holding to adult, male, freemen (white or black). Women, slaves, Native Americans, and non-U.S. citizens could not vote or hold office. Later, the post-U.S. Civil War (1861-1865) thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments

to the *U.S. Constitution* combined to free U.S. slaves and give the former male slaves the right to vote and hold office. Still, for almost 100 years after the 1870 passage of the fifteenth amendment, state and local laws and procedures nicknamed “Jim Crow,” mainly in southern states, enforced segregation actions obstructing former slaves and their descendants from voting or holding office—situations often enforced through violence. State and local governments enacted policies such as poll taxes and literacy tests to restrict black voting. The 1920 nineteenth amendment gave adult women the right to vote. The Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 made Native Americans U.S. citizens but allowed states to decide if they could vote—some did and some did not. Some states and local governments enacted policies similar to Jim Crow laws to prohibit Native American voting. It was not until the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act that racial discrimination in voting was prohibited at all levels of government. Today, some state and local governments continue to pass laws restricting the ability of minorities to vote.

### **Problem of Slavery**

Most Constitutional Convention representatives knew the brutal institution of slavery could not continue forever. Representatives from northern states were often anti-slavery abolitionists but realized to keep the southern slave states in the federation required they not directly threaten slavery. The southern state economies were largely based in agricultural production on plantations worked by slaves. Thus, the convention tweaked the institution of slavery around the edges, kept southern states happy, and “kicked-the-can-down-the-road” concerning abolishing slavery in the future.

The *U.S. Constitution* allowed in calculating electoral populations that slaves could not vote but were counted as three-fifths of a person to bolster the political power of the less populated southern states. This concerned how many representatives each southern state could send to the House of Representatives

and the number of Electoral College votes the state yielded for electing the U.S. president and vice-president. Thus, slave states wielded more power in the Congress and in electing the president and vice-president than their adult, male, freeman population would have otherwise allowed. Also in the *U.S. Constitution* was the prohibition of the international slave trade continuing after the year 1808 (roughly 20 years after the *Constitution's* estimated ratification). The federal 1807 Act Prohibiting Importation of Slaves was later passed and made effective on January 1, 1808. This prohibition of the international slave trade was not a burden on southern states. The Central Atlantic slave states of Virginia and North Carolina had an abundance of slaves that could be sold into the Deep South where slave death rates were highest and the demand for new slaves greatest. Demand for slaves was satisfied by the lively internal-U.S. slave trade and the continued illegal smuggling of slaves into the United States, mainly from the Caribbean. With the topic of slavery roiling U.S. politics in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, slavery was formally abolished after the U.S. Civil War in the 1865 thirteenth amendment.

### **Individual and States' Rights**

One of the major anti-federalist criticisms of the draft *U.S. Constitution* was the lack of protection of individual and states' rights. Those opposing the *U.S. Constitution* argued basic individual and states' rights were not included in the structure of the new *Constitution*. Those favoring the *Constitution* argued states could expand individual rights in their own constitutions. This did not silence the opposition. James Madison took the lead in researching and drafting what became the *U.S. Bill of Rights*, which became the first 10 amendments to the *U.S. Constitution* on January 18, 1792. Madison studied the anti-federalists' arguments about deficiencies in the new *Constitution* and the concerns of other critics. Historically he consulted the Magna Carta (1215), Massachusetts Body of Liberties (1641), English Bill of Rights (1689), Virginia Declaration of Rights (1776), which became part of the first *Virginia Constitution*, and *U.S. Declaration of*

*Independence* (1776). He also reviewed the individual rights in all state constitutions and created an initial list of 19 proposed amendments covering individual and states' rights not otherwise cited in the new *Constitution*. After revisions in the U.S. Congress, 12 of these proposed amendments were sent to the states for ratification. Only 10 of these rights survived the state ratification process. The amendments augmented the *Constitution* by providing specific guarantees of individual rights, limitations on government power in judicial and other proceedings, and a specific declaration that all powers not specifically granted to the federal government by the *Constitution* are reserved to the states.

## **Role of Political Parties**

The *U.S. Constitution* does not mention political parties. President George Washington warned against the rise of political parties. As his Farewell Address near the end of his second term as president, he published a letter to "Friends and Fellow Citizens," which included a warning against political parties. He felt political parties should be repressed in an elected government of the people as they would "...distract the government from their duties, create unfounded jealousies among groups and regions, raise false alarms among the people, promote riots and insurrection, and provide foreign nations and interests access to the government where they can impose their will upon the country."<sup>21</sup>

Washington was quite the accurate fortuneteller of future U.S. politics.

Washington raised the red flag about political parties at a time when they were already forming during his presidential terms. Thomas Jefferson led the southern and rural-based Democratic-Republican Party and Alexander Hamilton led the northern and business-based Federalist Party. These parties and their descendants have played a major role in every federal election and overall U.S. governance since Washington's departure from the presidency.

Not addressing political parties in the *Constitution* left almost no possibility of coalition government in the United States. The structure of the *Constitution*

unknowingly all but limits the country to only two main political parties. Third parties have arisen across U.S. history but have had minimal effects on electing U.S. federal government officeholders. Some third parties have elected individual U.S. House members and even senators, but none have been competitive in electing presidents or vice-presidents. Without the mention of political parties or multi-party coalitions in the *Constitution*, combined with the president and vice-president taking office after receiving a majority of electoral votes, the chance that multiple parties can unite and govern together is severely hampered. Multi-party ruling coalitions have become a standard in many democracies in the world where legislatures choose the president or prime minister.

### **Difficulty to Amend**

The Philadelphia Convention representatives purposely made amending the *U.S. Constitution* difficult. This could be seen as another step in thwarting the tyranny of the majority, where popular political parties or demagogues might attempt to change the *Constitution* in ways not in the best interests of all the citizens. For a *Constitutional* amendment to be considered it must be proposed by a two-third vote in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, or by vote of two-thirds of state legislatures. Proposed amendments must then be ratified by three-fourths of state legislatures. Thus, only the most important issues concerning federal government structure and operations or individual and states' rights are normally the subject of proposed amendments. Since 1788, only 27 amendments to the *U.S. Constitution* have been ratified—with the first 10 being the *U.S. Bill of Rights*. This contributes to the long life of the *U.S. Constitution*. What the *Constitution* did allow was how federal laws, statutes, and regulations could be enacted to provide the details of governing the United States. This is a major activity of the legislative and executive branches of government. The supplementing of the structure of the *Constitution* with more detailed laws, statutes, and regulations must follow constitutional principles and allows for

changes that occur based on issues such as societal change, crisis management (political and economic), technological improvements, and other domestic and international situations.

## **Ongoing Constitutional and Legal Challenges**

The *U.S. Constitution* was a brilliant effort by the Convention's 55 representatives. However, it is still not perfect. There have been numerous calls to amend the *Constitution* to address today's problems, with some going so far as to argue a need for a new constitution.<sup>22</sup> There are certain political and societal issues that have not been addressed adequately either in the *Constitution* or by the legislative or executive branches. Experts highlight the *Constitution* creates a decision-making system and today it is not making decisions on important issues.<sup>23</sup> Some of these political and societal issues could be resolved through legislation, but some might require *Constitutional* amendments. Today's major issues include:

### **Bias in Voting**

Political bias in voting results from a combination of gerrymandered voting districts, unregulated campaign financing, and state voting restrictions. States gerrymander districts to place voters supporting one particular party in the same district to ensure a bias (advantage) for that party in electing members of their own legislatures, the U.S. House of Representatives, and in presidential electoral voting. Unregulated campaign financing allows wealthy individuals and corporations to support candidates friendly to their interests, thus creating disproportionalities in the resources available to all candidates in the campaign. This leads to "the wealthy getting the government they pay for (see Wealth and Political Influence discussion below)." State voting laws often make it more

difficult for certain minorities and political party supporters to vote. This biases the overall vote in these states by using tactics such as limiting poll stations in some areas, not allowing mail-in or drop-box voting, limiting early voting for those who must work on Election Day, clearing of voter registration rolls, overly strict voter identification procedures, and many others—sort of a Jim Crow-lite.

### **Court Politicization**

Politicization of the federal courts can be a serious problem. Since presidents nominate and the Senate approves all federal judges (except immigration judges who work for the Department of Justice) this process tends to place judges on the bench who favor the political ideology of the political party of the nominating president. Federal judges are frequently accused of ruling based on the party ideology or desires of the president who nominated them to the federal bench, rather than ruling on the *Constitution* or U.S. law. This is not true in all cases but has happened enough to create distrust of the federal courts among citizens. The Senate judicial approval process does not provide much of a check on this situation as in the Senate the latest rules only require a majority vote to approve judgeships. The problem of politicizing the courts is magnified by the fact federal judges (less immigration judges) are appointed for life and can only be removed for misconduct (impeached), retirement, or death—thus those who tend to politicize their rulings can keep doing so for decades.

### **U.S. Citizen Voting Discrimination Outside States**

Representative voting by all U.S. citizens is a problem outside of U.S. states, including in Washington D.C. and U.S. territories (Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, etc.). These U.S. Citizens are not represented by elected officials in the U.S. Congress. At most, U.S. territories may send a delegate to the House that can participate in discussions but not vote on legislation. Thus, representation in the

Congress is biased toward U.S. state citizens. There have been discussions of making Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico states whose population sizes would qualify for at least one voting member of the U.S. House of Representatives. However, as states Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico would also qualify for two U.S. senators and there is currently no U.S. political will to increase the Senate by four members, especially four members who will likely vote liberal.

### **Lack of Electoral College Fairness**

Electoral College voting as currently structured does not ensure the democratic ideal of “one person, one vote” in electing U.S. presidents and vice-presidents. The Electoral College was created in part to provide representative fairness for U.S. southern states in the days of slavery. Each state receives the number of electors equal to the combined number of senators and congressional representatives from the state. Today, most states employ “a winner takes all” approach, whereby the candidate winning the statewide popular vote receives all the Electoral College votes for that state. This has resulted in instances where the presidential or vice-presidential candidates winning the Electoral College vote did not win the popular country-wide vote. Some argue the Electoral College should be eliminated to correlate with the ideal of “one person, one vote,” thus allowing winning candidates to be elected by a country-wide popular vote. Others argue the Electoral College is a unique and necessary element of U.S. federalism. A movement entitled “National Popular Vote” (NPV) is gaining support for a new state-based approach that “...preserves the Electoral College, state control of elections, and the power of the states to control how the president is elected.”<sup>24</sup> Under the NPV, states determine how they will assign electors. The NPV approach calls for citizens to vote for a presidential slate, but before electors are assigned, all participating states in the NPV compact will determine the country-wide popular voting results and assigned electors based on the national results—thus ensuring the same candidates win both the electoral and popular votes. Whether

a *Constitutional* amendment, federal law, or a series of state laws are enacted, the issue of the Electoral College requires addressing.

## **Wealth and Political Influence**

Being wealthy or politically influential often drives how some U.S. citizens are treated by the government. Income inequality is a major source of bias affecting non-wealthy U.S. citizens.<sup>25</sup> Here, the wealthy are considered those in the top 10-20 percent of citizens based on their incomes and financial and property holdings, while the other 80-90 percent of citizens are considered non-wealthy. Some pundits have even offered that the moderate-income U.S. middle class—often considered the foundation of democracy—is decreasing in size due to forces related to growing income inequality. Many of the non-wealthy suffer from low-paying jobs, lack of good health care, poor housing, food insecurity, poor education, and other societal afflictions, while the wealthy do not. Neither the legislative nor executive branches have adequately addressed this situation. To solve this problem would require a redistribution of national wealth. With an egalitarian ideology focused on the good of all society (see Chapter 6), some government leaders have made attempts to address aspects of income inequality. They have been generally thwarted by the individualistic ideology focused on the good of individual politicians and selected wealthy interests (see Chapter 6) that places major emphasis on citizen self-sufficiency and on maintaining the support of wealthier citizens—those who would have to pay for redistribution of wealth through higher taxes and lower profits.

Many U.S. citizens believe current interpretations of the *U.S. Constitution* are also biased toward the wealthy as it protects wealthy over non-wealthy citizens.<sup>26</sup> The wealthy tend to donate large amounts of money to political campaigns to protect and serve their interests. This also gives them easier access to federal officeholders, in the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. In the U.S. Justice system, it is felt that the wealthy receive preferential treatment as

they can afford more and better lawyers and have greater influence over law enforcement actions, prosecutorial decisions, and judicial rulings. It is widely believed the wealthy and politically powerful are given special consideration in the justice system as to whether they will be indicted for crimes. The perception of wealthy and politically powerful figures getting special treatment in the justice system creates a wedge of mistrust with non-wealthy citizens who believe the judicial system is rigged to protect the wealthy.

### **Fairness to Native Americans**

Native American status remains a problematic issue in the United States. Native Americans were barely mentioned in the *U.S. Constitution*. According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, there are 574 ethnically, culturally, and linguistically different federally recognized Native American tribes.<sup>27</sup> The history of British and U.S. relations with these tribes has been one of broken promises, broken treaties, and violence. This history can be characterized as a planned 400-year ongoing genocide. This has resulted in seizure and forced evacuation of tribal lands, relocation of tribes to reservations on often non-productive lands, and reeducation of Native American youth to destroy their cultural identity. Tribes have also been abused by state governments and federal and state justice systems. The result is that Native Americans have the same serious problems of non-wealthy citizens cited in the above income inequality discussion. Action is required to clarify the exact level of sovereignty the tribes possess under federal and state governments as it is often interpreted dissimilarly by different levels and branches of government. Action is also needed to help elevate tribal members' quality of living, especially in terms of their health care, education, and employment.

## Democracy Advancement and Assessment

As discussed previously, direct democracy first emerged in the Greek city-states and Roman Republic in 6<sup>th</sup>-century BCE. As it grew into the Roman Empire, the Roman Republic also experimented with representative democracy. Both Greece and Rome later reverted to authoritarian rule. It was not until 1788 that the *U.S. Constitution* created the first formal representative democratic government. Over the 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-centuries several representative democracies began to emerge around the world. Western Europe first saw the rise of representative democracy in the 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-centuries, most notably in Great Britain as the Prime Minister and House of Commons assumed responsibility for British governance. Other democratic European countries followed. Newly independent Latin American countries in the early-19<sup>th</sup>-century adopted democratic presidential systems due to their admiration for George Washington. When several of the Latin American countries created their governmental structures, they failed to implement a separation of powers as the constitutions they approved created imperial or unitary presidencies who could legislate and rule by decree (outside the normal legislative process) and who directly controlled the country's judiciary. As former colonies of the British Empire gained independence worldwide in late-19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-centuries, they primarily adopted the British parliamentary (Westminster) democratic governing structure, and many kept the British monarch as their head of state.<sup>28</sup> Some Latin American unitary presidential systems and small-country Westminster systems can be described as "elected dictatorships" due to power vested in their heads of government. Democratic countries in Africa and Asia often have similar strongman conditions.

U.S. Yale University political theorist Robert A. Dahl offered the next step beyond new, transitional, or weak democracies was when countries reached the level of **political polyarchy**.<sup>29</sup> Under the pluralist theoretical approach, polyarchy is a stronger form of democracy than what many world countries previously achieved. Under polyarchy, political outcomes are achieved through a

competitive process (cooperation, discussion, and compromise) by often unequal interest groups—political, economic, and social. Dahl highlighted how a polyarchy must be accompanied by a modern market economy (see Chapter 6) and a modern society. One important characteristic of polyarchies is their expansion of individual citizen rights. Figure 5.1 lists Dahl’s proposed political institutions (rules) required to achieve polyarchy.

**Figure 5.1**      **Institutions of Political Polyarchy<sup>30</sup>**

**Elected officials.** Control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in elected officials.

**Free and fair elections.** Elected officials are chosen in frequent and fairly conducted elections in which coercion is comparatively unknown.

**Inclusive suffrage.** Practically all adults have the right to vote in the election of officials.

**Right to run for office.** Practically all adults have the right to run for elective offices in government, though age limits may be higher for holding office than for suffrage.

**Freedom of expression.** Citizens have a right to express themselves without the danger of severe punishment on political matters broadly defined, including criticism of officials, the government, the regime, the socioeconomic order, and the prevailing ideology.

**Alternative information.** Citizens have a right to seek out alternative sources of information. Moreover, alternative sources of information exist and are protected by law.

**Associational autonomy.** To achieve their various rights, including those listed above, citizens also have a right to form relatively independent associations or organizations, including independent political parties and interest groups.

As discussed in Chapter 1, NGO Freedom House publishes an annual report on *Freedom in the World*<sup>31</sup> assessing the levels of political rights and civil liberties in world countries and selected territories—scale 0 (worst) to 100 (best). Freedom House offers their assessment captures the real-world situation concerning implementation of political rights and civil liberties and not just what may be found in laws and regulations passed in countries and selected territories. Freedom House bases their assessments on the standards in the *1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and includes Dahl’s polyarchy institutions in Figure 5.1. Political rights are assessed for electoral processes, political pluralism and participation, and functioning of government. For civil liberties they assess freedoms of expression and beliefs, associational and organizational rights, rule of law, personal autonomy, and individual rights. The Freedom House assessments result in an index rating world countries and select territories as either free, partly free, or not free. Many scholars consider Freedom House’s combined index ratings of political rights and civil liberties as the best rating of a country’s level of democracy.

Using the Freedom House index combining their political rights and civil liberties scores, and assuming a benchmark (mine) where any country or territory reaching polyarchy has achieved a score of 95 or better on the Freedom House index, only 22 of the 208 total world countries and territories could be considered polyarchies in 2024. The top countries with scores close to 100 were the Scandinavian countries of Norway, Sweden, and Finland, plus Australia, New Zealand and Canada, among others. There were another 18 countries or territories with scores of 90 or higher, meaning they are good candidates to become polyarchies. Eighty percent of the world population lives in countries or territories considered partly free or not free with index scores of 70 or below.<sup>32</sup> See Figure 1.1 for the steep decline in U.S. Freedom House ratings over the past decade.

## Signs of Democratic Demise

Freedom House subtitled their 2025 *Freedom in the World* report “The Uphill Battle to Safeguard Rights.”<sup>33</sup> They documented how worldwide the trends in numbers of free (democratic) countries have been decreasing. Harvard University professors of government Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt address the process of world democratic decline in their book *How Democracies Die*.<sup>34</sup> They highlight how the overthrow of democratic governments by military coup has greatly decreased since the 1991 end of the Cold War. Instead, the more recent democratic declines are from forces working from within democratic governments that move slowly toward more authoritarian rule.<sup>35</sup>

Levitsky and Ziblatt offer how the institutions of a democratic country create **guardrails** protecting their government. Institutions, as used here, are not just the brick and mortar, equipment, and people of a government, but are more appropriately the rules of politics, economics, and society allowing the country to function. Formal rules are solid guardrails enacted through constitutions, laws, statutes, court rulings, ordinances, regulations, standard operating procedures, and other rules formally instituted in writing and where officials can be held accountable by the courts or administrative processes for their compliance. Informal rules are considered **norms**, consisting of **soft-guardrails**, often not published in writing but understood as how institutions should function or government officials should act. When democracies decline slowly from internal sabotage, it is usually after leaders are first legally elected and then they begin attacking the governing norms and eventually the formal institutional governing system of the country. Using a comparative methodology, where conditions in multiple world countries over time were studied to establish trends and patterns, Levitsky and Ziblatt identified the most common norms assaulted in declining democracies. Figure 5.2 summarizes the governing norms they found are most often broken as a democracy declines and moves toward more authoritarian government. Freedom House’s annual *Freedom in the World* empirical reports

correspond closely with Levitsky and Ziblatt’s comparative findings on democratic decline.

<b>Figure 5.2 Broken Norms Leading to Democratic Decline<sup>36</sup></b>	
<p><b>1. Failure to display <u>mutual toleration</u> of political opponents.</b></p>	<p>Not accepting opponents have an equal right to exist, compete for power, and govern if they win elections.</p> <p>Treating opponents as treasonous or subversive.</p> <p>Failing to “agree to disagree” with opponents on policy and decision differences.</p> <p>Resorting to political violence or other measures against opponents.</p>
<p><b>2. Failure to offer <u>institutional forbearance</u>, meaning not displaying “patient self-control, restraint, and tolerance” concerning political opponents.</b></p>	<p>Not acting within the rule of law when exchanging power to govern after elections.</p> <p>Instituting wide-scale bogus investigations and prosecutions of opposing political parties. (If formal guardrails (laws) were broken legal action is likely justified.)</p>
<p><b>3. Rejection of (or weak commitment to) democratic rules of the game.</b></p>	<p>Rejecting the constitution or expressing a willingness to violate it.</p> <p>Suggesting a need for antidemocratic measures, such as cancelling elections,</p>

	<p>violating or suspending the constitution, banning certain organizations, or restricting basic political rights and civil liberties.</p> <p>Seeking to use (or endorse the use of) extra-constitutional means to change the government, such as military coups, violent insurrection, or mass protests aimed at forcing a change in government.</p> <p>Attempting to undermine the legitimacy of elections, for example, by refusing to accept credible electoral results.</p>
<p><b>4. Denial of the legitimacy of political opponents (corollary of institutional forbearance—No. 2 above).</b></p>	<p>Describing their opponents as subversive, or opposed to the existing constitutional order.</p> <p>Claiming their opponents constitute an existential threat, either to national security or to the prevailing way of life.</p> <p>Baselessly describing their opponents as criminals, whose supposed violation of the law (or potential to do so) disqualifies them from full participation in the political arena.</p> <p>Baselessly suggesting that their opponents are foreign agents, in that they are secretly working in an alliance</p>

	with (or the employ of) a foreign government (usually a major enemy).
<p><b>5. Toleration or encouragement of violence.</b></p>	<p>Having any ties to armed gangs, terrorist groups, paramilitary forces, militias, guerillas, or other organizations that engage in illicit violence.</p> <p>They or their partisan allies sponsoring or encouraging mob attacks on opponents.</p> <p>Having tacitly endorsed violence by their supporters by refusing to unambiguously condemn or punish it.</p> <p>Praising (or refusing to condemn) other significant acts of political violence, either in the past or elsewhere in the world.</p>
<p><b>6. Readiness to curtail civil liberties of opponents, including the media.</b></p>	<p>Having supported laws or policies that restrict civil liberties, such as expanded libel or defamation laws, or laws restricting protest, criticism, of the government, or certain civic and political organizations.</p> <p>Threatening to take legal or other punitive action against critics in opposing parties, civil society, or the media.</p>

	Praising the repressive measures taken by other governments, either in the past or elsewhere in the world.
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Figure 5.2 norms of mutual toleration (No. 1) and institutional forbearance (No. 2) are the most critical norms required in a functioning democracy.<sup>37</sup> When these norms are regularly broken by one side of the political spectrum or another, democratic decline is well underway. Political extremism encourages the breakdown of institutional forbearance.<sup>38</sup> It should be noted that most of the items listed in the right column of Figure 5.2 are often not illegal as they do not break formal governing rules. In some cases, civil or criminal suits could be filed against some of the actions in the right column of Figure 5.2, but for the most part the actions define norms (informal rules) that most government officials or political candidates should avoid breaking but where there is little or no accountability for those breaking them.

Levitsky and Ziblatt’s work explains why U.S. democracy has declined over the past decade due to violations of the Figure 5.2 norms. The result has been an extreme polarization of U.S. politics and a resultant decrease in societal trust leading to the destruction of political norms.<sup>39</sup> The Figure 1.1 empirical decline in U.S. democracy over the last decade is a direct result of the Figure 5.2 described attacks on political and civil norms. It is almost as if some of the U.S. governing elites over the last decade used Figure 5.2 as their “playbook.”

Winston Churchill’s quote at the start of this chapter implies democracy is worth saving as there is no governing system better. World historical experience reveals there is no governing system better than democracy when considering the personal freedoms and quality of life of a country’s population. Maintaining democracy is hard work. As Levitsky and Ziblatt remind us, country democratic breakdown is not inevitable nor irreversible.<sup>40</sup> Actions may be taken to strengthen democracies, even if they have been in decline as is the case for the United States

over the last decade. Ideally, we hope to avoid a situation of the United States continuing its path toward declining democracy as it promotes actions (see Chapter 9) to help strengthen democracy through improved civic education and critical thinking. Chapter 6 next provides a deeper analysis of world governing systems and the societal conditions they create.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, John Jay, Samuel Bryan, and Patrick Henry, *The Federalist and Anti-Federalist Papers* (e-artnow, 2018-- in Amazon Kindle digital version).

<sup>2</sup> Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 14.

<sup>3</sup> Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2019), 6 (in Amazon Kindle digital version).

<sup>4</sup> Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2025," <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2025/uphill-battle-to-safeguard-rights> (accessed June 9, 2025).

<sup>5</sup> Dahl, Chapters 16-20.

<sup>6</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London, J.E. Burghard, 1848—reprinted New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1964).

<sup>7</sup> Dahl, Chapter 1.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 27-28.

<sup>9</sup> For further discussion see: David Crouch, *The Normans, The History of a Dynasty* (London, UK: Hambledon Continuum, 2002), Chapter 4.

<sup>10</sup> For further discussion see: Robert Bartlett, *England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings, 1075-1225* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 2000), 64-67.

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<sup>11</sup> For further discussion see: Dan Jones, *The Plantagenets, The Warrior Kings and Queens Who Made England* (New York: Penguin Random House Books, 2012), Parts V, VI, and VII.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> For further discussion see: Michael Braddock, *God's Fury, English Fire: A New History of the English Civil Wars* (New York: Penguin, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Information on governance in Jamestown and the Virginia Colony was compiled from numerous sources, including Ancestry.com, online encyclopedias Wikipedia and *Britannica*, The Jamestown Society ([www.jamestowne.org](http://www.jamestowne.org)), and other references. Several of my ancestors were early Jamestown and Virginia Colony settlers and I conducted this research as part of my family genealogy studies.

<sup>15</sup> "Mayflower Compact," <https://www.mayflowercompact.org/> (accessed November 30, 2022).

<sup>16</sup> For further discussion see: Constitutional Rights Foundation, "Puritan Massachusetts: Theocracy or Democracy," *Bill of Rights in Action* newsletter, Vol. 29, No., fall 2013, <https://docslib.org/doc/12887789/puritan-massachusetts-theocracy-or-democracy> (accessed December 2, 2022).

<sup>17</sup> For further discussion see: John R. Vile, *The Writing and Ratification of the U.S. Constitution: Practical Virtue in Action* (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers. Inc., 2012) and Catherine Drinker Bowen, *Miracle at Philadelphia, The Story of the Constitutional Convention May to September 1787* (New York: Little Brown and Company, 1966).

<sup>18</sup> See Hamilton, Madison, Jay, Bryan, and Henry.

<sup>19</sup> *U.S. Constitution*, Article III (The Judicial Branch).

<sup>20</sup> The "Tyranny of the Majority" limits in the U.S. Senate have been weakened in the past two decades as approval of federal judges and senior government officials, plus some budget actions, have been reduced to Senate majority (50 percent plus 1) votes and not the earlier prescribed 60 percent vote.

<sup>21</sup> Wikipedia, "George Washington's Farewell Address," [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_Washington%27s\\_Farewell\\_Address#Political\\_parties](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Washington%27s_Farewell_Address#Political_parties) (accessed November 24, 2022).

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<sup>22</sup> George William Van Cleve, *Making a New American Constitution* (Denver, CO: Maroon Bells Press, 2020).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> National Popular Vote, “Agreement Among the States to Elect the President by National Popular Vote,” <https://www.nationalpopularvote.com/written-explanation> (accessed January 15, 2023).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Tribal and Native American Issues,” Issue Summary 2022, <https://www.gao.gov/tribal-and-native-american-issues> (accessed December 2, 2022).

<sup>28</sup> Anthony H. Birch, *The British System of Government* 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

<sup>29</sup> Dahl, Chapter 15.

<sup>30</sup> Dahl, 221.

<sup>31</sup> Freedom House.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Levitsky and Ziblatt.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 22-23, 102-105.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 161.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 8, 114.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 8.

# Chapter 6

## Influences of Political Culture

*For me, the most disturbing aspect of the [recent U.S. individualistic] political culture is how it puts unquenchable thirst for power, domination, and radical ideology, above facts, reason, and the truth.*

- Former U.S. Vice-President Al Gore

Above, Al Gore, the U.S. 45<sup>th</sup> Vice President, offers his perspective on recent U.S. governing political culture. The characteristics of democracies discussed in the last chapter are only one form of governing ideology found around the world. The differing governing institutions and general beliefs of societal groups generate differing political cultures leading to diversity in attitudes and behaviors. To understand, compare, and explain political behaviors and decision-making for different countries requires knowledge of the diverse world political cultures. This chapter discusses the theoretical and empirical aspects of political cultures worldwide. It develops a Theory of Political Cultures, which, as Chapter 7 will expand, is a necessary input to many critical-thinking projects.

### **Political Culture Defined**

The governing institutions and general beliefs of all societal groups generate differing political cultures that lead to differing attitudes and behaviors. This chapter discusses the theoretical and empirical aspects of political cultures worldwide, including the political, economic, and social aspects of different cultures. Understanding differing political cultures will help the reader analyze both U.S. and world politics.

Political culture defines a sub-set of a country or societal group's larger culture. Cultural studies often look at the customs, languages, music, dance, dress, food, religions, history (legacy), literature, economics, and politics of countries and societal groups. In its most general sense, culture defines the social conventions surrounding values, lifestyles, and beliefs that influence a country or societal group's pursuit of their goals. The remainder of this chapter specifically addresses political culture, a sub-set of larger cultures, and provides a theory of how political culture influences societal outcomes. This theory is equally applicable to not only individual countries but also to societal groups such as government departments, military services, political parties, international governmental organizations (IGOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), terrorist groups, organized crime syndicates, corporations, community groups, and many others.

Political culture stipulates the general processes used by a country or societal group to reach its goals (i.e., decisions about *who gets what, when, and how*<sup>1</sup>). This includes determining how a country or societal group is organized, how decisions are made, how power flows within the political structure, how both the leaders and the masses (citizens) view their societal roles, and how leaders and organizations interact with the government and among themselves to reach their goals.<sup>2</sup> Political culture is a major sub-component in explaining and predicting societal outputs, behaviors, and conditions. It also helps identify the constraints (or lack thereof) placed on country and societal group leaders.

In 1963, U.S. political scientists Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba's groundbreaking work *The Civic Culture*<sup>3</sup> first associated culture and modernization. Since then, there have been many scholarly attempts to classify differing political cultures and to use political culture as a factor to explain the strength of democracies and performance of governments. A synthesis of political culture literature reveals three principal types of political culture—**egalitarian**, **individualistic**, and **authoritarian**.<sup>4</sup> Uncovering the differences among these three

types of political cultures helps us understand the varying conditions in countries and societies.

## Theoretical Foundations of Political Cultures

The theoretical foundations of political cultures are shown in Figure 6.1.

<b>Figure 6.1</b>		<b>Theoretical Foundations of Political Cultures<sup>5</sup></b>		
<b>Dominant Rules</b>	<b>Commitment</b>	<b>Directive</b>	<b>Instruction</b>	
<b>Dominant Rules Purpose</b>	Create Roles	Provide Specificity, Sanctions	Delineate Values, Principles, Societal Beliefs	
<b>Dominant Rules Function</b>	What Have Right or Duty to Do	What Must Do	What Should Do (or Think)	
<b>Dominant Interests</b>	Wealth (Items of Value)	Security (Power)	Standing, Reputation	
<b>Form of Societal Rule</b>	Heteronomy	Hierarchy	Hegemony	
<b>Societal Rule Goals: Foster Good of...</b>	Entire Society (all levels)	Individuals and Specific Interest Groups (Political, Corporate, etc.)	Leaders and Governing Elites	
<b>Political Culture Type</b>	<b>Egalitarian</b>	<b>Individualistic</b>	<b>Authoritarian</b>	

The theoretical characteristics in Figure 6.1 are developed from the liberal rule-oriented constructivist approach to theorizing offered in U.S. social theorist Nicholas Onuf's book *World of our Making*.<sup>6</sup> The figure includes the key components of the rule-oriented constructivist theory of social rules in differing cultures. Social rules tell people (or agents) what they should do (or think), what

they must do, and what they have a right or duty to do. When people fail to follow rules, other supporting rules bring consequences (sanctions). Considering their material circumstances, some people choose to follow or disregard rules to achieve their goals. At the bottom of Figure 6.1 are columns correlating with the three principal types of political cultures—egalitarian, individualistic, and authoritarian—and their corresponding dominant rule structure.

Rule-oriented constructivists offer complex institutions consist of a constantly changing mix of three different categories of social rules. The term **institution** refers to patterns of rules, not just to the people and infrastructure (buildings, equipment, etc.) that make up an entity.<sup>7</sup> Each of the Figure 6.1 three categories of social rules has distinct purposes and functions.<sup>8</sup> First, **instruction rules** delineate the principles and beliefs informing agents (people and societal groups) of an institution's purposes. Instruction rules tell agents what they should do (or think). Second, **directive rules** provide specificity to the instruction-ruled principles and beliefs. Directive rules support instruction rules by telling agents what they must do. For directive rules to be effective, they must be supported by other rules (sanctions) stipulating the consequences if an agent does not follow a particular rule. Third, **commitment rules** create roles for agents; they tell agents what they have a right or duty to do. Commitment rules give some agents well-defined powers, while ensuring other agents those powers will not be abused.

How well these three categories of rules perform their assigned function depends upon their strength and formality. A rule's strength is determined by how frequently agents follow the rule. A rule's formality refers to a variety of conditions that set the rule apart and emphasize its importance. Figure 6.1 displays the correlation of the three different categories of social rule with the three principal types of political culture. While all political culture types have mixes of all three categories of rules, specific political culture types will be dominated by the corresponding rule shown in Figure 6.1.

Onuf further offers three principal interests corresponding to the dominant rules in a society and establish motives that govern social behavior and decision-

making—**standing, security, and wealth**.<sup>9</sup> An agent’s decision-making process includes consideration of all three of these interests; however, one interest usually dominates the final behavior or decision based on the situation’s surrounding structure. **Structure** refers to institutions and their intended or unintended consequences.<sup>10</sup> Where instruction rules dominate the decision-making situation, the agent’s principal interests are their **standing or reputation** among other internal or external agents. Standing entails an agent’s status or reputation among other agents and engenders feelings of esteem or envy. Where standing is the principal interest, the agent compares their situation with that of several other agents and then orders their behavioral preferences so they can be the best among agents. Where directive rules dominate a decision-making situation, the agent’s principal interests are **security**, which presents the agent with an awareness of threat (war, physical harm, job security, need for power, etc.). Where security is the agent’s principal interest, the agent compares their situation to that of one other agent (the one presenting the threat) and then orders their behavioral preferences so they can be the winner among agents. Where commitment rules dominate a decision-making situation, the agent’s principal interests are **wealth**. Wealth as an interest not only gives agents access to money or property but also includes other items of value such as health, education, civil liberties, political freedoms, and more.

The three categories of rules also foster three distinct forms of rule, or approaches for governing countries and societal groups. While all three rule categories exist in every society, those societies with a higher proportion of instruction rules are ruled by **hegemony**. The concept of hegemony used here follows the analysis of Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937),<sup>11</sup> who argues a governing class must persuade other classes in society to accept its moral, political, and cultural values, making a society’s ideology central to the characteristics of its governing system. As Onuf describes:

Hegemony refers to the promulgation and manipulation of principles and instructions by which superordinate powers monopolize meaning which is then passively absorbed by the subordinate actors. These activities constitute an arrangement of rule because the ruled are rendered incapable of comprehending their subordinate role. They cannot formulate alternative programs of action because they are inculcated with the self-serving ideology of the rulers who monopolize the production and dissemination of statements through which meaning is constituted.<sup>12</sup>

Societies with a higher proportion of directive rules are ruled by **hierarchy**. Onuf offers:

Hierarchy is the paradigm of rule most closely associated...as an arrangement of directive rules, it is instantly recognizable as bureaucracy. The relations of *bureaux*, or offices, form the typical pattern of super- and subordination, but always in ranks, such that each office is both subordinate to the one(s) above it and superordinate to the ones below.... The visualization of this arrangement of ranks linked by directives is the familiar pyramid of organization charts.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, societies with a higher proportion of commitment rules are ruled by **heteronomy**. The use of this term is traced to German Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who refers to heteronomy as a condition of not having autonomy. Onuf summarizes:

Kant posited heteronomy as an objective principle or command of reason, which constitutes the imperative guide for moral conduct in a situation. Here the individual faces a world of contingency and thus of uncertainty with respect to the consequences of any willful action. Citizens can do no better than heteronomy.<sup>14</sup>

Heteronomy defines a condition where leaders are never fully autonomous and whose decisions toward particular ends are bounded both by societal rules and their material means. Commitment rules stipulate promises by some agents, promises that become the rights (i.e., promises kept) of other agents. Conditions of formal and strong commitment rules massively restrict agent autonomy.<sup>15</sup>

A society's goals correlate with their rule-based institutions as defined by the three categories of rules and forms of rule. A society dominated by instructional rules and governed by hegemony possesses goals related primarily to the **good of the leaders and governing elites** and focus less on the good of the masses. A society dominated by directive rules and governed by hierarchy demonstrates goals defining the **good of specific individuals and groups**. The groups can be either members of or associated with the governing hierarchy, which could include a variety of political, economic, and social interest groups. A society dominated by commitment rules and governed by heteronomy creates goals related to the **good of the entire society**. The theoretical foundations of political cultures thus correspond with Onuf's rule-oriented constructivist framework and is further supported by societal empirical conditions discussed next.

## **Empirical Conditions Correlating with Different Political Cultures**

Based on a country or societal group's rule-based theoretical foundations in Figure 6.1, empirical (factual) correlations and some causal mechanisms are comparable with the country or societal group's conditions. These empirical conditions emerge over decades, if not centuries, as countries and societies develop their rule-based institutions. Figure 6.2 provides a summary of a country or societal group's empirical conditions correlating with the three types of political cultures. Governing ideologies, governing systems, and religions in Figure

6.2 may be classified by type based on the below discussions. Several IGOs and NGOs have devised methods to measure some of the country and societal groups' empirical conditions in Figure 6.2 and are discussed in more detail below.

Following Figure 6.2 is a discussion of each of the political culture types correlated with the empirical societal issues and measurements each generates.

<b>Figure 6.2</b>		<b>Empirical Conditions Correlating with Political Cultures</b>		
<b>Societal Issue Areas</b>	<b>Egalitarian</b>	<b>Individualistic</b>	<b>Authoritarian</b>	
<b>Governing Ideology</b>	Marxist, Liberal	Mixed Liberal-Realist	Realist	
<b>Governing System</b>	Strong Democracies (Polyarchies), Full Communism	New, Transitional, or Weak Democracies	Nationalists, Autocrats, Oligarchs, Dictators, Fascists	
<b>Religion</b>	Presbyterian Christian, Mixed, No Religion	Episcopalian Christian, Hinduism, Judaism	Eastern Orthodox Christian, Islamic, Buddhist	
<b>Economic and Resource Management</b>	Market, Neoliberal (Free)	Statist, Moderately Regulated (Mostly Free)	Patrimonial, Highly Regulated (Mostly Unfree, Repressed)	
<b>Levels of Political Rights &amp; Civil Liberties</b>	Free	Free/Partly Free	Not Free	
<b>Levels of Rule of Law</b>	Strong	Selective	Weak	
<b>Elite Accountability</b>	Significant	Some	Little	
<b>Levels of Corruption</b>	Incidental (Low)	Institutional (Moderate)	Systemic (High)	

<b>Levels of Civic Engagement &amp; Social Capital</b>	High	Moderate	Low
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**Governing Ideologies and Systems.<sup>16</sup>**

Classifying governing ideologies resulting from the social rules structure in Figure 6.1 is a challenging and complex task because hybrid governing ideologies combine aspects of different mainstream political ideologies. This complexity contributes to several hybrid governing systems. This section discusses mainstream governing ideologies and conditions found in the world today. The International Governmental Organization (IGO) World Bank authors an annual report on *World Governance Indicators*.<sup>17</sup> The report’s authors assess several indicators of the societal outputs of various world countries. For this section, the World Bank’s assessment of government effectiveness assists in evaluating how different governing ideologies correlate with societal outputs (empirical conditions). Government effectiveness indicates perceptions of the quality of a country’s public services, quality of the civil service, degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies.<sup>18</sup>

Most social science textbooks classify the mainstream governing ideologies or theories into three main approaches. These approaches, and their synonymous names in parentheses, include **Marxism** (radicalism, critical theory), **liberalism** (idealism, globalism, neoliberalism, pluralism), and **realism** (neorealism, populism, patrimonialism, nationalism). These three approaches generally postulate that physical or natural science methods may be applied to the study of human behavior and therefore, social science combining empiricism and rationalism is possible. Marxism, liberalism, and realism can all be considered part of the Positivist approach to social science (behavioralism). These three theoretical

approaches differ; however, in their **ontologies**, or views of how the world works. Because of differing ontologies, these three theoretical approaches have widely differing assumptions. Each of these approaches has its own lineage of philosophical literature dating back hundreds, if not thousands, of years and can be attributed to the likes of Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Marx, and many others.

The discussion below summarizes each of the three mainstream social science ideological approaches and provides their central assumptions. *Note:* More recent post-positivist or post-modernist approaches to social theory are not included here because they are not the governing ideologies found in existing countries and societal groups.

**Marxism: the Layer Cake Approach.** Marxists see **economics as the key causal mechanism** for explaining social behavior. German philosopher Karl Marx (1818-1883) is the primary author of this approach, with much of his material building on the work of the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). To Marxists, the base, or larger bottom layer of a two-layer cake, consists of a society's economic institutions and resources. The superstructure, or smaller second layer of a two-layer cake, constitutes a society's political, cultural, religious, and other non-economic institutions. Marxists believe the base, or economics, conditions all society's other institutions in the superstructure. Marxism's central assumptions include:

1. To assess political, economic, and social behavior, the structure (base) of the country or society's economic system must first be understood.
2. Social behavior must be viewed from a historical perspective. Marx's analytic methodology was historical materialism using the dialectic.
3. Mechanisms of domination (exploitation) in a country or societal system must be identified.

4. Economics are recognized as the driving force of the non-economic institutions (superstructure) of the country or society's social system.

Marxist analyses focus on class conflict and economic exploitation. In domestic analyses of both capitalist and authoritarian countries the principal class conflict is between the owners of the means of production (*bourgeoisie*) and the workers (*proletariat*), who sell their labor to the bourgeoisie. By not paying the proletariat a fair market price for their labor, the bourgeoisie generate "excess (surplus) value" from their enterprises, which become their profits and sources of wealth. The bourgeoisie thus exploits the proletariat under capitalist and authoritarian systems.

Beginning with Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924), one of the founders of the Soviet Union, international Marxists applied the Marxist framework of class conflict and economic exploitation to the world governing and economic systems. The international bourgeoisie are considered the developed countries (core), and the international proletariats are considered the developing countries (periphery). International Marxists offer that the core has constructed a world economic structure (capitalism) that extracts labor and natural resources from the periphery. The core generates its excess value (profits) by exploiting the periphery, as it does not pay the periphery a fair market price for its labor and natural resources. The core is facilitated in its exploitation of the periphery by key core agents (developing country ruling elite; multi-national corporations; and IGOs such as the World Trade Organization, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, etc.), which assist the core in building and strengthening the world system of economic exploitation. International Marxists argue that as long as this dependent core-periphery structure exists, developing countries will continue to experience widespread poverty and underdevelopment.

Marx predicted capitalism would eventually give way to a new economic structure he labeled **socialism**. He viewed the core of socialism as country (government) vice private ownership of the means of production. Under

socialism, the workers themselves both manage and work in production and equally distribute the output (materials and profits) of production to the larger population. Marx also theorized how democracy would eventually give way to a governing structure of **full communism**, i.e., the creation of a perfect, classless, minimally governed system, with a horizontal vice vertical structure where governing actions would be coordinated by committees of workers. Under full communism, international borders would disappear as the entire world would become a classless society. Beyond that, Marx was vague about additional details of his vision of full communism. Many political leaders and the world public often conflate socialism and communism as the same thing—but, as Marx theorized, socialism is an economic system and communism is a political system. No country has ever been governed by Marx's vision of full communism.

Marx wrote little about intercountry (interstate) conflict because he focused more on the internal struggle (conflict) of the proletariat against the oppressive bourgeoisie owners of the means of production. As Lenin took the basic tenets of Marxism and applied them to the international arena, he offered that the world would be in a constant state of conflict as long as there was uneven international development (rich and poor countries). The causes of this uneven development were that the core rich countries—especially the imperialistic colonial powers—were exploiting the peripheries' poor developing countries. Lenin called for an international brotherhood, known as the Communist International, of the developing countries to throw off the yoke of the oppressive capitalist developed countries, with an end goal of all world countries uniting in one socialist/communist system. Lenin offered intercountry conflicts started or supported by Marxist countries were thus justified as both a struggle against the capitalists and as movement toward establishing the world state of socialism/communism.

Many thought Marxism disappeared with the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union—this is not the case. China, Vietnam, Cuba, and North Korea still practice self-designed forms of Marxism. Marxism was (and still is in some cases) the

foundation of educational systems in much of Eastern Europe, Russia, former Soviet Republics, Africa, and Latin America.

The Soviets took the basic ideas of Marx's socialism and molded them into a government-owned patrimonial (command) economic system directed by an authoritarian governing elite, i.e., an **Authoritarian-Socialist** country. Under the Soviets the workers never managed their own production--which is not what Marx theorized. While many countries still give lip service to Marxism-Leninism, socialism, and communism, in fact no country has created economic or governing systems even close to the original ideas of Marx. A large majority of developing-country scholars, politicians, and populaces still embrace a Marxist-Leninist view of the world structure, which strongly conditions their thinking and behavior. Many scholars and policy makers outside the United States or other developed countries think, write, and behave from a Marxist point of view.

Many developed countries (Western Europe, Scandinavia, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, etc.) have adopted some socialist tenets as they created **Democratic-Socialist (Social Democratic)** economic systems. Democratic-Socialists seek to promote a more equal distribution of societal wealth. They see pure capitalism as incompatible with the ideals of liberty, equality, and solidarity. These developed countries do not embrace government ownership of the means of production, except when vital citizen services are not provided by the private sector; but they do deliver strong citizen social programs (health care, childcare, education, housing, food assistance, retirement programs, etc.).

Overall, **Marxist-Socialist** ideas, as developed by Marx and not as manipulated by the Soviets and other authoritarian regimes, are far from gone. Marx theorized a normative (what ought to be) future ideal condition for a world without societal conflict. To true Marxists the world will reach this ideal condition with the rise of socialist economies and eventual attainment of a world political system of full communism.

**Liberalism: the Cobweb Approach.** Liberals see the world as a mass of abstract interlocking webs (similar to cobwebs or spider webs), where the nodes of the webs (locations where web strands meet and/or cross) are both government and non-government actors. The web strands indicate the nature of the relationships or interactions between the various nodes. The denser the web, the more constrained government and non-government actors find themselves. Liberalism traces its roots to the writings of Plato, Aristotle, John Locke, and Immanuel Kant, among others. Liberal central assumptions include:

1. Country specific actors and IGOs, plus non-governmental actors, i.e., Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), multi-national corporations, terrorist groups, etc., are all important actors in the international arena and cannot be ignored.
2. Countries are not unitary actors; i.e., countries are made up of many actors and/or institutions that do not necessarily pursue the same policy goals on key issues.
3. Countries are not rational actors; i.e., country decision making is really a complex mix of coalition and counter-coalition building, bargaining, and compromise, which might not lead to optimal decisions.
4. Agendas of country politicians are extensive and complex; i.e., not dominated by military-security concerns.

Countries adopting liberal governing ideologies tend to be **democracies**, a system where citizens elect their government. Several different forms of democracy have emerged (presidential, parliamentary, mixed presidential-parliamentary, constitutional-monarchies, etc.). All democracies are not alike; some are new, transitional, or weak, while others entail mature, strong (polyarchic) governing systems.

Liberals do not see the world as in a constant state of war. They recognize the international system is based on an anarchic structure, where there is no

single all-powerful governing authority above countries. Liberals see the international system of anarchy as being regulated by international law and cooperation fostered by international institutions arrayed in ever-denser webs. They realize; however, that international law does not guarantee justice or prevent all intercountry conflict. Liberals argue countries have the right to make war when they have been injured in intercountry disputes, and international negotiations or legal proceedings do not provide satisfaction. Instead of focusing on war, liberals place more effort in seeking peace.

A key component in the liberal approach to peace is **Democratic-Peace Theory**. This theory offers that democracies do not go to war with each other (an empirical fact) because democratic values on both sides of a conflict will lead to cooperation and compromise to avoid armed conflict. However, it is also empirically supported how democracies will go to war with non-democracies, who do not share their same values. Democratic-Peace Theory also demonstrates democracies will be internally more peaceful than other political systems. The liberal approach offers how as democracy becomes more widespread, the world will become more peaceful, and other world problems (e.g., poverty, human rights violations, environmental degradation, corruption, etc.) eventually will be resolved. To liberals, a condition of total world peace is possible at some point in the future. The tenets of Democratic-Peace Theory drove U.S. foreign policy for decades after the end of World War II.

**Realism: the Billiard Ball Approach.** Realists see the world as an array of self-contained countries covered by hard outer shells (i.e., as billiard balls). The balls roll around the billiard table (world stage), frequently interacting (bumping into each other) and sometimes forming alliances with other balls (countries), but also frequently colliding (in conflict) with other balls. Realism traces its philosophical roots to the writings of Thucydides, Nicollò Machiavelli, and Thomas Hobbes, among others. Realist central assumptions include:

1. Countries are the principal and most important actors in the world system; i.e., country institutions, IGOs, and non-governmental actors are of secondary importance.
2. Countries are unitary actors; i.e., the country has one consistent policy on key issues.
3. Countries are rational actors; i.e., countries make decisions based on their goals and cost-benefit analyses.
4. National security tops the list of important issues; i.e., international military-security issues are considered high politics, while all other issues such as economics and the environment, etc., are considered low politics.

Country power is the most important concept to realists. While there is no one agreed-upon definition of power, it is generally based on the amount of military and economic power a country possesses that can be employed to influence the behavior of other countries. Countries with more power have larger billiard balls (i.e., the United States is really a bowling ball in comparison to Barbados' tiny marble). **Balance-of-power** is also an important realist concept, whereby several countries will create an alliance to thwart the threat from other countries. Rational Choice Theory, and its sub-fields of Game Theory and Public Choice Theory, are used widely by realists.

While there are democracies and democratic leaders who govern from a quasi-realist world view, the majority of realist countries are authoritarian non-democracies. Countries employing an authoritarian approach tend to adopt governing systems that are nationalistic, autocratic, dictatorial, fascist, absolute-monarchical, oligarchical, sultanistic, or totalitarian. Authoritarian countries usually lack citizen participation in government and place severe restrictions on citizens' political rights and civil liberties as discussed below.

Realists see the world as a "nasty and brutish" place.<sup>19</sup> To realists, there is no ideal end-state for humans, just a continuing cycle of human conflict. Realists take a pragmatic approach to world problems and believe intercountry conflict

can best be reduced, for at least short periods of time, by good diplomacy including a combination of alliance formation and proper application of power. Realists see the causes of war as human nature (rage, pride, reputation, revenge, etc.), in addition to differences in the nature of countries or societies (different governing approaches, economic structures, and cultures) and the nature of the intercountry system (shifts in relative power, capability imbalances, alliances, etc.). The **security dilemma** is a realist concept for explaining outbreaks of war. This concept offers that as one country improves its security by building a stronger military, it may instead find it has actually decreased its security as its neighboring countries get worried and start building their militaries too (i.e., a perpetual arms race). A security dilemma is usually caused by perceptions or misperceptions of country leaders.

## **Religion and Culture**

A country or society's points of view affecting its decisions and behaviors often are strongly influenced by religion. The rules, institutions, and structures of religions can influence how a country or society is organized and run. It is important that thinkers understand the religious influences that affect their thinking projects. This requires an in-depth search for information on how religion affects the leaders and societies under study, including how it affects political cultures.

The foundation of a religion consists of its sacred texts and supporting materials defining the values, ethics, rules/institutions, and myths of the religion.<sup>20</sup> There are numerous world religions, but the majority of the world lives in countries under what scholars usually consider the five great religions (listed in order of emergence): Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Each of the great religions are further divided into denominations or sects, which interpret the sacred texts of the religion in different ways. There are often radical

sects whose interpretations of the sacred texts are well outside the mainstream. For example, Islamic Middle Eastern terrorist groups employ a radical interpretation of the *Quran* to justify  *jihad*—armed struggle against non-believers (non-Islamics). Several U.S. white-supremacist hate groups use a radical interpretation of *The Bible* to support their racist ideologies and violent activities.<sup>21</sup>

Political leaders benefit from a supportive majority religion because it offers “...divine sanction to their governance, legitimizes the social order, and can be used to establish boundaries to keep apart or establish links among people.”<sup>22</sup> Most religions prescribe a framework of social ethics, including helping the poor, caring for others, and proscribing murder and stealing. If mixed with political nationalism, and the two become indistinguishable, religion can have extremely strong influences on societies. This may even result in religious leaders assuming direct or indirect roles as governing officials. Political leaders who claim the sanction of religion may bestow favors on its institutions and leaders. The country may pay the salaries of religious leaders and in return they rarely criticize a political leader. Subsidies for religious institutions, either indirectly through exemption from taxation, as in the United States, or through direct subsidies for their institutions, often facilitate religious leader silence and support.<sup>23</sup>

Government interaction with religion was seen in how the Roman Catholic Church supported Spanish and Portuguese rulers as part of the colonization of the Americas beginning around 1494 CE. Along with Spanish and Portuguese military and political leaders, Roman Catholic missionaries were dispatched to spread their religion in the Americas. The Roman Catholic Church allied with and was supported by the colonizing military and political leaders and failed to speak up about Spanish and Portuguese abuses of indigenous peoples. It was not until 1542, when Roman Catholic priest Bartolomé de las Casas published his *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* that a church official spoke out about the Spanish enslavement and other atrocities committed against the indigenous peoples of the Americas. Based on de la Casa’s writings and his personal appeals

to the Spanish King, a Spanish New Law was issued dismantling the past *encomienda* system allowing Spanish colonizers to enslave non-Christian people. Even with the New Law and de la Casas' influence at the Spanish court, the Roman Catholic Church continued to ally closely with the oppressive governance of colonizing Spanish and Portuguese elites. Past abusive relationships are hard to change.

Figure 6.2 correlates different political culture types, religions, and empirical conditions with differing political cultures. These correlations; however, are not "set in stone" and will often differ based on a combination of: (1) the differing interpretations of the sacred religious texts in a society, and (2) the population percentages of members of main and/or different religions in a country or society.

The majority of Eastern Orthodox Christian, Buddhist, and Islamic countries tend to be developing countries with authoritarian political cultures as they are still in the early phases of modernization and maintain "strongman" rule. However, there has been democratization in some countries with these majority religions. Over the past few decades, the Eastern Orthodox Christian country of Georgia displays an individualistic political culture, while Eastern Orthodox Christian Greece displays a mixed individualistic-egalitarian political culture. Mongolia is a majority Buddhist country with an individualistic political culture. Among Islamic countries, Tunisia has moved away from a strong authoritarian political culture and now displays a mixed authoritarian-individualistic political culture.

Majority Episcopalian Christian, Hindu, and Jewish countries tend to have individualistic political cultures. As introduced in Chapter 5, Episcopalian Christian churches are hierarchical top-down governed. Roman Catholics, Church of England (Anglican), and some Evangelical churches are Episcopalian Christian. Hindu and Jewish countries are hard to correlate with political cultures. India is the most populated majority Hindu country and Israel is the only majority Jewish

country, and both display individualistic political cultures based on other Figure 6.2 assessments.

Presbyterian Christian, mixed (no majority religion), and no-religion (secular) countries usually possess egalitarian political cultures. As described in Chapter 5, Presbyterian Christian religions use a bottom-up governing approach starting with the congregation. Presbyterian Christian churches include Lutherans, Baptists, Methodists, Church of Scotland, Presbyterian, and other protestant congregations. Countries with a mix of religions (no majority religion), or those significantly secular (large percentages of the population reporting no religious affiliation), tend toward egalitarian cultures. For example, mixed religions in Asian countries Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan contributed to these countries' modernization after World War II resulting in present-day egalitarian or mixed individualistic-egalitarian political cultures. All three of these Asian countries embrace combinations of Buddhism and Taoism (Confucianism), plus Shintoism (in Japan), and Christianity (in South Korea).

It may be a challenge to uncover exactly how religion influences a country or society's empirical conditions, but religion's role in creating political cultures is important to determine.

## **Economic and Resource Management**

Economic and resource management refers to the freedom of citizens to control their own labor and property and the efficient use of public resources. In an economically free society, individuals and businesses are free to work, produce, consume, and invest in any way they please (provided they follow the country or society's laws). In economically free societies, governments allow labor, capital, and goods to move freely, and refrain from coercion or constraints beyond the extent necessary to protect and maintain liberty itself. The NGO Heritage Foundation publishes an annual Index of Economic Freedom.<sup>24</sup> It assesses a

country's economic legal structure and implementation, size of government, regulatory efficiency, and open market conditions. Then on a scale of 0 (worst) to 100 (best), each country's level of economic freedom is rated ranging from repressed to free. The general characteristics of country economic and resource management systems are described below based on economic conditions as market (free), statist (mostly free), and patrimonial (mostly unfree or repressed).

**Market** economic and resource management systems are normally associated with egalitarian political cultures. Current countries with market economies employ free-market capitalism. Marxist-Socialist economic and resource management systems would also be egalitarian—in theory—but no such countries have ever truly existed. Thus, this discussion focuses on market-based systems presenting the neoliberal ideal of free and open economies and efficient country-owned resource management. Taking their lead from the works of Scottish economist and philosopher Adam Smith<sup>25</sup> and British economist David Ricardo,<sup>26</sup> market systems view the main role for the country's government in the economy is to provide public goods the market is unable to provide (monetary systems, public transportation infrastructure, etc.). Government-ownership of enterprises is contemplated only if the enterprise has no competition, and government-ownership is in the public's best interest (airlines, power plants, etc.). Market systems enjoy maximum economic transparency and openness. Government-owned resource management in market systems is efficient and transparent. Overall, market-based systems present the fewest opportunities for government officials' rent seeking (corruption).

**Statist** economic and resource management systems are normally associated with individualistic political cultures. They are characterized as moderately regulated capitalism. Statist systems experience moderate government control of a country's economy and government-owned resources. These systems often utilize a mix of patrimonial and free-market mechanisms to manage their economies, while still providing the governing elite ample

opportunities for rent seeking. Knowing their opportunities to accumulate capital are dependent upon their control of the country's resources and economic processes, governing and corporate elite in statist systems strive to ensure they play key decision-making roles in economic and country resource management. Statist systems include some protectionism of foreign trade (tariffs), some government ownership of key enterprises and infrastructure, and a strong emphasis on regulations (licensing, contracting procedures, etc.), allowing substantial rent seeking (corruption) by government officials. In effect, governing elite in statist systems see the country's economy and resources as their own private business resources and regulate them in a manner providing ample opportunity for illicit capital accumulation.<sup>27</sup>

**Patrimonial** economic and resource management systems are normally associated with authoritarian political cultures. They are characterized by repressed economic systems. Patrimonial systems foster maximum government control by limiting which classes of citizens (normally only the governing elite) have access to material resources. In these systems the small governing elite tightly control the economy and decide, often capriciously, how government-owned resources are distributed. Patrimonial systems are usually not transparent and provide almost unlimited opportunities for rent seeking (corruption). The governing elite are given the opportunity to use the national treasury and the country's resources as if they were their own personal property, and decide what, if any, resources may be distributed for the public good. To maximize their access to societal resources, governments with patrimonial systems maintain strict control over their economies, usually including high levels of protectionism of foreign trade (high tariffs, etc.), high personal and corporate taxes, government-ownership of major enterprises (public utilities, basic foodstuff production, etc.) and infrastructure (ports, airports, railroads, etc.), strict wage and price controls, and a variety of strict regulations (licensing, contracting, customs procedures, etc.) allowing maximum rent seeking by government officials. One analysis of

underdeveloped societies found where extensive patrimonialism existed, “the majority of the population are more or less permanently excluded” from the benefits of country resources.<sup>28</sup>

## **Political Rights and Civil Liberties**

How a country treats its people can be a major indicator of the effectiveness of its system of government. This is captured in the political rights and civil liberties a country allows its people. Political rights refer to citizens’ rights to be involved in the establishment and administration of a governing system, including the right to vote, hold public office, and participate in other political activities (attending government meetings, peaceful protesting, etc.). Ideally, these political rights allow participation in political life without discrimination or repression. Civil liberties allow for freedom of thought, expression, and peaceful action. Civil liberties are usually established in a country or society’s laws that are enacted for the good of the community. In the United States, the *Constitution and Bill of Rights* provided the foundation for political rights and civil liberties. Former U.S. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt championed the establishment of international standards for political rights and civil liberties as she led efforts to establish the 1948 *United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights* used by NGO Freedom House to assess country and territory political rights and civil liberties. Freedom House creates a combined index rating countries and territories as free, partly free, and not free. By this rating, egalitarian political cultures tend to be free, individualistic political cultures free or partly free, and authoritarian political cultures as not free.

## Rule of Law

At its core, rule of law refers to conditions where people and institutions, both in the public and private sectors, are subject and accountable to law, regulations, and rules; and these are applied fairly to both the elite and masses. In a nutshell, it means the laws of a country or society are obeyed by everyone and enforced fairly. This assumes there is a process to enact laws that are fair to all individuals and institutions and prevents the abuse of power. It also assumes there are fair systems to interpret the law, enforce the law, adjudicate individuals and organizations found violating the law, apply sanctions, and intervene when there are civil disputes.

There is no single definition or agreed-upon measurement of rule of law. The World Bank's *World Governance Indicators* and Freedom House's *Freedom in the World*, both discussed above, include differing rule of law evaluation factors in their research. One of the more comprehensive measurements of rule of law is found in the NGO World Justice Project's annual *Rule of Law Index*.<sup>29</sup> The World Justice Project's annual index focuses on two main principles. First, whether the law constrains the exercise of power by the country, individuals, and private organizations. Second, does the law serve the public's interests, protect people from violence, and ensure methods to mediate disputes and grievances. To measure these principles the *Rule of Law Index* includes assessments of constraints on government power, absence of corruption, openness of government, fundamental rights, order and security, regulatory enforcement, civil justice, and criminal justice. The *Rule of Law Index* is designed to be applicable to any governing ideology or governing system.

Differing political cultures have different levels of rule of law accountability. Egalitarian political cultures tend to have strong rule of law where both elites and citizens are equally held accountable for violating societal rules. Individualistic political cultures tend toward selective rule of law, with governing leaders and certain interest groups seldom being held accountable for their actions.

Authoritarian political cultures usually have weak rule of law accountability for their leaders and governing elites. In both individualistic and authoritarian political cultures, rule of law accountability is mainly used to control the masses (citizens), including initiating legal proceedings to suppress government opposition. Within Figure 6.2, two aspects of rule of law are especially important to assessing political cultures—levels of elite accountability and corruption.

**Elite Accountability.** Of particular concern to measures of rule of law is how a country or society's elite are held accountable. Ideally, leaders and elites, both those politically connected and the wealthy, should be treated equally under the law as do other members of the country or society. This means leaders and elites should be accountable to the same laws and should not be immune to legal sanctions. No one should be “above the law.” Unfortunately, this is often not the case in many countries or societies, especially in individualistic and authoritarian political cultures.

**Corruption.** The World Bank defines *corruption* as the “abuse of public office for private gain.” Corruption is limited to relationships between politics and government-owned resources (money, property, etc.). In the private sector, the illegal abuse of office for private gain is considered *fraud*. Both corruption and fraud are often known as rent seeking. When corrupt political leaders or elites enrich themselves through the abuse of public resources, it diverts these resources away from serving public interests. One of the main corrupt behaviors is when unregulated sources of money in politics unduly influence public policy in favor of the interests of the money's sources. Unregulated campaign donations, with future direct or implied expectations of reciprocity for the donor, are one of the main causes of corruption in democratic governing systems.

The World Bank's *World Governance Indicators*, Freedom House's *Freedom in the World*, and World Justice Project's *Rule of Law Index* research address country corruption levels. The most in-depth measure of corruption in individual

countries is produced by the NGO Transparency International in their annual *Corruption Perceptions Index*.<sup>30</sup> Transparency International research has found countries tend to have less corruption when political campaign financing is regulated, policymakers receive societal input from other than the politically connected and wealthy, and concentration of political power by the wealthy is limited.

## **Civic Engagement and Social Capital**

Individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern is a definition of **civic engagement**.<sup>31</sup> Found in many forms, civic engagement fosters electoral participation, organizational involvement, volunteer work, and a myriad of other civic activities.<sup>32</sup> Further, civic engagement is the ability of individuals and societal groups to jointly solve problems and achieve community political, economic, and social goals. Community engagement generates norms (informal rules) of reciprocity. At the individual level, it creates reciprocity conditions of “if I do something for you, then I expect you will do something for me.” At the larger societal level, it generates a broader general reciprocity of “if I do things for others, then at some time in the future others will do things for me.” Civic engagement activities are what U.S. Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam dubbed the “WD 40” that lubricates social interactions and builds trustworthiness throughout a society.<sup>33</sup> The strength of civic engagement directly cultivates a “sense of community,” speaks to the “social fabric” of a society, and is a significant factor in building social capital (trust) discussed below.

Putnam identified several categories of civic engagement and community participation that help build social trust (social capital).<sup>34</sup> Civic engagement (the focus of this book) includes not only voting but also volunteering to promote political candidates and working in polling stations. It also includes engaging

political leaders and government agencies at all levels through letter writing, personal meetings with office holders, political meeting attendance, and even political protest participation.

In addition to civic engagement, non-political **community participation** is also a key factor in building social capital. This entails membership and engagement with a myriad of NGOs ranging from Scout troops and food banks to professional and social organizations, among thousands of other NGO activities. It also includes religious community participation through membership in a religious group and engagement with other similar religious groups at the local, state, country, and national levels. Community participation occurs in the individual's specific workplace and with outside workplaces providing materials or other support to the individual's workplace, and with unions representing workers. Community participation also entails informal social community interactions with family and friends. Except for the rare individual isolated from the larger society, every individual will be members and participate at different levels with a variety of political, civic, religious, workplace, family, and other informal groups.

Scholars coined the term **social capital** to conceptualize the output of civic engagement and community participation to allow its study. Social capital is normally thought to include three major components: social networks, social norms, and social trust.<sup>35</sup> **Social networks** include the many nodes and connections of political, economic, and social groups and their relationships with individuals and among each other. This is similar to the "liberal cobweb" metaphor discussed earlier. The strength of the social networks can be determined by the number and nature of interactions among the many nodes. Sociologists have created methodological techniques of *network analysis* to study the size and strength of social networks. **Social rules** concern the laws, regulations, and informal norms that govern interactions for individuals and social groups. Of particular concern are the informal norms that help create general reciprocity. Social networks also include social norms (rules) that contribute to the creation of **social trust**; i.e., the ability to trust conditions of general

reciprocity among nodes. Since it cannot be directly measured with the human senses, social trust is an intersubjective factor measurable through observation of social interactions and by answers to survey questions about an individual's feelings concerning social trust. The terms social capital and social trust often are used interchangeably, but social capital is actually a broader concept incorporating social networks, social norms, and social trust.

Putnam identified two different types of social capital to better understand its effects in a society.<sup>36</sup> **Bonding social capital** is the level of trust generated within a social group (family, workplace, or societal group). An individual may belong to a number of social groups that build bonding social capital. Putnam offers that bonding social capital is the “superglue” holding individual social groups together and affecting their abilities to meet their goals.<sup>37</sup> **Bridging social capital** is the level of social trust generated by interactions among several groups outside of the bonded social group. Most social groups exist in a network of similar social groups. Bonding social capital is the previously mentioned “WD 40,” which lubricates relationships in the larger civil society.

Scholars have correlated social capital as a major factor in assessing societal conditions. Societies with higher levels of social capital have less crime and more secure neighborhoods; better health care, educational, and welfare systems; improved economies; and are overall happier.<sup>38</sup> For the United States in 2000, Putnam identified the region with the highest social capital as the upper-Midwest (Minnesota, Wisconsin, Dakotas, Iowa). He explains this region's higher social capital results largely from its population streams that originated in Scandinavia, Northern Europe, and West-Central Europe, regions that have the highest social capital in the world and foster the formation of complex civil societies with strong bridging social capital. Putnam also identified the U.S. region with the lowest social capital as the deep-South (Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and Tennessee). He explains this region's lower social capital results from the aftermath of slavery in the post-Civil War era where racial segregation (Jim Crow)

laws and policies kept these societies fractured along ethnic lines and retarded development of social capital and strong civil societies.<sup>39</sup>

Strong bonding social capital can also have negative societal effects; for example, it may become so strong as to deny group entry and benefits to non-members. Strong bonding also may produce pressure toward social conformity, thus limiting personal freedoms. Strongly bonded groups also may restrict their ability to bridge with other outside groups and thus retard the bonded group's ability to build bridging social capital by participating in the larger civic society. Mafia crime syndicates are examples of a strongly bonded social group with limited interactions with other groups. A Mafia group often is made up of family members and only the most loyal members from outside the family and normally only trust members who are part of the group. Mafia groups tend to distrust outsiders. Strict conformance with the bonded group's rules, usually established by a central leader or group of leaders, is expected from all group members. Such conditions of strong bonding social capital also will be found in other organized crime groups (drug cartels, international and domestic gangs, etc.), in addition to centrally controlled terrorist and insurgency groups.

Recently scholars have devised a number of methods to measure social capital in states, countries, and among societal groups. The World Bank focuses on researching social capital in developing countries, as it has been shown that lower social capital retards sustainable development.<sup>40</sup> Several international governmental organizations, including the World Bank, and NGOs also conduct research and publish measurements of social capital for all world countries.<sup>41</sup> While several researchers study social capital in the United States, the Pennsylvania State University Northeast Center for Rural Development (NECRD) developed social capital measures down to the county level in each U.S. state.<sup>42</sup> Using a different measurement methodology than Putnam, NECRD county-level social capital measures from 1990 to 2014 corresponded closely to Putnam's 2000 state-level assessments in terms of social capital levels in different U.S. states. The NECRD measures revealed two interesting insights. First, social capital levels do

not change appreciably over time. And second, individual U.S. states are not homogenous when it comes to social capital levels, as some counties or cities within the same state have much higher levels of social capital than others.

Since 2014, social capital has likely declined in the United States for two main reasons. First, the reliance on mobile computing and communication devices (digital phones, tablets, laptop computers) has isolated many U.S. citizens and degraded person-to-person interactions. This was especially true during the 2020 COVID 19 Pandemic lockdown. Such isolation has consequences for both bonding and bridging social capital. Second, U.S. politics have become so conflictual that people tend to avoid others not with their same political beliefs. Media reporting reveals this has affected both family structures and workplaces.

## **Summary of the Three Types of Political Culture**

The previous discussion covered the rule-based theoretical foundations and empirical conditions of the three types of political culture: egalitarian, individualistic, and authoritarian. Referring to Figures 6.1 and 6.2, this section summarizes the key characteristics of each type of political culture and reveals some of the macro-level conditions created by each type of political culture.

### **Egalitarian Political Cultures**

Egalitarian (civic) political cultures are ruled by heteronomy. An indicator of heteronomous rule is a lack of leader autonomy; i.e., governing elite behaviors are severely restricted by societal rules. It is found in mature, strong democracies (polyarchies—see Chapter 5) where the governing elite voluntarily change often as the result of free and fair elections. Although full communism is theorized as falling within egalitarian political cultures, communism as conceptualized by Marx has never existed at the country level.

Egalitarian societies are highly integrated and complex. Social and economic transactions in egalitarian cultures are conducted widely among a variety of differentiated groups. Individuals may belong to several political, economic, and social groups and have a large array of interests. Because of the widespread horizontal interactions and communications across differentiated groups, high levels of social capital (trust) develop in egalitarian cultures.<sup>43</sup> Economic and resource management in egalitarian cultures tend to be market-based with an emphasis on free trade and minimal government economic regulation. Egalitarian cultures generally are found in developed countries that received their population streams and political ideology from Scandinavia, Northern Europe, and Western Europe; but some smaller Asian countries also have developed egalitarian characteristics.

Members of egalitarian political cultures see politics as a public activity centered on the idea of the public good and devoted to the advancement of the public interest. The search for the common good is the controlling rule of egalitarian politics. These political cultures view politics as healthy and promote wide-scale involvement of civil society in political decision making. Egalitarian political officials vie for power just as those in other societies; however, their ultimate objective is less self-interested and self-serving and focus more on the search for the good of society. Leaders of egalitarian political cultures reject the notion that politics is a legitimate realm for private economic enrichment (corruption or fraud). While political parties and interest groups exist in egalitarian political cultures, their influence on political decision making is more nuanced, but still have some impact on government policy (but less than in individualistic societies). Political competition is focused on societal issues. Egalitarian government structures are organized hierarchically; however, their bureaucracies tend to be smaller and flatter than similarly sized individualistic societies. In egalitarian societies, political decision-making processes and communications tend to be more horizontal, including inputs from a large array of

public and private groups. The rule of law is strong in egalitarian political cultures and applies equally to the masses and governing elite.

Egalitarian political cultures were the driving force behind a worldwide movement entitled “The New World Order.” This movement arose after World War II and existed for over 70 years. In the United States both liberal and conservative governments promoted and supported The New World Order. The worldwide tenets of this movement followed egalitarian principles and were driven by not only countries but also IGOs and NGOs. These tenets included:

1. Advancement of Democracy worldwide (political rights and civil liberties).
2. Cultivation of International Free Trade—no tariffs, no non-tariff trade barriers.
3. Provision of International Aid to developing countries to prevent starvation and spread of diseases and provide health and education assistance.
4. Globalization (integration) of international communications, politics, security alliances, economics, sports, entertainment, etc.
5. Nurturing of International Environmental Stewardship.

Beginning in 2017, U.S. political culture began a transition from the New World Order to one more individualistic stressing aspects of nationalism and isolationism (see below). This helps explain the U.S. democracy decline in Figure 1.1.

## **Individualistic Political Cultures**

Individualistic political cultures exist in hierarchical ruled countries and societies. Organizational pyramids and military chains-of-command are typical structures associated with hierarchical rule, a situation where governing elites are changeable by regular elections—but not always free and fair ones—or by organizational appointments. Governing elites dominate the very top of the

hierarchy in individualistic political cultures. Hierarchical forms of rule normally are found in new, transitional, or weak democracies.

Individualistic societies are more integrated and complex than authoritarian societies, but less so than egalitarian societies. Within individualistic political cultures, social and economic transactions are conducted among people from different groups. Individuals frequently shift from one group to another and have a broader range of interests. Economic and resource management tends to be statist with government regulation to ensure elites benefit from the economic structure. Individual or group self-interest is the governing rule of this type of culture. The need to interact with persons from other groups to serve one's own self-interests results in a moderate level of social trust.

Individualistic political cultures view government as strictly utilitarian—to provide those functions demanded by the citizens it serves.<sup>44</sup> People in this culture see politics as a business; i.e., another means by which individuals can improve themselves socially and economically. Political competition revolves around individual attempts to achieve security by gaining and maintaining political or economic power. Politicians in individualistic societies are more interested in public office as a means for self-interested benefit than as a chance to build a better society. Political life in individualistic political cultures is based upon systems of mutual obligation that are rooted in personal relationships. These systems of mutual obligation usually are harnessed through the interactions of political parties, corporate elites, and powerful interest groups. Citizen participation in political decision-making is conducted through networks of political parties and interest groups that attempt to influence government policy. Patron-client relationships generated by the system of political parties, corporate elites, powerful interest groups, and government bureaucracies emerge in individualistic political cultures. Individualistic political cultures are extremely legalistic; however, the rule of law—while stronger than in authoritarian societies—remains focused primarily on controlling the masses and generates only limited accountability for the governing elite.

Individualistic political cultures include governing systems based in “rational-legal authority” as theorized by German Sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920).<sup>45</sup> Weber offered that to obtain efficient, flexible, and competent governance a rational-legal system was the ideal. These systems are based on strict laws, rules, and regulations (a lawyer’s dream). They have a clear division of labor, defined hierarchy of authority, and definite formal rules. Weber theorized impersonality should be desired with citizen allegiance to the governing system or ideology and not to specific governing officials.

## **Authoritarian Political Cultures**

Authoritarian (traditional) political cultures generally exist in countries with hegemonic forms of rule. Hegemonic rule indicates a central single-ruler or small governing elite who monopolize and mandate the values, principles, and beliefs (ideology) of the society—this is accomplished through either coercion or cooptation of the institutions of society. These countries tend to be ruled by nationalists, autocrats, dictators, oligarchs, or fascists.

Authoritarian societies are simple and segregated. Social and economic transactions in these societies are organized around small groups defined by familial, kinship, tribal, political, ethnic, religious, class, linguistic, or other social relationships. Each group tends to have its own narrow base of interests. Paternalism is the main intra-group controlling concept in authoritarian cultures; i.e., the father or group leader decides what is best for the family or group (like a mafia family). The best interests of the leaders and elites are the most important governing rule in authoritarian societies. Loyalty to the leader/group and maintaining the traditional status quo are other important rules. Economic and resource management tend to be patrimonial with the leaders and elites

controlling the structure and processes of the economy. With most social and economic transactions carried out within groups (intra-group), intergroup social trust (bridging social capital) in authoritarian cultures is often weak.

Authoritarian political cultures place power in the hands of a small and self-perpetuating governing elite who often inherit the right to govern through family ties or social position.<sup>46</sup> The hegemonic rule in authoritarian countries is often personal, meaning loyalty to the leader(s) is foremost and not based in a particular ideology or governing system. The method of rule often relies on strong patron-client systems of informal reciprocity, where the clients (citizens or specific groups) pledge their economic and political support to patrons (governing elite) for access to government positions and resources.<sup>47</sup> Political competition in these societies is primarily among the small group of self-perpetuating governing elite. Politics is considered a privilege in authoritarian political cultures, and those active in politics are expected to benefit personally from their efforts.

Authoritarian polities are centrally organized with the powerful governing elite constituting the central core of the most dominant societal group. The rule of law is weak in authoritarian political cultures, focused primarily on controlling the masses and offering little accountability for the governing elite.

Authoritarian countries tend to be nationalistic, where the leaders see their country as superior to others. Recent Western nationalistic movements prioritize their individual countries and seek to safeguard national traditions and culture over promoting democracy, encouraging free trade, or building global alliances.<sup>48</sup> Nationalists often try to use patriotism to rally their citizens behind their isolationist rule—but these efforts usually are **counterfeit agendas** as the real goal (**hidden agenda**) is the perpetuation of the power of the ruling elite that offers minimal benefit to the masses. At the extremes, nationalistic countries tend to generate discrimination and prejudice among their citizens and with external actors. This can result in xenophobia, intolerance (racism), military expansion, imperialism, and nativist (anti-immigration) sentiments. Nationalism may also lead to internal and diplomatic conflict and wars.

## Mixed Political Cultures

Figures 6.1 and 6.2 are not deterministic, meaning the theoretical and empirical conditions in these figures will seldom see a single country or societal group display all the Figure 6.2 empirical conditions under one type of political culture. Instead, most countries and societal groups will show a mix of two or more of the political culture types. Usually, one of the political culture types will dominate—but not always. Figure 6.3 provides a summary of political cultures in selected countries—with mixed political cultures shown at the boundaries of the three main types.

Singapore is an example of a mixed political culture country with a wide diversity in empirical conditions found in two types of political culture. Rating Singapore in Figure 6.2 and placing it in Figure 6.3 finds an overall mixed individualistic-authoritarian political culture. This is because Singapore has some conditions in the authoritarian column and others in the egalitarian column—thus its overall rating is pulled left away from strictly authoritarian conditions. A former British colony, Singapore has been ruled by a string of authoritarian prime ministers since its 1965 independence. Singapore citizens have highly restricted political rights and civil liberties. At the same time, Singapore is a world leader in free-market economic measures, strong rule of law, and low corruption levels, which foster an open and competitive business environment. These conditions correlate with an egalitarian political culture—not the authoritarian culture that might be expected. When a person encounters such a wide discrepancy in a country's conditions they must investigate and attempt to explain the causes. In Singapore's case, it is a small island city-state whose economy and the welfare of its elites and people rely on international trade and financial services. To facilitate an efficient business environment, its authoritarian leaders (often called “benevolent dictators”) have opened the economy and implemented strong

(harsh) rule of law and anti-corruption measures to protect foreign investors and customers. This explains why Singapore has mixed characteristics located in both the egalitarian and authoritarian political cultures.

**Figure 6.3 Selected World Political Cultures by Country (2024 Data)<sup>49</sup>**

Egalitarian		Individualistic		Authoritarian
Australia, NZ	Greece,	Costa Rica,	Hong	Afghanistan,
Canada, Belgium,	South Korea,	France,	Kong,	China, Cuba,
Denmark,	Taiwan,	Georgia,	Singapore,	Iran, Iraq,
Sweden. Finland,	Spain	Israel,	Tunisia,	North Korea,
Norway, Ireland,		India,	Turkey	Russia, Saudi
Germany, Japan	<b>(mixed)</b>	U.K., U.S.	<b>(mixed)</b>	Arabia

**Changing Political Cultures**

Countries and societies can change their political cultures, but changes are usually difficult to bring about. Political cultures can change gradually over time, or more suddenly due to a major societal event. During World War II, Axis powers Japan and Germany were ruled under authoritarian political cultures. As a result of their war losses, considered major societal failures, during the decades after the war Japan modernized to the point today it has an egalitarian political culture. As a result of the 1991 end of the Cold War, a then still-modernizing West Germany reunified with former Soviet vassal East Germany, an authoritarian political culture. Within three decades the reunified Germany possesses today’s egalitarian political culture.

Countries also can transition from individualistic or egalitarian political cultures toward more authoritarian political cultures. The 21<sup>st</sup>-century saw the rise of populist and nationalist political movements in several countries, including Brazil, Hungary, the Philippines, Poland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Over the first 25 years of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century all these countries moved toward more authoritarian political cultures as they rejected market economies

(free trade), restricted political rights and civil liberties, and fractured their publics' trust reducing social capital. In the early-21<sup>st</sup>-century a modernizing Turkey would have fallen more solidly under the individualistic political culture. However, with the election in 2014 of President Erdogan and his populist, authoritarian approach to governing, by 2020 Turkey had changed political cultures to one with mixed individualistic-authoritarian characteristics.

## Bottomline

Readers of this chapter should ask: "In what type of political culture do I want to live—egalitarian, individualistic, authoritarian, or mixed?" This should help decide what political candidates they will vote for and what other civic engagement activities and community participation they will engage in to achieve or maintain the desired political culture. In the next chapter we see how political culture is a major factor in influencing a decision-maker's points of view, assumptions, and beliefs in a critical-thinking project.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Harold D. Lasswell, *Politics: Who gets what, when, and how* (New York: P. Smith, 1950).

<sup>2</sup> Larry Diamond, "Introduction: Political Culture and Democracy," in *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries*, ed. Larry Diamond (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 1993), 1-27.

<sup>3</sup> Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1963).

<sup>4</sup> The political culture literature offers as few as two to as many as seven different types of political cultures. The three used in this discussion are the ones with the

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closest correlations to the rule-oriented constructivist framework presented in this work. See endnote 5 for additional context.

<sup>5</sup> The Theory of Political Culture rule-based foundations are from Onuf's, *World of Our Making, Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1989). The theoretical linkage of political cultures with Onuf's societal rules was first developed in Michael W. Collier, *Political Corruption in the Caribbean Basin, Constructing a Theory to Combat Corruption* (New York: Routledge, 2005). *Note:* Onuf was my doctoral and dissertation advisor.

<sup>6</sup> Onuf.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Much of the constructivist literature references only two categories of rules, regulative and constitutive rules. In Onuf's constructivism, all rules are deemed to have both regulative and constitutive properties. To Onuf, there are only three categories of rules that govern social action: instruction, directive, and commitment. The discussion under rules in social theory is an edited summary of Onuf's and other works originally published in Collier, 26-29.

<sup>9</sup> Onuf, 258.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York, NY: International Publishers, 1971).

<sup>12</sup> Onuf, 209-210.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 211.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 189.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 212.

<sup>16</sup> Material in this section summarized primarily from Paul R. Viotti and Mark V. Kauppi, *International Relations Theory*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston, MA: Longman, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> World Bank, "World Governance Indicators," <https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/> (accessed November 22, 2020).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, originally published 1651).

<sup>20</sup> J. William Frost, “Why Religions Facilitate War and How Religions Facilitate Peace,” <https://www.swarthmore.edu/friends-historical-library/why-religions-facilitate-war-and-how-religions-facilitate-peace> (accessed November 30, 2020).

<sup>21</sup> Daryl Johnson, “Hate in God’s Name,” Southern Poverty Law Center, September 25, 2017, <https://www.splcenter.org/20170925/hate-god%E2%80%99s-name> (accessed November 30, 2020).

<sup>22</sup> Frost.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Heritage Foundation, “Index of Economic Freedom,” <https://www.heritage.org/index/ranking> (accessed November 22, 2020).

<sup>25</sup> Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: Modern Library, 1937—first published 1776).

<sup>26</sup> David Ricardo, *The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1960—first published 1817).

<sup>27</sup> Luigi Manzetti and Charles Blake, “Market Reforms and Corruption in Latin America: New Means for Old Ways,” *Review of International Political Economy*, 3, no. 4 (winter, 1996): 662-697.

<sup>28</sup> Robin Theobald, *Corruption, Development and Underdevelopment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 91.

<sup>29</sup> World Justice Project, “Rule of Law Index,” <https://worldjusticeproject.org/our-work/wjp-rule-law-index> (accessed November 25, 2020).

<sup>30</sup> Transparency International, “Corruption Perceptions Index,” <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi> (accessed November 25, 2020).

<sup>31</sup> Michael Delli Carpini, “Definition of Civic Engagement,” The Pew Charitable Trusts, reprinted in <https://www.apa.org/education/undergrad/civic-engagement> (accessed November 27, 2020).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>33</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone, The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 23.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 22-24.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> World Bank, "Understanding and Measuring Social Capital: A Multidisciplinary Tool for Practitioners,"

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/14098> (accessed November 29, 2020).

<sup>41</sup> For examples see SolAbility, "Social Capital Index," <http://solability.com/the-global-sustainable-competitiveness-index/the-index/social-capital> (accessed

November 29, 2020); Basel Institute of Commons and Economics, "World Social Capital Monitor,"

[https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/commitments/6686\\_11706\\_commitment\\_World%20Social%20Capital%20Monitor%202019.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/commitments/6686_11706_commitment_World%20Social%20Capital%20Monitor%202019.pdf)

(accessed November 29, 2020); and Social Capital Research and Training, "Social Capital: Benefits of Human Sociability," <https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/> (accessed November 29, 2020).

<sup>42</sup> Pennsylvania State University Northeast Center for Rural Development, "Social Capital Maps," <https://aese.psu.edu/nercrd/community/social-capital-resources/us-maps-showing-county-social-capital-levels> (accessed November 29, 2020).

<sup>43</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Trust, The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: The Free Press, 1995).

<sup>44</sup> Daniel Elazar, *The American Mosaic* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 230-232.

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<sup>45</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019, originally published 1921).

<sup>46</sup> Daniel Elazar, *American Federalism: A View from the Country*, (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1966), 92-93.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Klitgaard, *Controlling Corruption* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 69-74.

<sup>48</sup> Simon Montlake, "Nationalist conservatives from US, Europe gather touting different views of democracy." *Christian Science Monitor*, September 2, 2025, <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Politics/2025/0902/natcon-democracy-europe-trump> (accessed September 2, 2025).

<sup>49</sup> Data from Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2025 Report*, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/scores> (accessed May 25, 2025).

# Chapter 7

## Points of View, Assumptions, Beliefs

*We become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic.  
Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings,  
different hopes, different dreams.*

- Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter

Jimmy Carter, the 39<sup>th</sup> U.S. president, highlights how different people have different beliefs. He also points out how the United States is not a “melting pot,” as many of us learned in school, where residents are assimilated into one seamless culture. Instead, he offers there is a U.S. “beautiful mosaic,” meaning the United States is covered with a host of different peoples, beliefs, and cultures.

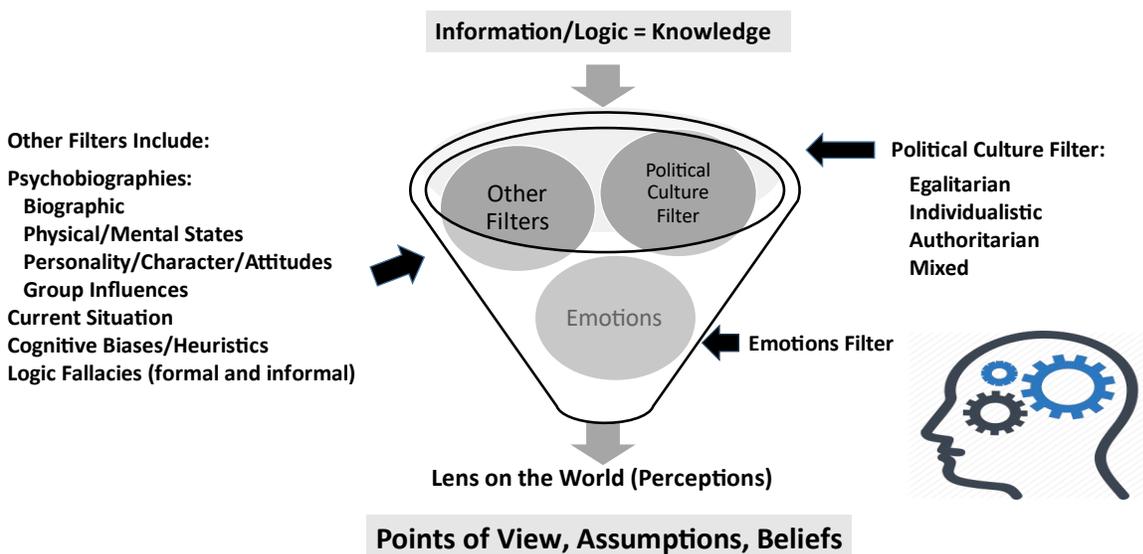
This chapter details how thinkers can assess the many influences that lead to different beliefs and how to use these assessments in a critical-thinking project. The material in this chapter takes an agency approach, meaning it looks at how individual agents or groups of agents making decisions are influenced by several factors. Based on an agent’s “mental model” they develop perspectives or their lens on the world. These perspectives then influence their decision-making and behavior. Chapter 6 reveals the different political cultures that influence a country or societal group’s political, economic, and social conditions and overall perspectives. In this chapter we discuss techniques for assessing agent’s perspectives in terms of their points of view, assumptions, and beliefs. These items must be assessed not only for agents making decisions or acting on a thinking-project issue, but also for the thinkers conducting the analysis. Points of view and assumptions speak to the belief systems of the agents under study, and include structural historical, ideological, political, economic, social, cultural, religious, linguistic, and security factors. Decision-making is also influenced by an agent’s emotions. Evaluating points of view, assumptions, and beliefs are crucial

for analyzing agents' decisions and behaviors, a key component of critical thinking.

## Analyzing Perspectives

Figure 7.1 depicts an abstract human mental model for how information is processed resulting in an agent's perspectives leading to their points of view, assumptions, and beliefs.<sup>1</sup> The model is abstract as it does not depict reality but helps us understand the many influences creating a person's perspectives. The model offers how information and logic leading to knowledge possessed by the agent (covered in Chapters 3-6 for civic life) is inserted into a vessel (here a funnel) containing numerous different filters. The filters impact (influence, affect, etc.) the information, logic, and knowledge, ultimately resulting in the funnel's output of an agent's lens on the world (perspectives) that help define the agent's points of view, assumptions, and beliefs in the situation under study. Figure 7.1 highlights the complexity of human thinking.

**Figure 7.1 Human Mental Model**



The upper right side of Figure 7.1 indicates a **political culture** filter that influences how the agent either operates within their existing culture or strive to attain one they want to bring about. This filter creates a larger context for the environment in which the agent operates. Because of the heavy influence political culture can have on an agent's perspectives it is placed as the first filter at the top of the funnel. Political culture may include the agent's country's political culture, other political divisions' political cultures (state, county, city, etc.), or their societal groups' (organizations) political cultures affecting the agent's thinking—depending on the issue being analyzed. See Chapter 6 for details on identifying and assessing different political cultures.

Filters on the left side of Figure 7.1 highlight additional influences on an agent's perspectives. These filters are very specific to individual agents. The analysis of these filters normally starts with a **psychobiography**, an analytic process mainly conducted by psychologists, psychiatrists, criminal profilers, intelligence analysts, and foreign policy analysts that are informed by theories of cognitive psychology. For thinkers who are not familiar with psychobiography, it begins with the critical-thinking information search for data (Chapters 3-6) requiring the thinker to collect information on agents, i.e., specific individuals or groups of individuals empowered as decision-makers in a situation. A psychobiography is a combination of assessments that detail specific leader and decision-maker characteristics influencing their perspectives, including biographic background (where born, family experience, education, religion, etc.), world experiences, cognitive and reasoning abilities, physical and mental states, attitudinal approaches, leadership and personality traits, and outside or group influences on the leader or decision-maker. Describing specific techniques for assessing each of these areas is beyond the scope of this book.<sup>2</sup> Additional information on conducting a psychobiography is contained in Chapter 6 of *Security Analysis, A Critical-Thinking Approach*.<sup>3</sup> The current situation and the agent's propensity to employ **cognitive biases** (heuristics) and **logic fallacies** in

their thinking are also part of the left side filters. Chapter 4 discusses identifying cognitive biases and logic fallacies.

On the lower right of Figure 7.1 is the important **emotions** filter. This filter is where agents tend to use opinions and feelings to mold their perceptions. The source of opinions mainly come from the Figure 3.2 knowledge categories of authority, faith, common sense, and intuition. Agents using mainly emotions to make decisions tend to disregard the Figure 3.2 higher-level knowledge categories of empiricism, rationalism, and science. In other words, System 2 (slow) fact and logic based rational thinking is replaced by System 1 (fast) thinking driven by emotions and feelings. Agents basing their perspectives and decisions on emotions or feelings are often little-informed or misinformed about the situation.

Emotions can have both positive and negative effects on an agent's perspectives and feelings. Typical emotions or feelings at play include:

Happiness	Anger	Disappointment
Excitement	Fear	Embarrassment
Joy	Anxiety	Envy
Love	Revenge	Guilt
Enjoyment	Sadness	Jealousy
Calmness	Disgust	Annoyance
Amusement	Pride	Contempt
Anticipation	Remorse	Doubt
Empathy	Shame	Surprise

Emotions can take over a decision process, especially in System 1 (fast) thinking efforts (see Chapter 4). Normally lacking complete truthful information, the agent tends to form strong opinions reinforced by **confirmation bias** (see Chapter 4). It is extremely hard to change an opinion reinforced by a stream of misinformation, emotions, and feelings. This helps answer the question of "Why do agents act against their own best interests?" Many low (and some moderate)

information people (agents) create their perspectives and make decisions with an avalanche of misinformation, often strengthened by the **repetition** informal logic fallacy and **confirmation bias** and without assessing the **consequences** of their decisions (see Chapter 2). This sort of decision-making often acts against the agent's own best interests.

The thinker can assume when using Figure 7.1 that the agents under study are involved in System 2 (slow) thinking (Chapter 4). This assumption is invalid for low information people and others basing their decisions mainly on emotions. When the agent is involved in a System 1 (fast) thinking effort, some of the filters in Figure 7.1 will likely not come into play, while others may still influence the final decision, but opinions driven by emotions and feelings may be the strongest influences. To facilitate analyses based on Figure 7.1, thinkers should prepare a pre-analysis psychobiography on agents they commonly encounter or expect to encounter in their thinking projects. Also, do not forget thinkers need to complete a psychobiography on themselves so their biases do not adversely affect the thinking-project findings. Next, we turn to techniques for further assessing perspectives related to points of view, assumptions, and beliefs.

## Analyzing Points of View

Identifying points of view on issues or situations is often difficult. This is the first step in assessing agent perspectives. A good starting point for assessing points of view is to use a **Four Ways of Seeing** template. This technique for identifying different agent "broad" views of an issue or situation has been used in the intelligence, security, and critical-thinking communities for many years.<sup>4</sup> It allows the thinker to delineate differing points of view and help tease out key assumptions for one or more agents by using a simple matrix technique shown in Figure 7.2. The blocks for two agents list their views of both the issue at hand and their views of the other agent.

<b>Figure 7.2 Four Ways of Seeing</b>	
<b>Agent A:</b> How does Agent A see the issue at hand?	<b>Agent B:</b> How does Agent B see the issue at hand?
How does Agent A see Agent B vis-à-vis the issue at hand?	How does Agent B see Agent A vis-à-vis the issue at hand?

Often, there are more than two agents involved in a thinking project. Figure 7.2 defines a dyadic (two-agent) scenario that is flexible and may be modified to include all agents involved in the issue. In a situation with only one outside agent (A), the second agent (B) could capture the views of the thinker. If there are more than two agents, then the figure would be expanded to Nine Ways of Seeing (3 agents), Sixteen Ways of Seeing (4 agents), and so on. When there are more than two or three agents, a better analytic technique is to conduct a pairwise comparison, where the Figure 7.2 dyadic model would be used to analyze each agent individually against each other agent. The analysis can get complicated with more than two or three agents. Remember the goal of the Four Ways of Seeing technique is to identify the broad “big picture” points of view of the agents involved in the thinking project. As an added result, Four Ways of Seeing will start identifying key assumptions (discussed in more detail below).

While a single thinker may complete Figure 7.2, it is better to have groups of thinkers work together as it is useful to bring more than one analytic perspective to the thinking project. Additional thinkers help insert differing perspectives into the thinking process. On a large thinking project, these additional thinkers should ideally differ in experiences, educational backgrounds, cultures, technical knowledge, or mindsets. Thinkers, whether individually or in groups, normally engage in a process best described as **informed brainstorming**,<sup>5</sup> <sup>6</sup> which entails a number of techniques to generate alternatives, such as alternative points of view. As thinkers consider the information collected on the

situation (Chapter 3-6) and the results of the Four Way of Seeing assessments and assumption analysis in the next section, plus any informed brainstorming results, they should also ask:

1. Why (am I/are we) confident the points of view or assumptions were correctly identified?
2. In what circumstances might points of view or assumptions be overlooked?
3. Could the points of view or assumptions have applied in the past but are no longer applicable today?
4. If the points of view or assumptions turn out not to be applicable today, how much impact would including them have on the analysis?<sup>7</sup>

For an example of Four Ways of Seeing, we will employ a specific research question continuing from the Figure 2.10 example for the specific research question about “Which U.S. immigration policy should I support?” The Figure 2.10 analysis allows the thinker to determine their own initial view of the immigration issue. In Figure 7.3 a hypothetical Four Ways of Seeing example (here a Nine Ways of Seeing) is shown, which identifies multiple agent’s views of immigration. We assume in this example that the thinker is analyzing the immigration views of three political candidates (agents) for a U.S. presidential election. Figure 7.3 candidates are shown with their likely political cultures (Chapter 6). This analysis assists the thinker in eventually selecting the candidate with the view of immigration policy that most closely matches their own (see Chapter 8).

**Figure 7.3** Four (Nine) Ways of Seeing Example: Immigration Views

<p><b>Candidate A (Egalitarian)</b></p>	<p><b>Candidate B (Mixed Egalitarian &amp; Individualistic)</b></p>	<p><b>Candidate C (Individualistic)</b></p>
<p>Candidate A sees legal, controlled immigration as good for the United States and accepts ongoing enforcement levels against undocumented and criminal immigrants.</p>	<p>Candidate B sees legal controlled immigration as good but recognizes increased enforcement needed against undocumented and criminal immigrants.</p>	<p>Candidate C sees all immigration (legal and illegal) as a threat to the United States that should be stopped and actions taken against undocumented and criminal immigrants.</p>
<p>Candidate A sees Candidate B’s stand on immigration as like their own but sees increased enforcement against undocumented and criminal immigrants unneeded.</p>	<p>Candidate B sees Candidate A’s stand on immigration as overall too permissive concerning enforcement against undocumented and criminal immigrants.</p>	<p>Candidate C sees Candidate A’s stand on immigration as totally naïve and would lead to serious damage to the United States by undocumented and criminal immigrants.</p>
<p>Candidate A sees Candidate C’s stand on immigration as cruel and not in keeping with the U.S. values, norms, and legal requirements.</p>	<p>Candidate B sees Candidate C’s stand on immigration as largely cruel and not in keeping with U.S. values, norms, and legal requirements.</p>	<p>Candidate C sees Candidate B’s overall stand on immigration as largely naïve and would lead to serious damage to the United States.</p>

Hypothetical Information

## Analyzing Assumptions

The second step in assessing agent perspectives is to uncover the agent's key and supporting assumptions. Identifying and assessing assumptions are critical parts of a thinking project.<sup>8</sup> The above points of view analysis may uncover some agent assumptions, but a deeper investigation to identify additional assumptions is likely still needed. This is often difficult as agents do not readily reveal their assumptions. The thinker must look beyond the visible facts of the situation and seek assumptions that undergird the thinking or behavior about the issue or situation under analysis. For example, as highlighted in Chapter 6, those agents working from a liberal ideological view assume "Countries are not rational actors, i.e., country decision making is really a complex mix of coalition and counter-coalition building, bargaining, and compromise, which might not lead to optimal decisions." In other words, agents following a liberal ideology would see immigration as an issue where coalition building, bargaining, and compromise could lead to solutions (although the solutions might not be optimal). Thus, when analyzing leaders or decision-makers working from an egalitarian or individualistic political culture, this underlying assumption will usually be at work, even if not spelled out by the leader or decision-maker. One method to identify underlying assumptions is to simply ask, "What must be true for this situation to exist?" Or "What would need to change for the opposite of this situation to occur?"

In social science, assumptions usually define theoretical propositions accepted as true even though they cannot be proven or disproven by empirical data or logic. Social science also identifies assumptions without empirical proof as used by thinkers to make inferences leading to their thinking-project's findings and conclusions. U.S. critical theorist Stephen Brookfield uses a broader definition of assumptions whereby they are any conception (theories, facts, perspectives, worldviews, points of view, beliefs) used in decision-making. Brookfield offers that once assumptions are identified they should be categorized as to their main

sources as either **paradigmatic**, **prescriptive**, or **causal** (see details below).<sup>9, 10</sup>

These categories may be used to classify both key and supporting assumptions.

Brookfield highlights how assumptions operate as instinctive guides to behavior, which is something people seldom consider because assumptions reside deep within a person's mental model (Figure 7.1). Assumptions influence how people think about the situation at hand. Brookfield offers they are difficult to evaluate as right or wrong, or valid or invalid, especially paradigmatic and prescriptive assumptions, but should be considered as to whether they are contextually appropriate for the situations they govern. Brookfield also boasts that identifying and categorizing assumptions is all that is needed in a critical-thinking analysis, although this book does not make that same **leap of faith**.

Brookfield developed the following categories of assumptions:

**Paradigmatic assumptions** concern the deeply held assumptions that frame an agent's views of how the world works; in other words, the agent's "dominant personal ideology." Paradigmatic assumptions go to the heart of an agent's points of view or personal belief system and include political, economic, religious, cultural, and social aspects of how the agent views the way the world works. These assumptions usually spring from dominant ideologies (see Chapter 6). For example, the dominant ideologies of democracy and free-market capitalism are so pervasive in egalitarian societies, their core assumptions often are never questioned in analyses. These core assumptions normally are accepted as the common-sense way of organizing and operating in the world. Paradigmatic assumptions often are hard to uncover, especially by analysts whose thinking is influenced by the same paradigmatic assumptions.

**Prescriptive assumptions** concern those that define the desirable ways an agent thinks or acts. They are mainly normative because they define what "ought" or "should" be the desirable ways of thinking or acting and how

the world “ought to” or “should” work. Prescriptive assumptions tend to flow from an agent’s ideological paradigmatic assumptions of how the world works. For example, prescriptive assumptions might define how a democracy should function or how resources ought to be allocated in a capitalist free-market system. In addition to flowing from an agent’s paradigmatic assumptions, prescriptive assumptions result from the structure of social rules (laws, regulations, policies, norms, treaties. etc.) telling people how they should act. There are many social rules (both formal and informal) that influence thinking and behavior and can be categorized as prescriptive assumptions.

**Causal assumptions** concern theoretical (cause and effect) and evidence-based assumptions about how the world works. Causal theoretical assumptions are generally statements or hypotheses about how one or more variables cause changes in another variable. In social science, the basic form of causal assumptions entails propositions or hypotheses stating how human thinking, decisions, behaviors, or conditions in factor X, results in or cause a change in human thinking, decisions, behaviors, or conditions in factor Y (i.e., the issue under study). In the physical sciences, causal conditions are much easier to assess as they have been established through repeated observation (experiments) and analysis. In the social sciences, causal conditions are much more elusive because of the complexity of human behavior and the lack of research in many aspects of social behavior. Causal assumptions related to social science often are deemed suspect because of the small sample size of cases governing the proposed causal linkages. Just because one agent or a small group of agents think or behave in a certain way, does not mean their thinking or behavior can be generalized to the thinking or behavior of a larger group of agents (**part-to-whole** informal logic fallacy). Further, just because an agent behaves in a certain way in one situation does not mean they will behave the same way

in future situations (**weak analogy** informal logic fallacy). Causal assumptions also may offer statements of information (data, facts, evidence). Unfortunately, it is common to find causal assumptions offered in statements or arguments with rampant misinformation and bad logic and reasoning (see Chapters 3-6). This highlights the importance of consistently checking the accuracy and validity of information and logic presented as causal assumptions (see next section on belief analysis).

Most issues or situations are governed by a mix of the above three assumption categories—paradigmatic, prescriptive, and causal. Normally, approximately 80 percent of assumptions in an issue or situation are causal in nature.<sup>11</sup> Thinkers may need to look deeper to uncover ideologically influenced paradigmatic and prescriptive assumptions. This effort may cause additional revisions to the list of assumptions generated in the Four Ways of Seeing and informed-brainstorming efforts.

To continue our Figure 2.10 example about the research question “Which U.S. immigration policy should I support?” and determining the immigration policy views of our hypothetical U.S. presidential candidates (see Figure 7.3) we must conduct an **assumptions analysis** of the issues. First, we must identify the key and supporting assumptions for each candidate (agent) involved. This is done through our thinking project’s information search, candidate written and verbal statements, Figure 7.3 analysis, informed brainstorming, and other research. Second, we classify each assumption based on Brookfield’s above categories. Third, we assess the validity of each assumption. Paradigmatic and prescriptive assumptions are normally “undetermined” as we cannot determine if they are right or wrong (valid or invalid). Causal assumptions can be found valid or invalid using the belief analysis techniques in the next section. Figure 7.4 provides an assumptions analysis for our example on immigration views.

<b>Figure 7.4 Assumptions Analysis: Immigration Views<sup>12</sup></b>		
<b>Assumptions</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Valid*</b>
<b>Candidate A/Egalitarian</b>		
Egalitarian (Marxist-Liberal) Assumptions	Paradigmatic	Undetermined
See immigration as positive (not U.S. threat)	Prescriptive	Undetermined
Immigration does not raise crime rates	Causal	Yes
Legal immigration ought to be allowed	Prescriptive	Undetermined
Illegal immigration not wanted	Causal	Yes
Undocumented immigrants should be deported	Causal	Yes
Legal and undocumented immigrants who commit crimes should be deported	Causal	Yes
Immigration enforcement satisfactory	Prescriptive	Undetermined
Immigration laws/programs need revision	Causal	Yes
<b>Candidate B/Mixed Egalitarian-Individualistic</b>		
Mix of Egalitarian (Marxist-Liberal) and Individualistic (Liberal-Realist) Assumptions	Paradigmatic	Undetermined
See immigration as positive (not U.S. threat)	Prescriptive	Undetermined
Immigration does raise crime rates	Causal	No
Legal immigration ought to be allowed	Prescriptive	Undetermined
Illegal immigration not wanted	Causal	Yes
Undocumented immigrants should be deported	Causal	Yes
Legal and undocumented immigrants who commit crimes should be deported	Causal	Yes
Immigrant enforcement should increase	Prescriptive	Undetermined
Immigration laws/programs need revision	Causal	Yes
<b>Candidate C/Individualistic</b>		
Individualistic (Liberal-Realist) Assumptions	Paradigmatic	Undetermined
See all immigration as negative (a threat to U.S.)	Prescriptive	Undetermined
Immigration does raise crime rates	Causal	No
Illegal immigrants bring greater social ills	Causal	No
Legal immigration should be curtailed	Prescriptive	Undetermined
Undocumented immigrants should be deported	Causal	Yes
Legal and undocumented immigrants who commit crimes should be deported	Causal	Yes
Illegal immigration enforcement should significantly increase	Prescriptive	Undetermined

Immigration laws/programs require no change	Causal	No
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Hypothetical Information/\*Validity determined by Belief Analysis (see below).

Figure 7.4 provides the thinker with a better understanding of each candidate’s (agent’s) perspectives by identifying the **web of beliefs** of key and supporting assumptions influencing each candidate’s thinking concerning immigration views. Figure 7.4’s first two columns identify specific assumptions and their assumption categories based on Brookfield’s work discussed above. The third column provides space to record each assumption’s (belief’s) validity assessment. Determining an assumption’s validity is the topic of the following belief analysis discussion.

## Assessing Beliefs

**Belief analysis** is the third and final step in assessing agent perspectives. One definition of belief entails “any conception that, if affirmed, shapes human experience, emotion, understanding, judgment, or action.”<sup>13</sup> In this broader context, beliefs may include an agent’s worldviews, perceptions, points of view, and assumptions, in other words the outputs of the Figure 7.1 Human Mental Model. The basic purpose of belief analysis is to determine if the belief is valid or invalid, then based on this determination develop the **implications and consequences** of policies implemented or actions taken based on the belief.

There are two steps in basic belief analyses. First, thinkers determine the validity of a belief employing critical-thinking-related techniques in Chapters 3-6. Second, the validity findings may then be used to predict the likely success or failure of policies or actions based on those beliefs. Belief analysis offers valid beliefs will more likely result in successful policies and actions. Conversely, it offers invalid beliefs will more likely result in unsuccessful policies or actions.<sup>14</sup> Determining belief validity and if acted upon its likely success is the minimal

effort required in a critical-thinking belief analysis. A more complex approach to belief analysis is found in *Critical Belief Analysis for Security Studies*.<sup>15</sup>

In Figure 7.4, causal assumptions are assessed as either valid (Yes) or invalid (No) based on truthful information, good logic, and suitable reasoning using critical-thinking assessment techniques. Assumptions could be further classified as valid (Yes) or invalid (No) **with Caveats**, indicating changes to conditions (facts, logic, or reasoning) that could make the assumption's validity assessment change from a No to a Yes (or vice versa). We do not use caveats in this chapter's example.

In continuing our analysis from Figures 7.3 and 7.4 of the example research question, "Which U.S. immigration policy should I support?" we employ belief analysis to assess the validity of each candidate's beliefs. Our analysis assumes that all three presidential candidates are vulnerable to bias in their selection and interpretation of information. We assume the material that shapes their views are also subject to inadvertent bias. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss in more detail biased information.<sup>16</sup> Reviewing Figure 7.4 reveals all three candidates view illegal immigration negatively, undocumented immigrants should be deported, and both undocumented immigrants and legal immigrants committing crimes should be deported (the so-called common ground). A belief analysis should be conducted on each of the candidates' key and supporting causal assumptions (beliefs) listed in Figure 7.4, but such a lengthy analysis is beyond the scope of this chapter. We will assume these assessments were conducted and the results shown in Figure 7.4. For learning purposes the following discussion focuses on the candidates' differing views of the key assumption on whether immigration does or does not raise U.S. crime rates.

**Candidate A.** Working from an egalitarian approach, Candidate A believes that immigration does not raise U.S. crime rates over crime rates of U.S.-born citizens. If their immigration and crime belief is deemed valid, policies and actions inspired by Candidate A's view of immigration and crime are likely not to be a

threat to the United States. This is consistent with Candidate A's egalitarian political culture focused on promoting the good of the entire society.

Candidate A's view of immigration and crime is supported by numerous governmental, academic, and left/centrist-leaning pro-immigration think tank studies (see Figure 3.5). Using government statistics, survey data, and other social data, these sources develop a broader nation-wide "big picture" of immigration effects on the United States showing national trends through crime and other social data.<sup>17</sup> These studies conclude that immigrants do not present a threat to the United States. They highlight that both legal and undocumented immigrants commit crimes well below the crime rates of U.S.-born citizens.<sup>18</sup> If we assume that these studies meet professional research and analysis standards, their guidance appears valid.

Since the other Figure 7.4 causal assumptions (beliefs) for Candidate A all possess valid (Yes) evaluations, their belief analyses are assumed similar to those for Candidate A's immigration and crime belief. The expanded belief analysis for Candidate A reveals that policies or actions based on Candidate A's Figure 7.4 web of beliefs on immigration should likely result in success.

**Candidate B.** Working from a mixed egalitarian-individualist approach, Candidate B has a similar view to Candidate A on most immigration issues in Figure 7.4. However, unlike Candidate A, Candidate B believes that immigrants, both legal and undocumented, commit crimes at higher rates than U.S.-born citizens. As such, Candidate B advocates devoting additional attention and resources to addressing immigrant criminality. This is consistent with Candidate B's individualistic beliefs in their mixed egalitarian-individualistic political culture where security is the dominant interest.

Candidate B's immigration and crime belief is deemed invalid because it is not based in valid crime and social data but instead is supported by mainly anecdotal (specific case) reporting spread via the **repetition** informal logic fallacy by conservative politicians, right-leaning anti-immigration think tanks, and right-

wing media, especially social media.<sup>19</sup> For example, if one undocumented immigrant commits murder, the “spin” in the reporting on this anecdotal incident usually implies all undocumented immigrants are murderers. Such reporting concludes that immigrants committing crimes present a threat to the United States and its citizens. Anecdotal evidence to support the belief violates the **law of small numbers** and **representativeness** cognitive biases, plus the **part-to-a-whole**, **appeal to fear**, and **stereotyping** informal logic fallacies (see Chapter 4).

Candidate B’s belief likely leads them to offer immigrant criminality should inspire immigration enforcement policies leading to demonstrably positive results. However, being invalid, Candidate B’s view of immigrant criminality is likely to be misleading or ineffective. In other words, Candidate B’s belief could inspire immigration enforcement policies or actions likely to be useless or destructive.

The additional Candidate B **causal** assumption assessments in Figure 7.4 are similar to Candidate A’s and possess valid (Yes) evaluations. This predicts policies or actions based on Candidate B’s web of beliefs on immigration, less the immigration and crime belief, would likely result in success.

**Candidate C.** Working from an individualistic approach, Candidate C believes that immigration does raise U.S. crime rates over crime rates of U.S.-born citizens. Candidate C sees crime by both legal and undocumented immigrants as a significant threat to the United States and its citizens and significant enforcement resources should be dedicated to the threat. This belief is consistent with Candidate C’s individualistic political culture with a dominant interest in security.

Like Candidate B, Candidate C’s belief on immigration and crime is invalid as it is not based on valid crime and social data but instead is supported by anecdotal reporting by conservative politicians, right-leaning anti-immigration think tanks, and right-wing media, especially social media. This anecdotal reporting is spread by the **repetition** informal logic fallacy. Candidate C’s immigration and crime belief suffers from the same cognitive biases, informal

logic fallacies, and invalid data and reasoning as does Candidate B's above. Such invalid beliefs promote how immigrants committing crimes present a significant threat to the United States.

Like Candidate B, Candidate C's belief guidance likely leads them to understand how immigrant criminality should inspire policies leading to demonstrably positive results. Unsurprisingly, the guidance inspired by Candidate C's view of immigrant criminality is likely to be misleading or ineffective. In other words, Candidate C's immigration and crime belief guidance could inspire policies or actions likely to be useless or destructive.

The additional Candidate C **causal** assumptions in Figure 7.4 possess both valid (Yes) and invalid (No) evaluations. The Candidate C invalid (No) causal assumption evaluations reveal that policies or actions based on Candidate C's invalid (No) items, would also likely result in useless or destructive policies or actions. However, Candidate C valid (yes) evaluations reveal policies or actions on these assumptions would likely be successful.

The belief analysis results above should lead to the thinker conducting a self-analysis on their views of immigration issues and compare their results to the three presidential candidates. This allows the thinker to determine which candidate is closest to the thinker's views and thus influence their ultimate decision of which candidate to vote for. This prepares the immigration issue for inclusion in the critical-thinking effort in Chapter 8. The analysis of the thinker's own immigration views can start with the analysis in Figure 2.10.

The above belief analysis techniques can also help predict future actions of the agents assessed. We can expect Candidate A to use the information supporting their Figure 7.4 web of beliefs in their presidential campaign platform on immigration issues. Candidate A's campaign should develop logical arguments their campaign should be expected to follow when investigating, contemplating, criticizing, discussing, or defending their immigration beliefs. For Candidate A, information for these arguments would be compiled from the government,

academic, and think tank studies that support their beliefs' validity. Candidate A's arguments would encourage attention to comparisons of conditions between U.S. citizens and immigrants. These arguments should encourage Candidate A to view the harmful acts of immigrants similar to the harmful acts of U.S. citizens. These comparisons would be based primarily on System 2 (slow) cognitive (rational) thinking and focus on how undocumented immigrants do not commit more crimes per-capita than U.S.-born citizens. Candidate B's campaign arguments would be similar to Candidate A's, with the exception of the immigration and crime issue. Candidate C's Figure 7.4 valid (Yes) causal assumption assessments would have similar campaign arguments as Candidate A's.

Candidates B's immigration and crime issue and all of Candidate C's Figure 7.4 invalid (No) causal assumptions would have a different campaign platform approach on the immigration issue. Their invalid (No) arguments would be based on the anecdotal evidence broadcast by conservative politicians, anti-immigration think tanks, and media reporting discussed previously. They would also be supported by misinformation spread on right-wing social media. The invalid (No) arguments of Candidates B and C would try to cultivate an **appeal to fear** informal logic fallacy, hoping to impart fear of immigrants into the U.S. populace as they focused their attention on the deleterious effects of immigrant criminality and harm done by immigrants to life in the United States. These campaign arguments of Candidates B and C encourage them to view the criminal acts of immigrants as avoidable and the toleration of such acts as irresponsible. Both candidates would maintain such harm would not have occurred if its perpetrators had been barred from entering the United States or are deported when located in the United States. Since their invalid (No) arguments would be largely based on misinformation, the arguments would be the equivalent of candidate **gaslighting** campaigns (see Chapter 3). Another example of political **gaslighting** is found at the end of Chapter 4 concerning IRS budget issues.

It can be expected that all candidates will support their immigration beliefs (especially during an election campaign) based on their compiled campaign

platform arguments. If a candidate can anticipate the arguments of the other candidates, they should be able to construct counterarguments to their competitors' offerings. Finding ways to counter an opponent's arguments is a common part of political discourse. Additionally, if elected, each candidate would likely act on their Figure 7.4 web of beliefs about immigration. This situation requires an **implications and consequences** element analysis described in Chapters 2 and 8.

## Concluding Thoughts

Human thinking is complex. Figure 7.1 attempts to capture several important aspects of human thinking. The myriad of influences on peoples' thinking leads to differences in each person's world views (perspectives). This chapter provides techniques for assessing differing perspectives through analysis of a person's points of view, assumptions, and beliefs. Such analyses are an important part of a critical-thinking project. In Chapter 8 we complete a critical-thinking project with an expanded research question of "Which Political Candidate to Vote For?" and where several major societal issues, including immigration, must be analyzed.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted and modified from Valerie M. Hudson, *Foreign Policy Analysis, Classic and Contemporary Theory* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014) 191-192, and Howard J. Wiarda, *American Foreign Policy, Actors and Processes* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 31.

<sup>2</sup> For additional information on conducting a psychobiography see William Todd Schultz, *Handbook of Psychobiography* (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 2005). Also see Hudson, 58-61.

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<sup>3</sup> Michael W. Collier, *Security Analysis, a Critical-Thinking Approach* (Richmond, KY, Eastern Kentucky University Libraries Encompass, 2023),

<https://encompass.eku.edu/ekuopen/6/> or

<https://manifold.open.umn.edu/projects/security-analysis>.

<sup>4</sup> Modified from New Thinking Tools, “Four ways of seeing,”

<https://newthinking.tools/resources/your-creative-mission/four-ways-of-seeing/>

(accessed December 19, 2020), attributed to University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies, *The Applied Critical Thinking Handbook*,

<https://fas.org/irp/doddir/army/critthink.pdf> (accessed December 19, 2020), 77.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Government, “A Tradecraft Primer: Structured Analytic Techniques for Improving Intelligence Analysis,” March 2009,

[https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-](https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/Tradecraft%20Primer-apr09.pdf)

[publications/books-and-monographs/Tradecraft%20Primer-apr09.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/Tradecraft%20Primer-apr09.pdf) (accessed November 4, 2020), 27-29.

<sup>6</sup> Brian Cole Miller, *Quick Brainstorming Activities for Busy Managers* (New York: American Management Association, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>8</sup> See Richards J. Heuer Jr. and Randolph H. Pherson, *Structured Analytic Techniques for Intelligence Analysis*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2015) 209-214.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen D. Brookfield, *Teaching for Critical Thinking, Tools and Techniques to Help Students Question Their Assumptions* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, a Wiley Imprint, 2012). Amazon eBook edition.

<sup>10</sup> Some references categorize assumptions differently from Brookfield and identify either **value assumptions** or **descriptive assumptions**. Value assumptions are a combination of Brookfield’s paradigmatic and prescriptive assumptions. Descriptive assumptions are similar to Brookfield’s causal assumptions.

<sup>11</sup> Brookfield.

<sup>12</sup> Modified from Sarah Miller Beebe and Randolph H. Pherson, *Cases in Intelligence Analysis, Structured Analytic Techniques in Action*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Sage/CQ Press, 2015) 55-57.

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<sup>13</sup> Barnet D. Feingold, “An Introduction to Critical Belief Analysis,” A Lecture Presented to the Williamsburg, VA, Philosophy Group, June 4, 2025.

<sup>14</sup> Barnet D. Feingold and Michael W. Collier, *Critical Belief Analysis for Security Studies* (Richmond, KY, Eastern Kentucky University Libraries Encompass, 2024), Chapter 2, <https://manifold.open.umn.edu/projects/critical-belief-analysis-for-security-studies>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, all Chapters.

<sup>16</sup> Chapters 3 and 4 highlight the potential biases in just about all sources of information. Political discourse, government reporting, academic studies, and think tank analyses likely all have biases. Figure 3.5 and its following discussion highlights the potential political biases in all these sources. Media reporting is even more prone to biases as shown in Figures 3.3 and 3.6. Also, as highlighted in Chapter 3, data on government crime statistics should always be considered biased because there are no national standardized crime reporting requirements. The thinker would be well advised to assess the biases in all sources pertaining to their belief analyses. The Figure 3.7 Checklist for Assessing Information provides a template for thinkers to assess the quality of the information in their belief analyses.

<sup>17</sup> In July 2024. Reuters published a summary of previous immigration studies. They concluded, based on the studies, that immigrants are not more likely to be involved in criminality than native-born U.S. citizens. The studies reviewed included those by academics (peer-reviewed) and think tanks. Reuters also cited studies that found the opposite of their conclusions, but were found flawed due to research methodological violations. See Ted Hesson and Mica Rosenberg, “Trump says migrants are fueling violent crime, Here is what research shows” *Reuters*, July 16, 2024 (<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-focuses-migrants-crime-here-is-what-research-shows-2024-04-11/>) (accessed August 18, 2025).

<sup>18</sup> For example, The CATO Institute, a centrist-leaning (libertarian) think tank, published a 2025 report on immigrant incarceration rates. They used

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incarceration rates as a proxy variable (substitute) for crime rates. They found native-born U.S. citizens were incarcerated more (i.e., committed more crimes) than immigrants. Their data on incarceration included the justice system holding alleged criminals for trial in jail and those convicted of crimes who were in jail or prison. Their reported per-capita results for 2023 (last year of available data) revealed the incarceration rates (per 100,000 U.S. residents) included:

<b>Native-Born U.S. Citizens</b>	<b>1,221</b>
<b>Undocumented Immigrants</b>	<b>357</b>
<b>Legal Immigrants and Naturalized U.S. Citizens</b>	<b>319</b>

The above does not include undocumented immigrants held in Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention for various immigration violations (usually misdemeanors)—if it did the undocumented immigrants’ total number was **613**. Data back to 2010 showed native-born U.S. citizens have continually exceeded the per-capita incarceration rates of undocumented immigrants, even when detention data was included. See Michelangelo Landgrave and Alex Norasteh, “Illegal Immigrant Incarceration Rates, 2010-2023,” *CATO Institute*, April 24, 2025, <https://www.cato.org/policy-analysis/illegal-immigrant-incarceration-rates-2010-2023> (accessed August 17, 2025).

<sup>19</sup> A thinker must always assess the validity of the information, logic, and reasoning in their assessments, even more so in belief analysis. Chapter 3 provides techniques for assessing whether information is valid or invalid misinformation. Chapter 4 discusses how to identify cognitive biases, informal logic fallacies, and bad arguments that can all lead to degraded and biased thinking and assessments. Unfortunately, U.S. political discourse today is rampant with misinformation. This leads to situations where the U.S. populace is continually **gaslit** and often end up not knowing who or what to believe.

# Chapter 8

## Critical Thinking at Work!

Freethinkers are those who are willing to use their minds without prejudice and without fearing to understand things that clash with their own customs, privileges, or beliefs. This state of mind is not common, but it is essential for critical thinking.

- Russian Writer Leo Tolstoy

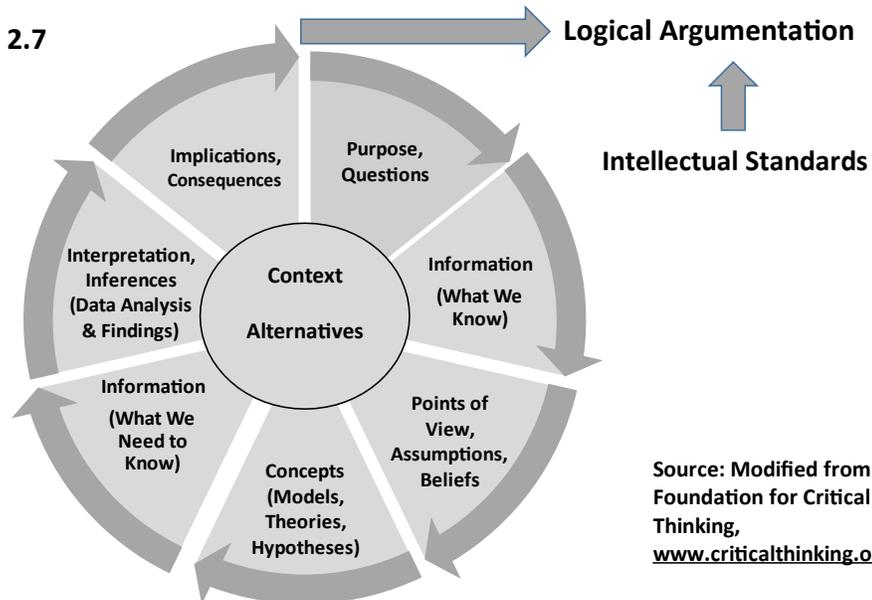
Having a proper state of mind as offered above by Russian Writer Leo Tolstoy is crucial to critical thinking. Those whose thinking is laced with prejudice and resist learning about different customs, privileges, or beliefs are far from being open-minded freethinkers. Having an open mind is a major implied theme in this book. This chapter is where we try to open the reader's mind and "put it all together" through an example of a complete System 2 (slow) critical-thinking project. This chapter will draw heavily on previous chapters. Since voting is the most important behavior in civic life, our example focuses on how a thinker (voter) should conduct a critical-thinking analysis before deciding who to vote for in an election.

### Conducting the Critical-Thinking Analysis

Our voting analysis starts with a review of the critical-thinking framework. Figure 8.1 (reprint of Figure 2.7) provides the Comprehensive Critical-Thinking Framework introduced in this book. The components inside the circles and wedges of the Figure 8.1 framework are called **The Elements of Thought**. Thinkers should review the critical-thinking framework narrative first presented near the end of Chapter 2. In this chapter, the Figure 8.1 framework will be followed in a clockwise manner starting with the Purpose and Questions element.

## Figure 8.1 A Comprehensive Critical-Thinking Framework

Reprinted from Figure 2.7



### Purpose and Questions

As discussed in Chapter 2, all thinking projects must first have a purpose and question(s). The **purpose** statement (could be a question) is usually a broader view of the problem or issue—often too broad to study with the time and resources available. The specific research **question(s)** (one or more) then narrow the problem or issue down to something the thinker can analyze with the resources and time available. The purpose statement and specific research question (here only one) for this chapter's example include:

**Purpose statement:** What Presidential candidate's potential policies and actions would most benefit me and the citizens of the United States? (A descriptive effort as defined on the Figure 2.8 research spectrum.)

**Specific research question:** “Which Political Candidate to Vote For?” (A problem-solving effort as defined on the Figure 2.8 research spectrum.)

This example assumes the next election is for U.S. president. Therefore, the government policies and programs investigated (as major societal issues) will be focused at the national level. The same process detailed below may also be used for any election with the candidates and societal issues adjusted to the respective state or local level.

## Information (What We Know) and Context

Chapters 3-6 provide techniques seeking information (what we know) for conducting an initial critical-thinking **information** and **context** search. This is usually the most time-consuming part of a critical-thinking analysis. For this example, the specific research question of: “Which Political Candidate to Vote For?” requires the thinker to access several different literatures. Searching the literatures identified should follow the Figure 3.3 Prioritizing Open-Source Searches guidance. The literature to be searched include:

1. Data on the political parties and political ideologies of each candidate.
2. Data on the major societal issues in the specific election, particularly those societal issues most important to the civic and personal interests of the thinker (voter).
3. Information on all political candidates and their stands on the major societal issues. A psychobiography (Chapter 7) on each candidate is likely required. The information should include sufficient data to complete the initial points of view, assumptions, and beliefs analysis (Chapter 7) for each major societal issue and each candidate.
4. Trends on how and why citizens vote as they do and any existing voting theories or models.

Compounding the difficulty in collecting the above information is the vast amount of misinformation likely to be encountered in the search. The Figure 3.7 Checklist for Assessing Information provides a template to assist in identifying and discarding misinformation. The historical context for the specific research question will normally be collected as part of the initial information search.

## Points of View, Assumptions, and Beliefs

Chapter 7 contains the procedures for **points of view, assumptions, and beliefs** analysis. This chapter assumes that the Chapter 7 examples for U.S. immigration views is one of the major societal issues addressed in the information search. Figure 7.3 Four Ways (Nine) Ways of Seeing Example: Immigration Views, Figure 7.4 Assumptions Analysis: Immigration Views, and the Chapter 7 Critical Belief Analysis example would be part of this chapter's example analysis. Similar analysis on each candidate's views on each major societal issue would also be needed. For this chapter's example, other major societal issues are identified in the following Conceptualization section.

## Conceptualization and Alternatives

In the **conceptualization** phase the thinker must use the material found in the first information search (including context) and generated in the points of view, assumptions, and beliefs analysis to develop a theory or model for the analysis. **Alternatives** contribute to developing theory or models by ensuring all possible options are considered. The theory used may be an existing one found in the information search, or one created by the thinker. Models may take on several different formats as discussed in Chapter 2. The goal here is to either create a theory (with hypotheses) or devise one or more models that capture, even if

abstractly, the behavior under study (here voting decision-making). Hypotheses and models are then populated with information and tested in the later **interpretation and inference** element, providing the findings or answers for the specific research question(s). For this example, we will use a matrix model that is developed as follows.

From the literature search, the thinker found how in past elections around 80 percent of total voters decide how they will vote based on emotions or feelings.<sup>1</sup> Of this 80 percent, about half the voters cast partisan ballots (about 40 percent of total voters), meaning they vote for candidates from their preferred political party. This leaves around 20 percent of voters as less-emotional thinkers who tend to vote based on a combination of emotions and rational (critical) analysis of the candidates and major societal issues in the election. Emotional voters tend to base their voting decisions on their emotions and feelings driven largely by the Figure 3.2 epistemological categories of authority, faith, common sense, and intuition. These emotional voters are normally involved in System 1 (fast) thinking (Chapter 4). The 20 percent making up less-emotional voters tend to make rational decisions of whom to vote for using the knowledge gained from both assessing their emotions and the Figure 3.2 epistemology categories of empiricism, rationalism, and science. Rational voters are likely involved in System 2 (slow) thinking (Chapter 4). The above percentages are based on past trends in voting and can change based on the candidates and major societal issues in a specific election.

The biggest lesson from the above statistics is how around 80 percent of total U.S. voters use their emotions and feelings to make voting decisions, rather than undertake a rational (critical) analysis of the candidates and major societal issues. History shows those U.S. presidential campaigns focusing on voters' emotions and feelings are almost always more successful.<sup>2</sup> In building the matrix model for this chapter's example we need to capture both the emotional constraints and cognitive (rational) constraints in voter behavior. While this

example is for one specific voter (the thinker) it should be able to travel to other agents and other elections.

Figure 8.2 provides the matrix model for this example analysis for the thinker in deciding on “Which political candidate to vote for?” Figure 8.2 designates the options or alternatives, i.e., candidates, along the top right side of the matrix. It is assumed this is a U.S. presidential election, and the candidates have been selected based on their political parties’ primary elections and national party conventions. Thus, the candidates are given, and no further alternatives apply (discounting write-in candidates). The evaluation factors, evidence, and assumptions are listed down the leftmost column in Figure 8.2. Here is where other options come into play as each matrix model will vary for different voters as each must decide the factors important to them in selecting a candidate to support. We next discuss how Figure 8.2’s leftmost column was developed.

<b>Figure 8.2 “Which Political Candidate to Vote For?” Matrix Model</b>			
<b>Perspective:</b> Thinker (Voter) in U.S. Presidential Election			
	<b>Options/Alternatives</b>		
<b>Evaluation Factors, Evidence, Assumptions</b>	<b>Candidate A Egalitarian</b>	<b>Candidate B Mixed</b>	<b>Candidate C Individual.</b>
<b>Emotional Constraints-Fast Thinking:</b>			
Party: Ideology & Legacy			
Candidate Character & Personality			
My Wishes, Fears (Anger), Values			
<b>Cognitive (Rational) Constraints-Slow Thinking: Does Candidate Offer Plan for Addressing These Societal Issues:</b>			
Threats to Democracy			
Jobs & Economy			
Cost of Living (Inflation)			
Abortion Rights			
Immigration Policy			

Crime & Terrorism			
Environment (Climate Change)			
Gun Safety (Gun Control)			
Other			
<b>Decision</b>			

The Figure 8.2 example left column lists the potential evaluation factors for one hypothetical voter’s (the thinker’s) decision-making. This column includes the most likely emotional constraints evaluation factors, and the cognitive (rational) constraints evaluation factors the thinker decides to consider as the most important in selecting a candidate to support. Emotional constraints’ evaluation factors include:

**Party: Ideology and Legacy.** Many U.S. voters, around 40 percent from existing research,<sup>3</sup> vote for their chosen political party’s candidates. These voters support one political party, likely for their entire lives, without looking deeper into other political ideologies or Figure 8.2 evaluation factors. Differing political ideologies and political cultures were covered in Chapter 6. Under each candidate in Figure 8.2 their corresponding hypothetical political cultures are noted. Candidate A is influenced by an egalitarian political culture. Candidate B is influenced by a mixed egalitarian-individualistic political culture. Candidate C is influenced by an individualistic political culture.

Informed thinkers (voters) should take a deeper look at the parties and candidates’ current ideology, political culture, and past behaviors, including successes and failures of each political party offering candidates in an election. Political ideologies do change over time. We have seen this over the last decade in U.S. conservative political ideology. Voters who always vote for candidates from the same political party, just because they or their family always voted that way, are not critical thinkers.

**Candidate Character and Personality.** Emotional voters and cognitive voters often look closely at the character and personality of candidates. This is

best accomplished with an assessment of the points of view, assumptions, and belief systems of each candidate, including a psychobiography (see Chapter 7). Thinkers should investigate whether the candidate speaks or acts with decency toward other candidates and fellow citizens, plus works well with others.<sup>4</sup> Additional factors the voter may assess include a candidate's values, honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, empathy/compassion, qualifications/competence, leadership/management styles, and moral compass (signs of narcissism, indecency, vulgarity, criminality, prejudices, bigotry, racism, misogyny, cruelty, etc.).

Cultural identity may also be a factor in candidate character assessments. In an almost cult-like manner, voters may look to define their own personal identity in terms of one candidate's character and values. Voters may look for candidates who are pugilistic and aggressive and who they feel match their own cultural identity and thus feel the candidate will fight for the issues most important to them. Recent politics have revealed how voters have often discounted or overlooked other candidate character and personality flaws discussed above. Instead, they use cultural identity to drive their voting decisions. Those voting based primarily on a candidate's character, personality, or cultural identity (or combination of all three) are also not critical thinkers.

**Voter Wishes, Fears (Anger), and Values.** In today's politics, voters are often motivated by a combination of the factors of wishes, fears (anger), and values. **Wishes** concern the voter's own self-interests and at times the interests of the larger society. A wish is a mental model of desired conditions usually associated with positive emotions of the voter.<sup>5</sup> For example, if the voter desires there be no limits on the types of personal weapons they may own, they would likely be drawn to a candidate that is against gun control. This raises the specter of single-issue voters who only care about one or two societal issues. Some voters can be so emotionally attached to certain societal issues that it becomes all they care about in voting. Usually driven by extreme **confirmation bias**, the inability to

accept information outside their existing world view (see Chapter 4), and possessing strong emotions about the societal issue, these voters may disregard all the other emotional and rational constraints in Figure 8.2 and support political candidates who match their views on the selected societal issue(s). Common single-issue voters have recently championed immigration, abortion rights, gender identity, sexual orientation, environment (climate change), taxation, and gun rights, among others.

**Fears** are strong motivational factors influencing voting. Fear creates a mental model of one or more unpleasant conditions associated with negative emotions, often leading to anger and anxiety.<sup>6</sup> Over the past decade, fear and anger among U.S. voters have reached a zenith. Politicians understand the strong motivating force of fear and often create stories (usually based in misinformation) to increase voter fears and gain the voters' support as the candidate argues they are the only ones who can fix things. For example, the U.S. economy may be structurally sound, but with a little more inflation than government officials desire. To foster and take advantage of the inflation fear factor an opposition political candidate may create a false picture using misinformation of a failing economy to gain voter support through fear.

Recent U.S. politics have seen citizen fear and anger generated around the loss of the mythical "American Dream." There are many views on the American Dream, but at its core is the idea of how U.S. residents (citizens and other residents) will succeed through hard work and determination. Adding to this core idea is a widespread belief of how children should become better off financially than their parents. An even more idealistic view of the American Dream is how all families should be able to live a happy life and afford a home, possess two cars, educate their children, and take a family vacation annually. Some recent politicians have campaigned on the notion the American Dream is dead, thus stoking voter fears and anger.

U.S. citizens are always seeking who to blame in bad situations. Citizens seldom, if ever, take responsibility for their own role in creating their personal

conditions and situation. Researchers have found U.S. citizens blame the loss of the American Dream on (1) big U.S. government, and (2) immigrants.<sup>7</sup> Thus, it is easy to understand how voter support would be generated by political candidates who offer to restore the American Dream by disrupting the U.S. government (attacking “The Deep State” or draining “The Swamp”) and deporting all the undocumented and criminal immigrants residing in the United States. The American Dream thus becomes another single-issue voter concern where the voters ignore all other emotional and rational constraints in Figure 8.2 and vote only for the return of the mythical American Dream.

**Values** are another motivator of voting and can be defined as emotion-loaded beliefs concerning how things should or should not be morally, interpersonally, and aesthetically.<sup>8</sup> A person develops their values similar to how they receive information, as is graphically depicted in Figure 3.1. Values can be developed from many sources but usually family, friends, religion, and education are the most salient. Future voters internalize their learned values. Different cultures possess different sets of values, both in a voter’s political culture and larger overall culture. Citizens are motivated and often vote using their “values map” as a guide. For example, some citizens revere the value of the tenet “thou shall not commit adultery.” Thus, if a political candidate is known to have committed adultery, it is less likely the citizen (voter) will support that candidate. There are literally thousands of values that could come into play in a complex U.S. presidential election. Values motivations are often intertwined with the voter’s assessment of candidate character and personality discussed above, especially in terms of the voter trying to match their values to a candidate’s cultural identity.

As with the other emotional constraints discussed above, a voter basing their selection of candidates on their wishes, fears (anger), and values is not a critical thinker, but likely using System 1 (fast) thinking. Figure 8.2 offers how a voting decision should only be made after a thorough analysis of both the above emotional constraints and the cognitive (rational) constraints discussed next.

**Cognitive (rational) constraints** concern major societal issues affecting the thinker (voter) or the larger society—those issues the voter cares (or should care) most about. The voter must have in-depth knowledge of the issues and determine how each candidate plans to address these issues. Societal issues often change between elections. For this example, voting booth exit polls have found recent major societal issues at the national level include **threats to democracy, jobs and the economy, cost of living and inflation, abortion rights, immigration policy, crime and terrorism, the environment and climate change, and gun safety (gun control)**.<sup>9</sup> These major societal issues have been entered under cognitive (rational) constraints in Figure 8.2. Each of the major societal issues should undergo a points of view, assumptions, and beliefs analysis for each candidate as was completed for the immigration issue in Chapter 7.

Voters (thinkers) may also add additional societal issues they find important for assessing which candidate to support. If the election was being held at the state or local level, the societal issues would no doubt differ. It can be seen how an informed voter would be challenged to know about each candidate and how they would rate on the Figure 8.2 emotional constraints and in their plans or views on each of the Figure 8.2 cognitive (rational) constraints. More on this analysis process is contained below. The final Figure 8.2 row for Decision helps the thinker decide which candidate most closely aligns with their voting preferences and is explained in greater detail below.

## Information (What We Need to Know)

At this point the thinker (voter) must likely return a second time to the information sources (Figure 3.3) to gather information needed to populate the Figure 8.2 matrix model for the following **interpretation and inference element**. Additional information is also likely required on each of the societal issues under cognitive (rational) constraints in Figure 8.2. Additional information and analysis

may be required to complete the points of view, assumptions, and beliefs investigations on each candidate (see Chapter 7). The alternative element comes back into play here as for each societal issue the thinker must uncover background (context) information and current information as they establish all the options and alternatives candidates might use to address these issues.

## Interpretation and Inference

Figure 8.2 is populated with data (information/analysis) In the **interpretation and inference element**. This leads to the critical-thinking projects' initial findings. They are "initial findings" as it is common for findings to change when they are subject to the **implications and consequences** element analysis in the next section. Figure 8.3 presents the Figure 8.2 matrix model populated with the thinker's assessment for each candidate's emotional constraints and cognitive (rational) constraints. The thinker's assessments are indicated by a **C** (Consistent), **CC** (Strongly Consistent), **I** (Inconsistent), or **II** (Strongly Inconsistent). The assessment designation indicates if the thinker's (voter's) self-interests, or hopefully larger societal interests, are consistent (**C** or **CC**) or inconsistent (**I** or **II**) with each candidates' stands, views, or desires on each Figure 8.2 evaluation factor.

To complete Figure 8.3, the thinker should also employ a Four Ways of Seeing (Figure 7.2), Assumptions Analysis (Figure 7.4), and a Critical Belief Analysis (Chapter 7) on their own views of each major societal issue. Additionally, the thinker must research each candidate in terms of their emotional constraints. The thinker then compares each candidate's ratings in each emotional constraint to their personal view of the evaluation factors under emotional constraints. Next, the thinker should determine their personal view of each of the cognitive (rational) constraints similar to the Chapter 7 analysis of the immigration issue. Finally, the thinker must assess each candidate on their views of each major societal issue. Figures 7.2 and 7.3, Figure 7.4, and the Chapter 7 Critical Belief Analysis process are a good framework for assessing each candidate against each

major societal issue. Figure 8.3 reveals the results of this analysis by one thinker. Other thinkers will likely have different results.

<b>Figure 8.3</b> "Which Political Candidate to Vote For?" Initial Findings			
<b>Perspective:</b> Thinker (Voter) in U.S. Presidential Election			
<b>Evaluation Factors, Evidence, Assumptions</b>	<b>Options/Alternatives</b>		
	<b>Candidate A Egalitarian</b>	<b>Candidate B Mixed</b>	<b>Candidate C Individual</b>
<b>Emotional Constraints-Fast Thinking:</b>			
Party Ideology & Legacy	<b>C</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>I</b>
Candidate Character & Personality	<b>C</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>II</b>
My Wishes, Fears (Anger), Values	<b>C</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>I</b>
<b>Cognitive (Rational) Constraints-Slow Thinking: Does Candidate Offer Plan for Addressing These Societal Issues:</b>			
Threats to Democracy	<b>CC</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>II</b>
Jobs & Economy	<b>C</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>I</b>
Cost of Living (Inflation)	<b>I</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>I</b>
Abortion Rights	<b>C</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>I</b>
Immigration Policy	<b>I</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>II</b>
Crime & Terrorism	<b>I</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>C</b>
Environment (Climate Change)	<b>CC</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>II</b>
Gun Safety (Gun Control)	<b>I</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>Decision</b> (least inconsistencies)	<b>4</b>	<b>3*</b>	<b>15</b>

Hypothetical Information/ \*Initial Winner

In interpreting Figure 8.3, the number of inconsistencies for each candidate are tabulated. **C** and **CC** ratings are not scored. An **I** rating is assigned a score of one (1) point. An **II** rating is assigned a score of two (2) points. The Decision row

lists the number of inconsistencies for each candidate. The candidate with the least inconsistencies (here Candidate B) is the initial winner, indicating their stands, views, or desires are the most closely aligned with the thinker (voter).

The Figure 8.3 analysis assumes the voter desires action on each item under cognitive (rational) constraints. This example also assumes each evaluation factor carries the same weight in the final decision. Matrix models using **C** and **I** assessments normally determine the best outcome (decision) by selecting the alternative (here candidate) with the least inconsistencies. However, seldom are all the evaluation factors in a matrix analysis of equal weight. When this is the case, the thinker would need to make their decision by adjusting their assessments for the evaluation factors with more weight. Examples of weighted analyses are contained in Chapter 9 of *Security Analysis, A Critical-Thinking Approach*.<sup>10</sup>

## Implications and Consequences

**Implications and consequences** is the final element of thought addressed in most critical-thinking projects. This element assesses the practicality of the initial findings. **Implications** claim or imply a related behavior, decision, or condition generated by the findings.<sup>11</sup> Implications address ideas because they directly or indirectly indicate, allude, hint, suggest, intimate, or entail beliefs, assumptions, or viewpoints resulting from the thinking. **Consequences** are the result of actions flowing from the implications. Thinking through the implications of a situation may lead to **positive consequences** that solve the problem or otherwise support the purpose of the analysis. Failure to think through the implications may result in **negative (unintended) consequences** that work against the interests of the thinker or decision-maker.<sup>12</sup> Consequences flowing from implications result in behaviors, decisions, or conditions that are acted upon. Chapter 2 provides a deeper discussion of implications and consequences.

For this example, the **cascading threat modeling** technique is used with Figure 8.3 to assess the implications and consequences elements. Chapter 2 also provides additional discussion of the cascading threat modeling technique.<sup>13</sup> Figure 8.4 provides the implications and consequences analysis for the Figure 8.3 assessment of candidate B's I rating under threats to democracy where the I was the result of candidate B having no plan for this societal issue.

**Figure 8.4**      **Cascading Threat Model: Threat to Democracy**

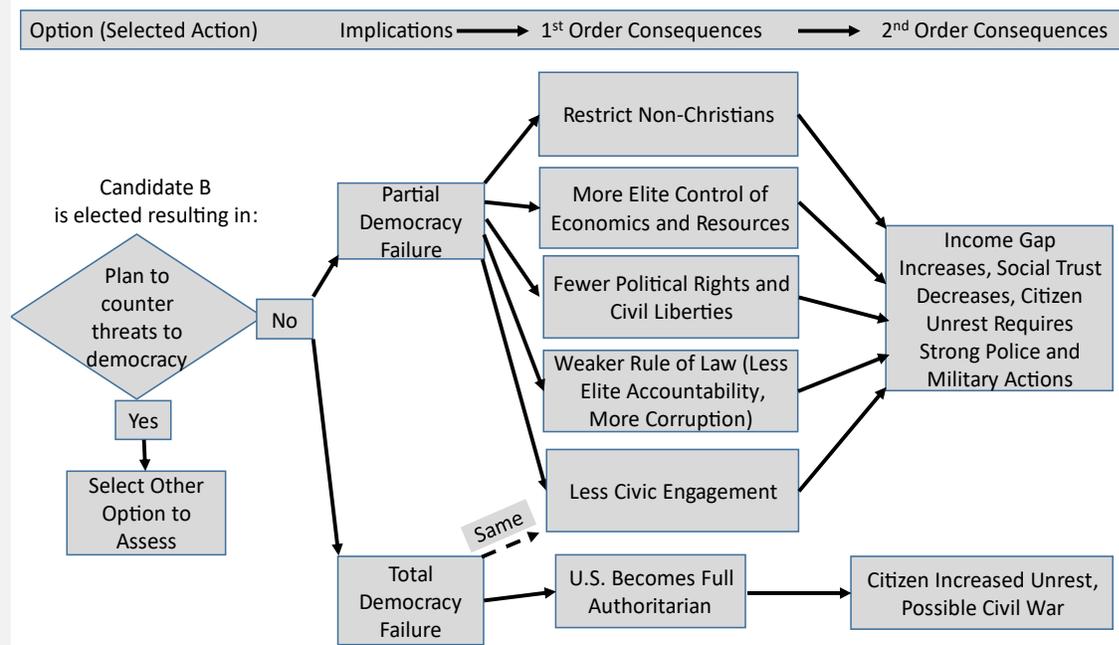
*Perspective:* Thinker (voter, citizen)

Assume the thinker wants to assess Figure 8.3 Candidate B, who offers no plan for countering threats to democracy—meaning democracy could deteriorate if this candidate was elected. Steps for constructing a cascading threat model include:

*Step 1:* Select finding or potential decision for assessment. In this example, the finding (or decision) was to select Candidate B and assess the consequences of their not having a plan for countering threats to democracy. This is the only finding (or decision) assessed for this example. A complete implications and consequences analysis would complete separate analyses for each alternative candidate and for each major societal issue.

*Step 2:* Create an events tree for the finding (or decision) under consideration. In this example the implications and consequences analysis assumes that if actions are not taken to counter threats to democracy, then democracy would potentially fail. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Order Consequences in the below events tree are based on the empirical political culture material in Chapter 6.

*Step 3: Insights* (see below) from this analysis include that if U.S. democracy fails (No plan) the implications could be failures along a continuum from a partial failure to a total failure. The 1<sup>st</sup> order consequences, based on the political culture material in Chapter 6, imply a partial failure would *probably* lead to religious restrictions on non-Christians, a more elite controlled economic and resource system, fewer political rights and civil liberties, weaker rule of law (less elite accountability and more corruption), and less civic engagement.



If these consequences occurred, it would *probably* lead (cascade) to the 2<sup>nd</sup> order consequences that could include an increasing income gap between the elites and general citizens, social trust would decrease, and resultant citizen unrest could require stronger police and military actions to maintain civic order.

If a total democracy failure would occur, all of the 1<sup>st</sup> order consequences for a partial failure would also occur (indicated by “Same” dashed arrow), but the degradations in each item could likely be far worst. Total failure would *probably* result in the United States becoming an authoritarian state with no meaningful elections, i.e., not a democracy. This could result in the 2<sup>nd</sup> order

consequences of increased citizen unrest, requiring even stronger police and military actions to maintain civic order, and the *probable* occurrence of civil war. Each of the actions listed as 2<sup>nd</sup> order consequences could then be expanded (further cascades) to assess the potential actions following from each. The main insight from this short analysis is how threats to democracy are a factor that informed citizens must substantially understand.

In considering the Figure 8.4 **implications and consequences** analysis, the thinker may find other options or alternatives (voting for other candidates) more practical. For example, the thinker may decide by voting for Candidate B that the risks to democracy developed in Figure 8.4 are unacceptable. Therefore, the voter may decide to shift their vote to Candidate A. Candidate A has only a slightly lower Figure 8.3 score on inconsistencies (4 instead of 3). Selecting Candidate A has the added advantage of Candidate A being consistent with the thinker in all emotional constraints. Additionally, Candidate A is strongly consistent with the thinker on the cognitive (rational) constraints of Threats to Democracy and Environment (Climate Change)—two issues the thinker cares deeply about. The voter's decision may change further as they conduct additional implications and consequences analyses on other Figure 8.3 emotional and cognitive (constraints) scores. The back-and-forth consideration of the interpretation and inference element findings and implications and consequences element analysis should lead to the final findings.

## Logical Argumentation and Intellectual Standards

When the final findings are generated, the voter should create a logical argument (see end of Chapter 4) explaining how and why their decision was made. In this voting example, there would be no written or oral report on the findings. However, there may be family, friends, or colleagues that ask about how the thinker (voter) sees the election and who they may support. In the United States,

the voter has the right to answer or not answer such queries. Even without a written or verbal report, the final findings should undergo a quality check using the intellectual standards in Figure 2.11. Thus, from the thinking project's purpose and questions to the logical argumentation presentation of the final findings, the thinker would have traversed the entire Figure 8.1 critical-thinking framework in deciding who to vote for in the example election.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Drew Weston, *The Political Brain, The Role of Emotion in Deciding The Fate of the Nation* (New York: Public Affairs, 2007), 115.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, chp. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 115.

<sup>4</sup> Amanda Ripley, "One Woman is Holding Politicians Accountable for Nasty Speech. It's Changing Politics," *Politico*, January 20, 2023, [https://www.yahoo.com/news/one-woman-audacious-quest-dignify-093000892.html?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuYmluZy5jb20v&guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAAEFM8aKOL4uill\\_mXR5kMppCRvUw3Pa2F8jIDNLpum59A8nED8DiJDOxuLYclnPP--yWwJbSTELAq5Dsr07JF1wKVIGDFG9y58byuY3t6EwoboGJKfwRZIJAcPK1ERVbIIFn6kCXh9fO2WY-y9tFRpVYVQdMu3bPZHm8kHT6cB6j](https://www.yahoo.com/news/one-woman-audacious-quest-dignify-093000892.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuYmluZy5jb20v&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAEFM8aKOL4uill_mXR5kMppCRvUw3Pa2F8jIDNLpum59A8nED8DiJDOxuLYclnPP--yWwJbSTELAq5Dsr07JF1wKVIGDFG9y58byuY3t6EwoboGJKfwRZIJAcPK1ERVbIIFn6kCXh9fO2WY-y9tFRpVYVQdMu3bPZHm8kHT6cB6j) (accessed January 21, 2023).

<sup>5</sup> Weston, 81.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Timothy P. Carney, *Alienated America, Why Some Places Thrive, While Others Collapse* (New York: Harper Collins, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Weston, 82.

<sup>9</sup> The societal issues listed came from an exit poll from the 2022 mid-term Congressional elections published as NBC News Survey, November 3-5, 2022, Study #220806 by Hart Research Associates/Public Opinion Strategies,

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<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/23272032-220806-nbc-november-poll-v2> (accessed November 6, 2022), and NBC News Exit Polls 2022, November 10, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2022-elections/exit-polls> (accessed November 13, 2022).

<sup>10</sup> Michael W. Collier, *Security Analysis, a Critical-Thinking Approach* (Richmond, KY, Eastern Kentucky University Libraries Encompass, 2023), <https://encompass.eku.edu/ekuopen/6/> or <https://manifold.open.umn.edu/projects/security-analysis>.

<sup>11</sup>Richard Paul and Linda Elder, *Critical Thinking, Tools for Taking Charge of Your Professional and Personal Life*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, NY: Pearson Education, Inc., 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 117.

<sup>13</sup> See Fred May, “Cascading Disaster Models in Postburn Flash Flood,” in *The Fire Environment—Innovations, Management, and Policy*, eds. Bret Butler and Wayne Cook, Proceedings RMRS-P-46CD, March 2007 (Fort Collins, CO: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station, 2007).

# Chapter 9

## What is To Be Done?

*The function of education is to teach one  
to think intensively and to think critically.*

*Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education.*

- Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.

The above view of Baptist minister, civil rights leader, and political philosopher Martin Luther King, Jr. has never been achieved country wide. The U.S. education system has failed in teaching critical thinking, especially as it applies to U.S. civic life. Changing our way of thinking is required to find solutions to our current political malaise. The central argument of this book offers to save U.S. democracy requires implementation of programs to strengthen civic education and develop critical thinking. One method to address these problems is to revise elementary, secondary, and post-secondary academic programs in civic education and critical thinking. These actions are discussed in more detail below. For those beyond their academic years, this book provides the minimal information, knowledge, and learning skills required for adults to become civically informed citizens. It is hoped the material in this book generates additional interest in adults learning more about civic education and critical thinking. This includes understanding U.S. founding documents such as the *Declaration of Independence*, *U.S. Constitution* and its *Bill of Rights*, and the *Federalist and Anti-Federalist Papers*, recognizing how U.S. democracy is still only an experiment, developing information literacy skills (including how to spot misinformation), and learning to conduct complex System 2 (slow) thinking using a critical-thinking process. A lot of work remains!

## Using Critical Thinking

After exposure to the material in this book:

As highlighted in Chapter 8, will 80 percent of U.S. citizens continue to vote with their emotions and use a System 1 (fast) thinking approach? Very Likely!

Or will U.S. citizens go forth and employ critical thinking and System 2 (slow) thinking in all their civic endeavors? We Wish, but Highly Doubtful!

Substantial time and experience are needed to complete a full System 2 thinking project. Some high information people, who may know substantial information on the issues in an election, are the most likely to become accomplished System 2 critical thinkers. Some moderate information people may also embrace critical thinking. Low information people are unlikely to use the critical-thinking techniques presented in this book. Instead, low information people will likely base their voting and other civic engagement decisions on the emotional constraints in Figure 8.2. Such low information people are a major part of the estimated 40 percent of U.S. citizens who vote based simply on partisan political party ideologies and legacies. This is why beginning in elementary school we should strengthen the teaching of civic education and critical thinking. Hopefully over time this will reduce the number of U.S. low information people.

It is hoped those reading this book will use at least some of the central tenets presented about critical thinking in their System 2 (slow) thinking. These include:

1. Seek information sources higher on the Figure 3.3 priority list. Try not to rely primarily on the Internet and Media for information.

2. Assess all information found for truthfulness using the Figure 3.7 checklist. Be particularly aware of misinformation, disinformation, and gaslighting. **Question Everything!**
3. Research and analyze the differing points of view, assumptions, and beliefs at work in a situation. Look for and reject invalid beliefs that are based primarily in misinformation (usually **lies** and **gaslighting**).
4. Seek options and alternatives for all important factors in conceptualizing the thinking and behavior under consideration.
5. Once initial findings are developed, use implication and consequence analytic techniques to identify potential unintended consequences.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is probably not an answer to U.S. citizens' lack of critical thinking, even if there are many people who may hope so. *Britannica* defines AI as "the ability of digital computers or computer-controlled robots to perform tasks commonly associated with intelligent beings [i.e., thinking and acting on that thinking]." <sup>1</sup> AI systems must "learn" by being digitally loaded with masses of data (information) and programmed to "think" with this data by using complex algorithms based in logic and reasoning. The data uploaded to AI may be either truthful or false (misinformation). The thinking algorithms may be programmed with bad reasoning, including biases and logic fallacies (see Chapter 4). This can lead to AI producing highly biased and questionable results. AI probably cannot replicate the abstract Figure 7.1 Human Mental Model, especially in terms of modeling human emotions. This is particularly true of the emotion of empathy, which is so important to human thinking and the human condition.

There have already been cases where AI "bots" were programmed to produce partisan political outputs, both in writing and publishing partisan messages and in creating or altering photographs and videos. These bots can manipulate citizens into either supporting or denigrating certain political candidates, governmental officials, and media personalities. Because they are

automated, these bots can create unlimited social media accounts and flood social media with misinformation. Thinkers must continually assess their information sources for fake material likely generated by AI.

## **Strengthening Civic Education**

Strengthening U.S. civic education will assist in improving U.S. civic life. The state of civic education at the elementary and secondary school levels across the United States is sketchy at best. A February 2018 report by the Center for American Progress<sup>2</sup> found ten U.S. states have no requirement for a secondary school civics course. Of the forty states with a civics course requirement, only eight states and the District of Columbia require at least a full year of civics or government instruction. Thirty-one states had what was considered a “full” civics curriculum including instruction on the *U.S. Constitution* and *Bill of Rights*, comparisons of democracies, state and local voting, and civic engagement. Twenty-six states had no requirements for community service (actual civic engagement and community participation), although it is common for individual school districts to require community service before students graduate, even when not mandated by the state. Sixteen states require passage of a civics examination to graduate from secondary school. The situation with teaching U.S. history is equally as sketchy, as a 2018 report by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)<sup>3</sup> found U.S. eighth graders with a weak grade-level understanding of their own history. NAEP found that only 15 percent of eighth graders tested were grade-level proficient or displayed advanced knowledge of U.S. history. A subsequent 2022 NAEP assessment found U.S. history knowledge even lower. NAEP efforts included assessment of proficiency in the history of U.S. democracy. There remains significant work to strengthen U.S. civic education, both in terms of civics or government education and in the history of U.S. democracy.

Action to strengthen civic education starts with the states. State education bureaucracies may revise elementary and secondary school curriculums with the addition of civic education and U.S. history student learning outcomes (SLOs). Everything starts with the SLOs. This would require advocates of civic education to lobby state legislators and/or state education departments to revise or issue new SLOs. Revised or new SLOs are required to energize teachers at the elementary and secondary school levels. Lobbying and engaging local school boards is also required.

Recommended minimum standards for civic education would likely include a required secondary school (high school) civics course with a full curriculum covered over an entire academic year, a U.S. history course covered over an entire year, and required standardized civics and U.S. history examinations prepared or approved by the state to graduate from secondary school. A period of community service should also be required for secondary school graduation to help foster civic engagement. The final goal would be to ensure those completing secondary school, i.e., those becoming new voters 18 years or older, would have a satisfactory level of civics and U.S. history knowledge to become informed citizens and future voters.

Those desiring to improve civic education levels may consult several organizations with civic education emphases to assist with developing SLOs and actual curriculums. The Center for Civic Education<sup>4</sup> is just one such organization that has prepared curriculums to improve civic education. Its six-unit program “We the People: The Citizen and the *Constitution*” may replace or supplement existing curriculums at the secondary school level. This program includes units on:

1. What are the Philosophical and Historical Foundations of the American Political System?
2. How did the Framers Create the Constitution?
3. How has the *Constitution* Been Changed to Further the Ideals Contained in the *Declaration of Independence*?

4. How have the Values and Principles Embodied in the *Constitution* shaped American Institutions and Practices?
5. What Rights Does the *Bill of Rights* Protect?
6. What Challenges Might Face American Constitutional Democracy in the Twenty-first Century?<sup>5</sup>

The Center for Civic Education found how students (and teachers) who complete the “We the People” and other center programs tend to vote at higher rates and have higher levels of civic engagement.<sup>6</sup> Chapters 5 and 6 touch on many of the above listed topics on the *U.S. Constitution* and democracy and is an example of the background and context material informed citizens should know. Additionally, those with good civic education grounding should understand comparative world governing systems that are alternatives to democracy. This material is summarized in Chapter 6 on political cultures. For example, informed citizens should know the nuances in the use of the term “socialism” discussed in Chapter 6. There is not one type of socialism, but at least three—Marxist-Socialism, Authoritarian-Socialism, and Democratic-Socialism, all with widely different characteristics. Informed citizens should also have a broad understanding of the societal conditions that correlate with differing governing systems as covered in Chapter 6.

Civic education teaching is also a problem at the post-secondary level. Many undergraduate college programs, especially at liberal arts institutions, usually require general education courses mandating all students—no matter their major—take one or more courses in civics/government and U.S. history. However, a 2015 study of U.S. post-secondary institutions found only one-fifth of the 1,000 institutions surveyed required a civics course.<sup>7</sup> Major curriculum requirements in the hard sciences, engineering, and mathematics, compete for valuable student time and general education courses such as civics, history, and the humanities often fall by the wayside. As not all U.S. citizens attend post-secondary schools, satisfactory knowledge of civics and U.S. history must be

completed in secondary schools as described above. In summary, the U.S. is not properly preparing its future voters to become informed citizens.

## Developing Critical Thinking

Critical thinking instruction should be a requirement for all U.S. citizens. There are those who think critical thinking should become the fourth **R** of basic U.S. education, arguing it must be taught and emphasized like the existing three **Rs**: **R**eading, **wR**iting, and **aR**ithmetic. This means critical-thinking basic techniques must be introduced early to elementary school students, more advanced techniques added as students advance through the grades, and the techniques exercised and thinking evaluated across the entire elementary, secondary, and post-secondary school curriculums—just as with the original three **Rs**. This is easier said than done. Getting schools to adopt new curriculums and instructing teachers on how to present the new material is a huge task.

As with improving civic education and U.S. history curriculums, the first step is for state education agencies to publish guidance for including critical-thinking instruction in school curriculums. There are several non-governmental organizations states could consult as they revise and create their critical-thinking SLOs. The Foundation for Critical Thinking<sup>8</sup> and other organizations specializing in advancing critical thinking and information literacy (media literacy) instruction are good places to start. A handful of states have already issued SLOs that cover some parts of critical thinking, but actions requiring comprehensive critical-thinking curriculums (Figure 2.7) and more states implementing such curriculums are needed. There are several critical-thinking frameworks that could be adopted, but for my money the best is the Figure 2.7 framework modified from the work of the Foundation for Critical Thinking.<sup>9</sup>

A critical-thinking curriculum needs to be presented based on the readiness of students to comprehend the material. For example, starting in kindergarten

and grades 1-3, students could be slowly introduced to Figure 2.7 information, alternative, and interpretation elements. Later elementary and secondary school grades could add additional elements with a goal that by the time students finish secondary school they have learned and are experienced in completing critical-thinking projects using all the Figure 2.7 elements, including knowing how to present their thinking findings in a logical argumentation format (see Chapter 4). For elementary and secondary school students without previous critical-thinking instruction, they should be inserted into the curriculum at the level where they are ready to learn. Keys to critical-thinking instruction in elementary and secondary schools requires it be systematic and comprehensive, as it is expanded and reinforced across grade levels in every subject area—not only in humanities and social science courses, but also in mathematics and science courses. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Figure 2.7 critical-thinking framework is an expansion of the scientific method, and applies to both the humanities and hard sciences, and thus can be taught and reinforced across all academic disciplines.

Teaching critical thinking at the post-secondary level is also challenging, especially when most students entering college have no background in critical thinking from their secondary school programs. Post-secondary school curriculums are different from elementary and secondary schools in that the post-secondary schools generally establish their own SLOs—usually at the instructor, program, departmental, school, or college levels. There may be a state post-secondary agency providing general curriculum guidance, but most of the curriculum development is within colleges. Post-secondary schools are also subject to guidance from regional accrediting agencies and specific academic disciplines and professional agencies certifying individual academic curriculums. A number of these accrediting agencies and certifying agencies have provided guidance on teaching critical thinking—but more is needed. The goal of post-secondary critical-thinking instruction, at both undergraduate and graduate levels, should be for students to learn and gain experience in completing complex thinking projects using in-depth mastery of all the Figure 2.7 elements, including

preparing their thinking findings in a logical argumentation format. Post-secondary level students should develop advanced critical-thinking skills in information searching, the conceptualization element (modeling, theorizing), and in interpretation and inference techniques as they learn to work closely with faculties and librarians, expanding their capabilities in thinking theoretically, and advance their mathematical and other inferential skills.

Academic research reveals instruction in critical thinking leads to a marked improvement in the thinking capabilities of those subject to this instruction. Several Canadian researchers conducted a meta-analysis of the outcomes of critical-thinking programs existing before 2015.<sup>10</sup> A meta-analysis combines data from multiple independent studies to better determine trends and patterns. In this Canadian meta-analysis, 684 previous independent studies were included. The meta-analysis found that most efforts to teach critical thinking included individual study—where students read about the topic, receive classroom lecture instruction, and solve problems individually. They also found the most successful critical-thinking instructional programs combined three additional instructional activities: (1) dialogue, (2) authentic instruction, and (3) mentoring. Dialogue is characterized as learning by group discussion, such as Team Based Learning, where students solve problems in groups through discussing a particular problem while using a critical-thinking framework. Authentic instruction presents groups of students with genuine real-world problems that make sense to them (particularly if in their academic major), where the problems engage and stimulate student inquiry. Mentoring is another individual learning activity, where students are mentored, tutored, or coached by teachers, teaching assistants, more advanced students, or internship supervisors. The Canadian meta-analysis found that all three of these additional instructional activities were required to obtain the best outcomes in student critical thinking.<sup>11</sup> Critical thinking can be taught, but it requires curriculum requirements, trained instructors, and the political will to change how critical thinking is taught.

## Challenges to Overcome

As with most societal issues, especially highly politicized issues, there are several challenges to overcome in strengthening civic education programs and instituting critical thinking among U.S. citizens. These include challenges of funding and political will. When revising and issuing new SLOs in any academic topic, funding is required to purchase new textbooks and teaching materials (posters, flipcharts, software, etc.) and for teacher/faculty training. Offering teacher training seminars or professional education programs is costly when considering the travel and per diem costs for off-site instruction, in addition to the costs for consultants to deliver the instruction either on- or off-site. There also may be a need to hire additional staff or teachers to coordinate and deliver civic education and critical-thinking programs. School funding at all levels comes from a combination of state support (some from federal sources), local taxes, and tuition payments (private schools and post-secondary programs). In most schools funding is limited and new programs in civic education and critical thinking would need to compete for funding support alongside a myriad of other school priorities.

Generating the political will to strengthen civic education and institute critical thinking may be even more of a formidable challenge than funding issues. It should be expected that resistance will be encountered at the state, local, and even teacher levels. There is existing state-level resistance to critical-thinking programs. For example, the 2012 platform of a state political party included the item:

Knowledge-Based Education – We oppose the teaching of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) (values clarification), critical-thinking skills and similar programs that are simply a relabeling of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) (mastery learning) which focus on behavior modification and have the

purpose of challenging the student’s fixed beliefs and undermining parental authority.<sup>12</sup>

This platform item caused a minor tempest in educational and media circles. Once the criticism of the platform item arose, the party tried to explain that the words “critical thinking” were not supposed to be in the above text. Both then and even now, the anti-critical-thinking movement offers how critical thinking cannot be effectively taught<sup>13</sup>—even with this being in opposition to academic research findings (see above meta-analysis discussion). The anti-critical thinking movement appears as a classic **counterfeit agenda** versus **hidden agenda**. The counterfeit agenda entails anti-critical thinking advocates using misinformation, **gaslighting**, etc., anchored in ideological beliefs to criticize teaching critical thinking. However, their hidden agenda is to prevent the development of citizens with higher order thinking skills (i.e., critical thinkers). The above party platform item is against challenging the student’s fixed beliefs and parental authority—in other words, not teaching future citizens to think for themselves. It is implied that the party does not want religious and political ideologies challenged in order to more easily manipulate citizens to vote for their party. This anti-critical-thinking sentiment exists at different political levels country-wide.

With such widespread national sentiments often against higher level thinking and additional civic education, it would be a challenge to convince state legislatures and state education departments to issue SLOs strengthening civic education and instituting critical thinking. Even if the states did issue revised and new SLOs, there would likely be additional resistance at local school boards to implement revised curriculums. There has been a large-scale effort over the past several years where politicized local school boards have intervened, at the urging of vocal groups of parents, to “scrub” state-issued SLOs and school curriculums to remove items objectionable to the complaining parents. Thus, SLOs addressing the history of U.S slavery, treatment of Native Americans, and U.S. population diversity, especially sex education, gender identify, and sexual orientation issues,

are being removed from elementary, secondary school, and even some post-secondary curriculums. This degrades student historical knowledge and their understanding of the current world. There has also been school board action to remove books from school libraries that cover any of the removed topics. Thus, it should be expected that SLOs addressing higher order thinking and strengthening civic education are likely to also be resisted by many local school boards. The hidden agenda with such actions are similar to the above national movement to prevent certain religious and political ideologies from being challenged, i.e., to suppress critical thinking to better manipulate citizens.

Resistance to revised or newly issued SLOs should also be expected from elementary and secondary school teachers and post-secondary school faculty. Teachers and faculty must be taught how to deliver critical-thinking instruction. This could be accomplished through targeted seminars or continuing education. In many cases, especially for those who have taught for many years, teachers will likely resist new curriculums (SLOs) and new teaching methods. Teachers can become quite set in their traditional ways concerning what they teach and how they teach, thus many will be highly resistant to any changes in their existing teaching content and methods. Introducing a critical-thinking structure at the elementary and secondary school levels adds a new layer to what teachers are already expected to cover, which may add to the resistance. Post-secondary instructors, who usually teach and follow a strict format within their academic disciplines' research methods courses, may be even more resistant to adding critical thinking to their curriculums. However, one way to implement critical-thinking instruction, and not add another layer to teaching curriculums, is to offer post-secondary research courses structured on the Figure 2.7 framework to replace their previous research methods courses. Figure 2.7 is applicable to both the deductive approach to hard science and social science research and to the inductive approach to research in the humanities, thus it applies to any post-secondary curriculum. Being trained in Figure 2.7 and using this framework in all

their post-secondary complex thinking projects would go a long way to improving country-wide critical thinking.

## **Some Final Thoughts**

I realize the above recommendations face large challenges. To get state education agencies, local school boards, elementary and secondary teachers, parents, and students all moving in the same direction on civic education and critical thinking is a tough but not impossible task. The previous section discusses some of the “landmines” those attempting to improve civic education and critical thinking will encounter at the elementary and secondary levels. The same is true of getting post-secondary institution faculties to require general education civics/government courses and adopt critical-thinking curriculums.

While I was teaching at Eastern Kentucky University, a university-wide effort was undertaken in the early-2000s to voluntarily inject critical thinking into all academic programs. I was one of about 25 faculty “Quality Enhancement Program Coaches” who were trained and qualified in critical thinking and other advanced instructional techniques and tasked to teach these to other ECU faculty (about 800 full-time faculty). The goal was to advance the quality of the university’s overall instruction. After 5–years of aggressive work, our Coaches’ group estimated we reached only 10-15 percent of the ECU faculty, i.e., those who voluntarily chose to attend our seminars. Without any negative career consequences for not implementing critical thinking, the remainder of the faculty continued to teach the way they always had—meaning how their academic disciplines prepared them. The ECU critical-thinking effort was substantially reduced after the first 5-years due to budget cuts. I was lucky as all the faculty in my ECU Homeland Security program were trained in and enthusiastic about critical thinking and we continued to infuse it throughout all the students’ major courses. Our Homeland Security faculty members were repeat winners of the ECU

Critical Thinking Teacher-of-the-Year Awards. Our assessments of the success of our critical-thinking efforts found similar positive improvement in student thinking as uncovered in the Canadian meta-analysis discussed above.<sup>14</sup>

Encouraging adults beyond their school years to improve their civic education knowledge and embrace critical thinking is also a colossal challenge. This requires self-discipline to voluntarily seek additional information about democracy and world governments and to adopt critical thinking in all their complex System 2 (slow) thought processes. Even for those becoming advocates of critical thinking, there is no expectation they will become experts in critical-thinking techniques. Conditions where citizens used (or at least thought about) the critical-thinking process would be a major victory, as it would help achieve the goal of citizens “...thinking about their thinking while they are thinking in order to make their thinking better....”<sup>15</sup>

The bottom line is that significant political will, additional funding, and a country-wide change in citizen attitudes would be required to improve U.S. democracy. Improving civic education and instituting critical thinking is a starting point. Without such action, U.S. democracy will likely continue to be threatened as highlighted in the Chapter 1 opening song lyrics from “Brain-Dead Nation!” This is not a situation most U.S. citizens should want!

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> B.J. Copeland, “artificial intelligence,” *Britannica*, item updated September 2, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/technology/artificial-intelligence> (accessed September 3, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> Center for American Progress, “The State of Civics Education,” February 21, 2018, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/state-civics-education/> (accessed December 14, 2022).

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- <sup>3</sup> National Assessment of Education Progress, "2018 Report U.S. History Assessment at Grade 8," <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/ushistory/> (accessed December 14, 2022).
- <sup>4</sup> Center for Civic Education, <https://www.civiced.org/> (accessed December 14, 2022).
- <sup>5</sup> Center for Civic Education, "We the People," <https://www.civiced.org/we-the-people> (accessed December 14, 2022).
- <sup>6</sup> Diana Owen, "Evaluation Report: Strengthening Democracy through History and Civics," Center for Civic Education, November 2021, [https://files.civiced.org/pdfs/research/Academies\\_FinalReport\\_Georgetown\\_November2021.pdf](https://files.civiced.org/pdfs/research/Academies_FinalReport_Georgetown_November2021.pdf) (accessed December 14, 2022).
- <sup>7</sup> Study cited in Richard Haass, "Why We Need Civics," *The Atlantic*, January 22, 2023, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/01/american-identity-democracy-civics-education-requirement/672789/> (accessed January 22, 2023).
- <sup>8</sup> The Foundation for Critical Thinking, <https://www.criticalthinking.org/> (accessed July 31, 2022).
- <sup>9</sup> See Richard Paul and Linda Elder, *Critical Thinking, Tools for Taking Charge of Your Professional and Personal Life*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, NY: Pearson Education, Inc., 2014), and Gerald Nosich, *Learning to Think Things Through: A Guide to Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum*s 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, NY: Pearson Education, Inc., 2012).
- <sup>10</sup> Phillip C. Abrami, Robert M. Bernard, Eugene Borokhovski, David I. Waddington, C. Anne Wade, and Tonje Persson, "Strategies for Teaching Students to Think Critically: A Meta-Analysis," *Review of Educational Research* June 2015, Vol. 85, No. 2, 275-314.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Valerie Strauss, "Texas GOP rejects "critical thinking" skills. Really?" *The Washington Post*, July 9, 2012, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/texas-gop-rejects-critical-thinking-skills-really/2012/07/08/gJQAHNpFXW\\_blog.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/texas-gop-rejects-critical-thinking-skills-really/2012/07/08/gJQAHNpFXW_blog.html) (accessed December 16, 2022).

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> From 2014 to 2016 the ECU Homeland Security faculty assessed the effectiveness of their curriculum heavy in critical thinking instruction. With permission of the Law School Admission Council, the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) Logical Reasoning sections were used for the evaluation (using past tests published in LSAT study guides). During the assessment, approximately 200 senior Homeland Security majors were tested in their last capstone course in Leadership and Management. Most majors exceeded the national average for the LSAT Logical Reasoning scores, i.e., among students nationwide applying to law school. The Homeland Security majors had received four years of critical-thinking instruction. We also tested approximately 150 new Homeland Security majors in their freshman Introduction to Homeland Security course. In comparison of the freshman and senior scores, we noticed a significant improvement in logical reasoning in the seniors during their four years of Homeland Security courses (something expected after four years of college instruction). Unfortunately, due to the short period of the assessments, there were no students who took the assessments in both their freshman and senior years. As a control group, we also tested approximately 90 juniors and seniors in other majors who enrolled in our Introduction to Homeland Security course as an elective. This control group was in majors without intensive critical-thinking instruction. Comparing the control group to the Homeland Security senior majors, there was a statistically significant finding of how the 4-year critical thinking curriculum improved the Homeland Security majors' logical reasoning skills. Due to the small sizes of our test samples, these results can only be generalized to the students participating in the assessment. However, the assessment results were robust enough to justify continuing our critical-thinking instruction.

<sup>15</sup> Paul and Elder, 367.