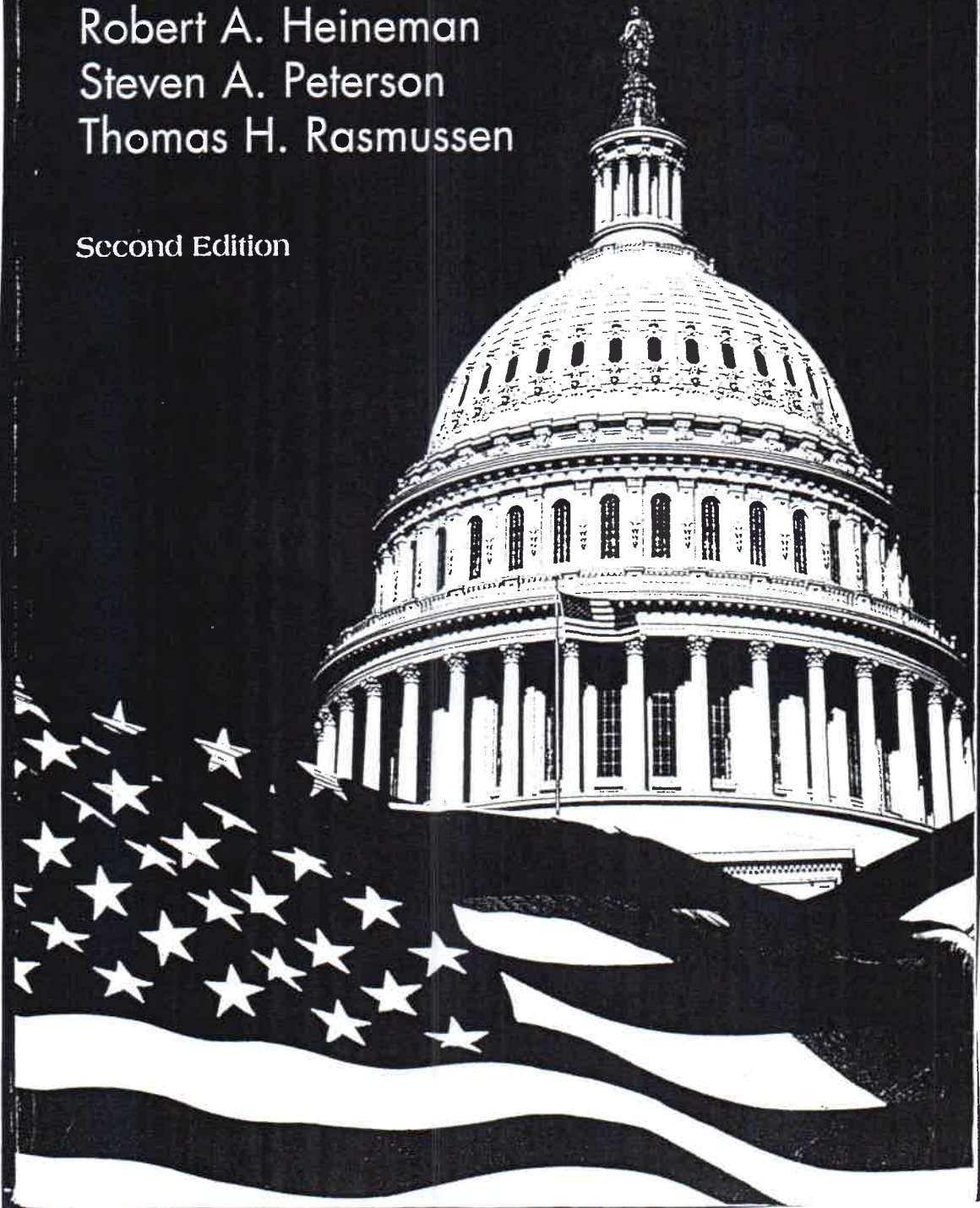


American Government

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Second Edition



CHAPTER 11	
The Federal Judiciary	223
CHAPTER 12	
The Public Policy Process	248
CHAPTER 13	
Economic Policy	265
CHAPTER 14	
Civil Liberties and Civil Rights	286
CHAPTER 15	
Foreign Policy	314
APPENDIX 1	
The Declaration of Independence	335
APPENDIX 2	
The Constitution of the United States of America	339
APPENDIX 3	
The Presidents of the United States	357
NOTES	359
GLOSSARY	383
INDEX	393

CHAPTER 1

Politics in a Changing Society

In 200 years America has been transformed from a primarily agrarian society to an industrial society. In 1790 most people lived on farms and provided for their own needs; today most people live in cities or suburbs and earn their living providing goods and services for other people.

One of the constants of American life over these 200 years has been government. Government affects our lives from the day we are born to the day we die. Government supports health clinics that provide prenatal care to some expectant mothers, inspects baby food for wholesomeness and accurate labeling, and bans the marketing of unsafe toys. Government operates the schools in which we learn, builds the highways on which we drive, and regulates the television we watch. Government provides for the common defense, which may require military conscription for many young people in times of international crisis and war.

Government supplies police and fire protection in our communities. Government provides financial assistance to the very young, the very old, the handicapped, and others who cannot maintain a minimal standard of living for themselves and their families. Government cushions the impact of crises for workers who lose their jobs, homeowners struck by floods or hurricanes, and farmers faced with falling grain prices. Government organizes a social security system, subsidizes the heavy medical needs of the aging, and licenses funeral homes. Truly, government is an important part of our lives from cradle to grave.

Chapter 1 surveys changes in the role of government in society over 200 years and introduces democratic, elitist, and pluralist perspectives on American political life. After describing the constitutional and federal framework of American government in Chapters 2 and 3, the book examines ways citizens participate in politics. Americans typically disagree about how much the government should do, and their efforts to influence government decisions are the stuff of politics. People who share a point of view join interest groups and support political parties. Public opinion polls record what citizens think about important policy issues. In regularly held elections, voters register their approval or disapproval of their elected officials. These political institutions are discussed in Chapters 4 through 7.

Government embodies those institutions established in the Constitution which define and carry out policies affecting how Americans live their lives. Congress passes laws and raises taxes. The president establishes priorities and, with the Cabinet and White House staff, supervises the work of some 3 million civilian employees who do the federal government's work. In the courts, judges penalize individuals who assault or cheat others and ensure that the actions of the president and Congress are consistent with the spirit of the Constitution as it has evolved over time. How these institutions work is discussed in Chapters 8 through 11.

Of course, the institutions of American government and politics cannot be separated as neatly as they are in the chapters of a book. Institutions work together (or against each other) in addressing the important public policy issues of our day. The dynamics of the policy process are explored in Chapters 12 through 15.

Although government is one of the constants of American life, its role is constantly changing. The Founding Fathers could not foresee that one day government would regulate business, manage the economy, or administer a social security system, but now it is generally accepted that government should perform these tasks. They could not imagine the rapid development of computer and telecommunications technology and all that it implies in terms of jobs and social changes. The better we understand how our political institutions have responded to social changes in the past, the better we can judge how government might respond to future social changes.

The Role of Government in Human Affairs

To resolve the political issues of today and tomorrow wisely, we need to think about what government should do and how well government does its work. Does the government provide peace and safety for its citizens, defending society from external enemies and enforcing laws which deter citizens

from physically attacking or stealing from other citizens? Does the government promote a more equal distribution of well-being by alleviating extreme poverty, taxing rich people more heavily than poor people, and granting all citizens access to schooling and adequate housing? Does the government permit the people meaningful control over their rulers by holding free and fair elections, allowing a political opposition to organize and campaign, and guaranteeing citizens basic freedoms of speech, press, and worship?

The majority of the governments around the world do not perform any of these tasks particularly well. Many people have the misfortune to live under governments which are ineffective, corrupt, and cruel. The industrialized democracies of Europe and North America probably do best, although the United States lags behind many societies in providing a more equal distribution of material resources. Americans accept levels of chronic poverty and homelessness which are not tolerated in democratic Western Europe.¹

Most Americans would not willingly live under a different kind of government. Given this broad support for the institutions of government, however, Americans still debate sharply the proper role of government in society. One important issue is how large a role government should play in economic and social life.

Laissez-Faire Government

The idea that government should play a limited role in human affairs developed in seventeenth-century England when reformers advocated a society in which individuals would be free to live their lives as they saw fit, with few restraints imposed by sovereign and church. At the time, absolute monarchs had the power and prestige to define their own priorities without any meaningful control from the people they ruled. Absolute monarchs claimed to rule as the representatives of God on earth, and as their subjects had to obey the will of God, so they had to obey the will of the sovereign. Monarchs ruled as they chose, unchecked by their subjects. The rulers made the laws, executed the laws, and settled disputes over application of the law. A monarch's successor was always a close relative, usually the eldest son. Rulers could tax their people and spend the revenues much as they pleased. They reserved the right to tell subjects how to worship. Monarchs controlled economic activity, selling the right to produce or trade important products to favorites and punishing any subject who challenged the royal monopoly.²

Citizens in seventeenth-century England challenged absolute monarchy and expressed several principles that became the foundation of laissez-faire government:

The principle of no taxation without representation—those who pay the taxes are entitled to have a say in how they are spent.

The principle of parliamentary sovereignty—the chief executive, whether monarch or president, governs as long as the elected representatives of the people agree that that person may govern.

The principle of individual freedom—individuals shall be free to think, speak, and worship as they see fit.

The principle of self-interest—individuals may choose where to reside, how to earn a living, and what life-style to lead, according to personal preference.

The principle of limited power—political rulers have limited responsibilities. That government is best which governs least, and governmental activities should be performed at the local level whenever possible.

The Founding Fathers who wrote our Constitution in 1789 accepted these principles. During the 1800s, Americans generally thought that society was best served if the government played a very limited role in economic and social life. Individual Americans transformed abundant natural resources into a highly productive agriculture. In the cities, factories produced more and better products. Most government services were supplied at the state and local levels. Beyond sheriff, judge, and schoolhouse, government provided few services, and individuals made their own way. At the national level, government activities were largely military in nature. Government soldiers pushed Mexico out of Texas, crushed the secessionist South in the Civil War, and decimated Native American populations who resisted white settlers moving into their lands.

Activist Government

By the end of the nineteenth century, reformers began to doubt that laissez-faire government was the best way to promote individual freedom and well-being. The Constitution gave individuals an important measure of control over their government, but now individual freedom was threatened from a new and unexpected quarter: the large industrial corporation. Put simply, individuals as workers and consumers could not compete on equal terms with corporate power, and the new industrial magnates grew rich and powerful at the expense of average farmers and workers. Many industries came to be dominated by one firm, which could charge very high prices. If only one railroad served a

farm town, for example, the railroad could charge farmers a high price to transport grain and make a large profit.

Workers often had to labor for low wages under poor working conditions. A contract fair to both employer and employee can be reached only if the two parties have approximately equal power. However, workers often had to accept what the employer offered, and women and children often worked long hours in unsafe factories for pennies. Industries dumped their untreated wastes into the nation's waters and skies and laid off workers during periodic business slumps, causing great family hardship.³

By the 1890s, reformers proposed that the role of government should be expanded to check abusive corporate power and to protect the interests of individual workers and consumers. Reformers began to work for legislation to curb monopoly power in steel, railroads, oil, and other industries. The government regulated the packaging and sale of food and drugs to consumers in 1906 after a muckraking journalist, Upton Sinclair, exposed unsanitary practices in the meat-packing industry.⁴

Conservationists prevailed upon government to develop an extensive national park system in order to protect the land from thoughtless, short-sighted ranchers and mining companies. Important political reforms included extending the right to vote to women; providing for the direct election of judges and minor political officials; and introducing the referendum, which allowed citizens to vote directly on policy issues.

After the Great Depression of 1929 stalled economic activity and threw one-fourth of the labor force out of work, Americans in unprecedented numbers became convinced that laissez-faire government and an unmanaged capitalist economy did not work. Franklin Delano Roosevelt won a landslide victory in the presidential election of 1932 and swept a reform-minded Congress into office too. In the following years, the role of the federal government was much expanded. The National Labor Relations Act supported the right of workers to join unions and to bargain with their employers. The Social Security Act gave workers a monthly income after retirement. The Agricultural Adjustment Act sought to protect farmers from devastating falls in the prices of their crops. The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) began to regulate financial institutions.⁵

Increased Support for Government Involvement

For more than 40 years following Roosevelt's first election, the federal government played an active and expanding role in society. In the area of civil rights, the federal government acted to discourage discrimination on the basis of race, creed, or gender. In 1948, Harry S. Truman signed an executive

order banning racial discrimination in the armed forces. In 1954, the Supreme Court declared racially segregated schools to be unconstitutional. In 1964, Congress enacted the Civil Rights Act, which prohibited discrimination in any public or private institution on the basis of race, religion, or national origin. In 1972, the Equal Employment Opportunity Act was passed to combat race and gender discrimination in employment.

Other government programs sought to provide everyone with a decent material standard of living, including a reasonable standard of food, clothing, shelter, and medical care and some protection from unemployment and the cares of old age. To promote greater socioeconomic equality, the government made available food stamps and housing subsidies, unemployment insurance and social security, scholarships, and work-training programs.

By the late 1970s, about 9 percent of American economic production and about 47 percent of the federal budget were devoted to social security, Medicare, food stamps, and other social welfare programs. These social spending programs did much to ease the burden of poverty in America; about 40 percent of social welfare spending went to persons with incomes below the official poverty line. However, when the income from social welfare programs is added to earned household income, 11 percent of American families still live below the poverty line. Without the income from government social welfare programs, 21 percent of American families would live in poverty.⁶

President Reagan and the Role of the Federal Government

Exactly how far government should go in promoting freedom from discrimination and guaranteeing an adequate material standard of living has become a matter of considerable dispute. To what extent does the Constitution require that governments, schools, and employers not discriminate against women or members of racial or religious minorities? Should government provide special scholarships and require affirmative action hiring programs to compensate for past discrimination? Should we as a society spend more on federal programs which redistribute income from the relatively well-off to the poor?

During his 1980 presidential election campaign, Ronald Reagan launched a sharp attack on the principle that the federal government should play an ever-expanding role in economic and social life. As President, Reagan fought for cuts in domestic spending programs, sponsored cuts in the income tax, slashed the budgets of federal regulatory agencies, and turned over responsibility for some government programs to the states. In the area of civil rights, the Reagan administration affirmed the values of community and tradition. If the community consensus is that religious values should be taught in the schools, homosexuality discouraged, and the values of home and family cherished,

these community standards should be respected. Government should not defend unpopular atheists or homosexuals against the unfriendly actions of the majority culture.⁷

Political debate has continued over these issues during the administrations of moderate Republican George Bush (1988–1992) and moderate Democrat Bill Clinton, elected in 1992. Are activist or laissez-faire principles likely to prevail? The answer depends on how Americans think government should respond to continuing social change. It also depends on who is most successful at building political support for particular policies. Because the American political system is complex, skilled observers often disagree about the relative power of those who participate in the game of politics. In the next section we examine three perspectives on who shapes policy choices in American politics and government.

Perspectives on Power

Power is the ability to get someone to do your bidding, even if that person does not want to. Of enduring interest in politics is the power relationship between the rulers (whether a hereditary monarch, a military group, or popularly elected officials) and the citizens whom they rule. How much control do Americans have over their government? How much control should they have? In seeking to answer these questions, defenders and critics of American government and politics have developed three theories about power in American political life.

Democratic theory asks to what extent the people actually govern themselves and exercise control over their elected leaders. *Elitist theory* maintains that in any society a wealthy, prestigious, powerful minority occupies key political positions and makes important policy decisions without much control by the people. *Pluralist theory* observes that citizens have much influence on political issues of great interest and importance to them but little influence on other issues. These three theories—democratic, elitist, and pluralist—are sets of ideas which help us organize and interpret our political experience.

Democratic Theory

From a democratic perspective, the important political issue is how effectively the people control their leaders. How much control citizens in a democracy actually have is a matter of some debate. The word “democracy” comes from the Greek word *demos* and means “rule by the people.” In ancient Athens, interested citizens met in the city square to discuss and resolve public issues, approaching the democratic ideal of rule by the people. Subsequent

generations of political philosophers were inspired by the idea that the people should participate actively in their own governance.⁸

In larger societies, citizens tend to participate less fully in political life. In contemporary America the people rule only in the minimal sense that they choose those who rule over them. Issues in industrial society are complex, and most citizens have neither the time nor the inclination to study them carefully. Participation in politics is often limited to passing judgment on the overall performance of officials in occasional elections. Indeed, most citizens cannot recall the names of their representatives in Congress. At best, the participatory democratic model is an ideal to be worked toward, not an accurate description of political reality in contemporary America.⁹

Democracy in Practice

In practice, American citizens do have considerable control over their leaders, certainly in comparison with the authoritarian regimes so common in the world. In many societies, political power is based on armed might, and would-be rulers literally fight it out to determine who will govern and for what purpose. Because the military has most of the weapons, colonels and generals make and break governments or establish military dictatorships. In the United States, the military has remained under civilian control, and political battles have been fought with ballots, not bullets. In comparison with other societies, American elections are free, political parties compete, and civil liberties are respected.

Attempts to gain a political advantage by circumventing the checks and balances provided in the Constitution have met with much disfavor. In 1937, President Franklin Roosevelt proposed to increase the number of Supreme Court justices from nine to fifteen so he could pack the Court with liberal justices. Although Roosevelt was at the peak of his popularity, his plan was widely criticized and quietly withdrawn.¹⁰

The experiences of other countries show that it is one thing to write a constitution giving people some meaningful control over their rulers and quite another to establish a democratic government in actual practice. In Latin America, states throwing off the yoke of Spanish rule in the 1820s and 1830s modeled their new constitutions on the U.S. Constitution. Important provisions were ignored, however, and a small landowning aristocracy dominated politics. The military frequently overthrew civilian politicians and suspended the constitutions. Similarly, England and France sought to encourage democratic parliamentary forms of government in their Asian and African colonies after World War II, but in most cases, noncompetitive elections, erosion of basic freedoms, and periods of military rule prevailed. Citizens exercised very little control over their rulers.

In the 1970s, fewer than 30 of the world's 150 political systems could be classified as democratic, although many more have had short periods of democratic governance.¹¹ In the 1990s, most African, Asian, and Latin American nations are experimenting with democratic elections. An important reason this came about was the collapse of authoritarian communist rule in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The fall of communism revealed that the sacrifice of freedom and the lack of any significant popular control of political leaders was not justified. Certainly authoritarian regimes failed to create efficient economies or just social systems. How many of these democratic experiments will end in creation of successful, enduring democracies remains to be seen.

Preconditions for Stable Democracy

Since citizens have won a substantial measure of control over their rulers in so few societies, it is important to ask when democratic political institutions are likely to succeed. The ruled have a better chance to keep control over their rulers in a free market economy, for the government then does not control production units such as factories or decide whom one works for, what job one works at, or where one lives.

Also important is the freedom to associate with others. In the United States, people belong to many social groups which are not controlled by the government but which do seek to influence the decisions of political leaders. On behalf of their members, churches speak out on abortion and school prayer issues, trade unions champion full-employment policies, the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars build pride in a militarily strong America, and the Sierra Club works to preserve our nation's natural resources from economic development and our environment from industrial pollution.

People must also agree to resolve their differences within the framework of political institutions and to play by the political rules of the game. That means extending to all a fair chance to become part of the majority which makes political decisions and recognizing that minimal rights of small and unpopular minorities must be respected. Political factions may be tempted to seize power by force of arms and to distribute the fruits of victory to their followers. Democratic institutions require a spirit of bargaining and accommodation with one's political opponents.¹²

This willingness to settle for half a loaf and to recognize the essential minimum demands of political opponents is impossible when ethnic conflicts are allowed to fester and deepen into murderous hatred. Ethnic antagonism in Bosnia, in the former Soviet republics, in Sudan, and Somalia creates a hostile climate in which people are unlikely to have confidence in democratic political institutions.

With the important exception of the Civil War, political leaders in the United States and their supporters have adhered to the rules of the political game as defined in the Constitution for 200 years. In few societies would a presidential candidate defeated by a few percentage points wish his victorious opponent well and retire to private life, as routinely happens in American politics.

As you read about government and politics, think about the quality of American democracy. To what extent do the people hold their political leaders accountable? How responsive are elected officials to the wishes of their constituents?

Elitist Theory

Elitists build upon the observation that a few people in society monopolize resources and wield influence. A professional politician, a full-time employee of an interest group, and a wealthy campaign contributor are more powerful than an 18-year-old worker in a fast-food restaurant, a single parent working 40 hours a week while raising two children, or a millionaire whose passions are watching professional sports and collecting antique cars.

The fundamental insight of elitism is that within any political group, 99 percent of the members are bystanders while the other 1 percent make decisions. The work and outputs of Congress are structured by the leaders, not by rank-and-file members. In political parties, an elite few choose a short list of acceptable candidates, write platforms, and define party positions on important issues. The agenda of interest groups is controlled by group leaders. Ordinary party members make campaign contributions and support party candidates, but the basic decisions are made by the elite few.

Elitists are persuaded that on the national level, a small group, perhaps 7000 individuals, dominates political life. This political elite includes top advisers to the president, key members of Congress, opinion-shaping print and television journalists, highly placed corporation officers, and lawyers and bankers to whom elected political figures listen.¹³

Characteristics of Elite Rule

When observers argue that elites dominate American political life, they are likely to note several characteristics of elite rule.

Attention to the Big Issues. The ruling minority guides the general direction of American politics, defines the terms of political debate, makes the major decisions about the role of government in society, and shapes the contours of economic policy. Many specific details are not worked out by the elite because these details are not important enough to merit their concern. The elite may not care whether the Air Force gets a new plane or the Navy gets a new

carrier as long as military preparedness is maintained. And the elite may not care whether the Republican or Democratic candidate is elected president, as long as the elite can control the nominating process. Members of the elite make sure that both political parties put up candidates of similar social and occupational backgrounds and life experiences.

Members of the political elite work hard to control the agenda for political discussion, a process which E. E. Schattschneider calls the “mobilization of bias.”¹⁴ In his view, the problem is not that the elite and the non-elite argue about political issues and the elite few always win; the problem is that the members of the elite control the agenda by deciding what the issues are. The average citizen does not have the time or the energy, the interest, or the knowledge to become familiar with complex public issues. Because the people are incapable of understanding and resolving public issues, democracy is an impossible dream and the elite few dominate politics by default.

Competition Within the Elite. Frequently, members of the elite are divided among themselves. For example, doctors no longer have a free hand in formulating health care policy. Other health care providers, including insurance companies, hospitals and nursing homes, drug manufacturers, and other health care support professionals, demand to be heard. And corporations alarmed at soaring health care costs challenge the dominance of medical professionals in shaping the health care system. Average Americans who are the patients and who pay most of the bill will not have much say.¹⁵

Intra-elite competition is an important source of social change. The role of government in society changes as elites adapt to a new environment. In post-Civil War America, the new industrial elites favored limited government and low taxes, but they also expected the federal government to subsidize railroad construction and subjugate native Americans. In the early 1900s, corporations advocated expanded federal regulation to protect established firms. Thus, established meat-packers favored that government inspect meat plants to protect the reputation of the industry from unscrupulous new entrants. Similarly, railroads favored rate regulation to protect the industry from price wars.¹⁶

Circulation of the Elite. Members of the elite move into and out of elite status regularly. In the nineteenth century, an industrial elite challenged the older commercial elite, and in the 1930s, labor leaders and ethnic leaders joined the ranks of the elites. Early elites were largely white Anglo-Saxon Protestant males; in recent decades, increasing numbers of Catholics, Jews, blacks, and women have been admitted into the ranks of the elite.

Informal Rule. The political elite rule informally in that they do not rent office space, have a letterhead, or develop a specific agenda.

Criticism of Elite Domination

Most observers of politics who believe that a political elite dominates also believe that elite rule is not in the best interests of the people. Among the most influential early critics of elitism were Karl Marx and C. Wright Mills. Writing in nineteenth-century Europe, Karl Marx saw that the industrial revolution was creating an all-powerful industrial and commercial elite (the bourgeoisie) whose power rested in their control of capital, the means of producing economic wealth.¹⁷ The bourgeoisie created a political elite to serve its interests. Marx denied that political leaders were powerful in their own right—they were, he thought, little more than a tool of the dominant class, which derived its power from control of the economy. While Marx saw the growing power of the economic elite, Mills broadened the elite to include key national political leaders, shapers of the public opinion, and presidents of prominent universities and other social institutions.¹⁸

The followers of Marx and Mills today argue that the elite has successfully turned the middle class against the poor so the wealthy can set the main policy course without interference. The middle classes direct their political efforts against affirmative action programs and social welfare spending which benefit the poor, while they ignore tax loopholes and the privileges of the rich. As always, the system benefits the rich; the distribution of income among the rich, the middle class, and the poor has not changed appreciably over the last 50 years.

Contemporary critics of elitism also are disturbed that Americans are given material affluence and mind-deadening entertainment in exchange for surrender of the right to participate in setting priorities. They argue that the middle class has been bought off with bread and circuses—material affluence and high-technology entertainment. Sadly, they say, we do not experience the joys of creative political participation beyond the pale rituals of watching television news nightly and casting an occasional ballot.

Average citizens are content with their lot, say the critics, because the elite deceives them successfully. Rather than resenting the wealth of the powerful, members of the middle class envy the rich as they read *People* magazine and watch *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* on television. “With a little luck, initiative, and energy, I too can become rich and famous,” thinks the average American. “You are the loser in an unfair game,” thinks elitism’s critic, “and you don’t even know it.”

The Argument for Elite Rule

Not all students of politics believe that elite rule is undesirable. Supporters of elitism argue that, paradoxically, a political democracy works better if the people play a rather limited role because the members of the elite are more

committed to democratic values than are the masses. The masses, they say, are more easily prejudiced and more inclined to compromise the civil liberties of unpopular religious, ethnic, and political minorities.¹⁹

Also, mass political apathy and inattentiveness to public issues indicate general satisfaction with the policies of an elite-dominated system. People become actively concerned with political issues when they are discontented, and discontented people may follow antidemocratic demagogues. For example, in 1933, many Germans supported Hitler, who promptly destroyed the democratic institutions of the Weimar Republic. Alternatively, the discontented may try to secede from the political system, as Southerners did over the issues of northern economic domination and the spread of slavery in 1861.

A Weakness of the Elitist Perspective

Proving false the idea that a small group dominates political life is difficult because any decision can be interpreted as the work of a self-serving elite. For example, if government raises taxes that hit average people hard, such as the social security payroll tax or a tax on energy, elites are making the decision in their own interest. If government raises the progressive income tax on high-income earners, elites are buying popular support for the elite-dominated political system.

And what if a member of the elite advocates policies which favor non-elite groups? Ted Kennedy is a highly publicized, wealthy senator from Massachusetts; he is also an articulate spokesman for the poor. Is he disqualified as a member of the elite because he advocates social welfare favorable to the poor? Or do we say that members of the elite are united only on the important issues and that since they are divided on helping the poor, helping the poor is not an important issue? Such reasoning makes it impossible to disprove the existence of a unified elite.

As you read about American government and politics, look for evidence supporting or refuting the claims of Marx, Mills, and their contemporary followers that an elite dominates our political life.

Pluralist Theory

Pluralist theory seeks the middle ground between democratic theory, which emphasizes that the citizens effectively control their leaders and participate significantly in their own governance, and elitist theory, which asserts that a few thousand people monopolize political power independent of any significant mass control.²⁰

From a pluralist perspective, American politics is an amalgam of many largely autonomous policy subsystems, each consisting of different influential actors addressing specific issues. For example, farmers and farm groups influence agricultural policy; soldiers and weapons manufacturers tend to dominate military policy; doctors, hospitals, and pharmaceutical companies tend to shape health care policy.

The principal architect of pluralist theory, Robert Dahl, describes the American political system as a “polyarchy,” which means “rule by the many.”²¹ He agrees with elitists that few people participate in the making of decisions, but he objects to the idea that a small power elite dominates. He agrees with democratic theorists that the masses exert considerable influence and that decision makers must be responsive to the people if they expect to remain in office. Pluralists, like democrats, draw our attention to elections and public opinion, interest groups, and political parties. These representative institutions allow people to control their rulers. In a well-functioning democracy, the executive, legislative, and judicial branches are responsive to these representative institutions.

Types of Political Resources

Pluralist theory maintains that power is widely distributed because many different kinds of resources—organization, expertise, money, numbers, and time and effort—can be converted into power on specific issues.

Organization. While individuals have neither the time nor the energy to persuade public officials, they can and do join interest groups. Their \$25 membership fee helps pay the salary and expenses of a full-time professional who will urge public officials to support the viewpoint of group members. The activities and effectiveness of interest groups are discussed in Chapter 7.

Expertise. Public officials often want to know the probable consequences of a proposed policy. To learn how well a defensive shield against missiles will work, they will talk with strategic experts, engineers, and physicists. To slow the spread of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), politicians and administrators will listen to the views of doctors and AIDS patients. Many Americans develop useful expertise on the job or through their life experiences.

Money. Citizens can convert their money into political influence. By financing a candidate’s election campaign, a contributor may gain a chance to meet with the candidate and express his or her point of view. Since money is essential in democratic politics, wealthy individuals have more clout than poor people do.

Numbers. In a democracy, political leaders must win the votes of citizens to remain in office. Mindful that the next election is coming up, politicians are careful not to alienate their supporters. The media conduct public opinion polls regularly on important political issues, and politicians read the results with interest. Public opinion and elections are discussed in Chapters 4 and 6.

Time and Effort. A few citizens are active in politics beyond occasionally discussing issues with friends and voting in elections. They may work on behalf of candidates in election campaigns, write letters to their representatives or to a local newspaper, and participate in demonstrations to underline the importance of an issue. In the pluralist view, many citizens have significant power on one issue but very little on other issues. Farmers shape agricultural policy but have little influence on health care or transportation policy. Fundamentalist Christians are influential in the abortion debate but have little influence on immigration policy or protectionism and free trade issues. Organized labor speaks effectively about policies to reduce the unemployment rate but has little voice in setting standards for nuclear plant safety.

The Argument for Pluralism

Pluralists are generally satisfied that government institutions respond to the people’s perceptions of what policies are needed. No major groups in society are denied a voice in the policy matters of greatest interest to them, and most interests can muster enough political clout to adjust policy to their liking. The system is responsive, and on controversial issues it encourages compromise. While no one is completely satisfied, compromise produces policies with which most can live.

A Critique of Pluralism

Some critics of American government and politics are profoundly dissatisfied with a pluralist political system dominated by a dense network of self-interested groups. Politics dominated by special interests pressing self-serving claims which government is unable to resist is called interest group liberalism.²² Special interests are powerful enough to prevent government policymakers from pursuing the common good. Consider the following examples:

The textile or shoe industry seeks tariff protections which will raise prices to consumers and invite retaliation by other nations.

Farmers seek subsidies for their peanut, tobacco, and milk production.

Opponents of nuclear power plants challenge and delay design and construction, raising costs dramatically.

Handicapped persons seek access ramps in all public buildings at taxpayer expense.

The National Rifle Association (NRA) successfully opposes gun-control restrictions which most people favor.

Pro-choice and antiabortion groups are fundamentally opposed and find no common ground for compromise.

These examples suggest that government institutions often fail to resist special-interest pleading. Public policies meet the needs of parochial special interests but work against the interests and preferences of the majority. Hypopluralism diminishes the quality of public life. For example, the entrenched power of well-established economic interests contributes to economic stagnation. Groups threatened by foreign competition, regional decline, or technological obsolescence defend their vested interest in the status quo rather than adapt to changing technology and competition from low-cost producers. Such groups expect government to insulate them from the forces of change, but slower growth hurts everyone in the long run.²³

Also, social divisiveness replaces a spirit of accommodation and compromise. Members of single-interest groups, such as the NRA and pro-choice and antiabortion groups, believe passionately in their single cause. Complete victory is their goal. They are reluctant to moderate their demands in order to find an alternative which the majority can support. The activities of equally intense pro-choice and antiabortion groups lead to stalemate. Government cannot find an acceptable solution to major national problems.

Another problem is that the true preferences of society are distorted when intense minorities dominate the policy-making process. A majority may prefer some form of gun control, but elected officials know that opposing gun control will win the votes of NRA members. Supporting gun control will not earn them votes, since gun control supporters are less passionate and typically evaluate a candidate's position on many issues. Therefore, the intense minority wins and the cooler majority loses.

Finally, our political system affords special-interest groups too many opportunities to achieve their policy objectives. Within Congress, the complicated process by which a bill becomes a law provides many opportunities to kill or modify unfavorable policies. To prevent a proposed law from being passed, an unhappy interest group needs to control the decision-making process at only one point. Disgruntled groups make extensive use of the courts to delay and obstruct. Environmental groups sue the Environmental Protec-

tion Agency to require industries to install expensive pollution control equipment. Religious groups bring local school districts into court to prevent sex education or the teaching of evolution. In our federal system, federal, state, and local governments must cooperate to implement many policies. If special interests are displeased with decisions made in Washington, they can continue the fight at state and local levels. A government responsive to its citizens addresses issues of common concern and crafts a package of policies acceptable to a broad cross section of the people. In a political system dominated by self-serving interest groups, government cannot do its job.

How well the American political system is working depends on what we expect it to do. That is why democratic, elitist, and pluralist theories are celebrated by some and criticized by others.

Within democratic theory, some writers advocate more individual participation in political life and closer citizen control over elected officials. Others believe that the masses are inclined to take a short-run, selfish position and follow unscrupulous, colorful demagogues who promise them impossible dreams. In this view, if people confine their political participation to voting and entrust political decision making to an elite committed to democratic institutions and values, it is best to leave well enough alone.

Within elitist theory, critics condemn domination by a political elite, while defenders believe that common people are well served to choose an elite to govern on society's behalf. Defenders of elitist theory are more concerned that excessive popular interference will hamstring the government's ability to act decisively in the public interest.

Within pluralist theory, defenders are pleased that most groups in society can influence the decisions of greatest importance to them. Critics complain that the proliferation of self-interested groups has created a stalemate society in which our political leaders lack the authority to make necessary social decisions. Such leaders, they say, cannot balance the budget or strengthen our competitive position abroad without incurring the wrath of powerful social groups.

Recommended Reading

Robert A. Dahl: *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy: Autonomy vs. Control*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1982.

Theodore Lowi: *The End of Liberalism*, Norton, New York, 1979.

20. James A. Garfield*	Republican	1881
21. Chester A. Arthur	Republican	1881-1885
22. Grover Cleveland	Democratic	1885-1889
23. Benjamin Harrison	Republican	1889-1893
24. Grover Cleveland	Democratic	1893-1897
25. William McKinley*	Republican	1897-1901
26. Theodore Roosevelt	Republican	1901-1909
27. William Howard Taft	Republican	1909-1913
28. Woodrow Wilson	Democratic	1913-1921
29. Warren G. Harding*	Republican	1921-1923
30. Calvin Coolidge	Republican	1923-1929
31. Herbert Hoover	Republican	1929-1933
32. Franklin Delano Roosevelt*	Democratic	1933-1945
33. Harry S. Truman	Democratic	1945-1953
34. Dwight D. Eisenhower	Republican	1953-1961
35. John F. Kennedy*	Democratic	1961-1963
36. Lyndon B. Johnson	Democratic	1963-1969
37. Richard M. Nixon†	Republican	1969-1974
38. Gerald R. Ford	Republican	1974-1977
39. Jimmy Carter	Democratic	1977-1981
40. Ronald Reagan	Republican	1981-1989
41. George Bush	Republican	1989-1993
42. Bill Clinton	Democratic	1993-

* Died in office.

† Resigned.

NOTES

Chapter 1

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2. Christopher Hill, *Reformation to Industrial Revolution*, Pantheon, New York, 1967.
3. Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR*, Knopf, New York, 1972.
4. Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle*, New American Library, New York, 1980.
5. Albert U. Romasco, *The Politics of Recovery: Roosevelt's New Deal*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1983.
6. *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1992*, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1993, p. 460.
7. John Kenneth White, *The New Politics of Old Values*, University Press of New England, Hanover, N.H., 1988.
8. Carol Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England, 1970; Benjamin R. Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984.
9. Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, Allen and Unwin London, 1976; Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1971.
10. Frank Freidel, *Franklin D. Roosevelt: A Rendezvous with Destiny*, Little Brown, Boston, 1990.
11. Giovanni Sartori, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited*, Chatham House, Chatham N.J., 1987; Georg Sorenson, *Democracy and Democratization*, Westview, Boulder Colo., 1993.

12. Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1977; G. Bingham Powell, *Contemporary Democracies*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1982.
13. Thomas R. Dye, *Who's Running America? The Conservative Years*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1986.
14. E. E. Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People*, The Dryden Press, Hinsdale, Ill., 1975.
15. Allen W. Inmershein, Philip C. Rond, and Mary P. Mathis, "Restructuring Patterns of Elite Dominance and the Formation of State Policy in Health Care," *American Journal of Sociology*, 97:4, January 1992.
16. Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism*, New York: Free Press, 1963.
17. Robert Tucker, ed., *The Marx Engels Reader*, Norton, New York, 1978.
18. C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1956.
19. See, for example, Herbert McCloskey and Alida Brill, *Dimensions of Tolerance: What Americans Think About Civil Liberties*, Russell Sage, New York, 1983.
20. Robert A. Dahl, *Pluralist Democracy in the United States*, Rand McNally, Chicago, 1967.
21. Robert A. Dahl, *A Preface To Democratic Theory*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1956.
22. Theodore Lowi, *The End of Liberalism*, Norton, New York, 1979.
23. Mancur Olson, *The Rise and Decline of Nations: Economic Growth, Stagflation, and Social Rigidities*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1983.

Chapter 2

1. Although it may be too simplistic to claim that the United States is a consistently liberal, egalitarian society, one can make the case that there are also illiberal, inequalitarian strands in American ideology. See Rogers M. Smith, "Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America," *American Political Science Review*, 87:549–566, 1993.
2. Bernard Bailyn, *The Origins of American Politics*, Vintage Books, New York, 1968.
3. Donald S. Lutz, "The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought," *American Political Science Review*, 78:189–197, 1984.
4. Jackson Turner Main, *The Social Structure of Revolutionary America*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1965.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 287.
6. James Wilson quoted in Alpheus T. Mason and Richard H. Leach, *In Quest of Freedom*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1959, p. 56.

7. For instance, compare Carl Becker, *The Declaration of Independence*, Vintage Press, New York, 1942; Garry Wills, *Inventing America*, Vintage Books, New York, 1978.
8. Quoted in Calvin Jillson and Rick K. Wilson, "The Continental Congress and the Origins of the U.S. House of Representatives," paper presented at the American Political Science Association meeting, Chicago, 1987, p. 24.
9. Rick K. Wilson and Calvin Jillson, "Leadership Patterns in the Continental and Confederation Congresses: 1774–1789," paper presented at the American Political Science Association meeting, Washington, D.C., 1988.
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14. Charles Beard, *An Economic Theory of the Constitution of the United States*, Macmillan, New York, 1935 ed.
15. Forrest McDonald, *We the People*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1958.
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18. John Roche, "The Founding Fathers: A Reform Caucus in Action," *American Political Science Review*, 4:799–816, 1961.
19. Jackson Turner Main, *The Antifederalists*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1961.
20. *Ibid.*; Roche, *op. cit.*
21. Luther Martin, "Letters on the Federal Convention of 1787," in Jonathan Elliott, ed., *Debates on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution*, vol. 1, Burt Franklin, New York, reprint of 1888 edition, pp. 360–361.
22. Cecilia Kenyon, "Men of Little Faith," in John Roche, ed., *Origins of American Political Thought*, Harper & Row, New York, 1967.

Chapter 3

1. Edward C. Banfield and James Q. Wilson, *City Politics*, Vintage Books, New York, 1963, pp. 64–65.
2. 9 Wheaton 1. (See note in Chapter 11.)
3. 4 Wheaton 316.
4. See *Hammer v. Dagenhart*, 247 U.S. 251 (1918), and *Bailey v. Drexel Furniture Co.*, 259 U.S. 20 (1922).