

# American Government

Sixth Edition



Walter E. Volkomer

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**SIXTH EDITION**

**Walter E. Volkomer**

*Hunter College of the City University of New York*

with the editorial assistance of Carolyn D. Smith

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# **American Government**

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# Preface

In the almost three years since the fifth edition of this textbook was published, there have been many important developments in both domestic and international politics. At home, Republican George Bush was elected as this nation's forty-first President in a one-sided contest with his Democratic opponent, Michael Dukakis.

During the 1988 campaign, many observers viewed George Bush as indecisive and lacking the necessary qualities of a leader. He began his service as President with many doubts about his executive abilities. The Bush administration soon began to have problems with its domestic policies. The President reneged on his election promise not to raise taxes ("Read my lips"), and in the fall of 1990 the Democratic-controlled Congress raised taxes and enacted a budget law that they had largely shaped. In other domestic areas, the Bush administration made promises but made no serious attempt to implement them. Indeed, it seemed to many that the President had little real interest in domestic matters, and that it was international affairs that most concerned him.

Events on the world scene favored George Bush. In his first year as President, the eastern European empire of the Soviet Union collapsed. After more than four decades of Soviet domination, Poland, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Romania all regained their political independence and struggled to create new, more democratic forms of government. Further, the division between East and West Germany was ended, and a new, united nation was created. The cold war tensions that had existed between the Soviet Union and the United States since the end of World War II declined, even if they did not entirely disappear. And a degree of democracy emerged in the Soviet Union after seventy years of rigid communist control.

In China, a student revolution against the communist government took place in 1989. The students erected a replica of the American Statue of Liberty in the main square of their nation's capital to symbolize their hopes for democracy. But the government brought in the army to crush the rebellion, and China quickly returned to totalitarian rule.

Movement toward greater freedom and democracy occurred in other parts of the world as well during the early years of President Bush's administration. Even South Africa, long under the repressive rule of a white minority, began to dismantle its system of apartheid and took its first steps towards granting equal rights to its African majority.

The defeat of communism and the yearning for freedom and democracy among people in many parts of the world seemed to many Americans to represent the triumph of this nation's values. President Bush basked in the reflected glory of the dramatic changes in the world, and his popularity at home soared.



But his leadership on the international scene was yet to be tested. The President met that test in the 1991 war with Iraq. Following Iraq's conquest of neighboring Kuwait, the President assembled a worldwide coalition of nations to oppose that conquest. He helped win the backing of the United Nations for an international embargo against trade with Iraq and its consent to wage war against Iraq if it did not leave Kuwait by January 15, 1991. The Congress of the United States, somewhat reluctantly, gave him its support for military intervention by United States forces against Iraq. When that country did not withdraw by the deadline, the President led an international armed force and won a quick and decisive victory over Iraq that restored the legitimate government of Kuwait.

Despite the hunger for democracy in many parts of the world and the preeminent position of the United States as a symbol of freedom and democracy, many Americans are indifferent and uninformed about their own governmental system. The election turnout of eligible voters in the United States is one of the lowest of all democratic nations. Various public opinion polls in recent years show that Americans know appallingly little about their governmental system and basic rights; 59 percent of adult Americans interviewed in one poll did not know what the Bill of Rights is, and only 46 percent could identify it as the first ten amendments to the United States Constitution!

My minimum hope in writing this book is that its readers will be able to give correct answers to such basic questions. Of course, I would be delighted if they learned a good deal more about this nation's governmental system. My maximum hope is that many would develop a lifelong interest in government and politics, and come to appreciate the importance of these subjects to their lives.

Finally, I want to restate something I have said in the preface to earlier editions of this book. In writing this text, I have always tried to keep the reader in the forefront of my thoughts. Too many authors of college textbooks have forgotten what it is like to be a first- or second-year student being introduced to new and often confusing areas of human knowledge. This loss of perspective too often results in textbooks that are research oriented, filled with technical jargon, and needlessly long and overwritten.

I have attempted to write a book that students will find both interesting and readable. The book does not avoid difficult topics, but rather seeks to handle them in a manner that is understandable to the average student. I have drawn on scholarly research in political science without employing its all-too-frequent abuse of the English language.

Again, a word of thanks to the members of the Hunter College Library staff who have helped me track down and obtain information and sources. My work has also been helped by the criticisms and suggestions of a number of reviewers, especially: Professor Lindsey Back, Morehead State University; Professor Timothy A. Cantrell, Lexington Community College; Professor Gerard S. Gryski, Auburn University; Dr. Larry Elowitz, Georgia College; Professor Donald F. Kerle, Pittsburg State University; Dr. Joseph S. Trachtenberg, Clayton State College; Professor John Sistarenik, Jefferson Community College. Any errors in the book are, of course, entirely my responsibility.

**Walter E. Volkomer**



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# American Government

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# 1

## Chapter Outline

### **The Nature of Politics**

Politics and Power

Political Power in America: Two Views

The Bases of Political Power

Politics and Government

### **Democracy as a Political System**

Defining Democracy

The Bases of Democracy

### **Democracy and Diversity**

## Questions for Thought

*What is political power?*

*What is the view of elitists about political power?*

*What is the view of pluralists about political power?*

*What is the difference between direct and representative democracy?*

*What are the main political ideas of John Locke, and how did they influence the framers of the United States Constitution?*

*Why are the principles of majority rule and minority rights both important in a democracy?*

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