

# *Promise and Performance of American Democracy*

SIXTH EDITION

**JON R. BOND** ★ **RICHARD A. WATSON** ★ **KEVIN B. SMITH**

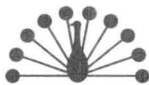
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*Promise and Performance  
of American Democracy*

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**F. E. Peacock Publishers, Inc.**  
Itasca, Illinois

Cover photograph ©Stone/Reza Estakhrian 2001

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Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 00 136431

ISBN 0-87581-439-5

Printed in the U.S.A.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

06 05 04 03 02 01

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The aim of the sixth edition of *Promise and Performance of American Democracy* is to provide a readable text that is readily accessible to undergraduates and that is anchored in and motivated by political science scholarship. We believe there is a place for a book based on the assumption that the scholarship of political science provides the best lens for an undergraduate's first college-level examination of the American political system. Our goal is to intellectually challenge students, to convince them that the challenge is worth accepting, and to help them successfully meet the challenge. We have sought to produce a text that is both engaging and substantive, that not only is accessible, but that also provides access to the wisdom of the most talented political science researchers.

The organizational and substantive character of this book is a deliberate reaction to our view of the advantages and disadvantages of historical and modern approaches to introductory surveys of American politics. Texts from decades past were books of political science that presented the subject of American government as revealed by the best scholarly research and writing. Unfortunately for the average undergraduate, they also tended to be demanding; the writing was often dense and the lessons difficult to extract.

Modern texts are much more accessible; the presentation is pedagogically oriented toward transferring information quickly. Although many of these modern textbooks are of high quality, we believe they lack an important contribution of traditional texts: an introduction to the discipline of political science. They no doubt ease the challenge of attracting the attention of undergraduates, but they can also submerge much of the wisdom and knowledge of political science research.

The sixth edition of *Promise and Performance of American Democracy* seeks to rejuvenate the scholarly tradition of introductory American government textbooks. The book is founded on the vision of its previous editions. Its organizing theme is the contrast between the theoretical promises of democracy and its actual performance. As detailed in Chapter 1, a number of scholars offer convincing evidence that citizens often have idealistic and unrealistic expectations of a democratic system of government and are understandably frustrated by the system's failure to deliver on these lofty promises. We seek to establish a theoretical benchmark about what a democratic system is supposed to do and to contrast it

with empirical conclusions culled from the discipline about what is actually happening. We deliberately seek to prod readers into making independent judgments about the correlation between promise and performance, and to give them the basic information necessary to make such informed judgments.

Following the introductory chapter that spells out this basic framework, the text is organized into four sections that represent the necessary foundation of an introductory survey to the American political system: the constitutional framework, popular control, official decision making, and individual freedoms. Each chapter begins with a high-interest example that sets up the comparison and ends with the authors' assessment of how well the American system delivers on the democratic promise, an assessment intended to stimulate independent thought rather than to proselytize. A wide variety of current controversies—including the meaning and value of public opinion polls, the power of interest groups, the intricacies of the electoral college, voter turnout, judicial policymaking, and the growth of the bureaucracy—are incorporated into this framework. Tables, charts, graphs, boxes, and photographs are used to visually augment the main issues discussed in the text.

Every chapter ends with a summary of main points, a list of key terms, and a brief annotated list of contemporary readings. Key terms are also defined in a glossary at the end of the book for easy reference, and an appendix includes the major documents of American democracy. Because we believe that the text used in political science classes should show students how political scientists report the results of their research, we use the APSA style of in-text citations with a comprehensive list of references.

With thorough coverage of the successes and failures of the workings of democracy in the contemporary United States, *Promise and Performance of American Democracy* is designed to report what political science has learned about American government, to challenge students, and to provide students with the intellectual tools they need to understand politics and evaluate the functioning of democracy. The ultimate aim is not simply to help them understand the political system, but to increase their capacity to make independent and informed decisions as citizens.

## Acknowledgments

For the sixth edition of *Promise and Performance of American Democracy*, Jon Bond and Kevin Smith have joined Richard Watson, who has retired, as coauthors. We have revised and updated all chapters. Watson's imprint and original conception remain. The previous editions of Watson's book embody the scholarly tradition of introductory American government textbooks that we seek to bring to our students, and we are grateful to him for allowing us to bring his text out of hibernation.

A text of this scope reflects the talents and vision of a group of people. Most important is a publisher that continues to value the scholarly tradition. F. E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., is such a publisher. Founder and President Ted Peacock and Vice President and Publisher Dick Welna have supported this vision of textbook publishing. This is in many ways their project—they backed it with their

wallets, their patience, and their faith in its worth. A number of others in the Peacock family also deserve recognition, especially Jane Steinman, Sybil Sosin, and Kim Vander Steen. Competent writers are commonplace; excellent editors are much rarer. We are the beneficiaries of three of the latter, and our gratitude and appreciation are immense.

Thanks is also due to the distinguished team of teacher-scholars who reviewed the chapters. Their feedback and input was invaluable in helping us achieve our goals, and they saved us from countless errors of fact and interpretation. They include Harold F. Bass, Jr., Ouachita Baptist University; Lawrence Baum, Ohio State University; James V. Calvi, West Texas A&M University; F. Chris Garcia, University of New Mexico; Donald Haider-Markel, University of Kansas; Marjorie Randon Hershey, Indiana University; Eric Herzik, University of Nevada, Reno; Paul Kantor, Fordham University; Jan Leighley, Texas A&M University; Susan Mezey, DePaul University; Michael K. Moore, University of Texas, Arlington; Raymond Tatalovich, Loyola University Chicago; Jerry L. Yeric, University of North Texas; and Garry Young, University of Missouri, Columbia.

In addition, we are especially grateful to Ken Meier, who made the phone call that got us together on this project. We have enjoyed and benefitted from the collaboration with each other, and we are grateful to Ken for recognizing that we would be compatible coauthors. And we thank Lydia Andrade, University of the Incarnate Word, for preparing the glossary and the Test Bank, Instructor's Manual, and Study Guide.

Jon Bond is grateful to numerous friends and colleagues. Rich Fleisher at Fordham University, who advised me on this project from its beginning, deserves special recognition. On this project as on others, I have valued his insight and friendship. Other colleagues who shared their expertise on various topics and provided guidance were Frank Baumgartner, Roy Flemming, Bob Harmel, Kim Hill, Pat Hurley, Charlie Johnson, Bryan Jones, Jan Leighley, Norm Luttbeg, Jim Rogers, and John Robertson. Several of my graduate students helped with background research and provided technical assistance in constructing the tables and figures. Thank you, Danette Brickman, Kristi Campbell, Michelle Chin, Jim Cottrill, Stephen Hanna, Brink Kerr, Glen Krutz, and Dorris McGonagle. Avis Munson in the Department of Political Science office also provided invaluable help on the tables and figures. Finally, I want to thank the special women in my life, my wife Karon, and my daughters Lynn, Mika, and Monika. I appreciate the love and support you have given me, and I hope to see more of you all now that this book is finally done.

Kevin Smith would like to thank a wide circle of friends and colleagues at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I would especially like to thank my wife Kelly, who put up with me while I was working on this project; my colleague John Hibbing who, perhaps without knowing it, made a number of key contributions to this project; and Winston Churchill, the Dallas Cowboys, and the Boulevard Brewery, whose distractions indulged me when I should have been working.

Jon R. Bond  
Kevin B. Smith



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# The Promise of Democracy

“What would you consider the greatest spectator sport in the country today? Would you say it was baseball, basketball, football?” asked Mayor Frank Skeffington.

“I think basketball has the highest paid attendance,” replied his nephew, a young sportswriter.

“It’s politics. That’s right, politics,” the Mayor retorted. “Millions and millions of people following it every day in the newspapers, over the TV and the radio. Now mind you, they wouldn’t get mixed up in this for all the tea in China, but they can tell you the names and numbers of all the players. And what they can’t tell the coaches about strategy . . . oh! [P]olitics is an exciting game to watch.”

This scene from the 1958 movie *The Last Hurrah* (Columbia Pictures 1958)<sup>1</sup> may have been an accurate portrayal of U.S. society fifty years ago. But if it was once true, it is no longer the case that Americans assiduously follow, let alone enjoy, the game of democratic politics. On the contrary, Americans appear to have become increasingly cynical, frustrated, and dissatisfied with politics in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the citizens of Mayor Skeffington’s day, citizens today do not understand the basic rules of democratic politics. Without understanding the rules, it isn’t possible to evaluate the results of the game.

Americans have a number of misconceptions about democracy. They tend to equate it with an idealistic yearning for freedom or as synonymous with capitalism, and they believe that the United States has always served as an example of how to do democracy “best.” None of these conceptions is necessarily true. In fact, when democracy moves from the abstract to the concrete, from the idealis-

<sup>1</sup>The movie was adapted from Edwin O’Connor’s 1956 novel, *The Last Hurrah*, a fictionalized account of Boston’s mayor and political boss, James Michael Curley. Mayor Curley was defeated in his bid for reelection in 1951, his last hurrah.

<sup>2</sup>For data on the decline in trust in government, see Figure 4.5 in Chapter 4.