

***George C. Edwards III  
Martin P. Wattenberg  
Robert L. Lineberry***

***Third Edition***  
***Government in America***  
***Brief Version***

# GOVERNMENT IN AMERICA

## People, Politics, and Policy

Brief Version

Third Edition

**George C. Edwards III**  
*Texas A&M University*

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*University of California, Irvine*

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# To

## *our Introduction to American Government students*

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# Preface

Americans elected a conservative majority to both the House and the Senate in 1994, the first Republican Congress in 40 years. In 1996, voters reelected Bill Clinton as president, but they also kept the Republicans in power in Congress, continuing the potential for legislative gridlock. In 1997, we face controversial decisions that will determine the scope of our government as we enter the twenty-first century. Students need a framework in which to understand these challenges.

## FOCUS

We write *Government in America* to provide our readers with a better understanding of our fascinating political system. We focus on four core subject areas: constitutional foundations, patterns of political behavior, political institutions, and public policy outputs. The third edition of *Government in America, Brief Version* continues to frame its content with a public policy approach to American government. We do *not* discuss policy at the expense of politics, however. Instead, we ask, “What difference does politics make to the policies governments produce?” Since the principal reason for studying politics is to understand these policies, this focus engages students’ interest and stimulates consideration of the most important aspects of governing.

We uniquely devote Chapter 14 to the budget. The federal budget codifies who gets what, a central issue in public policy. We discuss the size of the federal spending, taxation, and deficits, as well as the political interactions between the president, the executive branch, and Congress.

## TWO THEMES

To render the policy focus in concrete terms, two important themes appear throughout the book: the nature of democracy and the scope of government. Each chapter begins with a preview of the relevancy of the themes to the chapter’s subject. Each chapter ends with specific sections on the two themes under the heading of

“Understanding . . .” that show how the themes help illuminate the chapter’s subject matter.

The first theme, democracy, deals with the first great question central to governing—*How should we govern?* We evaluate how well the American system lives up to citizens’ expectations of democratic government. In Chapter 1, we define democracy as a means of selecting policymakers and of organizing government so that policy represents and responds to citizens’ preferences. As with previous editions, we continue to incorporate theoretical issues in our discussions of different models of American democracy. We also raise questions about democracy in the context of our discussion of the various components of American government. For example, is a strong presidency good for democracy? Do our mass media make us more democratic? Are powerful courts compatible with democracy? We try to encourage students to think analytically about the theories and develop independent assessments of the American government’s politics and policy.

The question of whether America’s diversity and open political process frequently produces gridlock emerges as a subtheme to our discussion of democracy. The diversity of the American people is reflected in the diversity of political interests represented in the political system. This system is so open that many different interests find access to policymakers. In our system of checks and balances, the opposition by one set of policymakers can sometimes frustrate the will of the majority. We leave it to the readers to determine whether the difficulty of achieving policy change, be it the Clinton health care reform plan or the Contract with America, is a positive feature of our system. Our goal is to promote understanding of the consequences of the system and provoke discussion about these consequences.

Our second theme, the scope of government, focuses on another great question of governing: *What should government do?* Here we discuss alternative views concerning the proper role and size for American government and the influence that the workings of government and politics have on the scope of government. The government’s scope is the core question around which politics



revolves in contemporary America, and this question pervades many crucial issues: To what degree should Washington impose national standards on state policies? How high should taxes be? Do elections encourage politicians to promise more government services?

A subtheme of the scope of government is the role of individualism in American political life. The people who immigrated to America may have been diverse, but many shared a common dream of America as a place where one could make it on one's own without interference from government. Today, individualism remains a powerful influence in the United States. Americans' strong preference for free markets and limited government has important consequences for public policy. Thus, we often employ the concept of individualism in our analysis of the scope of government.

We hope that readers come to employ the perennial questions embodied in our themes when they examine political events long after reading the book.

## CURRENCY

This edition is completely up to date and incorporates the best recent scholarship on U.S. government. We have expanded our coverage of several topics to reflect their importance in contemporary American politics. Our emphasis in each chapter on the scope of government is also very timely, considering the recent conflicts between Congress and the president.

There is expanded coverage of theories of democracy in Chapter 1. We have also added substantial material on fiscal federalism in Chapter 3, an area at the core of much of the current debate over public policy. In Chapter 4, we have added material on the Constitution and religion, both the free exercise and establishment of religion—another issue area animating American politics today. Similarly, we devote substantial attention to both women's rights and affirmative action in Chapter 4, as well as to racial gerrymandering and voting rights. Of course, the latest Supreme Court decisions are included wherever they are relevant.

A new section on individualism and the media about the increased focus on presidential politics and candidate-centered politics appears in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 on political parties devotes more attention to divided government to reflect the first Republican-controlled Congress to face a Democratic president since 1948. Chapter 9 has a new discussion of how interest groups campaigned successfully against President Clinton's health care reform proposal.

We have included comprehensive coverage of the 1996 presidential election and the historic 1994 congressional elections, both the campaigns and the results, in Chapters 8, 10, and 11. We also have up-to-date coverage of the

recent changes in congressional leadership, organization, and procedures in Chapter 10. Naturally, we devote considerable attention to the Clinton administration in Chapter 11 (including its relations with Congress, the public, and the press, the organization of the White House, and the president's actions as commander in chief) and to the efforts of both the president and Congress to deal with budget (Chapter 14), which has become so central to American politics and policy. President Clinton's judicial appointments are discussed in Chapter 13.

Chapters 15 and 16 are new to this edition. We have included them in response to instructors who requested chapters on public policy in this version of *Government in America*. Chapter 15 focuses on a core concern in the domestic area, social welfare policy—including the historic welfare reform of 1996. Chapter 16 focuses on defense and foreign policy. The appendixes continue to include the *Constitution* and the *Declaration of Independence*, *Federalist Papers No. 10* and *No. 51*, presidential election results, and a glossary of key terms.

## SUPPLEMENTS

### INSTRUCTOR'S MANUAL

Written by Diane Schmidt of Southwest Missouri State University, the Instructor's Manual includes learning objectives, chapter overviews, lectures notes, key terms and definitions, discussion and activity suggestions, and suggestions for additional readings and media.

### TEST BANK

Written by Charles Matzke of Indiana University, the Test Bank contains over 50 multiple choice questions for each chapter. The test bank also contains short answer and essay questions.

### TESTMASTER (DOS, MAC)

The test bank is available in TestMaster, our computerized test generator. TestMaster allows the user to build tests and quizzes, modify existing test questions, and add original questions.

### STUDY GUIDE

The student Study Guide, also written by Charles Matzke of Indiana University, includes learning objectives, chapter overviews, exercises keyed to the learning objectives, key terms, and practice tests.

### SUPERSHELL

Compiled by John Soares of Butte College, the Supershell tutorial program includes chapter summaries, key term exercises, and practice tests.

## POLITICAL SCIENCE TRANSPARENCY PACKAGE

A collection of over 80 full color transparencies linked to key topics in American government.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Finally, we would like to thank many instructors and colleagues whose thoughtful and detailed reviews helped shape this edition. We hope they find the results pleasing and effective. Our thanks go, especially, to William Blomquist, Indiana University, Indianapolis; Ronald J. Busch, Cleveland State University; Stephen

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Professor Edwards has served as President of the Presidency Research Section of the American Political Science Association and on many editorial boards. He has also received the Decoration for Distinguished Civilian Service from the U.S. Army. A frequent speaker at universities around the country, he also often lectures abroad.

Professor Edwards also applies his scholarship to practical issues of government. In 1988, he went to Brasilia to advise those writing the new constitution for Brazil. He was also an issue leader for the National Academy of Public Administration's Project on the 1988 Presidential Transition, providing advice to the new president. In 1993, he spent six weeks in China lecturing on democracy. In 1994, he was a consultant to Russian democratic leaders on building a political party system in that country.

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While at Michigan, Professor Wattenberg authored *The Decline of American Political Parties* (Harvard Univer-

sity Press), currently in its fifth edition. Most recently, he has written *The Rise of Candidate-Centered Politics: Presidential Elections of the 1980s*, also published by Harvard. In addition, he has contributed many professional articles to such journals as the *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *American Politics Quarterly*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, and *Public Opinion*.

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Dr. Lineberry has been President of the Policy Studies Section of the American Political Science Association and is currently the editor of *Social Science Quarterly*. He is the author or coauthor of numerous books and articles in political science. In addition, for the past thirty years he has taught regularly the introductory course in American government.

He has been married to Nita Lineberry for thirty years. They have two children, Nikki, who works in Glenwood Springs, Colorado, and Keith, who works in Houston, Texas. They have three grandchildren—Lee, Callie, and Hunter.



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# Introduction

# 1

The twenty-first century is fast approaching, bringing with it unimagined challenges. We want to be able to respond to these challenges individually, as citizens, and collectively, as a nation. In recent decades, for example, the United States has turned from being the world's largest creditor to its largest debtor nation; we have seen the decline and dissolution of what President Reagan called the "Evil Empire" of the Soviet Union; and the United States has gone from the quagmire of Vietnam to the pyrotechnics of the Persian Gulf War. There are inevitably other challenges to come. It is our hope that *Government in America* will help you become a well-informed citizen, a citizen better able to lead our country into the next century.

## TWO CENTRAL QUESTIONS

We begin Chapter 1 by introducing you to three important concepts: government, politics, and public policy. We also raise two fundamental questions about governing that will serve as themes throughout the book:

1. *How should we be governed?* Americans take great pride in calling their government democratic. Today there is a rush to establish democracies around the world, but not everyone agrees on what democracy means. This chapter will examine the workings of democratic government. The chapters that follow will evaluate the way American government actually works against the standard of an "ideal" democracy. We will continually ask, who holds power and who influences the policies adopted by government?
2. *What should government do?* This text will explore the relationship between how American government works and what the government does. In other words, does our government do what we want it to do? This second theme is closely linked to the first—the process of government is tied to the substance of public policy.

What government should do can be examined in terms of "the scope of government." Debates about the scope of government, including its functions and budget, are among the most important in American political life. These debates are at the core of disputes between the major political parties and between liberals and conservatives.

The purpose of Chapter 1 is to lay a foundation for understanding government in America. This foundation begins with the notion of government.

## GOVERNMENT, POLITICS, AND PUBLIC POLICY

Government, politics, and public policy are interrelated. Government is important because of what it does for us—and to us. It can protect us, feed us, educate us, send us to war, tax us, and affect us in just about every aspect of our lives. All of these actions involve setting public policies. The way government makes decisions about public policies is through politics. This chapter will first examine government itself to see how it works and how these procedures affect the policies it produces.

## GOVERNMENT

The institutions that make public policy for a society are collectively known as **government**. In our national government, these institutions are Congress, the president, the courts, and federal administrative agencies (often called "the bureaucracy"). We also have thousands of state and local governments in the United States, and they make policies that affect us as well. All told, there are about 500,000 elected officials in the United States.

Every government has a means of changing its leaders. Some changes, like those in American government, are orderly and peaceful. Just before noon on January 20, 1993, a crowd of well-dressed men and women stood patiently outside the main gate to the White House. As President Clinton prepared to take



his oath of office, they anxiously awaited the chance to take their posts in the new administration. When the clock struck twelve, the gates swung open and the new White House aides went in to move into their offices.

Not all governments change in such a peaceful and orderly fashion. The twentieth century has been a time of revolutionary upheaval. The Russians in 1917 and the Chinese in 1949 changed their governments through violent revolution in order to adopt communist governments. Sometimes a change in government is less orderly than in America, but less bloody than a revolution. In 1989, massive protest marches in East Germany led to a toppling of the communist government, free elections, and soon thereafter reunification with West Germany. Regardless of how they assumed power, however, all governments have certain functions in common.

**What Governments Do.** Big or small, democratic or not, governments in the modern world are similar in the following ways:

1. *Governments maintain national defense.* The United States spends about \$250 billion a year on national defense. Some politicians think the United States spends too much on defense; others think we have to be even better prepared for military action.
2. *Governments provide public goods.* **Public goods** are things that everyone can share, such as clean air. A central principle of modern political science and economics is that individuals have little incentive to provide public goods because no one can make a profit from them. For instance, many businesses seem unconcerned with cleaning the air, because they do not make a profit from providing clean air. Thus governments are usually left to provide things like public parks and pollution control.
3. *Governments have police powers to provide order.* Every government has some means of maintaining order. When people protest en masse, governments may resort to extreme measures to restore order. Chinese security forces occupied streets around Tiananmen Square in June of 1989 to crush the student protest. Even in the United States, governments consider the power to maintain order one of their most important jobs. Americans today are generally supportive of an increase in the government's police powers to control high crime rates and drug abuse.
4. *Governments provide public services.* Hospitals and many other public services are maintained by governments. Governments in our country spend billions of dollars on schools, libraries, weather

forecasting, halfway houses, and dozens of other public services.

5. *Governments socialize the young into the political culture.* Most modern governments pay for education and use it to develop support for national principles among the young. School curriculums typically offer a course on the philosophy and practice of the country's government. Rituals like the daily Pledge of Allegiance foster patriotism and love of country.
6. *Governments collect taxes.* In 1996, one of every three dollars earned by an American citizen was used to pay national, state, and local taxes. Although Americans often complain about the high cost of government, our tax burden is actually much lower than that of citizens in most other democratic nations.

The tasks of government listed above add up to tremendous responsibilities for our political leaders. Many important and difficult questions must be addressed regarding what government should do. The way we answer such questions is through politics.

## POLITICS

**Politics** determines whom we select as our governmental leaders and what policies they pursue. Political scientists often cite a famous definition of politics by Harold D. Lasswell: Politics is "who gets what, when, and how."<sup>1</sup> It is one of the briefest and most useful definitions of politics ever penned. Admittedly, this broad



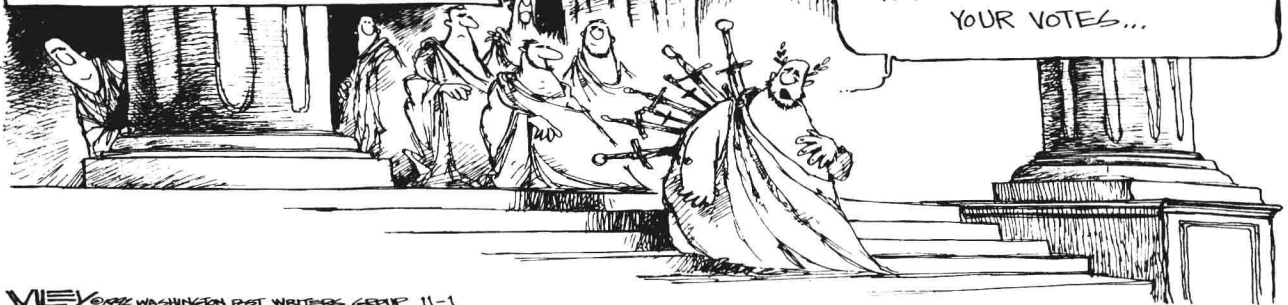
Like most governments around the world, the American government uses the public schools to socialize its children. Required civics courses and government approval of curriculum and textbooks help ensure that the young understand and support the American system of government.

# NON SEQUITUR

by WILEY

NOT-SO-FAMOUS LAST WORDS:  
JULIUS CAESAR, 44 b.c.

YOU GUYS HAVE GOT TO FIND  
A BETTER WAY TO CAST  
YOUR VOTES...



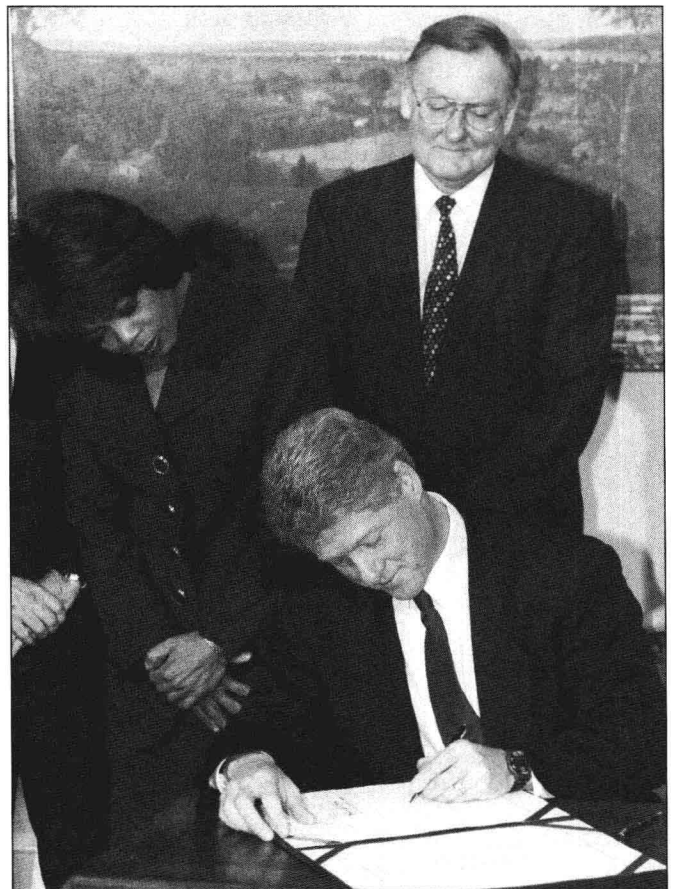
WILEY © 1992 WASHINGTON POST WRITERS GROUP 11-1

definition covers a lot of ground (office politics, sorority politics, and so on) in which political scientists are not interested. They are interested primarily in politics related to governmental decision making.

The media usually focuses on the *who* of politics. At a minimum this includes voters, candidates, groups, and parties. *How* people play politics is important, too. They get what they want by bargaining, supporting, compromising, lobbying, and so forth. *What* refers to the substance of politics and government—the public policies that come from government. Governments distribute benefits, such as new roads, and burdens, such as new taxes. In this sense, government and politics involve winners and losers.

## PUBLIC POLICY

More and more, Americans expect government to do something about their problems. The president and members of Congress are expected to keep the economy humming along; voters will penalize them at the polls if they do not. When people confront government officials with problems to be solved, they are trying to influence the government's **policy agenda**. John Kingdon defined a policy agenda as "the list of subjects or problems to which government officials, and people outside of government closely associated with those officials, are paying serious attention at any given time."<sup>2</sup> One of the key elements of democratic government is that if politicians want to get elected, they must pay attention to problems people are most concerned with. When you vote, you are partly looking at whether a candidate shares your agenda or not.



Political issues often draw the attention and active participation of entertainment stars. Talk-show host Oprah Winfrey was a prominent spokesperson on behalf of a 1993 law signed by President Clinton that established a nationwide database enabling child care centers to check on prospective employees.

A government's policy agenda changes regularly. Almost no one thought about amending the constitution to outlaw flag burning until the Supreme Court ruled that the First Amendment protected such actions as free expression. When jobs are scarce and business productivity is falling, economic problems occupy a high position on the government's agenda. If the economy is doing well and trouble spots around the world occupy the headlines, foreign policy questions are bound to dominate the agenda. Nothing works better than a crisis to elevate an issue on a policy agenda. An oil spill, an airline crash, or a brutal shooting will almost ensure that ecology, air safety, or gun control will rise to near the top of a government's agenda.

**Public policy** is a choice that government makes in response to some issue on its agenda (see Table 1.1). It is also worth noting that policymakers can establish a policy by doing nothing as well as by doing something. Doing nothing—or doing nothing different—is a choice. Often a debate about public policy centers on whether government should do something rather than nothing. Reporter Randy Shilts's book about the American government's response to the AIDS crisis tells a sad tale of inaction, even when the AIDS epidemic reached crisis levels.<sup>3</sup> Shilts reveals how governments in Washington and elsewhere long ignored AIDS because it was viewed as a gay person's disease. The issue remained a low priority on the government's policy agenda until infections started to spread to the general population, including celebrities like basketball star Magic Johnson.

## THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

A **political system** is a set of institutions and activities that link together government, politics, and public policy.<sup>4</sup> Most systems, political or not, can be diagrammed. We can create simple renderings of how a nuclear power plant or an automobile works. Figure 1.1 is a model of how a political system works. The rest of this book will flesh out this skeletal version of our political system, but for now the model will help you to identify several key elements.

Politics begins, of course, with people, and people do not always agree on the best course of action. A **political issue** arises when people disagree about a problem or about public policy choices made to combat a problem. There is never a shortage of political issues in this country; government, however, will not act upon an issue until it is high on the agenda.

In a democratic society, parties, elections, interest groups, and the media are key **linkage institutions** between the preferences of citizens and the government's policy agenda. Parties and interest groups both exert much effort to get the issues they feel are important to the top of the government's agenda. Elections and the media are two major forums through which potential agenda items receive public attention.

Policymakers stand at the core of the political system. Working within the government's institutions, they scan the issues on the policy agenda, select some for attention, and make policies concerning them. The U.S. Constitution establishes three policymaking institutions: Congress, the presidency, and the courts.

T A B L E  
1.1

### TYPES OF PUBLIC POLICIES

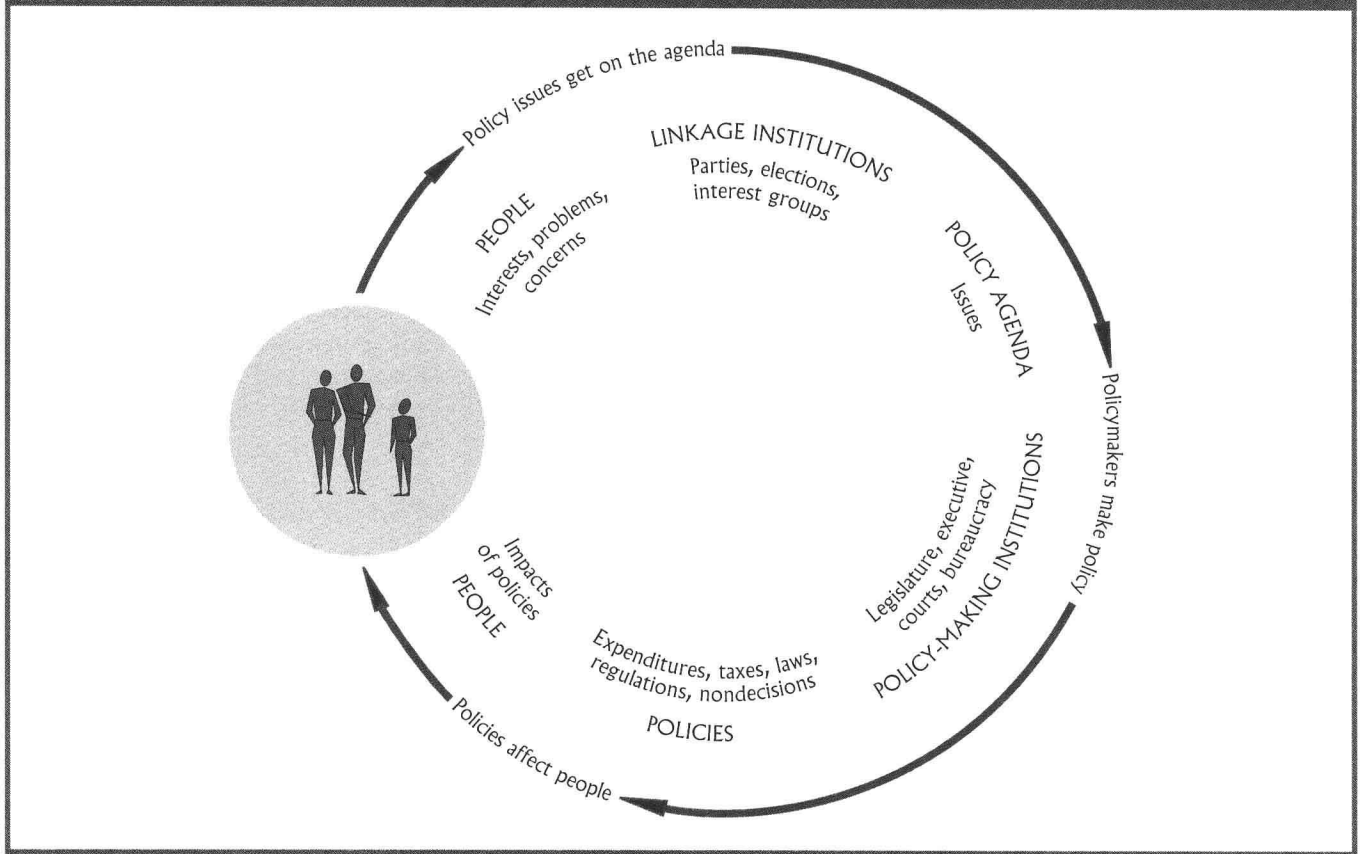
There are many types of public policies. Every decision that government makes—a law it passes, a budget it establishes, and even a decision not to act on an issue—is public policy. Here are the most important types of public policies:

TYPE	DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
Congressional statute	Law passed by Congress	Social Security Act
Presidential action	Decision by president	American troops sent to Bosnia
Court decision	Opinion by Supreme Court or other court	Supreme Court ruling that school segregation is unconstitutional
Budgetary choices	Legislative enactment of taxes and expenditures	The federal budget
Regulation	Agency adoption of regulation	Food and Drug Administration approval of a new drug



FIGURE  
1.1

## THE POLITICAL SYSTEM



Today, the power of the bureaucracy is so great that most political scientists consider it a fourth policy-making institution.

Very few policies are made by a single policymaking institution. Environmental policy is a good example. Some presidents have used their influence with Congress to urge clean-air and clean-water policies. When Congress responds by passing legislation to clean up the environment, bureaucracies have to implement the new policies. Rules and regulations issued by the bureaucratic agencies fill fat volumes. In addition, every law passed and every rule made can be challenged in the courts. Courts make decisions about what the policies mean and whether they conflict with the Constitution. In policymaking, every political institution gets involved.

The political system does not stop when a policy is announced. **Policy impacts** are the effects a policy has on people and society's problems. People who raise a policy issue usually want more than just a new law, a fancy proclamation, a bureaucratic rule, or a court judgment. They want a policy that works. Environ-

mentalists want a policy that not only claims to prevent air pollution, but does so. Consumers want a policy that actually reduces inflation. Minority groups want a policy that not only promises them more equal treatment, but ensures it. Understanding policy impacts carries us full circle back to the people, their concerns and problems. This translation of citizens' private desires into public policy is crucial to the workings of democracy.

## DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT

In 1848, the intellectual founders of modern communism, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, wrote *The Communist Manifesto*, one of the most famous political documents ever written. It began with these words: "A specter is haunting Europe. It is the specter of communism." Today one could write: "A specter is haunting Europe (and everywhere else). It is the specter of democracy." In recent years, democratic forms of governments have emerged in Eastern European countries



A statue of Vladimir Lenin, leader of Russia's Communist revolution, is hauled away in Bucharest, Romania, after the Communist government there was toppled in December 1989. Like Romania's Communist regime, the statue did not go down easily—it took two days of intensive work to remove the 25-foot high likeness of Lenin.

that were formerly communist, in Latin American countries that were controlled by military dictatorships, and in South Africa, where apartheid denied basic rights to the Black majority. Yet, despite this global move toward democracy, not everyone defines democracy the way Americans do—or think they do.

## DEFINING DEMOCRACY

The word *democracy* is overused. It takes its place among terms like *freedom*, *justice*, and *peace* as a word that has, seemingly, only positive connotations. Today, says political scientist Giovanni Sartori, almost any political activity can be justified if done in the name of democracy.<sup>5</sup> Democracy was not always so popular. The writers of the U.S. Constitution had no fondness for democracy. Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts, a delegate

to the Constitutional Convention, said that “the evils we experience flow from the excesses of democracy.” Another delegate, Roger Sherman, said that the people “should have as little to do as may be with the government.” Only much later did Americans come to cherish democracy.

Today, most Americans would probably say that democracy is “government by the people.” This phrase, of course, is part of Abraham Lincoln’s famous definition of democracy from his Gettysburg Address: “government of the people, by the people, and for the people.” However, in our representative form of government, the people do not actually govern themselves, but rather choose the leaders who will make the governing decisions. Thus, **democracy** can be defined as *a means of selecting policymakers and of organizing government so that policy represents and responds to the people’s preferences.*

## TRADITIONAL DEMOCRATIC THEORY

What we call **traditional democratic theory** rests upon several principles. These principles specify how a democratic government makes its decisions. One contemporary democratic theorist, Robert Dahl, suggests that “an ideal democratic process would satisfy five criteria.”<sup>6</sup> Here are his five cornerstones of an ideal democracy:

1. *Equality in voting.* The principle of “one person, one vote” is basic to democracy.
2. *Effective participation.* Political participation need not be universal, but it must be representative. If only the rich vote, a system cannot be very democratic.
3. *Enlightened understanding.* A democratic society must be a marketplace of ideas. A free press and free speech are essential to civic understanding.
4. *Citizen control of the agenda.* Citizens should have the collective ability to control the government’s policy agenda. If wealthy or powerful individuals or groups distort the agenda, citizens cannot make government address the issues they believe are most important.
5. *Inclusion.* The government must include, and extend rights to, all those subject to its laws.

Only by following these principles can a political system be called “democratic.” In addition, democracies must practice **majority rule** and preserve **minority rights**. In a democracy, choosing among alternatives (whether policies or officeholders) means weighing the desires of the majority.

Nothing is more fundamental to democratic theory than majority rule. Alexis de Tocqueville, the great French intellectual who traveled through America in

the 1830s, wrote that “the very essence of democratic government consists in the absolute sovereignty of the majority. The power of the majority in America is not only preponderant, but irresistible.”<sup>7</sup> Although Americans believe in majority rule, most also think it is vital to protect minority rights, such as freedom of speech.

In a society too large to make its decisions in open meetings, a few will have to carry on the affairs of the many. The relationship between the few leaders and the many followers is one of **representation**. The closer the correspondence between representatives and their electoral majority, the closer the approximation to democracy. Three contemporary theories presenting different views on how the representation process works are discussed in the following section.

### THREE CONTEMPORARY THEORIES OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

Theories of American politics are plentiful. Each focuses on a key element of politics, and each reaches a somewhat different conclusion. Theories of American democracy are essentially about who has power and influence. All, in one way or another, ask the question, who really governs in our nation?

**Pluralism.** One important theory of American democracy, **pluralist theory**, contends that many centers of influence vie for power and control. Groups compete with one another for control over public policy, and no one group or set of groups dominates. Pluralists’ views of American government are thus generally positive. There are, they say, multiple access points to our government. Because power is dispersed among the various branches and levels of government, groups that lose in one arena can take their case to another. According to pluralists, bargaining and compromise are essential ingredients in our democracy. The result is a rough approximation of the public interest in public policy.

**Elite and Class Theory.** Critics of pluralism believe that this view paints too rosy a picture of American political life. By arguing that almost every group can get a piece of the pie, they say, pluralists miss the larger question of who owns the pie. **Elite and class theory** contends that our society—like all societies—is divided along class lines, and that an upper-class elite rules. Wealth—the holding of assets such as property, stocks, and bonds—is the basis of this power. Over a third of the nation’s wealth is held by just one percent of the U.S. population. Elite and class theorists believe that this one percent of Americans control most policy decisions because they can afford to finance election campaigns and control key institutions, such as large corporations.

**Hyperpluralism.** A third theory, **hyperpluralism**, offers a different critique of pluralism. Hyperpluralism is pluralism gone sour. Just as it is said that too many cooks spoil the broth, hyperpluralists claim that too many influential groups cripple government’s ability to govern. Hyperpluralism states that many groups—not just the elite ones—are so strong that government is unable to act. These powerful groups divide the government and its authority. Hyperpluralist theory holds that government caves in to every conceivable interest and single-issue group. When policymakers try to placate many powerful groups, the result is muddled and inconsistent policy. Thus, one part of the government can subsidize tobacco farmers while another preaches about the evils of smoking.

### CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRACY

Regardless of which theory is most convincing, there are a number of continuing challenges to democracy. Many of these challenges apply not only to American democracy but also to the fledgling democracies around the world.

**How Can the People Confront Complex Issues?** Traditional democratic theory holds that ordinary citizens have the good sense to reach political judgments and that government has the capacity to act upon those judgments. Today, however, we live in a society of experts, whose technical knowledge overshadows the knowledge of most people. What, after all, does the average citizen know about chemical dumps, oil spills, Japanese competition, fighting AIDS, and the hundreds of other issues that government is faced with each year? As policy issues have become more numerous and complex, it has become more difficult for individual citizens to make well-informed decisions.

**Are Citizens Doing Their Job?** There is plenty of evidence that Americans know little about who their leaders are, much less about their policy decisions, as will be discussed at length in Chapter 5. Furthermore, Americans do not take full advantage of their opportunities to shape government or select its leaders. Only 38 percent of eligible voters participated in the 1994 congressional elections. These facts worry many democratic thinkers.

**Is American Democracy Too Dependent on Money?** Many political observers worry about the close connection between money and politics, especially in congressional elections. Winning a congressional seat these days usually requires a campaign war chest of at least half a million dollars. Candidates have become increasingly dependent on Political Action Committees (PACs) to fund their campaigns because of the escalation of



campaign costs. These PACs often represent specific economic interests, and they care little about how members of Congress vote on most issues—just the issues that particularly affect them. Critics charge that when it comes to the issues the PACs care about, the members of Congress listen, lest they be denied the money they need for their reelection. When elections are bought, manipulated, sold, or sullied, democracy suffers.

***Can the Political System Adapt to Today's Rapidly Changing World?*** Politics is always in a constant state of change, but over the last three decades the rate of change has been dizzying. With the world's oldest constitutional framework—one that was designed to resist change—some commentators question whether the American political system can be responsive to changing demands. James Sundquist writes that “a government too inefficient to embark on adventurous efforts to change society is also liable to be, by necessity, too inefficient to meet its inescapable, imperative responsibilities.”<sup>8</sup>

In 1963, Bill Clinton was inspired to pursue a political career by shaking hands with President Kennedy during a White House ceremony for high school students. The concepts of American politics and government that Clinton learned about while he was in college were shaped by the Kennedy years, just as the current political situation shapes much of the material in this book. Yet, a comparison of this textbook to the one that Bill Clinton used three decades ago would reveal tremendous differences. To cite just a few examples, in the Kennedy era voters trusted those in public office, political parties were strong, and the budget deficit was rarely a political issue; today, cynicism about politics is



In 1963, 16-year-old Bill Clinton made his first trip to Washington as one of Arkansas' representatives of Boys Nation. At a White House ceremony, Clinton shook hands with President John F. Kennedy. Clinton has often said in the years since then that it was at this moment that he decided to pursue a career in politics.



Business owners gathered at an entrance to Yellowstone National Park to protest the Federal shutdown that occurred in 1996 when President Clinton vetoed the budget plans of the Republican Congress.

pervasive, parties are weak, and the deficit is a continuing major problem. Although this book is mostly a snapshot of government in America at the present time, we believe it is important to present a regular focus on change over the last three decades as well.

***Does America's Diversity Produce Governmental Gridlock?*** The diversity of the American people is reflected in the diversity of political interests represented in the political system. As we will see, this system is so open that interests find it easy to gain effective access to policymakers. Moreover, the distribution of power within the government is so decentralized that access to a few policymakers may be enough to determine the outcome of battles over public policy.

When interests disagree, which they often do, no coalition may be strong enough to form a majority and establish policy. But each interest may use its influence to thwart those whose policy proposals they oppose. In effect, they have a veto over policy, creating what is often referred to as **policy gridlock**. This problem is magnified when voters choose a president of one party and congressional majorities of the other party, as has often been the case in recent years. The result is that nothing may get done, even if action is widely desired by a clear majority of voters. Thus, a major challenge to democracy in America is to overcome the diversity of interests and fragmentation of power to deliver responsive policies.

## SOME KEY QUESTIONS ABOUT DEMOCRACY

Throughout *Government in America* you will be asked to assess American democracy. The chapters that follow will acquaint you with the history of American democ-