

A complex network diagram with a black background. It features a dense web of thin, light-colored lines connecting numerous nodes. The nodes are represented by small circles in various colors, including red, blue, grey, and purple. Some nodes are larger than others, and some are clustered together, forming a complex, interconnected structure that resembles a social network or a data network.

LOWI
GINSBERG
SHEPSLE
ANSOLABEHERE

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

POWER AND PURPOSE

CORE
FIFTEENTH
EDITION

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POWER AND PURPOSE

CORE FIFTEENTH EDITION

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT **POWER AND PURPOSE**

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W. W. NORTON
NEW YORK • LONDON

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Printed in the United States of America.

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Composition: GraphicWorld
Manufacturing: LSC Crawfordsville

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The Library of Congress has cataloged another edition as follows:

Names: Lowi, Theodore J., author. | Ginsberg, Benjamin, author. | Shepsle, Kenneth A., author. | Ansolabehere, Stephen, author.
Title: American government : power & purpose / Theodore J. Lowi, Benjamin Ginsberg, Kenneth A. Shepsle, Stephen Ansolabehere.
Description: Fifteenth edition. | New York : W.W. Norton, 2019. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2018046029 | ISBN **9780393655537** (hardcover)
Subjects: LCSH: United States—Politics and government.
Classification: LCC JK276 .L69 2019 | DDC 320.473—dc23 LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018046029>

ISBN: 978-0-393-67500-9

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10110
wwnorton.com

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., 15 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BS

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

For Our Families

Angele, Anna, and Jason Lowi
Sandy, Cindy, and Alex Ginsberg
Rise Shepsle, Seth Shepsle, and
Nilsa Sweetser
Laurie Gould and Rebecca and
Julia Ansolabehere

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Preface

This book was written for faculty and students who are looking for a little more than just “nuts and bolts” and who are drawn to an analytical perspective. No fact about American government is intrinsically difficult to grasp, and in an open society such as ours, facts abound. The philosophy of a free and open media in the United States makes information about the government that would be suppressed elsewhere readily available. The advent of the internet and other new communication technologies has further expanded the opportunity to learn about our government. The ubiquity of information in our society is a great virtue. Common knowledge about the government gives our society a vocabulary that is widely shared among its citizens and enables us to communicate effectively with each other about politics. But it is also important to reach beyond that common vocabulary and develop a more sophisticated understanding of politics and government. The sheer quantity of facts in our society can be overwhelming. In a 24/7 news cycle it can be hard to pick out what stories are important and to stay focused on them. Today, moreover, Americans may choose among a variety of news sources, including broadcast, print, and various online formats, all clamoring for attention. The single most important task of the teacher of political science is to confront popular ideas and information and to choose from among them the small number of really significant concepts that help us make better sense of the world. This book aims to help instructors and students accomplish this task.

The analytical framework of this book is oriented around five principles that we use to help make sense of politics:

1. All political behavior has a purpose.
2. Institutions structure politics.
3. All politics is collective action.

4. Political outcomes are the products of individual preferences and institutional procedures.
5. How we got here matters.

This Fifteenth Edition continues our endeavor to make *American Government: Power and Purpose* the most authoritative and contemporary introductory text on the market. The approach of the book has not changed. Those who have used this book in the past are familiar with the narrative it presents about American government and politics—the storyline of how the U.S. government has evolved, how it operates, and the characters involved in the unfolding development of our polity. This book also presents an analytical approach to understanding American politics based on the five principles outlined above. We are guided by the belief that students of government need an analytical framework for understanding political phenomena—a framework rooted in some of the most important insights the discipline of political science has to offer and that encourages students to draw out the general lessons about collective action and collective decision making.

The major changes in this Fifteenth Edition, including a thorough analysis of the 2018 midterm elections and the first years of the Trump presidency, are intended to combine authoritative, concise coverage of the central topics in American politics with smart pedagogical features designed to get students thinking analytically about quantitative data and current issues. The most significant changes include the following:

- **New analysis of the 2018 midterm elections, including data figures**, walks students through what happened and why. This edition includes a section devoted to the 2018 elections in Chapter 11 as well as updated data, examples, and other information throughout the book.
- **A new primer, “Making Sense of Charts and Graphs,”** by Jennifer Bachner (Johns Hopkins University) at the end of Chapter 1 sets students up to understand the political data they encounter in the news and in the course, including in many new Timeplot and Analyzing the Evidence infographics throughout the book.
- **New Policy Principle boxes** authored by contributing author Elizabeth Rigby (George Washington University) highlight the various players and structures that shape current policy debates, including congressional action on the opioid crisis (Chapter 6), and federal vs. state marijuana laws (Chapter 3).
- **New and revised Timeplot features** use quantitative data to illuminate long-term trends in American politics. New Timeplots explore federal and state and local spending (Chapter 3) and immigration from continent of origin (Chapter 10).

- **Six new Analyzing the Evidence units written by expert researchers** highlight the political science behind the information in the book; the remaining units have been updated with new data and analysis. Each unit poses an important question from political science and presents evidence that can be used to analyze the question. The new units are
 - “Making Sense of Charts and Graphs” in Chapter 1, contributed by Jennifer Bachner (Johns Hopkins University)
 - “State Policies on Renewable Energy” in Chapter 3, contributed by David Konisky (Indiana University)
 - “Is the Public Principled or Prejudiced When It Comes to Affirmative Action?” in Chapter 5, contributed by David C. Wilson (University of Delaware)
 - “Unilateral Action and Presidential Power” in Chapter 7, contributed by Jon Rogowski (Harvard University)
 - “Explaining Vacancies in Presidential Appointments” in Chapter 8, contributed by Sanford Gordon (New York University)
 - “Is the Public as Polarized as Congress?” in Chapter 10, contributed by Edward G. Carmines and Eric R. Schmidt (both Indiana University)

For the Core Fifteenth Edition we have profited greatly from the guidance of many teachers who have used earlier editions and from the suggestions of numerous thoughtful reviewers. We thank them by name in the Acknowledgments. We recognize there is no single best way to craft an introductory text, and we are grateful for the advice we have received.

Benjamin Ginsberg
Kenneth A. Shepsle
Stephen Ansolabehere

Acknowledgments

We note with sadness the passing of Theodore J. Lowi. We miss Ted but continue to hear his voice and benefit from his wisdom in the pages of this book.

Our students at Cornell, Johns Hopkins, and Harvard have been an essential factor in the writing of this book. They have been our most immediate intellectual community, a hospitable one indeed. Another part of our community, perhaps a large suburb, is the discipline of political science itself. Our debt to the scholarship of our colleagues is scientifically measurable, probably to several decimal points, in the footnotes of each chapter. Despite many complaints that the field is too scientific or not scientific enough, political science is alive and well in the United States. Political science has never been at a loss for relevant literature, and without that literature, our job would have been impossible. For this edition, we are grateful for Elizabeth Rigby's significant revisions and updates to the policy discussions throughout the book as well as the new Policy Principle sections outlined in the preface.

We are pleased to acknowledge our debt to the many colleagues who had a direct and active role in criticism and preparation of the manuscript. The First Edition was read and reviewed by Gary Bryner, Brigham Young University; James F. Herndon, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University; James W. Riddlesperger Jr., Texas Christian University; John Schwarz, University of Arizona; Toni-Michelle Travis, George Mason University; and Lois Vietri, University of Maryland. We also want to reiterate our thanks to the four colleagues who allowed us the privilege of testing a trial edition of our book by using it as the major text in their introductory American Government courses: Gary Bryner, Brigham Young University; Allan J. Cigler, University of Kansas; Burnet V. Davis, Albion College; and Erwin A. Jaffe, California State University, Stanislaus.

For the Second through Seventh Editions, we relied heavily on the thoughtful manuscript reviews we received from J. Roger Baker, Wittenburg University; Timothy Boylan, Winthrop University; David Canon, University of Wisconsin;

Victoria Farrar-Myers, University of Texas at Arlington; John Gilmour, College of William and Mary; Mark Graber, University of Maryland; Russell Hanson, Indiana University; Robert Huckfeldt, University of California, Davis; Mark Joslyn, University of Kansas; William Keech, Carnegie Mellon University; Donald Kettl, University of Wisconsin; Anne Khademan, University of Wisconsin; Beth Leech, Rutgers University; James Lennertz, Lafayette College; Allan McBride, Grambling State University; William McLauchlan, Purdue University; Grant Neeley, Texas Tech University; Charles Noble, California State University, Long Beach; and Joseph Peek Jr., Georgia State University.

For the Eighth Edition, we benefited from the comments of Scott Ainsworth, University of Georgia; Thomas Brunell, Northern Arizona University; Daniel Carpenter, Harvard University; Brad Gomez, University of South Carolina; Paul Gronke, Reed College; Marc Hetherington, Bowdoin College; Gregory Huber, Yale University; Robert Lowry, Iowa State University; Anthony Nownes, University of Tennessee; Scott Adler, University of Colorado Boulder; John Coleman, University of Wisconsin—Madison; Richard Conley, University of Florida; Keith Dougherty, University of Georgia; John Ferejohn, Stanford University; Douglas Harris, Loyola College; Brian Humes, University of Nebraska—Lincoln; Jeffrey Jenkins, Northwestern University; Paul Johnson, University of Kansas; Andrew Polsky, Hunter College CUNY; Mark Richards, Grand Valley State University; Charles Shipan, University of Iowa; Craig Volden, Ohio State University; and Garry Young, George Washington University.

For the Ninth Edition, we were guided by the comments of John Baughman; Lawrence Baum, Ohio State University; Chris Cooper, Western Carolina State University; Charles Finochiaro, University at Buffalo—SUNY; Lisa Garcia-Bellorda, University of California, Irvine; Sandy Gordon, New York University; Steven Greene, North Carolina State University; Richard Herrera, Arizona State University; Ben Highton, University of California, Davis; Trey Hood, University of Georgia; Andy Karch, University of Texas at Austin; Glen Krutz, University of Oklahoma; Paul Labedz, Valencia Community College; Brad Lockerbie, University of Georgia; Wendy Martinek, Binghamton University—SUNY; Nicholas Miller, University of Maryland—Baltimore County; Russell Renka, Southeast Missouri State University; Debbie Schildkraut, Tufts University; Charles Shipan, University of Iowa; Chris Shortell, California State University, Northridge; John Sides, University of Texas at Austin; Sean Theriault, University of Texas at Austin; and Lynn Vavreck, University of California, Los Angeles.

For the Tenth Edition, we were grateful for the detailed comments of Christian Grose, Vanderbilt University; Kevin Esterling, University of California, Riverside; Martin Johnson, University of California, Riverside; Scott Meinke, Bucknell University; Jason MacDonald, Kent State University; Alan Wiseman, Ohio State University; Michelle Swers, Georgetown University; William Hixon, Lawrence University; Gregory Koger, University of Miami; and Renan Levine, University of Toronto.

For their advice on the Eleventh Edition, we thank Scott Ainsworth, University of Georgia; Bethany Albertson, University of Washington; Brian Arbour, John Jay College; James Battista, University at Buffalo—SUNY; Lawrence Becker, California State University, Northridge; Damon Cann, Utah

State University; Jamie Carson, University of Georgia; Suzanne Chod, Pennsylvania State University; Michael Crespin, University of Georgia; Ryan Emenaker, College of the Redwoods; Kevin Esterling, University of California, Riverside; Richard Glenn, Millersville University; Brad Gomez, Florida State University; Sanford Gordon, New York University; Christian Grose, Vanderbilt University; James Hanley, Adrian College; Ryan Hurl, University of Toronto; Josh Kaplan, University of Notre Dame; Wendy Martinek, Binghamton University; Will Miller, Southeast Missouri State University; Evan Parker-Stephen, Texas A&M University; Melody Rose, Portland State University; Eric Schickler, University of California, Berkeley; John Sides, George Washington University; and Lynn Vavreck, University of California, Los Angeles.

For the Twelfth Edition we looked to comments from John M. Aughenbaugh, Virginia Commonwealth University; Christopher Banks, Kent State University; Michael Berkman, Pennsylvania State University; Cynthia Bowling, Auburn University; Matthew Cahn, California State University, Northridge; Damon Cann, Utah State University; Tom Cioppa, Brookdale Community College; David Damore, University of Nevada, Las Vegas; Kevin Esterling, University of California, Riverside; Jessica Feezell, University of California, Santa Barbara; Charle J. Finocchiaro, University of South Carolina; Rodd Freitag, University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire; Kevin Jefferies, Alvin Community College; Nancy Jimeno, California State University, Fullerton; Gregory Koger, University of Miami; David E. Lewis, Vanderbilt University; Allison M. Martens, University of Louisville; Thomas M. Martin, Eastern Kentucky University; Michael Andrew McLatchy, Clarendon College; Ken Mulligan, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale; Geoffrey D. Peterson, University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire; Jesse Richman, Old Dominion University; Mark C. Rom, Georgetown University; Laura Schneider, Grand Valley State University; Scot Schraufnagel, Northern Illinois University; Ronald P. Seyb, Skidmore College; Martin S. Sheffer, Tidewater Community College; Charles R. Shipan, University of Michigan; Howard A. Smith, Florida Gulf Coast University; Michele Swers, Georgetown University; Charles Tien, Hunter College; Elizabeth Trentanelli, Gulf Coast State College; and Kenneth C. Williams, Michigan State University.

For the Thirteenth Edition we are indebted to Michael M. Binder, University of North Florida; Stephen Borrelli, University of Alabama; Dan Cassino, Fairleigh Dickinson University; Jangsup Choi, Texas A&M University—Commerce; Martin Cohen, James Madison University; Jeff Colbert, Elon University; Richard S. Conley, University of Florida; Mark Croatti, American University; David Dulio, Oakland University; Andrew M. Essig, DeSales University; Kathleen Ferraiolo, James Madison University; Emily R. Gill, Bradley University; Brad T. Gomez, Florida State University; Paul N. Goren, University of Minnesota; Thomas Halper, Baruch College; Audrey A. Haynes, University of Georgia; Diane J. Heith, St. John's University; Ronald J. Hrebenar, University of Utah; Ryan Hurl, University of Toronto Scarborough; Richard Jankowski, State University of New York at Fredonia; Kevin Jefferies, Alvin Community College; Timothy R. Johnson, University of Minnesota; Kenneth R. Mayer, University of Wisconsin—Madison; Mark McKenzie, Texas Tech University; Fiona Miller, University of Toronto Mississauga; Richard M. Pious, Barnard College; Tim Reynolds, Alvin

Community College; Martin Saiz, California State University, Northridge; Dante Scala, University of New Hampshire; Sean M. Theriault, University of Texas at Austin; J. Alejandro Tirado, Texas Tech University; Terri Towner, Oakland University; Nicholas Valentino, University of Michigan; Harold M. Waller, McGill University; and Jeffrey S. Worsham, West Virginia University.

We also thank the reviewers who advised us on the Fourteenth Edition: Michael E. Aleprete, Westminster College, Community College of Allegheny County; James Binney, Pennsylvania State University; William Blake, Indiana University—Purdue University Indianapolis; Eric Boyer, Colby-Sawyer College; Chelsie L. M. Bright, Mills College; Scott Englund, University of California, Santa Barbara; Amanda Friesen, Indiana University—Purdue University Indianapolis; Frank Fuller, Lincoln University; Baogang Guo, Dalton State College; Eric Hanson, State University of New York at Fredonia; Jennifer Haydel, Montgomery College; Tseggai Isaac, Missouri University of Science and Technology; Vicki Jeffries-Bilton, Portland State University; Nicole Kalaf-Hughes, Bowling Green State University; Ervin Kallfa, Hostos Community College of CUNY; Samantha Majic, John Jay College of Criminal Justice; William McLauchlan, Purdue University; Hong Min Park, University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee; John Patty, Washington University in St. Louis; John W. Ray, Montana Tech of the University of Montana; Eric Sands, Berry College; and Kathleen Tipler, Wake Forest University.

We are grateful for the comments from the reviewers for this Fifteenth Edition: Jeffrey Crouch, American University; Curtis R. Berry, Shippensburg University; David Darmofal, University of South Carolina; Paul Djupe, Denison University; Charles J. Finocchiaro, University of Oklahoma; Chris Galdieri, Saint Anselm College; Ben Gaskins, Lewis & Clark College; Greg Goelzhauser, Utah State University; Jake Haselswerdt, University of Missouri; Michael Herron, Dartmouth College; Krista Jenkins, Fairleigh Dickinson University; Kristin Kanthak, University of Pittsburgh; Daniel Levin, University of Utah; Janet M. Martin, Bowdoin College; Robert J. McGrath, George Mason University; Scott Meinke, Bucknell University; Nina M. Moore, Colgate University; Stephen Nichols, California State University, San Marcos; David O'Connell, Dickinson College; Mark Carl Rom, Georgetown University; Stella Rouse, University of Maryland; Travis S. Smith, Brigham Young University; Jennifer Nicoll Victor, George Mason University; Amber Wichowsky, Marquette University. We would also like to thank Andie Herrig and Johnathan Romero, students at Washington University in St. Louis, for identifying two errors in the book. We appreciate your close read.

An important contribution to recent editions was made by the authors of the Analyzing the Evidence units. We are grateful to the authors of the new Analyzing the Evidence units in the Fifteenth Edition, who are named in the Preface. In addition, Jenna Bednar, David E. Campbell, Jeremiah D. Castle, Patrick J. Egan, Sean Gailmard, John C. Green, Geoffrey C. Layman, Beth L. Leech, David Lewis, Andrew D. Martin, Kenneth Mayer, Kevin M. Quinn, and Dara Z. Strolovitch contributed to this feature in earlier editions, and much of their work is still reflected in this edition.

We would also like to thank our partners at W. W. Norton & Company, who have continued to apply their talents and energy to this textbook. The efforts of Ann Shin, Laura Wilk, Chris Howard-Woods, Shannon Jilek, David Bradley, Eric Pier-Hocking, Spencer Richardson-Jones, Michael Jaoui, and Tricia Vuong kept the production of the Fifteenth Edition and its accompanying resources coherent and in focus. We also thank Roby Harrington and Steve Dunn, whose contributions to previous editions remain invaluable.

We are more than happy, however, to absolve all these contributors from any flaws, errors, and misjudgments that this book contains. We wish it could be free of all production errors, grammatical errors, misspellings, misquotes, missed citations, etc. From that standpoint, a book ought to try to be perfect. But substantively we have not tried to write a flawless book; we have not tried to write a book to please everyone. We have again tried to write an effective book, a book that cannot be taken lightly. Our goal was not to make every reader a political scientist. Our goal was to restore politics as a subject of vigorous and enjoyable discourse, releasing it from the bondage of the 30-second sound bite and the 30-page technical briefing. Every person can be knowledgeable because everything about politics is accessible. One does not have to be a philosopher to argue about the requisites of democracy, a lawyer to dispute constitutional interpretations, an economist to debate public policy. We will be very proud if our book contributes in a small way to the restoration of the ancient art of political controversy.

Benjamin Ginsberg
Kenneth A. Shepsle
Stephen Ansolabehere

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT
POWER AND PURPOSE

1

Five Principles of Politics

Chapter Outline

- Making Sense of Government and Politics
 - Five Principles of Politics
 - Conclusion: Preparing to Analyze the American Political System
-

American government and politics are extraordinarily complex. The United States has many levels of government: federal, state, county, city, and town—to say nothing of a host of special and regional authorities. Each of these governments operates under its own rules and statutory authority and is related to the others in complex ways. In many nations, regional and local governments are appendages of the national government. This is not true in the United States, where state and local governments possess considerable independence and autonomy. Each level of government, moreover, consists of an array of departments, agencies, offices, and bureaus, each with its own policies, jurisdiction, and responsibilities and undertaking a variety of sometimes overlapping tasks.

At times this complexity gets in the way of effective governance, as in the case of governmental response to emergencies. The United States' federal, state, and local public safety agencies seldom share information and frequently use incompatible communications equipment, so they often cannot even speak to one another. For example, on September 11, 2001, New York City's police and fire departments could not effectively coordinate their responses to the attack on the World Trade Center because their communications systems were not linked. While communication has improved in the last two decades, many security and policy agencies, ranging from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), still possess separate computer operating systems and databases, which inhibits cooperation through sharing.

However, the complexity of the U.S. government is no accident. Complexity was one element of the Founders' grand constitutional design. The framers of the Constitution hoped that an elaborate sharing of power among national institutions and between the states and the national government would allow competing interests access to arenas of decision making and a voice in public affairs—while preventing any single group or coalition from monopolizing power. One set of interests might be active in some states, other forces would be influential in the national legislature, and still others might prevail in the

executive branch. The dispersion of power and opportunity would allow many groups to achieve at least some of their political goals. In this way, America's political tradition associates complexity with liberty and political opportunity.

Although this arrangement creates many avenues for political action, it also places a burden on citizens who wish to achieve something through political participation. They may be unable to discern where particular policies are actually made, who the decision makers are, and what forms of political participation are most effective. This is one of the paradoxes of political life: in a dictatorship, lines of political authority may be simple, but opportunities to influence the use of power are few; in the United States, political opportunities are plentiful, but how they should be used is far from obvious. Indeed, precisely because the United States' institutional and political arrangements are so complex, many Americans are mystified by government. As we see in Chapter 10, many Americans have difficulty making sense of even the basic features of the Constitution.

If the U.S. government seems complex, its politics can be utterly bewildering. Like the nation's governmental structure, its political processes have numerous components. For most Americans, the focal point of politics is the electoral process. As we see in Chapter 11, tens of millions of Americans participate in national, state, and local elections, during which they hear thousands of candidates debate a perplexing array of issues. Candidates inundate the media with promises, charges, and countercharges while pundits and journalists, whom we also discuss in Chapters 10 and 14, and even political scientists like us, add their own clamor to the din.

Politics, however, does not end on Election Day. Long after the voters have spoken, political struggles continue in Congress, the executive branch, and the

CORE OF THE ANALYSIS



Five principles of politics can help us think analytically about U.S. government and make sense of the apparent chaos and complexity of the political world. These five principles are:



All political behavior has a purpose (rationality principle).



Institutions structure politics (institution principle).



All politics is collective action (collective action principle).



Political outcomes are the products of individual preferences and institutional procedures (policy principle).



How we got here matters (history principle).

courts; they embroil political parties, interest groups, and the mass media. In some instances, the participants and their goals seem fairly obvious. For example, it is no secret that businesses and upper-income wage earners strongly support tax reduction, farmers support agricultural subsidies, and labor unions oppose increasing the eligibility age for Social Security. Each of these forces has created or joined organized groups to advance its cause. We examine some of these groups in Chapter 13.

In other instances, though, the participants and their goals are not so clear. Sometimes corporate groups hide behind environmental causes to surreptitiously promote their economic interests. Strong environmental requirements make it difficult for prospective competitors to enter their markets. Other times groups claiming to want to help the poor and downtrodden seek only to help themselves. And worse, many government policies are made behind closed doors, away from the light of publicity. Ordinary citizens can hardly be blamed for failing to understand bureaucratic rule making and other obscure techniques of government.

MAKING SENSE OF GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

Can we find order in the apparent chaos of politics? Yes, and doing so is the purpose of this text. Finding order in the apparent chaos of politics is precisely what political scientists do. The discipline of political science, and especially the study of American politics, seeks to identify and explain patterns in all the noise and maneuvering of everyday political life. This is motivated by two fundamental questions: What do we observe? And why?

The first question makes clear that political science is an *empirical* enterprise: it aims to identify facts and patterns that are true in the world around us. What strategies do candidates use to capture votes? How do legislators decide about how to vote on bills? What groups put pressure on the institutions of government? How do the media report politics? How have courts intervened in regulating political life? These and many other questions have prompted political scientists to observe and ascertain what is true about the political world, and we will take them up in detail in later chapters.

The second question—Why?—is the fundamental concern of science. We not only would like to know that something is true about the world. We also want to know why it is true, which requires us to create a theory of how the world works. And a theory is constructed from basic principles. The remainder of this chapter presents a set of such basic principles to help us navigate the apparent chaos of politics and make sense of what we observe. In this way we not only describe politics, we analyze it.

There is a third type of question that is *normative* rather than empirical or analytical. Normative questions focus on “should” issues: What should the responsibilities of citizenship consist of? How should judges judge and presidents lead? Political science grapples with all three types of questions.

In this book we believe that answers to the empirical and analytical help us formulate answers to the normative.

One of the most important goals of this book is to help readers learn to analyze what they observe in American politics.¹ Analysis requires abstracting. For example, in political science, we are not much interested in an analysis that explains *only* why the Republicans gained congressional seats in the 2016 elections. Such explanations are the province of pundits, journalists, and other commentators. Rather, as political scientists, we seek a more general theory of voting choice that we can apply to many particular instances—not just the 2016 elections but the 2018 elections as well.

In this chapter, we first discuss what we mean by *government* and *politics*. Then we introduce our five principles of politics. These principles are intentionally somewhat abstract because we want them to apply to a wide range of circumstances. However, we provide concrete illustrations along the way, and in later chapters we apply the principles intensively to specific features of politics and government in the United States. We conclude the chapter with a guide to analyzing evidence, something you will find useful as we examine empirical information throughout the rest of the book.

What Is Government?

Government is the term generally used to describe the formal political arrangements by which a land and its people are ruled. Government is composed of institutions and processes that rulers establish to strengthen and perpetuate their power or control over a land and its inhabitants. A government may be as simple as a tribal council that meets occasionally to advise the chief or as complex as our own vast establishment, with elaborate procedures, laws, governmental bodies, and bureaucracies. This more complex government is sometimes called the *state*, an abstract concept referring to the source of all public authority.

Forms of Government

Governments vary in institutional structure, size, and modes of operation. Two questions are key in determining how governments differ: Who governs? and How much government control is permitted?

In some nations political authority is vested in a single individual—a king or dictator, for example. This state of affairs is called an **autocracy**. When a small group of landowners, military officers, or wealthy merchants controls most of the governing decisions, the government is an **oligarchy**. If more people participate and the populace has some influence over decision making, the government is tending toward **democracy**.

← government

The institutions through which a land and its people are ruled.

← autocracy

A form of government in which a single individual rules.

← oligarchy

A form of government in which a small group of landowners, military officers, or wealthy merchants controls most of the governing decisions.

← democracy

A system of rule that permits citizens to play a significant part in government, usually through the selection of key public officials.

1 For an entire book devoted to the issue of analysis, see Kenneth A. Shepsle, *Analyzing Politics: Rationality, Behavior, and Institutions*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 2010).

Governments also vary in terms of how they govern. In the United States and some other nations, governments are severely limited in *what* they are permitted to control (they are restricted by substantive limits) as well as in *how* they exercise that control (they are restricted by procedural limits). These are called **constitutional** governments. In other nations, the law imposes few real limits on the government, but it is nevertheless kept in check by other political and social institutions that it cannot control but must come to terms with, such as autonomous territories or an organized church. Such governments are called **authoritarian**. In a third, very small group of nations, including the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin, Nazi Germany, and present-day North Korea, governments not only are free of legal limits but also seek to eliminate organized social groupings that might challenge their authority. These governments attempt to dominate political, economic, and social life and, as a result, are called **totalitarian**.

constitutional government →

A system of rule that establishes specific limits on the powers of the government.

authoritarian government →

A system of rule in which the government's power is not limited by law, though it may be restrained by other social institutions.

totalitarian government →

A system of rule in which the government's power is not limited by law and in which the government seeks to eliminate other social institutions that might challenge it.

politics →

Conflict and cooperation over the leadership, structure, and policies of government.

Politics

The term *politics* broadly refers to conflicts over the character, membership, and policies of any organization to which people belong. As the political scientist Harold Lasswell once put it, politics is the struggle over “who gets what, when, how.”² Although politics exists in any organization, in this book **politics** refers to conflicts over the leadership, structure, and policies of governments—that is, over who governs and who has power. But politics also involves collaboration and cooperation. The goal of politics, as we define it, is to have a say in the composition of the government's leadership, how the government is organized, or what its policies will be.³

Politics takes many forms. Individuals may run for office, vote, join political parties and movements, contribute money to candidates, lobby public officials, participate in demonstrations, write letters, talk to their friends and neighbors, go to court, and engage in numerous other activities. Some forms of politics aim at gaining power, some at influencing those in power, and others at bringing new people to power and throwing the old leaders out. Those in power use myriad strategies to try to achieve their goals. Power, in short, is a central focus of politics, but not always for its own sake. Power is sought for purposes—to elevate some and remove others, to introduce new policies, and to preserve old ones.

2 Harold D. Lasswell, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (1936; repr., New York: Meridian, 1958).

3 We distinguish *power* and *authority*. Power deals with who can, in fact, make decisions and influence outcomes, whereas authority deals with who has the *right*, in principle, to make those decisions. The powerful may not always have the authority to do what they do, and those authorized to do things may not be very effective (powerful) in accomplishing what they wish.

FIVE PRINCIPLES OF POLITICS

Politics possesses an underlying logic that can be understood in terms of five simple principles:

1. All political behavior has a purpose.
2. Institutions structure politics.
3. All politics is collective action.
4. Political outcomes are the products of individual preferences, institutional procedures, and collective action.
5. How we got here matters.

Some of these principles may seem obvious or abstract. They are useful, however, because they possess a distinct kernel of truth on the one hand yet on the other hand are sufficiently general to help us understand politics in a variety of settings. Armed with these principles, we can perceive the order underlying the apparent chaos of political events and processes whenever and wherever they take place.

The Rationality Principle: All Political Behavior Has a Purpose

One compelling reason governments do what they do is that they respond to what people want. All people have goals, and their political behavior is guided by these goals. For many citizens, political behavior is as simple and familiar as reading news headlines on Twitter or discussing political controversies with a neighbor over the back fence. Beyond these basic acts, political behavior broadens to include watching a political debate on television, arguing about politics with a co-worker, signing a petition, or attending a city council meeting. These are explicitly political activities that require some forethought. Political behavior requiring even more effort includes casting a vote in the November election (having first registered in a timely manner), contacting one's legislative representatives about a political issue, contributing time or money to a political campaign, or even running for local office.

Some of these acts require time, effort, financial resources, and resolve, whereas others place small, even insignificant, demands on a person. Nevertheless, all of them are done for specific reasons. They are not random; they are not entirely automatic or mechanical, even the smallest of them; they are purposeful. Sometimes they are engaged in for the sake of entertainment (reading the front page in the morning) or just to be sociable (chatting about politics with a neighbor, co-worker, or family member). At other times, they take on considerable personal importance explicitly because of their political content—because an individual cares about, and wants to influence, an issue, a candidate, a party, or a cause. We will treat all of this political activity as purposeful, as goal oriented. Indeed, our attempts to identify the goals of various political activities will help us understand them better.

We've just noted that many of the political activities of ordinary citizens are hard to distinguish from conventional everyday behavior—reading newspapers, surfing the internet, watching television news, discussing politics, and so on. For the professional politician, on the other hand—the legislator, executive, judge, party leader, bureau chief, or agency head—nearly every act is explicitly political. The legislator's decision to introduce a particular piece of legislation, give a speech in the legislative chamber, move an amendment to a pending bill, vote for or against that bill, or accept a contribution from a particular group requires her careful attention. There are pitfalls and dangers, and the slightest miscalculation can have huge consequences. Introduce a bill that appears to be too pro-labor in the eyes of your constituents, for example, and before you know it you're charged with being in bed with the unions during the next election campaign. Give a speech against job quotas for minorities, and you risk alienating the minority communities in your state or district. Accept campaign contributions from industries known to pollute, and environmentalists think you are no friend of the earth. Because nearly every move is fraught with risks, legislators make their choices with forethought and calculation. Their actions are, in a word, **instrumental**. Individuals think through the benefits and the costs of a decision, speculate about future effects, and weigh the risks of their decision. Making decisions is all about weighing the probabilities of various events and determining the personal value of the potential outcomes.

As examples of instrumental behavior, consider elected officials. Most politicians want to keep their positions or move up to more important positions. They like their jobs for a variety of reasons—salary, privileges, prestige, stepping-stones, and opportunities for accomplishment, to name just a few. So we can understand why politicians do what they do by thinking of their behavior as instrumental, with a goal of keeping their jobs. This is quite straightforward in regard to elected politicians, who often see no further than the next election and think mainly about how to prevail and who can help them win. “Retail” politics involves dealing directly with constituents, as when a politician helps an individual navigate a federal agency or find a misplaced Social Security check. “Wholesale” politics involves appealing to collections of constituents, as when a legislator introduces a bill that would benefit a group that is active in his state or district (say, veterans), secures money for a public building in his hometown, or intervenes in an official proceeding on behalf of an interest group that will, in turn, contribute to the next campaign. Politicians may do these things for ideological reasons; they may have policy and personal concerns of their own after all. But we institute elections and provide incentives for politicians to help constituents as a means of winning elections, just in case their generosity of spirit and personal ideology are insufficient. Elections and electoral politics are thus premised on instrumental behavior by politicians.

Political scientists explain the behavior of elected politicians by treating the “electoral connection” as the principal motivation.⁴ Elected politicians, in this

instrumental

Done with purpose, sometimes with forethought, and even with calculation.

4 The classic statement of this premise is David R. Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974). Although more than four decades old, this book remains a source of insight and wisdom.

view, base their behavior on the goal of maximizing votes at the next election or maximizing their probability of winning. Of course, politicians seek other things as well—public policy objectives, power within their institution, and ambition for higher office.⁵ Primary emphasis on the electoral motivation is premised on the fact that re-election is a necessary condition for pursuing any of the other objectives.⁶

But what about political actors who are not elected? What do they want? Consider a few examples:

- Agency heads and bureau chiefs, motivated by policy preferences and power, seek to maximize their budgets.
- Legislative committee chairs (who are elected to Congress but appointed to committees) are “turf minded,” intent on maximizing their committee’s policy jurisdiction and thus its power.
- Voters cast ballots to influence the policies of government, with an eye to their own personal welfare as well as their conception of “what’s best for the country.”
- Justices, serving lifetime terms, maximize the prospects for their view of constitutional interpretation to prevail.⁷

In each instance, we can postulate motivations that fit the political context. These goals often have a strong element of self-interest, but they may also incorporate “enlightened self-interest,” including the welfare of others such as their families, the entire society, or even all of humanity.

The Institution Principle: Institutions Structure Politics

In pursuing political goals, people—especially elected leaders and other government officials—confront certain recurring problems, and they develop standard ways of addressing them. Routinized, structured relations for pursuing goals

5 The classic statement of this additional premise is Richard F. Fenno, *Congressmen in Committees* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), another book that remains relevant decades after its publication.

6 As Vince Lombardi, the famous coach of the Green Bay Packers football team, once said, “Winning isn’t everything; it’s the only thing.”

7 Most political actors are motivated by self-interest. The motivations or purposes of judges and justices have proved more difficult to ascertain in that they typically enjoy lifetime appointments (and thus are not looking ahead to the next election or occasion for “contract renewal”). For an interesting discussion of judicial motivations by an eminent law professor and incumbent judge, see Richard Posner, “What Do Judges Maximize? (The Same Thing Everybody Else Does),” *Supreme Court Economic Review* 3 (1993): 1-41.