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American Government

Institutions & Policies

James Q. Wilson

John J. DiIulio, Jr.

Meena Bose

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American Government

Institutions & Policies

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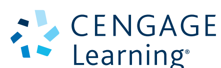

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Dear American Government Instructor:

We wrote *American Government: Institutions and Policies*, 15e not only to explain to students how the federal government works, but also to clarify how its institutions have developed over time and describe their effects on public policy. Within this distinguishing framework, we explain the history of Congress, the presidency, the judiciary, and the bureaucracy because the politics we see today are different from those we would have seen a few decades ago. Likewise, we also explain how public opinion, elections, interest groups, and the media shape and contribute to policy, and how that influence has evolved over time.

American Government: Institutions and Policies, 15e is written around certain key ideas that help students understand not simply American government, but the reasons why the government in this country is different from those in other democracies. These ideas are the U.S. Constitution, America's adversarial political culture, and a commitment to freedom and limited government. This book is an attempt to explain and give the historical and practical reasons for these differences.

New to This Edition

And as always, the book is thoroughly revised to excite students' interest about the latest in American politics and encourage critical thinking. Updates reflect the latest scholarship and current events, including 2015 Supreme Court rulings on gay marriage and health care; the 2014 elections and the 2016 presidential race; ongoing debates about the federal budget, immigration, taxes, and other key issues in American politics; and foreign-policy decisions on Iran, Russia, and Syria. Reworked Learning Objectives open, organize, and close each chapter, serving as a road map to key concepts and helping students assess their comprehension. Each chapter now contains a "Constitutional Connections" box to help students connect the topic to the nation's founding, "What Would You Do?" to deal with a real-life controversy, and "Policy Dynamics: Inside/Outside the Box" to apply our framework for understanding public policy to various issues. More visual aids are included throughout, including infographic inside covers, new figures, and a striking new design.

We are also excited to have Matthew S. Levendusky of the University from Pennsylvania onboard as a new coauthor. Matt's expertise in areas including political polarization and the mass media, public opinion, and campaigns and elections has been a great asset to this edition.

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We hope this book helps your students grapple with the fundamental questions of American government, and understand who governs and to what ends. And we hope it inspires them to continue their engagement with the exciting and dynamic world of American politics.

Sincerely,

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Letter To Students...

Dear Student:

Welcome to *American Government: Institutions and Policies*, 15e! We wrote the textbook to help you grapple with two of the fundamental questions of American government and politics: who governs and to what ends? The textbook will help you to answer these questions, and to better understand how the structure of American government determines the policies that we see. The features we include—from learning objectives, to constitutional connections, to policy dynamics, and what would you do—will help you to master key concepts and topics, and apply them from the classroom to everyday political life.

- **Learning Objectives** open and close each chapter, serving as a road map to the book's key concepts and helping you to assess your understanding.
- **Now and Then** chapter-opening vignettes offer attention-grabbing looks at a particular topic in the past and in the present, reinforcing the historical emphasis of the text and applying these experiences to the world around you today.
- **Constitutional Connections** features raise analytical issues from the constitutional debates that remain relevant today.
- **Policy Dynamics: Inside/Outside the Box** features present policy dynamics and encourage you to think about where they belong within *American Government's* classic politics of policymaking framework, which is introduced in Chapter 1.
- **Landmark Cases** provide brief descriptions of important Supreme Court cases.
- **How We Compare** features show how other nations around the world structure their governments and policies, and ask you to think about the consequences of these differences with American democracy.
- **How Things Work** boxes summarize key concepts and important facts that facilitate your comprehension of the political process.
- **What Would You Do?** features place you in the role of a decision maker on realistic contemporary policy debates.
- **To Learn More** sections close each chapter with carefully selected Web resources and classic and contemporary suggested readings to further assist you in learning about American politics.

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We hope all of these resources help you to master the material in the course and have a richer understanding of American government and democracy. We also hope that this textbook encourages you to continue your intellectual journey in American politics, and that understanding how the political process functions will inspire you to become involved in some way. How will you shape who governs and to what ends?

Sincerely,

John J. DiIulio, Jr.

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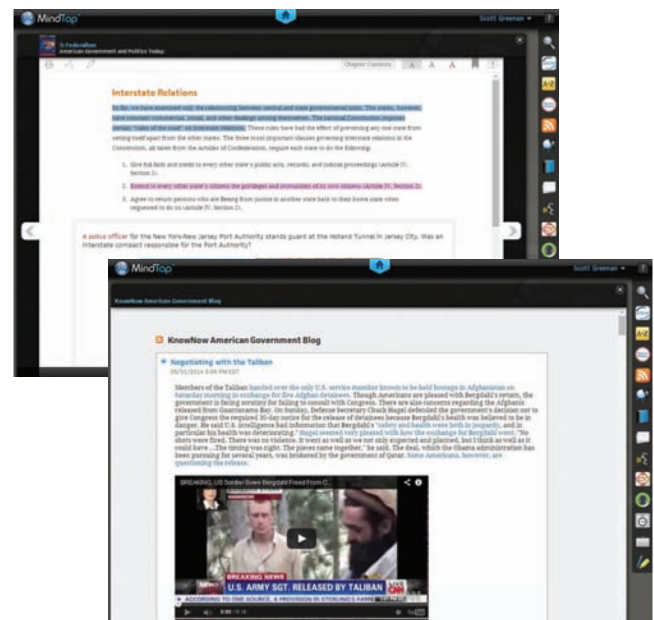

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PART 1

The American System

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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 oblige it to control itself.

— FEDERALIST NO. 51

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CHAPTER 1

The Study of American Government

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1-1 Explain how politics drives democracy.

1-2 Discuss five views of how political power is distributed in the United States.

1-3 Explain why "who governs" and "to what ends" are fundamental questions in American politics.

1-4 Summarize the key concepts for classifying the politics of different policy issues.

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Today, Americans and their elected leaders are hotly debating the federal government's fiscal responsibilities, for both spending and taxation.

Some things never change.

THEN

In 1786, a committee of Congress reported that since the Articles of Confederation were adopted in 1781, the state governments had paid only about one-seventh of the monies requisitioned by the federal government. The federal government was broke and sinking deeper into debt, including debt owed to foreign governments. Several states had financial crises, too.

In 1788, the proposed Constitution's chief architect, James Madison, argued that while the federal government needed its own "power of taxation" and "collectors of revenue," its overall powers would remain "few and defined" and its taxing power would be used sparingly.[1] In reply, critics of the proposed Constitution, including the famous patriot Patrick Henry, mocked Madison's view and predicted that if the Constitution were ratified, there would over time be "an immense increase of taxes" spent by an ever-growing federal government.[2]

NOW

The federal budget initially proposed for 2016 called for spending almost $4 trillion, with close to a $500 billion deficit (i.e., spending nearly half a trillion more than projected government revenues). An expected national debt of more than $19 trillion, much of it borrowed from foreign nations, was projected to balloon to $26 trillion by 2025. Projected interest on the national debt in 2016 would be nearly $300 billion, and was expected to triple by 2025.[3]

The Budget Control Act of 2011 had called for long-term deficit reduction, but when the White House and Congress could not reach agreement in 2013, automatic spending cuts—known as "sequestration"—went into effect, and the federal government even shut down for 16 days in October 2013. The two branches ultimately produced the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013, but could not find common ground on questions about long-term revenue and spending goals.

So, in the 1780s, as in the 2010s, nearly everyone agreed that government's finances were a huge mess and that bold action was required, and soon; but in each case, then and now, there was no consensus about what action to take, or when.

1-1 Politics and Democracy

This might seem odd. After all, it may appear that the government's financial problems, including big budget deficits and revenue shortfalls, could be solved by simple arithmetic: either spend and borrow less, or tax more, or both. But now ask: Spend or borrow less for what, and raise taxes on whom, when, how, and by how much? For example, should we cut the defense budget but continue to fund health care programs, or the reverse? Or should we keep defense and health care funding at current levels but reduce spending on environmental protection or homeland security? Should we perhaps increase taxes on the wealthy (define *wealthy*) and cut taxes for the middle class (define *middle class*), or . . . what?

issue A conflict, real or apparent, between the interests, ideas, or beliefs of different citizens.

Then, as now, the fundamental government finance problems were *political*, not mathematical. People disagreed not only over how much the federal government should tax and spend, but also over whether it should involve itself at all in various endeavors. For example, in 2011, the federal government nearly shut down, not mainly over disagreements between the two parties about how much needed to be cut from the federal budget (in the end, the agreed-to cuts totaled $38.5 billion), but primarily over whether any federal funding at all should go to certain relatively small-budget federal health, environmental, and other programs.

Fights over taxes and government finances; battles over abortion, school prayer, and gay rights; disputes about where to store nuclear waste; competing plans on immigration, international trade, welfare reform, environmental protection, or gun control; and contention surrounding a new health care proposal. Some of these matters are mainly about money and economic interests; others are more about ideas and personal beliefs. Some people care a lot about at least some of these matters; others seem to care little or not at all.

Regardless, all such matters and countless others have this in common: each is an **issue**, defined as a conflict, real or apparent, between the interests, ideas, or beliefs of different citizens.[4]

An issue may be more apparent than real; for example, people might fight over two tax plans that, despite superficial differences, would actually distribute tax burdens on different groups in exactly the same way. Or an issue may be as real as it seems to the conflicting parties, as, for example, it is in matters that pose clear-cut choices (high tariffs or no tariffs; abortion legal in all cases or illegal in all cases).

And an issue might be more about conflicts over means than over ends. For example, on health care reform or other issues, legislators who are in the same party and have similar ideological leanings (like a group of liberal Democrats, or a group of conservative Republicans) might agree on objectives but still wrangle bitterly with

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politics The activity by which an issue is agitated or settled.

power The ability of one person to get another person to act in accordance with the first person's intentions.

authority The right to use power.

each other over different means of achieving their goals. Or they might agree on both ends and means but differ over priorities (which goals to pursue first), timing (when to proceed), or tactics (how to proceed).

Whatever form issues take, they are the raw materials of politics. By **politics** we mean "the activity—negotiation, argument, discussion, application of force, persuasion, etc.—by which an issue is agitated or settled."[5] There are many different ways that any given issue can be agitated (brought to attention, stimulate conflict) or settled (brought to an accommodation, stimulate consensus). And there are many different ways that government can agitate or settle, foster or frustrate political conflict.

As you begin this textbook, this is a good time to ask yourself which issues matter to you. Generally speaking, do you care a lot, a little, or not at all about economic issues, social issues, or issues involving foreign policy or military affairs? Do you follow any particular, ongoing debates on issues such as tightening gun control laws, expanding health care insurance, regulating immigration, or funding antipoverty programs?

As you will learn in Part II of this textbook, some citizens are quite issue-oriented and politically active. They vote and try to influence others to vote likewise; they join political campaigns or give money to candidates; they keep informed about diverse issues, sign petitions, advocate for new laws, or communicate with elected leaders; and more.

But such politically attentive and engaged citizens are the exception to the rule, most especially among young adult citizens under age 30. According to many experts, ever more young Americans are closer to being "political dropouts" than they are to being "engaged citizens" (a fact that is made no less troubling by similar trends in the United Kingdom, Canada, Scandinavia, and elsewhere).[6] Many high school and college students believe getting "involved in our democracy" means volunteering for community service, but not voting.[7] Most young Americans do not regularly read or closely follow political news; and most know little about how government works and exhibit no "regular interest in politics."[8] In response to such concerns, various analysts and study commissions have made proposals ranging from compulsory voting to enhanced "civic education" in high schools.[9]

The fact that you are reading this textbook tells us that you probably have some interest in American politics and government. Our goal in this textbook is to develop, enliven, and inform that interest through examining concepts, interests, and institutions in American politics from a historical perspective as well as through current policy debates.

Power, Authority, and Legitimacy

Politics, and the processes by which issues are normally agitated or settled, involves the exercise of power. By **power** we mean the ability of one person to get another person to act in accordance with the first person's intentions. Sometimes an exercise of power is obvious, as when the president tells the Air Force that it cannot build a new bomber, or orders soldiers into combat in a foreign land. Other times an exercise of power is subtle, as when the president's junior speechwriters, reflecting their own evolving views, adopt a new tone when writing about controversial issues such as education policy. The speechwriters may not think they are using power—after all, they are the president's subordinates and may see their boss face-to-face infrequently. But if the president speaks the phrases that they craft, then they have used power.

Power is found in all human relationships, but we are concerned here only with power as it is used to affect who will hold government office and how government will behave. We limit our view here to government, and chiefly to the American federal government. However, we pay special attention repeatedly to how things once thought to be "private" matters become "public"—that is, how they manage to become objects of governmental action. Indeed, as we discuss more later, one of the most striking transformations of American politics has been the extent to which, in recent decades, almost every aspect of human life has found its way onto the political agenda.

People who exercise political power may or may not have the authority to do so. By **authority** we mean the right to use power. The exercise of rightful power—that is, of authority—is ordinarily easier than the exercise of power not supported by any persuasive claim of right. We accept decisions, often without question, if they are made by people who we believe have the right to make them; we may bow to naked power because we cannot resist it, but by our recalcitrance or our resentment we put the users of naked power to greater trouble than the wielders of authority. In this book, we on occasion speak of "formal authority." By this we mean that the right to exercise power is vested in a governmental office. A president, a senator, and a federal judge have formal authority to take certain actions.

What makes power rightful varies from time to time and from country to country. In the United States, we

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usually say a person has political authority if his or her right to act in a certain way is conferred by a law or by a state or national constitution. But what makes a law or constitution a source of right? That is the question of **legitimacy**. In the United States, the Constitution today is widely, if not unanimously, accepted as a source of legitimate authority, but that was not always the case.

Defining Democracy

On one matter, virtually all Americans seem to agree: no exercise of political power by government at any level is legitimate if it is not in some sense democratic. That wasn't always the prevailing view. In 1787, as the Framers drafted the Constitution, Alexander Hamilton worried that the new government he helped create might be too democratic, while George Mason, who refused to sign the Constitution, worried that it was not democratic enough. Today, however, almost everyone believes that democratic government is the only proper kind. Most people believe that American government is democratic; some believe that other institutions of public life—schools, universities, corporations, trade unions, churches—also should be run on democratic principles if they are to be legitimate; and some insist that promoting democracy abroad ought to be a primary purpose of U.S. foreign policy.

Democracy is a word with at least two different meanings. First, the term *democracy* is used to describe those regimes that come as close as possible to Aristotle's definition—the "rule of the many."[10] A government is democratic if all, or most, of its citizens participate directly in either holding office or making policy. This often is called **direct or participatory democracy**. In Aristotle's time—Greece in the 4th century B.C.—such a government was possible. The Greek city-state, or *polis*, was quite small, and within it citizenship was extended to all free adult male property holders. (Slaves, women, minors, and those without property were excluded from participation in government.) In more recent times, the New England town meeting approximates the Aristotelian ideal. In such a meeting, the adult citizens of a community gather once or twice a year to vote directly on all major issues and expenditures of the town. As towns have become larger and issues more complicated, many town governments have abandoned the pure town meeting in favor of either the representative town meeting (in which a large number of elected representatives, perhaps 200–300, meet to vote on town affairs) or representative government (in which a small number of elected city councilors make decisions).

Matthew Chattle/Alamy

Protestors around the world express support for the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong.

The second definition of *democracy* is the principle of governance of most nations that are called democratic. It was most concisely stated by economist Joseph Schumpeter: "The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals [i.e., leaders] acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote."[11] Sometimes this method is called, approvingly, **representative democracy**; at other times it is referred to, disapprovingly, as the elitist theory of democracy. It is justified by one or both of two arguments. First, it is impractical, owing to limits of time, information, energy, interest, and expertise, for the public at large to decide on public policy, but it is not impractical to expect them to make reasonable choices among competing leadership groups. Second, some people (including, as we shall see in the next chapter, many of the Framers of the Constitution) believe direct democracy is likely to lead to bad decisions because people often decide large issues on the basis of fleeting passions and in response to popular demagogues. This concern about direct democracy persists today, as evidenced by the statements of leaders who disagree with voter decisions. For example, voters in many states have rejected referenda that would have increased public funding for private schools. Politicians who oppose the defeated referenda speak approvingly of the "will of the people," but politicians who favor them speak disdainfully of "mass misunderstanding."

legitimacy Political authority conferred by law or by a state or national constitution.

democracy The rule of the many.

direct or participatory democracy A government in which all or most citizens participate directly.

representative democracy A government in which leaders make decisions by winning a competitive struggle for the popular vote.

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Whenever we refer to that form of democracy involving the direct participation of all or most citizens, we use the term *direct* or *participatory* democracy. Whenever the word *democracy* is used alone in this book, it will have the meaning Schumpeter gave it. Schumpeter's definition usefully implies basic benchmarks that enable us to judge the extent to which any given political system is democratic.[12] A political system is *non*democratic to the extent that it denies equal voting rights to part of its society and severely limits (or outright prohibits) "the civil and political freedoms to speak, publish, assemble, and organize,"[13] all of which are necessary to a truly "competitive struggle for the people's vote." A partial list of nondemocratic political systems would include absolute monarchies, empires, military dictatorships, authoritarian systems, and totalitarian states.[14]

Scholars of comparative politics and government have much to teach about how different types of political systems—democratic and nondemocratic—arise, persist, and change. For our present purposes, however, it is most important to understand that America itself was once far less democratic than it is today and that it was so not by accident but by design. As we discuss in the next chapter, the men who wrote the Constitution did not use the word *democracy* in that document. They wrote instead of a "republican form of government," but by that they meant what we call "representative democracy." And, as we emphasize when discussing civil liberties and civil rights (see Chapters 5 and 6), and again when discussing political participation (see Chapter 8), the United States was not born as a full-fledged representative democracy; and, for all the progress of the past half-century or so, the nation's representative democratic character is still very much a work in progress.

For any representative democracy to work, there must, of course, be an opportunity for genuine leadership competition. This requires in turn that individuals and parties be able to run for office; that communications (through speeches or the press, in meetings, and on the Internet) be free; and that the voters perceive that a meaningful choice exists. But what, exactly, constitutes a "meaningful choice"? How many offices should be elective and how many appointive? How many candidates or parties can exist before the choices become hopelessly confused? Where will the money come from to finance electoral campaigns? There are many answers to such questions. In some European democracies, for example, very few offices—often just those in the national or local legislature—are elective, and much of the money for campaigning for these offices comes from the government. In the United States, many offices—executive and judicial as well as legislative—are elective, and most of the money the candidates use for campaigning comes from industry, labor unions, and private individuals.

Immigration reform advocates organize a rally to build popular support for their cause.

Some people have argued that the virtues of direct or participatory democracy can and should be reclaimed even in a modern, complex society. This can be done either by allowing individual neighborhoods in big cities to govern themselves (community control) or by requiring those affected by some government program to participate in its formulation (citizen participation). In many states, a measure of direct democracy exists when voters can decide on referendum issues—that is, policy choices that appear on the ballot. The proponents of direct democracy defend it as the only way to ensure that the "will of the people" prevails.

As we discuss in the nearby Constitutional Connections feature, and as we explore more in Chapter 2, the Framers of the Constitution did not think that the "will of the people" was synonymous with the "common interest" or the "public good." They strongly favored representative democracy over direct democracy, and they believed that elected officials could best ascertain what was in the public interest.

1-2 Political Power in America: Five Views

Scholars differ in their interpretations of the American political experience. Where some see a steady march of democracy, others see no such thing; where some emphasize how voting and other rights have been steadily expanded, others stress how they were denied to so many for so long, and so forth. Short of attempting to reconcile these competing historical interpretations, let us step back now for a moment to our definition of representative democracy and five competing views about how political power has been distributed in America.

Representative democracy is defined as any system of government in which leaders are authorized to make decisions—and thereby to wield political power—by winning a competitive struggle for the popular vote. It is

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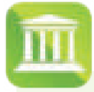

CONSTITUTIONAL CONNECTIONS

Deciding What's Legitimate

Much of American political history has been a struggle over what constitutes legitimate authority. The Constitutional Convention in 1787 was an effort to see whether a new, more powerful federal government could be made legitimate; the succeeding administrations of George Washington, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson were in large measure preoccupied with disputes over the kinds of decisions that were legitimate for the federal government to make. The Civil War was a bloody struggle over slavery and the legitimacy of the federal union; the New Deal of Franklin Roosevelt was hotly debated by those who disagreed over whether it was legitimate for the federal government to intervene deeply in the economy. Not uncommonly, the federal judiciary functions as the ultimate arbiter of what is legitimate in the context of deciding what is or is not constitutional (see Chapter 16). For instance, in 2012, amidst a contentious debate over the legitimacy of the federal health care law that was enacted in 2010, the U.S. Supreme Court decided that the federal government could require individuals to purchase health insurance but could not require states to expand health care benefits for citizens participating in the federal–state program known as Medicaid.

obvious then that very different sets of hands can control political power, depending on what kinds of people can become leaders, how the struggle for votes is carried on, how much freedom to act is given to those who win the struggle, and what other sorts of influence (besides the desire for popular approval) affect the leaders' actions.

The actual distribution of political power in a representative democracy will depend on the composition of the political elites who are involved in the struggles for power and over policy. By **elite** we mean an identifiable group of persons who possess a disproportionate share of some valued resource—in this case, political power.

There are at least five views about how political power is distributed in America: (1) wealthy capitalists and other economic elites determine most policies; (2) a group of business, military, labor union, and elected officials controls most decisions; (3) appointed bureaucrats ultimately run everything; (4) representatives of a large number of interest groups are in charge; and (5) morally impassioned elites drive political change.

The first view began with the theories of Karl Marx, who, in the 19th century, argued that governments were dominated by business owners (the "bourgeoisie") until a revolution replaced them with rule by laborers (the "proletariat").[15] But strict Marxism has collapsed in most countries. Today, a **class view**, though it may derive inspiration from Marx, is less dogmatic and emphasizes the power of "the rich" or the leaders of multinational corporations.

The second view ties business leaders together with other elites whose perceived power is of concern to the view's adherents. These elites may include top military officials, labor union leaders, mass media executives, and the heads of a few special-interest groups. Derived from the work of sociologist C. Wright Mills, this **power elite view** argues that American democracy is dominated by a few top leaders, many of them wealthy or privately powerful, who do not hold elective office.[16]

The third view is that appointed officials run everything despite the efforts of elected officials and the public to control them. The **bureaucratic view** was first set forth by German scholar Max Weber (1864–1920). He argued that the modern state, in order to become successful, puts its affairs in the hands of appointed bureaucrats whose competence is essential to the management of complex affairs.[17] These officials, invisible to most people, have mastered the written records and legislative details of the government and do more than just implement democratic policies; they actually make those policies.

The fourth view holds that political resources—such as money, prestige, expertise, and access to the mass media—have become so widely distributed that no single elite, no social class, no bureaucratic arrangement, can control them. Many 20th-century political scientists, among them David B. Truman, adopted

elite Persons who possess a disproportionate share of some valued resource, such as money, prestige, or expertise.

class view View that the government is dominated by capitalists.

power elite view View that the government is dominated by a few top leaders, most of whom are outside of government.

bureaucratic view View that the government is dominated by appointed officials.

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pluralist view View that competition among all affected interests shapes public policy.

creedal passion view View that morally impassioned elites drive important political changes.

a **pluralist view**.[18] In the United States, they argued, political resources are broadly shared in part because there are so many governmental institutions (cities, states, school boards) and so many rival institutions (legislatures, executives, judges, bureaucrats) that no single group can dominate most, or even much, of the political process.

The fifth view maintains that while each of the other four views is correct with respect to how power is distributed on certain issues or during political "business as usual" periods, each also misses how the most important policy decisions and political changes are influenced by morally impassioned elites who are motivated less by economic self-interest than they are by an almost religious zeal to bring government institutions and policies into line with democratic ideals. Samuel P. Huntington articulated this **creedal passion view**, offering the examples of Patrick Henry and the revolutionaries of the 1770s, the advocates of Jackson-style democracy in the 1820s, the progressive reformers of the early 20th century, and the leaders of the civil rights and antiwar movements in the mid-20th century.[19]

1-3 Who Governs? To What Ends?

So, which view is correct? At one level, all are correct, at least in part: Economic class interests, powerful cadres of elites, entrenched bureaucrats, competing pressure groups, and morally impassioned individuals have all at one time or another wielded political power and played a part in shaping our government and its policies.

But, more fundamentally, understanding any political system means being able to give reasonable answers to each of two separate but related questions about it: Who governs, and to what ends?

We want to know the answer to the first question because we believe that those who rule—their personalities and beliefs, their virtues and vices—will affect what they do to and for us. Many people think they already know the answer to the question, and they are prepared to talk and vote on that basis. That is their right, and the opinions they express may be correct. But they also may be wrong. Indeed, many of these opinions must be wrong because they are in conflict. When asked, "Who governs?" some people will say "the unions" and some will say "big business"; others will say "the politicians," "the people," or "the special interests." Still others will say "Wall Street," "the military," "crackpot liberals," "the media," "the bureaucrats," or "white males." Not all these answers can be correct—at least not all of the time.

The answer to the second question is important because it tells us how government affects our lives. We want to know not only who governs, but what difference it makes who governs. In our day-to-day lives, we may not think government makes much difference at all. In one sense that is right because our most pressing personal concerns—work, play, love, family, health—essentially are private matters on which government touches but slightly. But in a larger and longer perspective, government makes a substantial difference. Consider that in 1935, 96 percent of all American families paid no federal income tax, and for the 4 percent or so who did pay, the average rate was only about 4 percent of their incomes. Today almost all families pay federal payroll taxes, and the average rate is about 21 percent of their incomes. Or consider that in 1960, in many parts of the country, African Americans could ride only in the backs of buses, had to use washrooms and drinking fountains that were labeled "colored," and could not be served in most public restaurants. Such restrictions have almost all been eliminated, in large part because of decisions by the federal government.

It is important to bear in mind that we wish to answer two different questions, and not two versions of the same question. You cannot always predict what goals government will establish by knowing only who governs, nor can you always tell who governs by knowing what activities government undertakes. Most people holding national political office are middle-class, middle-aged, white, Protestant males, but we cannot then conclude that the government will adopt only policies that are to the narrow advantage of the middle class, the middle-aged, whites, Protestants, or men. If we thought that, we would be at a loss to explain why the rich are taxed more heavily than the poor, why the War on Poverty was declared, why constitutional amendments giving rights to African Americans and women passed Congress by large majorities, or why Catholics and Jews have been appointed to so many important governmental posts.

This book is chiefly devoted to answering the question, who governs? It is written in the belief that this question cannot be answered without looking at how government makes—or fails to make—decisions about a large variety of concrete issues. Thus, in this book we inspect government policies to see what individuals, groups, and institutions seem to exert the greatest power in the continuous struggle to define the purposes of government.

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HOW WE COMPARE

Academic Freedom

You are reading a textbook on American government, but how is the freedom to study, teach, or do research protected from undue government interference? And how do European democracies protect academic freedom?

The U.S. Constitution does not mention academic freedom. Rather, in America, the federal and state courts have typically treated academic freedom, at least in tax-supported universities, as "free speech" strongly protected under the First Amendment.

In each of nine European nations, the constitution is silent on academic freedom, but various national laws protect it. In 13 other European nations, academic freedom is protected both by explicit constitutional language and by national legislation. But is academic freedom better protected in these nations than in either the United States or elsewhere in Europe?

Not necessarily. Germany's constitution states that "research and teaching are free" but subject to "loyalty to the constitution." Italy's constitution offers lavish protections for academic freedom, but its national laws severely restrict those same freedoms.

The United Kingdom has no written constitution, but its national laws regarding academic freedom (and university self-governance) are quite restrictive by American standards.

Source: Terence Karran, "Freedom in Europe: A Preliminary Analysis," *Higher Education Policy* 20 (2007): 289–313.

Expanding the Political Agenda

No matter who governs, the most important decision that affects policymaking is also the least noticed one: deciding what to make policy *about*, or in the language of political science, deciding what belongs on the **political agenda**. The political agenda consists of issues that people believe require governmental action. We take for granted that politics is about certain familiar issues such as taxes, energy, welfare, civil rights, and homeland security. We forget that there is nothing inevitable about having these issues—rather than some other ones—on the nation's political agenda.

For example, at one time, it was unconstitutional for the federal government to levy income taxes; energy was a nonissue because everyone (or at least everyone who could chop down trees for firewood) had enough; welfare was something for cities and towns to handle; civil rights were supposed to be a matter of private choice rather than government action; "homeland security" was not in the political lexicon, and a huge federal cabinet department by that name was nowhere on the horizon.

political agenda Issues that people believe require governmental action.

At any given time, what is on the political agenda is affected by at least four things:

- Shared *political values*—for example, if people believe that poverty is the result of social forces rather than individual choices, then they have a reason to endorse enacting or expanding government programs to combat poverty.
- *The weight of custom and tradition*—people usually will accept what the government customarily does, even if they are leery of what it proposes to do.
- *The importance of events*—wars, terrorist attacks, and severe or sustained economic downturns can alter our sense of the proper role of government.
- *Terms of debate*—the way in which political elites discuss issues influences how the public views political priorities.

Because many people believe that whatever the government now does it ought to continue doing, and because changes in attitudes and the impact of events tend to increase the number of things that government does, the political agenda is always growing larger. Thus, today there are far fewer debates about the legitimacy of a proposed government policy than there were in the 1920s or the 1930s.

For instance, in the 1930s, when what became the Social Security program was first proposed, the debate was largely about whether the federal government should have any role whatsoever in providing financial support for older adults or disabled citizens. In stark contrast, today, not a single member of Congress denies that the federal government should have a *major* role in providing financial support for older adults or disabled citizens or advocates ending Social Security. Instead, today's debates about the program are largely over competing plans to ensure its long-term financial solvency.

Popular views regarding what belongs on the political agenda often are changed by events. During wartime or after a terrorist attack on this country, many people expect the government to do whatever is necessary to win, whether or not such actions are clearly authorized by the Constitution. Economic depressions or deep recessions, such as the ones that began in 1929 and 2007, also lead many people to expect the government to take action. A coal mine disaster leads to an enlarged role

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