

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT BRIEF EDITION



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American Government

Brief Edition

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American Government

Preface

As the Brief Edition of *American Government* went into production, the administration of President Bill Clinton, the nation's forty-second chief executive, was well underway. Following 12 years of control of the White House by Republican presidents Ronald Reagan (1981–1989) and George Bush (1989–1993), Clinton is the first Democratic president since Jimmy Carter (1977–1981) and only the second since Lyndon Johnson (1963–1969). The transfer of power from one administration to another at noon on January 20, 1993, dramatically illustrated the ongoing importance of economics and ideology in American politics. Clinton had run in 1992 on a platform of economic change. A sign on the wall in his campaign headquarters read, "It's the economy, stupid." Moreover, on a host of issues his administration has signaled an ideological break with the Reagan-Bush years.

Economics, Ideology, and Politics

A distinguishing feature of this book is the explicit recognition that economics and ideology significantly influence American politics. No student or instructor in a course on American government is immune to the ideological and economic forces which help shape the perennial pursuit of power in a democracy. Nor is any class or instructor untouched by recurring problems ranging from budget deficits and health care to unemployment and the underclass. Economics and ideology, in one way or another, intersect nearly all of them.

This text highlights the importance of economics and ideology in the context of American government in several ways. Chapter 12, "Economic Policy, the National Budget, and the Deficit," explores the relationship between politics and *economics*, as does a series of "Politics and Economics" boxes (described below) throughout the rest of the book. Students see how economic decisions have political consequences and how political decisions affect the economy. This is essential information in a day when economic topics frequently dominate electoral campaigns, television news, and conversation at the dinner table. However, the text assumes *no* prior knowledge of economics, and references to economic policy are free of confusing jargon.

Understanding differences among political beliefs is likewise essential at a time when the labels “liberal” and “conservative,” “left” and “right” are hurled about. Such terms can be baffling, particularly because their meaning has not been constant. Consequently, the text underscores the importance of *political ideology*—the ideas people have about what government should or should not do and what kind of government they should have. This emphasis is reflected in a series of “Politics and Ideas” boxes (described below), in Chapter 4, “Political Ideologies,” and in Chapter 5, “Public Opinion, the Mass Media, and Political Participation.” Chapter 4 is nearly unique among shorter volumes on American government because it draws a road map that guides students through intellectual debates, past and present, in American politics. Additionally, Chapter 3, “Civil Liberties and Civil Rights” probes ideological distinctions among Americans concerning fundamental freedoms. Such an encompassing survey of the spectrum of political ideas encourages students both to comprehend and to tolerate points of view other than their own, enabling them to gain further insight into political differences that exist nationwide.

Anatomy of this Brief Edition

The need persists for widespread mastery of the political system John Quincy Adams once described as “the most complicated on the face of the globe.” To this end, we offer today’s students a comprehensive, readable, and balanced study of the context, structure, and process of American politics.

Yet, writing a book on American government that is both lean and complete is a daunting challenge. The second edition of *American Government*, with which this book has a special kinship, contains 21 chapters with 700 pages of text. Clearly we believe all of it to be important. By contrast, this book contains 12 chapters with only slightly more than half the pages of the bigger book. A reader may fairly ask what we omitted. We answer this question by first noting what is present: full coverage, in discrete chapters, of the constitutional structure and the major institutions and processes of American government. These chapters include one each on the Constitution (Chapter 1), federalism (Chapter 2), political ideologies (Chapter 4), campaigns and elections (Chapter 7), Congress (Chapter 8), the presidency (Chapter 9), the bureaucracy and government regulation (Chapter 10), the judiciary (Chapter 11), and economic and budgetary policy (Chapter 12).

In addition, the book contains extensive, if somewhat reduced, coverage of several other subjects. Civil liberties and civil rights appear in a single chapter (Chapter 3), instead of in two; the political role of the mass media logically has been combined with public opinion and political participation (Chapter 5). Analysis of interest groups has been merged with political parties (Chapter 6). Omitted have been separate policy chapters on social welfare, science and technology, and foreign and defense policy. We supposed that instructors choosing a brief edition would probably not have time to cover such topics in depth. Readers familiar with the larger second edition of *American Government* will also note that we have reduced somewhat the number of special boxed features and pho-

tographs. We eliminated entirely some boxed features such as the personality profiles. Pedagogically useful, they are not essential to study of the subject at hand.

Pedagogical Features

This brief edition is not a “theme” or point-of-view book. Aside from emphasizing the importance of politics and political involvement, the book embraces no single ideological perspective; it does not attempt to make readers Democrats or Republicans, liberals or conservatives. To ensure a single voice in this presentation, one author has served as general editor.

The goals are knowledge of, and critical thinking about, American politics and government. Accordingly, we have designed the book to encourage students to *engage* the material. Passive reading is not enough. Understanding so important and complex a subject necessitates active intellectual involvement.

To aid in learning, the brief edition incorporates several serviceable pedagogical features.

- “Politics and Ideas” boxes appearing throughout the text explore ideological topics in depth. They demonstrate how ideological divisions generate different political consequences.
- “Politics and Economics” boxes appearing through the text highlight special economics topics, illustrating the relationship between economics and politics.
- “Contemporary Controversies” boxes are present in a few chapters to illustrate how the subject matter covered in the chapter carries over into disputes that divide the nation.
- Study questions conclude the special boxed features to encourage critical thinking and further inquiry.
- Tables, graphs, and maps appear throughout the text to display both quantitative and conceptual data. Some illustrations present new data, while others summarize information covered in the body of the chapter.
- A summary, key terms, and a description of suggested readings conclude each chapter. The summary contains in numbered form the main points presented in the chapter. Key terms, in boldface, are defined at the point at which they are introduced in the chapter. Suggested readings are widely available primary and secondary sources that students may consult in pursuing topics in the chapter.

Supplements

The following supplements are available from HarperCollins: Instructor’s Manual, Test Bank, Computerized Testmaster, Transparencies, Study Guide, and Democracy in Action: American Government Simulations.

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