5E Essentials

American Politics Today

Bianco · Canon

American Politics Today

Fifth Essentials Edition

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American Politics Today

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Indiana University, Bloomington

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University of Wisconsin, Madison

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For our families,
Regina, Anna, and Catherine,
Sarah, Neal, Katherine, and Sophia,
who encouraged, empathized, and
helped, with patience,
grace, and love.

About the Authors

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David T. Canon

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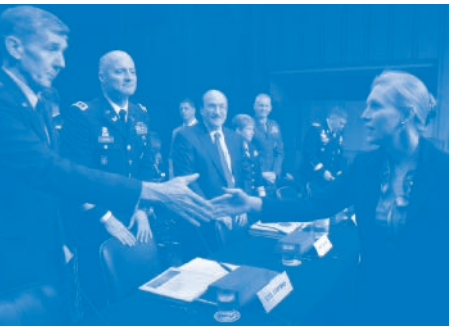

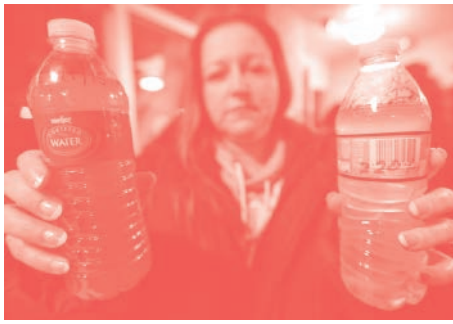

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Preface

This book is based on three simple premises: politics is conflictual, political process matters, and politics is everywhere. It reflects our belief that politics is explainable, that political outcomes can be understood in terms of decisions made by individuals—and that the average college undergraduate can make sense of the political world in these terms. It focuses on contemporary American politics, the events and outcomes that our students have lived through and know something about. The result, we believe, is a book that provides an accessible but rigorous account of the American political system.

American Politics Today is also the product of our dissatisfaction with existing texts. Thirty years ago we were assistant professors together at the same university, assigned to teach the introductory class in alternate semesters. Though our graduate training was quite different, we found that we shared a deep disappointment with available texts. Their wholesale focus on grand normative concepts such as civic responsibility or their use of advanced analytic themes left students with little idea of how American politics really works, how events in Washington, D.C., affect their everyday lives, and how to piece together all the facts about American politics into a coherent explanation of why things happen as they do. These texts did not engender excitement, fascination, or even passing interest. What they did was put students to sleep.

As with previous editions, the overarching goal of the Fifth Edition is to move beyond simply describing what happens in American politics to explaining behavior and outcomes. In part we wish to counter the widespread belief among students that politics is too complicated, too chaotic, or too secretive to make sense of. More than that, we want to empower our students, to demonstrate that everyday American politics is relevant to their lives. This emphasis is also a response to the typical complaint about American government textbooks—that they are full of facts but devoid of useful information, and that after students finish reading, they are no better able to answer "why" questions than they were before they cracked the book.

In this edition, we maintain our focus on conflict and compromise in American politics—identifying what Americans agree and disagree about and assessing how conflict shapes American politics, from campaign platforms to policy outcomes. Though this emphasis seems especially timely given the 2016 elections and the prospect of continued deadlock in Washington, our aim is to go beyond these events to identify a fundamental constant in American politics: the reality that much of politics is driven by disagreements over the scope and form of government policy, and that compromise is an essential component of virtually all significant changes in government policy. Indeed, it is impossible to imagine politics without conflict. Conflict was embedded in the American political system by the Founders, who set up a system of checks and balances to make sure that no single group could dominate. The Constitution's division of power guarantees that enacting and implementing laws will involve conflict and compromise. Furthermore, the Constitution itself was constructed as one long series of compromises. Accordingly, despite the general dislike people have for conflict, our students must recognize that conflict and compromise lie at the heart of politics.

Throughout the text, we emphasize common sense, showing students that politics inside the Beltway is often strikingly similar to the students' own everyday interactions. For example, what sustains policy compromises made by members of Congress?

The fact that the members typically have long careers, that they interact frequently with each other, and that they only deal with colleagues who have kept their word in the past. These strategies are not unique to the political world. Rather, they embody rules of thumb that most people follow (or are at least aware of) in their everyday interactions. In short, we try to help students understand American politics by emphasizing how it is not all that different from the world they know.

This focus on common sense is coupled with many references to the political science literature. We believe that contemporary research has something to say about prediction and explanation of events that students care about—and that these insights can be taught without turning students into game theorists or statisticians. Our text presents the essential insights of contemporary research, motivated by real-world political phenomena and explained using text or simple diagrams. This approach gives students a set of tools for understanding politics, provides an introduction to the political science literature, and matches up well with students' common-sense intuitions about everyday life. Moreover, by showing that academic scholarship is not a blind alley or irrelevant, this approach helps to bridge the gap between an instructor's teaching and his or her research.

The Fifth Edition builds on these strengths. We've continued to streamline and improve the presentation of text and graphics, and added a new section, "What Do the Numbers Say," that guides students through interpreting quantitative information. Our focus on explanation is hammered home throughout the chapters with new "Why Should I Care" call-outs. New or revised chapter openers use contemporary stories and examples (from student loans to the threats posed by ISIS) to highlight the conflict and compromise theme. We refer to these openers throughout the chapters to illustrate and extend our discussion. The "Take a Stand" sections now explicitly argue both sides of policy questions. Finally, we have added new pull quotes and other sidebar material to enhance the liveliness of the text.

The text continues to be ruthlessly contemporary, but also places recent events in context. Although we do not ignore American history, our stress is on contemporary politics—on the debates, actions, and outcomes that most college students are aware of. Focusing on recent events emphasizes the utility of the concepts and insights that we develop in the text. It also goes a long way toward establishing the relevance of the intro class. The new edition discusses the acceptance of same-sex marriage, the debate over immigration reform, and debates over income inequality—all issues that Americans care about. We have also devoted considerable space to describing the 2016 presidential race, working to show how the contest between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump fits into a broader theory of how candidates campaign and how voters decide.

Finally, our book offers an individual-level perspective on America's government. The essential message is that politics—elections, legislative proceedings, regulatory choices, and everything else we see—is a product of the decisions made by real flesh-and-blood people. This approach grounds our discussion of politics in the real world. Many texts focus on abstractions such as "the eternal debate," "the great questions," or "the pulse of democracy." We believe that these constructs don't explain where the debate, the questions, or even democracy come from. Nor do they help students understand what's going on in Washington, D.C., and elsewhere, as it's not obvious that the participants themselves care much about these sorts of abstractions—quite the opposite, in fact.

We replace these constructs with a focus on real people and actual choices. The primary goal is to make sense of American politics by understanding why politicians, bureaucrats, judges, and citizens act as they do. That is, we are grounding our description of American politics at the most fundamental level—an individual facing a decision. How, for example, does a voter choose among candidates? Stated that way, it is

reasonably easy to talk about where the choice came from, how the individual might evaluate different options, and why one choice might look better than the others. Voters' decisions may be understood by examining the different feasible strategies they employ (issue voting, retrospective evaluations, stereotyping, etc.) and by asking why some voters use one strategy while others use a different one.

By focusing on individuals and choices, we can place students in the shoes of the decision makers, and in so doing, give them insight into why people act as they do. We can discuss, for example, why a House member might favor enacting wasteful pork-barrel spending, even though a proposal full of such projects will make his constituents economically worse off—and why constituents might reward such behavior, even if they suspect the truth. By taking this approach, we are not trying to let legislators off the hook. Rather, we believe that any real understanding of the political process must begin with a sense of the decisions the participants make and why they make them. Focusing on individuals also segues naturally into a discussion of consequences, allowing us to move from examining decisions to describing and evaluating outcomes. In this way, we can show students how large-scale outcomes in politics, such as inefficient programs, don't happen by accident or because of malfeasance. Rather, they are the predictable results of choices made by individuals (here, politicians and voters).

The policy chapters in the Full and Essentials Editions also represent a distinctive feature of this book. The discussion of policy at the end of an intro class often fits awkwardly with the material covered earlier. It is supposed to be a culmination of the semester-long discussion of institutions, politicians, and political behavior, but instead it often becomes an afterthought that gets discarded when time runs out in the last few weeks of class. Our policy chapters explicitly draw on previous chapters' discussions of the actors that shape policy: the president, Congress, the courts, interest groups, and parties. By doing so, these chapters show how all the pieces of the puzzle fit together.

Finally, this book reflects our experience as practicing scholars and teachers, as well as interactions with more than fifteen thousand students in introductory classes at several universities. Rather than thinking of the intro class as a service obligation, we believe it offers a unique opportunity for faculty to develop a broader sense of American politics and American political science, while at the same time giving students the tools they need to behave as knowledgeable citizens or enthusiastic political science majors. We hope that it works for you as well as it does for us.

Features of the Text and Media Package

The book's "three key ideas"

are fully integrated throughout the text.

- **Politics Is Conflictual** and conflict and compromise are a normal, healthy part of politics. The questions debated in elections and the policy options considered by people in government are generally marked by disagreement at all levels. Making policy typically involves important issues on which people disagree, sometimes strongly; so compromise, bargaining, and tough choices about trade-offs are often necessary.
- **Political Process Matters** because it is the mechanism we have established to resolve conflicts and achieve compromise. Governmental actions result from conscious choices made by voters, elected officials, and bureaucrats. The media often cover political issues in the same way they do sporting events, and though this makes for entertaining news, it also leads citizens to overlook the institutions, rules, and procedures that have a decisive influence on American life. Politics really is not just a game.
- **Politics Is Everywhere** in that the results of the political process affect all aspects of Americans' everyday lives. Politics governs what people can and cannot do, their quality of life, and how they think about events, other people, and situations.

New and revised "How It Works" chapter openers

feature hot-button political issues and pose the kinds of questions students might ask. For example, "When is discrimination legal and when is it not?" (Civil Liberties) and "How do interest groups work? Do lobbying victories always go to the side with the most money?" (Interest Groups).

Organization around chapter goals

stresses learning objectives and mastery of core material.

- **Chapter Goals** appear at the beginning of the chapter and then recur at the start of the relevant sections throughout the chapter to create a more active reading experience that emphasizes important learning objectives.
- **Extensive end-of-chapter review sections organized around the Chapter Goals** include section summaries, practice quiz questions, key terms, and suggested reading lists. Students have everything they need to master the material in each section of the chapter.

Special features for critical thinking

reinforce the three key ideas while introducing other important ways to think about American politics.

- **"How It Works" graphics,** newly redesigned for greater clarity, highlight key political processes and structures and build graphical literacy. The "How It Works in Practice" section of these graphics show how the processes presented play out in a real-world political event.
- **NEW "What Do the Numbers Say?" features** develop quantitative reasoning skills by teaching students to read and interpret data on important political issues and current events.

- **NEW "Why Should I Care?" sections** draw explicit connections between the chapter material and students' lives.
- **NEW "Did you know?" features and pull quotes** give students tidbits of information that may induce questions, anger, and may even inspire students to get involved.
- **Revised "Take a Stand" features** address contemporary issues in a pro/con format and invite students to consider how they would argue their own position on the topic. Each feature concludes with two critical-thinking questions.
- **"Nuts & Bolts" features provide students with concise explanations of key concepts,** like the difference between civil liberties and civil rights, different kinds of gerrymanders, and brief summaries of campaign finance rules. These features provide an easy way for quick study and review.

Tools for a dynamic classroom

- **InQuizitive, Norton's formative, adaptive assessment tool,** accompanies the Fifth Edition of *American Politics Today* and reinforces reading comprehension with a focus on the foundations of government and major political science concepts. Guiding feedback helps students understand why their answers were right or wrong and steers them back to the text. Student knowledge is strengthened through questions that compel analysis of the systems of government, animated and static infographics, and images, charts, and graphs from this text. With InQuizitive, students have the opportunity to achieve the maximum score in a low-risk environment.

  To learn more about InQuizitive, visit http://books.wwnorton.com/books/inquizitive/overview/.
- **Norton Coursepacks are free and open with no access codes,** allowing you to easily bring Norton's high-quality digital content into your existing learning management system. The content is fully editable and is yours to keep forever. The Norton Coursepack for *American Politics Today,* Fifth Edition, contains the following activities and quizzes:
  - **How to Read Charts and Graphs tutorial** that provides students with extra practice and guidance interpreting common representations of data that they will encounter in this textbook and in the world,
  - **Pre-and post-test chapter quizzes** that assess student knowledge of core concepts,
  - **Video exercises** that engage students and help them retain and apply information through significant events,
  - **"How It Works" and "How It Works In Practice" animated graphics** that guide students through understanding political processes and institutions,
  - **Updated simulations** that show students how concepts work in the real world,
  - **"By the Numbers" activities** that give students more practice with quantitative skills and more familiarity with how political scientists know what they know, and
  - **"Take a Stand" exercises** that present students with multiple sides of contemporary debates and ask them to consider and refine their own views based on what they've learned.
- **Test bank** contains more than 1,800 questions tagged to chapter-learning objectives and keyed to Bloom's taxonomy.
- **Instructor's manual** includes chapter outlines, class activities, and discussion questions.
- **Instructor PowerPoints** contains fully customizable lecture slides with clicker questions and "How It Works" and "How It Works in Practice" animated PowerPoint slides for optimal classroom presentation.

Acknowledgments

This edition of *American Politics Today* is again dedicated to our families. Our wives, Regina and Sarah, have continued to accommodate our deadlines and schedules and have again served as our most accurate critics and sources of insight and inspiration. Our children have again been forced to contend with politics and textbook writing as a perennial topic of conversation in their visits home, and have responded with critiques and ideas of their own, which appear throughout the text.

Our colleagues at Indiana University and the University of Wisconsin (and before that, Duke University for both of us) provided many opportunities to talk about American politics and teaching this course.

Bill thanks his colleagues at Indiana University and elsewhere, including Christine Barbour, John Brehm, Ted Carmines, Chris DeSante, Mike Ensley, Bernard Fraga, Russ Hansen, Matthew Hayes, Yanna Krupnikov, Lin Ostrom, Regina Smyth, Will Winecoff, and Jerry Wright, for sharp insights and encouragement at crucial moments. He is also grateful to many teaching assistants who have helped him organize and teach the intro class at three universities. Finally, he thanks the students at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow, Russia, where he taught the introductory class as a Fulbright Scholar in 2012.

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Both of us are grateful to the political science faculty at Duke University, who, in addition to giving us our first academic jobs, worked to construct a hospitable and invigorating place to research and to teach. In particular, Rom Coles, Ruth Grant, John Aldrich, Tom Spragens, Taylor Cole, and David Barber were model teachers, colleagues, and scholars. We both learned to teach by watching them, and we are better instructors and scholars for it.

We are indebted to the outstanding people at W. W. Norton who have been our full partners through all five editions. Peter Lesser's relentless combination of wit, insight, and expertise is evident throughout the book. Sam Held kept us all on the same page, and was a graceful editor and deadline-enforcer. Steve Dunn was responsible for getting the process started and providing good counsel from beginning to end. Roby Harrington has been a source of constant encouragement and

feedback. Linda Feldman has been a superb project editor, bringing to the project her talent for clarity of words and visuals. Cat Abelman put together an excellent photo program. Megan Jackson cleared reprint permissions for the figures and tables. Ashley Horna handled production with efficiency and good humor. Jillian Burr and Open design studio created a beautiful design for the book's interior and cover. Spencer Richardson-Jones and Michael Jaoui's clear vision for the ever-more-complex and rich digital media package has been a major help. We also would like to thank Aaron Javsicas and Ann Shin for their outstanding work on earlier editions. The entire crew at Norton has been incredibly professional and supportive in ways we never knew when we started writing this book. Signing with them fifteen years ago was an eyes-shut home run.

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It is a humbling experience to have so many smart people involved in the process of writing and revising this book. Their reviews were often critical, but always insightful, and you the reader are the beneficiaries of their efforts. In many cases, the improvements in this edition are the direct result of their suggestions. They have our profound thanks.

William T. Bianco
David T. Canon
November 2016

American Politics Today

Fifth Essentials Edition

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In a democracy, oftentimes other people win.
— C. J. Cregg, *The West Wing*

1

Understanding American Politics

How does politics work and why does politics matter?

You have just lived through one of the most interesting presidential elections in American history. For the first time, a major party nominated a woman as their candidate. Even so, the election was won by a newcomer to politics, Republican Donald Trump, who won his party's nomination despite having a deeply problematic past, no political experience, and a campaign style that emphasized insult, innuendo, and attack. The campaign was one of the nastiest ever, exemplified by Trump's repeated threats to jail Clinton if he became president, and his claim that a conspiracy of elites, media companies, and banks were working to rig the election and ensure his defeat. Yet Trump was able to win by rallying voters who wanted change and opposed immigration reform, and by raising questions about Clinton's use of a private e-mail server while secretary of state and vowing to change the "culture of corruption."

For most of you, this is the first presidential election you have paid much attention to, and it would be no surprise if you asked whether American politics always worked this way. Are presidential contests always drawn-out, controversial, and conflictual? Do they typically feature candidates as widely disliked as Clinton and Trump? Do candidates often attack their opponents in intensely personal terms, such as Trump's referring to Clinton as "Crooked Hillary," alleging that she lacked the stamina and the judgment to be president, criticizing her appearance, or claiming she used drugs to enhance her debate performance? How often do significant numbers of party leaders abandon their nominees?

The easy answer is no: the 2016 presidential election is not typical. Trump's focus on general themes such as "make America great again" rather than specific policy proposals, his rejection of well-accepted campaign tactics, his charges of a rigged electoral process, claims of sexual assault against him, the dissention within Republican ranks—all of these things are highly unusual. Even so, political science does a good job of explaining what happened in 2016. Trump's nomination reflected the relatively extreme policy preferences held by the

CHAPTER GOALS

Describe the basic functions of government.
pages 4–8

Define *politics* and identify three key ideas that help explain politics.
pages 8–14

Identify major sources of conflict in American politics.
pages 15–19

Explain how the American values of democracy, liberty, and equality work to resolve political conflict.
pages 20–23

The 2016 presidential campaign and the surprising election of Republican Donald Trump highlighted the conflicts deeply embedded in American political life. Issues surrounding race, ethnicity, gender, geography, education, income level, and sexual orientation all seemed to further divide an already polarized country. Now the questions emerge: How will Trump govern? Will the divisions in American politics only become deeper, or will President Trump fulfill his election-night pledge to represent all Americans and work to unite the country?

average Republican primary voter and an anti-Washington mood. The closeness of the general election reflects the role of party identification and economic conditions in vote decisions. And the omnipresent conflict seen in 2016 was not only due to candidates or their campaign strategies—rather, it reflects sharp, sincere underlying differences between the parties (and their supporters) over what the federal government should and shouldn't be doing.

In fact, the outcome of the 2016 elections illustrates how digging below the surface of political events can help to explain why things happen in American politics—the conflicts and the political process that deals with them. But is conflict natural in American politics? Is this how politics really works? And why does politics matter in our lives?

DESCRIBE THE BASIC FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNMENT

Making sense of American government and politics

The premise of this book is simple: *American politics makes sense.* What happens in elections, in Washington, D.C., and everywhere else—even the 2016 election—has a logical and often simple explanation; we just have to know how to look for it. By the end of the book, we hope you get really good at analyzing the politics you see everywhere—in the news and in your own life.

This claim may seem unrealistic or even naive. On the surface, American politics often makes no sense. Polls show strong support for extreme, unconstitutional, or downright silly proposals. Candidates put more time into insulting their opponents than making credible campaign promises. Members of Congress seem more interested in beating their political opponents than getting something done. Elections look random or even chaotic. And many policy questions, from reforming immigration to deciding what to do about climate change, seem hopelessly intractable.

Many people, we believe, have given up on American politics because they don't understand the political process, feel helpless to influence election outcomes or policy making, and believe that politics is irrelevant to their lives. Many people disliked both

Conflicts within the government—say, over immigration policy—often reflect real divisions among American citizens about what government should do about certain issues. Groups on all sides of controversial issues pressure the government to enact their preferred policies.

of the candidates running in 2016, and saw this as more evidence that American politics do not work well. Since you are taking a class on American politics, we hope you have not given up on politics entirely. It is *not* our goal to turn you into a political junkie or a policy expert. You don't need to be completely immersed in politics to make sense of it, but we hope that after finishing this book you will have a basic understanding of the political process and why it matters.

One goal of this book is to help you take an active role in the political process. A functioning democracy allows citizens to defer complicated policy decisions to their elected leaders, but it also requires citizens to monitor what politicians do and to hold them accountable at the voting booth. This book will help you accomplish this important duty by providing the analytical skills you need to make sense of politics, even when it initially appears to make no sense at all.

We are not going to spend much time talking about how American politics should be. Rather, our focus will be on explaining American politics as it is. Here are some other questions we will examine:

- Why don't people vote? Why *do* people vote? How do they decide who to vote for?
- Why do so many people mistrust politicians and the political system?
- Why can't Congress get things done? Why can they get anything done?
- Why is the Supreme Court so political?
- Can presidents do whatever they want? Why can't they do more?
- Is the media biased?

We will answer these questions and many others by applying three key ideas about the nature of politics: politics is conflictual, political process matters, and politics is everywhere. But first, we begin with an even more basic question: Why do we have a government?

Why do we have a government?

As we prepare to address this question, let's agree on a definition: **government** is the system for implementing decisions made through the political process. All countries have some form of government, which in general serves two broad purposes: to provide order and to promote the general welfare.

government
The system for implementing decisions made through the political process.

To Provide Order At a basic level, the answer to the question "Why do we have a government?" seems obvious: without government there would be chaos. As the seventeenth-century British philosopher Thomas Hobbes said, life in the "state of nature" (that is, without government) would be "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."[1] Without government there would be no laws—people could do whatever they wanted. Even if people tried to develop informal rules, there would be no way to guarantee enforcement of those rules. Accordingly, one of the most important rules of government is policing—making sure that people obey the law and protecting citizens from threats coming from outside the nation.

The Founders of the United States noted this crucial role in the Constitution's preamble: two of the central goals of government are to "provide for the common defense" and to "insure domestic Tranquility." The former refers to military protection against foreign invasion and the defense of our nation's common security interests. The latter refers to law enforcement within the nation, which today includes the National Guard, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Department of Homeland Security, state and local police, and the courts. So at a minimal level, government is necessary to provide security.

However, there's more to it than that. The Founders cited the desire to "establish Justice . . . and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity." But do we need government to do these things? It may be obvious that the police power of the nation is required to prevent anarchy, but can't people have justice and liberty without government? In a perfect world, maybe, but the Founders had a more realistic view of human nature. As James Madison, one of the founding fathers (and the fourth president of the United States), said, "But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary."[2] Furthermore, Madison continued, people have a variety of interests that have "divided mankind into parties, inflamed them with mutual animosity, and rendered them much more disposed to vex and oppress each other than to co-operate for their common good."[3] That is, without government we would quickly be headed toward Hobbes's nasty and brutish state of nature because of differences in opinion about what society should look like. Having a government means that people cannot act unilaterally against each other, but it also creates a new problem: people will try to use the government and its powers to impose their views on the rest of society.

Madison's view of human nature might sound pessimistic, but it was also realistic. He assumed that people were self-interested: we want what is best for ourselves and for our families, and to satisfy those interests we tend to form groups with like-minded people. Madison saw these groups, which he called **factions**, as being opposed to the public good, and his greatest fear was of tyranny by a faction imposing its will on the rest of the nation. For example, if one group took power and established an official state religion, that faction would be tyrannizing people who practiced a different religion. This type of oppression is precisely why many of the early American colonists fled Europe in the first place.

factions
Groups of like-minded people who try to influence the government. American government is set up to avoid domination by any one of these groups.

So government is necessary to avoid the anarchy of the state of nature and the right kind of government is needed to avoid oppression by whoever controls the policy-making process. As we will discuss in Chapters 2 and 3, America's government seeks to control the effects of factions by dividing government power in three main ways. First, the **separation of powers** divides the government into three branches—judicial, executive, and legislative—and assigns distinct duties to each branch. Second, the system of **checks and balances** gives each branch some power over the other two. (For example, the president can veto legislation passed by Congress; Congress can impeach the president; and the Supreme Court has the power to interpret laws written by Congress to determine whether they are constitutional.) Third, **federalism** divides power yet again by allotting different responsibilities to local, state, and national governments. With power divided in this fashion, Madison reasoned, no single faction could dominate the government.

separation of powers
The division of government power across the judicial, executive, and legislative branches.

checks and balances
A system in which each branch of government has some power over the others.

federalism
The division of power across the local, state, and national levels of government.

To Promote the General Welfare The preamble to the Constitution also states that the federal government exists to "promote the general Welfare." This means tackling the hard problems that Americans cannot solve on their own, such as taking care of the poor, the sick, or the aged, and dealing with global issues like climate change, terrorist threats, and poverty in other countries. However, government intervention is not inevitable—people can decide that these problems aren't worth solving. But if people *do* want to address these large problems, government action is necessary because **public goods** such as these are not efficiently provided by the free market, either because of **collective action problems** or for other reasons.

public goods
Services or actions (such as protecting the environment) that, once provided to one person, become available to everyone. Government is typically needed to provide public goods because they will be under-provided by the free market.

collective action problems
Situations in which the members of a group would benefit by working together to produce some outcome, but each individual is better off refusing to cooperate and reaping benefits from those who do the work.

It is easy for two people or even a small group to tackle a common problem without the help of government, but 1,000 people (to say nothing of the more than 320 million in the United States today) would have a very difficult time. They would suffer from the

Two important government functions described in the Constitution are to "provide for the common defense" and "insure domestic Tranquility." The military and local police are two of the most commonly used forces the government maintains to fulfill those roles.

free rider problem—that is, because it is in everyone's own interest to let someone else do the work, the danger is that no one will contribute, even though everyone wants the outcome that collective contributions would create. A government representing more than 320 million people can provide public goods, such as protecting the environment or defending the nation, that all those people acting on their own would be unable to provide, so people elect leaders and pay taxes to provide those public goods.

free rider problem
The incentive to benefit from others' work without making a contribution, which leads individuals in a collective action situation to refuse to work together.

Collective action problems are common in modern society. Education is a great example. You benefit personally from your college education in terms of the knowledge and experience you gain and perhaps from the higher salary you will earn because of your college degree. However, society also benefits from your education. Your employer will benefit from your knowledge and skills, as will people you interact with. If education were provided solely by the free market, those who could afford schooling would be educated, but the rest would not, leaving a large segment of society with little or no education and therefore unemployable. So, public education, like many important services, benefits all levels of society and must be provided by the government for the general welfare.

Now that we understand *why* we have a government, the next question is: *What* does the government do to "insure domestic Tranquility" and "promote the general Welfare"? Many visible components of the government promote these goals, from the police and armed services to the Internal Revenue Service, Federal Reserve, Postal Service, Social Security Administration, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Department of Education, and Food and Drug Administration. In fact, it is hard to find an aspect of everyday life that does not involve the government in some way, either as a provider of public goods, such as national defense, interstate highways, and national parks, as a protector of civil liberties, as an enforcer of laws and property rights, or as a regulator of individual or corporate behavior.

Forms of government

While all governments must provide order and promote the general welfare, there are different types of governments. Greek political philosopher Aristotle, writing in the fourth century BC, developed a classification scheme for governments that is still useful. Aristotle distinguished three pure types of government based on the number of rulers versus the number of people ruled: monarchy (rule by one), aristocracy (rule by the few), and polity (rule by the many—such as the general population).

DID YOU KNOW?

64%

of the world's population lives in countries considered to be free or partly free. All countries considered not free are in Asia or Africa.
Source: Freedom House

Additional distinctions can be made within Aristotle's third type—constitutional republican governments—based on how they allocate power among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Presidential systems such as we have in the United States tend to follow a separation of power among the three branches, while parliamentary systems such as the one in the United Kingdom elect the chief executive from the legislature, so there is much closer coordination between those two branches.

We can further refine Aristotle's third type by considering the relationships among different levels of the government. In a federal system such as the United States, power is shared among the local, state, and national levels of government. In a unitary system (such as the United Kingdom), all power is held at the national level. A confederation (like Switzerland) is a less common form of government in which states retain their sovereignty and autonomy but form a loose association at the national level.

DEFINE *POLITICS* AND IDENTIFY THREE KEY IDEAS THAT HELP EXPLAIN POLITICS

What is politics?

politics
The process that determines what government does.

We define **politics** as the process that determines what government does. You may consider politics the same thing as government, but we view politics as being much broader; it includes ways of behaving and making decisions that are common in everyday life. Many aspects of our discussion of politics will probably sound familiar because your life involves politics on a regular basis. This may sound a little abstract, but it should become clear in light of the three key ideas of this book (see the How It Works graphic in this chapter).

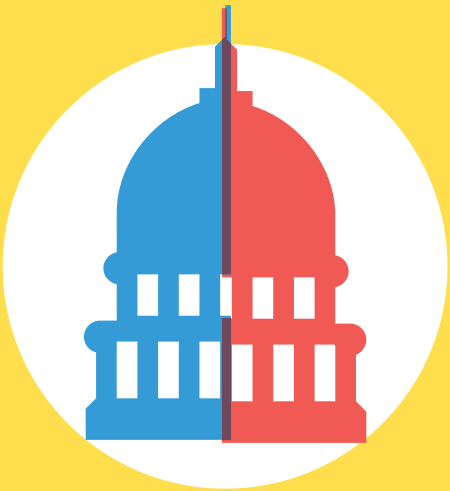
First, *politics is conflictual*. The questions debated in election campaigns and in Washington and the options considered by policy makers generally involve disagreement at all levels. The federal government does not spend much time resolving issues that everyone agrees should be decided in a particular way. Rather, making government policy involves issues on which people disagree, sometimes strongly, which makes compromise difficult—and this is a normal, healthy part of politics. Although compromise may be difficult, it is often necessary to produce an outcome that can be enacted and implemented.

Second, *political process matters*. Governmental actions don't happen by accident—they result from conscious choices made by elected officials and bureaucrats. Politics, as the process that determines what governments do, puts certain individuals into positions of power and makes the rules that structure their choices. The media often cover political campaigns the way they would report on a boxing match or the Super Bowl, focusing on the competition, rivalries, and entertaining stories, which can lead people to overlook the institutions, rules, and procedures that have a decisive influence on politics. Indeed, the political process is the mechanism for resolving conflict. The most obvious example of the political process at work is elections, which democracies use to resolve a fundamental conflict in society: deciding who should lead the country.

Third, *politics is everywhere*. Decisions about what government should do or who should be in charge are integral to society, and they influence the everyday lives of all Americans. Politics helps to determine what people can and cannot do, their quality of life, and how they think about events, people, and situations. Moreover, people's political thought and behavior are driven by the same types of calculations and decision-making rules that shape beliefs and actions in other parts of life. For example,

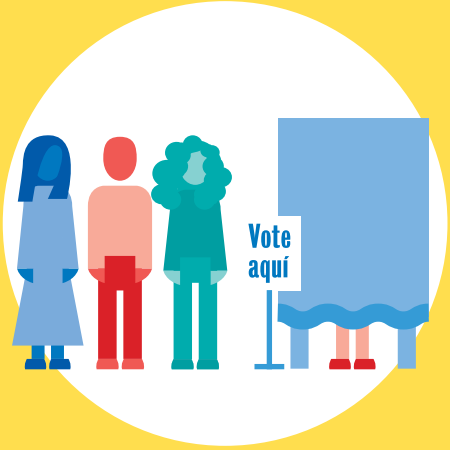
How it works: in theory

Three Key Ideas for Understanding Politics



Politics Is Conflictual

Conflict and compromise are natural parts of politics. Political conflict over issues like the national debt, abortion, and health care **reflects disagreements among the American people** and often requires compromises within government.



Political Process Matters

How political conflicts are resolved is important. Elections determine who represents citizens in government. **Rules and procedures determine who has power** in Congress and other branches of government.

Politics Is Everywhere

What happens in government affects our lives in countless ways. Policies related to jobs and the economy, food safety and nutrition, student loans, and many other areas shape **our everyday lives**. We see political information in the news and encounter political situations in many areas of our lives.

Critical Thinking

1. **One implication of the idea that politics is conflictual is that politicians** may not want to negotiate compromises on important policy questions. Why do you think politicians sometimes refuse to compromise rather than work together to get things done?
2. **Think back to the discussion** of the 2016 election at the beginning of this chapter. Even though this election was not typical, in what ways does it illustrate the three key ideas described here?