



# AMERICAN POLITICS TODAY

SIXTH CORE EDITION

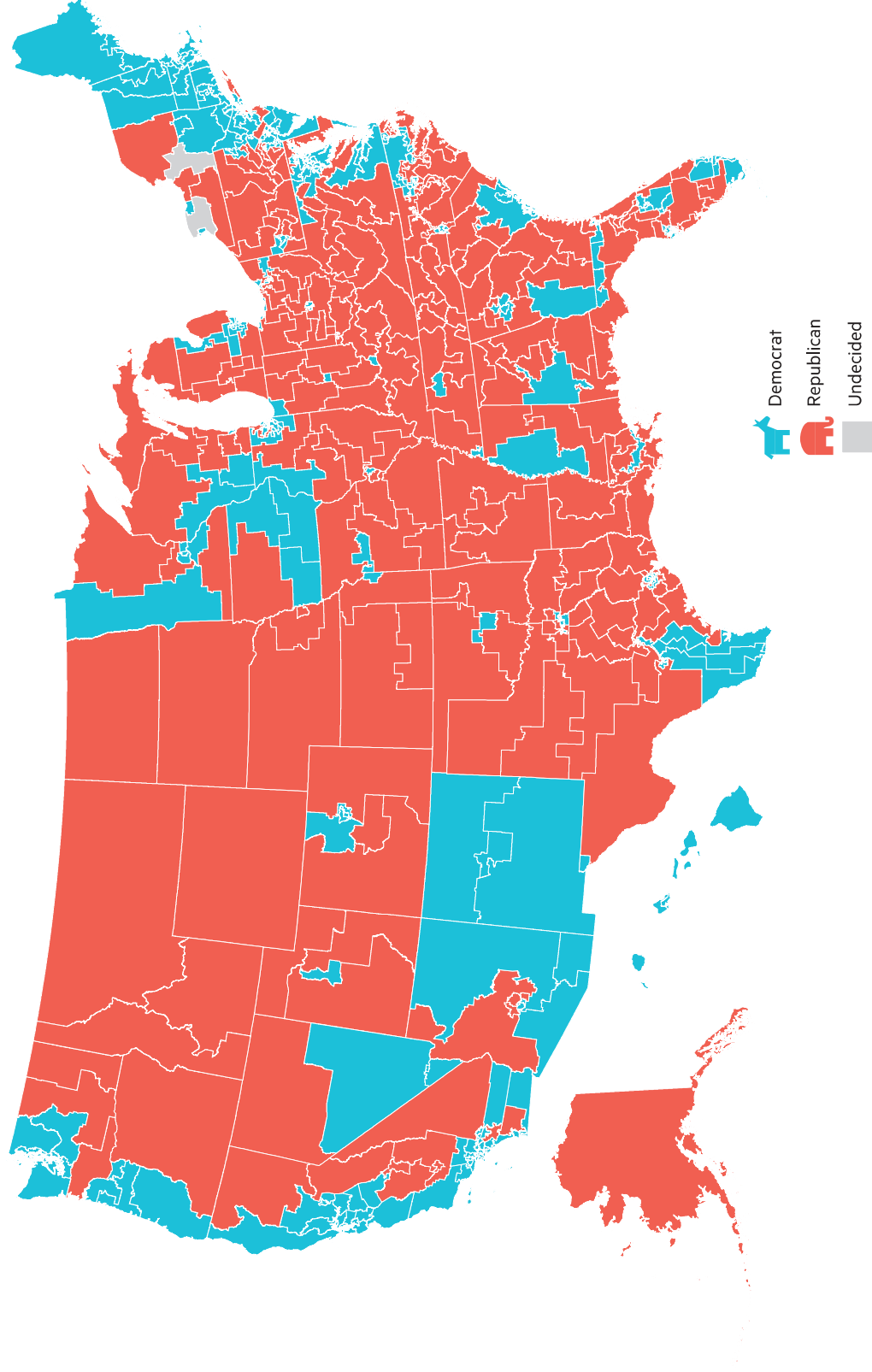
BIANCO • CANON

# THE 116TH CONGRESS, January 3, 2019–January 3, 2021

## UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2018 Election Results: Democrats gained control of the House\*

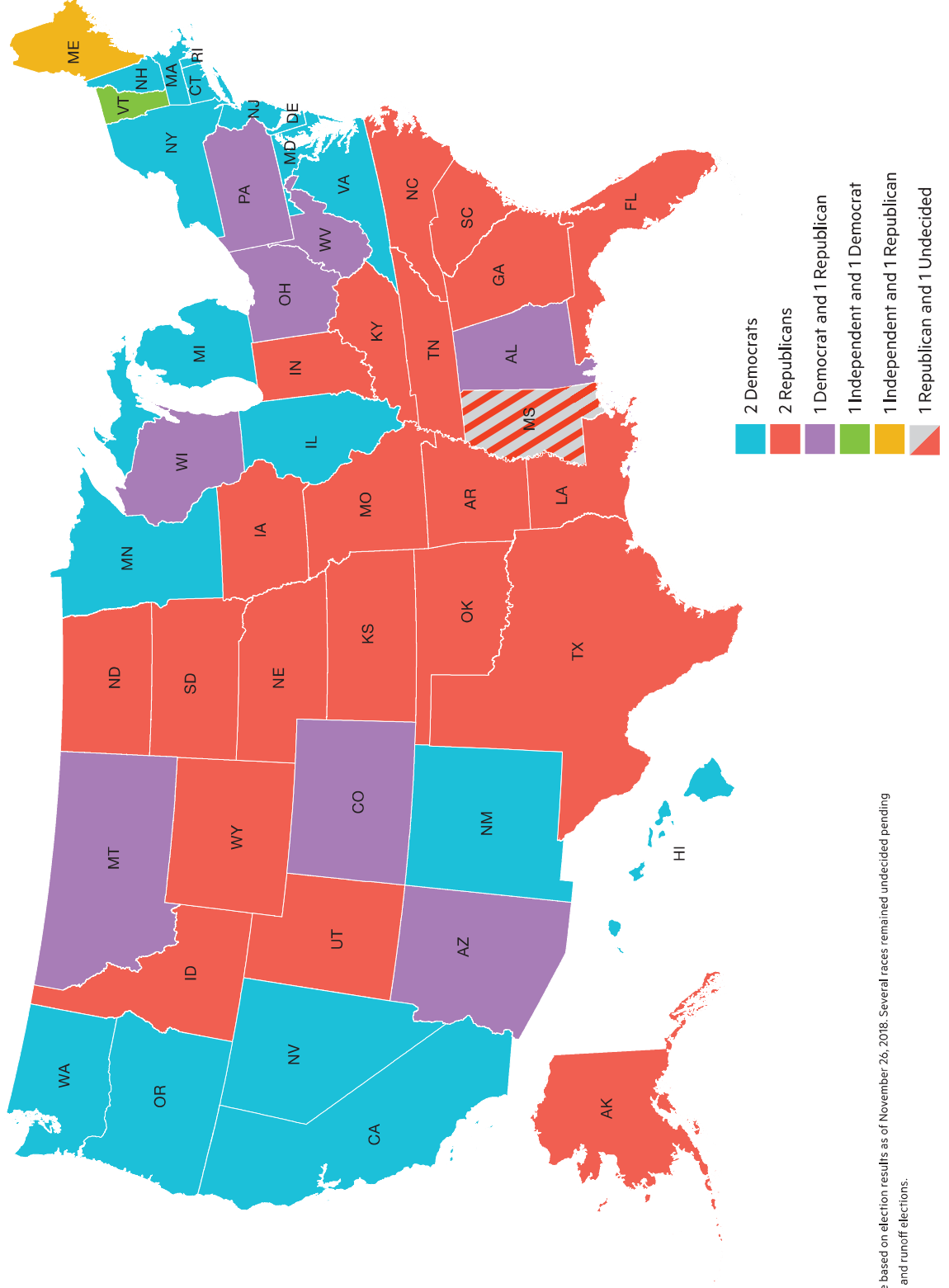
Democrats: 233 | Republicans: 200 | Undecided: 2



## UNITED STATES SENATE

2018 Election Results: Republicans retained control of the Senate\*

Democrats: 45 | Republicans: 52 | Independents: 2



\*Data are based on election results as of November 26, 2018. Several races remained undecided pending recounts and runoff elections.

# **American Politics Today**

**Sixth Core Edition**



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# American Politics Today

**William T. Bianco**

Indiana University, Bloomington

**David T. Canon**

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

## William T. Bianco

is professor of political science at Indiana University, Bloomington. His research focuses on congressional institutions, representation, and science policy. He received his undergraduate degree from SUNY Stony Brook and his MA and PhD from the University of Rochester. He is the author of *Trust: Representatives and Constituents*; *American Politics: Strategy and Choice*; and numerous articles on American politics. His research and graduate students have received funding from the National Science Foundation and the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research. He has also served as a consultant to congressional candidates and party campaign committees, as well as to the U.S. Department of Energy, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and other state and local government agencies. He was also a Fulbright Senior Scholar in Moscow, Russia, during 2011-12.



## David T. Canon

is professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. His teaching and research interests focus on American political institutions, especially Congress, and racial representation. He is the author of *Actors, Athletes, and Astronauts: Political Amateurs in the U.S. Congress*; *Race, Redistricting, and Representation: The Unintended Consequences of Black Majority Districts* (winner of the Richard F. Fenno Prize); *The Dysfunctional Congress?* (with Kenneth Mayer); and various articles and book chapters. He is the editor of the *Election Law Journal* and previously served as the Congress editor of *Legislative Studies Quarterly*. He is an AP consultant and has taught in the University of Wisconsin Summer AP Institute for U.S. Government & Politics since 1997. Professor Canon is the recipient of a University of Wisconsin Chancellor's Distinguished Teaching Award.





# Contents in Brief

**Preface** xxi

**Acknowledgments** xxvii

## Part I: Foundations

- 1. Understanding American Politics** 2
- 2. The Constitution and the Founding** 30
- 3. Federalism** 70
- 4. Civil Liberties** 102
- 5. Civil Rights** 148

## Part II: Politics

- 6. Public Opinion** 198
- 7. The Media** 232
- 8. Political Parties** 262
- 9. Elections** 296
- 10. Interest Groups** 340

## Part III: Institutions

- 11. Congress** 374
- 12. The Presidency** 418
- 13. The Bureaucracy** 454
- 14. The Courts** 488

## Appendix

- The Declaration of Independence** A1
- The Articles of Confederation** A3
- The Constitution of the United States of America** A6
- Amendments to the Constitution** A11
- The Federalist Papers** A16

**Endnotes** A23

**Glossary/Index** A53



# Contents

**Preface** xxi  
**Features of the Text and Media Package** xxiv  
**Acknowledgments** xxvii

## Part I: Foundations

### 1. Understanding American Politics 2

#### **Making Sense of American Government and Politics** 4

Why Do We Have a Government? 5  
Forms of Government 8

#### **What Is Politics?** 8

How It Works: Three Key Ideas for Understanding Politics 9  
Politics Is Conflictual 10  
Political Process Matters 12  
Politics Is Everywhere 13

#### **Sources of Conflict in American Politics** 15

Economic Interests 15  
Cultural Values 15  
Identity Politics: Racial, Gender, and Ethnic Differences 17  
Ideology 19

#### **Resolving Conflict: Democracy and American Political Values** 20

Democracy 21  
Liberty 21  
Equality 22

#### **How to Be a Critical Consumer of Politics** 24

#### **Unpacking the Conflict** 25

#### **Study Guide** 27

### 2. The Constitution and the Founding 30

#### **The Historical Context of the Constitution** 32

The Articles of Confederation: The First Attempt at Government 33  
Political Theories of the Framers 36  
Economic Interests 38

#### **The Politics of Compromise at the Constitutional Convention** 39

Majority Rule versus Minority Rights 41



Small States versus Large States	41
Legislative Power versus Executive Power	42
National Power versus State and Local Power	44
Slave States versus Nonslave States	45

### **Ratification 48**

The Antifederalists' Concerns	48
The Federalists' Strategies	50

### **The Constitution: A Framework for Government 51**

Exclusive Powers	51
<a href="#">How It Works: Checks and Balances</a>	52
Shared Powers	54
Negative or Checking Powers	56

### **Is the Constitution a “Living” Document? 59**

Ambiguity	59
Changing the Constitution	61
Multiple Interpreters	63

### **Unpacking the Conflict 65**

#### **Study Guide 67**



## **3. Federalism 70**

### **What Is Federalism and Why Does It Matter? 72**

Levels of Government and Their Degrees of Autonomy	73
A Comparative Perspective	73

### **Balancing National and State Power in the Constitution 75**

A Strong National Government	75
State Powers and Limits on National Power	76
Clauses that Favor Both Perspectives	76

### **The Evolving Concept of Federalism 77**

The Early Years	77
The Emergence of States' Rights and Dual Federalism	79
Cooperative Federalism	81

### **Federalism Today 83**

Cooperative Federalism Lives On: Fiscal Federalism	83
<a href="#">How It Works: Versions of Federalism</a>	84
Expanding National Power	88
The States Fight Back	89
Fighting for States' Rights: The Role of the Modern Supreme Court	90

### **Assessing Federalism 94**

Policy Preferences	94
Advantages of a Strong Role for the States	94
Disadvantages of Too Much State Power	96

**Unpacking the Conflict 98**  
**Study Guide 99**

## 4. Civil Liberties 102

### Defining Civil Liberties 104

Balancing Interests 104  
Drawing Lines 105

### The Origins of Civil Liberties 106

Origins of the Bill of Rights 106  
Selective Incorporation and the Fourteenth Amendment 109  
How It Works: The First Amendment 110

### Freedom of Religion 112

The Establishment Clause and Separation of Church and State 114  
The Free Exercise Clause 115

### Freedom of Speech, Assembly, and the Press 117

Generally Protected Expression 117  
Less Protected Speech and Publications 126

### The Right to Bear Arms 130

### Law, Order, and the Rights of Criminal Defendants 132

The Fourth Amendment: Unreasonable Searches and Seizures 132  
The Fifth Amendment 137  
The Sixth Amendment: The Right to Legal Counsel and a Jury Trial 138  
The Eighth Amendment: Cruel and Unusual Punishment 139

### Privacy Rights 140

Abortion Rights 141  
Gay Rights 143

### Unpacking the Conflict 143

**Study Guide 145**



## 5. Civil Rights 148

### The Context of Civil Rights 150

African Americans 151  
Native Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans 154  
Women and Civil Rights 156  
The LGBTQ Community 157

### The Racial Divide Today 159

Discriminatory Treatment 159  
Differences in Voting Access 159  
Socioeconomic Indicators 161  
Criminal Justice and Hate Crimes 163





## **Key Players in the Conflict Over Civil Rights 166**

Social Movements 166

The Courts 172

How It Works: Civil Rights 178

Congress 182

The President 186

## **Civil Rights Issues Today 188**

Affirmative Action 188

Multicultural and Immigration Issues 190

## **Unpacking the Conflict 194**

**Study Guide 195**

# **Part II: Politics**

## **6. Public Opinion 198**

### **What Is Public Opinion? 200**

Different Kinds of Opinion 201

### **Where Do Opinions Come From? 203**

Socialization: Families, Communities, and Networks 203

Events 204

Group Identity 204

Politicians and Other Political Actors 206

Considerations: The Process of Forming Opinions 207

### **Measuring Public Opinion 211**

How It Works: Measuring What a Nation of 330 Million Thinks:  
A Checklist 212

Problems in Measuring Public Opinion 215

How Useful Are Surveys? 218

### **What Americans Think about Politics 220**

Ideological Polarization 220

Evaluations of Government and Officeholders 222

Policy Preferences 224

Does Public Opinion Matter? 226

### **Unpacking the Conflict 228**

**Study Guide 229**

## **7. The Media 232**

### **Political Media Today 234**

Historical Overview: How Did We Get Here? 234

Media Sources in the Twenty-First Century 236

Where Do People Get Political Information? 239



## **How Do Politicians Use the Media? How Do the Media Use Politicians? 241**

Politicians' Media Strategies 241  
The Pressures and Legal Limits on Reporters 243

## **How Do The Media Influence their Audience? 245**

[How It Works: How News Makes It to the Public](#) 246  
Media Bias and Partisanship 248  
Filtering and Framing 250

## **Do the Media Work? 253**

Lack of Citizen Interest 253  
Market Forces 254

## **Unpacking the Conflict 257**

### **Study Guide 259**

## **8. Political Parties 262**

### **What Are Political Parties and Where Did Today's Parties Come From? 264**

History of American Political Parties 265

### **American Political Parties Today 268**

The Party Organization 268  
The Party in Government 270  
The Party in the Electorate 272

### **The Role of Political Parties in American Politics 278**

Organizing Elections 278  
[How It Works: Nominating Presidential Candidates](#) 282  
Cooperation in Government 284  
Minor Parties 287

### **How Well Do Parties Operate? 289**

Recruiting Good Candidates 289  
Working Together in Campaigns 289  
Working Together in Office 290  
Providing Accountability 291

### **Unpacking the Conflict 292**

#### **Study Guide 293**

## **9. Elections 296**

### **How Do American Elections Work? 298**

Functions of Elections 298  
Two Stages of Elections 299  
Mechanics of Elections 300  
Presidential Elections 302  
[How It Works: The Electoral College](#) 306



## **Electoral Campaigns 309**

- The “Fundamentals” 309
- Setting the Stage 311
- Before the Campaign 312
- Primaries and the General Election 316
- Campaign Advertising: Getting the Word Out 318
- Campaign Finance 320

## **How Do Voters Decide? 326**

- Who Votes, and Why? 326
- How Do People Vote? 327
- Who (Usually) Wins 328

## **Understanding the 2016 and 2018 Elections 331**

- The Path to 2018: The 2016 Elections 331
- The 2018 Midterms 333

## **Unpacking the Conflict 336**

### **Study Guide 337**



## **10. Interest Groups 340**

### **What Are Interest Groups? 342**

- The Business of Lobbying 344
- Organizational Structures 347
- Staff 347
- Membership 350
- Resources 350

### **Getting Organized 352**

- The Logic of Collective Action 352

### **Interest Group Strategies 355**

- Inside Strategies 355
- How It Works: Lobbying the Federal Government: Inside and Outside Strategies 356
- Outside Strategies 359
- Choosing Strategies 364

### **How Much Power Do Interest Groups Have? 365**

- What Determines When Interest Groups Succeed? 366

### **Unpacking the Conflict 370**

#### **Study Guide 371**



## **Part III: Institutions**

## **11. Congress 374**

### **Congress and the People 376**

- Congress and the Constitution 376

Congress Represents the People (or Tries To) 378  
Members of Congress Want to Keep Their Jobs 383  
Redistricting Connects Representation and Elections 389  
The Responsibility–Responsiveness Dilemma 394

### **The Structure of Congress 395**

Informal Structures 395  
Formal Structures 396

### **How a Bill Becomes a Law 404**

The Conventional Process 404  
[How It Works: Passing Legislation](#) 406  
Deviations from the Conventional Process 409  
Differences in the House and Senate Legislative Processes 410

### **Oversight 412**

### **Unpacking the Conflict 414**

### **Study Guide 415**

## **12. The Presidency 418**

### **The Development of Presidential Power 420**

Early Years through World War I 420  
The Great Depression through the Present 421

### **The President’s Job Description 423**

Head of the Executive Branch 424  
Appointments 425  
Executive Orders 426  
Commander in Chief 428  
Treaty Making and Foreign Policy 429  
Legislative Power 430  
Pardons and Commutations 433  
Executive Privilege 433  
[How It Works: How Presidents Make Policy outside the Legislative Process](#) 434

### **The Presidency as an Institution 437**

The Executive Office of the President 438  
The Vice President 439  
The First Spouse 440  
The President’s Cabinet 440

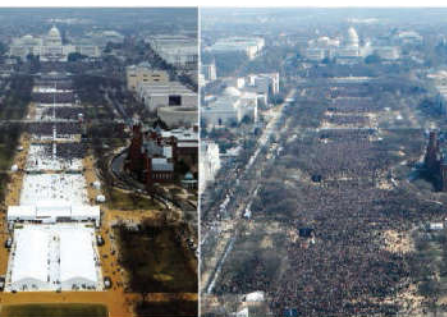
### **Presidential Power Today 441**

Presidents, Unilateral Action, and Policy Making 442  
Control Over the Interpretation and Implementation of Laws 444  
Congressional Responses to Unilateral Action 444  
Presidents as Politicians 446

### **Unpacking the Conflict 450**

### **Study Guide 451**





## 13. The Bureaucracy 454

### What Is the Federal Bureaucracy? 456

What Do Bureaucrats Do? 456

How It Works: Bureaucracy and Legislation 458

Bureaucratic Expertise and Its Consequences 462

### How Has the American Bureaucracy Grown? 465

The Beginning of America's Bureaucracy 466

Building a New American State: The Progressive Era 466

The New Deal, the Great Society, and the Reagan Revolution 467

### The Modern Federal Bureaucracy 469

The Structure of the Federal Government 469

The Size of the Federal Government 472

### The Human Face of the Bureaucracy 475

Civil Service Regulations 476

Limits on Political Activity 477

Political Appointees and the Senior Executive Service 477

### Controlling the Bureaucracy 479

Agency Organization 479

Monitoring 481

Correcting Violations 482

The Consequences of Control 483

### Unpacking the Conflict 484

Study Guide 485



## 14. The Courts 488

### The Development of an Independent and Powerful Federal Judiciary 490

The Founders' Views of the Courts: The Weakest Branch? 490

Judicial Review and *Marbury v. Madison* 492

Judicial Review in Practice 493

### The American Legal and Judicial System 494

Court Fundamentals 494

Structure of the Court System and Federalism 497

How It Works: The Court System 498

How Judges Are Selected 500

### Access to the Supreme Court 505

The Court's Workload 505

Rules of Access 506

The Court's Criteria 508

Internal Politics 509

**Hearing Cases before the Supreme Court 510**

- Briefs 510
- Oral Argument 511
- Conference 512
- Opinion Writing 512

**Supreme Court Decision Making 514**

- Legal Factors 515
- Political Factors 517

**The Role of the Court in Our Political System 521**

- Compliance and Implementation 521
- Relations with the Other Branches 521

**Unpacking the Conflict 526**

**Study Guide 527**

## Appendix

**The Declaration of Independence A1**

**The Articles of Confederation A3**

**The Constitution of the United States of America A6**

**Amendments to the Constitution A11**

**The Federalist Papers A16**

**Endnotes A23**

**Study Guide Answer Key A47**

**Credits A49**

**Glossary/Index A53**



# 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. 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 Sixth Edition is to describe what happens in American politics, but also to explain 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 recent elections and the prospect of continued deadlock in Washington under a Trump presidency, 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 Sixth Edition builds on these strengths. We've continued to streamline and improve the presentation of text and graphics, and enhanced our "How It Works" sections. New chapter openers use contemporary stories and examples and offer quotations from people on both sides of the debate (from student loans to marijuana legalization) 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. We have also worked to place the Trump presidency in context, acknowledging the differences between Trump and other presidents, but also explaining how Trump's successes and failures, both in public opinion and in policy terms, can be explained using the same logic we have applied to previous presidents.

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 and 2018 campaigns, working to show how recent contests at the presidential and congressional levels fit 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 twenty 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 chapter openers and conclusions

present two sides of a controversy that has dominated media headlines—and about which people have passionate, emotion-driven opinions from both points of view—framed by quotes from politicians, pundits, and everyday people who hold these views. These include sanctuary cities (Federalism), free speech on college campuses (Civil Liberties), and the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program (Congress). The “Unpacking the Conflict” sections at the end of each chapter show how the nuts and bolts of the chapter topic can be applied to help students understand both sides of these debates.

## New coverage of 2018 elections and Trump presidency

provides more than 20 pages and numerous graphics analyzing the 2016 and 2018 elections and the first two years of the Trump presidency, including coverage of current issues, such as the failure to pass “Trumpcare,” executive actions around immigration, border security and international travel (and judicial responses), tax reform, marijuana policy, North Korea, and President Trump’s use of social media.

## 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: In Theory/How It Works: In Practice” graphics**, many new to this edition, highlight key political processes and structures and build graphical literacy. New discussions include the Supreme Court’s decision on the Masterpiece Cakeshop (Civil Liberties) and passing the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (Congress).
- **“What Do the Facts Say?” features** develop quantitative reasoning skills by teaching students to read and interpret data on important political issues and current events.
- **“Why Should I Care?” sections** draw explicit connections between the chapter material and students’ lives.
- **“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.
- **“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 adaptive learning tool**, accompanies the Sixth 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. Norton recently conducted a within-subjects efficacy study in American government, and among the students who did not earn a perfect score on the pre-test, we saw an average InQuizitive Effect of 17 percentage points. To try it out, go to <https://digital.wwnorton.com/amerpoltodaycore6>.
- **Features for your Learning Management System (LMS)** allow you to easily bring Norton’s high-quality digital content into your existing LMS. The content is fully editable and adaptable to your course needs. The Norton Coursepack for *American Politics Today*, Sixth 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,
  - **Chapter quizzes** that assess student knowledge of each chapter’s core concepts,
  - **Video exercises** that engage students and help them retain and apply information through real-world events,
  - **“How It Works: In Theory/How It Works: In Practice” animated graphics**, with assessment, that guide students through understanding political processes and institutions,

- **Simulations** that show students how concepts work in the real world,
- **“What Do the Facts Say?” 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.
- **An Interactive Instructor Guide (IIG)** includes chapter outlines, class activities, and discussion questions, and suggestions for additional resources to engage students.
- **Instructor PowerPoints** contains fully customizable lecture slides with clicker questions and “How It Works: In Theory” and “How It Works: In Practice” animated PowerPoint slides for optimal classroom presentation.

# Acknowledgments

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William T. Bianco  
David T. Canon  
November 2018



# American Politics Today

**Sixth Core Edition**

**”**

**In a democracy, oftentimes other people win.**

— C. J. Cregg, *The West Wing*

# American Politics Today

**Sixth Edition**

**”**

**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?



**“The values of free expression and a reverence for the free press have been our global hallmark, for it is our ability to freely air the truth that keeps our government honest and keeps a people free.”**

*Senator Jeff Flake*



**“The Fake News is working overtime. Just reported that, despite the tremendous success we are having with the economy & all things else, 91% of the Network News about me is negative (Fake). Why do we work so hard in working with the media when it is corrupt? Take away credentials?”**

*President Donald Trump*



In October 2017, social media companies testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee on the spread of fake news through their platforms during the 2016 election. Fake advertisements like this one, in which a Twitter user encourages people to vote via text, were thought to have a detrimental effect on democratic processes in 2016. (Of course, you *can't* cast a vote by sending a text message.)

**Early in 2018, Senator Jeff Flake**, a Republican from Arizona, took to the floor of the Senate to make an impassioned defense of the freedom of the press in response to President Donald Trump's criticisms of the “Fake News” media.<sup>1</sup> He called out President Trump for labeling the media the “enemy of the people,” noting that Joseph Stalin had used the phrase to silence dissent in the Soviet Union. He continued, “And, of course, the president has it precisely backward—despotism is the enemy of the people. The free press is the despot's enemy, which makes the free press the guardian of democracy. When a figure in power reflexively calls any press that doesn't suit him ‘fake news,’ it is that person who should be the figure of suspicion, not the press.”<sup>2</sup> From this perspective, critical and even negative news coverage of political leaders is an essential part of democratic accountability—it is not fake news.

However, large majorities of the American public share the president's view on fake news. The conventional definition of fake news is the intentional portrayal of false information as



**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 15–20

**Explain how the American values of democracy, liberty, and equality work to resolve political conflict.** pages 20–24

**Understand how to interpret, evaluate, and use political information.** pages 24–25

the truth. Ninety-four percent of Americans agree that this is fake news (48 percent say this is “always” fake news and 46 percent say it is “sometimes”). But 79 percent of Americans also believe fake news is an “accurate news story casting a politician or political group in a negative light,” and 92 percent say that a story with inaccurate information based on sloppy fact-checking is also fake news. There are also significant partisan differences of opinion, with 17 percent of Democrats and 42 percent of Republicans thinking that accurate but negative stories about a politician are always fake news.<sup>3</sup>

*Real* fake news is simply deliberately made up, either as “click bait” to make money for the outlet that posted it or as an attempt to influence the outcome of an election. In the three months before the 2016 presidential election, BuzzFeed found that there were more total Facebook engagements (sharing, comments, and so on) with fake news (8.7 million) than with mainstream news (7.3 million) in the three months before the election. Top stories included “Pope Francis shocks world, endorses Donald Trump for president,” and “WikiLeaks confirms Hillary sold weapons to ISIS . . . Then drops another bombshell.” Another story popularly known as “Pizzagate” alleged that Hillary Clinton was connected to a child sex ring being run out of a pizzeria in Washington, D.C. A few weeks after the election, a poll found that 9 percent of Americans believed the story and 19 percent were not sure if it was true (14 percent of Trump voters believed the story and 32 percent were not sure).<sup>4</sup>

Fake news and sloppy journalism are only two examples of the array of political information that Americans confront every day: from conflicting opinions of friends and family members, to partisan pundits arguing on cable news and Twitter, to official statements from the White House or Congress. The quandaries posed by fake news represent only a fraction of the decisions we must make regarding how to make sense of the political noise around us. In terms of fake news, the danger in confusing completely bogus stories with legitimate journalism that has factual errors or depicts a politician in a negative light is that it makes it much more difficult to sort out real news and objective information from news that is truly fake. Attacks on the media by politicians further undermine confidence in the news and polarize public opinion. It is difficult for the typical American to know if Jeff Flake or President Trump is right. **If Americans can't even agree on which news is “fake,” how can we know what to trust? How can we meaningfully understand, evaluate, and act on the political information that we encounter?** A central goal of this book is to provide the tools you need to answer these questions.



## 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 Trump presidency—has a logical and often simple explanation; we just have to know how to look for it. By the end of this 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. Election outcomes look random or even chaotic. As we’ve just described, information from historically trusted national sources is labeled “fake news.” And many policy issues, from reforming immigration policy to deciding what to do about climate change, seem hopelessly intractable.





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.

Many people, we believe, are hostile toward 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 of the presidential candidates running in 2016 and saw this as more evidence that American politics does 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 like 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 be an effective participant 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 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 is the Supreme Court so political?
- Can presidents do whatever they want? Why can't they do more?
- How much power do bureaucrats have?
- 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.”<sup>5</sup> 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, some of the most important roles of government are policing and providing national security.

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 policing and law enforcement within the nation, which today includes the National Guard, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the 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.”<sup>6</sup> 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.”<sup>7</sup> 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.

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 government. With power divided in this fashion, Madison reasoned, no single faction could dominate the government.

### **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.

### **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, and 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 environmental protection or national defense are not efficiently provided by the free market, either because of **collective action problems** or for other reasons.

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 **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 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.

Collective action problems are common in modern society. Education provides a great example. You benefit personally from your primary, secondary, and college education in terms of the knowledge and experience you gain, and from the higher salary and better job 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, as a protector of civil liberties, as

### 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.

### 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.



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.



an enforcer of laws and property rights, or as a regulator of individual or corporate behavior. What makes politics both interesting and important is that in most of these cases, Americans disagree on what kinds of public goods the government should provide, or whether government should be involved at all.

## Forms of government

While all governments must provide order and promote the general welfare, different types of governments accomplish this in various ways. Greek political philosopher Aristotle, writing in the fourth century BC, developed a classification scheme for governments that is still surprisingly 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).

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, resulting in much closer coordination between those two branches.

We can further refine Aristotle's third type by considering the relationships among different levels of 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 France or Japan), all power is held at the national level, and local governments must comply with orders from the central government. 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.



### DID YOU KNOW?

**63%** of the world's population lives in countries considered to be free or partly free. Most countries considered not free are in Asia or Africa.

Source: Freedom House



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

#### politics

The process that determines what government does.

## What is politics?

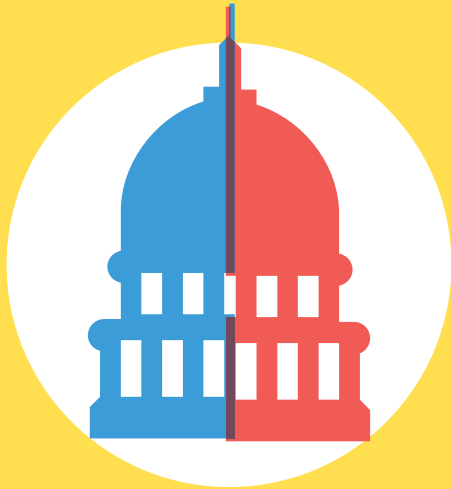
We define **politics** as the process that determines what government does—whether and how it provides different public and private goods. You may consider politics the same thing as government, but we view politics as being much broader; it includes ways of behaving and making decisions that are common 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 questions that everyone agrees on the answers to. 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 to achieve, it is often necessary to produce outcomes 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

How it works: **in theory**

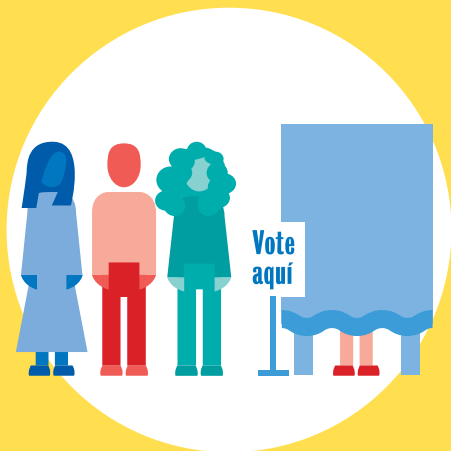
# Three Key Ideas for Understanding Politics



## 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 fake news at the beginning of this chapter.** In what ways do disagreements over what constitutes "fake" news illustrate the three key ideas described here?