

# Understanding American Government

SIXTH EDITION



WELCH GRUHL

COMER RIGDON AMBROSIUS



SIXTH EDITION

# *Understanding American Government*

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# Preface

**P**opular esteem for American political institutions continues to decline. The public alternates between curiosity about, and revulsion toward, politics and politicians. Yet beneath the scandals, and the attempts of elected officials to gain political advantage or minimize political disadvantage from these scandals, the role of government in our lives remains crucial. The sixth edition of our text, *Understanding American Government*, tries, as did the previous editions, to demonstrate to students why government is important, and to interest students in learning about the exciting, important, and controversial issues in American public life. We believe an introductory course succeeds if most students develop an understanding of major ideas, an interest in learning more about American government, and an ability to begin to understand and evaluate the news they hear about American political issues. Although a firm grounding in the essential “nuts and bolts” of American government is crucial, other approaches are helpful in motivating students’ interest in government.

We offer the essential “nuts and bolts” of American government, but we also want the student to understand why (and sometimes how) these important features have evolved, their impact on government and individuals, and why they are controversial (if they are) and worth learning. For example, we prefer students to leave the course remembering why campaign finance laws were created and why they are generally ineffective than to memorize specific dollar limitations on giving for different types of candidates from different types of organizations. The latter will change or will soon be forgotten, but understanding the “whys” will help the student understand the campaign finance issue long after the course is over.

We have also tried to interest students by describing and discussing the impact of various features of government. For example, students who do not understand why learning about voter registration laws is important may “see the light” when they understand the link between such laws and low voter turnout. Therefore, a particular emphasis throughout the book is on the *impact* of government: how individual features of government affect its responsiveness to different groups (in Lasswell’s terms, “Who gets what and why?”). We realize that nothing in American politics is simple; rarely does one feature of government produce, by itself, a clear outcome. Nevertheless, we think that students will be more willing to learn about government if they see some relationships between how government operates and the impact it has on them as American citizens.

## Changes in the Sixth Edition

This edition is again substantially revised. We cover the 2000 national elections, although our publication deadlines gave little time for postelection reflection.

We have added a new feature in each chapter: a timeline of important events. This timeline, found near the end of each chapter, is designed to help students remember key events and developments in the topic addressed in the chapter and to get a better sense of chronology of these events. Given national studies that show that a majority of college graduates are woefully ignorant about the chronology of even important events such as major wars and pathbreaking presidential administrations, we thought that students needed assistance in visualizing key points in the development of the American polity.



We have retained the feature box added in the fifth edition labelled *What Government Does Right*. In an era when it is fashionable to run against government when running for public office, and at a time when charges of scandal and corruption seem to come ever more frequently, we thought it useful to give students some examples of successful governmental activities.

This edition features new material on contemporary issues ranging from campaign finance reform to gun control, from capital punishment to the evolving role of technology in political communications and campaigning.

We have reordered some of the chapters in Part Two, Links between People and Government. Following Chapter 4 on public opinion comes the chapter on the media, followed by chapters on interest groups and political parties. Chapter 8, Elections, follows that, and this section ends with the money and politics chapter. We reorganized the part in this way to bring the chapters on public opinion and the media into proximity and to bring together those on elections and money and politics.

As always, we have updated the judiciary, civil liberties, and civil rights chapters to incorporate new Supreme Court decisions. Chapter 15, Civil Rights, includes a new treatment of the women's movement, a new section on sexual harassment and another on discrimination against men, a new discussion on the contemporary status of African Americans, and a revised treatment of affirmative action.

We are delighted to have the opportunity to write a sixth edition and to improve the text further in ways suggested by our students and readers. We have been extremely pleased by the reaction of instructors and students to our first five editions. We were especially gratified to have won three times the American Government Textbook Award from the Women's Caucus for Political Science of the American Political Science Association.

## Special Features

Student interest and analytic abilities grow when confronted with a clash of views about important issues. Today there is much discussion about how to stimulate the critical thinking abilities of students. Beginning with the first edition, our text has provided features especially designed to do this by involving students in the controversies—and excitement—of American politics.

### You Are There

Each chapter opens with a scenario called You Are There. In a page or two the student reads about a real-life politi-

cal dilemma faced by a public official or a private citizen involved in a controversial issue. Students are asked to put themselves in that individual's shoes, to weigh the pros and cons, and to decide what should be done. The instructor may want to poll the entire class and use the You Are There as a basis for class discussion. In the Epilogue at the end of the chapter, we reveal the actual decision and discuss it in light of the ideas presented in the chapter.

One-third of the You Are There features in this edition are new. They focus on contemporary topics such as the political struggle over preserving national environmental treasures (Chapter 3), the appropriate and ethical role of the media in exposing scandal (Chapter 5), the dilemma faced by John McCain in supporting George W. Bush (Chapter 7), and the influence of support for campaign finance on a candidate's chances (Chapter 9).

## American Diversity

In many chapters, American Diversity boxes illustrate the impact of the social diversity of the American population on political life. The boxes help students understand how a diversity of backgrounds and attitudes shapes views of politics and positions on issues.

## What Government Does Right

These boxes illustrate some of the successes of government. We believe this is a timely feature, given the antigovernment sentiment currently so pervasive. Far from being the ennobling activity as envisioned by the ancients, government now appears to be seen largely as corrupt and ineffective. Given this image, students might wonder why we have government at all. This feature gives students an opportunity to read about some concrete examples of government successes and think about the reasons for the existence of government.

## Timelines

Timelines in each chapter help the student visualize the chronological development of the American polity as well as highlight important issues in the chapter.

## Boxes

In each chapter, several boxes highlighting interesting aspects of American politics draw the students into the material. Many illustrate how government and politics really work in a particular situation—how a corporation lobbies for government benefits, how a seemingly powerless group is able to organize for political action, how interest groups solicit money by mail, and how political

polls are done—while others highlight features of government that may be of particular interest to students—what standard of risk should government use in regulating acne medication, how ethnicity shapes voting behavior, and the impact of federal programs on students.

Several other features help students organize their study.

### Outline

Each chapter begins with an outline of its contents.

### Key Terms

Key terms are boldfaced within the text and listed at the end of each chapter and the glossary.

### Further Reading

A brief, annotated list of further readings contains works that might be useful to a student doing research or looking for further reading.

### Electronic Resources

Each chapter lists addresses of particularly interesting or useful sites on the Internet that relate directly to the topics covered in the chapter.

### Glossary

A glossary at the end of the book defines terms that may be unfamiliar to students.

## The Organization and Contents of the Book

While the basic organization of American government books is fairly standard, our text has a unique chapter on money and politics and a half chapter on environmental politics. Other features include a civil rights chapter that integrates a thorough treatment of constitutional issues concerning minorities and women, a discussion of the civil rights and women's rights movements, and contemporary research on the political status of these groups. We include in this chapter the special legal problems of Hispanics and Native Americans.

The organization of the book is straightforward. After material on democracy, the Constitution, and federalism, the book covers linkages, including money and politics, then institutions, and finally policy. Civil liberties and rights are treated after the chapter on the judiciary. But the book is flexible enough that instructors can modify the order of the chapters. Some instructors will prefer to cover institutions before process. Others

may prefer to discuss civil liberties and rights when discussing the Constitution.

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### **Book-Specific Web Site**

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PLUS: quick access to The Wadsworth Political Science Resource Center and “Election Central”—featuring the latest election updates, information, and links to election Web sites. The Political Science Resource Center also includes *InfoTrac College Edition* activities, links to general political Web sites, a career center, online news, a discussion forum, and much more.

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*New!*

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Introduces a number of critical thinking and writing techniques, helping students make better use of the information they receive in class and in the text.

## ***Acknowledgments***

We would like to thank the many people who have aided and sustained us during the lengthy course of this project. We first acknowledge the work of Margery Ambrosius, the coauthor of Chapters 12 and 17, for her intellectual contribution to this book. Our current and former University of Nebraska and Penn State colleagues have been most tolerant and helpful. We thank them all. In particular, we appreciate the assistance of John Hibbing, Philip Dyer, Robert Miewald, Beth Theiss-Morse, Louis Picard, John Peters, David Rapkin, Peter Maslowski, David Forsythe, W. Randy Newell, and Steven Daniels, who provided us with data, bibliographic information, and other insights that we have used here. We are especially grateful to Philip Dyer, Alan Booth, Louis Picard, Robert Miewald, and John Hibbing, who read one or more chapters and saved us from a variety of errors.

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