

American Government

Power and Purpose

**FOURTEENTH
EDITION**

**Lowi
Ginsberg
Shepsle
Ansolabehere**

Analyzing Politics

The Five Principles of Politics will help you make sense of the complexity of the political world, identify political patterns, and understand political outcomes.



THE RATIONALITY PRINCIPLE

People do what they do politically to achieve purposes—personal, social, philosophical.

THE INSTITUTION PRINCIPLE

The rules we use to make decisions influence the outcomes.

THE COLLECTIVE ACTION PRINCIPLE

Politics involves many people who compete, bargain, and cooperate.

THE POLICY PRINCIPLE

Policies are the result of individual goals, institutional rules, and collective action.

THE HISTORY PRINCIPLE

Decisions and actions in the past affect political choices and outcomes today.

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT
POWER & PURPOSE

FOURTEENTH EDITION

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
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Julia Ansolabchere

Contents

PREFACE	xxiii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xxvi

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

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
<hr/>		
	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

PART 4 GOVERNANCE

15	Economic Policy	610
	How Does Government Make a Market Economy Possible?	612
	Conditions Required for a Market Economy	613
	Market Failures and Collective Responses	616
	The Goals of Economic Policy	618
	Promoting Stable Markets	618
	Promoting Economic Prosperity	619
	Promoting Business Development	624
	Protecting Employees and Consumers	625
	The Tools of Economic Policy	626
	Monetary Policy	626
	Fiscal Policy	630
	Institutions and Policies	635
	THE POLICY PRINCIPLE	
	Raising the Debt Ceiling	636
	Regulation and Antitrust Policy	639
	Subsidies, Tax Expenditures, and Contracting	640
	The Environment and the Economy	643
	The Politics of Economic Policy Making	645
	Conclusion: History and Opportunity in Economic Policy	647
	ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE	
	The Inequality of Political Influence in America	648
	For Further Reading	650

16	Social Policy	652
	What Is Social Policy	654
	The Politics of Social Policy	656
	THE POLICY PRINCIPLE	
	The War on Drugs	657
	The Foundations of the Social Welfare System	658
	Social Security	658
	Medicare	660
	ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE	
	Fixing Social Security?	662
	Welfare: Means-Tested Public-Assistance Policy	664
	Analyzing the Welfare System	668
	Arguments against Public Welfare	668
	Arguments for Public Welfare	669
	How Can Government Create Opportunity?	671
	Education Policies and Their Politics	671
	Conclusion: History versus Collective Action in Social Policy	675
	For Further Reading	676

17	Foreign Policy	678
	The Goals of Foreign Policy	680
	Security	680
	ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE	
	Cutting Defense Spending?	684
	Economic Prosperity	686
	International Humanitarian Policies	688
	Who Makes American Foreign Policy?	689
	The President	689

The Bureaucracy	690
THE POLICY PRINCIPLE	
The Use of Private Military Contractors	691
Congress	692
Interest Groups	694
Putting It Together	696
The Instruments of Modern American Foreign Policy	697
Diplomacy	697
The United Nations	699
The International Monetary Structure	700
Economic Aid and Sanctions	701
Collective Security	702
Military Force	703
Arbitration	705
Thinking Critically about America's Role in the World Today	706
For Further Reading	708

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	A57
Index	A59

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.
- **Seven 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 seven 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

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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

“The Inequality of Political Influence in America” in Chapter 15
Contributed by Martin Gilens, Princeton University

“Fixing Social Security?” in Chapter 16
Contributed by Rachael Vanessa Cobb, Suffolk University Boston

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 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.

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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

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).

constitutional government



A system of rule—a constitution—that specifies formal and effective limits on the powers of the government

authoritarian government



A system of rule in which the government recognizes no formal limits but may nevertheless be restrained by the power of other social institutions

totalitarian government



A system of rule in which the government recognizes no formal limits on its power and seeks to absorb or eliminate other social institutions that might challenge it

politics



Conflict, struggle, cooperation, and collaboration over the leadership, structure, and policies of government—over who governs and who has power

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**.

Politics

The term *politics* broadly refers to conflicts over the character, membership, and policies of any organization to which people belong. As Harold Lasswell, a famous political scientist, 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.

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.

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.

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

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 local 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 having a goal. 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, 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

instrumental

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

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. 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.³ Elected politicians, in this 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.⁴ Primary emphasis on the electoral motivation

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

4 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.

is premised on the fact that reelection is a necessary condition for pursuing any of the other objectives.⁵

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.⁶

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 and addressing recurring problems are what we call institutions. **Institutions** are the rules and procedures that provide incentives for political behavior, thereby shaping politics. Institutions may discourage conflict, encourage coordination, enable bargaining, and thus facilitate decision making, cooperation, and collective action.

Institutions are part script and part scorecard. As scripts, they choreograph political activity. As scorecards, they list the players, their positions, what they

institutions

The rules and procedures that provide incentives for political behavior, thereby shaping politics

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

6 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.