



*I*ntroduction to Politics

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Governments & Nations
in the Post Cold War Era

Martin Slann

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Martin Slann
Clemson University



Boston, Massachusetts Burr Ridge, Illinois Dubuque, Iowa
Madison, Wisconsin New York, New York San Francisco, California St. Louis, Missouri

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INTRODUCTION TO POLITICS: GOVERNMENTS AND NATIONS IN THE POST COLD WAR ERA

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*I*ntroduction to Politics

Preface

This book was written to provide an introduction to the most important areas of politics within the atmosphere of uncertainty and opportunity created by the end of the Cold War. Sometimes the uncertainties and opportunities are so entwined as to be almost indistinguishable. Communism's demise was a victory for western democracy, but it also presented new challenges in the form of religious radicalism and ethnic violence. After teaching introductory courses in politics for many years, I have come to believe that politics must be presented as a consistently dynamic and inevitable human activity that changes rapidly and often unpredictably. The Cold War's end was generally unanticipated, and it has radically altered the international environment.

The book is divided into four sections into which chapters seemed to naturally fall. Part I's three chapters develop the theme of politics as a creative human activity. It includes a review of the features considered proper ingredients of a political society as well as of the impact of a particular society's history and culture on the conduct of politics. Part II includes four chapters that explain the kind of political institutions and/or processes commonplace throughout political systems, including basic government structures familiar to most students. Part III explores some current themes of politics such as economy, geography, demography, and violence that we cannot ignore as critical considerations of nearly every country's political life. Finally, Part IV reviews the post Cold War international constellation, focusing on the characteristics that have changed it drastically over the past decade and that promise continued influence well into the new century.

The non-American introductory politics course is growing in popularity, but it differs considerably from campus to campus in content and in the way it is taught. No text, including this one, offers coverage that can satisfy all preferences. I have tried to provide coverage of materials and themes that are relatively commonplace and vital to the understanding of politics. Thus, for example, there are chapters devoted to such basic political institutions as the executive, legislature, and judiciary. Most of the time, the treatment of political institutions is comparative. However, where relevant, comparisons have been made to elements of the American political system. American references have been included for two main reasons: (1) to put the student at ease in handling much of the unfamiliar material, and (2) to point out that what is going on in

the increasingly global political economy is important to Americans, just as how our country copes with the Cold War's aftermath is important to the rest of the world.

Clarity of language in this book has been a consistent goal. Many students taking this course will not take another course that studies and analyzes politics. Three decades of teaching experience suggest to me that undergraduate students want to learn new material if it is interesting and not unduly cumbersome. My goal in writing this book has been to encourage the reader to become aware that the political conduct of individuals or entire nations is fascinating (if occasionally disturbing). Perhaps no text can completely captivate all students at all times. However, one of the most rewarding comments I receive on student evaluations is simply "This course was a lot more interesting than I thought it would be." It is my hope that readers will think the same of this book.

Throughout the writing process, I have been grateful for the invaluable encouragement and assistance provided by Irv Rockwood, Scott Spoolman, and Lynn Uhl, past and current political science editors, and Marsena Konkle and Monica Freedman, past and current developmental editors, who were always available for advice and ideas, and who served as a gracious link with sanity. Annie Mitchell, marketing manager, Ann Morgan, project manager, and Carol Smith, photo editor, were wonderful, helpful, and reassuring voices on the phone. Finally, an overdue but sincere thanks to my wife, Ruth, who more than lives up to her name. This text is truly a joint effort, though I must accept full responsibility for any and all mistakes you may encounter. Still, I hope it reflects my personal enthusiasm for and advocacy of the study of politics, as well as ignites an answering spark in the students who will read it.

Martin Slann
Clemson University

*F*or My Grandchildren

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Introduction: Government and Politics in the Post Cold War Era

Government is actually a recent innovation whose history goes back about eight thousand years, a very tiny percentage of the time humans have inhabited this planet. Governmental institutions were in large part the result of, and certainly coincided with, the development of agriculture and the establishment of permanent human settlements. The essential purpose of government has not changed since its creation: to achieve and guarantee a degree of social order that enables society's members to enjoy a maximum degree of physical security. This purpose is not easily accomplished. A large proportion of the world's population today remains either under uncertain and frequently incomplete governmental authority, or under government whose policies toward citizenries are so harsh that they threaten rather than provide physical security.

Government, whether acting on behalf of people or otherwise, is the result of politics. Politics is often considered a corrupt and debasing profession that no self-respecting person would consider entering. But politics is also a feature common to all human society. It is an activity that "arises from accepting the fact of the simultaneous existence of different groups, hence different interests and different traditions within a territory ruled."¹ We have and participate in politics because we need it.

Politics is not necessarily a complicated phenomenon. The distinguished political scientist Harold Laswell, for example, has succinctly defined it as a process of determining "who gets what, when, and how." More recently, another respected political scientist, David Easton, defined politics simply as "the

¹ Bernard Crick, *In Defense of Politics* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 18.

authoritative allocation of values.” There is little doubt (although often much disgust) that politics has become an important vehicle in the United States and elsewhere in the world for determining nonmaterial and frequently very intimate and personal values. Decisions on how separate church and state should be, whether homosexuals should be excluded from military service, or even on what language a national or subnational student community will be taught in are dilemmas that have been turned over to the political process.

Politics is far from being an isolated activity that occurs in national capitals such as London, Moscow, Tokyo, or Washington. Politics is a common feature of daily human existence that occurs wherever and whenever decisions are made about “who shall get what, when, and how.” Politics may take a variety of forms, some that may be familiar and desirable to us and others that may be neither.

This chapter will introduce you to some of the more current themes in politics as well as activities that continually cause stress in international relations. The chapters that follow will explore all of them in more detail. For the time being, let us develop an acquaintanceship with the issues that influence our lives and promise to continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

GOVERNMENT IN THE POST COLD WAR ERA

Politics and government are not the same thing. Politics often occurs outside of government. Similarly, politics may (and usually does) involve both governmental and nongovernmental actors. Important political actors may not even hold government posts. In the United States, for instance, the very active role First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton took in developing a national health plan in the early 1990s and trying (in this case, unsuccessfully) to coordinate its passage in Congress was apparent from the beginning of the Clinton presidency. Mrs. Clinton has generally been regarded as President Clinton’s closest political advisor.

President Saddam Hussein of Iraq, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of his eldest son, Uday, who holds no government office, but whose political qualifications consist mainly of driving fast cars, editing a tabloid newspaper, and playing the currency markets. The betting is on Uday to succeed his father,² assuming he continues to survive attempts on his life.

Of course, most of us don’t really care how policy is made as long as it is done in a rational and humane fashion. Government, then, may be defined simply as the formal social instrument that partially or wholly resolves conflicts that arise among individuals or groups. The primary purpose of government is to manage and resolve conflict, thereby providing security and continuity for society as a whole and for its individual members. Successful governments do this and more. A successful government is also one that is not itself a source of conflict. We tend, for example, to condemn the authoritarian government of

² “Inheriting the Crown,” *The Economist*, May 28, 1994, p. 42.

Iraq because it is the greatest perpetrator of violence in the country: its most visible accomplishment is the war it conducts against segments of its own population. It will come as no surprise that Saddam Hussein is not a fan of Alexander Hamilton, who argued in *Federalist Paper 51* that

in framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place to oblige it to control itself.

This is a tall order for most of the world's regimes, who still insist on either ignoring the people's legitimate needs or who are determined to make life miserable for their people by denying them basic human rights.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 is, in this context, instructive. Its economic system was a disaster that became more blatant during its last years. The Soviet population was stunned by the revelation that the communist regime had avoided economic reforms in order to avoid risking its own political power. To the Soviet communist elite, economic stagnation was a worthwhile price for continued power and privilege. The Soviets had therefore rejected another critical ingredient of successful government by refusing to take the steps necessary to enhance the quality of life for its citizens. During the last two decades of its existence, the Soviet Union became the only industrialized society in history to experience a *decline* in average life expectancy.³ To the Soviet citizen standing in line for hours to purchase basic foodstuffs, often in subfreezing conditions, it was of little comfort to be told that the Soviet military was achieving parity with the United States. Of more immediate concern was whether meat, bread, and milk would be available when finally reaching the head of the line (after an average wait of two hours).

Throughout the twentieth century, American government has taken on an ever increasing load of responsibility for at least two reasons: (1) we want government to do more for us (even though we are reluctant to pay for additional services with additional taxes) and (2) government is able to do more because of modern technology and increased (if unevenly distributed) economic prosperity. One estimate has it that 85 percent of all scientists who have ever lived are alive today.⁴ We are usually the beneficiaries of scientists whose medical and technological breakthroughs are frequently dependent on government funding.

Government in many countries, particularly the more advanced ones in Europe and North America, has unprecedented technological advantages when it comes to delivering services. At the same time, though, government can no longer consider itself the sole monopolizer of information, making pronouncements that the entire citizenry automatically believes. Some governments have a difficult time accepting the fact that satellites and other

³ By the early 1990s, Russian men had a life expectancy of only 68 and women 72 compared to 75 and 82 for Japanese men and women, respectively; 73 and 78 for Israeli men and women; and 72 and 79 for American men and women. See *The Economist*, June 4, p. 4.

⁴ Paul Kennedy, *Preparing for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Random House, 1993).



Part of the reason of the collapse of the Soviet Union: Muscovites waiting in long lines for their turn to purchase food.

communication technologies now provide almost instantaneous information to hundreds of millions of people.

But while government is experiencing both unprecedented assistance in delivering services and unprecedented public scrutiny, the collapse of the Soviet Union suddenly created yet a new challenge. While parts of the former Soviet empire are democratizing, others are suffering breakdowns in governmental authority as ethnic and religious strife reach levels unseen in the modern world for many decades.

Estimates of distinct ethnic groups around the world range from five thousand to six thousand communities. Some are very small indigenous tribes numbering only a few thousand members; the Han Chinese are the largest ethnic group in the world, with perhaps a billion people. Only a tiny percentage of the world's ethnic groups have their own territorial state and are equipped with the trappings of political sovereignty, such as a national flag, currency, language, and military. The number of independent states has increased since 1945 from fewer than 60 to nearly 200, but 96 percent or more of the ethnic communities in the world do not have their own sovereign system, and most are unlikely to acquire one. The potential challenges stateless communities pose for international political stability are serious, as we shall see in chapters to follow.



Ethnic diversity on an American college campus.

Government and Politics

Democratic governments are a lot more accustomed to dealing with challenges than nondemocratic ones because democratic regimes normally have to either respond to problems or risk being replaced at the next election. Politics is apparent in dictatorial regimes, but it is a politics played out within the confines of a political clique or between competing elements within a political elite. This body only reluctantly, if at all, considers public opinion, even if it knows what public opinion is on a given issue. But this is also why authoritarian government is inherently unstable: the government's lack of interest in and/or knowledge of public concerns is an excellent formula for ensuring that people withdraw both loyalty to and cooperation with the regime. If the public perceives the government as uninterested in or incapable of responding to citizen concerns, there is no point in supporting the regime. With this point in mind, we can make some reasonably safe assumptions about the nature of government and politics:

1. *Politics is a natural phenomenon that rises from human diversity. It should not be replaced by political ideology, a set of comprehensive beliefs about what a government should be doing.* If politics is working right, it will consider but not give way to different and often competing expressions of political ideology. The art of politics involves the selection of the best possible choice from a set of imperfect but workable alternatives. Politicians don't have all the answers. If they are honest, they admit to this. Ideologues brag that they have all the