

# GOVERNING THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC Economics, Law, and Policies

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## **PREFACE**

It is difficult to escape a narrow perspective when we try to make sense of very recent events. The decade of the 1980s seems to have been a time of many farreaching changes in American politics, governmental institutions, and public policies. The American people and their leaders faced new and pressing social problems such as AIDS and the homeless, altered global relationships, and the paradox of apparent economic stability in a time of international economic difficulties. To make sense of new trends and new phenomena, it is tempting to find radical shifts in the American political system—to search for answers in the unique personalities of presidents and other public officials, in new technologies that are reshaping America's society and economy, or in the accidents of history.

A genuine understanding of recent political changes cannot rely entirely on our current perceptions, however. Some things do not change, and others change very little; unless we learn about the most constant factors shaping government and politics, we will be unable to distinguish the interesting aberration from the fundamental change.

## The Approach of This Book

When we teach the introductory American government and politics course, we find it useful to present certain basic concepts. These concepts—goals, justice, cost, organization, incentives and constraints, benefits, and allocation—are introduced in Chapter 1 of this text. In other chapters (particularly 2, 3, 4, and 14), we probe the many meanings of the term *rights*. Concepts such as these are offered to help students make sense of the institutions, traditions, and policies of American government. But, as we try to make clear, they do not provide ultimate answers; rather, they help us to frame issues in sharper focus.

Although students vary in ability, energy, and interest, they are more likely to become interested in government when they can relate it to their own lives and practical concerns. Students have car accidents, rent rooms, buy goods and services, apply for admission to schools, and engage in a vast number of other activities that involve substantial government intervention. Accordingly, we have

included a good deal of material on law (a topic almost entirely ignored by most American Government texts), economics, and social policy (including civil rights). In addition to three chapters (4, 13, and 14) devoted wholly or largely to these topics, much material on them has been included in other chapters.

Our approach derives from a combined total of almost thirty years of teaching American Government courses at a variety of schools to many types of students. It is not an approach that may be labeled leftist, rightist, or centrist. Indeed, we ourselves differ sharply on many issues. We ask instructors and students to set their beliefs and preconceptions aside as they read this book; many of the questions we raise do not have simple or certain answers.

Governing the American Republic is not a book about "democracy." That idea, in the sense of majority preference, certainly plays an important role in our system, but the structure devised by America's constitutional Framers and carried forward by others is far more complex than is "democracy." Nor is this a book about "government" or "politics" alone. The institutions, processes, and policies of government in practice cannot be divorced from the social and economic arenas within which government must operate. The American Founders' conceptions of republicanism were largely devoted to defining the proper relationships between government and the other spheres of our lives. Thus, the idea of "governing" implies an active, creative process, whereby public officials continuously redefine the boundaries and interactions between public and private spheres of action.

## The Structure and Content of This Book

In keeping with our approach, Part I of *Governing the American Republic* begins by drawing connections between government and the broader aspects of American society. In Chapter 1, we offer first a short overview of the American people and their material lives. In the second half of the chapter, we provide students with the aforementioned set of concepts and organizing principles that will be used in subsequent chapters to help evaluate policies, proposals, and institutions.

The Constitution plays a crucial role in the daily lives of Americans, and it provides the basic rules for government and politics. Accordingly, it is important to examine it not only as it relates to government today but also in the context of the intellectual stream of which it was a part. The study of the Constitution in Chapter 2 examines the impact of Enlightenment thinkers such as Locke, Montesquieu, Newton, and Smith in order to show what the Founders attempted to achieve. We then investigate how the Founders' views shaped the details of the governmental system they devised. Chapter 3 illuminates the mechanisms of federalism—a vital and visible part of the constitutional system that embodies many of the Founders' assumptions about political powers and rights.

Many Americans participate directly in their system of government through the legal system—for example, by receiving a speeding ticket or signing a lease. In Chapter 4, we examine the functions, categories, and sources of law. These topics are usually either not considered at all in American Government texts or treated perfunctorily. We also link American law with our evolving conceptions of civil liberties and civil rights.

In Part II, we focus on the linkages between citizens and government. Chapter 5 discusses the various ways in which Americans participate in the political system as individuals: developing and expressing their political opinions, and acting on those opinions to protect their rights, extend their benefits, or limit the costs that can be imposed upon them. In Chapter 6, we extend our examination of the diverse and complex American participatory structure by discussing the formation, behavior, and effectiveness of interest groups. Chapter 7 traces the history of the American party system, spells out the functions of political parties, and considers the implications of the fragmented American two-party system. We ask students to evaluate the merits and faults of the American party system rather than to accept it simply as the sole inevitable one. In Chapter 8, we examine elections and campaigns: their purposes, their operation, and their effects. Students are challenged to consider one of the most common criticisms of modern American politics: that money and the mass media are undermining the integrity of the electoral process.

Using a unique focus, Part III covers the institutions of American government. The Founders consciously designed these institutions according to their expectations that structures would dictate institutional behavior regardless of who occupied the leadership posts. As Madison observed in *The Federalist*, no. 10, "Enlightened statesmen will not always be at the helm." Accordingly, in each of these chapters we look first at the powers of the relevant institutional structure. Concepts discussed in earlier chapters, such as incentives, costs, and organization, are used to help the student understand the ways that institutions function. Examples, such as events and personalities, do not stand alone, but provide students with a sense of how processes work.

In Chapter 9, we examine the powers, structures, and behavior of Congress. Our focus is on the constraints and incentives that shape congressional behavior, and at the end of the chapter we use this approach to make the congressional budget process more comprehensible. A similar approach is used in Chapter 10: we examine the president's powers and limitations, and we investigate the general forces that prevent presidents from increasing their powers. In addition, we ask how presidents organize their efforts to control the bureaucracy, work with Congress, and shape public opinion through the mass media. Chapter 11 covers the courts in a way that is unusual among American Government textbooks. We describe in concrete detail the system of justice and the process of the law, but instead of focusing almost exclusively on the rarified atmosphere of the Supreme Court, our treatment covers processes from the lowest courts to the highest. The differences between civil and criminal process are clarified. In Chapter 12, we apply our approach to the bureaucracy. The logic of bureaucracy is explained, along with popular myths and truths about its flaws. We include a full discussion of the policy process and illustrate it with an example to which all students can relate: product packaging and labeling regulations.

The final three chapters, which comprise Part IV, cover policies: economic,

social, foreign, and defense. We emphasize historical context and basic concepts so that students can understand the reasons for the shape of current policies and the debates about them and thus better evaluate those policies. For example, our discussion of economic policy begins with the historical and conceptual roots of the American version of capitalism. Similarly, we believe that students are not equipped to evaluate social welfare policies unless they recognize the connections and trade-offs between abstract rights and actual programs. Or again, can one understand current controversies about Central American policy without learning about the origins of the cold war and the theories to which it gave rise?

We have endeavored to state fairly the various perspectives on important controversies and to supply as many pertinent facts as space allows. Students will not find answers to all their questions about American politics, government, and policies. But they should be able to ask informed questions about the meaning of a presidential election, a Supreme Court ruling, or a proposed change in public policy.

## Special Features of the Text

Whenever a key term or concept appears in the text, its definition appears in the margin. In addition, there is a comprehensive glossary at the back of the book.

Each chapter opens with an outline of its contents, contains an annotated bibliography, and concludes with a review section that enables students to test their understanding of what they have read. These review sections, which include approximately thirty questions each, eliminate the need for a separate, expensive study guide. Answers to the questions are given after the glossary.

A combined Instructor's Manual (by Stephen Wainscott of Clemson University) and Test-Item File containing about fifteen hundred questions (by Ryan Barilleaux of Miami University of Ohio) is available to adopters.

## **Changes in This Edition**

Those familiar with the first edition of *Governing the American Republic* will find that its virtues have been preserved and that numerous additions have strengthened it. We hope, too, that its flaws have been ameliorated. While this second edition offers information about recent events, it is not merely an attempt to be current. Instead, many important developments that have occurred since the publication of the first edition have been integrated into the existing treatments. For instance, the Iran-Contra affair is discussed in Chapter 10 as an example of our government's 200-year-old difficulties in trying to establish the boundaries between congressional and executive powers.

In addition, this second edition significantly expands a number of subjects. The federalism chapter is entirely new. It acknowledges the phenomenonal resurgence of the states during the 1980s. In addition, the chapter recognizes the general principles of federalism that suggest federal-state relations have no stable equilibrium, evolving instead in response to such factors as public values

and international economic challenges. Chapter 4, "Law, Civil Liberties, and Civil Rights," a reorganization of earlier materials, now includes a more extensive discussion of discrimination in education and the workplace. Largely because of the curiosity of our students, we have increased our coverage of public opinion, ideology, and opinion surveys; collective participation and interest group behavior has also been expanded and placed in a separate chapter.

Other significant changes include coverage of the 1988 election, greater analysis of the roles of PACs and other political money in American elections, and a more detailed discussion of the impact of the media both on elections and on the president's guidance of government. While retaining the emphasis on law, this edition eliminates excessive details on some legal topics. All of the policy chapters have been updated, with numerous additions to the discussions of larger themes suggested by the concepts introduced in Chapter 1. The sequence of the institutional chapters has been altered to follow that of the Constitution. Finally, the number of terms defined in the page margins has been increased, and as mentioned, there is now a unique review section at the end of each chapter.

We hope that students and faculty will find the second edition of *Governing the American Republic* to be informative, useful, and thought-provoking, and we invite comments and suggestions from readers. Please send remarks to us in care of:

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Alan Stone Richard P. Barke

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