

S E C O N D E D I T I O N

WE THE PEOPLE



THOMAS E. PATTERSON

WE THE PEOPLE

A CONCISE INTRODUCTION
TO AMERICAN POLITICS

Second Edition

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A Concise Introduction to American Politics

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Preface



The story of American politics is a compelling one. It is about the struggle of real people to find mutually beneficial ways of living together. The title of this book, *We the People*, is a recognition of this struggle and its lofty goal—a government of and for *all* the people.

The writer Theodore White aptly described the United States as “a nation in search of itself.” The American people have created a remarkably stable political system but have never regarded their work as finished. Each generation has had to redefine how their government will work in practice. This imperative is as powerful today as at nearly any time in the nation’s history. The late twentieth century has been a period of extraordinary change in America, which has raised new challenges to the practice of government. Minorities and women, long denied access to political and economic power, are seeking a fairer share. New people in the millions from Asia and Latin America have joined the American community, bringing with them cultural traditions that have made our society richer and fuller, but also more fragmented and contentious. Traditional institutions, from political parties to families, have declined dramatically, weakening the fabric of our politics but also creating the possibility of adaptive new arrangements. America’s workers and businesses have built a highly productive economy but are now facing the risks and opportunities of a global marketplace. The cold war that dominated our attention in foreign policy for decades has been replaced by ethnic rivalries and localized conflicts that raise troubling new issues of world insecurity which, so far, have defied most attempts to resolve them.

Scholars have endeavored to keep pace with the great changes that are taking place in today’s politics. Never before has scholarship been so closely tied to the real world. If much of what political scientists study is arcane, we have tried increasingly to connect our work to the realities of everyday politics. The result has been the gradual emergence of a clearer and more complex picture of how American government operates. I have tried in this book to convey this advancement in knowledge in a faithful and interesting way.

In writing this book, I rejected the impulse to impose a single framework on the analysis. The U.S. political system and scholarship on it are both remarkably pluralistic, and any attempt at orthodoxy distorts their rich na-

ture. Accordingly, this text relies upon the several forms of analysis that have informed the work of political scientists—the philosophical, historical, behavioral, legal, policy-analytic, and institutional. Each perspective has its strengths and its place in a telling of the story of American government.

Nevertheless, the book has a unifying core. The American political system is characterized by a few major tendencies, which are the key to understanding how it operates, namely:

- An enduring set of cultural ideals that are its people's common bond and a source of their political goals.
- An extreme fragmentation of governing authority that is based on an elaborate system of checks and balances.
- A great many competing interests that are the result of the nation's great size, population diversity, and economic complexity.
- A strong emphasis on individual rights that is a consequence of the nation's political traditions.
- A sharp separation of the political and economic spheres that has the effect of placing many economic issues outside the reach of political majorities.

These tendencies are introduced in the first chapter and are woven into subsequent chapters at numerous points. If students soon forget many of the points made in this book, as they invariably will, they may at least retain an awareness of the deep underpinnings of the American political system.

This book originated in my larger text, *The American Democracy*, which was first published in 1990 and will soon enter its fourth edition. This shorter text, however, is not a mere abridgment of the longer one. It is meant to stand on its own and thus was created by a process of revision and reorganization rather than the deletion of whole sections or chapters. Yet throughout the writing of the original edition and now the second edition of *We the People*, I have labored to maintain what readers of the larger text say is one of its greatest strengths: the extensive use of narrative. Nothing dulls a student's interest more quickly than a text that piles fact upon fact and list upon list. Narrative themes are more likely to hold the reader's attention; they have also been shown to heighten learning.

A novel feature of *We the People* is its set of selected readings; each chapter is followed by a reading that develops a major point of the chapter. These readings are intended to deepen the student's understanding of American politics and to add flexibility to the instructor's use of the material. For the

instructor who prefers to supplement the course text with a book of readings, this text offers both. On the other hand, the instructor who wants to limit reading assignments to the text itself can simply skip the end-of-chapter readings or suggest them as optional reading for students who have the time and interest. The readings, with the exception of James Madison's *Federalist* No. 10, are contemporary ones. The authors, in order of their appearance, are distinguished scholars and public servants: Jennifer L. Hochschild; R. Kent Weaver; Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro; Sidney Verba; Kay Lehman Schlozman and Henry E. Banks; Alan Ehrenhalt; Jonathan Rauch; Thomas E. Patterson; Paul S. Herrnson; Richard Rose; David Osborne and Ted Gaebler; William J. Brennan, Jr.; Alice M. Rivlin; B. Guy Peters; and Kenichi Ohmae.

Another feature is a pair of boxed inserts in each chapter. One is entitled "How the United States Compares." The United States in many ways is the world's preeminent democracy, but it also has distinctive policies and practices. American students invariably gain a deeper understanding of their own society when they recognize the ways in which it differs from others. Each chapter also has a boxed insert entitled "States in the Nation." This material is designed to alert students to similarities and differences in the politics of the American states.

This book owes a great debt to others. Editions of my larger text were strengthened immeasurably by the suggestions of more than 300 scholars at U.S. colleges and universities of all types—public and private, large and small, two-year and four-year. Their sound advice helped shape every page of that book, which in turn has affected the pages here. I am also deeply thankful to the smaller group of scholars who advised me directly on the content of the first or second edition of *We the People*: Paul Blanchard, Eastern Kentucky University; John Bookman, University of Northern Colorado; Didrick Castberg, University of Hawaii at Hilo; John Cavanaugh, University of South Carolina; Paul Chardoul, Grand Rapids Community College; Linda Beail Coleman, Point Loma Nazarene College; Delmer Dunn, University of Georgia; Richard Logan Fox, University of Wyoming; Stephen Frank, St. Cloud State University; Lawrence Giventer, California State University, Stanislaus; Daniel Gregory, El Camino College; Nancy Haanstad, Weber State College; William Hastings, San Diego Mesa College; Eric Herzik, University of Nevada; Richard Keiser, University of Denver; William Kelly, Auburn University; Donald Kerle, Pittsburgh State University; Thomas Marshall, University of Texas at Arlington; Richard Miller, Sacramento City College; John Nickerson, University of Maine; Kenneth Payne, San Diego Mesa College; Linda Potter, Sul Ross State University;

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I also wish to thank Lyn Uhl, my editor at McGraw-Hill. She offered several helpful suggestions for the second edition and provided ample support and constructive criticism at every stage of the writing process. Lyn is a delight to work with, as were my two previous McGraw-Hill editors, Bert Lummus and Peter Labella. David Damstra of McGraw-Hill carefully oversaw the laborious process of turning a rough-hewn manuscript into a well-crafted and, to my mind, beautifully designed book. David has been part of every McGraw-Hill text edition I have written but recently left the company. I am deeply thankful for his help and patience over the years and will greatly miss working with him. Karen Osborne of McGraw-Hill is also owed a deep thanks; her careful copyediting improved the book's prose and substance. Barbara Salz contributed through her careful and imaginative photo research. I am also indebted to McGraw-Hill's Katrina Redmond. Finally, I wish to thank my student assistant, Matthew Malady. He spent a summer helping me update this edition. His many contributions made my job much easier.

Looking ahead, I invite from instructors and students any comments and criticisms that might inform future editions of this text. The strengths and weaknesses of a text are best discovered in its use, and I hope readers will share their thoughts with me. Suggestions can be mailed to me at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138. I can also be reached through e-mail: thomas__patterson@harvard.edu.

Finally, there is an Internet Web site devoted to this text. The site offers instructors and students up-to-date information on American politics that is keyed to the text's chapters. The site is located at:

<http://www.mhcollege.com/social/poli/patterson.htm>

Thomas E. Patterson

Contents

PREFACE	xvii
CHAPTER ONE The American Heritage	1
POLITICAL CULTURE: THE CORE PRINCIPLES OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT	3
POLITICS: THE PROCESS OF DECIDING UPON SOCIETY'S GOALS	12
THE CONCEPT OF A POLITICAL SYSTEM AND THE BOOK'S ORGANIZATION	20
Summary	22
Major Concepts	23
Suggested Readings	23
READING 1 The Future of the American Dream <i>Jennifer L. Hochschild</i>	25
CHAPTER TWO Federal Government	29
BEFORE THE CONSTITUTION: THE ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION	30
NEGOTIATING TOWARD A CONSTITUTION	33
FEDERALISM: NATIONAL AND STATE SOVEREIGNTY	36
FEDERALISM IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE	40
FEDERALISM TODAY	48
Summary	58
Major Concepts	59
Suggested Readings	59
READING 2 Deficits and Devolution <i>R. Kent Weaver</i>	61

CHAPTER THREE	Constitutional Democracy	65
THE ROOTS OF LIMITED GOVERNMENT		66
CONSTITUTIONAL RESTRAINTS ON POLITICAL POWER		68
CHECKS AND BALANCES IN PRACTICE		76
REPRESENTATION IN THE CONSTITUTION		81
MODIFYING THE FRAMERS' WORK: TOWARD A MORE DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY		84
THE MODERN ERA: THE TERM-LIMITATION REFORM MOVEMENT		90
CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY TODAY		92
Summary		93
Major Concepts		94
Suggested Readings		94
READING 3 The Mischiefs of Faction		
<i>James Madison</i>		96
CHAPTER FOUR	Civil Liberties	100
FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION		102
FREEDOM OF RELIGION		112
THE RIGHT OF PRIVACY		114
RIGHTS OF PERSONS ACCUSED OF CRIMES		117
THE COURTS AND A FREE SOCIETY		127
Summary		128
Major Concepts		128
Suggested Readings		129
READING 4 Flag Burning and Free Expression		
<i>Texas v. Johnson (1989)</i>		130
CHAPTER FIVE	Equal Rights	134
THE STRUGGLE FOR EQUALITY		135
EQUALITY UNDER THE LAW		151

EQUALITY OF RESULT	156
PERSISTENT DISCRIMINATION: SUPERFICIAL DIFFERENCES, DEEP DIVISIONS	163
Summary	164
Major Concepts	164
Suggested Readings	165
READING 5 College Admission and Equal Protection <i>United States v. Virginia</i>	166

CHAPTER SIX Public Opinion and Political Socialization 170

THE NATURE OF PUBLIC OPINION	172
POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION: HOW AMERICANS LEARN THEIR POLITICS	179
FRAMES OF REFERENCE: HOW AMERICANS THINK POLITICALLY	183
THE INFLUENCE OF PUBLIC OPINION ON POLICY	193
Summary	195
Major Concepts	196
Suggested Readings	196
READING 6 Democracy, Information, and the Rational Public <i>Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro</i>	198

CHAPTER SEVEN VOTING AND PARTICIPATION 202

VOTER PARTICIPATION	203
CONVENTIONAL FORMS OF PARTICIPATION OTHER THAN VOTING	216
UNCONVENTIONAL ACTIVISM: SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND PROTEST POLITICS	220
PARTICIPATION AND THE POTENTIAL FOR INFLUENCE	222
Summary	225
Major Concepts	226

Suggested Readings	226
READING 7 Participation and Equity <i>Sidney Verbar, Kay Leberman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady</i>	228
CHAPTER EIGHT Political Parties, Candidates, and Campaigns	232
PARTY COMPETITION AND MAJORITY RULE: THE HISTORY OF U.S. PARTIES	234
ELECTORAL AND PARTY SYSTEMS	241
PARTY ORGANIZATIONS	250
THE CANDIDATE-CENTERED CAMPAIGN	255
PARTIES, CANDIDATES, AND THE PUBLIC'S INFLUENCE	261
Summary	263
Major Concepts	264
Suggested Readings	264
READING 8 The Politics of Ambition <i>Alan Ehrenhalt</i>	266
CHAPTER NINE Interest Groups	270
THE INTEREST-GROUP SYSTEM	273
INSIDE LOBBYING: SEEKING INFLUENCE THROUGH OFFICIAL CONTACTS	282
OUTSIDE LOBBYING: SEEKING INFLUENCE THROUGH PUBLIC PRESSURE	288
THE GROUP SYSTEM: INDISPENSABLE BUT BIASED	293
Summary	298
Major Concepts	299
Suggested Readings	299
READING 9 Paralyzing Effect of Group Politics <i>Jonathan Rauch</i>	300

CHAPTER TEN	The News Media	304
	THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEWS MEDIA: FROM PARTISANSHIP TO OBJECTIVE JOURNALISM	306
	FREEDOM AND CONFORMITY IN THE U.S. NEWS MEDIA	312
	THE NEWS MEDIA AS LINK: ROLES THE PRESS CAN AND CANNOT PERFORM	316
	ORGANIZING THE PUBLIC IN THE MEDIA AGE	325
	Summary	325
	Major Concepts	326
	Suggested Readings	326
	READING 10 The Miscast Institution <i>Thomas E. Patterson</i>	328
CHAPTER ELEVEN	Congress	332
	CONGRESS AS A CAREER: ELECTION TO CONGRESS	334
	CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP	341
	THE COMMITTEE SYSTEM	346
	CONGRESS'S POLICYMAKING ROLE	354
	CONGRESS: TOO MUCH PLURALISM?	362
	Summary	363
	Major Concepts	365
	Suggested Readings	365
	READING 11 Running for Congress <i>Paul S. Herrnson</i>	367
CHAPTER TWELVE	The Presidency	371
	FOUNDATIONS OF THE MODERN PRESIDENCY	374
	CHOOSING THE PRESIDENT	378
	STAFFING THE PRESIDENCY	386
	FACTORS IN PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP	390

Summary	402
Major Concepts	403
Suggested Readings	403
READING 12 The Postmodern President <i>Richard Rose</i>	405
CHAPTER THIRTEEN The Bureaucracy	409
THE FEDERAL BUREAUCRACY: FORM, PERSONNEL, AND ACTIVITIES	411
DEVELOPMENT OF THE FEDERAL BUREAUCRACY: POLITICS AND ADMINISTRATION	418
THE BUREAUCRACY'S POWER IMPERATIVE	423
BUREAUCRATIC ACCOUNTABILITY	428
REINVENTING GOVERNMENT	436
Summary	438
Major Concepts	440
Suggested Readings	440
READING 13 Reinventing Government <i>David Osborne and Ted Gaebler</i>	442
CHAPTER FOURTEEN The Judiciary	446
THE FEDERAL JUDICIAL SYSTEM	448
FEDERAL COURT APPOINTEES	457
THE NATURE OF JUDICIAL DECISION MAKING	462
JUDICIAL POWER AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT	469
Summary	473
Major Concepts	474
Suggested Readings	474
READING 14 Judicial Interpretation <i>William J. Brennan, Jr.</i>	476

CHAPTER FIFTEEN	Economic Policy	480
REGULATING THE ECONOMY		481
HOW THE GOVERNMENT PROMOTES VARIOUS ECONOMIC INTERESTS		491
MAINTAINING A STABLE ECONOMY		494
Summary		506
Major Concepts		507
Suggested Readings		507
READING 15 Long-Term Goals for the Economy <i>Alice M. Rivlin</i>		509
CHAPTER SIXTEEN	Social Welfare Policy	513
POVERTY IN AMERICA: THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM		515
THE POLITICS AND POLICIES OF SOCIAL WELFARE		519
INDIVIDUAL-BENEFIT PROGRAMS		525
EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY THROUGH EDUCATION: THE AMERICAN WAY		533
CULTURE, POLITICS, AND SOCIAL WELFARE		536
Summary		540
Major Concepts		542
Suggested Readings		542
READING 16 The New Poverty <i>B. Guy Peters</i>		543
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN	Foreign and Defense Policy	547
THE ROOTS OF U.S. FOREIGN AND DEFENSE POLICY		548
THE PROCESS OF FOREIGN AND MILITARY POLICYMAKING		555
THE MILITARY DIMENSION OF NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY		559
THE ECONOMIC DIMENSION OF NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY		566
Summary		576

Major Concepts	577
Suggested Readings	577
READING 17 A Borderless World <i>Kenichi Ohmae</i>	579
THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE	A-1
THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	A-7
GLOSSARY	A-27
NOTES	A-45
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	A-79
INDEX	I-1

CHAPTER ONE

The American Heritage

One hears people say that it is inherent in the habits and nature of democracies to change feelings and thoughts at every moment. . . . But I have never seen anything like that happening in the great democracy on the other side of the ocean. What struck me most in the United States was the difficulty experienced in getting an idea, once conceived, out of the head of the majority.

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE¹



AT MIDDAY on January 20, 1997, Bill Clinton took the oath of office for a second term as president of the United States. Clinton's speech, if not for its contemporary statements, would have sounded familiar to any generation of Americans.² His address was punctuated with references to time-honored American principles: democracy, liberty, opportunity for all, diversity, unity, self-reliance. The same ideals had filled the speeches of Ronald Reagan and John Kennedy, Franklin Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln, and Andrew Jackson and Thomas Jefferson.³ The same ideals had been used to take America to war, to negotiate peace, to assert new rights, to declare major policies, and to memorialize national holidays.

Of course, the practice of these ideals has changed greatly during the two centuries that the United States has been a nation. When America's founders proclaimed in 1776 that "all men are created equal," they did not have in mind women or slaves. And the assumption that Americans are one people with a common vision has always obscured deep divisions in society.⁴ The claim that America is a gigantic melting pot has always been as much fable as fact. When Irish, Italian, and Polish immigrants reached this country's shores, they encountered nativist elements that scorned their ways of life and attacked their religion. The Latinos and Asians who have come here more recently have also been made to feel less than fully welcome. The "English-first" movement includes the not-very-subtle message that "true" Americans do not speak Spanish or Vietnamese or Cambodian.

Yet the American political experience has been remarkably enduring.



U.S. politics is remarkable for its historical continuity, which is celebrated here in a ceremony at the Capitol in Washington D.C. (Joseph Sohm/Stock, Boston)

Throughout their history, Americans have embraced the same core principles. The United States has been settled by diverse peoples who have maintained many of their cultural differences. But they have shared an idealized image of what it means to be an American. They have quarreled over other matters, and over the practice of these principles, but they seem never to have questioned the principles themselves. As Clinton Rossiter concluded, “There has been, in a doctrinal sense, only one America.”⁵

This is a book about contemporary American politics, not U.S. history or culture. Yet American politics today cannot be understood apart from the nation’s heritage. Government does not begin anew with each generation; it builds on the past. In the case of the United States, the most significant link between past and present lies in the nation’s founding ideals. This chapter briefly examines the principles that have shaped American politics since the country’s earliest years.

The chapter also explains basic concepts, such as power and authority, that are important in the study of government and politics, and describes the underlying rules and theories of the American governing system, such as constitutionalism and pluralism. The main points made in this chapter are the following: