Benjamin Ginsberg · Theodore J. Lowi · Margaret Weir

SHORTER FOURTH EDITION

WE THE PEOPLE

AN INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS

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An Introduction to American Politics

BENJAMIN GINSBERG
THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

THEODORE J. LOWI
CORNELL UNIVERSITY

MARGARET WEIR
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT BERKELEY

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WE THE PEOPLE

An Introduction to American Politics

SHORTER FOURTH EDITION

TO

SANDY, CINDY, AND ALEX GINSBERG

ANGELE, ANNA, AND JASON LOWI

NICHOLAS ZIEGLER

PREFACE

This book has been and continues to be dedicated to developing a satisfactory response to the question more and more Americans are asking: Why should we be engaged with government and politics? Through the first three editions, we sought to answer this question by making the text directly relevant to the lives of the students who would be reading it. As a result, we tried to make politics interesting by demonstrating that students' interests are at stake and that they therefore need to take a personal, even selfish, interest in the outcomes of government. At the same time, we realized that students needed guidance in how to become politically engaged. Beyond providing students with a core of political knowledge, we needed to show them how they could apply that knowledge as participants in the political process. The "Get Involved: What You Can Do" conclusions to each chapter helped achieve that goal.

This Fourth Edition retains the same goals and methods as earlier editions, but goes beyond them. As events from the last months of 2001 reminded us, "what government does" can be a matter of life and death. Before September 11, most Americans had concluded that government, especially the national government, had grown too large and too expensive to operate. The solution was simply to make government smaller. But September 11 changed everything. When crises occur, Americans look to the government for solutions. After September 11, the relevance and importance of government to our lives became tragically obvious. With September 11 as its backdrop, *We the People* introduces a new theme that reinforces the book's emphasis on the relevance of government to our lives: "What Government Does and Why It Matters." This new theme is incorporated in the following ways:

- **New chapter introductions focus on "What Government Does and Why It Matters."** During the past two decades, cynicism about "big government" has dominated the political zeitgeist. But critics of government often forget that governments do a great deal for citizens. Every year, Americans are the beneficiaries of billions of dollars of goods and services from government. Government "does" a lot, and it matters a great deal to everyone, including college students. At the start of each chapter, this theme is introduced and applied to the chapter's topic. The goal is to show students that government and politics mean something to their daily lives.
- **New boxes: "What Government Does . . . After September 11"** Americans' dependence on the government is brought into particularly sharp focus during times of danger. These boxes, one per chapter, highlight the ways in which the government has taken action following September 11.

Most of these actions have positive benefits for almost all citizens, such as beefing up airport security or combating bioterrorism. Others have positive benefits for the economy, such as the financial support given to the airline industry. Some of these actions have potentially negative consequences, however, and deserve scrutiny from citizens, such as ethnic profiling by government officials or the potential infringement of civil liberties by recent government actions.

- **Analysis of "who benefits?" from what government does** Government is not a neutral force in any society. Some individuals or groups always benefit more than others from the government's actions. In addition, there are constant debates over the ends or goals of government. Who benefits most from certain government actions? What should government do? These questions, and their potential answers, are now addressed more explicitly and more extensively in every chapter.
- **Post–September 11 content** In addition to the new chapter introductions and new boxes, there is an abundance of new material related to post–September 11 government. For example, the bureaucracy chapter includes discussions of the Office for Homeland Security, the controversy over the FBI's role in combating terrorism, the Center for Disease Control's initiatives to fight bioterrorism, the expansion of the federal workforce through the hiring of new airport security personnel, the Justice Department's encroachment on civil liberties, the debate over the effectiveness of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the State Department's role in building the multilateral coalition that fought the Taliban in Afghanistan, the costs and benefits of privatizing security, and the broader issue of bureaucratic reform.

History, such as the tragic events of 2001, reminds us that there will always be government because there will always be a need for government. Why is government necessary? As Adam Smith wrote in 1776,

> According to the system of natural liberty, the sovereign has only three duties to attend to; three duties of great importance: first, the duty of protecting the society from the violence and invasion of other independent societies; secondly, the duty of protecting, as far as possible, every member of the society from the injustice or oppression of every other member of it [with] an exact administration of justice; and, thirdly, the duty of erecting and maintaining certain publick [sic] works and certain publick institutions, which it can never be for the interest of any individual, or smaller number of individuals, to erect and maintain; because the profit could never repay the expense. . . .[1]

Reasonable people can disagree over questions of *what kind of government* or *how much government,* but, other than anarchy, there is no place for argument over *whether.*

In addition to our focus on "What Government Does and Why It Matters," we have also addressed the debate over what government does and who benefits from the outcomes. This is where politics comes in. Ultimately, the purpose of politics is

[1] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations,* Vol. II (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics edition of original Oxford University Press edition, 1981), pp. 687–88.

to influence what government does. This influence can come from eloquence of rhetoric, perseverance of effort, or pure and simple nuisance value. The method can be technologically rich, employing facts, e-mail, and Web sites; or it can be simple and personal, relying on picketing, heckling, and badgering members of Congress or state and local legislatures. But, as we have emphasized in all four editions of the book, influence requires knowledge about government and politics and it requires participation in the political process.

But *We the People* doesn't rely on sentimental and moralistic appeals to encourage student-citizens to participate in politics. We would be laughed out of the classroom if we pulled out the old adages that every citizen can be president or that the views of every citizen are taken equally into account in the representative process. "The People" is a collective noun; as individuals we may have extremely limited influence, but that does not diminish the validity of the message we convey in each and every chapter. First, we demonstrate in every chapter that one and the few *can* count. Moreover, those who doubt this are engaging in a self-fulfilling prophecy; that is, to be *in*active as a result of the pessimistic view of the capacity of citizens is to confirm to the fullest that citizen action cannot count. Two sets of issues that we employ help bring this point into focus for students.

The first of these sets of issues is the question of who is and who is not part of the American political community. This question has been the source of enormous conflict for Americans. Because there have been many restrictions throughout American history on who are "we the people" and what powers and rights "we the people" should have, we hope that students don't take their own powers and rights for granted. We also hope that students recognize that some groups benefit more from "what government does" than others. If students or any citizens for that matter wish to change that fact, knowledge and participation are essential. The second set of issues concerns American political values. The American nation is defined not only by its form of government but also by a set of shared beliefs and values, the most basic of which are liberty, equality, and democracy. Although these values are the basis of the structures and rules of American government, our job as authors is to recognize the gap between ideals and realities and to treat the gap honestly. After all, what is the meaning of "government by the people" if broad popular influence over political actions is diminished? Liberty, equality, and democracy are concepts that link all the chapters of our book. They are also criteria against which to measure, judge, and even criticize "what government does." And it's our view that a good citizen is a critical citizen.

One remaining feature of our text that we hope will help students become informed and critical citizens is what we call our "Greek chorus." Each chapter includes a "Student Debate" that presents the opposing views of students on current issues. As with the chorus in Greek drama, our student chorus illustrates the range of enlightenment. We continue to hope that our book will itself be accepted as a form of enlightened political action. This Fourth Edition is another chance. It is an advancement toward our goal. We promise to keep trying.

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Our students at Cornell, Johns Hopkins, Harvard, and Berkeley have been an essential factor in the writings of this book. They have been our most immediate intellectual community, a hospitable one indeed. Another part of our community, perhaps a large suburb, is the discipline of political science itself. Our debt to the scholarship of our colleagues is scientifically measurable, probably to several decimal points, in the endnotes of each chapter. Despite many complaints that the field is too scientific or not scientific enough, political science is alive and well in the United States. It is an aspect of democracy itself, and it has grown and changed in response to the developments in government and politics that we have chronicled in our book. If we did a "time line" on the history of political science, it would show a close association with developments in "the American state." Sometimes the discipline has been out of phase and critical; at other times, it has been in phase and perhaps apologetic. But political science has never been at a loss for relevant literature, and without it, our job would have been impossible.

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We are more than happy, however, to absolve all these contributors from any flaws, errors, and misjudgments that will inevitably be discovered. We wish the book could be free of all production errors, grammatical errors, misspellings, misquotes, missed citations, etc. From that standpoint, a book ought to try to be perfect. But substantively we have not tried to write a flawless book; we have not tried to write a book to please everyone. We have again tried to write an effective book, a book that cannot be taken lightly. Our goal was not to make every reader a political scientist or a political activist. Our goal was to restore politics as a subject matter of vigorous and enjoyable discourse, recapturing it from the bondage of the thirty-second sound bite and the thirty-page technical briefing. Every person can be knowledgeable because everything about politics is accessible. One does not have to be a television anchorperson to profit from political events. One does not have to be a philosopher to argue about the requisites of democracy, a lawyer to dispute constitutional interpretations, an economist to debate a public policy. We would be very proud if our book contributes in a small way to the restoration of the ancient art of political controversy.

BENJAMIN GINSBERG
THEODORE J. LOWI
MARGARET WEIR

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