Readings in American Government and Politics Today

1995–1996 Edition

Steffen W. Schmidt Mack C. Shelley, II

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Steffen W. Schmidt
Iowa State University

Mack C. Shelley, II
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Introduction

The "Three C's" of issues in the realms of politics, public policy, and government are complexity, controversy, and conflict. Most issues of any significance are characterized by these three factors.

In this book we have selected contrasting, and sometimes sharply conflicting, interpretations of nineteen important and interesting clusters of issues in American government and politics today. We have also proposed some solutions. These issues follow the outline of chapters included in our textbook, *American Government and Politics Today*, 1995-96 (West Publishing Co., 1995). However, this reader is designed to be used also as a stand-alone supplement for courses in American government and politics. For students who are not using our own textbook, the readings cover important contemporary topics on the American scene. The book is therefore a valuable companion to other assigned readings in American government and politics.

Our objective in this book is to allow its readers to taste the variety and sharpness present in the U.S. debate over such disparate matters as euthanasia, gun control, foreign policy choices, or health care.

Our premise is that, in order to understand the performance of modern American government, it is essential to know about the large and impersonal processes that are significant in determining political events in the United States, as well as the functions of key institutions (Congress, the presidency, and political parties, for example.) An examination of these processes and institutions often explains a substantial part of what happens in politics as well as in the governance of the United States. However, the engine of public debate is normally driven by conflict and controversy over relatively narrow and specialized issues. Therefore, this book adopts a case study approach to understanding American government and politics today.

The Case Study Approach

(Note: This section is reprinted with special permission from Prof. Steffen W. Schmidt, *Using the Case Study Method in Comparative Politics*, © S.W. Schmidt, 1992.)

One way to operationalize the readings in this book is to use the case study method. Think of each reading, or set of reading clusters, in this book as a micro "Case Study." Then approach the in-class analysis and discussion of the minicase using some of the criteria outlined below.

In 1922 Prof. E.P. Learned began using what he called the "case discussion" method in this classes. He applied it at the University of Kansas, for two years as an MBA candidate at Harvard, and for 40 years as professor of the Harvard Business School.[1] This was a period when many professors were coming to the disquieting conclusion that there was something wrong with the level of interest generated by most classes. The methods used at the time were taking a toll on student's speed and retention, and on their long-term skills.

Moreover, the professors were probably experiencing a growing volume of disturbing feedback from employers. Roughly, the feedback went like this: "Your students are well trained in theory and know the book-facts. However, they don't have a good sense of how to apply their learning to real life, and they are not adept at linking related information in a chain of understanding which helps guide them."

To correct these and other deficiencies a new device was gradually designed, refined, and implemented: *the case study.* This tool, combined with traditional theory and empirical information, balanced out the learning experience of students.

The premise of the case method is that truly to learn students need to apply the material acquired in lectures, readings, and class discussion. In other words, students need to "experience" as much as possible the situation they are studying. They also need to be put in a position where they have to "make a decision" related to the situation they are presented with and into which they are placed. In other words, they must learn to offer leadership and refine their leadership skills. Ideally, a case attempts to simulate all of these real-life factors.

A case is ". . . a description of a situation, . . . that will require you to identify a problem and make a decision concerning the best course of action."[2] A case is laid out as a true story of an event or problem. The goal of the case method is not so much to study and learn what decisions were actually made, but to encourage students to apply what they've learned, to explore options, and to select a desirable course of action. In other words, the case method teaches students to make decisions and then defend those decisions.

Advantages of the Case Study

The case study has several major advantages, of which the following need to be stressed:

1. The case method encourages you to learn real facts about real political events and problems in the context of a "hands-on" presentation.
2. The case method also encourages independent, creative, and critical thinking since it involves not just learning something but "doing something about" what you've learned.
3. The case method also encourages team work and collaborative problem solving since it is often assigned to working groups or teams which are expected to grapple with and resolve the cases.
4. Finally, the case method trains the students to develop and use rigorous procedures of evidence and argument (and persuasion) since normally cases are discussed in class.

How to Perform a Case Analysis[3]

To prepare a case analysis you should do the following:

1. Read the case carefully
2. Do a situational analysis
3. Develop a statement of the problem
4. Identify alternative scenarios, decisions, and courses of action
5. Identify the decision making criteria
6. Select one of the alternative decisions and/or make recommendations on the future of the issue or problem described in the case.

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[1] C. Roland Christensen, Teaching and the Case Study Method (Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School, 1981).

[2] H. Robert Dodge and William G. Zikmund, A Collection of Cases in Marketing Management, second edition (St. Paul, West Publishing Co., 1087), p. xv.

[3] This discussion is taken from Robert Ronstandt, The Art of Case Analysis: A Student's Guide (Medham, Mass.: Lord Publishing, 1977) and from Dodge and Zikmund (op. cit.), who use this method in the field of public management.

The instructor should lead the class in performing these six steps. Assign leadership teams to each case (for very large classes, teams of 15-20 students; for small classes, teams of 3-5). The entire class should do the reading, but the team will be responsible for leading through all the stages of the case analysis.

1. Read the case carefully

The cases are succinct summaries of a situation. They provide you with most of the information (but, as in real life, not all of the facts) you need to work intelligently with the problem presented. After the first quick reading you may want to assign students to find additional information which the class feels it needs to conduct the case study. However, don't overdo it! You can also use the case as a laboratory to raise unanswered questions.

To understand the material thoroughly you may need to read each case twice. You will also want to take notes and make an outline of key facts, the sequence of events, and important players (personalities, groups, institutions). In regard to the key players, you will want to identify:

- the main roles of each
- what motivates the players
- what explains their positions on the issues
- what players are not currently involved in the issue but could be brought into the picture in the future

2. Do a situational analysis

A SitAn (situational analysis) is a strategic mapping out of the factors in the case that are relevant to your decision making and problem solving. In most cases there is too much information and some of it is irrelevant to understanding the problem and making smart choices. Map out the facts you need. One good way to conduct a SitAn is to put yourself in the position of a detective—a sort of political Columbo! Start out by asking yourself key questions about the case. What information do you really need? Then jot that information down on a sheet of paper.

3. Develop a statement of the problem

In order to solve the problem posed by the case, you need to define what is the key big picture problem of the case. Think of this as putting together a puzzle. What's the picture you are assembling? This will give a clearer direction to your case analysis, because you know what the picture looks like. Next, ask yourself, "What are the key sub-component problems (i.e., the pieces of the puzzle)?" Finally, decide "What are the biggest

obstacles I face in putting together the big picture from the component pieces?"

When you define the problem be very careful not to confuse the symptoms with the problem. Race riots, for example, are a problem, but they may be symptoms of something else (economic conditions, political radicalism, deliberate hate mongering, etc.).

4. Identify alternative scenarios, decisions, and courses of action

"Many roads lead to Rome," says the old adage. So, also, are there many solutions to every problem. List as many of the alternatives as you can imagine. Some of these, although possible, are too outrageous to be taken seriously, because they are so unrealistic. Set those aside Others are possible, but very undesirable—set these aside as well in a "contingency" pile. Identify for a final grouping the alternatives that are desirable and also appear realistic—i.e., "doable." Work on these first.

5. Identify the decision making criteria

Decision making criteria are rules or principles which should be upheld (preserved) or enhanced as a result of the decision making (problem solving). These could be such things as fairness, balancing a budget, reducing tension, or accomplishing a vitally necessary task (such as collecting and disposing of garbage). The criteria will very likely differ from one problem to the next. Establish which criteria pertain, and make a prioritized ranking of the criteria that must be met.

6. Select one of the alternative decisions and/or make recommendations on the future of the issue or problem described in the case

This is the crowing moment of your experience, the point at which you must make a decision. Be sure that you have outlined clearly why you made this decision and why it is superior to other alternatives. Don't be discouraged that you don't have all the facts or "enough information." Most decision makers have to operate in an imperfect environment—they truly never have all the facts. Nonetheless, decisions must be made.

As we indicated above, it is not necessary to use this structured approach for the readings in this book. The pieces in this book can be assigned for more traditional reading and testing. They will serve as valuable discussion points for class, and they can help fill in informational gaps on topics of political significance. However, we have found the case method to be a valuable strategy for involving students in the discussion and analysis of issues, such as the ones presented in this reader. You may want to use this approach selectively in conjunction with traditional teaching techniques for some of the material in this book.

We would appreciate any feedback from instructors, as well as students. Please contact us at the following:

Steffen Schmidt and Mack Shelley
Political Science Department
Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa 50011

Tel: (515) 294-7256
Fax: (515) 294-1003
Internet: sws@iastate.edu
mshelley@iastate.edu

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1
American Democracy and Political Culture

The article "The Revolution in U.S. Politics Is Nearly Here" expresses the concerns many Republicans have about their "democratic" government and its bureaucracy. Americans have felt alienated by the bureaucratic ways of the federal government for many years now. This article claims that the people will revolt against the system if something isn't done by the president or other top officials soon. There are already signs of unhappiness, and of people speaking out through groups such as Ross Perot's United We Stand followers. Is the next step a social revolution?

Jerry Feigen, author of the article, "Lifestyle 2000: New Enterprise and Cultural Diversity," argues that the future success of the economy in the United States and the nation's political stability will depend on how well American society can integrate new residents from diverse cultural backgrounds. With a capitalist economic structure that depends for its survival on the continual development of new business entrepreneurs and an abundant supply of cheap labor, the United States cannot afford to omit major segments of the population from participating in the economy. Feigen notes that population trends for the start of the next century point to rapid growth, particularly of Hispanics and African-Americans, and suggests that their economic talents, as well as those of women and others who are not white males, must be tapped productively if the United States is to maintain its economic dominance.

A social revolution of a very different sort is discussed in Gerard Piel's essay, "Defusing the 'Population Bomb.'" His assertion that industrial and technological development will cure the problems associated with overpopulation in Third World countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East runs against much of expert opinion. He argues that falling death rates, which really ought to be good news, and not rising birth rates, are behind population "explosions" in many low-income countries. Further economic growth in the world should be "sustainable," by providing an adequate lifestyle to newborn children. This effort will require funding from the United States, which will also benefit from the resulting economic stimulus.

THE REVOLUTION IN U.S. POLITICS IS NEARLY HERE

by Lewis Wolfson

"The politics of anger is not going to be calmed simply by rhetoric about change or cautious reforms."

"Everybody knows things are bad," the half-crazed anchorman cries out in the 1976 movie "Network." "Everybody is out of work or scared of losing their job . . . Banks are going bust. . . The air is unfit to breathe and our food is unfit to eat. Some local newscaster tells us that there were 15 homicides and 63 violent crimes, as if that's the way it's supposed to be . . . [and] all we can say is, 'Please, leave us alone. Let me have my toaster and my TV and my steel-belted radials . . .'

"Well, I'm not going to leave you alone . . . You've got to say, 'I'm a human being, dammit, and my life has value . . .' I want all of you to get up out of your chairs and go to the window, and yell, 'I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take this anymore.'"

Eighteen years later, Americans are leaning out of their windows. They are making a new American revolution, but neither the politicians nor the press in Washington has grasped fully its depth and extent. The revolutionaries have moved from apathy to alienation to action.

The rising tide could push Washington beyond the modest reforms now contemplated to the kind of larger revolution in government Americans have not seen in more than half a century: overhauling the Federal bureaucracy to make it more efficient and public service-conscious; an ambitious rethinking of the way Congress does the people's business that goes beyond tinkering with campaign finances and reorganizing committees; and reinvigorating the parties—or else.

One of these days, the President and Congress could find tens of thousands of Americans camped on their doorstep, not to raise the roof for or against spending or abortion, but to take over because officials just don't get it. They do not grasp that many Americans have had their fill of Washington's self-seeking and power games that leave the people out. Tomorrow's John Does are poised to act.

Pres. Clinton must find a way to transform national anger into a rebirth of government by and for the people. Millions of Americans literally do not believe the U.S. has a democracy. Clinton talks about "reinventing government," but the people mean it. The economy, health care, the infrastructure—all of the President's fondest hopes will be eclipsed if the programs turn into more bureaucracy with less control over it. He may gain respect for his programs, but he can win the nation's heart if he convinces millions of deeply skeptical, alienated, even frightened Americans that the Federal government is not inherently implacable and can work for the people.

Over the balance of his presidency, Clinton could turn Washington from the number-one target of national resentment into a place of hope, as it was at the time of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. The best minds in government planning were drawn to Washington; new laws and agencies were created to protect citizens; and the Capitol became the nation's true political center. It was the place to be. Politics was a calling, not a dirty word. Government could change the course of America.

Clinton and Congress now have as large a task. They must find an antidote for anti-Washington fever that has gripped the U.S. for a quarter of a century, since the Vietnam War soured a basic faith in government. Much has been said about the scars of those who fought in and protested the war, but less about millions of Americans' shattered trust in political leaders. No president from Lyndon Johnson on has escaped the people's sadness and anger over leaders who resort to lying, betray promises, and attempt to cover up policy failures.

Clinton has talked about "scaling the wall" of the people's skepticism, "not with our words,

but with our deeds." He pledged to revolutionize government by cutting 100,000 Federal jobs through attrition over four years. Vice Pres. Gore heads the Reinventing Government reforms, with an opportunity for citizens to register complaints through toll-free phone lines and letters to the White House. Reform-minded senators have pressed for a government-wide review of the bureaucracy. Congress has moved to restructure its own committee system.

However, such changes may have only glacial effects. Meanwhile, many Americans have their own idea of what government should be and do. They hear the rhetoric of reform from Washington, but see perpetuation of a system of brokered interests and carefully calibrated change. The President and Congress fix on "realistic" campaign reforms, ethics codes, and rules for lobbyists that still protect their political interests.

Washington just doesn't get it, a Marshall, Wis., woman told the *Washington Post*. "The people there don't know how people who work every day feel. They're isolated; they're protected." A press account soon after the 1993 State of the Union address found support for Clinton's economic program, but puzzled over a continuing "dark" attitude toward Washington. A *Washington Post* survey showed trust in government at its lowest ebb in 35 years.

Some lawmakers blame the popular ire that periodically bursts forth on rabble-rousing by single-issue zealots and heavy-handed talk show hosts. Telephone-and-talk-show democracy, analysts worry, could lead to mob rule. Yet, sending Washington a message from the streets is as American as apple pie, as has been seen with the historic drive for labor laws, the civil rights movement, and the Vietnam War. Many who frowned on protest in the 1960s and 1970s are ready to march in the 1990s.

The crystallizing of anti-government anger

The politics of anger welled up long before the 1992 presidential election. A year earlier, the Kettering Foundation, in a nationwide study, *Citizens and Politics,* refuted the moss-grown theory that the masses were passive and apathetic. Once-silent Americans had been growing progressively resentful over government failures that seemed beyond their control. They were bombarded with stories about aborted foreign policy ventures, unregulated savings and loans institutions running wild with their money, and Congressional pay raises, honoraria, and perks. Many Federal agencies seem to be run by people mostly concerned with enriching themselves through government contracts. They found little uplifting about elections built on corruptive sums of cash, attack ads, and empty promises. The feeling grew that "we the people" had no control over their government.

Indeed, the Kettering study found that millions of Americans did not believe they lived in a democracy. "They feel as though they [have] been locked out of their own homes," Kettering president David Matthews wrote. The traditional conduits—elections, writing to one's Congressman, appealing to government agencies, being heard through the press—had been devalued. Only those with money and influence could be heard in Washington, a city run by lobbyists and campaign funding, not by the people's representatives or their votes. "The social contract underlying the political system [had been] abrogated," Matthews indicated.

Analysts puzzled over the "volatility" of voters in the elections. Politicians and reporters had talked about popular anger, but had little sense of the depth of the resentment. It was as if the revolution had been called off for the election.

A critical mass had been reached in American politics. People no longer felt helpless to deal with government or to change it. Corrupt members of Congress, self-interested bureaucrats, and self-important journalists had shredded the electorate's respect for Washington. Voters threw out House bank check-writers, pressured other members not to run again, and voted term limits in 14 states.

The alarm bell in the night was 10,000,000 people—nearly one-fifth of those going to the polls—who voted for Ross Perot, a presidential candidate outside the party system, because he had convinced them that only he could clean up Washington. While Clinton offered hope to

many, the angry voter will require a lot to be convinced of a basic change in the way government does things. Perot's message that "this country and those people up there in Washington work for you" continues to resonate. His bill of particulars about the changes people want in government hits close to home.

While the President and Congress try to convince the country that they are making meaningful reforms while still protecting political interests, millions of Americans have raised the ante:

- They want Congress to end power politics and preening and be the people's link to Washington it was meant to be. The Kettering survey found that many Americans perceive those in Washington as absorbed with power, ambition, and narrow interests over the public's needs. How can Congress serve the people if so much time is spent running with lobbyists, raising campaign funds, and churning out publicity? Congressmen will trace a lost Social Security check and pay earnest attention to voters' views at election time, but most seem unapproachable unless one is important or influential in the home district.
- They expect government agencies to be efficient and truly responsive to public needs. Something is wrong when millions of Americans see government as little more than telephones that go unanswered, forms that never end, or a chilling notice to pay up or pay the penalty. A president will not be trusted if the voters see their taxes going to agencies run by faceless bureaucrats who seem accountable to no one. The encompassing review of executive branch operations and citizen hotlines are promising steps, but citizens will most believe in change that touches them directly. Every president in memory has sworn to make the bureaucracy more responsive, but few have tried very hard. They have been reluctant to expend the necessary energy and political capital. Social scientists rate presidents on their roles as policymaker, party leader, or commander-in-chief, but virtually ignore one of the great failures in presidential leadership over the last half-century. The news media have let the last four presidents get away with politically self-serving attacks on the bureaucracy even while they were running it.

  Clinton promised Federal employees that he will be different, but he may have no choice. His domestic programs are at stake. If he looks like just another big-government Democrat, Republicans on the attack will find a sympathetic ear, as Americans watch the bureaucracy grow unchecked along with their taxes.
- They want political parties that speak to and for the people. Why do only about half the eligible voters turn out for national elections? Experts often cite the decline in loyalty to the political parties. Candidates can build their own election teams with PAC and other funding, says the accepted wisdom. The trouble is that, from the 1960s on, the parties fell deeper and deeper into an obsession with sterile techniques and tactics—the manipulation of TV, computerized fund-raising, telephone campaigns, and instant poll-taking—that destroyed their vibrancy. De-emphasizing fund-raising and technique and reviving the personal touch could give the parties a new life. People want turkeys at Thanksgiving and someone who will say, "We are people, not numbers. If you want our support, you have to listen. If you do not listen, the parties might have more than 10,000,000 Perot votes to worry about."
- They want politicians and journalists who talk to them, not just to each other. Public officials and the press need to explain government in terms the public understands. With more Americans joining up as players in policy, the press could gain a budding ally against official spoon-feeding of information and secretiveness. Bill Clinton should revive Jimmy Carter's standard for freedom of information—that it is up to government to prove it must hold back information, not up to the people to prove they have a right to it.

The press could damp down public over-reaction by adopting a more even-handed