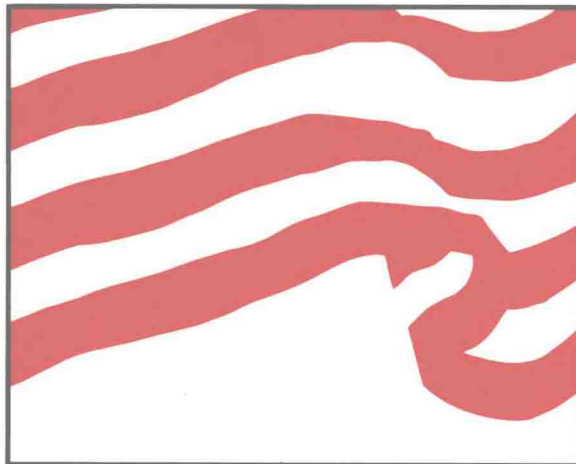


FOURTH EDITION

# POLITICAL ISSUES DEBATED

An Introduction  
to Politics



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Herbert M. Levine

fourth edition

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# **POLITICAL ISSUES DEBATED**

an introduction to politics

HERBERT M. LEVINE



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# Preface

When college students become involved in politics, it is often because issues are of vital concern to them. At times these issues may directly affect their lives, such as a decision by government to register young people for the draft or to send them to war, or, less seriously, to increase their tuition at state-supported universities. At other times, moral considerations compel college students to become involved in issues of vital concern to others, such as the isolation of human rights abroad or eliminating capital punishment.

This book focuses on issues in the hope that the excitement of politics, which comes from its subject matter and the controversy it generates, will interest students to learn more about politics. To that end, the book deals with subjects of great complexity and importance, such as the purpose of government, the reality of democracy, the nature of socialism, the poverty of distant nations, and the prospects of disarmament. The book examines twenty-six issues, some of

long-standing concern, such as the relationship between interest groups and the public interest, the possibility of participatory democracy, and the superiority of the British parliamentary system over the American presidential system of government. Other issues are of more recent relevance, such as whether television news has a unique impact on public opinion, and whether the West should redistribute its wealth to Third World countries.

The issues have been selected because of their controversial character. The intent of the author is to introduce subjects that will stimulate student interest in the study of politics. Background information is provided for each chapter. This material is designed to present the subject matter to students so that they will have the facts necessary to understand the debates. The length of the background information varies considerably, since the amount of information included depends upon the breadth of the subject matter considered in

the debates. A list of Recommended Readings at the end of each chapter provides additional sources that students may consult to improve their understanding of an issue. Questions are offered to encourage a discussion of the issues, and Key Terms are cited to focus attention on important concepts and definitions.

The purpose of the book and the nature of the format dictate an approach to the subject matter that is not methodologically rigorous. It is the belief of the author that students must first become interested in politics before they concern themselves with methodological matters.

The debate approach offers several educational benefits. First, students who are accustomed to believe in the truthfulness of the printed word will be encouraged to use their own critical talents, since opposing viewpoints are presented. Second, the debate format is a useful way for students with a limited background in politics to become interested in the subject matter of politics. Third, the instructor will have many possibilities in lecturing and giving assignments. Lectures can be presented that highlight the background information or take one or both sides of a debate. Classroom participation can be encouraged by dividing the class into groups that argue different sides of an issue.

A debate format is not without problems, however. First, students may be encouraged to think that there are only two sides to every argument, when often there are several worthy of consideration. Second, a certain amount of information about politics, which ordinarily is included in an introductory course, may have to be left out or treated briefly. The instructor must determine how to minimize the risks through lectures and class discussions.

The fourth edition of *Political Issues Debated* has retained the structure and most of the debate topics of the third edition. The astonishing developments since the publication of the third edition in 1990—most notably the collapse of communism,

the end of the cold war, the expansion of liberalism and democracy, and the greater acceptance of capitalism—are reflected in three new debates:

- Are liberal democracies the final form of political system that will usher in an era of peace?
- Does the demise of communism mean that socialism is dead, too?
- Should the United States adopt an isolationist foreign policy?

A civil liberties issue that has emerged since the last edition is considered in a fourth new debate:

- Should hate-speech codes be adopted at public universities in the United States?

The material in all chapters has been updated and revised to present additional information and to refine arguments. In some cases, separate Questions and Recommended Readings are supplied for issues in addition to those covering general subject matter.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In preparing the fourth edition of this book, I had the professional help of several people in both the academic and publishing communities. I am grateful to them for their assistance.

The editorial consultants for the book were Professors J. J. Hendricks, California State University, Stanislaus; Dennis A. Schmidt, Iona College; and David Nicholas, Montclair State College.

Karen Horton and Julie Berrisford were the political science editors, and Dolores Mars and Nicole Signoretti assisted them. Alison Gnerre was the production editor. Ann Hofstra Grogg was the copyeditor.

Although I had the assistance of many people, I accept full responsibility for any mistakes that may appear in the book.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Herbert M. Levine is a political scientist who taught at the University of Southwestern Louisiana for twenty years. He is the author or editor of several debate books in

political science. His recent books include *What If the American Political System Were Different?* (M. E. Sharpe) and *Point-Counterpoint: Readings in American Government* (St. Martin's Press). He is currently a writer based in Chevy Chase, Maryland.

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dom although we accept the *Affirmative's* contention that there is little democracy *within* interest groups in the sense of mass participation in elections and the overall working of the organization.<sup>22</sup>

The right of groups to form freely is a prerequisite of a free society. In the United States, the legal right is assured by the First Amendment to the Constitution, which forbids Congress from making any law abridging freedom of speech, press, peaceable assembly, and the right to petition the government for redress of grievances. The courts have properly been hesitant to restrict the right of groups to form so long as they abide by the "rules of the game."

There is another way in which freedom is protected by interest groups. The notion that voluntary associations are legitimate—that is, that any number of individuals displeased with the policies of government may form groups to bring about change—is inherently hostile to the totalitarian ideal. Totalitarianism assumes a uniformity of purpose, an integration of society under some ideology. To the extent that groups are permitted in totalitarian societies, they must be "harmonized" with that ideology, unless in practice they are so powerful as to defy control. In totalitarian systems, interest group leaders are appointed by or controlled by the ruling party. One of the first actions of totalitarian leaders upon coming to power is to destroy the autonomy of interest groups. For example, when the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia in 1917, they sought to make the Russian Orthodox church subservient to the communist regime.

A free polity assumes a distinction between state and society. The practice that groups may arise when necessary and act to change government policy serves as an impediment to totalitarian rule.

<sup>22</sup>Grant McConnell, *Private Power and American Democracy* (New York: Knopf, 1967), pp. 122–23.

## KEY TERMS

Interest group  
Iron law of oligarchy  
Iron triangle  
Lobbyists  
Material incentives  
Political action committees  
Pressure group

We can also argue that interest groups are subjected to a variety of constraints that limit their power. Because of these constraints, groups must act according to democratic practices. There are laws that make it a crime for individuals and groups to bribe public officials to achieve their objectives. To be sure, these rules are violated, but often the violators are subjected to criminal punishment.

In addition to the constraints imposed by law, interest groups are limited by other interest groups and by political parties and elections. Business must confront labor. Environmental groups must face business associations. Conflicts such as these give policy makers some discretion in making policy.

Other institutions, such as political parties, must work to aggregate the many interests that are asserted in the political arena, thus limiting the power of any single interest group. Elections continue to make a difference in the outcome of public policies. The interest group beneficiaries in the administration of Ronald Reagan were different in many cases from the beneficiaries under Jimmy Carter. Interests representing the military, business, and social conservatives were more likely to see their goals realized under Reagan than under Carter. Even with the declining strength of political parties, as the presidential elections of 1980, 1984, and 1988 indicate, elections continue to have significance in an interest-group state. Democracy in the United States continues to remain strong, consequently.

Although James Madison warned about the dangers of factions, he recognized that factions are inherent in the "nature of man." He realized that factions could not and should not be eliminated. He hoped that the system of American government with its dispersion of power would prevent any one interest or group of interests from controlling American society. The past two centuries have shown Madison to be right.

Public interest  
Public interest group  
Purposive incentives  
Single-issue groups  
Solidary incentives  
Voluntary association

## QUESTIONS

1. How would you compare interest groups in democracies with interest groups in dictatorships?
2. How do political interest groups differ from political parties?
3. Do public interest groups serve the public interest? What are the reasons for your answer?
4. What restrictions should be placed on interest groups in a democracy?
5. If there is a public interest, how would you describe it in policy terms?
6. In a democratic society in which interest groups are important, what types of interests are most likely to be unrepresented? What, if anything, can be done to guard against this?

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