

American Government

Power and Purpose

**CORE
FOURTEENTH
EDITION**

**Lowi
Ginsberg
Shepsle
Ansolabehere**

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT
POWER & PURPOSE

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AMERICAN GOVERNMENT **POWER & PURPOSE**

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For Our Families

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

Contents

PREFACE	xxii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xxv

PART 1 FOUNDATIONS

1	Five Principles of Politics	2
	Making Sense of Government and Politics	4
	What Is Government?	5
	Forms of Government	5
	Politics	6
	Five Principles of Politics	6
	The Rationality Principle: All Political Behavior Has a Purpose	7
	The Institution Principle: Institutions Structure Politics	9
	The Collective Action Principle: All Politics Is Collective Action	12
	The Policy Principle: Political Outcomes Are the Products of Individual Preferences and Institutional Procedures	18
	The History Principle: How We Got Here Matters	19

Conclusion: Preparing to Analyze the American Political System	21
For Further Reading	22
ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE	
How Do Political Scientists Know What They Know?	24

2	Constructing a Government: The Founding and the Constitution	30
	The First Founding: Interests and Conflicts	32
	British Taxes and Colonial Interests	33
	Political Strife and the Radicalizing of the Colonists	34
	The Declaration of Independence	36
	The Revolutionary War	36
	The Articles of Confederation	37
	The Second Founding: From Compromise to Constitution	38
	International Standing, Economic Difficulties, and Balance of Power	38
	The Annapolis Convention	39
	Shays's Rebellion	39
	The Constitutional Convention	40
	TIMEPLOT	
	Representation in Congress: States' Ranks	42
	The Constitution	46
	The Legislative Branch	47
	THE POLICY PRINCIPLE	
	The Constitution and Policy Outcomes	48
	The Executive Branch	50
	The Judicial Branch	51

ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE	
Constitutional Engineering: How Many Veto Gates?	52
National Unity and Power	54
Amending the Constitution	54
Ratifying the Constitution	55
Constitutional Limits on the National Government's Power	55
The Fight for Ratification: Federalists versus Antifederalists	57
Representation	59
The Threat of Tyranny	60
Governmental Power	61
Changing the Institutional Framework: Constitutional Amendment	62
Amendments: Many Are Called, Few Are Chosen	62
The Twenty-Seven Amendments	64
Conclusion: Reflections on the Founding—Ideals or Interests?	68
For Further Reading	70

3 **Federalism and the Separation of Powers** 72

Who Does What? Federalism and Institutional Jurisdictions	74
Federalism in the Constitution: Who Decides What	75
THE POLICY PRINCIPLE	
Federalism and Support for Corn Farmers	76
The Slow Growth of the National Government's Power	80
Cooperative Federalism and Grants-in-Aid: Institutions Shape Policies	83
Regulated Federalism and National Standards	86
New Federalism and the National–State Tug-of-War	88

ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE

Health Care Policy and the States 90

The Separation of Powers 92

Checks and Balances: A System of Mutual Vetoes 93

Legislative Supremacy 95

Checks and Balances: The Rationality Principle at Work 95

The Role of the Supreme Court: Establishing Decision Rules 96

Conclusion: Federalism and the Separation of Powers—Collective Action or Stalemate? 99**For Further Reading 101**

4 Civil Liberties 102

Origins of the Bill of Rights 103**Nationalizing the Bill of Rights 105**

Dual Citizenship 106

The Fourteenth Amendment 107

The Constitutional Revolution in Civil Liberties 111

The Bill of Rights Today 112

The First Amendment and Freedom of Religion 113

ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE

Americans' Attitudes Toward Church and State 116

The First Amendment and Freedom of Speech and the Press 118

The Second Amendment and the Right to Bear Arms 128

Rights of the Criminally Accused 130

The Fourth Amendment and Searches and Seizures 130

The Fifth Amendment and Criminal Proceedings 133

THE POLICY PRINCIPLE

The Fourth Amendment and Government Surveillance 134

The Sixth Amendment and the Right to Counsel 136

The Eighth Amendment and Cruel and Unusual Punishment	137
The Right to Privacy and the Constitution	139
Conclusion: Civil Liberties and Collective Action	142
For Further Reading	143

5 **Civil Rights** **144**

What Are Civil Rights?	146
The Struggle for Civil Rights	150
The Right to Vote	151
Racial Discrimination in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries	155
Opportunity in Education	159
TIMEPLOT	
Cause and Effect in the Civil Rights Movement	160
The Politics of Rights	164
Outlawing Discrimination in Employment	165
ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE	
Advocacy and Representation for Marginalized Groups	166
Women and Gender Discrimination	168
Latinos	170
THE POLICY PRINCIPLE	
Transgender Rights and Policy	171
Asian Americans	172
Immigration and Rights	173
Americans with Disabilities	174
Gay Men and Lesbians	174
Affirmative Action	177
The Supreme Court and the Burden of Proof	177

Conclusion: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights—Regulating Collective Action	179
For Further Reading	180

PART 2 INSTITUTIONS

6	Congress: The First Branch	182
	Representation	184
	House and Senate: Differences in Representation	188
	The Electoral System	190
	Problems of Legislative Organization	199
	Cooperation in Congress	200
	Underlying Problems and Challenges	201
	The Organization of Congress	202
	Party Leadership and Organization in the House and the Senate	202
	The Committee System: The Core of Congress	206
	The Staff System: Staffers and Agencies	214
	Informal Organization: The Caucuses	214
	Rules of Lawmaking: How a Bill Becomes a Law	215
	Committee Deliberation	215
	Debate	216
	THE POLICY PRINCIPLE	
	From the Patriot Act to the Freedom Act	217
	Conference Committee: Reconciling House and Senate Versions of a Bill	218
	Presidential Action	218
	Procedures in Congress: Regular and Unorthodox	220

TIMEPLOT	
Acts Passed by Congress, 1789–2014	222
The Distributive Tendency in Congress	222
How Congress Decides	224
Constituency	224
Interest Groups	225
ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE	
Why Congress Can't Make Ends Meet	226
Party Discipline	228
Weighing Diverse Influences	233
Beyond Legislation: Additional Congressional Powers	234
Advice and Consent: Special Senate Powers	234
Impeachment	235
Conclusion: Power and Representation	236
For Further Reading	238

7 The Presidency as an Institution 240

The Constitutional Origins and Powers of the Presidency	242
Expressed Powers	244
TIMEPLOT	
Presidential Vetoes, 1789–2016	250
Delegated Powers	253
THE POLICY PRINCIPLE	
The Veto and the Keystone XL Pipeline	254
Inherent Powers	256
The Rise of Presidential Government	261
The Legislative Epoch, 1800–1933	261
The New Deal and the Presidency	262

Presidential Government	264
The Formal Resources of Presidential Power	265
The Contemporary Bases of Presidential Power	270
The Administrative State	277
ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE	
Presidential Appointees in the Executive Branch	278
The Limits of Presidential Power	285
Conclusion: Presidential Power—Myths and Realities	285
For Further Reading	288

8	The Executive Branch: Bureaucracy in a Democracy	290
	Why Bureaucracy?	293
	Bureaucratic Organization Enhances the Efficient Operation of Government	295
	Bureaucrats Fulfill Important Roles	296
	Bureaucracies Serve Politicians	298
	How Is the Executive Branch Organized?	299
	Clientele Agencies	301
	Agencies for the Maintenance of the Union	302
	Regulatory Agencies	303
	Agencies of Redistribution	304
	The Problem of Bureaucratic Control	306
	Motivational Considerations of Bureaucrats	306
	Bureaucracy and the Principal-Agent Problem	309
	THE POLICY PRINCIPLE	
	The EPA: Regulating Clean Air	311
	The President as Manager-in-Chief	313
	Congressional Oversight and Incentives	314

ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE	
Congressional Design and Control of the Bureaucracy	316
Reforming the Bureaucracy	319
Termination	321
Devolution	322
Privatization	324
Conclusion: Public Bureaucracies and Politics	325
For Further Reading	326

9	The Federal Courts	328
	The Judicial Process	331
	The Organization of the Court System	333
	Types of Courts	333
	Federal Jurisdiction	334
	Federal Trial Courts	337
	Federal Appellate Courts	337
	The Supreme Court	339
	How Judges Are Appointed	340
	How Courts Work as Political Institutions	343
	Dispute Resolution	343
	Coordination	344
	Rule Interpretation	344
	The Power of Judicial Review	345
	Judicial Review of Acts of Congress	346
	Judicial Review of State Actions	347
	Judicial Review of Federal Agency Actions	348
	Judicial Review and Presidential Power	349
	Judicial Review and Lawmaking	350

The Supreme Court in Action	351
How Cases Reach the Supreme Court	352
Controlling the Flow of Cases	355
The Supreme Court's Procedures	357
Judicial Decision Making	360
The Supreme Court Justices	360
Other Institutions of Government	363
ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE	
Ideological Voting on the Supreme Court	364
The Implementation of Supreme Court Decisions	366
Strategic Behavior in the Supreme Court	368
THE POLICY PRINCIPLE	
Changing Judicial Direction: Gay Marriage	369
Conclusion: The Expanding Power of the Judiciary	372
For Further Reading	374

PART 3 DEMOCRATIC POLITICS

10	Public Opinion	376
	What Is Public Opinion?	378
	Preferences and Beliefs	379
	Choices	380
	Variety of Opinion	381
	Origins and Nature of Opinion	386
	Foundations of Preferences	386
	Political Ideology	390
	Identity Politics	392

Public Opinion and Political Knowledge	399
Political Knowledge and Preference Stability	400
Stability and the Meaning of Public Opinion	403
Shaping Opinion: Political Leaders, Private Groups, and the Media	405
Government and the Shaping of Public Opinion	405
ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE	
The Contact Hypothesis and Attitudes about Gay Rights	406
Private Groups and the Shaping of Public Opinion	409
The Media and Public Opinion	410
Measuring Public Opinion	413
Constructing Public Opinion from Surveys	414
How Does Public Opinion Influence Government Policy?	419
THE POLICY PRINCIPLE	
Public Opinion and Reforming Social Security	421
Conclusion: Government and the Will of the People	423
For Further Reading	424

11	Elections	426
	Institutions of Elections	429
	THE POLICY PRINCIPLE	
	Local Control of Elections and Voter ID Laws	430
	TIMEPLOT	
	The Growth of the American Electorate, 1790–2016	432
	Who Can Vote: Defining the Electorate	432
	How Americans Vote: The Ballot	440
	Where Americans Vote: Electoral Districts	442
	What It Takes to Win: Plurality Rule	450
	Direct Democracy: The Referendum and the Recall	453

How Voters Decide	455
Voters and Nonvoters	455
Partisan Loyalty	457
Issues	461
ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE	
Economic Influence on Presidential Elections	466
Candidate Characteristics	468
Campaigns: Money, Media, and Grass Roots	470
What It Takes to Win	470
Campaign Finance	472
Congressional Campaigns	475
Effectiveness of Campaigns	476
The 2016 Elections	478
Political Parties in 2016	479
The General Election	481
Republican Victory	482
Looking toward the Future	487
Conclusion: Elections and Accountability	488
For Further Reading	488

12	Political Parties	490
	Why Do Political Parties Form?	493
	To Facilitate Collective Action in the Electoral Process	494
	To Resolve Problems of Collective Choice in Government	495
	THE POLICY PRINCIPLE	
	Party Coalitions and Abortion Policy	496
	To Deal with the Problem of Ambition	497
	What Functions Do Parties Perform?	497
	Recruiting Candidates	497

Nominating Candidates	498
Getting Out the Vote	500
Facilitating Electoral Choice	501
Influencing National Government	503
Parties in Government	505
Parties in the Electorate	507
Party Identification	507
Group Basis of Parties	508
ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE	
Candidate Religion and Partisan Voting	512
Parties as Institutions	515
Contemporary Party Organizations	515
The Contemporary Party as Service Provider to Candidates	518
Party Systems	519
The First Party System: Federalists and Democratic-Republicans	521
The Second Party System: Democrats and Whigs	523
The Third Party System: Republicans and Democrats: 1860–96	525
The Fourth Party System, 1896–1932	527
The Fifth Party System: The New Deal Coalition, 1932–68	527
The Sixth Party System: 1968–Present	528
TIMEPLOT	
Parties' Share of Electoral Votes, 1789–2016	530
American Third Parties	533
Conclusion: Parties and Democracy	536
For Further Reading	537

13	Groups and Interests	538
<hr/>		
	What Are the Characteristics of Interest Groups?	540
	Interest Groups Not Only Enhance Democracy . . .	541
	. . . But Also Represent the Evils of Faction	541
	Organized Interests Are Predominantly Economic	542
	Most Groups Require Members, Money, and Leadership	543
	THE POLICY PRINCIPLE	
	The Mortgage Interest Tax Deduction	544
	Group Membership Has an Upper-Class Bias	545
	Groups Reflect Changes in the Political Environment	546
	Latent Groups	547
	How and Why Do Interest Groups Form?	548
	Interest Groups Facilitate Cooperation	549
	Selective Benefits: A Solution to the Collective Action Problem	552
	Political Entrepreneurs Organize and Maintain Groups	554
	How Do Interest Groups Influence Policy?	555
	Direct Lobbying	556
	ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE	
	Interest Group Influence	558
	Using the Courts	563
	Mobilizing Public Opinion	565
	Using Electoral Politics	569
	Are Interest Groups Effective?	572
	Conclusion: Interest Group Influence in U.S. Politics	574
	For Further Reading	576

14	The Media	578
	The Media as a Political Institution	580
	Types of Media	581
	ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE	
	Where Do Americans Get News about Politics?	586
	Regulation of the Broadcast and Electronic Media	589
	Freedom of the Press	591
	THE POLICY PRINCIPLE	
	Who Runs the Internet?	592
	Organization and Ownership of the Media	593
	What Affects News Coverage?	596
	Journalists	596
	News Sources	601
	Consumers	604
	Conclusion: Media Power and Responsibility	606
	For Further Reading	608
	Appendix	A1
	The Declaration of Independence	A3
	The Articles of Confederation	A7
	The Constitution of the United States of America	A13
	Amendments to the Constitution	A24
	Federalist Papers	A34
	No. 10: Madison	A34
	No. 51: Madison	A39
	Glossary	A43
	Credits	A55
	Index	A57

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 Fourteenth 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 United States 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 on the previous page. 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 Fourteenth Edition 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:

- **More than 15 pages on the 2016 elections, including data figures**, walk students through what happened and why. This edition includes a section devoted to analyzing the 2016 elections in Chapter 11, as well as updated data, examples, and other information throughout the book.
- **New Policy Principle boxes** in every chapter each provide a mini case-study on how individual preferences and institutional procedures led to a given policy outcome. These new sections make it easy to teach an analytical approach to policy throughout the course.
- **New Timeplot features** use quantitative data to illuminate long-term trends in American politics, such as shifts in party coalitions, the growth of the American electorate, and representation in Congress.
- **Five new Analyzing the Evidence units written by expert researchers** highlight the political science behind the information in the book, while 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 five new units are:

“Constitutional Engineering: How Many Veto Gates?” in Chapter 2
Contributed by Steven L. Taylor, Troy University; and Matthew S. Shugart, University of California, Davis

“Americans’ Attitudes Toward Church and State” in Chapter 4
Contributed by David E. Campbell, University of Notre Dame

“Why Congress Can’t Make Ends Meet” in Chapter 6
Contributed by David M. Primo, University of Rochester

“Economic Influence on Presidential Elections” in Chapter 11
Contributed by Robert S. Erikson, Columbia University

“Where Do Americans Get News about Politics?” in Chapter 14
Contributed by Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, University of Oxford

For the Fourteenth 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 that there is no single best way to craft an introductory text, and we are grateful for the advice we have received.

Theodore J. Lowi
Benjamin Ginsberg
Kenneth A. Shepsle
Stephen Ansolabehere

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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.

Theodore J. Lowi
Benjamin Ginsberg
Kenneth A. Shepsle
Stephen Ansolabehere

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT
POWER & 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 authority. 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. America’s 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 decade, 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.

The complexity of America’s government is no accident. Complexity was one element of the Founders’ grand constitutional design. The framers of the Constitution hoped that an elaborate division of power among institutions and between the states and the federal 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.

But although institutionalization 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 United States' 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, 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 courts; they embroil political parties, interest groups, and the mass media. In

CORE OF THE ANALYSIS



Five principles of politics can help us think analytically about American 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).

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 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 2014 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 2014 elections, but the 2016 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 more extensively to specific features of politics and government in the United States. We conclude 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**.

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

← government

The institutions and procedures 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 the governmental process, 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).