AN INTRODUCTION TO POLITICS

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A Primer on Politics

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Licensing

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About the Author

I spent 20 years as a working journalist, covering business, the economy and politics, before finishing my Ph.D. and taking up teaching. I also worked for several years in the Washington state Legislature and saw real politics firsthand. I have been published in a variety of publications including salon.com, *Washington Law & Politics*, and *Washington CEO* magazine. I am a past president of the Pacific Northwest Political Science Association and a former Washington Civic Educator of the Year. What I hope to bring to this project is a lot of experience writing for diverse audiences; a lot of experience teaching students from myriad backgrounds and interests; and an understanding of the basics and bigger picture of modern politics.

T.M. Sell

Preface

An Introduction to Politics proposes to chart a path that is at once a little more brief, concise and in between than those textbooks currently on the market. As this class is usually taught to freshmen, there is little to be gained and much to be lost with overloading a text with too much minutiae of the ins and outs of politics. Covering too much will, in the end, be covering too little if students don't read or give up on reading the book. Politics is a great story—the story of human existence. A successful textbook needs to tell that story.

The handful of students at elite universities might be ready for Magstadt or Roskin, however, that's not where most of us teach. Our students are no less capable; they have great potential and many of them will realize that potential in a variety of fields. But at the beginning level, many of them have to be convinced that politics, among many other things, actually matters in their lives. How many times have you heard a student say (or have you seen them write) "I don't really care about politics"? Their idea of politics is congressional and presidential bickering, which makes no sense until we explain to them that this is how our government—and much of the world—works.

This book should appeal to any professor who understands students and wants to be able to provide them with a basic outline of politics, what it means and how it works. For example, my proposed theory chapter would include a lot of useful information about how the politics of the western world developed, using theorists, as a way of explaining some of why we believe what we do. Moreover, such a book needs to engage students and help begin to convince them that politics actually matters. I've been teaching freshmen and sophomores for more than 15 years; that's forced me to be a generalist with an appreciation for the bigger picture and an understanding of how little new students may know.

All of the bells and whistles added to a typical text to try to make it relevant either mislead the students or bog them down with trivial and tangential information. As many professors know, students largely only read if they know that material from the book is going to be on the test. A textbook that is clear and direct and sticks to the basics, while still being readable and not dry, will give students what they need without asking them to wade through a lot of extras. Hence one of my fundamental laws of explanation: All life is politics. An Introduction to Politics will attempt to demystify the political world, and make it relevant by showing how things actually work and why—how political systems divide the spoils and spread the burdens of civilized life; how economic and political systems intersect; and how approaches to politics have evolved to bring us where we are today.

The book will be divided into the following chapters, roughly paralleling the pattern found in existing books:

1. Politics and power—Defining both politics and power; describing why government seems to be necessary; explaining how governments use power to create situations in which society can flourish (and when they don't). Explanation of the concept of the state and the rule of law.
2. Taking a theorem to keep from getting thick—A survey of the major political theories throughout history; explaining how theory both predates and justifies different political system; citing examples of when and where theory has been put to use in creating new governments. This would also explain something about how we got where we are.
3. Isms—A survey of the different isms, including liberalism, libertarianism, socialism, communism, fascism, Nazism and anarchism, including the distinction between classical liberalism and the American subsystems of conservatism and liberalism.
4. A republic or a democracy—direct rule by the people versus representative governments, and the different flavors those come in. How governments apportion power in civil society. Also, the role of constitutions; federalism vs. unitary systems.
5. Citizens and politics—Ways people participate in politics; political culture; political communication including media systems; interest groups; protest movements.
6. Electoral systems—The importance of voting; who votes and who doesn't; why people do or don't vote; different kinds of electoral systems and how that changes the politics of a particular state. (This gets its own chapter because encouraging civic engagement is a common campus wide objective at many schools, and one that political science departments are ideally suited to address.)
7. The building blocks of government—executive, legislatures and court systems. How power is divided between different parts of government in different places.
8. Economic systems—market-based systems versus command systems (capitalism vs. socialism); the trade-offs involved in each approach; the advantages and disadvantages of one system over another. Also, the intersection between business and

government. This deserves a specific chapter because politics and economics are so intertwined; to my mind, politics is basically economic competition carried on by other means.

9. International relations—Relations between states; what kinds of factors play into the actions of states in dealing with other states; why domestic political interests and the realities of international relations sometimes don't match up. Realism versus idealism, and the different things nations do to achieve results in international relations.
10. Issues—How current issues inform political decisions: global climate change; global debt; the never-ending struggle for power and security; terrorism; trade. An issues chapter, written broadly enough, will help students connect the idea of politics and government to things that are happening around them. A comment my students frequently make is that they are very glad, at the end of the class, because things they see and hear on the news now make sense.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

1: Politics and Power

1.1: Do We Need a Government?
1.2: A (Very) Brief History of Government
1.3: You Don’t Care About Government, and Maybe You Should

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1.1: Do We Need a Government?

Learning Objectives

1. Understand why we might want to have a government.
2. Understand the role of power in politics, and understand the different faces of power.
3. Get an overview about how systems of government developed over time.

You might have gone to a leadership camp or seminar some time. (I did.) The organizers trot out a speaker, often a broken down football coach who can speak a little. The old coach will say something very much like "You know what happens when you assume? You make an ass out of you and me." (My impression at the time was that there really was only one ass in the room.) But there is a bit of point here—we all need to question our assumptions, and try to limit them. Realistically, you can't get through life without some assumptions. (The mathematician and philosopher Kurt Godel proved that even basic arithmetic is founded on some critical assumptions.) If we take that to its logical conclusion, we don't know anything. But let's not go that far. It's not impossible for us to know something, even if we know that our opinion on that something may change as we get more information.

So, with that in mind, the assumption we're making in this book is that we need a government. And that's not an assumption, as we'll see, that's been shared by everyone throughout history. Therefore, we should probably occasionally question that assumption. If nothing else, testing your assumptions helps you strengthen the arguments you use to support them.

Why do we have to do things this way? We don't, necessarily. We could just let everything happen and let everyone choose for themselves. Anarchists have argued for centuries that government makes us worse people; that, left to their own, people will just get along and do what they want. Libertarians, who believe in minimal government, make a very similar argument (perhaps without realizing it).

There are a number of potential problems with the idea that we would be better with no government, however. (And, examined closely, anarchy doesn't really mean no government; it tends to mean a decentralized sort of government that limits the amount of power anybody has.) The first is what we might call the traffic light problem. In a society of any size, it becomes very difficult to predict what everybody will do, like having a lot of drivers at an intersection. Traffic lights help sort out who goes when, which cuts way down on accidents. You don't have to know people to know what each one will do—there's an established order (as long as everyone's watching the light as they approach the intersection). In economics, traffic lights are a classic example of a public or social good—traffic lights won't be provided by normal market activity because nobody can make a profit from them. Without some kind of social organization—government—there will be no traffic lights (or four-way stops or roundabouts or any other way making sense out of an intersection). As annoying as they can be when we're in a hurry, I think we'd actually miss them.

It's not all pretty lights, however. By living in an organized society, we give up some freedom in exchange for predictability and certainty. If society were the 30 or so people in your class or your section, you'd all get to know each other enough that your behaviors would be predictable and understandable. There wouldn't be so much need for written rules, because, generally, everyone would have a sense of what the rules are. But as societies grow, eventually you don't know everyone in the group, and organization becomes more likely as people seek to continue to make life predictable and stable. Human beings don't like change, and yet nothing is probably more certain in our lives. So government is one way we try to keep change at a minimum.

In a small society, say a band of the size of a class—up to 150 people, according to one studyThe late W.L. Gore, the man who brought us Gore-Tex, based on his own observations, demonstrated that the ideal factory size was about 150 people, because then everybody in the plant would know everybody else and that tended to boost efficiency and productivity, as well as workers' contentment. Later studies have tended to support Gore's experience.—you can pretty much know everyone personally, and you can predict their behaviors. Rules get established by custom and tradition, and people will largely get along.

But as societies get bigger, we have a harder time predicting how everyone will behave. Very soon, we don't know everyone, and your custom and tradition might be slightly different than mine. (If you travel overseas, for example, don't flash someone a reversed peace sign [palm facing you], because in many parts of the world, that means something else, and it's not a welcoming gesture.)

Formal politics seems to arise in any society of any size. People begin to make rules, choose leaders, find ways to make decisions, and find ways to exercise power. Because as soon as someone's a "leader," or some person or group of people can make decisions, we're talking about power. Rightly or wrongly, human beings seem to tend to prefer some kind of organization in society. One of the great challenges of being human is that while there's nothing we avoid so much as change (unless we're in charge of the change), there's nothing so inevitable in our lives. Change is stressful; enough serious change can make you susceptible to illness. And so we build custom and tradition in our lives, because predictability can be comforting, and it's often less work. In economic terms, predictability in social life lowers transaction costs, which are the costs of negotiating and enforcing contracts. Every interaction with other people is not a contract, in a narrow sense, but like walking into a room full of people you don't know, if you couldn't predict anybody else's behavior, life would be a lot of work. Although sometimes we would prefer to do what we want when we want to, life is slightly easier when we know what the rules are, what is expected of us, and that there are formal consequences for our actions. Consequently, living in an organized society means trading some freedom for some level of predictability.

Politics and Power

Custom and tradition thus give rise to rules, and to government. (The fact that some people then try to use all this for their own benefit doesn't change the fact that most people seem to prefer some kind of government.) This formal politics means that some people in any society will be given some portion ofpower. What does that look like? Power takes many shapes:

- The ability to get somebody to do something they wouldn't otherwise do. The government, by threats and rewards, gets you to buckle your seatbelt while driving, to file your income tax return on time, and to not throw your garbage in the street. You might do all those things on your own, but we probably know at least a few people who wouldn't. This is sometimes called coercive power, and government is more likely to have it than anyone else. Aside from self-defense, government tends also to have the sole ability to legally use force.
- The ability to set agendas. Agenda-setting means the ability to decide what gets talked about and what never comes up. This is a big deal in government. If your issue remains "on the back burner," as they say in politics, it won't get attention or resolution. Setting the agenda means that somebody has the power to decide what issues get the state's attention and which don't.
- Access to decision makers. Power can mean that you have somebody's ear. If Bill Gates calls the president, he gets a call back long before you or I get a call from either one of them. Access means you at least have a chance to be heard, often in person, which means you will have greater influence on agendas and outcomes.
- The ability to participate in decision making. Here again, power can be the ability to weigh in on what will be done on issues that have made the public agenda. Elected (and some appointed) officials tend to have the most of this, but that's why we elect, them isn't it?
- Power is also the ability to persuade. For example, when the president speaks, it's news, and if the president speaks well, he or she can rally the nation in one direction or another. An effective president can also push Congress to approve one law or stop another. Part of the skill required to be an effective leader is being able to convince people to do things.

All of this matters to us because whatever our elected officials do will have an impact on us, at home, at school, or at work. Changes in state laws have made it illegal to talk or text on a cell phone while driving, or for young drivers to have too many people in their cars. The federal No Child Left Behind Law pushed states to adopt standardized testing, which, it can be argued, changed the whole direction of education across the country. The people who favored that law had the power to see it enacted into law; the federal government, by tying it to federal funds to education, had the power to make state governments apply it to the schools within their borders. Power is the ability to make things happen and to get things done. Power can be a good thing or a bad thing (if it's used to oppress or kill people), but it's always there.

Models of Power

All of the types of power show up in and around government. But who has power? There are different theories, and all of them have some truth.

- Majoritarian: The majority decides. Elections are typically decided on a majoritarian basis. Whoever gets the most votes wins, so, at least for that election, a majority decided. That presumes, however, that the winner got 50 percent plus one; if we allow multiple candidates, someone can with with a plurality of votes (the most votes among the candidates, but not a majority of the

total vote cast). Majorities also tend to be temporary things, and that doesn't tell us much about who might be pushing people to become part of one majority or another.

- Pluralist: Different groups coalesce around different issues at different times, each competing for desired outcomes in decisions made by government. The pluralist model suggests that there are a lot of competing groups, each looking out for their own issues, and, to some extent, helping to keep each other in check. The evidence for pluralism includes the fact that groups do tend to be focused on particular issues while ignoring others. This means that no group is likely to be all-powerful. For example, a campaign for a school levy may unite disparate groups of people the community, but the same group isn't likely to spend much time on issues that don't relate to local schools.
- Elitist: Elitism says that despite the evidence for a pluralistic division of power, wealthy and powerful elites tend to dominate decision-making, with relatively little meaningful competition among groups. One of the flaws in pluralism might be that even if there are a lot of groups involved in politics, they won't necessarily keep each other in check. And as some groups have more money, those groups likely will be more powerful. So car dealers were able to block a proposed national "lemon" law in part because consumer advocates were less organized and much less well-funded than were the dealers.

As we'll see throughout our exploration of politics, there is evidence for majoritarian, elite and pluralist models. Groups do form around certain issues and compete over them. Elites do exist, and tend to exert greater influence on some issues. Elites, however, are not monolithic, and frequently are in conflict with each other.

Legitimacy and Power

Whatever the form of government, it has to be legitimate in the eyes of its people to survive.Legitimacy is the belief by citizens that their government has the right to rule, that the government's laws should be obeyed. People feel they have a stake in society, which usually means they're getting something from it. It also means that governments must be seen to be fair. If a government treats its citizens unequally, people will become happy. Throughout history, protest movements grow out of inequality, particularly inequality of opportunity but also inequality of achievement. The American Civil Rights movement, which pushed for equal political treatment and equal economic opportunity for people of diverse backgrounds, grew out of 100 years of discrimination that followed the end of slavery and the Civil War.

Every state has to establish its legitimacy, and no state that isn't legitimate in the eyes of its people can be successful for very long, if at all. If the state is seen as legitimate, then people support it, obey its laws, and pay their taxes. At the most basic level, legitimacy has always depended on two things: Keeping people safe, and keeping them fed. If either one of those things fail, a government is likely to fail as people lose faith in it and stop supporting it. Even non-democratic governments face this test.

Most governments therefore try to remain legitimate in the eyes of their citizens. Some governments make appeals to nationalism, a kind of pride in the nation-state. This can be risky; nationalism can lead to anger at foreigners or people who are in some way different. Extreme nationalism pushed people in Nazi Germany to condone the killing of Jews, gypsies and gays. China has pushed nationalism as a substitute for the ideology of communism, but saw anti-Japanese riots break out in 2005 in partial response. China and Japan have a not always happy history, but at the moment they are major trading partners and Japan has been a big investor in China. As the Chinese government's other legitimization tactic is economic growth, riots against a major trading partner might be counterproductive.

Governments also are expected to create the conditions that provide people with an acceptable standard of living. Stagnant living standards helped topple the Soviet Union; poverty in rural China has led to protests even as living standards rise in other parts of the country.

Governments also obtain legitimacy by allowing people to participate in politics—voting, running for office, and having access to people in government. If nothing else, if people get to vote, they are less likely to take up arms and try to overthrow the government. If you participate in something, you're more likely to support it. Perhaps you've done an exercise like this: You break up into groups, and each group is supposed to complete a quick project—make a flag, come up with a motto, something. Usually it doesn't go well; the final product won't get taped to the refrigerator at home. But ask the groups to stand up for their work, and they all cheer heartily. Government is the same way. If you get to participate in any meaningful way, it becomes your government, and a little bit more legitimate.

If governments have legitimacy, they can exercise power. A government with no power is not a government worth discussing. It can't do anything. People sometimes talk as though they want government to have no power, but that would eventually mean government couldn't do the things you might want it to do (and, granted, everybody seems to have their own list of what that would be.)

The State

For our purposes, the institution that collectively holds this kind of power is often called "the state." This doesn't mean the U.S. state that you live in; it means a hypothetical government of a hypothetical nation (like in economics where we talk about "the firm," meaning any typical business). We mean governments in general, so we mean the state in the way we might say, "the car," as an idea, as opposed to that specific car over there. So the state is the government and all the people in it, and even though every nation is different, they tend to share some similarities. (We should note that a "nation" is also used in the sense of a group of people who share a common culture, language, religion and/or ethnicity, so that a nation isn't always a state).

A state is said to be sovereign, which means there is no higher power above it. A sovereign state is independent of other states; has defined borders which its neighbors respect; it has ultimate legal authority within those borders.

That means the state has power. If we talk about the power of the state, we're talking about what the state can do—what it can compel people to do. So the power of the state enforces speeds limits, decides where houses and businesses can be located, and decides what taxes will be and how that money will be spent. If you attend any kind of public school, drive on a public road, or get time-and-a-half if you work more than 40 hours in a week, that's all, in part, because of the active power of the state.

And yet people in general, and Americans in particular, have mixed feelings about the power of the state. We tend to like the services government can provide, but we aren't as certain about the limits on individual behavior that come with an organized state. Like people throughout history, we're less excited about the taxes we pay than we are about the services we receive. So while we're grateful for a functioning highway system, we have less consensus over speed limits, and motorcycle helmet and seatbelt laws (all of which have been shown to keep people safer on the road). People in general, and Americans in particular, don't like other folks telling them what to do. But living in an organized society means you probably don't have complete freedom to do anything at any time or place.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Government can provide predictability and stability in daily life.
- A state has to have power to do anything.
- Power shows up in several different ways, and is exercised by different individuals and groups at different times and places.

EXERCISES

1. Who has power in your life? Who do you have power over?
2. Is the government where you live legitimate? What does this government do that preserves its legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens?

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1.2: A (Very) Brief History of Government

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the historical path of the development of governments.
2. Understand historical events and forces that shaped the development of those governments

One piece of evidence that would suggest that humans prefer an organized government is that for thousands of years, we've always had them. For much of human history, people seem to prefer to live in organized groups. These groups took different forms in different times and places, but generally there seems always to have been a process by which people made decisions. We know a little about the earliest states, which ranged from democracies and republics in ancient Greece and Rome, to early kingdoms and empires all over the world, to ancient states in China where everybody who wasn't the king was, in effect, a slave.

Tribal societies tend to be somewhat egalitarian—everyone tends to have more of an equal say. Native American tribes and tribes in ancient Europe might have had a king or a chief, but that person was often elected and had limited power (with no guarantee that you'd be succeeded by your son or daughter). Some tribes, such as the Commanches of the American Southwest, chose separate war and peace chiefs, who even then had authority only to the extent that they were successful in the ventures they organized. The state has always had to provide something to people to be legitimate, and even the kings and emperors of antiquity weren't immune to public pressure. Governments continued (and still continue) to rule as long as they provided some combination of stability, safety and prosperity.

Many ancient kingdoms and empires made religious appeals, even going so far as to say that the king or emperor was a god and therefore had to be obeyed. We don't know to what extent people believed this, even among the people who said it. And it was a dicey proposition—if you're a god, and you make it rain, and then one year it doesn't rain, people might begin to doubt. An El Nino weather event resulted in droughts in Egypt that toppled the Old Kingdom around 2150 BCE. Succeeding pharaohs in the Middle and New Kingdom eras were a little more careful about claiming to be rainmakers after that.

States and rulers didn't give up entirely as a basis for religion. Kings and emperors around the world, from Japan and China to Europe, frequently claimed to be either chosen by god or, in some instances, gods themselves. In ancient Greece and Rome, religion was an important part of civic life. Elected officials in the Roman republic had to perform ceremonial religious duties as part of their jobs. Roman emperors often claimed to be gods themselves, but then adopted Christianity as a way of maintaining authority and legitimacy as the empire came under increasing pressure from within and without.

The Greeks and Romans

Not every state was ruled by a king or an emperor. Studies have shown that if societies become wealthy enough, they tend to become more democratic.Minxin Pei, Economic Institutions, Democracy and Development, carnegieendowment.org/1999/02...velopment/2uv0 This appears to be because having satisfied their basic needs, people can turn to other pursuits, and are less likely to surrender quite so much liberty in exchange for security. So, city-states (states not much bigger than a city, but sovereign nations nonetheless) in Greece and nearby lands evolved into something like democracies. Ancient Athens was a democracy, in that a lot of people voted directly on the affairs of state. However, that voting population was limited to free, property-owning males, so that women, foreigners and slaves (which may have been as much as two-thirds of the population of Athens) didn't get to vote. And even in this democracy, the citizens elected less-numerous councils above them to make important decisions. So they were also somewhat likerepublics, in which people elect other people to make decisions on their behalf.

Greece was never a very big country, and even when Alexander the Great conquered a good chunk of the world he knew about, his empire didn't outlive his death at age of 33. But the Greeks are very important to the history of politics. They wrote—a lot—and a lot of their work survives. The multiplicity of Greek city-states meant they experimented with a variety of governments. The work of Plato and especially Aristotle invented political science as the formalized study of governments. What they did and wrote had a huge impact on the western world, and eventually on the globe.

Rome was also a city-state, and the Romans were very impressed with the culture and learning of the Greeks. The Roman state was much more enduring, and Roman political practice and law also had a huge impact on the development of government through the

ages. Rome, which grew from a city-state to an empire, evolved from rule by a king to a republic in about 508 BCE. The Roman republic featured a series of elected officials, each with specific duties, and a senate, where elected citizens would also weigh in on the tasks and issues of the day. Roman government was noted for its checks and balances—it wasn't difficult for one part of government to block action by another part. The Roman republic had so many checks and balances that it was in fact hard to get anything done, so that needed changes to the law, such as land reform and tax reform, never happened. In the end, the richest empire in the western world couldn't afford to defend itself, and attempted to rule an empire with what amounted to a government designed to run a city.

When Octavius, (Julius Caesar's nephew) became emperor in 27 BCE, it meant that somebody could finally make a decision, and the Roman Empire lasted nearly another 500 years. But a system of government that relies on continually finding just the right guy to be in charge is an iffy proposition.

The Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire, based in Constantinople (now Istanbul) lasted another 1,000 years. In the west, however, what survived the empire was what we now think of as the Catholic Church, and it was to dominate European politics for the next 1,000 years. The church, as the one institution that survived the fall of Rome (conquered, sacked and then finally occupied by invading peoples from the north and east), created order, preserved learning, and exercised some influence and authority over the many kingdoms that divided up Europe and the old Roman world.

Meanwhile, the Islamic empire that grew out of Saudi Arabia around 700 CE also was heavily influenced by faith, so that the two competing sides in the western world were significantly faith-based states. This led to a lot of debate about the role of the church in secular (everyday) affairs, a debate that never quite seems to leave us, even today.

After the Roman Empire

This era in Europe, from 500–1,000 CE, is sometimes called the Dark Ages, which scholars have more recently decried as an incorrect characterization of life at the time. But it is true that life was less safe; the old Roman order had broken down. Travel became more difficult, trade dried up, and people again traded liberty for security. This led to the development of a system called feudalism, in which common people bound themselves to powerful rulers who offered security in exchange for labor and goods. The legitimacy of the feudal state was, to some extent, based on this mutual obligation—feed me and I'll keep the bad guys away. Some scholars say feudalism flourished between 900 and 1500 CE, part of which (around 900–1200 CE) is often referred to as the Middle Ages. At its best, it meant a safer life; at its worst, it meant economic exploitation and a lack of freedom. A peasant classified as a serf, for example, was bound to the land and the person who owned it—not quite a slave, but certainly not a free person.

Feudalism was not very economically efficient. Being self-sufficient is an attractive idea, but you generally get better stuff at better prices if you can shop around. And not every part of every country is as good at producing things as some other places—it would be very expensive to grow oranges in the Dakotas, and they probably wouldn't taste as good as oranges from California and Florida. But with trade limited by the uncertain conditions at the time, people's living standards were sometimes lower than they had been than during the Pax Romana (the Roman peace).

This wasn't to last, however. Feudalism helped create order out of chaos. This system held together, somewhat roughly, for 500 years or so. Order created safety, which made travel and trade possible again, and that meant more wealth. As Karl Marx once observed, by creating security, feudalism sowed the seeds of its own demise. From small, self-sustaining political units, empires and kingdoms grew. Travel and trade became possible again, people's lives got better, and suddenly the guy with the big muscles and the pointed stick wasn't quite as important as the guy with all the gold. Increasingly, urban areas grew and cities began to clamor for freedom if not outright independence from kings, queens and the duke of whatever.

The Renaissance

The return of stability and order helped create Renaissance. From an old French word meaning "to be reborn," the Renaissance (14th-17th centuries) saw an increase in arts and literature as well as trade and material wealth, and, inevitably, more participatory forms of government. Italian city-states such as Florence and Venice became republics; people in what is now Switzerland and the Netherlands fought for and won their independence from the descendants of the feudal lords of Europe.

Along the way a couple of remarkable events occurred that had great impact on the later history of governments. In the middle of a dispute with a group of unhappy barons, in 1215 King John of England was forced to sign a document we now refer to as the Magna Carta, "the Great Charter." (They didn't call it that. It was later referred to as Magna Carta so as to distinguish it from another charter.) The Magna Carta talked about a lot of things that involved particular disputes between John and the feudal lords underneath him. But of particular importance to us, it established that justice had to be applied evenly to all, as opposed to the king just throwing you in jail. As with a lot of good ideas from antiquity, this didn't apply to you if you were a serf, but it was a start. (A serf was a half-step above a slave but below a true citizen; serfs were bound to the land and the people who owned it.)

Magna Carta formalized the council of feudal lords and churchmen who had advised English kings since William the Conqueror, although it would be a mistake to call this a parliament. And, in fact, King John didn't make much use of it despite signing the Magna Carta (and he died in 1216). But his grandson, Edward I, called Parliament into formal session in 1295, including the barons, earls and dukes of the kingdom, church officials, but also knights and burgesses (free citizens who were leaders of local communities) from every shire and borough. The knights and burgesses eventually became the commons, which today is called the House of Commons, in effect the community of the state.

Why would a king call a parliament into session? Edward, like rulers before and after, wanted money with which to fight wars. He wanted more land; and his neighbors wanted to take land from him. Having the parliament raise money took pressure off the king and legitimized the raising of taxes. But it also gave this early legislative body a power that would eventually make it far more durably powerful than any king. Eventually members of this parliament were elected, although it would take another 500 years before ordinary citizens were allowed to vote and a century after that for women to gain that right. But as with the legal rights prescribed in the Magna Carta, it was a start.

The other big event that was to echo down the hallways of history was the Reformation. In 1517, in Wittenberg, Germany, a professor and priest named Martin Luther walked up the church door and nailed a series of statements (the "Ninety-five Theses") that were to change the western world. (While this may sound like an act of defiance, in fact it was the 16th century equivalent of posting something on Facebook to see how people will react.) Luther's arguments weren't about politics; in his mind, he only hoped to reform the church. The church, dominated by popes and cardinals in Rome, was raising money for wars and monuments by promising salvation to people who paid enough money. From what Luther observed, that wasn't what the Bible said, and consequently people who couldn't afford it were giving up money for a promise the church couldn't keep. Neither the pope nor Luther would back down in this dispute. Some German princes, eager to be out from under the thumb of both the church and the Holy Roman emperor (who was elected by the princes and affirmed by the pope), protected Luther and helped him start a new flavor of Christianity, Protestantism.

This matters for politics because Luther argued that everyone was equal in the eyes of God. And while Luther was not a terribly progressive thinker when it came to politics, he had let the genie out of the bottle with his argument. If we are equal before God, it's not a huge leap to begin arguing that we should also be equal in the eyes of the state.

The American Experiment

For the country that became the United States, this was all very important. It meant that the Europeans who came to the New World after Columbus bumped into it in 1492 brought traditions with them that led to the founding of the United States. Americans sometime grow up with the romantic notion that the revolution was a battle against tyranny and taxation, but that isn't quite the story. The colonists in British North America elected their own legislatures and levied their own taxes and enjoyed as much liberty as any people in the world. So it's not immediately obvious why the colonists decided to revolt.

The usual story is about taxes, but that's a relatively small part of it. Following what Americans call the French and Indian War (1754–1763, which the British refer to as the Seven Years War), the cost of defending the colonies caused the British government to raise taxes on the North American colonies. While the colonists had in fact levied taxes on themselves, they were less keen on taxes imposed from elsewhere. But the bigger issues were economic. Parliament had banned the export of manufacturing equipment to the colonies; trade of many goods had to move on British ships through Britain on its way to North America.

Take, for example, the Boston Tea Party. In more recent times, a political movement calling itself the Tea Party has complained about taxes and a somewhat mixed list of other issues (such as the remarkably frequent calls to "Keep the government out of my Medicare." Think that one through). But, in fact, the original tea party had nothing to do with taxes and everything to do with tea.

Tea was a big deal when it arrived in the western world from the east. It can only be grown in certain places, so transplanting the crop is difficult. Before tea, people drank alcohol as a way of drinking water that wouldn't kill you. Water otherwise had to be boiled. Making tea means boiling water, and tea has the opposite effect of alcohol. So when the British government arranged to dump a lot of tea on the North American tea market, to help bail out the East India Company, Boston tea merchants responded by dressing up as Native Americans, climbing aboard three ships, and dumping a lot of tea in the harbor. Parliament backed off on some laws, particularly taxes, but not on others, and the Americans became increasingly concerned that their economic futures were in doubt.Ben Baack, The Economics of the American Revolutionary War, eh.net/encyclopedia/article/b...volutionary.us

Another interesting thing to note about the American Revolution is that while the Declaration of Independence goes on at some length about the sins of King George, by that point in history the king was on his way to being a bit player in British politics. The revolutionaries' real beef was with Parliament, and there was no real check on the power of Parliament.

And so the Americans sought political and economic independence from the most politically liberal state on earth. It wasn't a direct road from revolution to functioning republic, however. The war ended in 1783; briefly, the 13 colonies toyed with the idea of becoming 13 separate states. Instead, they stayed united under the Articles of Confederation. This didn't work well. Congress had no power over the states and no authority to raise money. Money borrowed during the war wasn't being paid back; the states threatened to go to war with each other; and the fledgling nation stood in danger of being cherry picked by the Europeans.

In 1787, a subset of the folks we think of as the Founding Fathers met in Philadelphia at what became known as the Constitutional Convention. They faced an uphill slog. They distrusted centralized power, but they knew that government needed some power in order to get anything done. Under a total news blackout, they hammered out the document that became known as the Constitution, which was eventually approved by all 13 states. It attempted to balance power between different branches and levels of government, and it gave Congress the power to tax and spend, and to regulate commerce that travels between the states. The Founding Fathers were by no means perfect, and there are no perfect governments. But the depth and breadth of their experiment, which has had a large impact on the practice of politics all over the world, still is worth thinking about and admiring.

The result was the United States of America. While not the first republic, it was certainly the largest ever attempted. Previous attempts at participatory government tended to be small, homogenous states, and the degree of participation was limited. You will sometimes hear that the United States is the world's oldest democracy. In fact, it's neither a democracy (it's a republic) nor the world's oldest republic. (It does have the world's oldest constitution that remains in use.) Voting as part of government long predates the American Revolution. Electing kings and chiefs was common in many ancient cultures. The Icelandic parliament, the Allthing, is nearly 1,000 years old, and the world's oldest republic, San Marino (an independent enclave surrounded by Italy) got its start when it was founded in the year 301.Its current constitution was adopted in 1600, although some observers argue that the documents of 1600 weren't really a constitution. The Faeroe Islands' Logting may be older than the Icelandic Allthing, and the parliament of the Isle of Man, a self-governing part of the British state, dates to at least the 1500s. All this being said, the American experiment was ground-breaking.

A Full House of Commons Beats a Pair of Kings

History did not stop with the U.S. Constitution. Subsequent experiments in government have had a record no less mixed, and perhaps more uneven, than has the American one. Slowly, over the last two centuries, more states have adopted participatory forms of government—allowing more and more people to vote. As the world moved into the 1800s, more and more states added legislative bodies such as parliaments to their governments. So even where kings and emperors still ruled, they were increasingly aided by legislatures. The pressure for this came from citizens of all types, including business people and nobles. Civil unrest and outright revolutions occurred across Europe during the 1800s, and pressure for a state that offered more to all people began to grow.

Nonetheless, this was actually a relatively stable period for the Europeans, who used that stability and advances in military technology to conquer and subjugate most of Africa and large parts of Asia. Africa had been home to a long series of substantial kingdoms and empires, some of which were greatly damaged by the slave trade that followed the conquest of the New World. (African states went to war with each other to capture slaves to sell to Europeans, to the extent that all were weaker when the Europeans showed up with guns and a hunger for land.) The British, Portuguese and French carved up and conquered the several states of India, and the Chinese empire, once the world's most advanced, had so turned inward on the world that it was nearly helpless when Europeans began to rip off chunks of the country to rule as their own. So, it was a profitable time for some Europeans, but not such a good time for many other people around the world.

The years around World War I saw the end of monarchy as a legitimate form of government. The last few major monarchic states fell apart, from the Qing Dynasty in China to the collapse of the German and Austro-Hungarian empires at the end of World War I in 1918. Nonetheless, it wasn't all an inevitable road to progress. The side trips from what we loosely call democracy have been significant. Many European and Asian nations tried to become participatory—governments based on voting and elections. Sometimes it worked, and sometimes these fledgling republics were overwhelmed by strong men who became dictators. Republican Russia lasted all of six months until the government was toppled by the Bolsheviks, who became the Communists and, after World War II ushered in a half-century of experimenting in dictatorial socialism. Those governments eventually lost legitimacy too. They were economically inefficient and politically closed and unfair. As there was no check on the power of the state, the state could go haywire and often did. The Soviet dictator Josef Stalin killed perhaps seven and 20 million of his own people (estimates vary widely) while attempting to create a communist paradise. Germany and Italy experimented with fascism in the middle of the 20th century, and multiple states tried out socialism as an economic system and communism as a political and economic system up until the 1990s. The results, as you probably know, ranged from inefficient (moribund economies that never seemed to produce enough goods and services) all the way to catastrophic—war, repression, millions of people killed over their beliefs and refusal to cooperate with ideas that they disagreed with.

Governments today remain diverse in their approaches to governing, but democratic-style governments have been on the rise. By one account, 121 of 192 sovereign states rely on elections for choosing governments, up from only 76 in the 1980s.Karatnycky, Adrian and Piano, Aili and Puddington, Arch, Editors, *Freedom in the World 2003: The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003 This is important, if only because Americans sometimes get the impression that they live in the only country with political liberty. Meanwhile, the 21st century world features very few actual monarchies, which was the dominant form of government for much of the last 2,000 years. Communist states have shrunk to two—Cuba and North Korea—while many states remain dictatorships with limited political participation outside of an inner circle of rulers. Increasingly, states have to prove their legitimacy by letting people participate meaningfully in government. That can range from a parliament in a monarchy such as Kuwait, to a theocratic (church-based) republic such as Iran (also called a theocracy, but that doesn't have to be a republic). The Arab spring has seen states from Tunisia to Libya to Egypt overthrow dictators and replace them with elected governments, although it's too early to tell how successful they will be.

We appear to live in an age dominated by market economics and, in some small way, by more participatory government. You'll have to decide how that's working. Hopefully, how it works will make more sense as we go along.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Systems of government have evolved over time.
- The American Revolution was as much about economic issues as it was about political issues.
- The United States is not the only republic, or the only place where people enjoy political liberty.

EXERCISES

1. Where did your ancestors come from? What was the government like when they left there, and what is it like now?
2. If history doesn't stop happening, what could government be like in the future? For example, how might technology affect the way we govern ourselves?

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1.3: You Don't Care About Government, and Maybe You Should

Learning Objectives

1. Understand why people don't like politics
2. Understand the meaning of politics
3. Understand why politics matters

You might have said this. Some of your classmates have said this. A lot of people say this:

"I don't care about politics."

Many Americans have said this for a long time. Why? In a country founded on a great political experiment—in a country where we are sometimes so proud of ourselves that we annoy the heck out of foreigners—many Americans say they don't like politics, and sometimes appear to have only the dimmest notion of how the country works. Or how politics work at all. (For example, in one recent survey, more than half the people receiving some kind of government assistance did not understand that their assistance came from the government.)

Why don't we like politics? Talking about politics can help you start a bar fight, and easily turn you into flame-bait on Facebook. An old maxim states that the two things you shouldn't talk about are politics and religion (because those are good ways to start an argument). And many of us don't like to argue that much.

But as a professor of mine once said, those are precisely the two things we should talk about: How we live now, and how we might live in the hereafter. In this book, we're going to talk about how we live now. And how we live now is all about politics, because much of life is politics.

Our job is to cut through all the smoke and mirrors and understand how things are supposed to work and how they do work. Politics is a pretty good story—it's the history of the world, the news this week, and a window on the future all once. Like a good movie, it's got heroes and villains, romance and passion, action and adventure—and it's all true. Together, we can tell that story and know more at the end than we did at the beginning.

What Is Politics?

What do we mean when we say politics? The dictionary definition is usually something along the lines of the art and practice of government. Unpack that definition, and you get all the things people do by way of defining, organizing and regulating society, from campaigns and elections to making laws, taxing and spending, regulating behavior and managing the economy. Politics is the art of the possible: How do you get people to agree to do something that you want to do, in a way that they won't want to hurt you after you've achieved your objective?

The 20th century American political scientist Harold Lasswell offered a tighter (and insightful definition): "Who gets what, when, and how." A similar definition comes from another heavy hitter of that era, political scientist David Easton, who called politics "the authoritative allocation of value." If you work through this definition, it makes some sense.

"Authoritative" refers to some group of people with authority—the ability to make decisions and do something. Like a coach at a football game, political authority means that someone can call the shots. Things may not always work out as planned, but authority means someone can set a direction. "Allocation" means dividing things up—who gets what. At any given moment, the pie is one size, and "authoritative allocation" means somebody is deciding how it should be sliced. (The size of the pie regularly changes, another place where politics can have a great influence.) Finally, "value" is stuff that we want—food, shelter, money (retirement programs, health care assistance, support for business), public facilities (such as colleges, stadiums and airports), or even space (such as state and national parks and forests). So, as we said before, politics is how we make these kinds of decisions: Who gets what and who's going to pay for it?

What Is Political Science?

Political science is the study of politics (which is actually more interesting than it sounds, although the kinds of things that get political scientists excited might not make most people run for the video camera). It is a social science as it involves the study of

people and how they behave, and therefore in the same family as psychology, sociology, history, anthropology and economics (apologies to anyone I've left out). Because it deals with real people, we have to observe people, ask them questions and collect data on what really happens, as opposed to doing live experiments on folks. For our purposes, political science will help us study how government works (and when it doesn't), so that we understand politics better.

And we should want to understand it better. Politics is all around us, from the purely personal level all the way to the global economy. I used to hear people say, "that's just politics" to explain why something had happened or why someone got promoted over somebody else. And then, at last, it dawned on me: All life is politics. We are social creatures by nature, not naturally solitary, and what we do and why we do it has much to do with the networks of people we know, the cultural expectations we have of each other, and conditions in which we all live. People also sometimes say, "it's who you know, not what you know," and there's a lot of truth to that. (Successful players in politics at all levels know a lot of people, including the right people.)

Politics: Hate the Player, Not the Game

But if politics is so important, why don't people like politics? First, politics is not pretty. This is not dancing with the (fading) stars; this isn't a beauty contest (although it never hurts a political candidate to be considered good-looking). Politics is often partisan—people take sides, and try to win elections to get into power, and in the process say nasty things about the people running against them. Negative campaigning tends to make people dislike politics,Stephen Ansolabehere and Shanto Iyengar, "Going Negative," http://pcl.stanford.edu/common/docs/research/iyengar/1996/goingneg.html yet it's an accepted article of campaign faith that you can't nice your way to victory.

Meanwhile, many recent political candidates are fond of saying things like "The system is broken." The unstated subtext is that the candidate is the person we need to fix the system, but the message that may be getting through to voters is that government doesn't work, so why bother? It's no more broken then it ever was, and largely works like always has. Only the arguments have changed. As Pete Townsend said in "Won't Get Fooled Again," (the greatest rock'n'roll song ever written about politics), "The party on the left, is now the party on the right, and the beards have all grown longer overnight." (Really, nothing much changes in terms of human nature and how we attempt to make things work in society.) But telling people that it's broken has the counterintuitive effect of making them not care. People feel powerless in the face of problems they don't feel they can fix.

Politics, because it's often about conflict, is messy. As the 19th century American poet John Godfrey Saxe once said, people who like laws and sausages shouldn't watch either being made.The actual quote is "Laws, like sausages, cease to inspire respect in proportion as we know how they are made." The quote is often mis-attributed to the 19th century German political leader Otto von Bismarck. But that thought in itself gives us a reason to get over the less-pleasant parts of politics and focus on what matters: If how we live is determined, in part, by the laws of the country where we live, then it doesn't matter what happened on the way to those laws. For example, when I worked in a state Legislature, back in the day, I was amazed at the people who were there. And I mean the legislators. They were not all very nice, or very smart, and a lot of them had no taste in clothes (seriously). But eventually, it dawned on me that a law is a good law or a bad law irrespective of the personalities of the people who passed it. What really matters for most of us is how does the law work? And we should care about that, because those laws say something about how fast you can drive, what taxes will be, or what kinds of mind-altering substances it is legal to use.

One more reason why people don't like politics could be the parties and politicians themselves. In the United States, neither Republicans nor Democrats, conservatives nor liberals do a very good job of explaining what is that they believe. Part of that is because we seem to be living through an era of negative campaigning—parties and candidates spend more time attacking each other than they do explaining what they believe. And when they do explain, it's not always very clear. Neither side, to my mind, builds a very good case for one approach to government or another, and both sides have some logic behind their positions. I'm not always sure that candidates of any stripe have a clear understanding of why they believe what they say they believe, and as a consequence, they don't do a very good job of explaining it to you, the voter and citizen whose job it is to decide if that's the way the country should go. Meanwhile, as we've already noted, negative campaigning tends to turn people off when it comes to politics, so that doesn't help.

How Politics Affects You

Which brings us to another reason people don't like politics. People—and some younger people—sometimes say they don't like politics because it doesn't affect them. An ordinary person is quite busy with her or his life—working a job, going to school, taking

care of family members, trying to have a little fun now and then. So it's easy to lose sight of why your local city council, the state Legislature, or even Congress should matter. Unfortunately, perhaps, in the United States, this has gotten to the point where many people don't seem to grasp how it all works (and, as we'll see, American government in particular can be a bit complicated).

Odds are, as you go through life, you're going to care more about politics. People do tend to care more about politics as they get older. In the United States, voter turnout is higher among older groups and lowest for the youngest voters. In Norway, for example, there's a senior citizens party. Senior citizens share many things in common, but one of them is they won't live forever. You might think, then, that the party would go the way of the dinosaur and eventually fade from view. But as people get older there, their viewpoints about what matters change, and the senior citizens party gets new members to replace the old ones.

Why would it be that people care more about politics as they get older? (And voting statistics show us that they do.) When you finish college and get a job, suddenly laws about behavior in the workplace and taxes are suddenly much more important. If you move away from home, and especially when you buy a house, you have more of a stake in your neighborhood and community, if only because your house value depends in part on what shape the neighborhood's in. And you're paying property taxes directly now, and maybe you have kids of your own, and suddenly the local school district and its governance is more important to you than when you were a student there yourself. So, as we say in politics, where you stand depends upon where you sit. And when it's your chair, that changes something about where you stand on politics and government in general.

But take it as an article of faith that, whatever your age, government affects you in a lot of ways (and I mean all of you). Even if you're still living with your parents and not even old enough to vote, politics affects your life in many ways, from rules for younger drivers to requirements for standardized testing in high school. Every decision such as those is made in government, which means it was decided in a political process that involved people from all over the nation.

Politics decides if we go to war, and whether you'll be sent overseas to fight. Politics decides how high taxes are, and what programs get funded, and whether one drug is legal but another is not. Politics is how we sort through what you want and what I want. Politics is how we divide up the pie, and change its size and shape. Politics is how much public college tuition costs and how much that tuition is subsidized by the state.

Take that one example: Across the country, most public colleges are state-run institutions. (You're at a private college? Financial aid is often financed by federal and state governments. Student loan rates can be determined by Congress.) They have boards of trustees or regents who oversee the operation, and those trustees often are appointed by governors and legislators. State legislatures often decide how much tuition can be raised, and usually decide how much state tax money will go to support higher education. And governors and state legislatures will also set tax rates to determine how much money states will have available. Those governors and state legislators all are elected by citizens. And many of those citizens may be more concerned about issues that affect their legislative districts than they are about the state as a whole. And all of that happens in the middle of a lot of competing interests—business groups, public employee unions, health care professionals, economic development advocates, transportation interests (which includes the people who build, maintain and manage the roads you travel on to get to school or work), social service providers, park and outdoor recreation users, and K-12 teachers, and people with kids. Every year, people with an interest in all of those areas push legislators to spend more on them, which may mean less spent on something else.

Politics—the push and pull, the negotiations, the arguments—are how we decide who gets what. And who gets what has an effect on every person in this country, whether they know it or not.

People also say, "Government doesn't do anything for me" (students regularly tell me they hear this from their parents). And yet government organizes and pays for roads, bridges, airports, seaports, mass transit, schools, public hospitals, health care, retirement programs, police and fire services, parks, economic development, and national defense, among a lot of other things. Some people argue that many things on that list shouldn't be part of government. Whatever you think about that, the fact of the matter is that government does do a lot of things, and how those things are done is a matter of politics. If nothing else, who gets elected will change the nature and operation of government services and that will affect you.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Politics is about who gets what, and how.
- Political science is the study of government, including policymaking, campaigns and elections, institutions, and people's behavior with regard to politics

- Politics has a great impact on your life.

EXERCISES

1. List some of the ways politics and government affect your life right now.
2. Think of a law you'd like to see passed. What would it take for that to happen?

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

2: Political Philosophy- Taking a Theorem to Keep From Getting Thick

2.1: What's the Big Idea?
2.2: From Antiquity to Modernity
2.3: From Modernity to Today

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2.1: What's the Big Idea?

Learning Objectives

1. Understand what a theory is, and what a political theory is.
2. Understand the three main directions of political philosophy.
3. Understand why the ancient Greeks and Romans were so important to the development of modern politics.

Behind (and in front and alongside) every flavor of politics, there's a theory. Theory matters because it tells us something about why we do what we do. It can give us ideas about what we ought to do. It can help us understand why things happen the way they do. The best, most interesting theory seems to have grown out of crisis and trouble (and pain seems to be the genesis of much art—two enduring forms of American music, the blues and country, derive from the experiences of poor black and white Americans, respectively). Time and again, political philosophy has arisen at times when somebody saw something wrong and had to say something about it. Theory also matters because people use it to make political arguments today, snatching up (sometimes incorrectly) snippets of things that people are supposed to have said to justify what they happen to believe at the moment. (In American politics in particular, we find the Founding Fathers reinvented to support every current flavor of politics. And we should be careful about that, for, as Abraham Lincoln once said, "You just can believe all this stuff you read on the internet.")

A theory is a testable proposition about the nature and reality of something. In "hard" sciences such as physics, chemistry or biology, it's often possible to physically test a theory: What happens when you do X to Y? We can begin with a hypothesis, and try to disprove it (because if you fail to actively disprove it, it might just be solid). In social sciences, such as political science, it's a lot more difficult to actively test a theory, if only because people tend to object when you perform experiments on them. This is an oversimplification, of course; in behavioral economics, for example, researchers do in fact perform experiments on willing groups of subjects (such as setting up auction situations to explore whether people are rational when it comes to money). But even in that kind of test, even if there's real money on the table, it's not real life. So to test political theory, we have to observe what people actually do while trying to account for the other things that might make them behave one way or another.

What is a political theory? Blackwell's Encyclopedia of Political Thought (a pretty handy resource if you decide to get serious about political science) defines it as "Systematic reflection on the nature and purposes of government, characteristically involving both an understanding of existing political institutions and a view about how (if at all) they ought to be changed."David Miller, "Political Theory," The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Thought. Cambridge, Mass: Basil Blackwell, 1991. Granted, that's a mouthful. But it shouldn't be hard to dissect: Systematic, as in organized and purposeful. We don't try to understand politics in a random way; we try to work thought things carefully, step-by-step, in hopes that we will miss fewer clues. Reflection, as in taking a step back and looking at what's happened, to see what we might notice that we might have missed while we were in the middle of it. It's usually to see where you were when you've moved on to someplace else. The nature and purposes of government: What's it actually like, what's it for, and what does it do? Political institutions: The structures of government, including the offices and agencies where elected and appointed officials serve. Congress and the Canadian House of Commons are examples of political institutions. Finally, should they be changed? Can they be improved? Would change make things worse? Along with much of the rest of political science, this is what political theory—also called political philosophy—tries to do. And at the moment you tell someone something you believe about politics, you have become, in the words of economist Paul Krugman, "an accidental theorist." Everything we say about politics is essentially a theory that something is true or not true. We are all philosophers, in our way.

What Is and What Ought to Be: Three Versions of Politics

And that's not new. Throughout recorded history, wherever people have developed writing, political philosophers have tried to figure out why people behave the way they do, and then to prescribe what they should do to create the ideal state. We have positive theory, which says this how things are, and normative theory, which says this is how things ought to be. Normative theory prescribes; positive theory explains. Theory can both drive politics and follow after it. Theory sometimes predates political practice; sometimes theory is developed to justify what's already happening. Much of what we're dealing with in this chapter is normative theory, but it tends to be based on positive theory about things really are. Most of history's great thinkers had ideas about how things ought to be, as well as how they actually were. Remarkably, nearly all of them thought they were creating a better state.

We can group most political theories into a few broad categories. If we were put nearly 3,000 years of human writing about politics in a pot and boil it down to its essence, we might find three basic approaches in political theory:

- One version says that people—lots of people—can know something. This is the version of theory that says it's possible for people to participate in governing themselves. This school of thought argues that the actions of people create the conditions of government. Aristotle, John Locke and James Madison fall into this category. We might call this the democratic tradition, because in this tradition, people are expected to participate.
- The second version argues that some people have knowledge, and some people have to be taught. The people, ruling themselves without proper instruction, will go astray. Plato and Marx fall into this category. We might call this the authoritarian tradition, because it tends to argue that if people do participate, more problems will arise than will be solved.
- The third version argues that government is the problem, not the solution, and that the institutions of government in fact lead people astray. Rousseau, Proudhon and modern anarchists fall into this category. We can call this the anarchic tradition, because it argues that it is institutions, not people, who cause the most trouble in the world.

Of course, the theories often overlap. Madison, who was the chief author of the U.S. Constitution, did not have complete faith in the voice of the people. Marx, as we shall see, seemed to believe that people, once properly socialized, would be capable of living virtuously. Both the second and third schools of thought argue that the conditions of material life create people's spiritual, mental and physical reality.

Different societies developed different ways of ruling themselves throughout antiquity, all over the world. In some places kings were elected, ruling for life, but not replaced by any of their children. In other instances, monarchy—rule by one person—became hereditary, so that a king or emperor was replaced by his nearest descendant (most often his oldest son).

Somewhere along the way, the king became king because he was the strongest man—the toughest, the smartest, the one who could organize and protect. And, as Plato was soon to note, if you had a really good king, like a really good CEO or a really clever professor, this could be a very good form of government. But, as Plato wrote in the fourth century BCE, in practice this could become the very worst form of government.

Why? A wise and clever king would sort things out. Like the biblical King Solomon, who, when confronted with two women each claiming that an infant was hers, offered to divide the baby in half. One woman said yes to Solomon's offer and the other offered to give the baby, whole, to the first woman. Solomon then gave the baby to the second woman, reasoning that the child's real mother would give up the child itself to preserve its life.

But kings weren't always that wise, and even Solomon, according to the Bible, helped fracture his kingdom by excessive taxation in order to build more temples and monuments. (When his son Rehoboam continued the high taxes, Israel split into two kingdoms, Israel and Judea. When divided, they were less able to withstand attacks by invaders from the east.) Moreover, often a king had all of the power and there was no check on that power. So if the king was cruel and greedy as opposed to smart, kind and thinking ahead, there was nothing to keep the king from oppressing the people.

The Ancients: It's All Greek (or Chinese) to Them

In ancient Greece and in ancient Rome, kings were overthrown in favor of various kinds of republics. And as these societies grew wealthy, people found time to write about what was happening and what they thought should happen. Although fragments and references by others tell us that there were political philosophers before Plato (some of whom, such as Thales, who might have had very interesting things to say), his work is the oldest that comes down to us in roughly whole form.

Plato lived in 424–384 BCE in Athens, the pre-eminent city-state of the ancient Greek world. City-states were just what the name implies—small, sovereign nations built around particular cities. The Greek city-states shared a common language, religion and culture, but tucked into the valleys between Greece's many mountains, they developed into independent states, each with its own government.

Athens was sort of a democracy—every free, property-owning mail got to vote, although they elected councils and leaders above them to make decisions (although an estimated two-thirds of the city's population were slaves). The Athenians, at their peak, were rich, powerful and a dominant force in the Mediterranean world. It is largely Athenian ideas and literature that survive to this day, and what they did has had a big impact on the development of Europe and the western world.

Politics was everything to the ancient Greeks—their golf game, Netflix and Facebook all wrapped up into one. Politics was sport, hobby and passion. Our word idiot derives from the Greek word “idiotes,” which meant those who are not interested in politics. So, perhaps like a nation devoted to cooking, the Greeks came up with a lot of recipes for politics.

This was the time and place that gave us two important philosophers, Plato and Aristotle. If you understand Plato and Aristotle, you understand most of what you need to know about politics. The two great traditions—democratic and authoritarian—flow from their ideas.

Unlike a lot of philosophers, Plato was a big, handsome, athletic guy. He also appears to have studied under Socrates (scholars disagree about the precise details of Plato’s life). Socrates created a framework for the study of politics by developing the Socratic method: asking enough good questions that you eventually get to something like the truth. Socrates is famous largely because Plato wrote about him at length.

Socrates made his living as a teacher. Wealthy Athenians paid him to teach their sons the basics of knowledge and how to achieve it. Socrates himself isn’t known to have written anything down, but was noted for his ability to ask probing questions to force his students to think things through. Plato uses the voice of Socrates to get his own points across.

Plato’s experience with Socrates seems to have driven Plato to a particular view of politics. Most of Plato’s work comes in the form of dialogues, involving Socrates and other historical figures of the time, exploring in their conversations all manner of philosophical topics, including politics.

What Plato saw in the history of democratic Athens was how common people tended to get carried away, and elect leaders who promised them everything but gave them very little. The Greeks developed the term “demagogue” to describe this kind of politics. A demagogue is someone who plays on people’s fears, prejudices and emotions in order to gain political power. History is full of demagogues (and full of people who call other people demagogues). But democracy in Athens came to mean that perfectly good leaders could get thrown out of office over some perceived offense, and be replaced by demagogues who would proceed to seriously mess things up. In Athens, for example, the citizens could not just vote somebody out of office, they could vote them out of the country (our word “ostracize” comes from the Greek ostraka, the shards of pottery on which citizens would write the name of someone who was to be expelled). For Athenian citizens, getting voted off the island (metaphorically speaking) was worse than death; it was like being forced to sit at the kid’s table at Thanksgiving but without any food. In Plato’s lifetime, the Athenian empire foundered, run aground on foreign adventures and questionable policy choices, while political leaders competed for control like contestants on American Idol.

Perhaps the last straw for Plato was when Socrates was charged with impiety and corrupting the youth, his only real sin appearing to have been asking hard questions about the current and democratically chosen government of Athens. Socrates was effectively put to death (he was ordered to commit suicide) by the democratically elected government of Athens, as people who go around asking difficult questions sometimes get branded as troublemakers.

For Plato, then, democracy was not the answer. It was the problem. In his mind, popular, widespread political participation put decisions in the hands of people who had not studied and did not understand politics and governance, resulting in the elections of poor leaders and in too many changes in political direction. How does one then avoid this problem?

In a famous dialogue in The Republic, Plato’s major work about politics, Socrates defines justice having people do those jobs for which they are best suited. The best farmer would grow the best crops; the best shoemaker would make the best shoes. Nobody would complain about having to do business with those folks. And, therefore, the best government would be run by the people best suited for the job of governing. Hence, the philosopher king—the perfect combination of wisdom and power.

Plato wrestled with the problem of how to find the philosopher king—the person with just the right stuff to effectively and fairly rule the state. To his credit, few other philosophers ever came up with such a precise prescription for how to do this. Plato’s answer to this problem—the efficiency of someone who can make a decision versus the risk of someone who makes bad decisions—was complicated but interesting.

In the course of the dialogues in The Republic, Plato develops how he thinks this could work. As justice is having everyone do what they are best suited for—some should be soldiers; others business people; others craftsmen and women;Plato is notable for being one of the first thinkers to accord a potentially equal role for women in politics. and still others should be rulers. Plato lays out a program to find out who’s best at what—a lot of schooling, experience at a number of jobs, and then, finally, advancement to

the guardian class, who will rule the state, whose needs are taken care of, and who will both own and want for nothing, thus removing any urge to rob the people to enrich themselves. Moreover, anybody could apply to become a guardian, so in no way was the governing structure limited to any particular class. In this way, Plato believed, the just state could be created via rule by the wise.

Plato's prescription has both sense and nonsense to it. Clearly, not everybody is equally good at doing everything. Some people are simply better at some tasks than others. For example, one of my brothers is very good with mechanical things; one is very good with computers. We're all better off if the first brother works on cars and if the second brother works on computers. Plato applied this idea to the whole of society. Everyone will be better off if people do the jobs that they're best at.

This system wasn't tried in Plato's time. The one ruler who invited Plato to implement his system ended up throwing him in jail for a time once he realized what Plato really had in mind.

But this system has been tried. In medieval times, the Catholic Church operated very much like this. The church effectively governed a lot of land and people throughout Europe. Anyone could apply to join the church; church leaders didn't own anything personally; and they rose to power through years of testing and service. The Soviet Union also looked a bit like Plato's just state—a system of governance open to anyone (via joining the Communist Party); very little private ownership for this governing class, although their physical needs were met by the state; and people rose to power through years of testing and service (and, in some instances, by being more ruthless than their rivals).

And that's perhaps the biggest problem with this system: There is no check on the power of the guardians, and, particularly in the case of communist states, guardians arise who proceed to do very bad things to people. In practical terms, it's also true that people don't all develop at the same level. You might be better at something later in life, but a system that slots you into one job or another doesn't account for that, or give you much choice about changing your mind.

Undoubtedly, Plato didn't foresee this, nor would he have approved. And he said a lot of other interesting things. Like a number of political philosophers, he was an astute observer of his own times. He understood that too much disparity of wealth between the rich and the poor would cause social strife, and he understood that people don't always pay as much attention to political affairs as perhaps they should. But he also believed that not everybody was fit to participate in government, nor could they even truly understand it.

Like Socrates, Plato was a teacher, and at the Lyceum, the college he established, he taught another bright young Greek, Aristotle (384–322 BCE). In many ways, Aristotle is the father of political science, the man who first sat down and catalogued what politics and government is all about. Honestly, if you read Plato and Aristotle, you will see pretty much everything we talk about today.

Aristotle, unlike Plato, didn't write in dialogues, which can make him a bit easier for modern eyes to read. He just said what he thought. Like Plato, Aristotle didn't find the common people to be so smart. His work has been described as "a severely aristocratic" political philosophy; he doesn't have much good to say about ordinary people. But he recognized the flaws in Plato's proposals, even as he recognized the challenges faced by different kinds of government. (Aristotle says, in a thinly veiled reference to his former teacher, if this is such a good idea, why is nobody actually doing this?)

Aristotle lays out what we he regards as the good forms of government: monarchy (rule by one);aristocracy (rule by the best); and polity (rule by the people). Each of these forms could erode into "perversions" of the original, however. Monarchy could become tyranny. Aristrocracy could decay into oligarchy, rule by the few for their own benefit. Polity could become democracy, rule by the mob.

Aristotle then laid down a couple of principles that are with us today. First he said, was that the people all together are likely to be slightly less crazy than any subset of the citizenry. So the common, aggregated wisdom of the masses stands a better chance of making fewer foolish choices in government. But he also said that the ideal state might want parts of polity, aristocracy and monarchy, so as to produce some balance of power within the state. This idea has been repeated often throughout political history, and became the foundation of American government, some 2,000 years later.

Across the world, another great thinker was in the process of coming up with ideas that would have an equally great impact on world history, Confucius (551–479 BCE), or Kung Fu-Tze (only one of many variations of his name, which was likely something else entirely). Confucius was a political official in the Chinese state of Lu, where he fixed quite a mess in the administration of justice through rational, respectful management. He either left his post over disgust with the ruler, or was done in by political

intrigue, depending on which version you read. Either way, he became a sort of wandering scholar/consultant/teacher. He preached an ethical politics based on order, morality, and a respect for tradition. He might have been a conservative, and he might just been using a conservative appeal to push a different agenda. He favored an all-powerful ruler, whose power would nonetheless be checked by tradition, honesty and the rule of law. Like Socrates (and eventually like Mao Tse-Tung), he doesn't appear to have written anything down, but his disciples did, sometimes generations after the fact. What's important about Confucius in part is that his ideas eventually became central to the Chinese state. Study of Confucian classics became the backbone of the mandarin class, the Chinese civil servants who ran the state. At its best, this created a sturdy, predictable form of government (and the Chinese empire lasted for 2,000 years). At its worst, however, it created resistance to change and modernization and a state that was unable to cope with the technological superiority of the west.

When in Rome, Do as the Greeks Do (or Don't)

The Greeks were a great influence on the Romans, even after the Romans conquered the Greek city-states and made them parts of the Roman empire. The Romans are more noted for their political practice than for their theoretical ideas, although Roman law had a big impact on development of law in the western world. When the Romans ended the monarchy that originally ruled them, they chose instead a republic. In a republic, people elect other people to make decisions on their behalf. Having lived through the rule of tyrants, the Romans devised a system of government that had checks on power. The elected Senate made laws; while the consuls were chief executives and the tribunes represented the people. But it wasn't all that simple. In fact, the Roman republic featured a somewhat bewildering array of assemblies and elected officials, any one of who might check the power of any other person or body, to the point where it was often hard to get anything done. The system proved so cumbersome that the Romans often resorted to choosing a dictator to run the show during times of trouble.

Eventually the dictators became emperors and began to wield the real power in government, changing the Roman Republic to the Roman Empire. (And it's worth noting, for those of you who have seen the Russell Crowe film Gladiator, that neither Marcus Aurelius or any other Roman emperor ever toyed with the idea of restoring the republic). Why did this happen? In part because there were so many checks on power that reforming the state became nearly impossible. Because the Senate, the consuls and the tribunes could each say no to almost anything that came up, needed changes in land reform, taxes and citizenship, for example, never quite got accomplished. And, eventually, the empire, desperate for revenue but also for political support, raised taxes on the middle class, even while they cut them on the wealthy. Why? Because emperors needed the support of the wealthy to remain in power. Eventually, people became so poor that they sold themselves to rich people so as to stay alive. In the end, the richest, most powerful empire in the western world couldn't afford to defend itself.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Political theory is a systematic way of studying the performance of government.
- Political theories tend to fall into authoritarian, democratic and anarchic models.
- Plato thought that average people were not fit to rule, and that people would need to be carefully trained to make them into rulers.
- Aristotle didn't trust common people either, but thought that a balanced constitution, combining elements of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy would be best.
- Confucius thought that emphasis on order, tradition and respect would lead to the best government.
- The Roman Republic had so many checks and balances it was unable to act when it nee

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Assume you were studying to be a member of Plato's guardian class. What things would you need to know to be an effective ruler?
2. In what ways to order and tradition play a role in everyday life today? Do these help or hinder progress?

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2.2: From Antiquity to Modernity

Learning Objectives

1. Understand how early Christian and Moslem thinkers tried to reconcile the competing spheres of church and state.
2. Understand how political science was reinvented, and how that changed views on government

The Roman empire officially collapsed in 485 CE, overrun by various tribes who had come in large numbers from the east and the north, the barbarians (from another word derived from Greek, barbaros, or foreigners).

Every society is born out of chaos. Strong people create order out of chaos, which creates a different set of conditions and needs. Once order is established, people start thinking about other things, including food and wealth and a more comfortable existence. The Dark Ages (roughly 500–900 CE) and the Middle Ages (900–1200 CE) weren't periods of total chaos. There were states, sometimes quite substantial, but they typically were born of violence and often succumbed to the same. Charlemagne carved out an empire covering much of Europe, but it was subdivided between his sons, and not everybody wanted to be a part of it anyway. It didn't last another 100 years.

But for some time after the fall of the empire, in Europe, human human misery increased. It was often unsafe to travel, trade dried up, and people sought security above all else. This eventually gave rise to the economic and political system called feudalism. In feudalism, ordinary people agree to work for and feed the biggest, baddest guy with the pointy stick, who in return agrees to keep the peasants safe from danger and attack. Feudal states were self-sufficient, because there was very little trade (remember, it wasn't safe to travel). As not every place is equally good at producing every kind of good or service, this is not an economically very efficient way to organize things. It did, however, eventually, restore order.

All knowledge was not lost, however. With the rise of Islam in the eight century CE, another rich and powerful civilization was born. Moslem philosophers built on the work of Plato and Aristotle. For both early Christian and early Moslem thinkers, the challenge was to reconcile earthly government with the idea of an all-powerful God who commanded strict adherence to his laws. St. Augustine (354–430 CE) saw the state as God's punishment for man's sinfulness. The City of God matters; the city of man, not as much. Moslem philosophers such as Al-Farabi (872–950 CE), Avicenna (980–1087 CE) and Averroes (1126–1198 CE), built on Plato's idea of a philosopher-king (in this case, a prophet-imam) who would combine both religious righteousness with just rule. These Arab philosophers had access to both Plato and Aristotle, and Aristotle in particular had been lost to the Christian west.

But in 1085, the European Spanish reconquered the city of Toledo from the Moslem Spanish (the Moors), and Toledo had a really big library that, miraculously, wasn't burned to the ground. Works of all kinds were translated from Arabic and Hebrew to Spanish and Latin, which meant that they were accessible to a much larger group of people. Aristotle was troubling at first to medieval Christian scholars; he said things that weren't in the Bible. Eventually, however, he became the chief source for everything that wasn't in the Bible, which, in fields such as science, wasn't always the best choice.

Aristotle was partially rehabilitated in the west by St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), whose work was to have enormous impact on the development of the Catholic Church. Aquinas said it was not necessary to have a theocratic state, ruled by the church, and that it was acceptable to have a secular (non-church government). The church in the form of the pope still had supreme authority, but unlike St. Augustine, Aquinas seems to be saying that it's not just the next life that matters; this life matters a little too.

Political Science: The Comeback Kid

In Aquinas' time, Europe was at last on the road to recovery from the collapse of the Roman Empire. That meant increasing stability and order. That produced the conditions that make it possible to trade. So, for example, by the 1200s, trade fairs began to spring up in the Champagne region of France. The rise of trade began to increase the demand for goods, such as cloth, which created a new class of people—merchants, bankers, the people of business. And their needs weren't the same as those of the feudal lords.

In the midst of this change, things happened. Disagreements between English barons and King John led to the creation of the Magna Carta, which led to the creation of the English Parliament, the most representative body since the Roman Senate. A century later, in 1295, the English Kind Edward I called Parliament into session all on his own. Why? Because he needed them to raise

taxes to pay for wars. Having Parliament pass taxes legitimized them more than the king just calling for them on his own. That single act gave Parliament a power that was to change the nature of the state forever.

This era became known as the Renaissance, when, in Europe, cities began to grow and trade resumed and there was a rebirth of art, culture and science. (When people have time to think, they often do.) This struggle between the old feudal order, whose wealth and power was based on land, and the new business order, lasted for hundreds of years. Why it happened in Europe and not in, say, China or India, which also had very advanced societies, is hard to say. There have been a lot of theories, none of them completely satisfying. But it did happen in Europe, and, if nothing else, that had a great impact on what happened in America.

So whereas the political theory of the pre-Renaissance period was largely about how much power should be possessed by the church, after the Renaissance began theory increasingly was once again about what the ideal state should look like. Niccolo Machiavelli (one of history's most misunderstood philosophers) barely even mentions God and the church; he doesn't spend pages justifying the need for a state. Contrast that with St. Thomas Aquinas, who was still arguing that the state was divinely ordained and therefore, at the end of the day, subservient to the church. Machiavelli says, in effect, "get real" and assumes there will be a state. Writing at a time when Italy was a collection of uncertain city-states, and also the training ground for the armies of Europe, Machiavelli argued that 1. You don't get very far by playing fair if your enemies don't and 2. The ideal state has a balance of power that keeps tyranny from taking over. Machiavelli tried to look at what states were really like, and to deduce from that how we might make them better. People have tended to look at Machiavelli's most famous work, The Prince, and be horrified that anyone would say, in effect, if your enemies are trying to kill you, take them out first. But if you read his work carefully, you begin to understand that Machiavelli wanted 1. A free and united Italy and 2. A state that, when secure, would be governed fairly and for the benefit of the people. If nothing else, Machiavelli gives us the first truly practical discussion of political science since Aristotle.

Machiavelli is sometimes considered the first "modern" political philosopher. "Modernity" is a funny sounding word (if you put the accent on the second syllable instead of the first, it will sound about right), but an important idea. As later thinkers such as Max Weber (1864–1920) were to recognize, the separation of church and state demystified the world. We might still believe in God, but we don't expect him to part the Red Sea or deliver messages through burning bushes. Without the moral guide rails of a universal faith, we are left to figure things out on our own. Our senses of right and wrong must be redefined. So, if life is really a journey and not a destination, modernity means we just lost the map.

Amid all this came the Reformation. Martin Luther, a German churchman, became frustrated with the excesses of the Catholic Church, such as shaking down people for money (indulgences) so as to buy their way into heaven. (The money, at that time, wasn't going to help the poor. It was going to build fancier palaces, fight more wars, and throw bigger parties.) Luther wasn't a political radical—he didn't argue that kings and princes didn't have the right to rule. But he did say that we are all equal for before God, regardless of wealth or privilege. And if we're all equal before God, it's not a great step to thinking we're also equal before the state. Luther probably didn't realize it, but he had just helped let the genie out of the bottle. Increasingly, from this point forward, more political philosophers began to argue that more people—not less—should participate in governing the state.

But not everybody, and not all in the same way. The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) argued that government is a contract between the ruler and the ruled. Hobbes saw government and civil society as the antidote to what he called "the state of nature," in which every person was out for him or herself, and in which life was best described as "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short" (spelling at that time being a somewhat creative affair). Hobbes' social contract, therefore, keeps us and the barbarian hordes in check, allowing people to live better, longer, easier lives.

Hobbes granted the ruler, who he called the sovereign, pretty much absolute power (Hobbes had worked for the English king. In politics, where you stand often depends upon where you sit.) He thought that the sovereign would realize it's in his own self-interest to treat people well, because if your kingdom is decrepit, you won't be in power long. Having lived through the long and violent English Civil War, Hobbes thought that the contract was all about security. Having established the sovereign by mutual consent, the people were bound to support and obey the sovereign up to the point at which he or it could no longer protect them. (The fact that if the sovereign fell to such a level of powerlessness, he wasn't really a sovereign anymore, seems to have escaped Hobbes.)

The challenging part about Hobbes' argument is that it relies on the king understanding that the people's well-being was in his own best interest. And yet it doesn't always work out that way. Eventually, the English kings, thinking they were the only thing that mattered, so angered much of the rest of the country that they chased King James II away and replaced him with William and Mary

(in what the British refer to as the Glorious Revolution of 1688). Another Englishman, John Locke (1632–1704) writing at about that time, argued for the supremacy of the legislature—Parliament. Soon after, increasingly, Great Britain was, for all purposes, ruled by Parliament, not by the king.

Locke is important because he had such a big impact on so many others, including the American revolutionaries who were to create the United States. Like Hobbes, Locke saw government as a social contract between the governed and the governors. Unlike Hobbes, Locke didn't see people as inherently selfish and therefore potentially dangerous. They could, in fact, be charitable and rational. Government's role is not to restrain people, but to protect their rights to "life, health, liberty or possessions," (in some references rendered as "life, liberty or property"), as he put it. Any social contract that led to oppression was null and void before the ink had dried. Locke thought that sovereignty lay with the people, not kings, and that therefore an elected parliament was the best form of government. Although Locke acknowledged that kings did not have an exclusive franchise on tyranny, the only check on the power of parliament he provided was elections, short of revolution. Locke, like others who were involved in revolutions, argued that there was a right to revolution, which probably sounds better when you're on the front end than when you're on the receiving end.

Locke was also an influence on the Swiss-French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), one of those historical curiosities who loved humanity but wasn't so good with people (he gave up his own children for adoption, for example). Rousseau's state of nature was the opposite of Hobbes'—an idyllic Eden in which people lived peacefully, long and well before being corrupted by the advent of organized society. (This was to have a great impact on anarchist thinkers down the road.) "Man is born free," he wrote in The Social Contract (1762), "and everywhere he is in chains." Despite what sounds like a call to anarchy, Rousseau proceeded to argue that the chains would be much lighter in a properly constituted republic. Sovereignty rests with the people, who rule through a combination of magistrates (who don't make policy on their own) and direct democracy. The ideal republic is a city-state, like Geneva, the Swiss city where he was born. It's worth noting that Geneva was republican on the surface and a theocracy underneath, and of the latter Rousseau clearly did not approve. Unlike the real Geneva, proper government should be an expression of the general will (one of those somewhat hazy ideas that sound pretty good until you try to define it and make it practical). In his defense, Rousseau did appear to think that the general will should not be used to oppress the individual. Nonetheless, Rousseau's work influenced thinkers from anarchists to liberals to Marxists, everyone seeming to find a suitable present under the tree of his varied thought.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Medieval philosophers tried to reconcile the competing powers of church and state.
- Modern philosophers presumed the existence of the state, and set about trying to make it better.
- Social contract theory saw government as a contract between the government and the governed.

EXERCISES

1. Do you practice a particular faith? What should be the role of religion in civil society?
2. Is government a social contract? How does that contract work for people who weren't born when it was agreed upon?

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2.3: From Modernity to Today

Learning Objectives

1. Understand why the U.S. Constitution was designed the way it was.
2. Understand Marx and Mill's different visions for a just society.
3. Understand contemporary approaches in political theory.

Sometimes overlooked among political philosophers is James Madison (1751–1836). A small man with a high voice, he nonetheless became the fourth president of the United States after being the chief author of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Madison read history and political philosophy and was able to build on the ideas of those who came before him. Unlike Locke, he argued for a balance of power in government, more like Aristotle, Machiavelli and Montesquieu (1685–1755), a French philosopher who influenced the American Founding Fathers. This balance of power became, in practical terms, the division of power in U.S. government between the states and the national government; the division of power between the executive, legislative and judicial branches; and the literal encouragement of interest groups who would, Madison hoped, keep each other in check.

This last idea was a crucial one, for interest groups (which Madison called "factions") had been the downfall of Athens and other states throughout history. Factions, he argued, tended to become so obsessed with their own concerns that they forgot about everything else. That could mean that important issues were neglected and that good leaders could be thrown from office over differences on a particular topic. But, Madison argued, limiting the influence of interest groups would in fact limit the liberty they had just fought so hard to win. The answer, he said, was a system of government with many checks on power, so that no one group could dominate the government, and letting interest groups flourish so that they will keep each other in check. The challenge to this idea is the danger of ending up like the Roman Republic, with so many checks on power that you can't get anything done. For the United States, at least, we don't have a final score on that yet.

Revolution and Counter-Revolution

The American Revolution was followed by the French Revolution in 1789, with somewhat less benign results. The French monarchy was not meeting people's needs, and avenues for political participation and regime change were limited. When the cork finally popped on this over-shaken bottle of civic champagne, royals and revolutionaries lost their heads, literally and figuratively. (Eventually, Napoleon made himself emperor, and ushered in a few more decades of war in Europe.) Revolution produced different reactions among political thinkers.

Edmund Burke (1729–1797), a British politician, found himself on both sides of the issue. While serving in Parliament, he argued against any oppression of the American colonists, recognizing that a wealthy America would make Britain richer than it could imagine. He turned the other way on the French revolution, as people who disagreed with the new regime kept ending up dead.

A strong believer in representative government, Burke is nonetheless often regarded as the father of modern conservatism. Like Confucius, he argued against rapid, radical change, saying instead that human institutions are there for a reason, and embody the collective wisdom of generations.

Thomas Paine (1737–1809), whose pamphlet Common Sense helped reinvigorate the American revolution, later served in the revolutionary legislature in France (even though he didn't speak French). Paine was anti-monarchy, which made him a radical for his time and rather unpopular in his native Britain. In his pamphlet Rights of Man, he argued for a right to revolution when government does not protect people's rights. He also argued that rights are natural to human beings, and are not granted by government, because then they become mere privileges, which can be taken way.

The 1800s saw a broader push for more popular participation in government, at least in Europe and the Americas. It also saw the Industrial Revolution, which began the movement from a world in which most people were farmers to a world in which most people were not. The Industrial Revolution, beginning with the widespread use of steam and water power and continuing through the revolution of electricity late in the 1800s, changed how we live. Farms got more efficient, so that fewer farmers were needed. Meanwhile, mass production, rapid transit (beginning with the steam train and the steam ship), and rapid, widespread communications (beginning with the telegraph and then the telephone), led to the creation both of efficient factories and of large business enterprises. When most people were farmers, people worked outdoors and, in theory, could at least feed themselves.

Factory work meant less pleasant if not downright dangerous working conditions and, frequently, low pay and no benefits. This was a world in which there were no child labor laws (and children were sometimes chained to the machines they operated), no overtime, no day off except Sunday, no industrial insurance, no unemployment insurance, and no protection for workers at all. (Some folks on the right would tell you that this was better; you'll have to decide that for yourself.) In this world, in which civic institutions were playing catch-up with the realities of modern life, a couple of different philosophers approached the problem in widely different ways.

John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) argued for broader political participation. Mill saw the benefits of expanding wealth, and thought that popular political institutions were the way to address the inequalities generated by the uneven flowering of capitalism.

Mill had a strange childhood. His father, a political philosopher in his own right, gave his son a rather rigid upbringing, so that he learned Ancient Greek at age 3 and was reading Plato and Aristotle by age 12. He has been estimated to have had the highest IQ in history, and at age 20 he had a mental breakdown, having become, in his own words, "an intellectual thoroughbred and an emotional hobbyhorse."

Mill recovered, and wrote a lot of important work. He believed in individual liberty and limits on the power of government. He believed that society existed for the benefit of the individual, who ought to be able to do what she or he likes, as long as they aren't hurting others. In the concept of utilitarianism, in which Mill built on the work of his father and of the economist Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), Mill argued that society should provide the greatest good for the greatest number. For the most part, he believed that people should be allowed to participate in government (for the most part, because he allowed that despotism was OK in "backward" societies). He did, however, oppose slavery. But while he was not always a progressive thinker on race, he was perhaps the first major philosopher since Plato to argue for the rights of women (his wife, Harriet Taylor Mill, is regarded as a first-rate philosopher in her own right).

Mill believed in free markets—leaving the economy alone and letting capitalism work as intended (though later in life he began to edge toward socialism). He also believed in some sort of workplace democracy, with workers given a say in choosing managers.

The Marx Brother

Karl Marx (1818–1883) did not believe in free markets (or God or capitalism or democracy. None of this, he said, helped people). Born in Germany, Marx described the world as he saw it. Like most political philosophers, he was a voracious reader, a critical thinker, a voluminous writer, and a bit odd. (A visitor to his house in London, where he later lived, described a chaotic scene of dirt, broken furniture, randomly placed children and a heavy patina of stale cigarette smoke.) His analysis of the modern capitalist world was compelling, and his ideas had a huge impact on world history.

While Mill saw the upside of an evolving world, Marx saw the costs. Workers were oppressed, and capitalists, "the bourgeoisie," as he called them, were unduly profiting from their labor. This led to what he and his writing partner, Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), (who, ironically, was himself a wealthy member of the bourgeoisie), called the labor theory of value: The worth of anything is reflected by the labor it took to produce it. Profit, therefore, was merely value stolen from the workers.

Also unlike Mill, Marx said that the state was merely an instrument of the capitalist class, "the committee of the bourgeoisie," there to enforce the rules that kept the workers in their places. Neither elections nor labor unions, which were quite weak in Marx's time, would provide the workers with any meaningful protections against the depredations of capital.

Marx gave us what he called dialectical materialism. This argued that the conditions of production determined the material and political conditions of life. So, for example, under feudalism people were ruled by aristocrats such as kings and dukes, and were treated badly in the process. But, Marx said, each new system sewed the seeds of its own demise. So feudalism managed to create order out of chaos, which led to trade, the growth of cities, and the end of feudalism.

For Marx, history wasn't a series of random events, but instead unfolded with all the crystalline clarity of a strand of DNA. One gene leads to another. The history of man was essentially the history of class struggle. And so, Marx predicted, capitalism would plant the flowers of its own funeral. It would so impoverish the workers that they would rise up, overthrow their capitalism overlords, and begin the happy march toward a workers' paradise. (It was for this reason that Marx expected that what he calledcommunism would arise first in the industrialized west, rather than in the agrarian east.)

Marx's answer was socialism, an idea developing in various times and places in the 19th century in response to the excesses of industrial capitalism. Under socialism, the workers would control the means of production, and people's needs would be met: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs," as Marx once put it. Marx understood that some people wouldn't like this idea much, and so the workers' paradise is to be reached through a transitory phase, "the dictatorship of the proletariat." The proletariat are the working class, and the dictatorship will allow them to learn, over time, that the promises of a market-based, capitalist economy are merely the siren song of our old friends the bourgeoisie, who never have your best interests at heart. Eventually, Marx said, people will be properly educated and the state will just "wither away," leaving people to produce for use, not profit, and leading more fulfilling lives. "Workers of the world unite," Marx and Engels wrote at the end of The Communist Manifesto. "The proletariat have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win." (Translations of this line vary from place to place, but you get the idea.)

Marx was a little hazy on how all this was supposed to work. As trenchant as his analysis of his time was, his prescriptions were a bit foggy. We are left to guess at how Marx would have regarded the oppressions that were later visited in his name.

The objections to Marx are many and worth considering. First, while he sees human history as an evolutionary process, for some unexplained reason it apparently just stops evolving when we get to communism. Seriously, if capitalism sewed the seeds of its own demise, wouldn't communism also naturally give birth to its own Oedipal assassin? (The Greek tragic hero Oedipus kills his own father to become king. Of course, he didn't know it was his own father, but that's Greek tragedy for you.) Second, if the problem with capitalist classical liberalism is that it tends to centralize power to the point where the system oppresses the many for the benefit of the few, wouldn't communism, run by a doctrinaire dictatorship, have the same problem all over? The anarchist writer Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1876) correctly predicted that if Marx's dictatorship of the proletariat came to pass, it would simply be just that, a dictatorship, oppressing people in much the same they'd been oppressed by business and government under capitalism. Finally, Marx may have underestimated people's ability to get change through normal democratic means—choosing leaders who would pass laws to empower and protect workers through the excesses of capitalism. It's worth noting that while Marx predicted communism would occur in the industrialized west, in fact it was two very poor, largely agrarian societies—China and Russia—that took to communism, whereas Europe and the Americas never really did. In societies where people already owned nothing, perhaps communism offered something. In societies where people were becoming wealthier, perhaps it did not offer as much.

Modern/Contemporary Theories

History did not stop with communism; people have continued to make arguments about the nature of politics and government long after Marx. Human beings are pretty clever, and people frequently think of new ways of looking at and explaining things. (And, let's be honest: In contemporary academics, you have to say something new and different if you want to get anywhere.) And while some of this theory isn't quite as fun as the older theory, it can be helpful in explaining why things happen the way they do (even if the answers aren't any clearer than they've ever been).

For example: Institutionalists have long looked at the institutions of politics and government, and tried to understand how the way we organize things can influence how we behave. From Madison until recent times, institutionalism was the dominant school of political philosophy in the United States. Certainly, as people figure out how the institutions of modern governments actually work, they will adjust their behavior to try to achieve what they want by making best use of those institutions. Institutionalism fell somewhat out of vogue as governments that looked good on paper, such as the Soviet Union's (whose constitution had substantial guarantees of individual liberty) failed to match their descriptions.

Other contemporary (which usually means after World War II) theories have drawn on other disciplines to try to explain politics, such as psychology, sociology and biology. Behavioralists have attempted to collect data on people's actual behavior and use that to explain why they behave the way they do. Post-behavioralists attempt to combine this with more traditional forms of analysis to form a more well-rounded picture of current political behavior. Systems theory, which borrows from biology, tries to look at politics as a living system, in which all the players interact to create the political environment in which we live. As a change in climate would affect a forest and the creatures that live in it, a change in political and economic conditions tends to produce reactions among citizens, which are somewhat reflected in actions by government (presuming the government is at all responsive to public pressure). Modernization theory notes that as nations get richer, they become more stable and more democratic (rich people don't riot, except maybe at sales where they run out of Guccis). Feminist theories examine the role of women in politics, rightly

pointing out that, historically, women were excluded from politics and economic and public life. While feminist political theory is generally aimed at gaining and preserving an equal footing for women in politics, it comes in all kinds of flavors, from Marxist feminists to democratic feminists, with several stops in between.

Rational choice theory attempted to apply economic logic to politics: People calculate what serves their interests best, and behave accordingly. This may seem sort of obvious, and it is, and it's also not so easy to predict what's rational from person to person. It also presumes that people are completely self-interested, and operate with perfect information, neither which is likely to be true all the time. And it also ignores culture-driven aspects of people's behavior. It can, however, help us predict elected officials' behavior. For example, will a city council approve a rezone for an apartment complex, or insist that the land be used for single-family homes? Rational choice theory would tell us that they will choose single-family homes, because they will attract wealthier people who will pay more taxes and demand less services, thus costing the city less money (and this is what often happens).

Critical theory might best be summed up in a light-bulb joke: How many critical theorists does it take to screw in a light bulb? Only one, but first he has to sit in a darkened room and determine whether light is something he really needs, or if it's just something that's been culturally imposed upon him. Critical theory looks at communication and culture to try to determine if 1. We make choices because we are driven by culture (which might lead us to make less than optimal choices) and 2. If, when we communicate, we are actually getting true to each other. The assumption of the leading light of critical theory, the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas, is that if we create this "ideal speech situation," is that we'll all be Marxists. And since communism ended up looking so much like Plato's guardian plan, that rather takes us back to the beginning, doesn't it?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Madison and the Founding Fathers sought to balance government's need for power with citizens' need for liberty
- Mill thought that government and society should create the greatest good for the greatest number.
- Marx thought that capitalism would so impoverish the workers that they would revolt and create communism.
- Contemporary theories have sought explain people's political actions by applying the disciplines of other social sciences.

EXERCISES

1. Read the preamble to the U.S. Constitution athttp://www.archives.gov/exhibits/c...ranscript.html (It won't take you long to read the whole thing.) Based on what you know about American government, is the nation living up to this?
2. Imagine Karl Marx's ideal state, run by and for workers. What could be better about this? What might be worse? Could this work?

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: Ideologies and Isms

3.1: Liberalism
3.2: Alternatives to Liberalism

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3.1: Liberalism

Learning Objectives

In this section, you will learn:

1. What liberalism is.
2. The different types of liberalism.
3. The difference between American liberalism and American conservatism.

Classical Liberalism

Liberalism can be a confusing term because it can mean more than one thing. Classical liberalism describes a major direction in western politics, of which American liberalism is a subset. Despite some wild-eyed conservatives accusing President Obama of being a socialist (because that's still dirty word in American politics), both Democrats and Republicans in the United States fall under the umbrella of classical liberalism. In the big picture, U.S. politics are fairly homogenous.

Classical liberalism has two prominent features:

1. A reliance on markets for economic decision making.
2. A reliance on democratic institutions for political decision making.

A reliance on markets means that people get to vote with their dollars, pounds, rupees or euros on what they want to buy and how much they're willing to pay for it. A market is all the producers, sellers and buyers of any product or service, such as the market for smart phones. In classical liberalism, we tend to try to leave markets alone to function as consumers and businesses see fit. So instead of the state deciding what gets produced and how much it will cost, the market decides through millions of individual transactions. Individuals can own and invest in businesses; businesses have some ability to choose what to make and what to charge for it. We call this economic system capitalism (a term first used, perhaps, by the English novelist William Makepeace Thackeray in 1852, although the term "capitalist" appears to be older).

Capitalism aims to promote maximum wealth by letting people try, fail and succeed in business. The Scottish philosopher Adam Smith (who didn't call it capitalism) described this in his work *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776. Smith (1723-1790) noted that just letting people do what they wanted to do produced more wealth, more efficiently, than did the prevailing economic theory of the time, mercantilism.

Mercantilism was a very Euro-centric theory (though it has since been applied elsewhere). It argued that the nation with the most gold was the best off. It also argued that nations should maximize imports and minimize exports, while maintaining overseas colonies to serve as sources of raw materials and markets for finished goods. This was the kind of policy that helped spur the American revolution, by limiting the British American colonists' ability to make what they wanted and trade with whom they wanted to. Ironically, perhaps, it is the very strategy that allowed the "Asian tigers"—Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore—to grow so much in the post-World War II era—limit imports, maximize exports, and build up domestic industries so they can compete effectively on world markets.

Adam Smith's book is long enough, and few enough people have read it, that it gets used to justify almost any sort of behavior. To our eyes, he didn't understand so much about how prices are set, particularly rents on property (he wrote, more or less, that it was about costs). But he did seem to grasp some ideas that are still with us today. In perhaps his most famous (and in some ways, most unfortunate) phrase, Smith wrote that if people simply tried to take care of themselves (make money), they would in fact make others better off (as if, he wrote, guided by "an invisible hand"—a verbal construction that makes it seem as if economics was some mystical science. It isn't). What Smith was really saying was that by working hard, saving, investing and consuming, people in a market economy generate more wealth, which means they are able to take care of themselves and their families, in the process of which they spend some of that wealth which generates more economic activity elsewhere in society. What is sometimes overlooked in Smith's work is that he understood, explicitly, that people are often trying to rig the market to limit competition, raise prices, and increase profits. Smith reserved special scorn for the East India Company, the government-sponsored monopoly that was in the process of robbing and conquering India and the Indians. In particular, Smith criticizes the company for how bad it was treating the Indians, who were in the process of being excluded from meaningful participation in the economic and political life of their

country. Despite (and perhaps because of) its monopoly status—it had no legal competitors for British trade with India—it was a terribly inefficient business, so much so that the British government had to repeatedly bail it out. This led the Brits to dump tea on the North American market, which led to the Boston Tea Party and the American revolution.

The British economy of the time still featured a lot of medieval laws restricting trade and the movement of workers, both of which kept prices high, supply down and the wages of most people lower than they would be otherwise. Smith understood that capitalism would generate more wealth for more people, as long as markets could be kept free of restraints.

The other half of the classical liberal prescription is a reliance on democratic institutions: In classical liberalism, political decisions are made in some way by people casting votes. States decide who is a qualified citizen, and those people get to vote in free elections. The state may set rules on who can run for office, such as a minimum age requirement, but if you reach that age, the state cannot decide that you can't run. Candidates don't have to be approved by the government before they can seek office. In most if not all instances, citizens elect people who make decisions on their behalf. This kind of government is called a republic.

As with every approach to government and the economy, classical liberalism has its share of strengths and weaknesses. By allowing people to spend and invest as they wish, and by depending on open elections, it provides a higher degree of individual liberty than do some alternatives. It creates opportunity for participating in the economic and political life of a country. By relying on markets to make economic decisions, it tends to produce more wealth, more efficiently (at lower cost). Because it depends upon elections for political decision making, it gives citizens an outlet for their discontent, and allows them to make changes to law and policy.

On the other hand, while classical liberalism tends to produce more wealth, it may distribute that wealth unevenly. An uneven distribution of wealth can lead to wealthy people dominating the political system. They have more money to contribute to election campaigns, and more resources with which to lobby the government. The U.S. Senate is pretty much a millionaires' club now, for example, and while it's not impossible for a very wealthy person to understand the concerns of someone who is poor, it may also be harder for them to understand the concerns of the less wealthy. Because the creation of wealth often gets tied to the broader concept of liberty, the system may have a difficult time dealing with problems generated by market activity, such as pollution. State controls on pollution, because they cost money, lower profits, and, under this equation, loss of profits gets portrayed as a loss of liberty.

Conversely, if the specific political system is more inclusive—gives everybody a real voice—it may not be very efficient in decision making, and may in fact be slow to respond to people's needs. So, for example, in the United States, the financing of the Medicare system faces problems down the road. Although it's a train wreck that everybody can see coming, the political system has so far been unable to deal with it because, in part, because of pressure from so many interest groups. Nobody wants to pay higher taxes to pay for the system, but nobody wants to reduce benefits in any way. While the political system may eventually deal with this, it might be better to deal with it sooner rather than later.

The form of the republic is not terribly important in considering how liberal it is. So it doesn't matter of the republic is a constitutional monarchy, a parliamentary democracy, or has an American-style division of power between president and the Congress. What matters is the availability of free and fair elections. Scholars classify some republics as "illiberal democracies," because although there are elections, they don't appear to be completely free and fair, such as in Russia. They may have either a parliamentary or a president/legislative government, but the system does not always work as advertised. Singapore is sometimes called an illiberal state, because of the dominance of a single party and restrictions on civil liberties. Mexico was an illiberal democracy for much of the 20th century, when the Institutional Revolutionary Party won every national election, regardless of the actual vote count.

American Liberalism

Classical liberalism isn't what many people in the United States mean when they say "liberal," however. American liberalism is a particular flavor of classical liberalism. Originally, it was a political philosophy that argued that government had a positive role to play in society. This movement and its cousin, progressivism, grew out of the reaction to the excesses of late 19th and early 20th century capitalism—no protections for workers such as a 40-hour week and mandatory overtime, child workers chained to factory floors, and very few health, safety and environmental laws.

Progressives (which some liberals have begun to call themselves, after American conservatives managed to turn "liberal" into a dirty word) saw a world that was dominated by big business and by big city political machines. Big business limited competition

and raised prices through the creation of trusts, conglomerations of firms in the same market so that one really big company dominated the entire market. Big city political machines dominated urban politics for much of the first half of the 20th century, uniting blocks of immigrant voters behind regimes that controlled much of what happened in large cities. While they empowered the powerless, who had been excluded from the political spoils of city life by business interests, they tended to exclude all the people who didn't agree with them. So the Progressives pushed for electoral reforms such as non-partisan elections (in which candidates don't run on the basis of party), open primary elections (previously dominated by party organizations, who thus controlled which candidates got on the ballot), and a stronger role for government in economic management (such as breaking up the trusts).

American liberalism can find its roots in the **Progressive movement**, but it really took flower after the Great Depression. Private charity was completely overwhelmed by the high level of unemployment, and so American politics turned heavily toward an active role for government in economic and eventually personal affairs. Liberals fought for more protections for workers and unions, a broader social safety net for the poor and unemployed, and health, safety and environmental regulations. As always, this approach to government has both costs and benefits—fewer people starving to death (which sometimes happened before welfare and unemployment compensation), versus higher taxes and higher costs for businesses and consumers, driven in party by complying with more regulations.

American Conservatism

American conservativism, like American liberalism, is a subset of classical liberalism, though perhaps a tiny big closer to the ideal. American conservatives have tended to argue for less government involvement in the economy, a movement that also grew out of the Great Depression. As the size and scope of U.S. government grew in the post-World War II era, conservatives began to argue that taxes and regulation were hampering economic growth and actually lowering people's standards of living. Conservatives argue that people should be able to make their own choices about where to spend their money, pointing out that taxes to support government programs effectively make those choices for you. They also argue that too wide a social safety net discourages people from working and taking care of themselves.

Traditional American conservatives tend to favor lower taxes, a balanced federal budget and less regulation of the economic system. In more recent years, however, a subset of American conservatives have become more concerned about issue such as abortion rights and gay marriage, topics that traditional conservatives might have avoided. For some conservatives, less government means less government. Others, including some who might call themselves Christian conservatives because of their faith, support social legislation to ban some kinds of behavior and encourage others. Conversely, so while American liberals have usually tended to advocate more government involvement in economic life, they now tend to favor less government involvement in private life. Religious conservatives tend to favor less government involvement in economic life, but more government involvement in private life. And liberals and religious conservatives sometimes find common ground over environmental issues. As the American writer Charles Dudley Warner said in the 1800s, "Politics makes strange bedfellows."

Realistically, we shouldn't be surprised that people hold opinions (more government in some areas, less in others) that don't always appear to be logically consistent. When we consider the liberal/conservative dichotomy, it's difficult to draw a clean line. Many of us have issues on which we are conservative, and others on which we may be liberal. For example, conservatives are for less government involvement in the economy, and yet southern conservative members of Congress consistently vote for subsidies for tobacco farmers.

Populism

While we're on the subject of American political isms, we shouldn't forget populism. Populism is not so much an ideology as an approach to politics. At its best, populism displays a genuine concern for citizens whose rights and needs have not been considered. At its worst, populists can be as oppressive as the people they replaced. A lot of the time, populism often displays a sort of talk-radio level of understanding of complicated issues (which is to say, not very much. Talk radio hosts on the left and on the right often seem to oversimplify complex topics, without always grasping the difficult choices behind them).

Generally speaking, populists make an appeal to the common person, and claim to represent their interests, as opposed to the interests of the rich and powerful. American political figures such Huey Long, Ralph Nader, Ross Perot and Pat Buchanan were or are populists. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, who claims to represent the common people of his country but who has also

enriched his family while in office, is a populist. Populism is a common theme in American politics; most American political candidates attempt to paint themselves as ordinary folks just like you and me. A movie such as*Dave*, a 1993 film starring Kevin Kline, plays on the American attraction to populism. Kline plays an average, well-meaning guy who's a dead-ringer for the president. When called upon to fill in for the incapacitated (and not very nice) president, Dave, among other things, manages to balance the federal budget with the help of his accountant over sandwiches one night. (Seriously, if it were that easy, wouldn't it have happened by now?) But the theme is common throughout American politics—if only honest, hard-working people of good moral standing could make it into office, all of our problems would go away.

Populists are fond of bashing big business, and/or big government; of promising to stand up for the little guy; and of vowing to save the nation from its certain doom. The problem with populists is that in those rare occasions where they get elected to major office, they tend to run things in the very way they have criticized the establish order about—high-handed, unresponsive, with surprisingly little real concern for what might best serve the state as a whole. When Huey Long became governor of Louisiana in 1928, he raised taxes on oil companies, got free textbooks for school children, and got roads and bridges built for a state that desperately needed them. However, he also forced state employees to donate 10 percent of their wages to his re-election fund, doled out highway contracts based on who kicked back the most money, harshly punished political opponents, and, by the time he was assassinated in 1935, had become the virtual dictator of the state. So while populists, like most people in politics, mean well, they don't always perform well.

Libertarianism

Libertarians believe in the least amount of government possible—national defense, police and fire, and not much else. (I'm over-simplifying here, but not by much). True libertarians are not at all concerned with social issues, as they don't see that as government's job. Hard-core American libertarians tend to oppose a global role for the U.S. beyond trade and commerce, leaving most decisions about everything up to private citizens.

Libertarianism grew out of the reaction to Soviet-style communism in the post-World War II era. Soviet-style communism was not noted for its commitment to liberty of any kind, and a number of writers, such as the novelist Ayn Rand, and economists such as Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman pushed for hands-off approach for the state.

Libertarianism offers considerable freedom of choice on a range of issues, and this is its chief virtue. By not encumbering the economy with higher taxes and regulations, it may promote economic growth. And the idea of maximum personal freedom is often very appealing. But to argue that if less government is better, then nearly no government is ideal is a difficult assertion. For one thing, the government of the United States (and parts of Europe) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was very much like the libertarian prescription. Government was incapable of dealing with economic downturns, and people suffered as a result. Workplace, food and transportation safety issues were not addressed, and the concentration of economic power tended to prod government to favor the wealthy even more. The first anti-trust laws, passed to break up business monopolies, were used instead to prevent workers from forming unions. You might think that's a good idea or a bad one, but if businesses can organize, why not workers? (You will, as always, have to make up your own mind on questions such as this.)

Libertarianism doesn't seem designed to deal with environmental issues in particular, as markets by themselves aren't always very good at dealing with problems such as over-fishing and air and water pollution. Libertarians would argue that such questions really are a matter of property rights, as in if what you do impacts the value of my property, then I have a valid complaint. However, that presumes that not much that happens on my property will impact your property, a notion that some ecological scientists would probably take issue with.

Libertarianism appeals to some people in current American politics, perhaps because when government does not seem to be performing well, the idea of less government sounds like a potential improvement. Many Americans are sympathetic to the notion of keeping the government from telling people how they should live. We might call that small "l" libertarianism, as opposed to those who belong to or support the Libertarian Party, which seeks to win elections to put their principles into practice. Some citizens probably also find appeal in the notion of a smaller government in hopes that would mean lower taxes.

It's an open question whether libertarianism could be made to work better than it did in the 1800s. Some people would tell you that it worked just fine; others point to the problems of the era as evidence that it didn't work all that well. A lot of services that government provides would go away, and how much infrastructure investment—roads, bridges, port facilities, public education—

would happen under a libertarian government is not clear. Obviously, I'm skeptical of this ideology, though you may not be (and that's OK). Libertarian students will sometimes respond to my criticisms of libertarianism by saying "But Any Rand said…" to which I reply, "For an economist, Ayn Rand was a helluva novelist." Suffice it to say that libertarianism, like most ideologies, has its strengths and weaknesses.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Classical liberalism is currently the dominant political and economic philosophy in the world.
- Classical liberalism and its variants all have strengths and weaknesses.

EXERCISES

1. What seems to be different between American conservatives and liberals at present? In what ways would you say you are conservative or liberal in your political beliefs?
2. If Libertarians were to win enough elections to take charge of a government, what changes would happen? How would people respond to the changing mix of public services and taxes? How would this work?

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3.2: Alternatives to Liberalism

Learning Objectives

In this section, you will learn:

1. What the difference is between socialism and communism.
2. What the difference is between fascism and nazism.
3. What anarchism is, and how it views people and politics differently from many other philosophies.

Classical liberalism is perhaps the dominant ideology of our time. Since World War II, and particularly since the end of the Cold War, more countries have moved from authoritarian governments to liberal ones. Economies have turned away from planning and toward markets for decision making, and people have pushed for more democratization in government. While this movement has been uneven both in timing and results, completely undemocratic states have declined in number. So in only a relative handful of states is either one or a small group of people in charge. But classical liberalism isn't the only way to run a society.

Socialism

Socialism is purely an economic system, and one that gets thrown around a lot in American political discourse (with reference to scary things Americans may not like). What it really means is public ownership of productive resources. Instead of private firms such as Ford, GM and Chrysler, you might have the Department of Automotive Transportation. This would be a state agency, charged with producing automobiles for society and with employing people to do that. Whereas capitalism is more concerned with generating wealth and efficiency, socialism is more concerned with equality of outcome. Socialists point to decades of growing inequality under capitalism and argue that it just doesn't work.

And right there is where we find the strengths and weaknesses of socialism. A private corporation such as Ford has shareholders—investors who own the company—who want to see the company be profitable and be paid back for their investment (through dividend payments and a higher share price). So Ford's management has to pay attention to costs as well as sales, so in theory it won't employ any more people than it has to. The automotive department also has to try to produce cars with reasonable efficiency, but it also is supposed to employ people so they all have jobs. More to the point, it is less likely to lay people off when sales are down. That adds costs and will make the organization less efficient. It will probably generate less wealth, although it may spread that wealth around more evenly. So, at a minimum, there's a trade-off there between efficiency and equity. In effect, more people will get benefits, but the average benefit level may be lower.

From a consumer standpoint, there's also a cost. Government managers historically cannot predict what people will want in terms of consumer goods, so that high-demand items tend to be in short supply while low-demand items tend to be oversupplied. And the goods tend to be of substandard quality. In a market-oriented system, firms that make bad goods go out of business. In a managed system, the organization making the bad goods is unlikely to be punished for making bad goods; it will be rewarded for putting more people to work. A market system also will make many of the same mistakes, but they are corrected more quickly.

An example of the challenge of socialism could be found in Poland before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Poland was then ruled by the Communist Party, and under the thumb of the Soviets. But what matters to us in this example is that the economic system involved socialism. In many parts of the world, bread is a basic foodstuff. In order to make bread available for everyone, state-run bakeries were limited in what they could charge for bread. As the bakeries could not thereby increase production (added ingredients cost extra money which, in a market economy, often means higher prices in the short term). So production was limited, and bread, perhaps because of the artificially low price, was always in short supply. The price of cake was not limited, however, and the bakeries always had plenty of cake. Marie Antoinette may not have said, "Let them eat cake," but socialist Poland's economic managers effectively did.

So socialism tends to offer a higher floor and a lower ceiling. Wealth is more evenly distributed and people tend to get the minimum of what they need—food, clothing, housing and health care. On the other hand, there's just less of everything to go around, and consumers tend to see less quality and less choice. Overall standards of living may be lower. And while a socialist state could be democratic in terms of open elections, the lack of a meaningful private sector at least calls into question whether there will be political interests who are able to oppose the power of the state.

We should understand that in fact most states have what we might call a mixed economy, combining elements of both socialism and capitalism. That means that some services and goods will be provided by the private sector, while others may be provided by a public agency. So in the United States, for example, in some parts of the country people buy their water from private water companies. But in other parts, especially in the west, water is often provided by utility districts, which are owned by the people who live in the district and managed by an elected board of commissioners. The same thing is true for a number of utility services, such as sewage treatment and electricity.

People routinely argue both sides of this question, even in an ostensibly capitalist nation such as the United States. Advocates of markets maintain that socialism will limit freedom and lower living standards, while critics of capitalism point to poverty amid the considerable wealth created by market activity. You will have to decide for yourself where you land in that debate.

Communism

Communism is another complicated idea. For the men who coined the term, the 19th century German philosopher and economist Karl Marx, and his partner Friedrich Engels, it meant a state that "withered away," as people evolved out of the basic greed that makes capitalism possible. For critics of the idea, it tends to mean the economic and political system employed in the Soviet Union (1917-1991) and in China from 1949 until the early 1980s. We can't really know what Marx would have thought of this, as he was somewhat vague on how to get to the workers' paradise he envisioned, and he didn't live to see what a self-professed Marxist state actually looked like. So we should be careful to separate Marx from his several stepchildren. This system is also sometimes called Marxism-Leninism, after Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924), founder of the Soviet Union and the person who put Marxism into practice. So while we can't say for sure what real communism might be like, we can talk about what people who said there were communists did.

For lack of a better term, Soviet-style communism meant a high degree of socialism (and hence a low degree of private ownership), coupled with a one-party state. So while there were elections in the Soviet Union, there was usually only one candidate, who had been approved by the Communist Party.

Soviet communism had all the problems of socialism, and then some. While it did mean that people had jobs, homes and health care, consumer goods were often inferior and in short supply. The old joke about the Soviet Union was that it's minus-60 degrees Fahrenheit in Leningrad (St. Petersburg) in February and you still can't get a cold Coke (Soviet-made refrigerators being not very good at actually keeping things cold).

For a while, especially after World War II, it looked like the Soviet system might actually work. The Soviet Union enjoyed substantial economic growth in the years after the war, and you had to wonder when Soviet Premier Nikita Khruschev promised "We will bury you" in a famous speech to western ambassadors in Poland in 1956.

It didn't last. When much of your economy has been destroyed by war, and you're effectively starting from zero, your initial growth rates will look pretty good. In reality, it simply wasn't a very efficient system. Other than weapons, there were no Soviet-made consumer goods that anybody in the rest of the world wanted to buy. Western travelers to the Soviet Union often reported making money selling denim jeans on the black market to fashion-hungry Russian consumers. And you could always get a better exchange rate on rubles to dollars if you met somebody around the corner.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the economic echoes continued. When I covered air shows around the world, at which aerospace manufacturers pitched their products to airlines and defense officials, it took some years before Russian aerospace representatives learned to say "we think this product will help our customers make money." Before that, they mostly talked about how much product they could push out the door, not whether it was any good.

I visited a friend of mine in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, in 1993 after the collapse of the Soviet empire. His fax machine didn't work; three employees from the state telephone company came out to tell him that it was broken, and they offered to sell him a new one for $600 (about $900 in 2012 prices). The problem was in the phone lines, however; his fax machine worked fine at his neighbor's apartment.

"This is the legacy of 40 years of socialism," said my friend. "These guys just don't want to work."

Later that day, however, we happened across the monument to the victory of the west in the **Cold War**. As we rounded a corner in Bratislava, we came upon on a K-mart with a Pepsi billboard on the side.

“There, you see?” I told my friend. “That’s it. We won.”

That being said, Soviet citizens, when surveyed, said they didn’t mind the system, but they were often unhappy with the government. The one-party state meant there were no avenues for public protest and discontent, and throughout Soviet history people were thrown in jail or even killed for disagreeing with the state. So while the system provided basic standards of living for most people, it tended toward political repression. That’s because the system was aimed at creating a broad version of socialism, and because ruthless people were sometimes more likely to take power. The Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin may have killed 6-7 million of his own people; Chinese Communist leader Mao Tse-Tung may have killed 30 million.

Chinese communism was different than Soviet communism. In a time of unrest and disunion in China following the collapse of the Qing Dynasty early in the 20th century, Mao led what amounted to a peasant rebellion to take control of the country in 1949. China was a land of millions of landless peasants. Unlike the Nationalists led by Chaing Kai-Shek, Mao was not beholden to the landlords and moneyed interests. He insisted that his soldiers treat the peasants with respect, and he offered those peasants hope. Mao redistributed land to the peasants, and agricultural production boomed. He then declared that peasant farmers could form cooperatives to pool their resources, and production rose even more. But then he declared that the farms were to be collectivized—owned by the state—everybody and nobody—and production fell.

So while Chinese communism was never quite the unyielding monolith that Soviet communism became, it increasingly became a function of Chairman Mao’s quirky ego. Around 1958, in a quixotic bid to produce more steel than the United Kingdom (and modernize China’s economy), Mao pushed the people to create backyard steel furnaces. This led to smelting down lots of useful stuff to make useless steel, and to a famine that killed 20-30 million people (since so much food was diverted from the countryside to the cities). Even the current Chinese government has declared that the Great Helmsman was right only about 70 percent of the time. Later, Mao pushed what became known as the Cultural Revolution (roughly 1966-1969, with echoes until 1976), in which legions of young people led an effort to denounce people who appeared to have backslid away from true communism. This led to widespread destruction of Chinese cultural artifacts, some deaths, and millions of people persecuted for their alleged capitalist beliefs. A Chinese colleague of mine in graduate school said that his parents, schoolteachers, were forced to the school every day to be denounced for their crimes. He said this lasted for two years.

Defenders of communism argue that a Marxist state doesn’t have to be like that, but too often it was. The Soviet constitution was full of guarantees of human rights, but there was no way to compel the state to enforce those guarantees. Any citizen could join the Communist Party, but that was no guarantee of having any influence. The lack of meaningful political participation both delegitimized the state in the eyes of its citizens, and also failed to provide any kind of check on the power of the state when it went off course.

And that happens, because the communist governing apparatus tends to invite ruthless people to take power. Whoever can threaten or appeal to the vanity of enough people will sometimes get the job, and sometimes can be too often. (It sort of reminds me of a lot of places I’ve worked—the people who become managers are truly terrible with people, but they said what the bosses above them wanted to hear.) With no check on the power of the state, a bad leader can cause great suffering for a lot of people.

Ironically, the communist state that may have worked the best was also led by a strongman dictator, Yugoslavia under Marshal Josip Broz Tito (1892-1980). Yugoslavia had been cobbled together by the British and French at the end of World War I, ostensibly to make it big enough to defend itself. But in the process, they lumped together a diverse set of people—Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, Montenegrins, Slovenians, Albanians and Macedonians—who hadn’t always gotten along. Tito held it all together for as long as he lived, and Yugoslav communism apparently did feature worker-led enterprises, higher standards of living, and less outright oppression than was common in some other states. (Although when I traveled through it in the 1970s, it still looked pretty bleak compared to the rest of Europe.) Tito was noteworthy also for thumbing his nose at both the Soviets and the Chinese. But after Tito’s death, the patchwork nation quickly unraveled, leading to a war that gave us the term “ethnic cleansing” as Serbs fought Croatians and Bosnians in a rather nasty conflict. Yugoslavia is now no more, having dissolved into at least seven different states, none of them still communist.

The performance of other communist states, like the states themselves, has been all over the map. China’s rulers still call themselves the Communist Party, but they’re not very communist, particularly when it comes to economic policy. It’s now possible to own a business in China, although the government still plays a big role in the economy. Ditto for Vietnam.

China is an interesting experiment in the long-term survival of a communism party, if not of communism. Since the death of Chairman Mao in 1976, the country has gradually liberalized its economy. Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997), "rehabilitated" after falling victim to the Cultural Revolution, became the new leader in 1978. Deng had been a Marxist since his youth, but later uttered the very un-Marxist statement "It doesn't matter if it's a black cat or a white cat, as long as it catches a mouse." As the economy was opened up under this leadership, he followed up his earlier pronouncement with the less ambiguous "It is glorious to be rich." Farms were de-collectivized, people were allowed to start businesses, and the economy boomed. China is now the second largest economy in the world, after the United States.

However, if we measure the economy on a per-person basis (per capita GDP, or gross domestic product), China ranks 95th (the U.S. slips to 20th), which means there are hundreds of millions of very poor people among China's estimated population of 1.5 billion. Rising living standards is one of the key ways in which the not-very-Communist Party maintains legitimacy. Western scholars have two theories about how this will all play out: In the hard-landing scenario, China falls apart. The soft-landing scenario, China evolves into something more like a liberal democracy. Chinese officials in different parts of the country have different theories—in the north, they say they will remain "communist," while in the south I have heard scholars say "we'll be a democracy in 20 years." Despite a substantial degree of government control and influence on the economy, the Chinese for the moment have rejected the economic portions of communism.

North Korea remains an economic and political basket case, where the government maintains legitimacy by convincing people that the state is all that stands between the people and sure annihilation by the rest of the world, even as the people literally starve to death. At the other end of the spectrum is Cuba, which has high rates of literacy, housing, employment and good health care, but no political freedom and a fair amount of political repression. Under founding father Fidel Castro's brother, Raoul, some small economic liberalization has occurred—you can own a restaurant, for example, but only employ family members. This is of small consolation to the Cuban-Americans, exiles, who lost land and businesses when Cuba went communist in 1959. Despite its successes, Cuba has gone from a food exporter to a food importer in 50 years of communism, and its future remains uncertain.

Anarchism

Anarchism is an interesting and challenging school of thought, and perhaps the one that might not actually have been really tried (aside from the occasional experiment). Anarchists, like libertarians, want nearly no government, but unlike libertarians, theirs is a vision driven by localized cooperation rather than by a faith in markets.

The anarchist vision is a little bit like Marx's workers' paradise, but anarchists are less likely to call for a dictatorship of the proletariat to get us there. Some thinkers have said that what Marx missed was the idea that it doesn't matter what kind of state and economic institutions you have, all of them will become tools of oppression. Marx would have disagreed; his vision was that the state would "wither away" as people learned to co-exist and no longer required the overarching management of a formal state. This is, in a way, the "don't hate the playa, hate the game" school of political philosophy. We're not bad people; it's the state that makes us that way.

Beyond that, one lumps together the many strains of anarchism at one's own peril. Anarchists range from people who think society should be organized collectively (anarcho-communists) to a libertarian strain that believes in private property and free enterprise, just no government (and no big business). Anarcho-syndicalists want to replace capitalism with an economy run by workers for workers, with "production for use, not for profit" and an end to wages.

The Chinese philosopher Lao Tze advocated a kind of anarchist approach to life. At one point in his writings he encouraged the good person to move to the country, and live simply with family members (and a few servants). Lao Tze may have been a contemporary of Confucius (551-479 BCE); on the other hand, he did write something, the Tao te Ching, one of those vague works of literature that has since been claimed an influence by elites, the poor, libertarians, and Moslems, as well as anarchists.

The American writer Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) said that government was an engine of evil, promoting corruption and dishonesty, but he only said one should disobey government when it does wrong. What he preached bordered on anarchism; it was Thoreau (and not Thomas Jefferson) who said "The best government is that which governs least," following that up with "That government is best which governs not at all." But Thoreau appeared to be speaking as much metaphorically as he was practically.

The first person to call himself an anarchist was Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865), a French politician and theorist. Proudhon argued that "property is theft"—in essence, saying that claiming to own something necessarily steals it from someone else. He also

characterized anarchism as “order without power,” underscoring anarchists’ general belief that if left alone, most people will do the right thing. Whereas most political philosophers have focused on what people do wrong, anarchist thought does focus more on what people do right.

It’s hard to judge these ideas. This hasn’t been tried on a large scale, and it’s really difficult to imagine a society so decentralized existing amid a world of nations armed to the teeth and a world of businesses bent on profit.

But things that look like anarchism have been tried on a small scale; the history of the 1800s is dotted with town-sized utopian experiments where people tried to live the kind of life anarchists have long preached. Experiments in anarchist-style societies have been short-lived, if only because they were overrun by forces that wanted to be in power themselves. At other times and places, such as Robert Owen’s New Harmony community in Indiana in the 1820s, things fell apart if only because some people worked and some people just didn’t.

Owen (1771–1858) was a British mill-owner (and hence a capitalist) who styled himself a socialist reformer. His mill in Manchester, England, was a model for its time, and he limited his profits to try to take better care of his workers, many of whom were orphan children. This was a time when many millworkers were paid only in company tokens, redeemable only at the company store. Workers were often little better than serfs, bound to the factories where they worked and to the towns in which they lived.

Owen envisioned small, self-governing, self-supporting communities in which people would take care of themselves and provide for their own needs. Owen managed to give this a try, both in Scotland and in Indiana. Both experiments fell apart, as friction developed between people who wanted to work and people who apparently wouldn’t. So while it might be true that most of the time people will do the right thing, just often enough, they don’t. We can’t know whether anarchism is any of its forms would work; we do know that it, like every other ideology, it would have its strengths and weaknesses.

One society that looked a bit like anarchy, and worked, was the Tiv of Nigeria. The fourth-largest ethnic group in Nigeria, the Tiv governed themselves by relying on relationships. They all considered themselves descended from the same ancestor (a man named Tiv), and society was broken down into small, extended family groups who lived and worked together. Tiv society, before the British began to try to impose “order,” had no courts, no chiefs, no elected councils—just family and relationships. Disputes were settled by bargaining and negotiation, and by the knowledge that relationships are ongoing. You don’t want to anger anyone too much, because today’s opponent may be tomorrow’s ally. And so, with remarkable success, the Tiv worked things out, and long maintained a relatively peaceful, stable society.

How would this work elsewhere? Would it work elsewhere? Again, we can’t really know for sure. Clearly, for the Tiv, a sense of kinship and common lineage helped; in fluid societies in the west, people sometimes barely know their neighbors before they move. By multiple accounts, the lack of sense of community makes us less happy, but that seems unlikely to change for the foreseeable future. So the constant introduction of new people means that it could be more difficult for people in many parts Europe, Asia and the Americas to create a system of self-governance based on lineage, kinship and custom.

Clearly, in some ways, government does make people worse off. Wherever human institutions are created, for whatever reasons, some people will sometimes misuse them to exercise power over other people. Human institutions create traditions, which will be both valuable in creating predictability, and damaging because traditions can limit the possibility of needed change.

But even if we concede that human institutions can make people worse, and worse off, that doesn’t necessarily say that a lack of institutions—a lack of government—will make them better, or better off. The institutions in which we live—schools, businesses where we work, churches, governments—have an impact on how we develop and behave as people. But we also have an impact on them, and each of us, in some small way, make those institutions what they are.

Nazism and Fascism

We have saved the worst for last. Fascism, and its more racist cousin, nazism, should be the least-appealing ideologies we can find, and yet some people are drawn to them even in this day.

Fascism got its start in Italy in the mind and ideas of Benito Mussolini (1883-1945). The word fascism derives from an Italian word that originally meant a bundle, as in sticks, but later came to mean a group or a league. Mussolini was not the first to use the term that way, but he helped put fascism on the political map in the way that we understand it today.

Mussolini was a bully, a thug, a man who used fear to gain power. He started his political life as a socialist, then invented fascism as a way of gaining power and justifying the use of that power. Much of Europe was in economic and social turmoil after the end of World War I. Mussolini climbed through that window of opportunity. He took power in 1922 by marching on Rome with an army of ruffians. Despite having been defeated at the polls in previous elections, his threatening behavior led him to be named prime minister.

As Gertrude Stein once said of Oakland, California, “there’s no ‘there’ there.” Stein was certainly wrong about Oakland, but it’s certainly true of fascism. To read anything by a famous fascist such as Hitler or Mussolini is to quickly recognize that this isn’t a theory as much as it is a lot of words without much real meaning. The rationalization of fascism is pretty much, “we’re right; you’re wrong if you’re against us; and we’re right because we say we’re right.” This is an oversimplification, but not much. Fascism glorifies the power of the state, but it’s hard to tell how that makes the majority better off.

Fascism argues that some people are just better than others, and they should be in charge. Naturally, the only test of this is whether you agree with the fascists. As a result, fascism appeals to nationalism, that sense of a people that they have unique qualities and a unique destiny. Fascism glorifies the state; the individual exists for the state, not the other way around. Fascism glorified war and poked fun at peace; it was also expressly anti-communist. Fear of communism, in the wake of the Russian revolution, was to be a commonly played card in western politics for decades to come. Despite how the horrors of World War II discredited fascism, it got a boost in the Cold War era (between World War II and the collapse of the Soviet Union) because it could claim to be not communist, oppressive though it typically was. This became increasingly awkward for western powers such as the United States, because it meant we were allied with rulers whose politics were antithetical to what Americans say they believe about freedom and democracy. But if they were against communism, we helped prop them up.

Nazism was Adolph Hitler’s version of fascism, and Hitler was an early admirer of Mussolini (who was not so far gone that he didn’t soon realize, after they met, that Hitler was crazy). Nazi was a corruption of “National Socialist,” the name of Hitler’s party. That was an odd name, as the party clearly didn’t believe in socialism. Germany was the only Nazi state, and it lasted barely 12 years. Yet it remains worth considering because of the unparalleled damage it did to people around the world.

As with Mussolini’s writing, Hitler’s meandering diatribes don’t really describe a coherent ideology as much as they justify the use of power for private ends. Nazism, as you probably know, was expressly racist, denigrating everyone who didn’t fall into Hitler’s vision of a perfect Aryan race. (There probably were Aryans, once, and they were most likely from India.) Like Mussolini, Hitler took power through fear and intimidation. Also like Mussolini, he rapidly ended any pretense of electoral government. Unlike Mussolini, whose crimes were serious but much smaller, he proceeded over the next dozen years to horrify the world in ways it could not have previously imagined. An estimated 60 million people died in World War II, and while Hitler wasn’t responsible for all of their deaths, he was the leading cause of the tragedy.

Nazism and fascism could be said to be forms of totalitarianism, a kind of authoritarian government that relies on an arbitrary view of the law (it’s not the same very everybody), and the cult-like status of official leaders. It’s a religion in which the thing to be worshipped is the state, and the state takes human form in the guise of the leader. It becomes, in the end, an extended pep rally, with rather severe penalties for not cheering along.

So there’s not much to say for fascism in any form. The one possible strength of fascism is its ability to make decisions, but the fact they are usually such wrong decisions makes that of no consolation. Mussolini was said to make the Italian trains run on time, but even that was a myth: The trains didn’t run on time during World War I; after that, they got back on schedule.

Under fascism, the lack of meaningful elections provides no check on the power of the state, which can then proceed to systematically oppress unpopular groups. Fascism purports to be capitalist, but as the system rewards friends and punishes enemies, the uneven granting of state favors means market don’t really function efficiently, and people’s economic opportunities may be quite limited. This is sometimes called “crony capitalism,” and it tends to be a problem in authoritarian regimes in general.

Fascism only ever seems to take hold when someone is able to convince people that their order and security are at risk, even as those agents tend to be contributing to that problem. Mussolini promised a restored Roman empire and Hitler a “thousand-year reich,” but together all they got was a decade or two of incredible human suffering. No other ideology can make that claim, and none should. Mussolini was killed by his own people in 1945; they cut off his head and stuck it on a pole near Milan. Not long afterward, Hitler took poison in a bunker in Berlin. He had his henchman burn his body so that he is head wouldn’t end up the same way.

The longest-surviving fascist state may have been Spain under the rule of Francisco Franco (1892-1975). Franco took power at the end of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). He ruled until his death in 1975, decreeing that when he was gone, Spain would again become a monarchy. King Juan Carlos, upon taking office, called for elections and Spain became a constitutional monarchy and a liberal democracy, which it remains. Franco probably was able to remain in power because he didn't follow Hitler and Mussolini, who had supported him in the civil war, into World War II. Franco didn't start out as a fascist, and didn't end up as one. He relied on the support of the Spanish fascist Falange party, but after the end of that war, Franco backed away from fascist ideology, although he continued as dictator until his death.

Fascism has never entirely gone away; there are tiny neo-Nazi movements scattered around the U.S. and Europe. Mussolini's granddaughter, Alessandra Mussolini, after a career as a minor film star and pin-up girl, has served in both the European and Italian parliaments. While she hasn't shied away from her grandfather's notorious past, her politics, while generally right wing, have been all over the map. Maybe it's something about Italian politics. Voters there also once elected former porn star Ilona Staller to parliament, but she was a member of the Lista del Sole, the first Italian pro-environment party.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Other ideologies outside of classical liberalism and its variants tend to offer greater equality of outcomes but generate less overall wealth.
- Socialism is an economic system that provides greater equality of result but less equality of opportunity.
- Communism combines a socialist economy with a one-party government.
- Anarchism has not been tried on a large scale outside of the Tiv in Nigeria.
- Fascism glorifies the state; individuals are important only as part of the state.
- Nazism glorifies the state, with an expressly racist approach to politics

EXERCISES

1. How would the place where you work be different if it was a government agency? If it's already a public agency, what would be different if it was privatized?
2. Which countries still claim to be communist? What things could cause that to change?

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: Types of Governments - A Republic or a Democracy?

The precise definition of democracy is direct rule by the people. In a true democracy, the people would vote directly on whatever comes before the state—laws, amendments, and decisions by government. If your class votes for a take-home exam instead of an in-class test, that would be an example of democracy. And anything that invites people to participate in decision-making in some meaningful way, such as elections, can be said to be democratic. But that's not the same thing as a democracy. Why does this matter? First, words should have meaning, so that when we talk about politics, for example, we're all speaking the same language. When Americans call their government a democracy, they are also implying that they are directly in control of government. It probably would surprise many of them to learn that the Founding Fathers, about whom so many American citizens like to wax nostalgic if not poetic, thought that ordinary citizens should have a definite but limited role in directly controlling the government. Calling the government a democracy may also lead to unrealistic expectations of how government works and how quickly it responds. In fact, most of the modern "democracies" are designed to be a little bit slow and a little bit unresponsive. In this chapter, we'll see why.

4.1: Direct Democracy

4.2: Indirect Democracy

4.3: Constitutions

4.4: Divisions of Power

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4.1: Direct Democracy

Learning Objectives

In this section, you will learn:

1. What democracy means.
2. What the difference is between direct and indirect democracy.
3. Ways that direct democracy plays a role in contemporary government.

The usual example of a true democracy is ancient Athens. The word democracy derives from Greek roots, “demos” (people) and “kratis” (power). Athens, still the capital of modern Greece, was the richest and most powerful of Greek citystates, at a time when Greece was divided into dozens of competing tiny states. Athens had democratic elements in its government from about 500 BCE off and on until the Romans effectively conquered Greece in the Second Century BCE. Other Greek city-states had democratic governments, but Athens is the one about which we have the best information.

At its peak, ancient Athens had between 250,000 and 400,000 people (estimates vary), of whom as many as two-thirds were slaves. Only free male citizens (who had completed military training) were allowed to participate actively in politics, so that only about 20 percent of the male citizens could actually vote. And, unlike a true democracy, they didn’t vote on everything; they elected councils above them to handle some decisions. But big decisions, such as going to war, were made by the assembly, a monthly gathering of eligible citizens. The assembly had a quorum (the minimum number needed to be present for the decisions to count) of 6,000, making it one of the broadest-based governing bodies in history.

This is what we now call **direct democracy**, in that the people, however defined, make government decisions directly. Direct democracy has the virtue of including more people and giving them a voice, and the people aren’t always wrong. Others have suggested that there’s a price in giving everybody a voice. The challenge of direct democracy for Athens is the same challenge that direct democracy faces today: Leaving decisions to people who may not be paying enough attention, and may get caught up in the passion of the moment, can lead to bad decisions. For the Athenians, that meant throwing out good leaders in favor of demagogues (candidates and leaders who say what people want to hear, as opposed to, perhaps, what they need to hear), and entering wars that succeeded only in squandering Athens’ blood and treasure. So, as with most ideas in politics, direct democracy involves trade-offs.

Contemporary Direct Democracy

Direct democracy is still with us today, nonetheless. In nearly 90 nations, and in the United States, people do sometimes vote en masse on laws. In the U.S., 27 states have some form of initiatives and referenda, which are tools of direct democracy.

Initiatives

Initiatives allow people to propose laws directly, either to the voters as a whole (direct initiative) or to state legislatures (indirect initiative). With a direct initiative, the people vote, and if it passes, the measure becomes law. With an indirect initiative, the measure goes first to the state legislature, which typically can pass the measure into law; ignore it, in which case it goes to the people for a vote; or pass their own alternative, which goes on the ballot along with the original measure. This brings voters into a gray area, since state constitutions don’t always make clear what happens if both measures pass.

Initiatives usually require some number of signatures of registered voters to make it on the ballot. In 18 states, voters can use the initiative process to amend state constitution.

Direct ballot measures tend to peak when the economy is soft; in the U.S there were 183 measures from the people on state ballots in 2010, but only 34 in 2011. In the latter year, 22 of those passed. In 100 years of initiative history, Oregon (351) and California (329) have had the most initiatives on the ballot, by far.

In the U.S., initiatives grew out of the frustration of voters in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, who found themselves unable to budge state governments on various issues. They saw state government as too beholden to powerful interest groups such as mining and railroads, and saw the initiative process as a convenient end-around maneuver to get past legislatures that appeared to be locked down by lobbyists.

As with everything in government, initiatives have been used for good and for greed (which is which naturally depends on your point of view). Citizens have used the initiative process to make the political process more transparent, to increase funding for schools and various other public programs, and to require more training for child-care providers. They have also been used to cut taxes, raise taxes, decriminalize marijuana, limit abortion, and, in Oklahoma, make English the official language of the state. Citizens certainly have the right to ask for these things. But when citizens in successive years raise spending on schools but cut taxes (as they did in my state, Washington), you should begin to get an idea of the challenges of the initiative process. Voters may not be paying enough attention to recognize that simultaneously raising spending and cutting revenue may not be very good policy.

A good example of the mixed blessings of initiatives is California's Proposition 13, passed in 1978. By this initiative, citizens of California amended the state Constitution to limit future property tax increases by no more than 2 percent. Property taxes tax property owners based on the assessed value of their land and buildings. In some ways, the tax is a relic of the 19th century, when land was indeed a good measure of people's wealth. Now that very few of us are farmers, this might not be the case. Nonetheless, property taxes continue to be a major source of revenue for state and local governments. The trade-offs in Prop 13 should be fairly obvious: Property owners were protected from rising tax rates in the often-booming California real estate market, since rising property values would otherwise mean higher taxes for property owners. Voters also were concerned that retired people could be priced out of their homes as property values and taxes continued to rise. On the other hand, state and local government have been starved for cash ever since, particularly local governments such as cities and school districts. Critics also say it interferes with the housing market since people are less likely to sell their homes (a change of ownership means a new baseline assessment for tax value; otherwise the baseline is the home value in 1975). So while it might have saved California taxpayers more than $500 billion, some of that money might have gone to things people say they want, like good schools. Clearly, it's a trade-off.

Meanwhile, initiatives have another shortcoming. For most initiatives, you get an up-or-down vote, and the initiative is passed into law, unchangeable for a couple of years before a legislature can refine it. Contrast that with the legislative process, in which a proposed law (a bill) is discussed, debated and amended before it becomes law, and subject to change as soon as somebody recognizes that it doesn't work as planned.

Finally, although they are called citizen initiatives, increasingly they are a tool of people with money. Courts have allowed paid signature-gatherers, a great help when you might need 200,000-300,000 valid signatures of registered voters to get a measure on the ballot. Campaigns are increasingly funded by interest groups with an axe to grind, with money coming from out-of-state both for and against measures that, ostensibly, are to be decided by the people of that state. While everyone has a right to her or his opinion, and the freedom to express that opinion as they see fit, big-money initiative campaigns seem a little different than what the original reformers had in mind.

Referenda

Referenda (the proper plural of referendum, also sometimes called plebiscites) are another form of direct democracy, available in 24 U.S. states and more than 30 countries. Referenda allow legislatures to put things before the people for a vote, such as constitutional amendments and tax measures. (Every state except Delaware requires a vote by the citizens to approve constitutional amendments.)

Referenda also allow citizens to force a measure passed by a legislature onto the ballot, usually with an eye to overturning that measure. Often this means there's an interest group that wants a new law changed, because it takes time, live bodies and money to mount a successful referendum campaign. This usually features an expensive campaign in which the law is painted as a threat to mom, decency and the republic, when it may in fact just be a threat to that particular industry. We may be for or against businesses, unions or environmental groups who want to repeal a law, but it is their right to pursue their interests.

Referenda have been used to make big decisions around the world. Voters in Scotland and Wales used referenda to decide to create their own parliaments in 1997. Voters in Norway said no to joining the European Union in 1994. Voters in Quebec, Canada chose not to secede from Canada in 1980 and 1995. Voters in Montenegro voted to leave what was left of Yugoslavia in 2006. And white voters in South Africa in 1992 voted overwhelmingly to formally end the policy of apartheid, in which South Africans of color were not allowed to vote.

In the U.S., in 2011 Maine voters used a referendum to overturn a new law that banned same-day registration for voters (register to vote and get to vote on election day). Voters in Ohio overturned a new law that limited unionized workers' collective bargaining

rights. In 2010, in Washington state, voters approved the repeal of a 5-cent tax on bottled water and other “non-food” consumables. So whatever we think of the measures, referenda give voters a chance to just say no.

Bonds and Levies

State and local governments in the United States in particular use direct democracy in another way—votes on special levies and bond measures for schools and other public facilities. Levies are usually additions to the local property tax—so many cents per $1,000 of assessed value of the property. Bondsare a way in which government all over the world finance projects. If an investor buys a bond, they are lending the government agency money, which means they get an interest payment, plus their original investment back. Governments use this method of financing when they need a lot of cash up front—if the local school district is building a new high school, the contractor has to get paid so he or she can pay for the materials and pay all the workers. Investors may be willing to lend money to the school district because it’s a relatively safe investment. So in a bond-issue election, local governments are asking voters to promise to pay additional property tax to pay back the investors who buy the bonds.

U.S. state constitutions often require such votes, which force local governments to explain to voters why they need the money and what they will do with it. Some states add turnout requirements to such special levies, which is fundamentally undemocratic if you think about it. If you are against the levy, and if there’s a turnout requirement, the best thing you could do is stay home. Normally, not voting means you have surrendered your voice in this matter; turnout requirements effectively reward not voting. Others argue that it simply puts more pressure on school, water and fire districts to work harder to prove to voters that they need the money. Turn-out requirements for school levies were eased in Washington state after many school districts found themselves getting “yes” votes by as much as 90 percent, only to see the levies fail because not enough voters showed up at the polls. You will have to decide which argument makes more sense to you. Some bond measures also require a super-majority, so that the measure needs a 60 percent yes-vote to pass.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Democracy literally means “direct rule by the people.” Sometimes this is referred to as “direct democracy.”
- Direct democracy existed only partially in ancient Greek citystates such as Athens.
- Direct democracy is found in initiatives, referenda, and local levy and bond issue votes.

EXERCISES

1. Does your state allow initiatives and/or referenda? If so, how have these been used to change the law in your state?
2. How much do local governments in your area, such as school or fire districts, rely on special levies for funding? Is there a minimum turn-out requirement for approval?

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4.2: Indirect Democracy

Learning Objectives

In this section, you will learn:

1. What a republic is.
2. The different kinds of republics.
3. Alternatives to republican forms of government.

Republics

The problems and opportunities of direct democracy haven't changed in 3,000 years of written history. At best, they empower the people to make needed changes. At worst, they put important decisions directly in the hands of people who may get carried away by the passion of the moment, or simply aren't paying enough attention.

How then do we create a government that both gives people a voice but still manages to let government be run by folks who are at least paying attention? The answer for some has been the republic. In arepublic, strictly speaking, people elect others who make decisions on their behalf. When you consider that even in ancient Athens, the assembly of 6,000 still elected a council of 500, you see that most democratic governments have included some features of a republic. Because they typically let a broad range of citizens vote, we might call them **democratic republics**, but as that term was used by so many erstwhile communist states, "democratic republic" can have multiple meanings.

Republics are designed to put a check on the passions of the people, which can make them seem remote and unresponsive. The designers of the U.S. Constitution did not see themselves as "democrats," as democracy to them, from their reading of history, looked like rule by the mob. The party of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, which eventually became the Democratic Party, originally called themselves Republicans (in some texts, they are referred to as "Democratic-Republicans," but they apparently never referred to themselves as such). Hence the many layers of government, and checks and balances, that one finds in various republics—all designed to slow the whole process down.

This, of course, can be maddening if what you want is government to do something—anything—make a change. On the other hand, making government work more slowly, forcing the governors to deliberate and discuss, isn't lacking in virtue either. Governments are full of people, and people are simultaneously capable of flights of inspiration and genius as well as complete foolishness. So in a republic, the goal tends to be to stop things from happening as much as it is to make things happen. What we also hope for in republics is that an idea that becomes a law is hammered, recut and welded until the idea is so compelling that everyone says yes.

Of the 192 recognized sovereign nations in the world, only about 10 are not some kind of republic, in which people vote for representatives who in some way make up the government. Not everyone is called a republic—there are around 40 constitutional monarchies, in which they still have a king or queen who remains head of state in a ceremonial role. The United Kingdom, Spain, Norway and Sweden are constitutional monarchies. Despite the presence of a monarch, it is the people who are elected to office who make the real decisions.

In some republics, such as the United States, power is divided between executive, legislative and judicial branches. In other countries, such as Canada and the United Kingdom, the legislative branch (parliament) holds both legislative and executive power.

A handful of states call themselves republics, and also still call themselves communist, such as China and Vietnam, which should be an oxymoron. Republics rely on elections, and communism does not allow meaningful elections.

True republics are distinguished by elections, in which people seek office and citizens decide by voting who gets in office. A republic also features an elected legislature, such as an assembly, a congress or parliament, whose job it is to make laws. A republic may have a separately elected president, or a prime minister who is chosen from the majority party in parliament. Some parliamentary republics also have a separately elected president, whose job is largely ceremonial.

Some republics are categorized as illiberal democracies. They have elections, which aren't necessarily free and fair. They tend to have less meaningful preservation of civil rights and liberties. They also tend to control the media. Russia tends to be the prime example of such a state. People who oppose sometime president, sometime prime minister Vladimir Putin keep ending up in jail.

Singapore is sometimes considered an illiberal democracy, because a single party tends to dominate the government and citizens there lack some civil liberties. Mexico was an illiberal republic for much of the 20th century, as the Institutional Revolutionary Party (the PRI, in its Spanish-language acronym) dominated elections, even when they probably weren't winning.

Some are in between the parliamentary and president/congress models. France is a semi-presidential republic. Power is divided between executive, legislative and judicial branches. But the president shares some powers with the prime minister, who represents the majority party in the French parliament and is appointed by the president. This is no problem if the president and the majority in the National Assembly are from the same party, and quite a bit trickier if they're not. The president can dissolve the assembly and call for new elections, but if the new elections don't change the balance of power, the president can expect to have an even more difficult time with an assembly dominated by his or her opponents. (And if that wasn't enough complexity, there's an appointed constitutional council to rule on the constitutionality of new laws.)

Other Forms of Government: Monarchy

Monarchy means rule by a monarch, a king, a queen, a sultan—whatever title fits the language and tradition of that country. As we just noted, most monarchies that remain in the world—around 40, depending on who's counting—are constitutional monarchies, in which someone maintains the title and the job of "head of state" but all real political power rests with some elected portion of government, such as a parliament or other-named legislative body. For example, in 1892, William Gladstone was chosen as prime minister (head of government of Great Britain) when his Liberal Party won a majority in the House of Commons. Queen Victoria (1819-1901) didn't like Gladstone (who had qualms about Britain's growing empire, and the queen found herself liking this idea of empire more and more as it grew), but she was effectively bound by law to name him prime minister.

Four nations in the world (Brunei, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia) are still absolute monarchies. In several states states, Swaziland, Kuwait, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, are mixed, in which the monarch shares some power with elected officials. In each of these countries except Kuwait, legislative bodies are partially elected and partially appointed by the monarch. In Jordan, Morocco, Monaco and Lichtenstein, the monarch still plays an active role in government. You will note that aside from Lichtenstein, Swaziland and Monaco, are all these are Middle Eastern states, most of which are relatively wealthy from oil.

Consider Saudi Arabia. It may be the only state in the world that is named after its ruling family, the Sauds. Adul-Aziz Ibn Saud created the kingdom by force in 1932, and his descendants have ruled ever since. Normally, royal succession proceeds from generation to generation; the kings of Saudi Arabia to date all have been brothers. Abdul-Aziz ibn Saud had 22 wives, and 37–45 sons (estimates vary). As a consequence, he is survived by about 15,000 family members, including 2,000 more-or-less direct descendants who help run the country. It was only in 2006 that the ruling family agreed that subsequent kings would by chosen by a council of 32 top-ranking family members, who are to consider the skill, experience, popularity and religious sentiments of eligible candidates.

How does this all work? Saudi Arabia has 13 provinces, all governed by royal princes (of whom there may be as many as 7,000). Royal family members hold all of the top offices, such as head of defense, foreign relations, and minister of the interior. The king is both head of state and head of government.

We might also ask how such a state maintains legitimacy. Public protests against the government are officially banned, and the royal family justifies its rule as sanctioned by the Quran, the Moslem holy book. In fact, Abdul-Aziz ibn Saud gained power in part by allying himself with leaders of the Wahabbist/Salafi sect of Islam, thus adopting a fairly strict interpretation of the Quran. Religious authorities still have a great deal of influence on government and policy. Women can't vote, but then again, not much of anybody else can either. The country had local elections in 2005 and 2011, and King Abdullah has said that women will be able to run for office and vote in local elections in 2015.

Legitimacy comes in part through the elevation of faith; the Quran and other holy documents are regarded as the national constitution. Some public participation in governance is possible through the court system, in which separate court systems deal with religious matters (the Sharia courts), grievances, and local matters. The government also maintains some of its tribal heritage, in that anyone can petition the king to discuss a grievance, and members of the royal family are regularly employed in hearing such petitions.

The state also attempts to provide higher standards of living by investing its oil wealth in education and economic development, with some positive results. But citizens sometimes complain that some members of the royal family treat national wealth as

personal wealth. So the monarchy, while absolute, must balance the competing demands of citizens, religious authorities, other wealthy families within the country, and forces within and without the country that would prefer to see some other form of government there. This may be part of the reason why the great majority of monarchies evolved into constitutional monarchies—the challenges of maintaining legitimacy are greater when citizens lack enough of a voice in the affairs of state.

Authoritarian Governments/Dictatorships

Including monarchies, the world still has a fistful of authoritarian governments, but that is slowly changing. The popular uprisings of the Arab Spring in 2011 toppled authoritarian governments in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt. Syria is suffering through what amounts to a civil war between opponents and supporters of rule by the Assad family. Myanmar (Burma) finally allowed elections after 40 years of military rule. Turkmenistan, a former Soviet republic in Central Asia, is effectively a one-party state, as is Belorussia, another former Soviet republic.

But others remain. The magazine The Economist, using a method that relies heavily on surveying "experts," counted 53 states as authoritarian, plus 37 as "hybrid," 53 as "flawed democracies," and only 25 as full democracies. The Economist looked thing such as for "free and fair elections," political participation, and whether government works the way it's supposed to (such as civil servants being able to perform their jobs fairly). So flawed democracies don't score well on all categories, and hybrid states have authoritarian and well as democratic elements at work.

Only two states, North Korea and Cuba, still operate the collectivized economy typical of 20th century communist states such as the Soviet Union. And from time to time, a state is ruled by its own military, such as recently in Fiji and Guinea-Bissau, while the Vatican City and Iran are theocracies—states ruled by a church.

Whereas the remaining monarchies attempt to remain in power by sharing enough of their oil wealth that citizens are willing to put up with rule by a hereditary monarch, authoritarian governments tend to hang on through force and propaganda. Authoritarian states do not have meaningful elections; public dissent is discouraged if not forbidden. They tend to grow out of responses to public unrest and dissension, but hang on because of fear, greed and a lust for power. Many authoritarian states are poor. Modernization theory suggests that states will not become democratic until they become wealthy enough; a state's chance of becoming and remaining democratic improves greatly after per capita GDP surpasses $5,000. Mexico did not have truly free elections until 1993, when a candidate from a party other than the PRI won the presidency and control of the Mexican Congress (and Mexico has had competitive elections ever since). The key difference seems to be Mexico's growing wealth. When people are wealthy enough, they seem more willing to let democratic institutions work.

The two most authoritarian states, according to rankings of The Economist, are North Korea and the Central African Republic. The Central African Republic has suffered from 150 years of slave raids, colonial oppression, and the last 50 years of uncertain elections, military coups and general misrule. And it's still probably a more free place to live than North Korea.

North Korea, at the bottom of nearly every ranking, is the better known of the two. Korea, since about 700 CE, was one country, even when it was under the thumb of China or Japan. During World War II, communist guerrillas fought the Japanese, along with non-communists. After the war, the country was divided, north and south, with the communists ending up in the north. The south, formally the Republic of Korea, was not a very liberal state, but its economy grew and eventually it entered the ranks of true democracies with real elections in 1993. By at least one measure, it has the world's 13th largest economy.

North Korea attempted to reunite with the south by force in the Korean War (1950–1953). Things went downhill from there. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea turned inward, using the United States (and the rest of the world) as a bogeyman to keep people in a perpetual state of fear. Members of the Kim family have ruled the country throughout its history. The nation spends 25 percent of GDP on defense (the U.S. spends less than 5, which is high by world standards), including developing a nuclear weapons program, even as malnutrition and starvation plague much of the population. South Korea has roughly twice as many people as North Korea, but its economy is 17 times larger than the north's. One report said that a third of North Korean children show visible effects of malnutrition."Millions of North Korean children suffering from malnutrition, says UN,"www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012...alnutrition-un

So how does the government stay in power? Geography plays a role—North Korea is bordered only by South Korea and China, so it's a little harder for people to flee. The government has eliminated all potential sources of opposition—the only real interest group is the military, and it is well supported by the state. There are no unions, no business groups, no other political factions. The state

apparatus sniffs out any hint of dissent, which is dealt with brutally. People are either “re-educated” or simply executed, and under the “three-generations” policy, entire families are punished if one member makes a mistake. North Korea’s constant saber-rattling at the rest of the world keeps the military happy and many people apparently believing that whichever Kim is currently in power is the only thing that stands between them and annihilation by foreign powers. Meanwhile, other nations continue to give North Korea aid, in between nuclear tests. Economic sanctions designed to force change only affect the ruled, not the rulers; China, South Korea and the United States avoid sanctions that might hurt the elites who run the country because nobody wants to see North Korea collapse (a cure that might be worse than the disease).Daniel Bynum, et al, “Keeping Kim: How North Korea’s Regime Stays in Power,”belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/...eping_kim.html

Authoritarian governments rarely make people better off, and yet they persist. Some scholars distinguish between totalitarian and authoritarian governments. Totalitarian governments are seen as more extreme, with a single ruler relying on charisma to convince the people that he’s really on their side. Authoritarian governments have a higher level of corruption (raiding the public treasury for private gain, or simply accepting bribes). Totalitarian governments are ideological—there’s an overriding, underlying philosophy that drives the system.Sondrol, P. C., “Totalitarian and Authoritarian Dictators: A Comparison of Fidel Castro and Alfredo Stroessner”. Journal of Latin American Studies, Vol. 23, No. 3, 1991. So, Benito Mussolini’s Fascist rule of Italy was totalitarian; the military dictatorship of Myanmar/Burma was not. Totalitarian governments don’t usually have elections. Authoritarian governments might, but the results are often in doubt—the elections may not have been free and fair.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Most governments in the world are some kind of republic, although they don’t all work the same way, or even work as advertised.
- Republics usually feature open elections, and some kind of elected legislative body.
- The world still has a handful of monarchies, and a number of authoritarian governments in which political freedom is limited.

EXERCISES

1. Pick any country other than the one you live or are from. Visit a source such as the CIA World Factbook, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook. What kind of government do they have? Is it a republic? Do they have political liberty there?
2. Some people have campaigned for a national initiative process for the United States. How would that work? What might be better or worse about that?

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4.3: Constitutions

Learning Objectives

In this section, you will learn:

1. How a constitution can establish the framework for a government.
2. Constitutions are broad statements of principle, although some are very specific.
3. Constitutions often guarantee civil rights and civil liberties.

The majority of the world's governments are some kind of republic. Republics often are established via constitutions. In fact, only three states—the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Israel—have no formal written constitution. But even those states have collections of documents that function, more or less, as constitutions. Every U.S. state has a constitution of its own. The oldest constitution in the world could be that of the tiny Republic of San Marino (written in 1600); it could be that of the state of Massachusetts (1780, but the oldest in continuous use). India has the longest constitution, more than 110,000 words; the United States has the shortest, at 4,543 words.That's according to the U.S. Government Archives; many sources list it at around 7,000.http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_q_and_a.html#cite More than 100 states around the world have rewritten or written new constitutions in the last decade.

As concise and philosophic as the U.S. Constitution is, U.S. state constitutions are not. Most are too long and too specific; scholars say what's in them would be better off in laws passed by state legislatures and hence easier to amend. Many states have had multiple constitutions. Vermont's is the shortest at 8,295 words long. Alabama, now on its sixth constitution, weighs in at 357,157 words long. Generally, there's too much detail. For example, the constitution of the state of Georgia, now on its 10th version, has 11 articles, beginning with a Bill of Rights and ending with "Miscellaneous Provisions." It's 113 pages long, which is actually on the short side for U.S. State Constitutions. While the U.S. Constitution left the details up to Congress and the citizens, the Georgia State Constitution tells lawmakers, in Article VII, Taxation and Finance, how to treat mobile homes, cars and stands of timber for tax purposes. Now those are actually very important items for the conduct of state government. But it's an open question as to whether they belong in a constitution, or if they should just be matters of statute law. If nothing else, constitutions are harder to change than are regular laws, and that often ties the hands of state legislatures that may be forced to consider different policy choices.

A constitution is a statement of general principles, the blueprint, the foundation of a government. A constitution establishes a government and its rule, usually with an eye to defining citizens rights and limiting the power of government. It establishes the structure of the state. A properly adopted constitution is the supreme law of the land, and political debate often begins and ends with the question of constitutionality. Constitutions establish governments, and what they can and can't do. A constitution can set the standards for elections, who can run for office and who can vote; it can set terms of office for elected officials; it can prescribe the rights and responsibilities of people in office.

A nation governed by impartial law is a western invention that has slowly spread around the globe, even though it isn't always applied equally at all times and in all places. What that means is that the law doesn't play favorites. It is to be applied equally to everybody. Law decides what is permitted and what is not. Everyone is expected to obey. Law is there to settle disputes, protect human rights, and to proscribe and prescribe various behaviors.

An alternative to constitutional law could be law that derives from custom and tradition, from clan and tribe, or from religious authority. Traditional societies in Africa and Asia created order by internal regulation—people got together and dealt with issues as they arose. This works in part because these decisions are based on ongoing relationships. Under this scenario, people are known to each other, and understand that they must get along tomorrow as well as today.

Constitutions (and the laws that derive from them) may be better at dealing with situations where everybody doesn't know each other. They establish impartiality and predictability, and set the state as the sole legal authority. This can pose problems as states become more diverse, bringing together people whose legal traditions are different. For instance, an immigrant from a conservative Moslem state may have been used to the structure of Sharia (Islamic) law, and may find that western law is different and differently applied. Constitutions and laws must also be viewed as legitimate, including the processes by which they are made and amended.

The U.S. Constitution

The U.S. Constitution was ratified in 1788 and took effect on March 4, 1789. It is the supreme law of the land; all state constitutions are subservient to it. It has only seven articles, laying out the duties of the states and the national government, of the three branches of the national government—overall, how the government is supposed to work. Its brevity makes it pretty vague, which is both a strength and a weakness. For example, the Second Amendment says "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." What does that mean? According to some folks, it means most people can own a gun, any kind of gun. Then again, a bunch of folks with Saturday-night specials doesn't sound like a well-regulate militia, does it? And what would the Founding Fathers have thought if there had been automatic assault rifles instead of muzzle-loading flintlocks? We can't know for certain, so to some extent, American citizens must decide for themselves.

Some judges and scholars in the U.S. say they are "strict constructionists"—the Constitution as written, sometimes with reference to the intent of the Founding Fathers. Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia has said that anyone who thinks the Constitution is a flexible document is "an idiot." Scalia espouses a view of the Constitution called originalism, in which the Constitution is to be applied as it was written and intended at the time. In the case of the Second Amendment, that might mean that Congress is incapable of putting restrictions on gun ownership.

The other theory is sometimes called the living constitution, in which it is regarded as an organic document that needs to be reinterpreted as times change. That might mean, for example, that Congress might put limits on gun ownership because bad things can happen when anybody can buy a fully automatic Uzi or AK-47.

Who is right is to some extent a matter of opinion; one could justify either interpretation without too much trouble. To say that we must interpret the Constitution as written and intended has the benefit of giving words meaning. If words mean whatever we want them to mean, the law is no protection for anybody. The law might mean one thing for you and one for me.

On the other hand, the Founding Fathers clearly were not all of one mind on government and the law. They were not, for example, all devoutly Christian; about half of them were Deists. Deism was a then-popular philosophy that acknowledged the existence of God, but argued that He didn't give a darn. The other thing we might note is that there's some evidence that James Madison, the chief architect of the Constitution, thought it should be flexible. For example, he didn't allow the publication of his constitutional notes and journals in his lifetime.

The other problem with originalism is that nobody seems to apply that idea consistently. For example, the First Amendment says that "Congress shall make no law … abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press…" And yet in the United States there is an entire body of law limiting freedom of speech and of the press, beginning with you can't yell fire in a crowded room (unless there is one), through government's ability to withhold sensitive information, to laws that affect what can be reported about various classes of people. In one case, the late Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black said "I read 'no law . . . abridging' to mean no law abridging." And yet Justice Black served on a court that expanded the power of the federal government in a way that some people have argued was outside what the Founding Fathers intended. So what the U.S. Constitution means often comes down to what somebody thinks it means.

Civil Rights and Liberties

The first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution form the section known as the Bill of Rights, wherein we find among the most explicit guarantees of civil liberties in U.S. government. And that is another area of constitutional concern the world over—what are the rights of the citizen with regard to government and politics? In the case of the United States, promised adoption of the amendments that became the Bill of Rights was a key element in securing ratification from the 13 original states. Across the world, constitutions are a place where we might find how a state views the question of rights and liberties.

Rights and liberties don't mean precisely the same thing. Here are a couple of definitions:

- Civil liberties are personal freedoms inherent in each individual, guaranteed by a constitution or other laws.
- Civil rights are legal claims aimed at restraining the government to seek equal protection before the law.

The original American conception of civil liberties was not unique for its time, but was perhaps the broadest application to date. The key is the idea of them being inherent. That means you are born with them. The Constitution literally grants Americans no

liberties; it seeks to stop the government from taking them away. But while Americans often support the abstract notion of rights and liberties, yet they frequently don't favor the idea in the concrete.

It has taken hundreds of years to get them to apply equally to all citizens. For example, despite all the fine language about the inherent freedom and equality of all men, the Constitution acknowledged slavery when, in Article I, section two, it counts three-fifths of all "other persons" (slaves) when apportioning seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, and again in Article IV, section two, when it promises that escaped slaves will be returned to their owners. (These sections were eclipsed by the 14th and 13th amendments, respectively.) The Founding Fathers reserved the original right to vote for property-owning males. We didn't really pound the last nail in the coffin of property qualifications until passage of the 27th amendment in 1964 outlawed the poll tax (another way of keeping people of color from voting in the south). Women didn't get the right vote across the country until passage of the 19th amendment in 1920. Around the world, New Zealand gave women the right to vote in 1893, and Switzerland waited until 1971. The United Arab Emirates granted women the right to vote in 2006, and Saudi Arabia, as we noted earlier, has its eye on 2015.

Who gets what rights is always a subject of debate and dissension, for a wider dispersion of liberties is a wider dispersion of power. For much of the 19th century, the U.S. Supreme Court applied the Bill of Rights only to the federal government. It was believed that the states, being closer to the people, would not violate citizens' rights. They did it a lot, however, and it wasn't until the 20th century that the High Court finally applied the Bill of Rights to the legal behavior of state governments. Some states complained that this was an unwarranted intrusion into states' rights. Until recent times, "states' rights" was largely a code phrase for the ability of states to discriminate against some of their citizens solely on the basis of skin color.

In the United States, the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s was largely about getting government to treat all of its citizens the same way. Although the Civil War had ended slavery, across the country laws remained that made it harder for African-Americans to vote, to live wherever they wanted, or to even use the same public facilities as white people. President Andrew Johnson, who took office after Abraham Lincoln's assassination, basically told the southern states it to ignore the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments, which outlawed slavery. They did, and things went downhill from there. That noted champion of democracy, President Woodrow Wilson, upon taking office in 1913, barred the hiring of African-Americans by the federal government. Throughout the first half of the 20th century, states increasingly passed laws that barred citizens of color from full participation in society.

One thing that changed the nation's view on civil rights was World War II. It demanded the full participation of everybody in the country, so that women and people of color were called upon to work in jobs and perform tasks that they previously had been excluded from. The generation that came home from the war had different expectations about how society would treat them.

The wall began to crack in 1954 when the Supreme Court ruled in Brown vs. Board of Education, a school desegregation case, that separate facilities and programs for black and white Americans were inherently unequal, and therefore illegal. Following that, civil rights leaders began to campaign for an end to all such legalized discrimination, culminating with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The Union of South Africa had its own internal struggle over racial equality. From 1948 until 1994, the country operated under the policy of apartheid, in which people of color were excluded from all meaningful political participation. By this device, the white minority ruled the black majority, buttressed by enforced residential segregation. Nearly five decades of protest, violence and international pressure finally forced an end to apartheid with the first election to include all South Africans in 1993.

This issue of who gets to participate and who doesn't hasn't completely gone away. Convicted felons in many U.S. states are not allowed to vote, which disenfranchises a disproportional amount of non-white citizens. In the 2000 presidential election, the state of Florida just started purging voter rolls, affecting mostly African-American voters. They started repeating this in 2012, before bad publicity and the U.S. Department of Justice compelled them to stop. Although the United States is notable for its lack of voter fraud, several states have toyed with and passed measures requiring photo ID for voters (all to stop voter fraud), which also disproportionately affects poor people and citizens of color. (Then again, how hard is it to get official photo ID?) Republicans for years tried to bar laws that would create motor-voter registration, figuring that such a plan was likely to register more new Democrats than Republicans. But Republicans have achieved greater electoral success since motor-voter laws became widespread, so perhaps they weren't accurate in their predictions.

What should be included among civil liberties? During World War II, U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt pushed for “the four freedoms”—freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom from fear, and freedom from want. (The first two of those are included in the U.S. Constitution; No. 3 is alluded to and No. 4, not so much.) This evolved into the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the assembly in 1948. It says everyone has a right to “life, liberty and security of person”; bans slavery and torture; guarantees rights of equal standing before the law and of a fair trial, including being regarded as innocent until proven guilty; bans “arbitrary arrest, detention or exile”; right to “freedom of thought, conscience and religion”; education; equal pay for equal work; right to marry and have a family; and more.You can find the entire text athttp://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml Obviously, these are goals because U.N. declarations lack the force of law within the sovereign states, despite most of the nations of the world having voted for the measure.

So, as a planet, how are we doing? Freedom House, a non-profit advocacy group, in its annual report (2009) lists 89 countries as free; 58 as partly free; and 47 as not free. In its 2012 survey, it listed Norway, Luxembourg, San Marino, Sweden and Finland as the most free. North Korea scored zero once again.You can find the full report at http://www.freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-worldOn the plus side, the percentage of “electoral democracies” has risen from 41 percent of the world’s nations in 1989 to 60 percent in 2012.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Constitutions are statements of general principles that set the terms of operation of government, and the rights and liberties of citizens.
- The world has become a more democratic place in the last 50 years.

EXERCISES

1. Take a look at the U.S. Constitution athttp://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html. Does anything surprise you about what it says? Do you see places where different people might see different things?
2. Would you favor an originalist or an organic interpretation of the Constitution? Why? What would be the trade-offs for each choice?
3. What would it mean for your country to adopt the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights? Would changes to existing law be necessary?
4. If you live in the U.S., find your state’s constitution athttp://www.thegreenpapers.com/slg/links.phtml. Take a look: How is it different and/or similar to the U.S. Constitution?

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4.4: Divisions of Power

Learning Objectives

In this section, you will learn:

1. How power is divided in republics, and why that is done.
2. What the tradeoffs are between federal and unitary systems of government.

How do societies remain free? Constitutions, as we have seen, can declare there are all kinds of freedoms. For them to work, people have to obey the law. One answer has been dividing power within a government, so that there are checks on the power of any one part of government, or on the power of any particular interest group. If the power of the government is limited, citizens see that government is not overstepping its bounds, and are more likely to go along and obey the law.

Power within a government can be divided in various ways. Obviously, in authoritarian governments, power isn't divided, and so there is no check on the power of whoever has the authority. This can create a couple of problems. First, it robs people of the ability to peacefully take action if the government does something they don't like. Second, there are no brakes if the government gets carried away—nothing in the system that could force those in authority to adhere to the laws as written.

Checks on power begin with elections. Elections effectively split power between the people and the government. If citizens don't like something government is doing, they can vote the rascals out. But elections are periodic—they only happen every so often—and in the short term, government can do things that an election will take too long to rectify.

A second check on power is the division of power into different branches. This isn't very common around the world; many republics tend to concentrate power in the legislative branch. That's especially true of parliamentary systems, where the head of government, the prime minister, is usually the leader of the majority party in parliament. So in that system, there is no separate branch that checks the power of parliament (except, perhaps, a constitutional court that can rule on the constitutionality of a particular law). This is called legislative supremacy—most power in the government rests with the legislative body. It has the advantage of letting things happen more quickly. In a parliamentary system, a new majority party can make changes more quickly, as there is no president to veto new laws, or usually even another legislative chamber where proposed changes can bog down.

That happens in a country such as the United States, where power is divided between co-equal branches of government. In the case of the U.S., that means only Congress can pass laws; the president must sign them to become law; and the court system can declare laws to be unconstitutional and thereby null and void. Of course, the president appoints federal judges, who must be confirmed by the U.S. Senate, and Congress as a whole can impeach and remove any federal official from office for "high crimes and misdemeanors" (one of those maddeningly vague moments in the Constitution—a misdemeanor? Though if the president were caught shoplifting, we might all have some questions). The ancient Roman Republic had even more checks on power, to the point where needed reforms were impossible to push through because somebody nearly always had the power to keep them from happening. American government can sometimes look that way, although when the game is on the line, the system does allow change to happen, such as the passage of civil rights laws in the 1960s. On the other hand, it took nearly 100 years after the Civil War for the question of civil rights to be meaningfully addressed. Consequently, division of power into branches is both a prize and a penalty in government: The checks and balances inherent in such a division make it harder for government to get carried away, and also make it harder to get anything done.

Divisions of Power: Federalism, Unitary Systems, and Confederations

A third way of dividing power is called federalism, which is a system of government that divides power between different levels of government. A confederacy would give most if not all the power to states that make up the confederation, while a unitary system of government puts all the power in the hands of the central government.

Most of the world's governments (nearly 90 percent) are unitary. A strong central government lends power to subnational governments, who cannot make and execute policy on their own. Unitary governments can create or abolish subnational units of governments. Federal governments typically cannot. The U.S. national government, for example, can't decide that Wyoming would be much better as a part of Montana, or that two Dakotas is just one too many.

The other choice usually is a confederation, in which a group of states are equal partners in a government. While this prevents a strong central government from dictating to its members, it also means nobody's in charge. The United States, from 1783-1788, was a confederacy, under the Articles of Confederation. It didn't work very well. The national government couldn't pay its debts, which caused the economy to shrink; the states were on the edge of war over trade and territorial issues. The Confederate States of America seceded from the Union in 1861, leading to the Civil War. They, too, suffered the problem of being unable to fully compel the member states to support the war effort.

The European Union is a confederation. Although there is a freely elected European Parliament, it lacks the full authority to force the 27 member states to do everything it might. The power of the confederation largely exists because the member nations have signed on to the treaties creating it, because they share a common currency (the Euro) and because states such as Germany and France have so much more economic power than the other members (and can't afford to see it all fail). It helps that all the member nations are fairly well-developed states and all republics with regular elections of their own. The EU also seems to be very careful in not stepping on the sovereignty of its member nations. As a consequence, despite EU provisions that require member nations to maintain roughly balanced budgets, big budget deficits in Greece, Italy and Spain have provoked a financial crisis for the entire union.

Federalism divides and shares power between the **national government** (often referred to as the federal government in the U.S.) and subnational governments such states or provinces. Subnational governments may be bound by a national constitution, but have some ability to work within that framework to create their own particular laws. In U.S. federalism, for example, states have the ability to regulate trade within their borders, but only the federal government can regulate commerce that crosses state borders. National governments usually retain the sole ability to provide for national defense and the conduct of foreign relations, whereas both the states and the national government can create traffic and environmental laws. Both levels have the ability to raise revenues and spend money, while only national governments can address topics relating to international trade. Larger nations sometimes turn to federalism to manage widespread territories, such as the United States, Canada and Australia.

Federalism comes in degrees: In weak federalism, states don't get very much power, as in Mexico or Brazil. In strong federalism, subnational governments have a higher degree of power, as in Canada. The United States, if you're keeping score, is somewhere in between. Worldwide, 26 states are federal republics; nine more have granted some local authority to regional governments.

For example, for most of its history, the United Kingdom was a unitary state. England conquered Wales and Ireland, and was united with Scotland when James I became king of both nations in 1603. Ireland won its independence in 1921, but the six counties of what became Northern Ireland voted to remain in the United Kingdom. But then, in 1997, people in Scotland and Wales voted for devolution, by which the central government granted some authority to local assemblies there. Northern Ireland also now has its own local assembly as well. All have the ability to raise taxes, spend money and order their own affairs, but they are not sovereign states.

Creating a federal structure on paper doesn't make one, however. China has 22 provinces, four municipalities, five autonomous regions, and two special administrative regions. Of these, only Hong Kong and Macao, the special administrative regions, can be said to enjoy any sort of self-rule, and a majority of their legislatures are appointed by the central government in Beijing. The autonomous regions include Tibet, where dissatisfaction with Chinese rule has led to violence and unrest.

American Federalism

Being in between strong and weak federalism, the **American version of federalism** is actually a good example of all the challenges and benefits of a federal society.

You should note a couple of things right away:

1. American federalism divides power between the states and the national (federal) government. That equation does NOT include the many thousands of local governments, which are not mentioned in the Constitution and largely borrow power from the states. Each state is, in effect, a unitary government. Some states have granted limited home-rule charters to large local governments, but that's a state-level decision, and not provided for in the U.S. Constitution.
2. The division of power at the national level into three branches, while an important feature of American government, is NOT a feature of American federalism. A unitary-style government could also have a similar division of power into branches; a federal government could also have no division of power at its upper level.

Federalism is, in some ways, an American invention. Confederacies had existed before, and they lacked central power and hence the ability to get anything done. The Founding Fathers, having lived through four years under the Articles of Confederation, saw that they needed a central government with enough power to do what was needed, but still not so much power that it could oppress the people and the states. And the states, to buy into this, were going to want to retain some of their own power as part of the bargain. This fundamental distrust of centralized power, along with the perhaps grudging admission that some of it was necessary, led to both the division of federal power into three branches, and the division of power between the states and the national government.

So who has the power? The U.S. Constitution does seem to provide some space for a strong national government in a number of places:

- The "necessary and proper" clause (sometimes called "the elastic clause" because of its ability to stretch to cover a lot of ground) of the Constitution (Article I, Section 8, clause 18): This says Congress shall have the necessary and proper authority to do what needs to be done.
- The supremacy clause (Article VI, clause 2): The Constitution is established as the supreme law of the land.
- The commerce clause (Article I, Section 8, clause 3): Only Congress has the ability to regulate interstate commerce.
- The spending clause (Article I, Section 8, clause 1): Congress is expressly granted the ability to raise taxes and spend money.

Couple these features with the power of the presidency and the national government's greater ability to raise money, and you have a recipe for a strong national government. I don't think this is necessarily a bad thing. Others disagree.

Then again, there's the 10th Amendment to the Constitution, and the last piece of the Bill of Rights: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people." That can be interpreted in any number of ways, and has been. Does it mean the federal government can only do things expressly described in the Constitution? Does it mean anything not addressed in the Constitution is up to the states? Does it create wiggle room for interpreting the Constitution, or take it away? Some people would tell you they are sure it means one thing or another, and others would simply disagree.

American federalism is said to have gone through a number of phases, including the following:

- Dual federalism: 1790–1932. The federal government did its thing, and the state government did their thing, and there was very little overlap.
- Cooperative federalism: 1933–1980. This featured a much larger role for the federal government, with more money flowing to the states, along with marching orders to go with the cash. States became conduits for federal policy, with federal matching funds there to entice the states to administer programs such as welfare.
- New federalism: 1980–present. Some scholars would divide this up into more than three categories, and probably call this era something else. But these aren't necessarily meaningful distinctions. Sometimes the federal government has pushed programs onto the states (pay for it yourself). At other times, the federal government has attempted to dictate to the states (the Defense of Marriage Act, No Child Left Behind, the continued criminalization of marijuana and hemp). The Feds have given states money via block grants with few restrictions, categorical grants with lots of restrictions, and revenue sharing with no restrictions. Typical federal funding still often involves matching funds for a specific purpose. An unresolved question remains: Should the federal government have the ability to mandate state and local programs based on its ability to provide money for them? What if it provides no money? So it's unclear what New Federalism is precisely, because it is not consistent in how it treats state/federal relations.

And that's typical of U.S. federalism in general. As with so many things in U.S. government, the precise nature of American federalism is ill-defined. Thomas Jefferson, who was not an author of the Constitution, thought that states should be able to just say no to acts of Congress (a term called "nullification"). State governors in our own time are sometimes heard to express such thoughts. The term "states' rights" gets trotted out from time to time, to justify something states want to do or to protest an imposition from the federal government. We should be clear: for most of its history, the term states' rights largely meant only one thing: The ability of states to legally discriminate against citizens of color. So while it has taken on a wider meaning in recent decades, it doesn't have a happy history.

Whatever the issue, the states and the federal government are often at odds at who gets to do what, and who gets to pay for it. So while states tended to favor the reform of the welfare system in the mid-1990s, they certainly didn't want to give up federal funding

of the system. Similarly, Congress has used federal funding of the highway system as a carrot and a stick to get states to raise their minimum drinking laws: Raise it to 21, or you lose your federal highway funds. Only tourism-dependent Louisiana did not comply.

Federalism's Strengths and Weaknesses

These kinds of issues underscore both the strengths and weaknesses of the federal system, which are many.

Strengths:

- It allows experimentation and specialization at the state and local level. States are free to try different ways of pursuing policy objectives.
- It allows flexibility and diversity in making policy. States can tailor programs to the particular conditions, needs and desires of their citizens.
- It brings government closer to the people, ensuring responsiveness. All those levels of government mean that there's someone you can turn to for help.
- It helps to protect liberty, by providing a strong national government that can prevent states from usurping liberty, but also making it hard for federal government to do the same. States provide, in effect, another interest group that can contend with the power of the national government.
- Increases opportunity for participation. Once again, there's room amid all that government for people to get involved.
- Improves efficiency. States and local governments may be more efficient at providing public services.
- Helps to manage conflict by providing arenas for its articulation. By giving more people more access to a responsive government, people are more likely to address their grievances without resorting to violence.

Weaknesses:

- It can make government seem more remote—insulating the government from the people. While in many ways the many levels of government can be a good thing, it can also be confusing. Who's responsible for what, and where do you turn?
- Federalism, and all those levels of government, makes elections more complex. The United States has perhaps the longest ballots in the world. Ballot drop-off is a frequent feature of U.S. elections. Citizens get to the bottom of the ballot, decide they don't know anything about either candidate for state superior court judge, and stop voting
- It impedes the adoption of national standards. One state or province might want one set of environmental laws, while another might want fewer protections and more emphasis on economic opportunity.
- And that gets at the heart of the matter: Divisions of power make action more difficult, which can be both a good thing and a bad thing. Federalism's strength is also thereby its weakness. It is a slow system of government, which keeps us from doing really stupid things in the heat of the moment (Prohibition being one of the few bad examples). It also, however, is slow to change, with compromise between the factions represented in Congress, the presidency, the courts and the voters being required for anything to get done. So federalism forces deliberation and caution, which can be both good and bad.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Most of the world's governments are unitary. A few dozen are federal; very few have been confederacies.
- Federalist governments share power with subnational governments; unitary governments do not.
- Federalism has both strengths and weaknesses.

EXERCISES

1. If you live in the United States, what does your state allow or prohibit that varies from what the federal government allows or prohibits?
2. How much should a federal government have the power to compel subnational governments to do things? How much should subnational governments have the power to say no?

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

5: Citizens and Politics

How people participate, and how much they participate, may be determined in part by political culture.Political culture is a broadly shared system of beliefs on the nature of government and citizens' roles within government. "Broadly shared" means these are ideas that large numbers of people agree upon. These values influence the way decisions are made and what people think should happen in public life. The idea of political culture therefore attempts to explain why people behave the way they do - in terms not so much of their specific desires, but rather in terms of what they believe about what government should be like and how it should be run.

5.1: Political Culture
5.2: Media
5.3: Interest Groups
5.4: Public Opinion

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5.1: Political Culture

Learning Objectives

In this section, you will learn:

1. What political culture is.
2. What political socialization is.

Political culture, and hence public opinion, starts with what is called **political socialization**—all of the elements and influences that go into making any one person's outlook on political life. The influences are fairly obvious once you stop and think about them—your parents, friends and neighbors, education, media, where you work. Some of this appears to be formed by your experiences in your late teens and college years. That is, for example, why so much advertising is targeted at young adults. People in that age group haven't entirely made up their minds about things, and so advertisers pursue them in hopes of snaring potential longtime, loyal customers.

So, college will have a big impact on how you think about politics and government. You may largely disagree with what I think, for example, but odds are you will be nudged a little bit one way or another by the experience of reading this book. The opinions of your professors and the people you meet in college will necessarily make you think a little bit differently about the world.

What you believe about government and citizens' roles within it makes up political culture, an idea that annoys some political scientists because it's hard to measure (and therefore you can't really crank out fancy equations to demonstrate it). Nonetheless, political culture can tell us something about what people think before they vote or make other political decisions. It can't necessarily tell us how people will decide, but it can tell us something about what items and choices will make their way onto the public agenda.

How do aspects of American political culture color the way our government operates? Some elements of American political culture include the following:

- Liberty: U.S. citizens believe they are free to make choices in most aspects of life.
- Equality: Everyone is regarded as equal before the law.
- Individualism: Americans tend to think individuals are responsible for themselves. Especially other individuals.
- Democracy: We expect to vote on things.
- Justice: If someone has been wronged, there should be recompense. People who have broken the law should be punished.
- The rule of law: Aside from speed limits, we expect to obey the law, even when no one is looking.
- Nationalism: Americans tend to be remarkably proud of their country, and to think it is somehow different and special. This is sometimes called American exceptionalism. This thought can go so far as to mean that the United States has a special mission to spread freedom and democracy (and capitalism). As Ronald Reagan once said, echoing Puritan pioneer John Withrop, who was quoting the Bible, America is a "shining city on the hill." This level of chest-pounding, cheerleading self-celebration is sometimes quite annoying to non-U.S. citizens (something to keep in mind when you travel overseas). The United States has done some good things in its time, but if you stop to think about it, every country is special and different. But many Americans will tell you that the U.S. is the best place on earth, even when they've never lived anywhere else.
- Optimism: We expect things to get better.
- Idealism: The belief that a better political system can and will be created.

Every nation has some kind of political culture. People in other nations tend to have less faith in government than do Americans (though that may be changing in an era when so many candidates say "the system is broken" as their opening line). Europeans tend to value public consensus and state support for the individual a little more than do U.S. citizens; in India and the United Kingdom, social and economic class play a bigger role in politics than they do in the U.S.

In the case of the U.S., whereas we might agree broadly that liberty, opportunity and fairness is what we believe in, when it comes to specifics we rapidly break down into different camps as to how these ideas will be translated into policy. For example, consider the notion of equality. What does it mean for us to be equal? We believe everyone should get to vote over a certain age, although

for a long time and in different parts of the country this wasn't always true. For example the Founding Fathers thought only property owning males should get to vote. Gradually, this franchise was extended to every citizen over the age of 18.

But what else could equality mean? We generally favor equality of opportunity, at least in name if not in practice. Some Americans would prefer equality of outcome, and point to income disparities between the rich and the poor to suggest that equality of opportunity must be reflected in equality of result for it to be meaningful. Others oppose equality of result, and suggest that people need to make their own way, so that hard work and initiative are rewarded.

Regionally, we still find a great deal of variation in terms of political culture. The politics of Chicago, Seattle, and Atlanta are quite different, as are the politics of urban and rural settings. (People from the east who visit Seattle are surprised to see Seattleites waiting at crosswalks for the light to change, even when there are no cars coming. Some are even more surprised when they get tickets for jaywalking.) As a result, government operates in different ways in each setting, with different expectations and frequently outcomes.

The political scientist Daniel Elazar identified three types of American political culture (others have found more):

- Moralistic: Society matters slightly more than does the individual; government's role is to create a good society in which the community can flourish. Typical of the Midwest and parts of the West.
- Individualistic: Government is limited to helping individuals advance; it isn't always clean; it shouldn't get involved in private matters. Common in the Northeast.
- Traditionalist: Government preserves the existing social order; social and family connections tend to dominate politics. Common in the South.

These are generalizations, of course. Within every state are pockets of different sets of belief and, as with ideology, people may have a mixed set of beliefs about politics.

Another related factor that can influence political outcomes is what has been called the political landscape. This includes a variety of social and demographic factors—age, race, gender, average level of education, average incomes, percentage of home ownership, level of employment, major employers. So, for example, an area with a higher percentage of senior citizens will vote more often and be more concerned about issues such as Social Security. In some communities, senior citizens may be less likely to vote for school funding measures. Some wealthier areas of the U.S. (but not all) are more likely to vote Republican; some (but not all) poorer areas may vote Democrat more often. Urban areas tend to vote Democrat; rural areas are more likely to vote Republican. Homeowners tend to vote more often than renters. Areas with higher percentages of immigrants may be more concerned about immigration issues; U.S. states on the border with Mexico, for example, will have populations who feel quite differently about immigration issues. For the United States, those two issues—increasing diversity plus an aging population—will continue to inform politics for some years to come.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Political culture can tell us what gets on the agenda, not necessarily what decisions will be made.
- Political culture varies across nations and within nations.
- Political socialization includes all of the influences in a person's life.

EXERCISES

1. What political culture best describes the way you feel about politics and government?
2. What influences have shaped your beliefs about politics and government?

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5.2: Media

Learning Objectives

In this section, you will learn:

1. How media influences politics.
2. How media covers politics.
3. How the news business works.

One of the sources of political socialization, and also a reflection of political culture and public opinion, is mass media. Clearly, mass media—including TV, radio, print publications and the internet—have a huge impact on our lives, and hence on politics. Nothing seems to consume us so much as the various forms of media, which raises the question of whether we are, as the late Neil Postman put it, "entertaining ourselves to death," or simply doing that thing which makes us human—communicating with other humans.

Media are a way in which political officials communicate with citizens, and media also reflect feedback from citizens to those officials. "The news" is how most people find out what's going on in government. An elected official can have a town-hall meeting in her or his district or community, for example, but will only meet with a handful of constituents. At election time, local candidates may knock on the doors of a lot of constituents, but that happens only every two to four years, and the meetings are brief. Elected officials may even mail out newsletters to constituents, but even that is only occasional.

News media provide daily coverage of the events and ideas of government. Done well, citizens get a chance to see, hear and read about what their elected officials are saying and doing, and what issues have moved to the forefront of the political discussion. Done poorly, reports may miss important issues or misunderstand factors that might be leading to one decision or another.

The idea of free speech has a long tradition in American politics. Freedom of speech has been identified as one of the hallmarks of a democratic society, and yet the job of news media is seen differently in different parts of the world. So in democratic societies, news media are relatively unencumbered in how and what they decide to cover. In some societies, reporters are allegedly free, but may be bullied, arrested or even killed for trying to tell what they perceive to be the truth. In other countries, news media are seen as simply another arm of the state, there to help the state tell people what they think they should know, and how they should understand that information.

The Roots of Free Speech in the United States

By making freedom of speech and of the press one of the very first things added to the Constitution, the Founding Fathers clearly signaled their belief that freedom of communication is of paramount importance to a functioning republic. It should be easy to see why. You have to be able to discuss things openly and without fear of retribution in order to do politics on any level. The Framers believed that an open marketplace of ideas would best allow this, and that somehow, the truth inevitably would win out. As with so much of what they wrote, the idea of free speech was soon trampled by actual practice. The Federalist Party-dominated Congress soon passed the Alien and Sedition Laws, by which pro-Jeffersonian Republican newspapers could be penalized for criticizing the Federalists and President John Adams.

But journalism, the practice of gathering and reporting the news, was different then. It was expected that publications had a particular approach to politics, and wrote about it that way. It wasn't until the 20th century that newspapers, and eventually television and radio, would try to cover the news objectively—without a slant one way or the other. So while publishers such as William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer actively pushed for war with Spain in the 1890s, the expectation today is that reporters won't take sides. This was called "yellow journalism," for the yellowish tint of the newsprint they used. Today's journalism is supposed to be colorless, and sometimes is.

Court cases stretching across the 20th century helped establish that the standard of press freedom implied by the First Amendment in fact means what it says: Congress and other governments can't make laws that restrict the ability of people to say what they want, and for reporters to write or broadcast what they want. Political speech is in fact the most protected form of speech in the United States, so that anyone may write or say nearly anything about the president, no matter how false, and not suffer legal

consequences. (Unless of course you suggest violence against the president or other elected official, in which case you will get a visit from members of the Secret Service. It won't be a friendly chat.) This allows an internet blogger such as Matt Drudge to reprint any wild rumor about the president, even things that are clearly false.

And yet despite all this free speech—and the United States may have the most expansive view of free speech of any country in the world—speech is in fact restricted in a number of ways. A so-called strict constructionist view of the Constitution then would suggest that the phrase in the First Amendment, "Congress shall make no law..." means precisely that: no law. But an entire body of law is devoted to libel, for example—no one has the liberty to simply make things up about someone if it in some way damages that person (although the distinction between public and private figures allows people more leeway to make up things about politicians).

For example, broadcast television is regulated by the Federal Communications Commission. The airwaves over which TV (and radio) signals travel are in finite supply, and therefore regarded as a public possession used only under license. As a consequence, TV and radio transmissions are regulated as to objectionable content, (which means you can kill all the people you want on television, but no sex!). Gradually, the FCC has relaxed its rules, so that broadcast stations are no longer required to give equal time to opposing viewpoints, and the number of local stations that can be owned by the networks has slowly grown. Broadcast stations once were required to air a minimum amount of news coverage, which also is no longer true. Local television stations continue to air local news in part because it's cheap to produce and so earns the stations a fair return on their investment.

Despite the restrictions, which are substantial, when it comes to content, we have news media that largely are restricted only by market forces. Mass media are largely paid for by advertising. The more people who watch, read or subscribe, the more they are able to sell ads, and the more they can charge for those ads. Media outlets go so far as to certify the number of listeners, viewers and subscribers, so as to convince advertisers that they are buying real eyes and ears.

Not having to rely on the government for funding gives them considerable leeway to cover politics. As with most things in life, some do it well, some do not. Letting the market manage the output of media gives it some freedom, but it also tends to put pressure to produce coverage that is sensational and focused on entertainment value (which draws ratings and advertisers) rather than meaningful content. Reporters face enormous pressure from management to break "big" stories, which often simply aren't there.

Where the News Comes From

Most Americans' news comes from half a dozen major TV networks, one wire service, a few magazines, and handful of newspapers, some radio, and, increasingly, the internet. A lot of this seems to be piggybacking off what traditional journalists have already reported. Bloggers (a contraction of the term web log) litter the internet like trash in a park after the Fourth of July, but the great majority of them only regurgitate what they've read in mainstream media. Very few actually do original reporting and break stories that haven't already been reported elsewhere.

The concentration of media interests can lead to a sameness of coverage, and to the exclusion of certain viewpoints. In fact, only about two dozen major companies control the great bulk of the nation's mass media. In the case of some organizations, such as Rupert Murdoch's News Corp., parent of Fox, conservative viewpoints tend to be pushed. MSNBC presents news from a liberal standpoint. CNN, while endlessly and annoyingly touting the quality of its coverage, tries to carve out a middle ground.

Most Americans - 50-80 percent, depending on the estimate - get their information from television, which, unfortunately, rarely covers politics on a meaningful level. TV's ability to take you there makes it great at covering events—natural disasters, sports, items with visual appeal. But its time-bound structure and its need for visual elements makes it not very good at covering ideas, which is what most of politics is about. Much coverage of presidential elections, and elections in general, is about who is ahead, not who is saying what. That's when politics is covered at all. In another study, researchers found that the total amount of political coverage was declining in all media, particularly state and local politics. As a couple of political scientists put it some years ago, "TV and the American electorate are partners in failure." Local TV news is particularly weak at covering local politics. Coupled with the decline of newspapers, people increasingly lack access to information about what city councils and even state Legislatures are up to. And that information is no less important than it ever was.

Television coverage tends to focus more on the flash, on what can make good pictures, and on who's ahead in any given race, than on any sort of useful coverage about what people actually stand for, or whether one promised agenda or another will have positive

or negative effects. Even with the need to be visual and brief, however, it should be possible to present coherent coverage of politics. Watch, for instance, the News Hour on PBS and compare that with what passes for news on the networks. Odds are, you won't recognize it.

The emphasis on splash and flash can have other impacts. When broadcast news and entertainment programming tend to overdramatize routine events, this can make the world appear more troubled than it actually is. Even casual watching of local TV news in most markets would make one think that your community is under siege by the forces of darkness. And yet crime in America has been on a downward trend since the 1970s. Yet TV will probably never report that most teenagers don't commit crimes, that most African-Americans are typical middle class citizens with jobs and homes, and that most Americans don't use drugs.

Entertainment television is particularly fascinating. Think about a typical murder show such as "Murder She Wrote." It takes place in a tiny town where someone dies every week. Why does anyone live in that town? It's an actuarial nightmare. About three out of 100 Americans will be crime victims in a given year, and yet television averages 10 crimes a night. Businessmen are most often represented as committing crimes, and yet in real life most crime is committed by males under the age of 25. Politicians are represented as corrupt at least half the time, and yet the second half of the 20th century was one of the least corrupt periods in American history.

There is quite a bit of debate over the effect of media sex and violence, although a number of studies have been done and none have been conclusive. One has to wonder about a program such as Mighty Morphin Power Rangers, a mid-1990s kid franchise that apparently featured 28 minutes of the Ranger kicking the crap out of the bad guys, followed by two minutes of telling young viewers, "You know kids, violence isn't the answer." Which message do you think gets through?

And yet virtually every American home has a television, and at least one half have cable. Estimates suggest that Americans watch an average of 3-7 hours of television a day. That means the TV is on in a typical home from the time a person gets home to the time when they fall asleep at night.

Up to a quarter of Americans still get most of their information from newspapers, which tend to do a better job of covering politics than do broadcast media. Estimates of how many people still read a newspaper vary; it could be as much as 75 percent when you count both print and online editions. For newspapers, that's part of the problem. Online editions still don't generate enough revenue for newspapers to afford to be able to employ the number of reporters it takes to really cover something such as politics. This has been a particular problem for local papers, which usually provide the only meaningful coverage of local politics.

Newspapers still have an impact on "opinion leaders" (and this class will help make you one). A relatively small number of people who pay attention to politics tend to have an outsized impact on what other people think. It may be around 30 percent actually pay attention, and then spell out the details for the other 70 percent.

But are they effective? A test was done in Cincinnati in the mid-1940s, in which people were surveyed about the United Nations, which was then brand new. About 30 percent of respondents understood what it was. There followed a widespread, substantial information campaign to inform people about the U.N.—media stories, advertising, public forums. Following the campaign, a second survey was done, and about 30 percent of the people understood the U.N.

How News Media Actually Work

I will often ask students about what news sources they watch or read, and what they think of them. Many of them will answer that the news media are biased and lie just to get ratings, so they don't read, watch or listen to anything. To which I respond, if you don't read, watch or listen to anything, how do you know they're biased?

The complaint is common. The United States has gone from a nation where people had complete faith in public institutions to a nation where people have almost none. Frankly, neither seems a very realistic view point. Conservatives claim there's a liberal bias; liberals point to the obvious conservative bent of something such as Fox News. Radicals complain that the media tends to support the establishment (as though we should be surprised that reporters who are Americans in fact reflect what typical Americans are like).

Reporters do tend to be slightly more liberal that average voters; however the people who own the media are overwhelmingly conservative. Aside from the editorial pages, which tend to reflect the politics of ownership (and generally don't hide that fact),

most newsrooms don't get dictates from above as to what they will cover and how they will cover it. Reporters at all levels try to present what seems to be the truth. If there's a criticism to be leveled at journalism and journalists, it's that so few political reporters know much about politics, and so don't ask the right questions of their sources. Consequently, they tend to make errors of omission rather sins of commission.

We should understand something about how this all works. First, most reporters in the United States have gone to college and got a degree in journalism or communications. They've all been educated in the same tradition—go out and get the story, try to tell the truth, don't take sides. Reporters at any kind of news organization—TV, radio, print, internet—get assigned to stories by their editors, and they go out and interview people who might know something about the topic, as well as getting reaction from people who might be affected by what's happening in the news. So what a typical reporter is relying on is what people tell them. Reporters are biased—who isn't?—but most of them try to work against that bias and tell the whole story.

Particularly with newspapers, the different parts and functions of a publication can be a little confusing, as readers may lump everybody together as though it was a single living organism with one goal in mind. The editorial page, or management's commentary in some broadcast news programs, is where the management of the publication expresses its opinion. People get hired to do just that. Columns, which appear on the same page, often with the writer's picture, are the opinion of that person. Most newspapers attempt to run a variety of columnists to express a variety of viewpoints. Print stories have headlines, which aren't written by the reporter, and may make a story appear slanted in a different direction than the reporter intended. Reporters work with editors, who make assignments and sometimes even help reporters do a better job. They get a limited amount of time to report, write and file a story, before it ends up in print, on the air, or in the internet.

The problem reporters run into is that most news is based on what people tell them. Good sources, which reporters cultivate, may be people who are willing to talk as opposed to people who actually know something. Meanwhile, not that many people actually lie, people will say things they don't really know for sure, because they think it's OK if you're making a valid point. Reporters have been trained to interview and to write, but they may not know as much about the particular subject to know when they're being snowed. As a consequence, too many people are covering too many things about which they don't know enough. A classic example was the coverage of the Tet Offensive in the Vietnam war. This was probably the turning point in American attitudes about the war, as it was widely portrayed as a disaster for the Americans and South Vietnamese. And yet, in reality, it was a military disaster for the Viet Cong, who ceased to be a factor in the war after that point.

Conversely, the U.S. military played the major media like puppets in their coverage of the first Gulf War, except for moments when publications such as Newsweek predicted extraordinary Allied casualties when soldiers inevitably had to storm the Iraqis' sand forts (anyone with a smattering of military history would see that the easy answer was to go around them, which we did). The few casualties that did occur were flown into Dover, Delaware, at midnight, so as to avoid the Vietnam-era spectacle of so many flag-draped caskets coming home. Patriot missiles, which may not have actually hit anything, were portrayed as technological marvels, as were smart bombs, which actually only hit about 25 percent of their targets.

At the end of the war, General Norman Schwarzkopf literally thanked the media for their help in perpetuating so many myths about where the Allies might strike (such as a rumored sea landing in Kuwait City, which pushed the Iraqis to move units to an area where U.S. forces had no intention of landing). It didn't hurt that the Iraqi government was as inept as the U.S military was media savvy. At one point in the war, a U.S. missile took out a building that the Iraqis claimed was a chemical weapons factory. The Iraqis claimed that it produced infant formula, which might have been plausible until they released video of workers, scampering over the wreckage, in coveralls that read, in English, "Baby Milk Factory." In a country where they nearly all speak Arabic?

Coverage of the second Gulf War was even more restricted and uneven; virtually no one reported on casualties among Iraqi civilians during "Operation Shock and Awe." No network TV cameras showed the Iraqis who were unhappy as the statue of Saddam Hussein was toppled. Saddam Hussein was a bad man, but if you're supposed to be supplying fair and balanced coverage, then you're supposed to show us that stuff, too.

Lacking knowledge, reporters too often fail to think critically about what they're told, except for the many reporters who simply assume that people in positions of authority are always lying. Neither of these approaches is likely to provide citizens and voters with useful information on which to base opinions and decisions. The problem is not, as many press critics claim, the news media's adherence to the standard of objectivity, the idea that news reporting will be unbiased. For one thing, hardly anybody in the business talks about objectivity, as most people recognize that it's not possible to be completely objective. It is possible, however,

to be fair, and fairness is a much more reasonable standard. What would be better still would reporting that tests hypotheses, as opposed to merely relaying them. Sometimes that happens, sometimes it doesn't.

Another set of critics wants to see more interpretation and slant on the news, which usually has to do with how the critic feels about one subject or another. Even if we could argue that objectivity is the standard, or fairness, those approaches don't have to be bland, and they have the virtue of letting the reader/viewer make up her or his own mind.

That leads to the chief fault of media consumers—too many people look for sources of news that confirm what they already believe. Anything that runs against that must be biased and is therefore evil and wrong, etc.

Similarly, the criticism that journalists tend to reflect middle class American values shouldn't be surprising to anyone who can think beyond the end of his or her nose. Most working journalists are, like most Americans, of middle class backgrounds. The fact that their work should reflect the culture and socioeconomic stratum of which they are a part shouldn't surprise anyone.

Journalists and politicians, naturally, have a mutually antagonistic and yet beneficial relationship. Having been on both sides of that fence, neither side truly understands the other in a useful way. The journalists frequently grasp neither politics nor policy, whereas the politicians have no appreciation or understanding what journalists are up against or what it is they hope to do. Even when they employ public relations people, often as not the PR types aren't any better at working with the press than are their bosses, and sometimes worse. Politicians nonetheless find journalists useful for "leaks," a time-honored process in which elected and appointed officials test-market ideas or send signals by surreptitiously "leaking" major news to selected reporters. This doesn't always work. In 1988, George H.W. Bush was thinking of naming Indiana Sen. Dan Quayle as his vice presidential running mate. Quayle was not unintelligent, but he was not a good impromptu speaker. Bush's aides thought he was a poor choice, and so leaked the idea to the press. Apparently, no one took it seriously and it wasn't reported as the Bush aides hope it would be, and Quayle got the nomination.

Despite the media's many faults, there is often enough information there to actually get a picture of what's going on. Perhaps the best thing about American media is that there's an awful lot of it. With a little bit of work, one can find quite a bit of information from a variety of sources, and that's probably what's required of anyone who wants some real understanding of what's going on in the country. You simply have to consult a number of sources, and force yourself to look openly at things you think you oppose and critically at things you think you believe.

The News: Fair and Balanced?

This view of news as an attempt to provide an objective truth is a 20th century phenomenon and largely an American invention. Going back to the founding of the country, and in lots of the rest of the world, newspapers were expected to have a point of view—liberal, conservative, or something else. Reporters in such situations may be more likely to tell people what they want to hear, but also, sometimes, to explain what's wrong with somebody else's idea. Objective news coverage is more likely to give credence to ideas that make no sense in the process of telling both sides of the story.

Trade-offs are inevitable in news coverage from a point of view, however. Consider Fox News, which despite its self-proclaimed status as "fair and balanced" regularly presents favorable coverage of conservative viewpoints while trashing liberal ones. Although there's nothing wrong with championing either viewpoint, from an informational standpoint, Fox may not be doing its viewers any favors. They probably could chuck the hyperbole and still do a good job covering news from a conservative viewpoint. But as it stands, in two different studies, Fox viewers were among the least informed people in the United States, and the more they watched, the more wrong they were about world and national events.

A third view of media, more common in authoritarian states, is that the media should be a tool of the state. In China, for example, major media are owned by the state and are expected to support and further the ends of the state (occasional Chinese protests to the contrary notwithstanding). A reporter who wrote critically of the performance of the Communist Party in running the country would have a short career. In recent years, Vietnamese journalists briefly did such things, before the communist government cracked down on them.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Mass media are in fact a critical link between government and citizens.
- Freedom of speech and the press was regarded as essential to a functioning republic by the U.S. Founding Fathers.
- Reporters at legitimate news organizations gather information by interviewing people and then try to tell stories based on that information.
- In other countries, news media may be regarded as a tool of the state.

EXERCISES

1. Which news media do you read, watch or listen to? Try something else, something you don't normally see, and make note of what's different about their approach to and coverage of the news.
2. Take a look at a local newspaper or a local TV newscast over several days. How much coverage of local politics do they include? What kinds of things do they cover more?

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5.3: Interest Groups

Learning Objectives

In this section, you will learn:

1. What an interest group is.
2. The ways in which interest groups try to influence public policy.

A major source of information for journalists, and another way in which people can get involved in politics, is interest groups. Interest groups are formal coalitions of individuals and organizations who unite in pursuit of common policy goals. People tend to think of them as interest groups when they share or don't mind those goals, and "special interest groups" when they disagree with them.

Interest groups are not new. In fact they are as old as politics. Plato and Aristotle warned about them, and James Madison had them in mind when he wrote the Constitution. Madison referred to them as factions. He warned that factions could be dangerous because they tend to pursue their issues to the exclusion of all else. Historically, Madison said, factions could undermine government as they single-mindedly pursued their own interests. Nonetheless, he also recognized that factions are an unavoidable fact of political life, and that limiting factions would in fact limit the very liberty the Constitution was trying to create. His answer was to divide power in the government by way of federalism and by checks and balances—dividing power between different branches and levels of government. His genius was to create a system of government in which power is so divided that it's difficult for a single group to dominate the whole government, and that purposefully pits factions against each other in the practice of that government. The question remains, however, if this works, and interest groups continue to play influential roles in states around the world.

The public tends to view interest groups (except for the ones they belong to) with suspicion and mistrust. Depending on who you talk to, people will say that this group or another has too much influence, be it the gun lobby or religious conservatives or abortion rights activists.

Some political scientists say that interest groups aren't all bad. In this view, interest groups are in fact a sign of a healthy political society, a sign that competition (what Madison intended) is alive and well. By that measure, you should be really concerned is when everyone is happy with a decision, because that may mean something's not right. Elected officials can be heard to say that when everyone is equally unhappy with something they've done, they've probably done about as well as they can hope to.

Groups have a few things in common. The people who belong to groups tend to have time, money and desire**.** Groups without resources tend to be less organized and less successful, so the rich tend to be overrepresented and the poor tend to be underrepresented. There are welfare rights lobbies, and student lobbies, and neither tends to be successful because they don't have money. They also represent two groups of people—students and poor people—who tend to vote less often. Contrast that with senior citizen lobbies. As they represent retired people, they're not all wealthy, but senior citizens have one thing in common: They vote. Elected officials know that, and behave accordingly. A state legislator came to one of my classes once and began his presentation by saying, "I don't care what you think. I just finished talking to a group of senior citizens, and I listened to what they had to say. They vote. You guys don't vote, so why should I listen to you?" A number of the students were incensed at his comments, but some of them got his point: If you want to be heard, you have to go out and get involved, and that includes voting.

And yet not all groups are successful, even ones with money. As one lobbyist said, "I've seen large organizations with plenty of money with fairly pathetic public affairs efforts." Having money is not enough; a successful interest group hires the right people and presents the right message.

How Groups Work

Groups attempt to influence policy in a number of ways:

Lobbying is a basic form of political activity. Representatives of groups attempt to contact elected officials, often directly, to tell their side of a story. The terms lobby and lobbyist might come from the habit of British members of Parliament to meet in the lobby of the House of Commons before and after debate. It might also come from the interest group representatives who would try to

chase down President Ulysses S. Grant in the lobby of the Willard Hotel in Washington, D.C., where he liked to enjoy a cigar and a brandy.

Some lobbyists work for particular organizations or businesses; others, contract lobbyists, may have multiple clients. A good lobbyist tells the legislator both sides of an issue, so that the legislator can go home and anticipate the inevitable objections to his or her position. Consequently, good lobbyists are known for not lying. If a legislator were to catch a lobbyist in a lie, then the lobbyist would lose all access to the legislator. End of game; you lose. Lobbyists certainly try to persuade elected officials of the rightness of their position, but they try to do that through information.

Advertising and public relations campaigns which are directed at convincing voters and elected officials of one position or another. These range from "what a great company we are" (especially firms that don't sell directly to consumers, who nonetheless purchase television ads), to campaigns directed at specific issues (such as recent campaigns singing the praises of "clean coal" and other energy initiatives). Ads such as these will sometimes target particular markets and the members of Congress who represent that market ("call Congressman Smith and tell him to stop attacking our freedom!").

Get out the vote campaigns seek to get people to vote on ballot measures, or for or against certain candidates. Groups that can deliver votes obviously will have lots of clout. Groups send information to members at election time, often with a "report card" on people in office, detailing who voted in the direction of the group's interests and who didn't. Groups attempt to mobilize members to both vote and to make campaign contributions to approved candidates.

Making campaign contributions. Groups give a lot of money to candidates and, increasingly, spend money on their own. People do give money to candidates in hopes of swaying their decisions. But a lot of that money goes to people who already agree with the donor, in which case the issue could be whether certain groups overrepresented in Congress (or state legislatures)?

Engaging in legal action. Interest groups with enough money can hire lawyers, who can file suits to block unfavorable laws or the try to compel government to adhere to the law as written.

Are Interest Groups Effective?

So, do interest groups have too much power? They have power, but how much is too much? Some factors seem to limit groups' influence. Groups rarely are coherent monoliths when it comes to policy. People join for lots of reasons, and politics often is not one of them. They join for fellowship, for group discounts and benefits (this is why the American Association of Retired Persons has more than 35 million members). As a consequence, groups often are unable to deliver the votes they promise. Interest group leaders often turn out to be a rather imperfect mirror of their memberships' diverse desires.

The larger the group, the more diverse it is, and group diversity poses special challenges. The National Federation of Independent Businesses claims 350,000 members, but it probably has less clout than the National Association of Manufacturers, which has 14,000 members (typically larger firms with more money). A diverse membership may help deliver votes, but it makes it harder for the group to take strong stands on issues about which their members do not have a consensus.

Numbers by themselves aren't enough. Political scientists once theorized that cities would be a powerful lobby at the federal level. The United States has thousands of cities, staffed by people who understand politics, with an umbrella group, the National League of Cities. But they can't make campaign contributions, and despite similar issues they lack a common agenda.

A specific agenda can help a lot. Consider the National Rifle Association. It has fewer than 5 million members, and isn't wealthy compared to a number of other organizations. It is, however, narrowly focused on issues involving gun ownership rights and the Second Amendment. Opinion polls consistently show that most Americans favor gun control laws, yet that feeling is neither organized or intense. As a consequence, the NRA has been very successful in its efforts to limit gun control, because the group is largely unified around the issue.

That speaks to another limit on interest groups: They can't afford to watch every issue all the time. Successful interest groups stick to their knitting, as they say in business, and try to focus their resources on issues that matter most to their leaders and members.

So, do we have too many interest groups, or too much government? The number and intensity of groups seems to have risen over time, and it has paralleled the increasing size and scope of government. The nation's rising wealth also has meant people have more at stake, and more resources to do something about it. State and federal regulation has increased in the post-World War II era, and a couple things haven't changed since the start.

The Iron Law of Public Policy: Every government action creates winners and losers in the marketplace. Intelligent business people act accordingly.Robert A. Leone, *Who Profits: Winners, Losers and Government Regulation*, New York, Basic Books, 1986. This leads to Sell's Second Law of Political Economy: Politics is economic competition carried on by other means. A lot of what happens in government is about interests attempting to tilt the rules of the game in their favor. Ask yourself who really benefitted from President Bush's Medicare senior citizen prescription drug buying plan. Senior citizens, who do get drug coverage. But also large pharmacy chains stores, as they can best afford to subscribe to the plan and offer the group discounts. They can make it up in volume. Who loses? Smaller chains and independents, who can less afford the discounts and lacked the political clout to forestall the plan.

Should we do anything about groups? That's a tricky question. If you limit the ability of groups to participate in the political process, in some sense you limit freedom. On the other hand, without some limits, it's clear from history that the wealthy and powerful can at times dominate the discourse of society. Where do you strike a balance?

Madison's original idea was to create a competitive political marketplace, where groups would keep each other in check. Does this still work? Everybody is represented somewhere in the political spectrum, but is everybody's interest represented all the time? You may be represented by a labor union or the business lobby or a group concerned with one social issue or another. But who represents your interest when the car dealers try to weaken lemon laws, or when tax burdens are shifted from one group to another? The answer isn't always obvious. Meanwhile, interest groups (including congressional campaign committees, who get most of their money from other interest groups), spent more than $280 million on the 2010 congressional elections. That was five times more than was spent on the 2006 elections. Court decisions such as Citizens United, which opened the door for private groups and corporations to spend all the money they wanted on politics, further muddy the water. In the first half of 2012, interest groups had spent $170 million on the presidential and congressional campaigns. The billionaire Koch brothers promised to spend $100 million to ensure that President Obama was not re-elected. If the voices with the most money speak the loudest, are other voices being heard? Meanwhile, interest groups representing the private prison industry helped push for three-strikes-you're-out legislation in various states, which has raised the prison population and increased the need for prisons. The private education industry has helped back the push for charter schools across the country.

Following the financial meltdown and the Great Recession of 2007-2008, many people called out for reform of the financial sector. For the most part, it didn't happen, despite the substantial evidence that a lack of regulation had contributed to the enormous size of the problem. The financial services industry in 2009 and 2010 deployed 3,000 lobbyists in Washington, D.C.—five for each member of Congress. They spent $1.3 billion battling against further regulation, and largely succeeded. It's their right to do this under U.S. law, and it's not immediately obvious how this could be addressed. But it's a question worth asking.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Interest groups have always been a part of politics.
- Interest groups attempt to influence public policy through activities such as lobbying, voter mobilization, and campaign contributions.
- Interest groups are not all equally effective. Successful groups tend to be more narrowly focused on a smaller set of issues.

EXERCISES

1. What interest groups do you belong to? What issues matter to you right now that would tend to connect you to an interest group (even if you're not an active member)?
2. If you decided to limit the influence of interest groups, what steps would you take? What would be the trade-offs involved?

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5.4: Public Opinion

Learning Objectives

In this section, you will learn:

1. How public opinion is demonstrated.
2. How much public opinion matters.

Media coverage sways public opinion, and interest groups often hope to. The people tend to matter as well. For all the influences on public opinion, the people do have minds of their own.

Public opinion is made evident in a number of ways. Voting is the obvious way, as it's the only poll that truly counts for something. But it also shows up in direct participation, direct communication, survey research, and protests. Public opinion seems to matter. For example, studies show that, broadly speaking, Congress tends to follow the will of the American people. Most elected officials understand that they ignore the passions of their constituents at their own peril. So while an official may try to persuade voters to in one direction, most try to keep an ear to what people are saying back home.

How Citizens Get Involved

Citizens can get involved in a variety of ways.

Direct Participation

As distant as government may seem sometimes, there are many ways for people to participate in politics. Campaigns in the United States and elsewhere are always looking for volunteers (and for anybody who's really interested in politics, there's probably no better way to get your foot in the door). Local governments also have advisory boards of many types (such as planning, building, arts and parks commissions), which rely on citizen volunteers to staff them. Citizens on such panels do research and hear requests from the public, and report to city councils on what they think should happen next.

Direct Communication

People talk to their elected officials—in person, by telephone, by letter and by e-mail. Elected officials say that letters tend to have more impact, because e-mails are to easy to send. A stamped letter tends to say the person cares deeply about this particular issue. Elected officials often have open forums where voters come and say what they think (which, officials will privately say, can be a challenge when folks show up who are obsessed with a particular issue, or who just want to complain). You can also show up at a hearing, at city hall or at the state Legislature, and have your say. In a typical legislative committee meeting, when there's a hearing on a particular bill or topic, there's a sign-up sheet and if you're there, you get your three minutes to speak your mind. In any case, democratic systems tend to be remarkably open to citizen input.

Survey Research

Another way in which public opinion is evidenced is survey research, or opinion polling. A survey is just asking a lot of people the same questions. Done correctly, this can be a fairly accurate gauge of what people are thinking. Scientific survey research involves random sampling of a population, and some fancy math to extrapolate those results to the public at large. A random sample means that everyone in the target population has an equal chance of being chosen. Survey research firms generate random lists of telephone numbers of voters in a state, district or even an entire country. What you should look for in reports about survey research is 1. a specified margin of error (you don't get one without doing the fancy math), and 2. the sample size. The margin of error is a way of judging how confident we are that the results of the survey are in range of what the entire population thinks. If this information is included in the survey, you have some assurance that it's a scientific survey, and not, say, one taken by a congressman by mass-mailing his district.

Legislators and members of Congress infrequently survey people back home, usually by doing a mass mailing to all the registered voters in the district. The problem with those sorts of surveys is that they are not random samples, but self-selecting samples. The only people who respond to such surveys are those with really strong feelings about an issue, and what we know about them is that

there tend to be fewer of them than the mass of folks in the middle. So the answers may not be indicative of what the general population thinks. Public officials who conduct such surveys only seem to pay attention to the surveys when they confirm what the official already thinks.

A good survey also avoids question bias—questions should not lead the respondent to an answer. I had some rather substantial arguments when I was a legislative staffer over that one. The people I worked for tended to want to write questions that more or less said "do you agree with this or are you stupid?" The surveys were by no means scientific, but it seemed like we would needlessly aggravate people who read the survey and didn't agree with the conclusions we were trying to get them to reach.

News organizations will often partner with survey research firms to find out what people are thinking about particular topics, such as whether they support a particular policy initiative or who they're going to vote for. Political campaigns survey voters to find out what's working and what isn't, and which groups they're connecting with. Surveys also depend upon people telling the truth. Most of the time, they do. In Nicaragua in 1990, however, voters told pollsters that they would re-elect the Sandanistas to power. When election time rolled around, the opposition coalition managed a convincing victory. Voters were simply not used to being asked such questions as the pollsters posed, and apparently feared retaliation by the Sandanista-led government.

Protest

Protest is yet another form of measuring public opinion, and clearly not one to be underestimated. The classic example in American politics has to be the Vietnam War. Although we tend to dwell on the many tragic aspects of the war, it was in fact a triumph of democracy. Was there ever another nation as powerful as the U.S. that changed its foreign policy so radically as a result of public protest? People—many, many young people—marched; sat in (sit-ins, which predate the Occupy movement, involved occupying public spaces in hopes of disrupting somebody's activities, to make a point); and generally advocated an exit from Vietnam. This did not produce immediate results, but the public dissent clearly made it harder for elected officials to continue the war.

Protest can be non-violent, such as much of the Civil Rights movement, or violent, from the WTO riots in Seattle in 1999, all the way to acts of terrorism.

Non-violent protest goes at least back to the 19th century American writer Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). In his 1849 essay Civil Disobedience, Thoreau wrote that if one viewed a law as unjust, one should not obey it. Thoreau was unhappy over slavery and the Mexican-American War, and advocated resisting what he saw as government-sponsored injustice, for example, by not paying your taxes. (He spent a night in jail for this, before someone paid his taxes and he was released.)

Thoreau was a big influence on Mohandas K. (Mahatma) Gandhi (1869-1948), who led one of the most successful non-violent protest movements in history. Gandhi was born in India, which had been effectively conquered by the British earlier in the 19th century. Gandhi went to Great Britain and studied to be a lawyer, and ended up working South Africa. After getting thrown off a train for refusing to move to a third-class coach (he had a first-class ticket), Gandhi pondered how he should respond. He recognized that he couldn't fight his oppressors; they were too many. If he simply went along, he was empowering them. Finally, he decided, the best answer was to simply resist the unjustice he was facing as a person of color in South Africa by disobeying what were clearly unjust laws. Over the next several years, he developed what he called "satyagraha," a Sanskrit word meaning "truth-force," or devotion to truth.

Gandhi established the basic tenets of non-violent resistance. It is active, not passive: One actively resists injustice without being violent. Violence only begets more violence, Gandhi reasoned; non-violence disarms one's oppressor because the oppressor can point to nothing that justifies his use of violence. Using these tactics, Gandhi was able to win some consideration for the many Indians the British had imported to South Africa, before he returned to India in 1915. There he began to lead the movement that would eventually win India's independence from Great Britain, again relying exclusively on non-violent tactics. Gandhi and his followers marched to the sea to make salt (the British held the monopoly on making salt in India); they spun cloth in protest of British control of the textile industry; they resisted British rule whenever possible. Finally, in 1947, the British gave up and went home.

It may seem odd that Gandhi chose this method; the British had about 100,000 soldiers maintaining control over a nation of at around 400 million people (at that time). Clearly, they could have violently ousted the British, especially during World War I and II when the British were largely occupied elsewhere. But Gandhi seems to have recognized that the Indian state would be better off if born in peace rather than violence. Today it stands to as a relatively peaceful and democratic society, despite its occasional clashes

with Pakistan and China. For example, it is one of the only liberated ex-colonies to never have suffered a military coup. Although Gandhi was assassinated (by a Hindu nationalist who thought he was being too kind to Moslems), Gandhi succeeded in winning independence for India and Pakistan (part of which is now Bangladesh) without any shots being fired.

Gandhi and Thoreau were big influences the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who led the U.S. Civil Rights movement until his assassination in 1968. Dr. King, in following their lead, organized Americans of all races to protest the unfair treatment of people of color in the U.S. Beginning with a boycott of city buses in Montgomery, Alabama, (where African-Americans had to sit in the back) in 1955-1956, King led a series of peaceful, direct-action "campaigns" to protest everything from school segregation to lack of voting rights for African-Americans in the south. That meant arrests, beatings, attacks by police dogs and fire hoses. A key moment—and a good example of how non-violent resistance can work—was a march from Selma to Montgomery to protest the lack of voting rights in 1965. On March 7, a day that became known as "Bloody Sunday," 600 marchers were attacked by Alabama state troopers using horses, tear gas and billy clubs. National television cameras were there and the nation, including President Lyndon Johnson, watched. Under court order and with protection of federal troops, the march eventually proceeded, but the important detail is that the event helped push support for the Voting Rights Act of 1965, outlawing a century of political discrimination against African-American citizens. Like Gandhi, King seems to have understood that non-violent resistance would win more support and more converts than would violence.

Contrast this with the 1999 WTO riots in Seattle. The World Trade Organization, which tries to set the terms of trade between nations, drew representatives of states from around the world, and perhaps 40,000 protestors as well. Most of them were peaceful, but those who weren't did $20 million in property damage and lost sales in downtown Seattle. One of my students' parents had to be rescued by police when demonstrators attacked her car as she drove to work. What did this accomplish? The protestors had plenty of legitimate complaints about globalization, issues that at least deserve to be discussed (environmental degradation, the unequal impacts of trade around the world), and the protest did help put those issues on the map. On the other hand, violent actions tend to take sympathy away from the protestors. Protestors have claimed that they changed the course of history, but more than a decade later, it's hard to tell what's different when it comes to world trade.

The Occupy movement seems to have learned from this, and has maintained a non-violent stance throughout its brief history. Occupy, which began in New York in September 2011 with Occupy Wall Street, has grown into a global movement protesting all manner of social and economic injustice and inequality. Like other recent protest movements, Occupy has had the benefit of using social media such as Facebook and Twitter to spread its message and coordinate activities. Occupy has probably helped frame the debate over economic policies in the U.S. and around the world, but tangible results are few (although it's early in the game). The other problem that Occupy faces is coming up with a coherent agenda. The Civil Rights movement had the luxury of having a narrowly focused agenda: changing laws that restricted people's rights. Changing people's attitudes has proven much more difficult. Dr. King, despite his great skills as a leader and orator, had some of the same troubles when he moved his work from civil rights to economic justice. Laws are easy to change; people's beliefs not so much. As one elected official who met with Occupy people told one of my classes, "They're angry. They have a right to be angry. But they don't have a plan." This doesn't mean that the Occupy movement can't or won't accomplish what it wants to, but it won't be a quick or a simple task.

Economic change is somewhat easier to accomplish if economic results can be demonstrated via a lack of change. The Rev. Jesse Jackson had success, for example, in getting Coca-Cola to hire and promote more African-Americans when he was able to point out how important that market segment is to Coke's success. The Occupy movement might have more success by organizing more boycotts of firms whose practices it doesn't like. Moral arguments in such a case might be loftier, but money talks.

Not all non-violent protest is successful. In 1989, thousands of Chinese young adults (mostly students, the shock troops of every revolution), gathered in Tiananmen Square in the heart of Beijing, the Chinese capital. As many as 500,000 people may have assembled there at the peak of the demonstrations. The protests were uniformly peaceful, with demonstrators calling for the usual litany of economic and political opportunity and reform. They even went so far as to build a papier-mâché replica of the Statue of Liberty. But Chinese officials who opposed the protests won out over those who favored it, and on June 4 Chinese army units forcibly removed the demonstrators from the square. Casualty estimates range from hundreds to thousands; no official number was ever released.

Sometimes protests grow violent, and sometimes they start out that way. And there's violence, and then there's violence. Trashing businesses isn't in the same league with blowing things up and killing people. Sadly, terrorism has become a tool of politics in recent decades.

Consider the Middle East. Some people of Jewish descent had long dreamed of returning to their historical homeland of Israel, having been forcibly ejected by the Romans in the Second Century BCE. They had been persecuted nearly everywhere they went, so reconstituting the state of Israel seemed like a chance to be left alone. But the former territory was occupied by Palestinian Arabs, ruled first by the Turkish Ottoman Empire and then by the British. Jews began to move there, nonetheless, and in 1917 the British government more or less guaranteed the Jews access to territory there. Friction resulted—between Arabs and Jews, and between Jews and the British, and in 1948, the new state of Israel declared its independence. A series of wars between Israel and its neighbors ensued, and the territory that would have been Palestine became, instead, Israel after the Arabs attacked Israel in 1948. This left a dispossessed population of Palestinian Arabs, who, unfortunately, turned to violent forms of protest against the Israelis. That has led to 60 years of intermittent warfare and frequent violence, with little to show for it but the gravesites.

The airborne terrorist strikes of September 11, 2001, are, in a way, only one chapter in a long-running clash between parts of the east and parts of the west. U.S. involvement in the Middle East is unpopular with some Arab Moslems, particularly U.S. support for Israel. But what could move people to such horrible acts?

Terrorism is politically driven, targets civilians rather than military targets, and aims to change political attitudes and decision-making. Terrorism seems to occur when one group of people can see no way of achieving their objectives other than inflicting pain on the people with whom they disagree. Usually, then, the terrorists must feel some degree of powerlessness, as the perceived oppressor has a distinct military advantage over the group that feels oppressed. Terrorists aim to spread fear among citizens, who then will put pressure on their government to change policy.

Terrorism is not new; people we might describe as terrorists have been assassinating political leaders since the 1800s. The targeting of civilians is new, as is the potential access to weapons that can kill a lot of people. But while acts of terrorism have killed more than 4,000 people in the last few decades, little has changed in terms of policy and leaders in the states where the terrorists have made their targets. In some ways, like war, terrorism is as much the failure of politics as it is a way of achieving change.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- People participate in politics in a variety of ways, including direct participation and communication.
- Surveys, media reports, and interest groups are all ways that public opinion is relayed to candidates and elected officials.
- Non-violent resistance is an active method protesting unjust laws.
- Terrorism is a method of political protest that seeks to spread fear among citizens, who will put pressure on leaders to change policy.

EXERCISES

1. Have you ever actively engaged in a political protest? What issues might make you do so?
2. Survey other students about their attitudes about a political issue. Check your results against those of existing scientific surveys on the same topic.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

6: Voting and Elections

6.1: Voting
6.2: Electoral Systems
6.3: Political Parties

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6.1: Voting

Learning Objectives

In this section, you will learn:

1. Who votes and who doesn't.
2. Requirements for voting.
3. Why people choose to vote or not vote.

Ask yourself this one question: Is it worth your time to vote?

Not everybody thinks so, not all the time. A majority of citizens, in democratic republics around the world, think so when it comes to big elections. Elections for presidents and parliaments attract well over 50 percent of registered voters, all over the world. But fewer people think so in less prominent elections. In the United States, voter turnout drops by at least 10 points in the swing from presidential to non-presidential elections. Across the country, fewer than half the registered voters participate in local elections, which in some ways are the most important elections you face (the president or Congress won't put in or take out that speed camera at the local intersection). Overall, Americans vote less regularly than many of their counterparts in other republics. In fact, according to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, the United States, the supposed bastion of democracy, ranks 132nd out of 172 nations in voter turnout.http://www.idea.int/publications/vt/upload/Voter%20turnout.pdf The turnout numbers are even worse if you consider not just registered voters but the whole voting-age population. And yet voting is the fundamental act of democratic participation—the thing that makes a nation a true republic. It is the axle on which the wheel of government turns. Especially in the United States—a nation full of people who will tell you it's the greatest country on earth, etc., etc., why don't more people vote? So let's take a moment to explore the question of voting before we ask that question—do you/would you vote?—again.

Who Votes?

The obvious part of the answer is citizens who are old enough. Universally, you have to be a citizen to vote in any country's elections. In most countries, the minimum age is 18. The minimum is 16 in Cuba, Brazil, Nicaragua and Austria; it's 17 in the Seychelles and Senegal, 19 in South Korea and 20 in Japan. Eight countries, including Bolivia, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Dominica, Djibouti, Fiji, Kuwait and Lebanon, have a 21-year-old minimum.

For much of its history, the voting age in the United States was 21. What changed that was the Vietnam War. Young men and women argued that if they could be drafted and sent to die for their country, they should also be able to vote. The debate actually began during World War II. President Dwight Eisenhower, who had been the Allied commander in the war, spoke in favor of the lower age in 1954. With thousands of young Americans being drafted and sent to Vietnam, and nationwide protests against the war growing, Congress was at last moved to act. In 1970, Congress passed amendments to the Voting Rights Act, lowering the minimum voting age to 18. The states of Oregon, Texas and Idaho sued to block that, and, in 1970, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Oregon v. Mitchell that while the federal government could set the age for federal elections, states could choose minimum ages for their own elections. In March 1971 Congress then passed the 26th amendment (94–0 in the Senate and 401–19 in the House of Representatives), lowering the minimum age to 18. Within four months, three-quarters of state legislatures had approved the amendment, and it became law on July 5, 1971, when signed by President Richard Nixon. Constitutional change doesn't usually happen that fast.

Young people at that time campaigned hard to win the right to vote in the U.S. Ironically, no group of people votes less than young people do today.

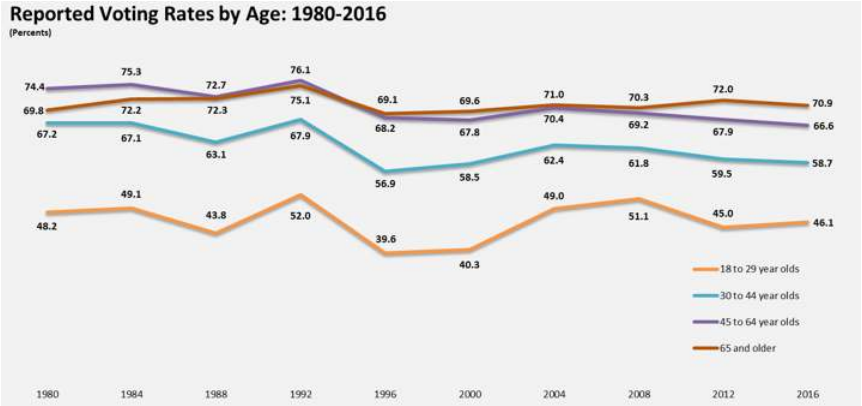

Figure **6.1.1**: Voter Turnout by Age Group in the U.S. (Public Domain; US Census)

The Vietnam era was a high point in youth voting; in 1972, 72.5 percent of young people ages 18–29 participated in the presidential election. It's been largely downhill from there. In the 2008 election, when 62.1 percent of that age group voted, it was the highest since 1992. And only 48.7 percent of registered voters ages 18–24 voted in 2008.

Clearly, not having the draft and a war staring you in the face probably took away some of the impetus to vote. But what other factors could be impacting voting?

Age and education: While young people aren't voting as much, older people still vote often. And more-educated people vote more as well. So while 27 percent of those 18–24 who didn't finish high school voted in 2008, 51.9 percent of those age 65 and up with the same level of education voted. Among those with a bachelor's degree or more, 70.2 percent of the 18–24 group voted, versus 82 percent of those 65 and up with at least a bachelor's degree.

What's different between the age groups? The longer you're around, the more you get a sense of what matters and how government might affect you. Older people may have houses and careers, and time to think about them, whereas younger people may be working multiple jobs and trying to finish school. (According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in the 2004 election, 23 percent of 18– to 24-year-old non-voters said they were just too busy.) More educated people may also have a better sense of how elections work, why they matter, how to register and when to vote. More educated people also tend to earn higher incomes, and that's another group that votes more often. In the 2008 election, 51.9 percent of those with less than $20,000 in household income a year voted, versus 79.8 percent of those with more than $100,000 in household income.

Race also appears to play a role. White and African-American citizens vote more often than do Hispanic- and Asian-American citizens. Among Asian-Americans, 47.6 percent voted in 2008, versus 49.9 percent of Hispanic-Americans (of any race), 64.7 percent of African-Americans and 66.1 percent of white Americans. The difference there may reflect the larger numbers of relatively recent immigrants among Asian and Hispanic citizens.

Why People Vote, and Why They Don't

So why don't more people vote, especially in the United States? In Australia, it is illegal not to vote—and you get can fined for not voting—and turnout sometimes reaches 95 percent. On the other hand, turnout also hits 95 percent in the Mediterranean island nation of Malta, where voting is not compulsory.

Many other countries make it easier to vote. In Germany, after you turn 18, you get a card in the mail telling about the next election in which you are eligible to vote. Most U.S states require a two-step process—first you register, some time before the election, and then later you get to vote. In many countries, voter-eligibility lists are taken from existing lists such as income tax or birth records (you turn 18, you can vote). Voter registration has been required to prevent voter fraud, such as voting by people who are no longer living, though it's worth noting that the U.S. has had little if any voter fraud in the last 50 years.http://www.brennancenter.org/content/resource/policy_brief_on_the_truth_about_voter_fraud/

So making that process easier, such as allowing voters to register on election day, also is predicted to raise turnout. Among U.S. states, only North Dakota does not require registration. Ohio and North Carolina allow same-day registration, while Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, Wyoming and Washington, D.C. have some form of same-day registration. But those don't always have an appreciably higher percentage of voter turnout; in the 2002 election, for example, only

about half of North Dakota's voting-age population bothered to show up at the polls. In 2004 and 2006, however, same-day registration states averaged 10–12 percent higher turnout than traditional registration dates, according to one study. Arizona, Colorado, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington all allow voters to register online. More recently, however, a number of states have attempted to make it harder to vote. States such as Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Georgia enacted photo identification requirements for voters, with legislative sponsors arguing this was needed to prevent voter fraud. Critics argue that such requirements will hurt lower income and minority voters. They tend to vote Democrat; the bills were passed by Republican majorities in those state legislatures. In Pennsylvania, in a court case over the law, state officials couldn't produce any incidents of voter fraud as evidence.http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/16/pennsylvania-voter-id-law_n_1790844.htmld

As for higher or lower turnout in any given election year, correlation is not causality—because two things happen in close proximity doesn't mean that one is influencing the other. For example, a hot local or statewide election can boost the turnout in one community or state, or a lack of pressing elections on the ballot can depress it. Meanwhile, consider the circumstances in which elections take place. A low point in voter turnout came in 1996, when only about half the country voted and Bill Clinton was re-elected president. The economy was growing and the nation was at peace, so people may have been relatively content. It was the lowest turnout since 1924, when the country was also amid a sustained period of peaceful prosperity. Contentment tends to keep people away from the polls. Contrast that with 2008, when turnout was 10 points higher than in 1996. The nation was involved in two not entirely popular wars, the economy was crashing, and Barack Obama, the Democrat nominee, made a big push for young voters.

People vote when it seems to matter, but they have a lot of other reasons for voting: They vote to show support for the system, an act of patriotism. They vote because they can. People vote to support a candidate, or vote because they don't like one. They vote to make a statement. They vote because they care about what happens to their neighborhoods and communities.

Some people vote by party. If there's an R or a D after a candidate's name on the ballot, that's who they choose. Here's a true story from my neighborhood. A few years back, an incumbent Democrat state senator was seeking re-election. She was attractive, well-regarded, in a fairly Democrat-leaning district. The Republicans were unlikely to put forth a serious candidate when they had so little chance of winning.

But one Republican filed. He was a quiet, pleasant guy from my neighborhood, known mostly for looking a bit like Keith Richards and for frequently walking to the local market for a latte. One of my students actually interviewed him—apparently the only person who ever bothered to do so. The candidate informed my student that the Russians had tried to shoot him with a laser rifle (he knew it was the Russians because they're the only ones with a laser rifle), but that the shot had bounced off his belt buckle. They had tried to kill him because they couldn't abide the thought of the son of God becoming president of the United States.

This guy didn't campaign much, but it got out that he was, in fact, mentally ill (although, by all accounts, harmless). Nonetheless, in the general election, he got 30 percent of the vote. That many people, that year, were determined to vote Republican, probably not knowing much about the candidate they had chosen.

The candidate might have had a better-sounding name than his opponent, which also seems to make a difference. I tried to convince a friend of mine to run for judge, but he said his name—Lamb—wouldn't probably fly with the voters. I then tried to convince him to change his name to "Lamb-of-God" to pick up the religious conservative vote, but he wouldn't go for that either.

The list of reasons for not voting is a bit longer then reasons why people do vote:

First, voting is not free. It costs time—to actually vote, to become even the slightest bit informed on candidates and issues—and even a little money if you drive to the polling place or stick a stamp on your mail-in ballot. On top of which, you have to register to vote, which, until Motor Voter registration, required you to go to a public library or other public facility and fill out a form. With motor voter, you can easily register when you renew your driver's license. But either way, you have to take a step to be able to vote.

It's a longer process than that required in many other countries. On top of that, the United States has lots of elections and very long ballots—lots of races to decide—further complicating voters' task when they sit down to choose.

In some U.S. states, jury pools are chosen from voter registration lists, so some people do not register to vote so they can avoid jury duty. One study showed that the threat of jury duty reduced voter registration by 11 percent.http://www.electionstudies.org/resources/papers/documents/nes002296.pdf

People also don't vote because they feel uninformed. Not having followed politics and elections, they may feel as though they are so uninformed that they would be voting blind. People also may not vote because they don't like any of the candidates; as a form of protest; for religious reasons; or the classic, traditional excuse: "My vote doesn't count."

An Argument for Voting

This is the point where I tell my students, "This is what I think, and I think you should vote." And, like I also tell my students, you will have to decide for yourself. But most of the arguments against voting don't make a lot of sense, at least to me.

First, it's not difficult to become informed enough to make a sensible choice based on what you believe and what matters to you in your own life. Many state election departments send out information on candidates; candidates themselves make substantial effort to contact voters with information. Granted, it's all biased in favor of the candidate, but it usually tells you something about which way the candidate leans. Looking at which groups endorse candidates can tell us even more. Are they supported by business, labor or environmental groups? And, in the age of the internet, candidates and interest groups provide lots of information about who's for what and why. You don't have to be an expert to make an informed vote.

If you don't like the candidates, find one you do like, or run yourself. And if you do a little research, you should be able to distinguish between the bad and the not-so-bad. We should never expect to agree 100 percent with any candidate.

As a form of protest, it's one of the weakest. If you're trying to make a statement by boycotting an election, how can we tell if this is a protest or if you're just lazy?

Finally, voting gives you the right to complain. If you don't vote, and you don't like what government is doing, who can you blame but yourself? That's because your vote always counts.

At this point, you should be asking, how can that be true? In elections in the U.S., with frequently thousands and millions of voters casting ballots, what difference can one vote make? Sometimes not much, but sometimes a lot. Sometimes elections are very close: In September 1996, in King County, Washington, voters faced a ballot measure to impose a local sales tax to fund a new baseball stadium and keep the Seattle Mariners from fleeing town. The measure failed by 20 votes—you and your friends could have tipped the election one way or the other had you been there to vote. The Mariners subsequently went on a big winning streak and nearly made the World Series (which, for Mariner fans, is about as good as it gets), and in October the state Legislature came up with a new funding package for the stadium. The team's success helped, but if the vote hadn't been so close, the Legislature might not have made the moves it did.

And that points to another way in which your vote counts: Margin of victory matters greatly in electoral outcomes. If a candidate wins by a lot, say, more than 60 percent, she or he is less likely to get serious opposition next time around. Conversely, if the candidate just squeaks by, opponents will be lining up for the next go-round, because that's a vulnerable candidate. Voting is an aggregate function: It's the total that matters, not the individual vote. So even if your candidate seems like a safe bet to win, adding to that total helps them in the future. And even if your candidate seems likely to lose, the closer her or she gets, the more likely it is that the candidate you don't like gets a stronger, better funded opponent the next time around.

Margin of victory clearly matters after the election as well. When Bill Clinton was first elected president in 1992, he won with only 43 percent of the popular vote. In part that was because of the third-party candidacy of billionaire H. Ross Perot, who got nearly 19 percent, leaving incumbent President George H.W. Bush with 31 percent. Although later research showed that Perot voters were pretty evenly split between people who would have otherwise voted for Bush or Clinton, so that the outcome would not have changed without Perot in the race, Clinton's low vote total had an impact on his relations with Congress. Why listen to a president whose popular mandate was clearly so weak? That left the new president with a somewhat rocky road to travel with the legislative branch, and gave Republicans an opening to call for action in the 1994 elections. And in those elections, they took majorities in both the House and the Senate.

If the majority in Congress swings one way or another, or especially if a president wins by a lot, that sends a message that the electorate wants change, and maybe even wants it pointing in one a particular direction. Anyone who's watched Congress for any length of time will see those results in action; conservative or liberal agendas have more success if elections point toward conservativism or liberalism. And it's not just who's in Congress as a result of the elections (although that obviously makes a big difference). The Democrats still held a commanding majority in the U.S. House of Representatives after the 1980 elections, but

passed President Reagan's tax cuts after seeing how well he did in the 1980 vote. And in fact, research shows that, over time, Congress generally votes in accord with the broadly expressed will of the people.

Finally, voting is a unique experience. It is the one time in your life when you can say you are absolutely the equal of everybody else. Your vote counts no more or no less than anybody else's—you, me, Bill Gates and the president are all on equal footing at the ballot box.

So, now, ask yourself again: Is it worth your time to vote?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- People vote to support the system, to have a say, and to support or oppose a particular candidate.
- People don't vote because they say they lack the time, lack motivation, and lack information.
- Voter turnout varies from year to year and from group to group. Older, richer, more educated people tend to vote more often than do younger, poorer, less educated people.

EXERCISES

1. Is it worth your time to vote? List the reasons why you would or wouldn't vote in a given election.
2. Find out what it would take to register voters in your state. Set up a table on campus and see how many people you can convince to register.
3. Students on campus on how many are registered to vote; how many plan to vote in the next election; and how many voted in the last election. Compare your results with those of national surveys.

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6.2: Electoral Systems

Learning Objectives

In this section you will learn:

1. How elections are structured in the U.S. and elsewhere.
2. How we choose presidential candidates in the U.S.
3. How the Electoral College works and why it's there.

Elections are how officials get chosen in nations all around the world. States use a variety of systems to organize elections. First, let's talk about what we do in the United States, and then compare that with happens elsewhere.

Elections in the United States

The U.S. has one of the longest, most complicated electoral systems on the planet. There's an election for something every year, and most elections involve a two-step process—a primary election followed by a general election. You probably know the broad details: Every four years we elect a president. Every two years, we elect members of the House of Representatives. Also every two years, approximately one-third of the seats in the U.S. Senate are up for election, as senators serve six-year terms.

On top of this, states typically also elect governors, state legislators, and other statewide officials on even-numbered years. Some states elect governors in non-presidential years, some at the same time as the presidential election. Odd-numbered years tend to be for local elections, such as city and county councils, with elections for judges thrown in there somewhere in states where judges are elected.

The primary election process varies from state to state. Most primary elections reduce numbers of candidates to no more than one per party. Progressive reformers in the U.S. in the early 20th century pushed for primary elections as a way to challenge the power of political machines, state and local party organizations that controlled the nominating process and thereby who could run for office. By 1917, all but four states had adopted primaries for state and local elections.

Each method of choosing candidates, either through primary elections or by party meetings or conventions, has its advantages. When parties were in charge, they were able to exert some discipline on candidates and to push for particular agendas. Then again, parties tended to at least look like they were under the thumb of interest groups such as railroads, and the system as whole was not very democratic. Primary elections, in contrast, invite a much higher level of political participation and offer more popular control of the electoral system. It also makes election seasons longer, and may have made the party system more polarized, as the people who do show up to vote in primaries tend to be more liberal or more conservative than the general electorate.

Either system can distort the outcome. In the presidential election of 1912, former President Theodore Roosevelt decided to challenge his successor, incumbent President William Howard Taft. Roosevelt won nine state primaries and Taft only one, but since the party still controlled the nominating process, Taft was the nominee. Roosevelt ran as an independent, splitting the vote with Taft and handing the election to Democrat Woodrow Wilson. Contrast that with the 1972 election, when the Democratic Party might have preferred someone other than U.S. Sen. George McGovern to run against Richard Nixon, but McGovern's strong showing in state primaries pushed him to the nomination. Nixon won handily in the general election.

Primary elections have the advantage of making it more likely that the winner will be elected with a majority of the votes cast, especially in winner-take-all elections. If there was no primary, and anybody could file for the general election, the winner would be the candidate gets a plurality—the most votes, not the majority of votes. So, in a three-person race, the winner could have as few as 34 percent of the votes—not a very democratic outcome. A primary election, by limiting who's on the general-election ballot, tends to produce winners who get more than 50 percent of the vote. If, as in some states, one candidate from any registered party ends up on the general election ballot, there still could be multiple candidates from which to choose. In the U.S., however, if two of the candidates are a Democrat and a Republican, one of them is more likely to end up with more than half the vote.

In 39 states, voters must register to vote by party. So, if you register as an independent, you may or may not get to vote in the primary election (state rules vary). Choice of party can happen when you first register to vote, or, as in eight states, you choose which party you will vote for on the day you vote in the primary (sometimes called a Montana-style primary, or the pick-a-party

primary). Any primary election where you have to declare a primary is called a closed primary, because voters can only choose among the candidates of their declared party. Parties prefer a closed primary because A. it gives them access to people who say they are Republicans or Democrats and B. it prevents crossover voting. The fear among party leaders is that members of the other party will "cross over" and change the outcome of one party's nomination process—say, for example, a bunch of Republicans cross over and vote for a Democrat. The fear is that it will result in the nomination of a weaker candidate, but there's not much evidence that this happens. In 1980, Washington state voters did appear to cross over to vote against incumbent Gov. Dixy Lee Ray, but not because they thought state Sen. (now U.S. Rep.) Jim McDermott was the weaker candidate. As voters said at the time, that election was about "ABD—Anyone But Dixy." McDermott lost to a Republican in the general election.

The opposite of a closed primary is an open primary, in which voters can choose whichever candidate of whichever party they find most appealing. So you might vote for a Republican in one race and a democrat in the next. One variation of this system is called a Cajun primary, after the state of Louisiana, where the top two candidates advance to the general election, regardless of party. Louisiana adopted this system in 1975; there's a general election run-off only if no candidate gets more than 50 percent of the vote.

Washington state is a bit of an anomaly among state election systems. From 1935 to 2003, Washington had a blanket primary, a system later adopted in California. Under a blanket primary, voters were not required to register by party, and could vote for any candidate of any party in a primary election. The top vote getter of each party advanced to the general election.

In 2000, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that California's blanket primary was unconstitutional, because it violated the parties' right to freedom of association. Washington's law was similarly invalidated in 2003. Interest groups and voters filed an initiative to restore the primary that year, while the state used a Montana-style primary in the interim. The initiative passed, but the measure was eventually again struck down by the federal courts. The state Legislature passed a top-two primary in 2004. If you think that elected officials don't care what people think, consider this: While state party organizations, of which the legislators were effectively members, were dead set against an open primary, 76 percent of voters surveyed said they were for it. A legislator would have to be unconscious to not see which way that wind was blowing, and most were wide awake for that vote.

Nonetheless, the state governor vetoed the legislation. In the meantime, another initiative passed, and in 2008, the U.S. Supreme Court overruled the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and let the new law stand. In 2008, Washington state had its first truly open primary, with several state legislative races in which the top two vote getters were either both Republicans or both Democrats, and who advanced to a run-off in the general election. California, also by initiative, adopted a top-two system in 2010. Alaska had an open primary from 1947 until 2000. The legislature there replaced it with a closed primary; voters now must request a primary ballot for the party of their choice.

Primary elections are followed by general elections, in which the winner is chosen from however many candidates qualified via the primary. In the United States, the election system is generally by district or state and is called winner-take-all or first-past-the-post. If there are more than two candidates, the winner need only have a plurality—more votes than anyone else. This doesn't happen with a top-two primary, where the winner, by definition, has taken 50 percent of the votes plus one. This has one important effect on U.S. politics, namely the two-party system. Winner-take-all elections effectively narrow voters' choices, as a typical voter is more likely to vote for a candidate who has a reasonable chance of winning. So you may lean Libertarian or socialist or something else entirely, but unless you just want to make a statement, you're more likely to vote for a Republican or a Democrat. The parties, as a result, are quite broad in the range of ideologies they encompass. At various times in American political history, Republicans (and Democrats) have been elected who were actually more liberal (or more conservative) than the Democrats (or Republicans) they were replacing. As the comedian Will Rogers once said, "I am not a member of an organized party. I am a Democrat."

There are alternatives to this system. Some countries use proportional representation. Under this system, if a party gets 5 percent of the vote, they get five percent of the seats in the national legislature. Israel's national elections are conducted entirely in this way—there are no district elections for the Knesset, the Israeli parliament. There are a number of modified versions of this system, so that, for example, there might be a series of 10-member districts, and in that district, parties get seats according to the percentage of votes they receive. This encourages multi-party systems, because unlike in a winner-take-all system, your candidate doesn't have to win—your party just has to get some percentage of the vote to get seats in the legislature. This system has further variations. In a closed-list system, voters are confronted with a party-selected list of candidates, ordered by the party's preference. If Party A wins 60 percent of the vote, the top six people on its list will get 6 of the 10 seats in that district. In an open-list system, voters may also choose which of the party's candidates they would prefer to see in office. This latter system is more common in Europe and is also

used in South Africa. In some countries, such as Germany, Mexico and New Zealand, a mixed system is employed: Some seats are awarded via district elections, others by proportional representation.

Yet another system is called the single transferrable vote. This requires multi-member districts. Voters are presented a list of candidates from all parties; they then rank the candidates in order of preference. Voters don't have to choose more than one. A formula is used (dividing the total valid vote by the number of seats to be filled, plus one, and then adding one vote) to determine the minimum number of votes needed to take office. If, say, that number is 10,001, any candidate reaching the threshold is elected. If the candidate gets more than that number of votes, the remaining votes are redistributed to the voters' second choice. The least popular candidate is eliminated outright, and her or his votes are redistributed to the remaining candidates who were somebody's No. 2 pick. This process is repeated until all the seats are filled. This system is designed to address "wasted votes," which rather ignores the importance of margin of victory in influencing both policy and future elections. Nonetheless, it is used in some elections in Australia, India, and Ireland, and in Cambridge, Mass.

The upside of proportional representation is that more particular viewpoints get represented in government. Also, in winner-take-all elections, a legislative majority may effectively be chosen by less than 50 percent of the total vote, thus not truly reflecting the preferences of the overall majority of voters. The downside of proportional representation is that no party may have a majority in the legislature and hence not much may get done. Italy, using a party-based proportional system, has had nearly 60 governments since 1946, as it has been rare for any coalition of parties to maintain a stable majority for very long. Germany, however, employing a multi-party system for about the same period of time, has had fairly stable governments despite no one party ever having an outright majority in the Bundestag.

One recent electoral reform has been term limits, or the idea that anyone should only be able to serve for so long in a particular office. The United States passed the 22nd amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1947, imposing a two-term limit on the presidency. More recently, however, 15 states successfully adopted term limits for state legislators. Several attempted to limit the terms of their congressional delegations, but federal courts concluded that would put the states in the position of unilaterally amending the Constitution, and said no.

The argument for term limits is that "career politicians," who may serve for some decades, become too out of touch with the voters and too beholden to special interests. The argument against term limits is that 1. it's undemocratic because it doesn't allow voters to vote for whom they want and 2. it actually strengthens special interests. This is because policymaking typically involves three groups: legislators, interest groups, and appointed public officials, who run state or federal agencies who implement the laws. Term limits, by limiting the experience of legislators, actually makes the other two groups—bureaucrats and lobbyists—more powerful, and you don't get to vote for them. Whatever their faults, veteran legislators are more likely to know when they're being fed a line of bovine effluent. Legislatures where term limits have been imposed have lost a lot of institutional knowledge and leadership, with less than happy results.http://www.ncsl.org/legislatures-elections/legisdata/legislative-term-limits-overview.aspx

U.S. Presidential Elections

We should take a moment to discuss U.S. presidential elections, if only because there's not really anything else like it on earth, and many people find it confusing.

The election of the president starts with the nomination process. To be elected, a presidential candidate typically has to be nominated by a major party, although John Anderson in 1980, H. Ross Perot in 1992 and 1996, and Ralph Nader in 2000 were able to mount national campaigns as independents.

For much of the history of the country, the nominating process was controlled by the parties, with national nominating conventions often becoming battlegrounds where rival candidates jockeyed for favor among state delegations. Progressive reformers early in the 20th century began to push for democratizing the process, leading states to increasingly adopt primaries and caucuses as methods for choosing presidential nominees. But as recently as 1968, Hubert Humphrey won the Democrat nomination for president without entering a single primary.

Now, no candidate could get the nomination without entering most if not all of the primaries. They begin in January of election year with the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary, and stretch on into the early summer. States have been steadily moving their primaries up so as to attract more attention from the candidates—having an early primary means candidates visit, spend money and make promises. In some ways, that's what politics is all about.

Most states have primary elections for presidential nominees, but about a dozen states still use caucuses. Texas uses both, choosing some delegates through the primary and some via the caucus. Thecaucus system involves a series of meetings, starting at places such as schools and people's homes, leading up to district and state conventions, where delegates ultimately decide who gets the nod for that state. The state convention chooses a slate of representatives to go to the national convention, who will cast their ballots (each state gets so many votes, largely based on population) to decide who will be the party's standard-bearer in November.

Primaries, by contrast, are pretty simple: People vote, and candidates are awarded convention delegates on the basis of that vote. Some states use winner-take-all rules—the top vote getter gets all the delegates—party regulars and activists who will attend the national convention, pledged to vote for the winner. Some award delegates proportionally based on the vote.

Primary turnout is pretty low—usually less than 50 percent. Caucus turnout is even lower, but it does invite a deeper level of participation among voters, and brings people together in their neighborhoods to talk politics. Because caucuses are a multi-stage process, the results at the precinct level are both hard to judge and sometimes misreported. In 1976, despite having spent much of the last two years there, little-known Georgia Gov. Jimmy Carter came in second behind "uncommitted" in the opening round of the Iowa caucuses. Somehow this got reported as a victory, and propelled Carter to the nomination and the presidency. Caucuses also can be overrun by a committed group, as when televangelist Pat Robertson won the Washington state caucuses in 1988. The low turnout in both primaries and caucuses usually means that the people who show up are more liberal or more conservative than the voters at large. The people who really care about issues are the ones who will more often make the effort to vote or otherwise get involved. This makes it more difficult for moderate candidates to win the nomination. So a successful presidential candidate often has to appeal to a more conservative or liberal element within her or his party, and then dance back toward the middle once the nomination is locked up.

The nominating campaign is wrapped up by spring. As candidates carve out victories among the states, they get more attention, and funds dry up for the also-rans. No Democrat or Republican nominee hasn't had the nomination locked up well before the convention since 1972. The conventions have become, instead, elaborate dog-and-pony shows designed to boost the nominees' chances heading into the November election. This has made the national party conventions not just tedious but largely pointless. In 2004, John Kerrey and George W. Bush had their nominations nailed down well before the conventions, leading the television networks to cover very little of the convention proceedings.

Earning a Degree from the Electoral College

After the nomination comes the general election, on the first Tuesday in November every four years. As you may know, in the United States citizens elect a president through the Electoral College. This is one of the oddest features of American politics, and worth explaining if only because it confuses so many people. They easy explanation is that we have 51 separate, winner-take-all elections for president—50 states plus the District of Columbia. Each state gets electoral votes equal to the total size of its congressional delegation—senators (two) plus representatives. So for the 2012 election, California had the most electoral votes, 55, because it has the most people of any state (37.6 million) and hence the biggest House delegation. Alaska, D.C., Delaware, Montana, Vermont, Wyoming and the Dakotas all have the minimum, three.

The electors are real people—typically Republicans or Democrats who are chosen by their respective parties. They may be high party officials or big donors. The only requirements are that an elector cannot be a currently sitting elected official, and cannot have engaged in an insurrection against the United States, or assisted with one (part of the 14th amendment to the Constitution, following the Civil War). In December they gather in state capitals to cast their ballots, which are subsequently counted in the U.S. Senate and the election is certified in January.

There are 538 total electoral votes, and a candidate has to get at least 270 to win. So he or she has to win enough states to get to 270. This changes how candidates pursue their campaigns, because all of them are smart enough to realize that a state such as Texas likely will vote Republican, while California will vote Democrat. The election then tends to come down to "swing states"—states that can go either way depending on the year. Candidates thus concentrate their efforts on those states, while not completely neglecting the others. On the other hand, the states with only three electoral votes don't get as much attention. So in 2012, it was expected that the election would come down to a handful of states: Nevada, Colorado, Iowa, Wisconsin, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Virginia, North Carolina and Florida.

How did the U.S. decide to use this somewhat confusing system? It was a compromise between letting the people choose the president and letting Congress do it. The Founding Fathers didn't have total faith in the citizens, a problem compounded by the fact that the new nation was just under 4 million—less than New York City today—spread all up down the East Coast, without any form of rapid transportation or mass communication. They feared that voters would turn only to candidates they knew—"favorite sons"—making it harder for anyone to get elected nationally. Letting the Congress elect the president would upset the balance of power created in the Constitution—the president would owe his office to Congress, making it less likely that he could stand up to them. So the Electoral College, originally to be a college of learned persons, chosen by the people, was the compromise. States were allowed to decide their own method of choosing electors, but by 1860, only South Carolina wasn't letting the people choose their electors (they still had electors chosen by the state legislature). As soon as political parties began to germinate—basically, after the election of George Washington, the electors rapidly came to stand for one candidate or another.

The Electoral College is apportioned in part by population, and therefore depends on the Census taken every 10 years. Because if a state grows enough in population to gain a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives (or loses enough people to lose a seat), they gain not only congressional clout but also more attention from candidates. Washington state and Massachusetts literally went to court over the apportionment from the 1990 census, which Washington won by virtue of being able to count members of the Armed Forces officially stationed in Washington and though temporarily assigned elsewhere in the world. That's how far states will go to get that extra congressional seat and electoral vote.

It's a complicated system, and not always popular with voters. And, on several occasions, the winner of the popular vote doesn't actually win the election, most recently in 2000. The alternative would be a national election by popular vote. Proponents of the Electoral College say that would allow one region of the country to dominate elections, which is questionable. So why don't we change? Big states think it helps them, and small states think it helps them. Big states like the influence a lot of electoral votes generates: Candidates show up, spend money, and make promises. Small states, meanwhile, claim to see the same advantage. In a contest where the magic number of 270 is achieved by piecing together enough state victories to get there, every state counts. So, in the 2012 election, states such as New Hampshire (four votes) and Vermont (three) mattered in what was expected to be a close election.

In the United States, Election Season Never Ends

No, it doesn't. The character of U.S. elections is to some extent defined by our rather broad conception of freedom of speech. We can't, for example, limit the campaign season, as they do in the United Kingdom. And as long as the courts equate spending money with freedom of speech, it is difficult to limit the amount of money that can be spent on an election campaign.

In a parliamentary system, governments have to have elections every so often, such as every five years. But elections can come sooner—majority parties sometimes try to call for elections when things are going well for them, or a no-confidence vote in parliament can force a new election.

That means in the United Kingdom, for example, the whole campaign season can last only a month. An election is called, and with a matter of weeks, people vote. In the United States, in contrast, candidates for the 2016 presidential election will start visiting Iowa and New Hampshire in 2013. With political speech the most protected form of speech in the U.S., it is virtually impossible to keep anyone from campaigning for any office at any time. As a consequence, election campaigns go on for months and years, which may actually give voters a feeling of burnout long before it's time to cast their ballots. It also means you can say anything you want, no matter how egregiously false it might be (such as Republican claims that President Obama's health care plans included federal "death panels" who would decide who lives or dies. There was, in fact, nothing of the sort in the bill).

Money and Elections

If you want to run for office, you need money. Jesse Unruh, a California political operator with a talent for a pithy phrase, famously said, "Money is the mother's milk of politics." Money makes campaigns possible and campaigns successful. But like oxygen for fire, it's a necessary but insufficient ingredient. Hillary Clinton spent $250 million pursuing the Democrat nomination in 2008 and lost. Magazine publisher Steve Forbes spent $86 million—seven times what George W. Bush had spent by the time Forbes dropped out of the campaign in February 2000—and didn't win a single primary. Michael Huffington spent $28 million to run for the U.S. Senate in California in 1994, and lost. So having a lot of money is not a guarantee of victory. But without some money, it's very hard to get elected.

Money can do a lot of things for a candidate:

Advertising: Advertising gets your name out there, and your ideas, and, quite often, something about how wrong your opponent is. The bigger the race, the more the candidate will need broadcast media—radio, TV and the internet—to reach voters across the state and the country. The more local the race, the less that makes sense. Broadcast advertising in an urban area, for example, will reach a lot of voters who don't live in your district and can't vote for you anyway. So that's effectively a waste of resources. Candidates may also advertise on billboards, transit placards, and in print media such as newspapers and magazines. Not as many people subscribe to newspapers as once did. On the other hand, the people who do subscribe tend to be more educated and therefore more likely to vote.

Candidates used to spend money on doo-dads—buttons, combs, pens, emery boards—small items with the candidate's name and something about what they're running for. People don't wear campaign buttons so much anymore, but items such as pens and emery boards might still catch somebody's eye. Nonetheless, they're increasingly rare in contemporary campaigns.

Money can also buy direct mail, which, in local races, can be very effective. Candidates, their allies and their opponents all buy lists of registered voters and mail to them directly, touting the candidate's virtues, and telling you how wrong her or his opponent is. Usually this comes in the form of a postcard of some size, featuring a picture of the candidate, attractively posed with children, pets (and usually a dog as opposed to a cat or an iguana) and/or old people, and the printed equivalent of a few sound bites about what a great person she or he is. The advantage of direct mail is that it can reach people in your district at home. The disadvantage is that it's still junk mail, and potentially lost amid the ads, credit card offers and pleas for money that clutter a typical mailbox.

Hire consultants and staff: Hiring a good consultant can help a candidate polish her or his message, say the right things, and look a little more polished. Good staff is essential to a campaign—people who can organize events, get them filled up with your supporters—people who can get you to the church on time, as it were.

Travel: The bigger the race, the more you're going to have to travel. So a national campaign will spend a certain amount of money just driving and jetting around the country, meeting voters, giving speeches, kissing babies and shaking hands.

Hiring pollsters: Candidates in bigger races regularly pollsters to find out where their support is among voters, which issues matter most in this election, and trying to figure out where their own and their opponents' weaknesses are. Like a big company test-marketing a new product, candidates in major races, if they have the money, try to leave little to chance. Nonetheless, one suspects, that the tiniest bit of common sense ought to tell you if, say, the economy is the big issue in the campaign. If there isn't a war, it usually is.

Whether you need all this, depends upon the arena. A statewide or national campaign might require millions of dollars just to be competitive, but a local race typically costs much less. And at the street level of local politics, getting elected often is a question of who you know and how much you're known. Somebody who's been working in the community for a long time, in business and in civic activities such as charities, will be known by more people. If they've made a favorable impression, those folks will tell their friends that Candidate X is a pretty good guy (or woman), a solid citizen and a straight shooter.

The other key campaign component at the local level is doorbelling. Nothing apparently beats the candidate walking the neighborhoods, knocking on doors and meeting the voters. Candidates who've pounded the pavement to get elected say they meet all kinds of people, from the literally naked to the nominally nasty, but report that most people are fairly normal and are actually pleased to meet the person who represents them.

Where does the money come from? All over, but from some folks more than others. For example, in the 2010 U.S. congressional elections, 40–50 percent (depending on whether it was a House or Senate race and which party) came from large individual donors, followed by 10–30 percent from political action committees, 10–20 percent from small individual donors, and 3–20 percent from the candidates' own funds. Political action committees are organizations that solicit money from members, who may be businesses, individuals or unions, and contribute to campaigns. U.S. federal election law still prohibits direct corporate contributions to candidates, and the size of donations is severely limited—$2,500 per election to one candidate from one individual, and $5,000 per election to one candidate from one PAC. So the most a PAC could give would be $10,000—$5,000 for the primary and $5,000 more for the general election. There are no limits on how much of their own money candidates can spend.

Reforms in the 1970s and 1980s created this rule, but it was rather like squeezing a balloon. Money in politics is like electricity—it seeks the path of least resistance. As barriers to direct contributions grew, individuals and organizations turned to independent

spending. Most recently, the U.S. Supreme Court in a case called Citizens United voted 5–4 that the government could not limit any kind of election expenditure anyone wanted to make on their own behalf. So corporations and individuals can give as much money as they want to organizations that are technically separate from any candidate. And the organizations no longer have to report who their donors are, circumventing one of what had been one of the positive features of American campaign finance—transparency. It seems like a pretty thin line; it shouldn't be hard to figure out which organizations support your candidate and oppose the other one. And even though such organizations aren't supposed to consult with candidates or their campaign staff, it shouldn't be too difficult to figure out what's needed to support the campaign.

And so a lot of money gets spent, especially in the United States, on election campaigns. A lot of money. In 2008, U.S. candidates spent $5.3 billion, including more than $1 billion in the race for the presidency. Around $4 billion was spent on the 2010 elections, and 2012 spending was expected to reach nearly $10 billion. It's a lot of money, but we should put this in some perspective. Businesses in the United States spend more than $100 billion a year on advertising; the automobile industry alone spends as much in six months as the candidates spend in an entire two-year campaign cycle.

Does this matter? Clearly, underfunded candidates don't get elected. Repeated research shows that vote totals tend to track fundraising totals, to a point. At some point, a candidate just needs to have enough money. So, outspending your opponent by a factor of 5 or 6 to 1 means you have a much better chance of winning. But the more that margin falls, the worse your odds become. If candidates have enough money to run a campaign and get their message out there, who has the most money won't matter quite as much.

Aside from who wins, the other concern is whether campaign contributions affect how sitting legislators vote. The evidence tends to be inconclusive. First, contributors tend to give money to people who agree with them anyway. Under those circumstances, the campaign contribution may have some influence on who gets elected, but it may not actually be changing anybody's mind when they get there. Then again, lobbying organizations and interest groups who can make campaign contributions are probably more effective than those who can't.

One reform that has been tried has been public funding of elections, so that candidates don't have to rely on private donations to run their campaigns. In U.S. states where the amount of money offered was substantial, such as Minnesota and Wisconsin, candidates comply with the program and raise and spend less money. In states where the system is not well-funded, such as Hawaii and Arizona, serious candidates decline to participate, since adhering to the spending limits and taking the public money effectively disarms you in the face of your opponent, who can spend whatever he or she wants (more than you).

Presidential campaigns were briefly publically funded in the United States. Beginning with the 1976 campaign, major party candidates took advantage of the law and accepted public money in exchange for limiting the amount of outside contributions they received. But by 2000, candidates increasingly turned down public money in favor of private fundraising, which allowed them to raise and spend much more money than they could otherwise. Consider that President Obama spent $240 million in the 2008 primary campaign alone, while the federal spending limit for those accepting public funds was $10 million.

Although the data are incomplete, the United States spends more per capita on campaign finance than do other democracies. For 2008, we spent about $17 per person; Canadians spent $12 per person and in Australia they spent only $7. In other countries, such as Sweden and Mexico, campaigns are largely publically financed. Three quarters of the money spent on elections in Norway is public money, and political ads are banned from TV and radio. This kind of approach is, in fact, very common in Europe and South America.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The United States has a two-party system because of its winner-take-all elections.
- Proportional representation systems tend to produce multiparty states.
- Money is a necessary but insufficient ingredient for electoral success.

EXERCISE

1. What are the election laws in your state? What kind of primary does your state have? Do you have to register to vote by party? Does your state have a website for campaign finance information? How much did candidates in your area spend on the last election? Who were the big donors to those campaigns?

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6.3: Political Parties

Learning Objectives

In this section you will learn:

1. How parties have evolved.
2. What functions parties perform.

Another important feature of electoral politics is parties. Political parties are a basic way in which the conduct of politics is organized. Parties are in some sense political factions, a broad-based form of interest group. They are formal organizations of like-minded individuals who unite in pursuit of common political objectives.

Parties are not mentioned in the U.S. Constitution, and yet much of American politics is built around them, as is politics in pretty much every democratic state in the world. Even in the rare instances in which legislative bodies are organized on a non-partisan basis, party-like factions emerge. Parties evolved first in Great Britain and the United States, although there have been party-like factions in government dating back to Ancient Athens.

The Evolution of U.S. Parties

We have been through a number of what political scientists call party systems. After George Washington's terms in office, the new nation's politically active citizens began to divide into two parties, the Federalists and the Republicans. Scholars sometimes refer to them as the Democratic-Republicans, since the party eventually became known as the Democrats, but they apparently never referred to themselves as this. The Federalists were the business party, the mercantile party; the Republicans were the party of agricultural interests and ordinary workers. Being regionally and commercially based at a time when most of the country was made up of farmers, the Federalists were quickly overwhelmed and became a footnote in political history. By the election of 1824, all the candidates were of the same party.

But the party split in 1828, into a new party calling itself the Democrats and another group that called itself the National Republicans (changing to the Whigs after 1835. The term whig may come from a British party of the same name, or from a group of American revolutionaries). This was the Second Party System, and it lasted until near the start of the Civil War. The Democrats continued to be the party of agrarian interests and of states' rights, as in just say no to the federal government. The Whigs were the party of commerce and industry, and of a strong federal government. While the Whigs elected a couple of presidents, they fell apart over the issue of slavery in the 1850s.

The Whigs were replaced by the Republicans in 1854, with the Republicans becoming the first and only successful third-party movement in the history of the country. The Republicans were avowedly anti-slavery, which helped make them the dominant party in the U.S. after the north won the Civil War. Until 1930–32, Republicans dominated national politics, except in the American South, where Democrats predominated. Some scholars divide this era into two periods, the first one ending in 1896 and then succeeded by the Progessive era, but either way, Republicans were often in control.

Republican dominance was ended by the Great Depression, which saw huge electoral gains for Democrats in 1930 and 1932. Under Franklin Roosevelt, Democrats forged what became known as the New Deal Coalition, combining working-class citizens, people of color, and Southern Democrats to become the major force in American politics for the next 50 years. Remember that politics make strange bedfellows: The coalition included northern African-Americans, who could vote, and Southern Democrats, who wanted to keep them from voting. Somehow, it worked.

The election of 1980 changed that once again. Ronald Reagan won the presidency and the South finally forgave the Republican party for the Civil War. Control of the presidency and Congress has since swung back and forth between the parties. Political historians will someday give this era a coherent name, but probably not before one of you is teaching this class. As for now, we're in the middle of it. It is an era of divided government.

Third Party Movements

Why do we have a two-party system, especially when you hear so many people decry what they see as a lack of options when there are only two choices? Remember that it's the nature of U.S. elections that makes it so. In winner-take-all elections, there's little reward for voting for a third-party candidate, and starting a new party is no small (or cheap) endeavor. As a result, serious candidates and most voters gravitate toward one of the two major parties, because to do otherwise is to waste one's time and effort. Nonetheless, U.S. third parties do play an important role: bringing new ideas into politics. The Populists and Progressives of the late 19th and early 20th centuries pushed for a number of reforms, and as those movements had success at the polls, they were adopted and absorbed by the major parties. The DNA of the Populists and the Progressives is wound into that of the Democrats and Republicans of the 21st century. For example, in Minnesota, Democrats appear on the ballot as DFL—Democratic-Farmer-Labor—so named for a 1944 merger between Democrats and the Farmer-Labor Party. It would be difficult to predict whether a growing party movement such as the Libertarians will someday influence the future of Republicans or Democrats, but that is how things get started. Libertarians believe in the least amount of government possible, so their economic ideals are closer to what some Republicans say they believe, but their social concerns align more closely with what some Democrats profess.

American parties used to be stronger. Before electoral reforms in the 20th century, they controlled who ran for office and who got the money to do so. Voters' only real say in the system came in the general election, where it was not uncommon, for example, to get a ballot that allowed you to check one box and vote a straight Republican or straight Democrat ticket.

What Parties Do

U.S. parties still perform a number of important functions, however:

They recruit and train candidates. Especially in legislative races, each party wants a candidate in every district. This is so that even if someone is the candidate of the dominant party in a "safe" (leaning heavily) Republican or Democrat district, the majority party candidate will have to spend time and resources campaigning. This means they can funnel less support (money) to candidates in more competitive ("swing") districts.

Parties, therefore, also provide financial support for candidates. Party officials will talk to potential donors and steer money toward those candidates who stand the best chance of winning.

Parties try to mobilize voters at election time, spending money on direct mail, e-mail and social media, traditional advertising and telephone banks to find and get voters to the polls (or mail in their ballots in states where that's the norm). They try to identify likely Democrat or Republican voters and make sure that they vote.

Parties organize legislative politics. In Congress, and in every state except Nebraska, which has a non-partisan legislature, legislative bodies, such as the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, are organized by party. Party members meet in caucus as a group, where they plan legislative strategy and make assignments for thing such as floor debates over bills. The majority party will control the chamber, and the minority party will try to figure out how to slow them down.

Parties also write platforms, which are statements of general principles of the party. Platforms are serious, but they're also a bit of window dressing, as they don't have the force of law and don't compel any elected officials to adhere to the platform. And as the people who get involved in party politics enough to get elected, say, to the state or national platform committee, tend to be either Really Republican or Diehard Democrat, the platforms that emerge tend to be a bit to the right or to the left of where the average voter (and many candidates and officials) might be. In 2012, the Texas state Republican platform, for example, advocated barring the teaching of critical thinking skills. One state reason was that it might make young people disagree with their parents. A number of Texas Republican officials backpedaled away from that plank as soon as it got out, but it's in fact not atypical of what ends up in the platforms of both parties.When Harry Truman was running for re-election in 1948, he introduced the Republican party platform as legislation in Congress, then gleefully watched as the Republican majority voted down their own platform.

In a two-party system, the parties tend to be pretty broad. Until the 1990s, it was not uncommon in U.S. politics to find Republicans who were effectively more liberal than some Democrats, and Democrats who might be more conservative than many republicans. Parties in many other democratic states tend to be more narrowly focused, however, especially in states where proportional representation is the rule. Remember that under such electoral rules, a party need only get so many votes—not necessarily winning individual seats—to get seats in the national or regional legislature. That encourages multiple parties, because it rewards voters who choose any party, not just the top two.

Parties Outside of the United States

One thing we don't have in the United States is a true labor party, a standard feature in most European democracies. This is because we have no aristocratic tradition. We don't have the longstanding class divisions that still define a lot of European politics. Democrats tend to be more pro-labor than Republicans, but in such a broad party organization, labor is only one of many factions under the party umbrella. In Europe in particular, the ancient echoes of aristocracy and opposition to it are still heard in more class-based politics of the present. The British Labor Party, which has grown more centrist in the last few decades, was for much of its history the unapologetic voice of the working person. European democracies also are more likely to have an avowedly socialist party, such as the Social Democrats. Although they have shifted rightward in recent decades, they still tend to advocate for more government involvement in the economy. Nations from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe have parties that either call themselves or adhere to Social Democratic principles.

Communist parties still exist in nearly every nation, and in some, such as Brazil, Bangladesh, Denmark and Uruguay, they hold enough legislative seats to participate in the coalitions that rule the country. Like the Social Democrats, communist parties have tended to soften their stances at bit since the collapse of the Soviet Union. "Green" parties that advocate more concern for the environment are sprouting up, along with libertarian-flavored parties that argue for the least amount of government possible.

Opposite them we often find the Christian Democrats, who had religious roots but have become more of a market-oriented party in recent years. Nations from Albania to Venezuela have variants of this kind of party. Liberal parties are also right of center, leaning toward markets and away from government control of the economy, but without the religious roots of the Christian Democrats. Conservative parties are farther right still, campaigning for unfettered markets and what they see as greater economic opportunity.

Voters in other countries may face quite a few more real choices than do voters in the United States. So, for example, Germany has seven active parties: the Christian Democrats, the Christian Social Union, the Social Democrats, the Free Democrats, the Left, and the Greens. Canada has five parties: the Conservatives, the Liberals, the left-leaning New Democrats, the Parti Quebecois, which advocates Quebec leaving Canada, and the Greens. Brazil has four major and 15 medium-sized parties, and more than half a dozen other minor parties.

Wherever we find parties, we do find partisanship, which can be both good and bad for the body politic. Party politics can lead to pursuit of partisan advantage over sound policy; parties in legislative bodies sometimes spend more time trying to make the other side look bad than trying to get something positive done. Parties also can get stuck in ideological ruts, and hence fail to pursue needed reforms.

But despite their challenges, parties will never fade away. Some cities and local governments in the west have non-partisan elections, but it's usually not difficult to figure out what stripes every tiger has. Uganda recently experimented with party-free politics; the fact that the experiment didn't last ought to tell you something. James Madison, in campaigning for the adoption of the U.S. Constitution, warned against the evils of factions. But within a decade, he was leading one.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Political parties are a broad form of interest group.
- Parties recruit, train and fund candidates; they educate and mobilize voters; they organize the legislative process.
- U.S. parties are not as powerful as they once were, but still perform important functions in American politics.

EXERCISES

1. Which party do you more closely align with? Why? Visit that party's website and look at their most recent political platform. Does it match what you believe about politics and government?
2. Interview an elected official, and ask them why belong to one party instead of another?

EXERCISES

1. How do you register to vote where you live? What would it take for you and your classmates to register people to vote? Do it, and keep track of how many people say no, and why they say no.
2. Survey people on campus: Are they registered to vote? Do they intend to vote in the next election?

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

7: The Building Blocks of Government

7.1: Legislatures
7.2: Executives
7.3: Courts
7.4: Sub-National Governments
7.5: Bureaucracy

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7.1: Legislatures

Learning Objectives

In this section you will learn:

1. About the different kinds of legislatures.
2. How the U.S. Congress works.
3. How parliamentary systems work.

Basically, there are three kinds of legislatures:

- Consultative—in which the legislature advises the ruler or rulers on matters of law and policy. Members may be elected and/or appointed.
- Parliamentary—in which an elected legislature makes laws and also, through its leadership, serves as the executive branch of government.
- Congressional—in which one or more elected groups of legislators make law and share powers with other branches of government.

Legislatures typically perform a basic set of functions:

- **They make and revise laws**. This usually includes the sole or main authority to write budgets—to officially sanction the imposition and collection of taxes, and the spending of public money.
- **They engage in administrative oversight**. Legislatures usually are charged with ensuring that the laws are being carried out properly by the agencies of government. In a congressional system, they may also "advise and consent" with executives on appointments to government and the making of treaties with other countries. Effectively, this means that a legislature may deny a presidential appointment, or prevent the adoption of a treat.
- **They represent constituents to the government**. In legislatures where elections are based on geographically defined districts, individual legislators will spend some time attempting to help out their constituents address individual problems they have with government, such as public pension benefits or securing appointments to military academies.

The biggest job of legislatures is making laws. Having legislatures make laws pushes power toward the people, who, in a functioning republic, have in some fashion elected the members of the legislature. That gives voters the power to recall legislators by electing somebody else next time around. Legislators typically have defined terms of office, usually from two to six years in length. In parliamentary systems, the term of office may be only until the next election, which could be anywhere from a month to five years.Elections can come quickly in parliamentary systems. The Earl of Bath served as British prime minister for two days in February 1746; the government collapsed when no agreed to serve with him. George Canning served as prime minister for 119 days in 1827 before an election was called. In contrast, Sir Robert Walpole served as prime minister for 20 years, from 1721 to 1742. As explained in the previous chapter, legislators may be elected to represent certain districts, states or provinces within a nation, or elected in proportion to the number of votes received by their party in the election. And many nations use a combination of the two methods.

Consultative Assemblies

A handful of nations have consultative assemblies, which lack the lawmaking power of a traditional legislature. These include several Middle Eastern states such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait. Ostensibly communist states such as China, Vietnam, Cuba and Laos have national assemblies, which, on paper, have lawmaking power. In practice, however, as with the Chinese National People's Congress, they meet briefly each year and have very limited ability to make law. Consultative assemblies give the appearance of giving the people a voice, but they provide no real check on the power of the government, wherever it may actually be found.

China's legislature is worth a little examination, if only because it is so different than what is found in much of the rest of the world. At 2,987 members, it's the largest legislature in the world, and still means only one member of Congress for about every

400,000 people in China. In contrast, the New Hampshire state House (part of the world's fourth largest legislature), has 400 members representing about 3,000 people each. Members of the U.S. House of Representatives serve about 700,000 people each.

The People's Congress meets for a couple of weeks each year, at the same time as the Chinese People's Consultative Conference, which is supposed to represent various interest groups in the country. Its supporters say that it works to mediate disputes between different factions within China; its critics say it's still mostly a rubber stamp for the Chinese Communist Party, which still holds effective ruling power in the country. Technically speaking, the members of the People's Congress are elected by assemblies below them, and those assemblies are elected by the people. In reality, the members of the People's Congress are largely chosen by the party. Around 70 percent are party members, and while there are eight other political parties in China, they've all been approved by the Communists.

Legislatures in Congressional Systems

Most legislature don't look like that. As the American poet John Godfrey Saxe once said, "Laws, like sausages, cease to inspire respect in proportion to how they are made."Frequently misattributed to 19th century German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. Legislatures can be messy, cantankerous affairs, full of arguing, bargaining and general unease.

Let's consider the U.S. Congress, which has some differences from other legislatures but is not atypical of how the legislative process works in general.

In the United States, Congress is the body of government that makes laws. All federal laws start in Congress; neither the courts nor the president has the power to make law.

Congress, like most legislatures, is an arena for the articulation of conflict. That means it's a place where the people's business can be done without real violence.Although, in the pre-Civil War 1800s, physical attacks by one member on another were not unheard of.

While Congress' main job is making law, it must balance the needs of making policy and meeting constituent needs. This is at the heart of the internal conflict that drives Congress—how to balance the particular needs of one's state or district against the needs of the nation as a whole. These two things may not coincide, and sometimes it appears that members of Congress tend toward considering parochial needs over national ones. So, many members of Congress have railed against what they saw as excessive government spending, but didn't fail to direct federal funds to their home states and districts. Similarly, members of Congress may find themselves in conflict over the needs of the nation and the needs of particular constituents and interest groups. So a member of Congress likely would say that he or she is in favor of a balanced budget, but may still vote for spending that funds a local project or a defense contractor in his or her state or district.

Congress has a substantial constitutional mandate: It can levy taxes, borrow money, spend money, regulate interstate commerce, establish a national currency, establish a post office, declare war, raise and support an army and navy; establish courts; and pass all laws "necessary and proper" to implement this. It can propose amendments or call a constitutional convention; it can admit new states. TheHouse of Representatives can elect a president. The Senate advises and consents on treaties and nominations to judicial posts. The House can impeach and Senate may try any officer of government. It can investigate whatever it likes, and discipline its own members.

The U.S. Congress has 535 members: 100 in the Senate, two for each state; and 435 in the House of Representatives, apportioned among the states by population (about 600,000 people per district). The House is capped at 435 by act of Congress in 1929. The House includes non-voting delegates from the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Virgin Islands and American Samoa. DC voters don't get real representation because the national capital was put outside the boundaries of any state, as the states were all still pretty jealous of each other the late 1700s. While that's no longer as true, at various times in the nation's history, Republicans and Democrats each feared that giving congressional representation to the district would mean more seats for the other party. The most rational solution, simply letting D.C. residents vote in Maryland's congressional elections, hasn't cleared that hurdle either.

Having a two-chambered legislature—the House and Senate are coequal branches of government—slows down the legislative process. For any bill to become law, it must pass both chambers in exactly the same version. This is further complicated by the nature of the Senate. As the Senate is based on states and not on population, it disproportionately tips power toward less populous states. If you added up all the smallest states to get 51 seats (and hence a Senate majority), you'd have legislators representing

about 17 percent of the nation. And being able to block something in the Senate means being able to stop nearly everything. The Senate has unlimited debate, which means that even the threat of filibuster—talking without end on the floor of the Senate—can derail any piece of legislation. It's pretty rare for any party to have 60 seats in the Senate anymore, so invoking cloture and ending debate is not a simple task.

If Senate apportionment by state wasn't in the Constitution, it wouldn't last a day in court. In decisions in the 1950s and 1960s, U.S. federal courts ruled that legislative districts need to be fairly equal in terms of population, usually within 1 percent. Prior that, districts often had wildly uneven populations—a good thing in a smaller district, not so good in a larger one. In Arizona, for example, the state House was apportioned by population, while the state Senate was divided by county. With the great majority of the state's population in only two counties (centered around Phoenix and Tucson), rural interests dominated the Legislature. That's not necessarily wrong, but it wasn't fair to the majority of the state's residents.

Now, following the U.S. Census, every 10 years states must redistrict, both for state legislative and U.S. House districts. Some states let legislative majority parties draw new districts, which is usually bad news for whichever party isn't in the majority; other states appoint technically non-partisan redistricting commissions to do the job. Even there, that often means partisan appointees will try to get an edge in redistricting for their side.

House members are elected to two-year terms; from the start, it was intended to be the chamber of the people (although state legislatures commonly had annual elections before the adoption of the Constitution). Members of the Senate are elected to six-year terms. The original design was a more deliberative body to put a check on the temporary passions of the masses. With a six-year term, members of the Senate can afford to take a slightly longer, broader view of issues without having to face re-election quite so soon. Also, for that reason, originally they were elected by state Legislatures. By the late 19th century, this system had run into problems. State legislatures frequently couldn't agree on whom to send, and seats sometimes went vacant. The lack of popular control on the Senate also meant that it tended to be dominated by the interest groups, such as railroads, much to the displeasure of many voters. The 17th amendment was passed in 1913 to provide for direct election of U.S. senators.

The vice president serves as President of the Senate, and can in fact vote to break a tie. The Speaker of the House leads the House, and the Senate Majority Leader is the boss of the Senate. The majority party typically elects both positions.

The majority party also controls the committee system, which is where the work in Congress is done. Often as not, by the time something gets to the floor, the issue is decided.This should be called McCrone's rule, after the eminent political scientist Don McCrone, who said that nothing comes to a vote that hasn't already been decided. Typically, if you know you don't have the votes to get something passed, you don't bring it to the floor, unless you want to make a statement. Statements are fine, but they don't get bills passed.

The speaker has some ability to control floor debate, make committee assignments and assign bills to committee. This can be effective in finding out whether a bill has a future or just a past. Committee chairman have similar power with regard to their committees.

Congress convenes in early January and, with occasional recesses, will meet until anywhere from August to October. Most of the work is done in committees.

The Committee System

There are 21 standing committees in the House and 17 in the Senate, though the numbers change from year to year. They cover everything from the budget and taxes to agriculture to science. Members of Congress vie for choice committee assignments. If you're from a farm area, you don't need a guidebook to know you should be on the agriculture committee. If you've got military bases in your district, then the armed services committee would be a prudent choice. A successful member of Congress will find a specialization and become an expert. This gives the representative or senator some power, something to trade with other members, and something to hang her or his hat on when she or he goes home to the district.

Committees divide labor and allow specialization. It would be difficult for any member of Congress to be an expert on everything; committee specialization allows members of Congress to be good at something, and, hopefully, share that expertise with others.

Committees are further broken down into subcommittees. Subcommittees typically are where the nuts and bolts work of legislating is done. For a bill to become law, some member of Congress must sponsor it. Most bills can start in the House or the Senate, where

they will be assigned to at least one committee, and maybe more if there's a revenue or spending impact. The bill may get scheduled for a hearing, and maybe even a vote in the subcommittee. If it survives that, it must be voted out by committee, and then on to the House or Senate floor. If it survives all that, it goes to the other chamber, where it must go through the same process all over again. For the bill to become law, it must pass both chambers in exactly the same version. If House or Senate amendments change one version, the two sides may call a conference committee featuring members of both parties, who may be able to hammer out a compromise. And then it must be signed by the president.

Given that gantletThat's not a misspelling: A gauntlet is not a punishing line of people whacking the person who has to run the length of the line, it's a kind of glove. of challenges, most bills die long before they become law. But like the villains in a zombie movie, a bill is never really dead. If you're a member of the minority party, the majority party is less likely to let you push legislation through. A skillful legislator finds a friend across the aisle and lets her or him sponsor the legislation. Alternatively, a dead bill can rise from the grave as an amendment to a bill that's still alive. The Senate has no germaneness rule, which states that an amendment must be germane (relate) to the subject of the original bill. The House has such a rule. So, in the Senate, you can hang any amendment on any measure, and some bills get so many amendments that they get called "Christmas tree bills," as everyone has hung an ornament on them. But even with those potential lifesaving measures, most bills are doomed to fail. Congress gets 10,000 bills a year—most from the executive branch—but only 3–5 percent will ever become law.

One of Congress' most important jobs is among the least glamorous: administrative oversight. Congressional committees spend a lot of time talking and listening with members of the executive branch to try to figure out if everything is working the way the law said it was supposed to. But there are few immediate rewards for the important but unexciting task of oversight. An incumbent seeking re-election can't go home and get much mileage out of "Vote for me; I oversaw the routine handling of road repair and bridge building." And yet that's actually a more important task than some high-profile issues.

Among the most important committees is the House Rules Committee. This is typically is chaired by the speaker or by someone he really trusts, and it sets the terms and conditions of debate, and the path through which legislation must travel. Contrast that with the Senate and its unlimited debate, and where the threat of filibuster can hold up even innocuous legislation if somebody has his knickers in a twist over something. A single senator can hold up a judicial or other federal appointment for any reason as well. One school of thought suggests that the Senate needs some reform, but its ability to stop the train may look better or worse depending on your point of view. If you're a conservative and the Senate is blocking a liberal agenda, this might look OK, and vice versa. Absent a constitutional amendment, the Senate writes its own rules, so it would take something dramatic to force a change.

The Senate "advises and consents" on presidential appointments, including high administrative officials and federal judges, and on treaties with foreign nations. That means the Senate conducts hearings on appointments and treaties, and either approves or denies them. McCrone's Rule comes into play once again, as the Senate will signal to the president that a nominee or a treaty isn't up to standard long before it comes to a vote. And unlike congressional parties, presidents are much less interested in making a statement; if the Senate just says no, the president looks bad.

Members of Congress are not alone. Committee staff work on policy; legislative (personal) staff work on constituency concerns. Congress has about 31,000 staffers. Constituency service is an important part of what members of Congress do—everything from meeting the home folks, both at home and in the capital, to helping citizens sort out their issues with federal agencies. Members of Congress who are seen as too remote from their states or districts typically have a harder time getting re-elected. So they maintain offices back home as well as in Washington. Despite a travel allowance, serving is easier for members from East Coast states than for those from the west, who have a lot longer to travel and still maintain some kind of residence back home. An average member works more than 60 hours a week, at a salary of $174,000 a year, plus a travel allowance and office support. The travel allowance is good if you live close by, less good if you don't, and the salary would be comfortable if you lived in one place instead of two.

Congress and the President

The president must sign bills into law. He can veto them. Congress can override the veto by a two-thirds vote. But that has happened only 4 percent of the time since George Washington was president. Presidents don't actually use veto all that often; Richard Nixon vetoed a few dozen bills in his entire term in office and that was regarded as a lot. The two sides must work together, and so there's a lot of give and take, and Congress will take care in sending the president bills he is less likely to veto unless they're specifically trying to embarrass him. Meanwhile, Congress has resources with which to challenge the president: The

General Accounting Office, the Congressional Budget Office, and the Office of Technology Assessment. Information is power in government, and typically is seen as more impressive than money.

Congress tends to have more power in domestic policy than in foreign affairs. Foreign policy often requires quick and decisive action; Congress is not designed for this. Domestic policy, on the other hand, can be more careful and deliberative, and Congress excels at this.

Members of Congress frequently form caucuses of members concerned about a variety of issues, from economic interests to ethnicity. These can form blocs within Congress. In recent years, for example, moderate Republicans have forced Republican leadership to back down on sweeping changes to environmental laws.

Congress isn't like the rest of the country. Congress is older, whiter, richer than the nation as a whole. In 2012, it was 8 percent African-American, 5 percent Hispanic-American and less than 2 percent Asian-American, so that is now whiter than it was 20 years ago even as the nation has become more diverse. Only 17 percent of members are women, and that's the highest ever. Nearly 16 percent of members are over 70, and only 4 percent are under 40. The average age is 58. The average House member has served for 10 years, and the average Senator has served 13. Eighty-five percent of members are married, and fewer than 8 percent are not some flavor of Christianity. Nearly all have college educations, with professions most often listed as public service/politics, business and law.

Congress' Lack of Popularity

The conundrum of Congress is that this symbol of American democracy is, and long has been, wildly unpopular. In July 2012, Congress' approval rating was only 16 percent, although it's generally on the low side when the economy is bad. But even in good years, Congress' approval rating hasn't moved north of 50 percent in the last half century. Studies have shown that Congress generally follows the popular will, broadly speaking, and it costs you less than the price of dinner at a fast-food restaurant, once a year. And yet people don't like it.

Congress is a convenient repository for national blame and popular regret. Why? This, in some ways, the heart of the American system of government of which U.S. citizens are so justly proud.

Some possible reasons:

People think Congress wastes money. Among the things it is famous for is pork barrel legislation: The phrase comes from the 18th century practice of keeping pork in a barrel, and letting slaves and farmhands have a grab, and they would grab for all they could get. Hence it can be with legislators at all levels, who will grab for all the morsels they can in terms of getting money for projects in their districts. But one person's pork is another person's paradise. Where do you draw the line? Then again,earmarks—amendments to bills to fund projects in home states and districts—account for less than 1 percent of the federal budget. So the issue is probably somewhat overstated. You could make all the earmarks disappear, and the federal budget would not be much closer to being balanced.

Figure 7.1 [To Come] Federal Budget and Revenue Pie Charts

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Some earmarks do look a bit silly, such as nearly $1 million in 2010 to get more poetry in zoos. Consider a somewhat famous example from the 2000s. The late U.S. Sen. Ted Stevens, a conservative Republican who still managed to bring home billions in federal aid to Alaska, helped get federal funding for a $398 million bridge in Ketchikan in Southeast Alaska. As Ketchikan has a population of only about 15,000, the project acquired the nickname of "the bridge to nowhere."

In fact, the bridge would have connected to Gravina Island, home of about 50 people and to Ketchikan's airport, which serves about 200,000 passengers a year. Ketchikan, a lovely town, sits at the foot of impassible mountains and is connected to nowhere else by road. So the only way in or out of the self-proclaimed "Salmon capital of the world" is by boat or by plane, and you have to take a ferry to the airport (which takes about 15 minutes). That complicated the structure of the bridge, since it had to be long enough to reach the island and high enough to allow ship traffic to pass underneath. Bridge proponents also argued that it would allow development of more land on the island. Developable land is, somewhat ironically, in short supply in many parts of the country's largest state.

The issue was controversial everywhere, even in Ketchikan. On one visit, I asked a friend of mine who lives there what locals thought about the bridge, and he responded, amid a local store, “Do you want to see me start a fight, right here?”

Criticism of the project mounted, both in Congress and in the national discussion, and the project became something of a poster-child for wasteful federal spending. Then-Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, originally a staunch proponent of the project, cancelled it after Sen. Stevens’ earmark was excised from the federal budget. Palin then became the Republican vice-presidential nominee, and started claiming that she had stopped the project herself. She also went ahead and accepted $25 million in federal highway funds to build the Gravina Island highway, which would have connected with the bridge. It sits there now, largely unused, appropriately dubbed “the road to nowhere.”

Whether the bridge project was a good idea or a bad one, it underscores people’s feelings about federal spending—one person’s boondoggle is another person’s vital civic improvement. If you had to take a ferry to the airport—and if you’ve ever had to wait in a ferry line, the question changes in scope and dimension—would you rather have a bridge?

Congress vs. itself: Part of the problem is that candidates have been running against Congress for much of the last 40 years. Even incumbents may rail against the institution, even as they ask voters to send them back. If you keep telling people that “the system is broken,” in one currently popular phrase, eventually they’ll believe you. And yet incumbents win more than 90 percent of the time, year in and year out. Voters appear to like their own members of Congress; it’s those other guys who are causing all the trouble. Part of that may relate to what political scientists have called the case of the vanishing marginals: Why have so many races become less competitive over the years? More often than not, since the second half of the 20th century, congressional elections are not close. In part this may be due to redistricting efforts that have created congressional districts that are predominantly Republican or Democrat, leaving the other party with a diminished chance of ever winning the seat. Parties respond by failing to invest in campaigns in those districts, knowing they have little chance of winning.

The evidence isn’t entirely conclusive as to why incumbents win so often. But if you’re so unhappy with Congress, why keep sending the same people back, over and over again?

Misinformation: The internet, that great font of misinformation, probably hasn’t helped. You don’t have to look very far to find some version of the endlessly forwarded e-mail calling on Congress to have to adhere to its own laws (it does), to cut its pay (which would encourage either real corruption or make it impossible for anybody but a billionaire to serve), and make them pay into Social Security (they do). The list goes on, and it’s all bunk.

Lack of understanding: The fact that Congress was designed to deliberate and work slowly seems to be lost on too many people. Like that tingling sensation from your dandruff shampoo, when you see the president and Congress at an apparent impasse, that means it’s working, and working the way it was supposed to. Congress was supposed to be a check on the presidency, the courts, and, above all, on the momentary passions of the electorate. When national consensus is achieved, Congress acts. Failing that, Congress deliberates. It’s not very pretty, but that’s what was supposed to happen.

Legislatures in Other Countries

Nations in North and South America tend to have congressional-style governments, with separately elected presidents who are not entirely tied to the whim of the legislature. The alternative to a congressional-style legislature is the parliamentary style, an approach more common to Europe, Africa and Asia.

And Canada, which is a good example of how parliamentary legislatures work. The Canadian Parliament is divided into two chambers, the House of Commons and the Senate. More power and authority ride in the 308-member House of Commons. The members are elected in winner-take-all elections in districts known as ridings, which may derive from an old British term, which may derive from an old Norse term. The number of seats is expected to rise for the next election, tentatively scheduled for Oct. 19, 2015. At one seat per 110,000 people, the level of representation is much higher than in the U.S. at one seat per 650,000 people. Terms are up to five years or until the next election, which is one key difference for parliamentary systems. The ruling party or coalition of parties may call for an election whenever they want, or an election may be forced by a no-confidence vote in the Commons.

The biggest difference between parliamentary systems and congressional systems is in the structure of government. In the congressional system, power is shared and divided between the different branches of government, including the legislative, executive and judicial. In a parliamentary system, the chief legislative body serves as both the executive and legislative branches.

The head of government is the prime minister, who is chosen either by the majority party or by the coalition that builds a majority in the legislature. All of what in the United States would be cabinet secretaries appointed by the president are in Canada simply members of Parliament, appointed by the prime minister and the majority party. So instead of a secretary of defense and chairmen or women of the House and Senate defense committees, they have a defense minister who is not only in charge of the agency, he or she can vote on its budget and policies.

Canada's government has some vestiges of its British ancestry. The governor general is the representative of the British crown in Canada. He or she is appointed by the British monarch on the advice of the Canadian prime minister. Although governors general take their roles seriously, they are largely ceremonial. The 105-member Senate is appointed by governor general, again on the recommendation of the prime minister. The Senate is somewhat like the British House of Lords. It can debate and amend pieces of legislation, but cannot introduce any measures relating to spending and taxes. Once appointed, Senators may remain in office until age 75. The Senate does, on occasion, block legislation from the House of Commons, at various times holding up or rejecting bills relating to trade, abortion, greenhouse gases and taxes. The House of Lords in Great Britain has no say on revenue or spending measures.

As with the congressional system, parliamentary systems divide work by committees. Unlike congressional systems, a change in government via election can mean rapid change in government policy. With most power vested in one chamber, the only serious check on the power of the majority is elections, although court systems provide some check on power in some parliamentary states. But typically, in Canada, a victory by the Conservatives or the Liberals will mean a definite turn toward that party's priorities. Contrast that with the United States, where a new congressional majority may face presidential vetoes, or where Republican control of one chamber and Democrat control of another may provoke disagreement and stalemate. In the British House of Commons, debate is severely limited, so that unlike in the U.S. Congress, for example, the minority party is less able to hold up legislation it doesn't like. So things may happen more quickly in a parliamentary system.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Members of the U.S. Congress, and legislators in general, have three basic duties: Making law, overseeing the efficient operations of government, and serving constituents.
- Congressional systems are used in nations where government power is divided and shared by more than one branch. Parliamentary systems place executive and legislative power in one branch.
- The basic work of legislatures of all types is often done in committees and subcommittees, where legislators and their support staff can specialize in particular policy subject areas.

EXERCISE

1. Look up your local state or congressional representative. What committees does this person serve on? How long has she or he been in office? Contact them and ask a question about a policy issue that you are interested in.

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7.2: Executives

Learning Objectives

In this section you will learn:

1. What executives do.
2. The difference between the head of state and the head of government.
3. The difference between a president and a prime minister.

The chief executive of a nation has two potential tasks: head of government and head of state. Head of government is in charge of the day-to-day affairs of the state, like the chief executive of a large corporation. The head of state represents the nation to the world, and may include any number of ceremonial duties. Some chief executives combine both functions; others perform one or the other.

Types of Executives

In congressional systems, the chief executive, often called the president, is both head of government and head of state. Approximately 48 nations feature a separately elected president, who is in some way a check on the power of the chief legislative body. In some handful of states, the chief executive is a monarch—a king, a prince or a sultan, for example—who owes his or her job to heredity. The majority of nations have a parliamentary system. In parliamentary systems, the prime minister or premier is the head of government. Depending on the nation, the head of state may be a hereditary monarch such as Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain. It might also be a separately elected president, such as in Germany. The German presidency is a largely ceremonial post; the president has veto powers over the Bundestag, the main house of parliament, but has never used them. He or she serves a five-year term, elected the federal convention, which includes all the members of parliament plus members chosen by the state parliaments. Policy and power, however, rest with the chancellor, the equivalent of Canada's prime minister. And many more people around the world could probably tell you that Germany's chancellor in 2012 was Angela Merkel than could tell you that Germany's president was Joachim Gauck.

A **prime minister** or **chancellor** in a parliamentary system is also a member of the more powerful house of the legislature, and also typically the leader of that party. Assuming that the prime minister has an outright parliamentary majority, as opposed to heading a coalition of allied parties, he or she has some advantages and challenges with regard to governing. Since by definition the prime minister has a legislative majority, it should be easier to push through one's legislative agenda. You start every day with the votes you need. That's an oversimplification, of course. Members of parliament, even of your own party, will have their own take on things, and what the parliamentary majority wants may not be precisely what the majority of people want. So no parliamentary majority is completely immune from public pressure. On the other hand, unlike a separately elected president in a congressional system, a prime minister owes his or her power to his or her legislative majority. If the majority becomes unhappy with the prime minister's leadership, they can conduct a no-confidence vote and that executive's career at the top of the heap may be over.

Presidents in Congressional Systems

Presidents in congressional systems are separately elected. Such a president may or may not have a working majority in the legislature. If she or he doesn't, it will be more difficult to get her or his policy agenda turned into law. The key point here is that a president in a congressional system does not have anywhere near complete power to change government and policy. Although such a president is both chief of state and head of government, she or he lacks full authority to dictate which way government is going to go. Nonetheless, citizens in countries with this kind of president tend to put all of their hopes and dreams and fears onto the presidency, and onto the particular president in office at any given time. Let us consider the presidency, using the U.S. presidency as an example.

The U.S. President

The **U.S. *presidency*** is probably the single most powerful office on earth, and yet the president finds himself (and someday herself) in the middle of competing power centers. Presidents get far too much credit for what goes right in the country, and far too much blame for what goes wrong. A president is elected every four years in years divisible by four. U.S. presidents may serve no more

than two terms or 10 years, in the case of a president assuming office mid-term. This came from the 22nd amendment, adopted 1947 after Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected and re-elected four times beginning in 1932.

The U.S. president has a number of formal powers. He or she can:

- **Carry out legislation**. The president directs the executive branch and the federal bureaucracy to carry out the laws as passed by Congress.
- **Provide information and advice to Congress**, including through the State of the Union address.
- **Negotiate treaties and executive agreements with foreign states**. Treaties must be approved by the Senate; executive agreements need not and are more easily contravened either by act of Congress or by the next president.
- **Make appointments to positions in the executive branch**. He has about 3,000 jobs to fill, including cabinet secretaries. The cabinet doesn't actually function like a cabinet, however; they don't all get together and have meetings. From the original four positions, the cabinet has grown to 14, and the president may designate other officials as cabinet level, such as UN ambassador.
- **Grant pardons**. The president can pardon criminals who have been convicted of crimes except in cases of impeachment.
- **Act as chief of state and commander in chief of the armed forces**.
- **Sign legislation to make it law and veto legislation to block it** (Congress can override vetoes by a two-thirds vote). The president has limited ability to impound federal funds, and can issue executive orders to the bureaucracy. Both of these actions can be easily overturned by Congress, simply by passing a new law.

The Founding Fathers didn't really envision the president having as much power as he does today, but this was probably inevitable. If nothing else, the nature of the situation suggests that one person—the president—can pull himself together and make a decision faster than can a group of 535 people—many of whom think they should be president—divided into two typically contentious groups. The organizational dynamics of the situation dictate that the president will be the dominant player in the political scene.

Consequently, although it is Congress' job to make law, 80–90 of legislation proposed in Congress comes from the executive branch, including all of the cabinet agencies under the president. As a consequence, at times Congress is more of an arbiter or gate-keeper of policy, as opposed to leading the way.

Nonetheless, the president has the power to persuade, not to command. He can't say jump and expect immediate action outside of the White House. This power is not inconsiderable. U.S. citizens may be acutely unhappy with a particular president, but on the whole, Americans have tended to have a great reverence for the office of the president, and this lends itself to substantial power if used properly. That's one reason why presidents go around and make speeches: It's usually to try to sway public opinion in the direction of policy goals, which can be very useful if you're butting heads with a recalcitrant Congress. This has been true since Franklin Delano Roosevelt first gave his famous "fireside chats" on the radio in the 1930s. Roosevelt spoke each week on the radio when that was the chief medium of mass communication. His comforting president gave people a little hope in otherwise difficult times. Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton also were very good at using the media to persuade the masses. To the extent that the news media still covers politics in any meaningful way, the U.S. House of Representatives gets fairly meager coverage, while the U.S. Senate gets a little more. What the president says, by definition, is news, so that the president's face and voice are ever-present.

This is important because presidents must succeed symbolically. They must be seen to be in charge, to care, to be trying to do something to make people's lives better. So Franklin Delano Roosevelt, under whose watch the Great Depression stretched on for nearly 10 more years, still remained popular with many voters because they believed that he cared about them. Ditto for Ronald Reagan, who, as George H.W. Bush once sneered during the 1980 primaries, had "that vision thing." The unfortunate Mr. Bush, who enjoyed record popularity at the successful conclusion of the first Gulf War, still failed to get re-elected in part because the economy was sagging and he seemed out of touch with what that meant to people. Ronald Reagan, in contrast, pursued policy that people said they disagreed with in reliable opinion polls. But they elected him twice because they liked him. So the president's actual performance and his popularity may diverge quite a bit. Voters who may not be paying close attention are often compelled by the form rather than the substance of the president's action.

Quick and decisive action usually helps the president's approval ratings, which is why presidents score big points on the foreign policy front but not many on the home front (unless the economy does well). The Founding Fathers actually imagined that Congress, in particular the Senate, would direct foreign policy, but this is not workable. The gang of 535 simply can't respond quickly enough. The president, meanwhile, can travel the world, meet with foreign leaders, negotiate treaties, open doors and be seen to be taking decisive action and solving problems. In the 1980s, as the Soviet Union collapsed from within, Ronald Reagan's

stern anti-communist speeches and efforts to negotiate with the Soviets helped him look like the conquering hero of the Cold War. Some scholars do give Reagan credit, but one could argue that the Soviet Union was on its last legs when Reagan was first elected.

As commander-in-chief, the president can put the armed forces to work. As a consequence, U.S. troops have been sent overseas more than 150 times but Congress has declared war only six times, and not once since World War II. In the wake of the United States' involvement in Vietnam, which went from being a training mission to having half a million men and women serving there, Congress felt the need to assert itself. They passed the

War Powers Act in 1973, which requires the president to commit troops for more than six months before reporting to Congress and justifying her or his actions. It's not clear if this works, as it hasn't been tested, and the hammer is still with the president. Congress can't order the troops home. Its only recourse is to cut off funding for the mission. That would likely be seen as endangering the lives of the men and women who have been sent overseas, which is likely to be extremely unpopular back home.

Other presidents in other countries will have particular mixes of duties and authority, but this is the general model for what a president in a non-parliamentary system. One could argue, as the United States has one of the oldest governments in the world, that the American presidency was the model for what followed. It's probably no accident that this system of government is most common in North and South America.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Chief executives may have both ceremonial and practical responsibilities in government.
- A president in a congressional system is a separately elected official who represents the executive branch of government, which is usually co-equal with the other branches of government.
- A prime minister is the leader of the majority party or majority coalition in a parliamentary style of government. He or she serves as the head of government, but not usually head of state.

EXERCISE

1. What would it mean if the United States had a parliamentary style of government? At this moment, who would be in charge and what would that mean for policy for the country?

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7.3: Courts

Learning Objectives

In this section you will learn:

1. The role and function of court systems in most modern governments.
2. How the U.S. court system works.

Courts are typically the branch or part of government where laws are interpreted and enforced. Courts typically feature judges, either alone or in panels, who decided legal matters in cases brought before them according to the laws of that country. The court system may be separate from other branches of government, as in divided systems; or they may be subservient to the rest of the government, as in authoritarian systems; or they may be somewhere in between, as in some parliamentary system. Courts are often set up for specific purposes, such as tax, bankruptcy and military courts in the United States. Let's first consider courts in the United States, then see how they compare with court systems in other countries.

U.S. Courts

U.S. courts are different in a couple of ways: First, because the United States is a federal system, there is a dual federal and state system of courts, each with its own powers and area of authority; second, because of the power of judicial review, by which U.S. courts can overturn acts of Congress or state legislatures because they are judged to run contrary to the U.S. or to a state constitution. Not every court in every country has this power; all U.S. courts of a certain level have this power.

In the United States, courts are the third branch of the government, and thereby serve as a check on the first two. The highest court, the U.S. Supreme Court, is one of the most powerful in the world because of its ability to overturn legislation. It cannot, however, consider things on a review basis; someone has to bring suit for it to consider anything.

The Supreme Court is the only court mentioned in the Constitution, but that document gives Congress the power to create courts inferior to the Supreme Court. They did. Beneath the Supreme Court are 13 Courts of Appeal, and beneath them 96 federal district courts. In addition, the federal court system includes the Court of Military Appeals, tax courts, bankruptcy courts, claims courts and international trade courts.

Federal judges are appointed for life, except for bankruptcy court judges, who are appointed for 14-year terms.Apparently, this is because the courts were created until Article I on the Constitution, not Article III, which says that federal judges are appointed for life.http://www.bankruptcylawnetwork.com/here-comes-the-judge/ This insulates them from political pressure because they don't have to run for re-election. This sometimes leads people to complain about the court's insularity, most often when they disagree with the kinds of decisions the courts are making. Many state court judges are elected, and the evidence does not suggest any particular advantage or disadvantage for that system. Voters may find judicial elections particularly challenging, since judges are not supposed to campaign on how they would rule on a particular kind of case, as they are supposed to rule on cases based on the facts as presented in trial. The people who might know something about the quality of a judicial candidate are lawyers, but outside of bar association ratings, they're generally not talking, since every potential judge is somebody you might have to try a case before some day. Consequently, judicial elections sometimes feature little-known candidates with good names unseating experienced judges whose names don't sound as good. In some U.S. states, judges are chosen by commissions; in others, they are appointed by governors and confirmed by the state senate, much as with the U.S. federal courts.

In the case of federal courts, federal judicial nominations have become a serious political issue in the last 30 years. Presidents nominate federal judges, including Supreme Court justices, who must be confirmed by the U.S. Senate. Conservative presidents will want to appoint conservative judges, while more liberal presidents will do the opposite. So nominees, particularly for the Supreme Court, tend to undergo intense scrutiny in Senate hearings, with nearly every moment of the nominee's adult life up for inspection. Under the rules of the U.S. Senate, one senator can hold up the confirmation of any judge, even if that senator's party lacks a majority in the Senate. As a consequence, judicial vacancies have been filled rather slowly, especially during the presidency of Barack Obama, as conservative Republicans sought to prevent him from filling all the court openings below the U.S. Supreme Court.

Even with Supreme Court vacancies, the Senate can and sometimes does say no. In 1969, President Richard Nixon nominated Clement Haynesworth to the high court, despite the candidate's questionable record on civil rights. The U.S. Senate rejected his nomination. Nixon, apparently angered, responded with an even more conservative nominee, G. Harrold Carswell, and the Senate again voted no. Ronald Reagan sought to nominate Robert Bork to the high court, but he did not fare well in hearings and seemed too conservative for the time. His next nominee, Daniel Ginsberg, foundered on revelations that he had smoked some marijuana in college. George W. Bush sought to nominate his private White House attorney, Harriet Myers, whose relative lack of qualifications prompted Senate leadership to make clear to the president that his was a questionable choice, the nomination was withdrawn. So, most of the time, these rejections don't come to a vote, and a careful president tends to sound out Senate leaders on the likelihood that a nominee will be looked upon favorable.

Although the 50 state court systems have great authority within their own borders, the U.S. Supreme Court has the final say in interpreting the Constitution. The court has subsequently made many important decisions that have had large impact on U.S. politics and government.

At various times in its history the court has validated slavery and sent people to jail for nothing more than peacefully protesting U.S. involvement in World War I. The 19th century High Court simultaneously prohibited the states and the national government from regulating railroads, saying that was reserved for the other level of government (depending on the suit). The court also struck down FDR's New Deal proposals that would have given the government sweeping powers over the economy. The court ended segregation in schools and greatly expanded civil rights protection in the 1950s and 1960s.

Not everybody will agree with every court decision. Modern courts are sometimes criticized for "judicial activism," which seems to flow one way or another depending on whether you happen to agree with the court's decision. Critics of judicial activism argue that the courts should strictly interpret the Constitution as written, as opposed to those who might argue that the Constitution's often vague and open language renders that idea both difficult and questionable. And one could argue that both ways. In the 2011 Citizens United decision, the court clearly made a decision that put freedom of speech in the form of spending money on politics ahead of ensuring equal access of all citizens to electoral office. The point is not whether that was a right or wrong decisions—there's a rational argument to be made for both positions—the point is that the high court, in making that decision, had to interpret the law.

This is especially important in light of what is known as case law. Court decisions at all levels build and expand the body of law that guides the country. Other courts, in reaching verdicts in new cases, will make reference to other decisions in other courts. In particular, U.S. Supreme Court decisions trickle down to all lower courts, informing their decisions on subsequent cases. To that end, it makes a difference if the Supreme Court has ruled 9–0, leaving no doubt as to their opinion, or merely 5–4, which means that things might someday change. In light of the importance of case law, to argue that judges should only interpret law, not make it, is to misunderstand the U.S. court system. Every judicial decision makes law.

As we discussed earlier, U.S. Courts can only hear cases that are brought before them. The power of judicial review does not extend to issuing advisory opinions on proposed or existing laws. Somebody has to file suit, and a judge has to say that the case has enough merit to be heard. In the United States, court cases start at what are called trial courts. At this level, evidence is presented and arguments are made. The case may be heard by a jury of six to 12 people; in major cases, a grand jury may be convened, to determine whether a case should proceed to trial. In some cases, defendants may waive their right to a trial by jury and have their case decided solely by the presiding judge. There are basically two kinds of cases: civil cases, featuring disputes between two or more private parties; and criminal cases, in which someone stands accused of having broken the law. In criminal cases, the judge may also set the sentence if the defendant is convicted. The defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty, so that the burden of proof lies with the plaintiff or with the state, in the form of the prosecution, to prove that the defendant has committed some wrong or otherwise broken the law. In criminal cases in particular, the prosecution must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant has committed a crime.

If either party in a civil case is dissatisfied with the verdict, or if the defendant feels he or she has been wrongly convicted, they may appeal the decision to a higher court. At the federal level, this is the U.S. Court of Appeals. Every U.S. state court system has a similar court, although it may have a different name. Appeals courts accept no new evidence; the parties making the appeal are arguing, in effect, that mistakes were made in the original trial, such as overlooking evidence or misapplying the law. Appeals courts are under no obligation to hear appeals. They can let the verdict stand; they can overturn the verdict in whole or in part; or they can send the case back to the trial judge with instructions.

It is possible to appeal all the way to a state supreme court or to the U.S. Supreme Court, but the highest courts usually only hear cases in which substantial constitutional questions are at stake. So while 5,000 cases may get appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court in a single year, it may hear no more than 150–200 in that same time frame. Decisions by state Supreme Courts may sometimes be appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which is the court of original jurisdiction—the trial court—in cases involving top federal officials.

You probably can't appeal your traffic ticket all the way to the Supreme Court; there's no constitutional question involved there. But sometimes an ordinary citizen can succeed in seeking justice at the highest level. For example, in 1961, a sometime, small-time criminal named Clarence Gideon was arrested for knocking over a pool hall in Florida. Mr. Gideon was actually innocent of this crime, but as he couldn't afford legal representation, he was forced to represent himself and was quickly convicted of this crime. Gideon didn't give up, however, and eventually his letters reached the U.S. Supreme Court, which was looking for a case that involved this issue of legal representation—the right to attorney. The court took on the case, ruled that in all felony cases, the defendant has the right to an attorney, and sent the case back to the trial court for a rehearing. A lawyer was appointed to represent Gideon, and he quickly demolished the prosecution's apparently flimsy case, and Gideon was set free. The public defender system, which grew out of that Supreme Court decision, is often overworked and underfunded, but sometimes, it works. It worked for Clarence Gideon, who remains a shining example that sometimes, you can make a difference.

Courts in other countries may vary from U.S. courts. In France and other countries influenced by France, under the Napoleonic code, a defendant is guilty until proven innocent. French courts also do not consider case law in making decisions. Many courts in other nations lack the power of judicial review, although the United Kingdom adopted a Supreme Court in 2009. Some countries do have a special constitutional court, which does have the power of judicial review.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- In congressional systems, courts are the third branch of government.
- U.S. courts have the power of judicial review, which means they can overturn acts of government as unconstitutional. But this requires somebody to have filed suit over the law.
- U.S. federal judges are appointed for life, to help insulate them from political pressure in making judicial rulings.

EXERCISE

1. How does your state choose judges? What are the advantages of this system, compared to the federal system of presidential appointments with Senate confirmation? Are there also disadvantages?

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7.4: Sub-National Governments

Learning Objectives

In this section you will learn about:

1. The role and function of subnational governments in modern governments.
2. How, in the United States, power is apportioned from state to local governments.

In the United States and other countries with federal systems of government, another important piece of the political pie are state and local governments, also sometimes called sub-national governments. In most countries, these are governments in some way below the national government, whatever form it takes. In all systems, to some extent, but especially in federal systems, state and local governments are closest to the citizens, and frequently are the parts of government that deliver services and enforce laws in your city, town or neighborhood. In the U.S., voter turnout for elections for this level of government tends to be the lowest among all elections, which is probably unfortunate. This is the level of government closest to citizens, and the one most likely to have an immediate impact on your life.

Remember that the status of sub-national or local depends on whether the nation operates under a federal or under a unitary system. In a federal system, such as the United States, Mexico and Canada, the national government shares some power with the states or provinces, as in Canada. While particularly in the area of foreign affairs, states are subservient to the national government, they may have quite a bit of leeway to set their own laws within the boundaries established by a national constitution. In unitary governments, all power comes from the national government, which delegates some of that power to local governments to carry out the local business of governing.

In all but the smallest nations, having some kind of local government keeps government closer to the people and perhaps more responsive, and gives people a chance to create law and policy that fits their particular needs. State and local governments therefore are often responsible for things such as local transportation needs, law enforcement, and public schools, and sometimes have a role in broader issues such as environmental protection and health care.

U.S. State and Local Governments

The 50 U.S. states are in some ways like 50 mini-republics, each with its own executive, legislative and judicial branches. The governor is the chief executive, although states often have separately elected statewide officials such as the state attorney general or the state treasurer. In 49 states, voters choose a two-chambered legislature, such as a house and a Senate. Only Nebraska has a unicameral legislature, with one non-partisan chamber to do the state's legislative business.

States have substantial leeway to order their own affairs—to create and maintain laws particular to the people of that state. So, for example, self-service gasoline remains illegal in Oregon, while the drinking age in Louisiana is 19.

In addition to creating policies that might fit more with the desires and conditions of local citizens, states deliver services directly to citizens. So, federally funded programs such as welfare and Medicare/Medicaid will be funneled through state offices, with the states and the federal government sharing funding responsibility. Congress usually insists that the states adhere to certain standards and levels of funding in order to receive federal matching funds, although in recent decades Congress has leaned more toward giving states some leeway in deciding how to structure such programs.

U.S. states typically have much more authority over education than does the federal government. There is a U.S. Department of Education, and the federal government provides some funding for both K-12 and for higher education, but the great majority of funding for education, and hence the standards to be applied, the level of tuition, and the location of schools, colleges and universities, is the work of state and sometimes local governments. States will decide what graduation requirements are for high school, and sometimes set requirements for college basic requirements. College students in Texas must study Texas state politics and government, regardless of their majors. That was a decision of the state government.

States have a major say in transportation issues, aside from the interstate freeway system, which was created by the federal government. States will often set speed limits on state highways. Wyoming once had no speed limit on freeways outside of urban areas, a nod to the travel time between its somewhat far-flung towns and cities. Congress, which was concerned about energy

issues, wanted states to set lower speed limits to encourage fuel conservation, and threatened to take away Wyoming's federal highway funds if it did not comply. Wyoming got to the letter if not the spirit of the law by having state troopers issue tickets for wasting resources for drivers who treated state highways like the German Autobahn (where there often is no speed limit). States and provinces, and the local governments inside of them, often find themselves dependent on the governments above them for revenues. Nations and states have broader revenue bases, which allows them to collect more money than any state or city can. So even as they try to create law and policy that appeals to local residents, they find themselves under pressure from governments above them to spend the money in a particular way, as dictated by state or national governments.

States manage park systems, regional economic development efforts, and state legislatures set tax rates and create budgets that direct state spending. States may create more or less stringent environmental laws; expand or contract marriage rights; and regulate business and commerce within their own borders.

Local Governments: Cities

States are unitary governments—for the most part, they lend power to local governments. In some states, large cities and counties have received what's called a limited home-rule charter, by which they have a little more authority to decide their own affairs. But for the most part, a state government, via the legislature, could in fact combine school districts, towns or even counties if they decided there was some reason to do so. When this happens, it's usually because one of these local governments is too small to support itself.

There are more than 87,000 local governments in the United States. These range from counties to cities to special purpose districts, local governments designed to provide and manage a particular kind of service.

Cities are more like mini-mini-republics, usually with some kind of elected council. In a strong-mayor form of government, the city council and the mayor are elected separately, and relate to each other in a way similar to how the president and Congress, or a governor and a state legislature, deal with each other. The council makes law; the mayor is the chief executive of city government. This system is more common in large cities. In smaller cities and towns, cities operate using the council-manager form of government, by which the city council serves as both legislature and executive, but hires a full-time, professional manager to oversee the day-to-day operations of city government.

Cities may provide police and fire protection, local transportation planning and improvement, and laws relating to the conduct of life within city limits. It is city government that sets local speed limits, puts in a stoplight, or takes out a traffic camera from your neighborhood. Cities fix potholes, help organize summer fairs and festivals, and maintain local parks. Many cities engage in zoning, laws by which rules are set about what can be built where. So, if an area is zoned retail, a developer can put in a store. If an area is zoned residential, the only thing that can be built there is housing. Like anything government does, zoning helps some people and hurts others. It can protect homeowners' home values, because you're going to have a harder time selling your home if somebody builds a Wal-Mart or other large store around the corner. On the other hand, zoning, by limiting the supply of available land, can make housing and other construction more expensive. Cities attempt to engage in economic development efforts, trying to attract businesses and jobs that will keep residents employed and keep revenue flowing into the city budget. In large cities in particular, city governments often face a balancing act in promoting economic development while trying to maintain quality of life for existing residents.

Counties

Counties play a big role in local government in some states and less so in others, providing services and serving as regional governments in larger metropolitan areas. There are more than 3,000 counties in the United States, ranging from the 25 square miles of Arlington County, Virginia to the 330,000 square miles of the Unorganized Borough of Alaska. They range in population from around 10 million in Los Angeles County to less than 100 in Loving County, Texas. In Connecticut and Rhode Island, there are counties, but no county governments. In Louisiana, counties are called parishes, and in Alaska they are boroughs. Like cities, county governments may have either an executive and a council, separately elected, or, in the case of smaller counties, an elected board of 3–5 commissioners who have both executive and legislative power. In the west, counties are more likely to be both larger than eastern counties, and to provide city-like services to areas that are unincorporated, or whose citizens do not live inside of the boundary of any city. In Maryland, counties run school systems; in North Carolina, counties do not maintain local roads as they do elsewhere. Counties often maintain vital statistics records, such as marriages, births and deaths. Counties also often are responsible

for local election and voter registration. In the northeastern U.S., counties may be divided into townships, establishing local governments which then have responsibility for a particular area within a county.

Special Purpose Districts

Special purpose districts, as we noted earlier, are created to provide one kind of service. The most common special purpose district are school districts, which manage K-12 school systems in most parts of the country. While much of the money for schools comes from state governments, school districts manage how the money is spent. School districts usually have regularly elected boards of directors and a hired superintendent to manage the everyday operations of the district. Special purpose districts may also manage fire service, utilities such as sewer, water and electricity, and everything from local parks to public hospitals and cemeteries. In rural areas, special purpose districts may be created to manage pest control and irrigation, allowing local farmers to pool their resources and provide common service to a wider number of people. In some states, port districts are charged with encouraging economic development and managing sea and airports to encourage commerce and foster job creation.

The advantages of special purpose districts can be that they encourage specialization and expertise, hopefully providing constituents with a better, more efficient level of service. In theory, with elected boards in charge, they are not immune to popular control. If citizens are unhappy, they can throw the rascals out and elect a new board. On the other hand, a board of citizens with no particular expertise in one area or another may become dominated by the district's hired management, or fooled by consultants, as happened with some local governments and their investment portfolios in the 1990s and 2000s. So, like all levels of government, they are by no means perfect. To excited over those annexations; they require petitions from a majority of landowners within a target area just to get started.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Sub-national governments manage local affairs on behalf of national governments.
- U.S. states often delegate local responsibility and authority to cities, counties, townships and special purpose districts.
- The autonomy of states or provinces will depend if the overall system of government is federal or unitary.

EXERCISE

1. Look up the local government where you live. What services does it provide? What is the structure of its government? How does it fund those operations—what are its sources of revenue? How much of that money comes from the state government? Contact a local elected official and ask how much they are required to adhere to state guidelines on spending the money.

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7.5: Bureaucracy

Learning Objectives

In this section, you will learn:

1. What is the role and function of the bureaucracy.
2. Why bureaucracies may seem inefficient or inflexible.

The last piece of government we will consider in this chapter are the agencies of government that are assigned with turning all that law into practice. Often, this part of government is called "the bureaucracy," usually not meant as a compliment. Bureaucracy is often used as a dirty word to describe a government out of control. This is unfortunate, because it is actually only a form of organization.Bureaucracy refers to organization with a defined chain of heirarchical command; defined tasks for people within that chain; division of labor; clear lines of authority; goal-oriented approach to problems; and adherence to established rules. In fact, this describes most modern human institutions, from the college where you study to the place where you work.

Why do we have a bureaucratic form of organization? Because people have demanded a high degree of accountability and predictablity in government, and this is one way to get it. Bureaucracy delegates and handles the details. It provides governance and oversight of the government. Generally speaking, people working in government agencies try to adhere to the laws as written, and sometimes one of the challenges is figuring out just what the legislative body intended.

In the United States, this form of organization grew in part from unhappiness with the often-corrupt spoils system that was common in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Many if not most government jobs were handed out to party loyalists as opposed to who might do the job best; as a consequence, contracting and various government jobs often went to the highest bidder—the one who promised to kick back the most of the money made from the job. The civil service system, which was created by Congress following the assassination of newly elected President James Garfield by a disappointed office seeker in 1881, insists that government hire people based on their ability to do whatever job they're being hired for. This is sometimes called the merit system.

This kind of system is not new. The long-term success of both the Chinese and British empires were based on their civil service systems, which required substantial learning and rigorous testing before admission into government service. Although the Chinese system, which was heavily based on knowledge of Confucian classic texts, eventually failed to keep up with a changing world, as it helped maintain the empire for 2,000 years, it can hardly be called a failure.

This gets at the heart of the important trade-off in bureaucratic systems. Because they are rule-based systems, they provide some consistency, predictability and accountability. The goal is that everybody who has to deal with a government agency is treated equally and fairly—treated the same. The trade-off is that this kind of system makes it more difficult for agency officials—bureaucrats, in the term used by people who may be unhappy with the results—to apply judgment to particular circumstances. So a city building inspector is supposed to ensure that every construction project meets particular demands for safety and durability, and isn't supposed to give anybody a little leeway if circumstances warrant. For a contractor or a homeowner doing a remodel, this can be frustrating, but for the next buyer, she or he can be assured that the project was done "up to code" when it was first built. And while we might like our bureaucrats to be more flexible when dealing with the public, too much flexibility can lead to favoritism and looking the other way at the wrong time.

This kind of system is common now in more developed countries. Agencies, staffed with experienced experts, attempt to administer the law, provide services to people, keep an eye on the public purse, and provide feedback to lawmakers about how everything is working. As agency heads often are political appointees, this can create problems for agencies. For example, in 2003, President George W. Bush appointed Mike Brown as head of the *Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)*, which attempts to help states and communities plan for and respond to both natural and man-made disasters. Brown, an attorney, had a fair amount of legal and government experience, but not necessarily crisis management or managing a large organization. FEMA appeared to be slow to respond to the disaster wrought by Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005, and Brown was forced to resign. Whether he was responsible for FEMA's slow response, or merely the fall guy for the Bush administration is by no means clear, but someone better suited to the job might have been appointed in the first place.

You have probably had good and bad experiences with government agencies—welfare offices, the Postal Service, even your college if it's a public school and hence an agency of the state government. Either way, one should be careful in generalizing from those experiences. For the most part, however, the people who work in government agencies are just people, trying to balance the needs of their constituents and the demands of policymakers above them. So, for example, people complain about both the expense of welfare programs and object to paying people who aren't working. That pressure leads policymakers to push agencies to keep a close eye on the books, so that agency employees try harder to ensure that no one gets on welfare illegally (and the incidence of welfare fraud is, in fact, very low in the United States). As pressure mounted to get people off welfare rolls, can it be surprising that getting on them became so much more difficult? In the end, then, the agency and its people become unpopular with both the people they serve and with the people who foot the bill.

How big is the bureaucracy? The U.S. federal government employs about 1.8 million people, plus 515,000 in the U.S. Postal Service, plus about 2.6 million in the armed forces, 1.4 million of whom are classified as active duty. That's actually not greatly different than 40 years ago. You can check the*Bureau of Labor Statistics* for the most current numbers. In the United States, most of the growth in government over the last 50 years has occurred at the state and local level.

The federal government also spends about $2.8 trillion a year, versus the total U.S. economy of $13.1 trillion. The U.S. government's size relative to the size of the national economy actually is smaller than that of most other industrialized countries. Government spending was 38.9 percent of GDP in 2011, a down year for the economy. Internationally, the range runs from 8 percent in Burma to 97 percent in Zimbabwe. In terms of tax burden, globally the U.S. is in the middle of the pack, which ranges from 0.9 percent of GDP in Equitorial Guinea to 63.1 percent in Lesotho (both nations in Africa).

The largest U.S. agency is the *Department of Defense* in terms of bodies, with 1 million civilian employees. Social spending, including health care and *Social Security*, is the largest budget category, at about 40 percent of the total federal budget. What you may think of as traditional welfare actually is about 3 percent of the whole budget. Foreign aid, another target of internet outrage, is also around 1 percent. Defense spending is 15 percent.

The federal government, through its agencies, plays a huge role in the economy. And while it hasn't grown that much, some people argue that it should still be smaller. One ongoing suggestion is to privatize certain public services, with the argument that the private sector will do a better job at less price. This might be true, but in the case of transit and postal service, for example, it would mean less and more expensive service for rural areas. In some states, private contractors have used their private status to avoid dealing with legally elected unions or to comply with rules on workplace safety. So, as with most things, there are significant tradeoffs to be made when choosing between public and private service providers. As for efficiency, both Social Security and Medicare have lower expense ratios (overhead) than do their private-sector counterparts. So while not every government agency is a picture of perfect efficiency, not every agency is burning piles of public cash in bonfires.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Bureaucratic forms of organization are common in governments and other organizations throughout the world.
- Bureaucracies trade flexibility for predictability and fairness.

EXERCISES

1. Think about where you do or have worked. Was it organized bureaucratically? What would it mean for that place to be organized differently?
2. What public agencies have you dealt with on a personal level? What kind of service did you receive?

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

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8.1: Recessions and Depressions

Learning Objectives

1. Understand what a recession is (and what a depression isn't)
2. Understand the causes of recessions, and what fixes them
3. Learn why the Great Depression was such a major event, and what led to it (and out of it)

Regulation is almost a sideshow compared to the main attraction: How is the economy doing? (Think of it this way: Will I get a job when I graduate from college, or a note from parents that as long as I'm still living at home, I need to do my chores?) Despite the best efforts of the private sector, Congress, the president and the Federal Reserve, the economy isn't always expanding. Sometimes it's flat, and sometimes it's shrinking. If the economy contracts (as measured by GDP) for two consecutive quarters (six months), that's a recession. Recessions mean fewer people have jobs, and people with jobs have less money. It means more human suffering, and a lot of unhappy campers come election. In democratic societies around the world, elections often as not are referenda on the state of the economy.

A bad enough recession can be called a depression, a word picked by then-President Herbert Hoover to replace the previous term for a severe downturn, the less-happy-sounding panic. There's no good definition for a depression, except perhaps this old joke: A recession is when your neighbor loses his job; a depression is when you do. Either way, we haven't had a nationwide depression since the 1930s in the U.S., or largely elsewhere in the world.

Recessions are caused by one thing and one thing only: A drop in aggregate demand. Aggregate demand is a useful term to describe the total demand for goods and services in the economy. Aggregate demand has three parts: consumer spending (about 70 percent); business investment (about 10 percent) and government spending (about 20 percent). So, if total demand drops, businesses will sell fewer goods and services. Workers will have hours cut or lose their jobs entirely, and the total size of the economy—GDP—will shrink. This phenomenon tends to be reinforcing. If people have less money, or if they're just worried about their jobs, they cut personal spending. That means fewer houses and cars are sold, and stores sell fewer goods. Those businesses now have less money, so they cut back hours and lay workers off, who now spend less money, which means firms are doing even less business, and things get even worse.

What Causes Recessions?

Your next question ought to be, what causes that drop in aggregate demand? A lot of factors can be the culprit. And one of the potentially confusing things about understanding the economy is that nothing happens in a vacuum. All of the factors that affect economic performance are happening at the same time.

- First is the business cycle: The business cycle is the ups and downs of a market economy. It's not really a cycle, in that it's not predictable, but it is a cycle in that it seems inevitable. (Economic policy makers can sometimes be heard to say that they've "solved the business cycle," from U.S. officials in the 1960s to Chinese officials today, but it ain't necessarily so.)

  A business cycle looks like this: Let's say there's been a boom somewhere in the economy, say the internet and telecommunications as happened in the 1990s. New products and services mean that consumers rush out to buy these new products, which leads entrepreneurs to start new firms and existing firms to expand production. That means more hiring and higher wages and general economic expansion. Things are good, and, inevitably, somebody says "the old economy is dead. This time is different." (When you hear that, grab your wallet: The end is near.) But nothing grows forever. Eventually, markets mature, sales level off or fall, firms begin to lay off workers or even fail, and suddenly the endless boom begins to look like a recession. Some economists refer to these periods as bubbles, and bubbles eventually burst. Overinvestment in railroads contributed to the many panics of the 1800s; ditto for automobiles and radios in the 1920s; blue chip stocks in the 1960s; the internet and telecom in the 1990s (leading to the recession of 2001); and the housing bubble that led to the Great Recession of 2007. If one thing is true about government and the economy, it is that this always happens. Sooner or later, markets take a tumble because human beings have a tendency to invest and spend like there's no tomorrow. And tomorrow seems to show up on our doorsteps every morning, without fail.

  But recessions can also come from policy:

- Cuts in government spending: President Richard Nixon managed to get Congress to balance the federal budget in 1969, and soon after we had a recession. Do the math: Cutting government spending will reduce aggregate demand. One of the challenges we have faced in the Great Recession is that cuts in government spending, particularly among cash-strapped states and cities, has meant a lot of jobs lost and softer overall demand in the economy. So even as the private sector slowly grows, those gains tend to be offset by losses in the public sector. Economic slowdowns also followed cuts in government spending at the close of World War I and World War II.
- Tight monetary policy: As we've already seen, cranking up interest rates in the early 1980s led to a very steep recession as the housing sector crashed and burned.
- Natural disasters: Storms and earthquakes can so devastate an area that its economy suffers. The twin hammers of Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil spill did no favors for the Gulf Coast region of the United States. At various points in human history, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions have set back the cause of human progress by centuries. An enormous eruption of a volcano in what is now Indonesia around the year 1xxx produced years of year-round winter-like conditions around the world, leading some scholars to say that it delayed the Europe's recovery from the Dark Ages by 100 years or more. Not every disaster leads to an economic downturn, however. The 9/11 terrorist attacks, epic tragedies though they were, didn't cause the recession of 2001, as the economy already was turning south before the attacks occurred.

The Great Depression

A question that often comes up, and one that people still debate, is what caused the Great Depression? The truth seems to be that it was a perfect storm of economic inevitability and bad policy, with no single cause the likely villain (despite the claims of many economists that it was the factor about which they've just written a brilliant book).

It was triggered by the stock market crash of 1929, which points to the first culprit—a bubble in investment in automobiles and radios. Investors, enabled by lax investing rules that allowed them to borrow most of the money they were buying stocks with, bid prices on stocks up to record highs. When the market came tumbling down, a lot of private wealth was erased, and firms in those key industries began the downward spiral of the business cycle. While the economy typically had recovered quickly from downturns, this time it didn't. President Herbert Hoover, up until that point an extremely popular politician and a very able administrator, usually gets cast as the villain of this piece, which isn't entirely fair. As commerce secretary in the 1920, Hoover had written a paper after the recession of 1921 suggesting that next time, the nation needed to engage in spending on infrastructure to jump the start the economy. As president during the outset of the Depression, Hoover got Congress to set a number of programs in motion, including the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, which loaned money to banks, railroads and other businesses to keep them afloat, and also pushed through bills to raise infrastructure spending.

But as the election of 1932 drew near, Hoover's opponent was shaping up to be Franklin Roosevelt. As governor of New York, FDR had done nothing to reign in the excesses of the New York Stock Exchange, but had "that vision thing," as the elder George Bush once said derisively of Ronald Reagan. FDR had the ability to make people feel good about themselves, and with unemployment climbing north of 20 percent, people wanted something positive. FDR offered a rather vague set of hopes and promises to get the economy going again, notably campaigning against what he called "irresponsible Republican budget deficits." Hoover, too, wasn't entirely comfortable with a budget deficit, and also worried that too much aid would make people too dependent on the government. (At this time, there was no welfare, no unemployment insurance—nothing except private charity, which was quickly overwhelmed by the sheer volume of unemployed Americans.) So Hoover got Congress to rein in spending, eliminating any stimulus effect of the added federal spending.

Roosevelt won the 1932 election in a landslide. He initiated a number of programs designed to put people back to work, but until the late 1930s, he pushed to get Congress to keep the budget balanced. He didn't always succeed, but the stimulus effect of Roosevelt's New Deal was always very small. In fact, in 1936, Congress cut spending so much that the economy fell further and faster than it had in 1929–1930.

Even then, the economy might have recovered sooner. On top of the cyclical downturn and tight fiscal policy, in the early 1930s, the Federal Reserve tightened the money supply to prevent an outflow of gold from U.S. reserves. So at the precise moment when the Fed should have been making sure the money supply was growing, they jacked up interest rates. That cut off borrowing and made recovery even more difficult.Monetarist guru and Nobel-prize winner Milton Friedman, and, to a lesser extent, current Fed Chairman Ben Bernanke, have argued that monetary policy was the sole cause of the Depression. Other scholars, such as Peter

Temin, have argued that in fact the downturns Friedman and Bernanke point to occurred largely before the Fed tightened up credit markets. What seems likely true is that in the realm of policy, almost nothing anybody did was right, and that's why the Depression lasted so long.

Some conservatives have blamed both FDR and workers for the Depression. Some of FDR's policy initiatives, such as the National Recovery Administration, were pretty bizarre. As one political scientist noted, FDR "proposed to save capitalism by ending it." (The NRA created industry cartels which effectively would have ended most competition. The U.S. Supreme Court threw it—and its farm cousin, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration—out on its posterior.) They have also argued that if only workers had reduced their demands for higher wages, wages would have fallen enough that firms would have been able to afford to rehire. There are a couple of problems with this analysis. First, wages fells throughout the 1930s, except for those of CEOs, and second, the NRA and the AAA didn't last much more than a year. And, as we've previously observed, firms don't borrow, invest, or hire unless somebody's buying. And that doesn't describe the Great Depression.

What is true is that World War II ended the Great Depression. It forced government to borrow and spend a lot of money, which put people back to work. The budget deficit grew temporarily, but given a chance to catch its breath, the economy surged toward a general expansion that lasted into the 1970s. The British economist John Maynard Keynes had tried to tell Roosevelt this at a meeting the 1930s, but Roosevelt, like Hoover and a lot of people of that era, were prisoners of their own times. Budget deficits just seemed like a bad idea. Keynes later described FDR as having "a first-rate personality and a third-rate mind." Roosevelt, nonetheless, came off as the hero of the Great Depression, despite having done not much more than Hoover to fix it. But the changes that occurred in this era—such as Social Security, minimum wage and maximum hour laws, the right to unionize, and a lot more regulation—are with us still.

Fixing Recessions

So, we might ask, what ends recessions? Well, in the simplest terms, it's the causes of recessions, operating in reverse.

The business cycle, left to its own, eventually will turn upward. One of the keys here, and an important economic indicator, is inventories. When the cycle is turning down, firms don't order as much new product because sales are falling. Firms often are a little behind the curve on knowing how things are going, so that rising inventories often are a sign of coming trouble. So, when inventories start to fall, that's a potentially good sign. Even in a deep recession, sales don't go away entirely. Eventually, firms begin to burn through their inventories and have to place new orders. The businesses that supply them now have more work to do, which means more work for their suppliers, and so on. Slowly, the cycle begins to turn upward. Firms hire workers to meet rising demand; those workers now have more money and they go out and spend some of it pushing demand even higher. Meanwhile, in one of the great perversities of economics, recessions turn out to be somewhat good for the economy (although bad for people). Like a forest fire, the deadwood gets cleared out and new growth occurs. Some firms fail during recessions, but those are the firms that weren't as good as the ones that survive. Surviving firms, usually by a combination of learning how to do things more efficiently and by forcing their remaining employees to work harder, become more productive and eventually more profitable. As some of that profit trickles down to employees, they get a little more money and spend a little more money and the upward spiral gets a little more steam.

And that's what eventually happens in the economy, other things being equal, as economists so often say. Here's the catch: This is what happens in the long run. As Keynes famously said, in the long run we're all dead. Most people and their governments don't want to wait for economic theory to be proven true. They want economic recovery sooner rather than later; daddy's tired of Hamburger Helper and baby needs a new pair of shoes. So, more often than not, governments take action to counteract a recession:

Fiscal policy: Since the Great Depression, with the advent of welfare and unemployment compensation, when people lose their jobs, they get some help. That keeps total demand from falling as far as it did in the Great Depression. These kinds of programs are sometimes called automatic stabilizers, because spending on them pretty much kicks in as people lose their jobs. So recessions tend to be softer than they would be otherwise.

As we noted above, governments can also engage in added spending to try to boost the economy, such as President Obama's stimulus package, which gave money to states and local governments, including money for infrastructure projects such as roads and bridges. Republicans who would prefer to see someone else in the White House loudly tagged it as the "failed" stimulus package, but the truth is that the economy would have done much worse without it. Liberal critics of the president, such as Nobel Prize-

winning economist Paul Krugman, have argued that the only problem with the stimulus program (as with Franklin Roosevelt's), is that it wasn't big enough. One thing that we might conclude about fiscal stimulus is that the more it contributes to gains in productivity, the better it will be for the economy in the long run. So spending on infrastructure, education and training, and small business support, will generally produce more economic gains than would just, say, dropping cash out of an airplane.

The other part of fiscal policy is taxes, and here again, governments can use tax policy to encourage economic recovery. They can give tax credits and tax breaks for certain kinds of activities, such as hiring more workers or spending on equipment (capital goods, in the parlance of business and finance). Also common are simple tax cuts—cut people's taxes, so they have more money in their pockets. As we also noted above, tax cuts don't have a great track record for stimulating the economy. As with cheap interest rates, firms still don't hire more workers unless they see rising demand for their products and services. So tax breaks may also not help in that regard. The Bush and Obama tax cuts may not have worked because at that time, people seem to have used the extra money for saving rather than spending and investing. People either saved the money or paid down their debt. Neither of those is bad for the economy (in fact they're good in the long run), but it won't produce much short-term stimulus. It won't boost total demand.

Monetary policy: Here again, while tight monetary policy (higher interest rates) can cool things down, cheaper money can heat things up. Lower interest rates spurred the housing industry in the 1980s, leading the U.S. out of that recession. The same thing happened in the early 1990s. But, as we've already noted, there has to be some level of demand already in the economy for lower interest rates to encourage people to borrow. Interest rates remained low throughout the Great Recession of 2007 and its aftermath, but neither consumers nor businesses went out of their way to borrow. The Federal Reserve, trying to ensure sufficient liquidity (ready cash) in capital markets, made sure that major banks had as much money as they could want at their disposal, and microscopic interest rates. But despite all that cash floating around, people and businesses didn't want to borrow. Consumers, fearing for their jobs (or without them) didn't want to take on more debt. With soft demand, businesses had no reason to borrow for expansion.

The final solution would be to wait things out and let the market sort through what's wrong with the economy. Under this scenario, workers would cut their wage demands until it became profitable to hire them again, and the economy would then begin to turn around. This seems to have worked in the past, although it clearly didn't happen in the Great Depression. So it's not clear how workable this solution is in the current age, when most of us can't go back to the farm and at least feed ourselves while we're waiting for the economy to turn around.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Recessions can be caused—and ended—by a variety of factors.
- A recession is two quarters of economic contraction as measured by GDP. There is no solid definition of a depression, but it lasts longer and is more painful than a recession.
- The Great Depression appears to have been caused by a convergence of several factors. It was ended by World War II.

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8.2: Summary

That's a lot to digest in a hurry, isn't it? Entire courses are taught, and degrees bestowed, by and people who spend lifetimes studying no more than how government and business intersect. What you should know is that government plays a big role in the economy, and that economic forces seek to use government to their own ends. What you might also understand is that economic policy has an effect on all of us, and that paying attention to what elected officials and candidates say they will do can give you a better sense of whether you want to vote for that person.

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8.3: Different Economic Systems

Learning Objectives

1. Know the difference between capitalism, socialism, communism and fascism.
2. Understand how market-based and planning-based economies work.

Our basic economic system, as you probably know, is called capitalism. Capitalism means private ownership of productive resources, with a reliance on markets to decide what gets produced and how much it will cost. So, you can start and own a business, and consumers will decide if they want your business around. Markets let consumers and business owners vote with their dollars, euros or yen on what will be for sale, what the price will be, and which firms survive to produce another day. As we'll see, markets are very good at some things and perhaps not so good at others.

The alternative to market-based economic decision-making is some kind of government-based model. Government would decide, on behalf of people, what will be produced and how much each item will cost. As with market-based systems, government-based systems have their strengths and weaknesses. As a society, in the United States we have largely opted for a market-based approach, but not always.

Take a step back to the isms we talked about in chapter three, and think about them with an eye to how they make economic decisions, and what the advantages and disadvantages of each system is:

- Capitalism: Private ownership of productive resources, with decisions made largely by consumers and businesses deciding on their own what to produce and what to buy. Remember that capitalism is part of what we call classical liberalism—a system that relies on open elections and on markets. Generally speaking, capitalism is more efficient and less equalitarian in terms of who gets what. It produces more wealth, but can distribute it somewhat unevenly.
- Socialism: Government ownership of productive resources. Public agencies decide what will be produced and what it will cost. These agencies could be subject to political control through elections; they also could simply be imposed on consumers by the state. Socialism doesn't necessarily imply one kind of political system over another. Socialism is generally less efficient but more equalitarian. Everybody gets something, but everybody may not get as much. To some extent, this is because a socialist system may be more focused on providing jobs for people than it is on providing goods and services.
- Communism: Government ownership of productive resources, and a one-party state to enforce decisions. The level of public ownership is usually higher than in socialism. It is even less efficient and even more equalitarian (although under communism, some folks appear to be more equal than others. Dictators and high party officials usually appear to live better than do common citizens).
- Fascism: Fascism claims to be capitalist, but as the state is not democratic, there's little popular control over anything. The state (usually, some dictator or group of dictators) tends to reward its friends and punish its enemies, which leads both to oppression and an inefficient economy. (The firm that kicks back the most money to the government is the firm that survives and makes a profit, but it isn't very often the firm that produces the best products at the lowest price.) Both inefficient and unequal, this seems to represent the worst of all possible worlds.

The world has tended toward capitalism in the last 30 years. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the opening of China's economy, only North Korea and Cuba remain as communist states. And Cuba seems to be slowly edging rightward. That means more economies operated via markets.

Markets vs. Planning

A market is all the people and businesses involved in the production, distribution and consumption of any good or service. Markets are neither all bad nor all good. When the U.S. economy is doing well, you will hear how wonderful free markets are, like some fairy tale in which everyone really does live happily ever after. Conversely, when the economy is not doing well, you will hear how the market system doesn't really doesn't work, and that socialism, after all, is the only answer.

Realistically, neither of these viewpoints is 100 percent true. Every system has its share of strengths and weaknesses, and each represents trade-offs in the creation and distribution of wealth.

As we've already noted, market-based systems tend to be more productive—more goods for sale, higher quality and better prices. Planned systems have a hard time anticipating what the public will want, and so tend to produce fewer goods of worse quality, and consequently generate less overall wealth for society. As was noted in the days of the old Soviet Union in the 1970s, it was −60 degrees in Leningrad in February, and you still couldn't get a cold Coke, because the Soviet-era refrigerators were so bad. That might be a bit of an exaggeration, but in the old communist economies, consumer goods were of poor quality and often in short supply. For example, in Poland in the 1980s, when it was still communist, the price of bread was regulated. Limiting the price of bread meant that even the state-run bakeries couldn't supply more bread because they couldn't raise the price to buy more flour. Meanwhile, the price of cake wasn't regulated, and the bakeries always had lots of cake.

Hard-core socialist systems don't always reward hard work and initiative. In the early 1990s, I visited a friend in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, which broke away from the Czech Republic after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. His business required him to have a fax machine in his apartment, but he couldn't get the fax to work. He called the state telephone company, which sent three guys out to look at his fax machine. They told him it was broken, and offered to sell him a new one for about $600 (a lot of money for a fax machine, then and now). The fax machine wasn't broken; in fact, it worked fine on his neighbor's phone line. The problem was clearly in his phone line, but the repairmen weren't motivated to go after that. After the "repairmen" left, my friend turned to me and said, "This is the legacy of 40 years of communism. These people don't know how to work." But it was in Bratislava that we stumbled across the monument to the victory of the west in the Cold War: Coming around a corner, we came square upon on a large K-mart, with a Pespi logo painted on its side. "You see," I told my friend, "there it is. We won."

It was in part the west's ability to produce more stuff of higher quality and better cost that enabled it to wade through 50 years of the Cold War and come out ahead. And that ability largely stemmed from its reliance on markets.

Market systems aren't perfect when it comes to predicting demand, either. But if one firm produces more jeans than consumers want at that time, the firm (and its employees) bear the cost of that decision, as opposed to the whole society. And because most firms know that, they tend to be more careful about how much inventory to produce. Badly run firms go out of business or are acquired; well-run firms prosper and, hopefully, share that success with their employees and customers.

Conversely, however, planned systems can move resources in a way that means there will be less abject poverty. Cuba, for all its problems, has better basic health care, higher literacy rates, and less homelessness than does the United States. On the other hand, it would be much harder for you to go into business for yourself in Havana than it would in Hartford or Hawaii. (Sweden, which has much fewer natural advantages than Cuba, but a market-based economy, has an economy nine times the size of Cuba's.) So while socialist economies have less disparity of wealth, capitalist societies tend to be richer overall. So socialist economies have a higher floor, and capitalist economies have a higher ceiling.

Capitalist or Socialist?

Finding a balance between the higher floor and the higher ceiling remains the tricky part of economic policy. Increasingly, the world's nations rely on markets for economic decision making, even a self-proclaimed communist nation such as China. I've heard people say of China, "Don't they know they're communist?" Having spent some time there, I think they know they're not. Officially, China's economic description is described as "Chinese socialism with characteristics of market capitalism," or, more recently, "market capitalism with characteristics of Chinese socialism." Perhaps it's an evolutionary process.

China is still ruled by what I like to call the not-very-Communist Party (or the Kaching! Dynasty), because while they are not very democratic, it is possible to start and own a business. From the time party reformer Deng Xiao Ping (the successor to Chairman Mao) declared "It is glorious to be rich," China has been grinding its way toward building a market-oriented economy. Many firms are still state-owned, but many are not. That division between the private sector and the state is likely to drive change in China, as private firms will someday increasingly question why they need an overwhelming, unchecked state telling them what to do. So one of China's great challenges is how to reconcile the unchecked power of the Communist Party with the growing demands of the private sector. The party's legitimacy increasingly rests on its ability to provide rising standards of living for the nation's 1.5 billion people. That's a tough job under the best of circumstances; as every nation realizes at the end of a boom, nothing grows forever (except maybe people's expectations). While China's economic growth rates have been strong for more than a decade, when you're starting from zero, you have nowhere to go but up. That kind of growth simply won't last forever.

China isn't really communist, nonetheless, and the United States isn't 100 percent capitalist. Most nations have what is called a mixed economy—a blend of private and public enterprises. Even in the United States, while most businesses are privately owned, we have a number of publicly owned enterprises, from the U.S. Postal Service to public hospitals, water and sewer districts, and public power companies. But most of the economy depends on markets.

Figure 8.1

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Chart TK: A diagram placing major nations of the world on the spectrum between socialism and capitalism.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Capitalism is an economic system that relies on markets.
- Socialism and communist rely on government planning.
- Most of the world's economies are a mix of the two, with some decisions made by private firms and consumers in markets, but some decisions made by government.

EXERCISES

1. Identify some private firms near where you live.
2. Identify some government-run firms. What would it mean for them to be privatized?
3. Which countries in the world are still ostensibly communist?

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8.4: Basic Economics

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the basics of a market-driven economy.
2. Understand the laws of supply and demand.
3. Understand different kinds of markets.

Now that we've established the importance of markets in understanding society, let's learn something about how markets work. First, some basic econ. Economics is another subject that confuses some people, and it shouldn't. In fact, most of it turns out to be common sense. People respond fairly predictably when it comes to money, and that's true for both consumers and businesses. And if you understand the laws of supply and demand, you understand most of what you need to know about economics. And if you understand something about how our economy works, it should be easier to understand how government affects the economy.

First, the law of supply: **The higher the price, the more suppliers want to sell.** If the price of iPods goes up, Apple ships more units. Why? Because higher prices mean a supplier can cover the cost of added production and still make a profit. If the price falls, they ship fewer units.

Second, the law of demand: **At higher prices, consumers want to buy less of an item, and at lower prices, they tend to want to buy more.** If the price of downloads for an iPod go up, you buy less; if they fall, you may buy more.

Obviously, you can't think about one law without thinking about the other. If demand rises for a product—consumers want more of it—that tends to bid up the price. More suppliers will enter that market, increasing supply, which eventually will drive down the price. If demand falls, suppliers will leave the market, supplying less of the good in question. (Suppliers *will not* raise the price in the face of falling demand, hoping to make up the difference. Remember the law of demand: Higher prices would simply drive demand down even further.)

A lot of other factors can influence supply and demand (such as people's level of income, the price of inputs for suppliers, and the availability of substitutes for consumers. Taxes and subsidies also can influence supply and demand). But most of what happens in the economic world comes back to simple supply and demand.

Why this matters is because we live—and much of the world lives—in a market-driven economy. To varying degrees, most nations on earth rely on markets to make decisions about prices and production.

How Markets Work

So how are markets supposed to work? First, let's remember what a market is: A market is the collection of buyers and sellers for a given product. So when we talk about markets, we're talking about all the people involved in the production, buying and selling of any particular product, from artichokes to Zambonis. When we talk about markets, then, we're not necessarily talking about a particular place. We're talking about a lot of places and a lot of people, usually scattered all over the world.

A market has a demand side—the buyers—and a supply side—the sellers. Buyers and sellers seek each other out to improve their welfare. Markets don't need to be organized; they just happen. At the right price, almost anything is available.A friend of mine from the gym once decided he wanted to get bigger and so set off in search of anabolic steroids (which will make you bigger sometime before they kill you). He found, for a price, all manner of drugs, people willing to do things not normally regarded as legal, and even weapons such as Uzi submachine guns, but, fortunately, didn't find anyone willing to sell him 'roids. If there's a demand for a product, sellers will try to meet that demand. As the demand for fuel-efficient vehicles grows with rising gasoline prices, automakers are more willing to supply them, such as hybrid vehicles. In the last decade, for example, sales of Toyota's Prius soared while sales of gas-guzzling Hummers plummeted. (Eventually, General Motors stopped producing Hummers altogether and started producing the all-electric Volt.)

By definition, buyers and sellers will reach an agreement on price. The price will be one that lets suppliers make a profit but isn't more than buyers are willing to pay. For this reason, we say that markets tend to self-regulate. If demand is less than output, or exceeds output, the market will respond by changes in price and/or quantity supplied. Markets for this reason typically don't

require outside organization. As we'll see, they do, however, sometimes require oversight to ensure that everyone is playing fair. (Not everyone agrees with that idea, and you will have to decide whether you think that's true.)

Some people have a rather high degree of faith in markets; other people think they're good at some things but not without their challenges. (And some people argue that markets simply have too many problems; at the moment, those folks aren't winning the argument.) For example, markets work when there's real competition. If there isn't real competition, it's not much of a market. Despite what everyone says about free enterprise, firms tend to want to limit competition, because that means higher prices. For example, in the 1930s, U.S. airlines (and also the trucking industry) went to the government and sought regulation as way of limiting "ruinous" competition—having to compete on price over what is basically a commodity—airline seats—meant that profit margins were lower. As we will discuss below, that led to 40 years of no price competition in the airline industry.

In a true market, no one sets the price alone. Prices are determined by 1) the costs of production and 2) the demand for the product [remember the laws of supply and demand]. In some countries and in some periods of our history, we have attempted to interfere with markets through price controls: arbitrarily setting the price of goods to ensure that no one has to pay too much. This usually doesn't work very well. Price controls distort the functioning of a market, typically limiting supply. Remember, according to the law of supply, at a given price, sellers will only supply so much of a good. But the higher price, the more suppliers want to sell, so a lid on prices necessarily means suppliers will only want to sell so much. Selling more means selling at a loss, and nobody does that for very long. Price controls, such as those imposed in this country during World War II, mean that supply will be limited. That meant that people also had to be issued ration cards so that they could get their share of scarce foodstuffs such as meat. Ending rationing would have meant higher prices, but it also would have meant more meat for sale.

Different Kinds of Markets

Figure 8.2 Chart TK: Different kinds of markets, with examples

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There are different kinds of markets—different kinds of competition—throughout the economy. Not every market for every product operates the same way.

Before we talk about different kinds of competition, here are a couple of concepts that are useful to understanding the nature of competition:

- Market power: this is the ability to set prices. If a firm has market power, it can set prices higher than the normal price (the equilibrium point, in economic jargon—the point where supply meets demand) that would be dictated by normal forces of supply and demand. A firm that has no market power is a price-taker—they get whatever price the market is offering. If a firm has market power, however, prices are higher than they should be because there isn't sufficient competition.
- Barriers to entry: How easy or difficult is it to break into a business? If an industry has high capital costs (it would be very expensive to start building automobiles from scratch), or requires substantial education and skills, it has higher barriers to entry. The business of espresso stands has relatively low barriers to entry. A radiation technology clinic would have high barriers to entry. If, in a given market, there are high barriers to entry, the market may not work as efficiently as we might hope, because, once again, there is less competition.

With that in mind, consider the different kinds of competition that we might find in the economy:

- Pure Competition: Pure competition is best described as featuring many firms, none too big, and no firm has market power. These firms are price-takers. Whatever price the market offers is the price the supplier gets. Farms are probably the best example—lots of farms, a wide-open market, and no one farm can likely set the price for any commodity. This is somewhat typical of commodity markets in general—markets where the product doesn't vary greatly from batch to batch or load to load. Everything from corn to rice to oil to iron ore to coffee beans is, to some extent, a commodity market.
- Monopolistic competition: Many firms; low to high barriers to entry; limited market power. This describes a lot of businesses, from accountants to hair salons to restaurants to attorneys. Firms try to distinguish their products and services as different from all their competitors', which allows them to charge slightly higher prices. Hair salons, for example, target different market segments: From uptown, high-end salons, which may charge very high prices, to a hair factory such as SuperCuts, which charges lower prices. Although both kinds of salons cut hair, each offers a slightly different level and type of service and product.

- Oligopoloy: Few firms; high barriers to entry; limited price competition. This would describe the automobile industry, for example. (A duopoly has two firms, such as Boeing and Airbus.) Starting an automobile company or any heavy industrial firm requires a lot of money, equipment and technical expertise, so that not many people are going to try this from scratch. As a result, there's less competition and prices are higher than they might be otherwise. Before foreign car manufacturers began to enter the U.S. market in the 1960s and 1970s, U.S. car prices became somewhat high.
- Monopoly: One firm. Monopolies happen for a variety of reasons: a firm has a technological advantage that no one is able to replicate; government bars other firms from competing in that market (fairly rare); a firm puts all of its competitors out of business (this can and has happened); or the market is best served by a single firm (a "natural" monopoly).

Usually, when there's only one firm, government steps in with some level of regulation, attempting to keep the one firm from charging monopoly prices (prices higher than the market would otherwise allow). In the U.S., the government uses anti-trust regulation to keep any single firm from dominating its market, so as to preserve some minimum of competition.

In the case of a natural monopoly, for some services it may be better to have only firm providing that service. This tends to be true for services such as water, sewer, electricity and garbage collection (though not everyone agrees on this). It would not be profitable for a competing firm to build a second set of water, sewer and electric lines through your neighborhood. Consequently, these natural monopolies usually are regulated by the government—in the case of the United States, usually at the state level. This prevents the firms from charging whatever prices they want, but tends to also mean the state regulators give the service provider some minimum level of profit. It's an admittedly imperfect system. These utility firms aren't always as efficient as they might be, nor are regulators perfect at determining when a rate hike is or isn't justified.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The law of demand: The higher the price, the less consumers want to buy.
- The law of supply: The higher the price, the more suppliers want to sell.
- A market is all of the people involved in producing, selling and buying a particular good or service.
- There are several different kinds of markets, each featuring a different level of competition.

EXERCISES

1. The price of lattes as the campus coffee stand goes up. How are people likely to respond?
2. Rising demand for iPads bids the price up. How will other firms respond to this change in prices?
3. How is monopolistic competition different from a monopoly?

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8.5: The Other Side of Markets

Learning Objectives

1. Understand market imperfections
2. Understand market failures
3. Understand externalities

Markets are very useful, even though they don't always work the way they're supposed to. As we're about to see, that can have a cost for everyone. As we live in a free-market economy, in which citizens are allowed to make their own economic choices, we presume that competition is an open free for all, and the market—in the form of businesses and consumers—decides what gets made and who buys how much at what price. As with most things in economics, that's true, to a point.

So we might always ask, how well does any given market function? Classical economic theory says that markets are perfectly efficient because consumers and businesses simply vote with their dollars, and the best firms and the best products win out. Consumers, meanwhile, only spend their money where they perceive they are getting value for it.

But how can we know if a market is efficient as theory suggests it will be? One immediate problem is that people who worship at the temple of the market assume that everyone has perfect information: Consumers and businesses know everything they need to know to make rational decisions. Think about all the dumb things you've ever done with your money, and that pretty quickly should appear to be a really big assumption.

Market Imperfections

Markets are very good at making product and pricing decisions. People do vote with their dollars, and the market eventually responds. But they are not perfect. First, unlike the theoretical markets of free-market dreams, markets are not frictionless—markets face transaction costs. Transaction costs are the costs of negotiating and enforcing contracts. Information held by buyers and sellers is not perfect. Although buyers and sellers do find each other, that's not without cost. Businesses have the costs of advertising and marketing; consumers have the costs of shopping for the right product at the right price. (Something like e-Bay works in part because uniting buyers and sellers in once place—the internet—lowers transaction costs.) So, for example, you're usually at a disadvantage at a car lot. The dealer or his representative knows what the car really cost, and what might be wrong with it. The sales representative also has been trained in price negotiation, or at least has experience at it. You, on the other hand, might be very good at your job, but may be inexperienced at price negotiation and may not know what the car is worth. And you certainly don't know that it needs a new transmission. So markets aren't always a level playing field.

Markets don't always make the best choices, despite their reputation for doing so. Consider Qwerty economics. Qwerty, you may recognize, is the first five letters on the upper left side of the keyboard you are probably now using. If you stop and think about this keyboard, it's fairly awkward. The letters you use the most, such as A and S, are under your weaker fingers. This was by design. This keyboard was created in the 1800s when typewriters became commonplace. With a manual typewriter, if you type fast enough, you could jam the keys together and have to stop and separate them. This was a problem for rapid 19th century typists, so a keyboard was designed to slow them down a bit and enable them to proceed at a good steady pace.

Then, in 1932, a University of Washington professor, Dr. August Dvorak, developed a new keyboard that was more ergonomically efficient. Typewriters had gotten mechanically better, and the invention of the electric typewriter meant you could type very fast if you were any good at it. A trained Dvorak typist can kick major bunny on the best Qwerty typist.

So why don't we all use the Dvorak keyboard? It's better, and we'd all probably like a keyboard that put the most commonly used letters under our strongest fingers. You can convert any late-model Windows computer to Dvorak with a few mouse clicks, and it shouldn't be too difficult to order a Dvorak keyboard for your computer.

But we don't change. The short-term cost of retraining an entire nation in typing outweighs the apparent long-term benefits. (I tried a French keyboard once while in Paris on business. French keyboards have the letters in different places. It's very difficult to type on a different keyboard once you've been trained to do one way.) Either way, that's a market decision, and the market hasn't made the best decision. Markets sometimes do that. The old Sony Betamax system was much superior to the VHS system, but the VHS

system won out. Sony didn't license its platform to other manufacturers; the VHS patent holder did. So even though Betamax was better, VHS was much cheaper. Apple Macintosh computers were much superior to the early Windows machines, but as Apple (like Sony) didn't license its operating system to other suppliers, Windows-based PCs won out over Apples on price alone. In each case, greed won out over good business sense.

Market Failures

Imperfections are relatively minor concerns; they add costs to markets, but they don't keep markets from working. But markets face much bigger challenges than that. Some economists call these market failures, or cases where markets don't perform as well as we hope they will. (We should note that people with extreme faith in the power of markets don't admit that markets might not be perfect. In the eye of some very conservative economists, whatever happens with the market is what's supposed to happen. And if that means you suffer as result, well, it sucks to be you.)

First, markets have a tendency toward imperfect competition. Remember that in perfect (pure) competition, no firm controls too much of the market, there are low barriers to entry (it's easy for somebody to get into that market and provide competition), and firms get whatever price the market is currently offering. Very few markets look like this in the real world. Commodities—raw materials, some agricultural goods, airline tickets—tend to operate this way. But even there, firms tend to try to differentiate their products so that they can charge a slightly higher price. (Giving us such puzzling products as "Eggland's Best," even though, for the most part, an egg is an egg. By claiming that their eggs are somehow better [they never really say why, and I can't seem to find Eggland on a map], they can charge a little more for their product. Grocery stores also sometimes charge more for eggs with different colored shells, even though there's really no difference beyond the way they look.) This is called monopolistic competition. Each firm tries to create its own monopoly by positioning its product or service as being slightly different from its competitor's offering. What matters here is that positioning your product away from the field gives you a little bit of market power—the ability to set prices. That usually means higher profits, and that's what most businesses want.

This is a condition that doesn't stop markets from functioning—lots of firms, selling similar products, each trying to carve out its own market niche. But what happens when some firms come to dominate a market? If we get down to just a few firms, we have what's called an oligopoly. As these firms dominate their markets, there is less competition and higher prices. Before the advent of foreign imports, U.S. auto firms were an oligopoly, and even now, there's a relatively small number of firms worldwide that compete in the automobile industry. In the commercial jetliner business, two firms (a duopoly)—Boeing and Airbus—are the dominant players, and while they compete fiercely over this business, they mostly have the field to themselves for the moment.

Left to their own, many markets tend toward just one firm. One company manages to get an edge, and begins to either buy up or push out its competitors. This happens most often in businesses where there are high barriers to entry (it's either expensive [also called capital-intensive] or technologically challenging to get into the field). As we've already noted, it would be relatively simple for you to open a coffee stand, but it's not likely that you'll start manufacturing automobiles in your garage (and be successful at it). Only one firm means a monopoly, and monopolies usually mean higher prices and lower quality, because there isn't any competition to force that one surviving supplier to do a better job.

This happened in the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s, when business leaders managed to assemble a series of "trusts," which controlled much of the nation's (and sometimes the world's) supply of everything from sugar to oil. For example, John D. Rockefeller, starting from scratch, built a behemoth known as Standard Oil, which at its peak controlled 95 percent of the world's known oil. He ran a better business than many of his competitors, but he also undersold competitors to put them out of business (and probably arranged for accidents for some who refused to go away quietly).

In the United States, government's response was to pass a series of anti-trust laws, making it illegal for one firm to control an entire industry and giving government the power to break up the trusts and preserve competition. So, for example, when AT&T (which had been broken up by the government in the 1980s) declared in 2011 that it would buy T-mobile, federal anti-trust regulators said "not so fast," and filed suit to block the acquisition on the grounds that it would limit competition in the cellular telephone business.

It's not entirely clear how well any of this works. For example, it took until 1924 to break up Standard Oil, by which point its control of the world's oil supplies had fallen to about 25 percent. How did that happen? High prices tend to attract more competitors; by charging monopoly prices, Standard Oil had already drilled the wells of its own demise. Similarly, the break-up of

AT&T in the 1980s, when it was the world's biggest corporation and the nation's dominant phone company, became something of a moot point in a few years as cell phones and satellite communication began to end AT&T's dominance of local and long-distance telephone service.

The tendency toward imperfect competition takes other forms. As we've already noted, participants in markets frequently try to rig them by changing the rules, or by colluding with others. For example, at various times in our history, business has encouraged government to produce rules that limit competition. At other times, firms have secretly joined together to fix prices and avoid competition altogether. In the early 1960s, for example, suppliers of large generating equipment secretly agreed to stop competing (bid-rigging), so that prices would be higher for all firms involved. (Eventually, somebody noticed, lawsuits were filed, and fines were levied.) Firms also have tried to corner the market on some materials, making it difficult for other firms to compete. So although markets are supposed to be inherently efficient, and to generate whatever products are needed, markets may in fact need someone to enforce the rules of the market—to make sure that no one is cheating by finding ways to limit competition.

Markets also are cited for their failure to provide social (or public) goods: Markets can't provide public goods such as traffic lights, because there's no way to make a profit off a traffic light. One could argue that roads and transportation infrastructure in general fall into this category, and probably police and fire protection as well. In economic-speak, social goods are said to be non-rival and non-exclusionary, in that consumption of them does not diminish their quantity and they can be used by anybody. That means it would be difficult for a private business to make money on them. Traffic controls such as stoplights are an example of a social good since they limit accidents, help manage the flow of traffic and can be used by anybody who is driving. And if I use a traffic signal, there isn't less of the traffic signal for you to use after me. The market won't provide traffic signals because there's no way to make them profitable for a private owner, so the only way to get them is gather up some money from everybody (taxes), pool those funds and build what needs to be built.

Markets also suffer from unequal distribution of wealth: Because markets generate a lot of wealth but don't spread it around evenly, market economies can produce extremes of wealth and poverty. This generates problems for most societies. The rich get greedier, no surprise, and the poor get more envious of the rich. This often leads to more poverty, higher crime, and more social problems of all sorts. Plato and Aristotle wrote about this very problem 2,500 years ago, and not much has changed. Figuring out how to fix that, however, remains as difficult as ever, because if we make the distribution of wealth more equitable (more even), we likely also will make the economy less efficient and productive. Striking a balance, I think, is the hard part. Of course, not everyone agrees that this is a problem. Conservatives and libertarians would argue that if some people are poor, it's their own fault, and that they are more likely to become wealthy and successful if they get going and do something to improve themselves. As usual, the truth is probably somewhere in the middle. There are people who lift themselves up out of poverty, and people who can't see their way to anything like that. And clearly some people start out ahead of the game. Your parents' income level is a pretty fair predictor of your income level. (And if you work enough jobs, you will inevitably meet someone who owes his or her position to the wealth they inherited. You will also meet people who are brilliant at business, and, in some sense, deserve what they have.) But what is certain is that poverty has a social cost that extends beyond the poor themselves. Poor parts of every country tend to have higher crime, poorer nutrition, shorter life spans, and generally less pleasant lives. The question, as always in politics, is what to do about that.

Another kind of market failure is externalities, which are the unintended consequences of economic activity. Externalities also are said to be the costs not paid for by the user of the resource. Pollution is the classic example of an externality, and the market may not in fact account for the real costs of pollution. So, a smoke stack from a factory, or all the air pollution created by automobiles and most other forms of transportation, does create a lot of jobs and wealth. No problem there. But the cost of the pollution in terms of health and the environment isn't paid for by the user of the resource, either you or me driving to work or school, or the people who own or work at the factory. That cost is left for society at large.

Nobody really wants to create pollution, yet the market by itself won't do much about it. Why not? In the example of pollution, we often face the free-rider problem. If each of us owns a factory around a lake, and we're all dumping effluent into the lake, we will ruin it in a short period of time. So we'd all be better off not polluting the lake. But absent some outside influence, there's nothing to make any of us stop polluting the lake. One of us might decide to take steps to reduce the pollution we're dumping into the lake, but whoever does that bears the full cost of that and yet shares the reward with everybody else around the lake, making them, in effect, free riders on our good deed. Moreover, by taking on the cost of cleaning up our plant, we have added to our costs, making our product less competitive with firms that chose not to do the right thing.

Externalities can be both positive and negative. Negative externalities make something worse for somebody else. Positive externalities make something better. A positive externality might be a business that buys an old building, cleans it up and landscapes the outside. That would make neighboring properties worth more—a benefit to those landowners, and totally unintentional on the part of the business. Public education also produces positive externalities, since the people who are educated at public expense will be more productive than if they had not been educated. That generates economic benefits for the rest of society.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Markets may not be capable of providing needed goods and services.
- Markets may not account for the full cost of using a resource.
- The free-rider problem discourages firms from doing the right thing on their own.

EXERCISES

1. Should government step in to deal with negative externalities? Are there costs and benefits, for example, for mandatory pollution controls.
2. What would be the costs and benefits of unequal distribution of wealth?
3. Think of some examples of public goods. Why doesn't the market provide these?

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8.6: How Politics and Markets Intersect

Learning Objectives

1. Understand arguments for and against government intervention in markets.
2. Understand why businesses seek protection from competition through government action.

All of this leaves us with a couple of things to think about. First, to what extent should government intervene in the economy? Second, presuming we intend to continue to use markets to determine what to produce, etc., how can we keep government from limiting competition when it does intervene? This second question may seem less obvious, but what history tells us is that markets seek intervention nearly as often as government seeks to intervene.

The Case for Leaving Markets Alone

Some people say that, left alone, the market will eventually sort all of its problems out. The public choice school of thought points out that government doesn't always make good choices, and that people in general are a better judge of what to do with their money. Conservatives, public choice advocates, as well as libertarians, think government should be smaller, do less, tax less, and spend less money. Libertarians don't see much of a role for government except for national defense and police protection.

Part of the argument here is that people will do what they learn to do, so if you bail them out from stupid decisions, they'll keep making stupid decisions because there's no consequence to their actions. So people who, say, don't save for retirement, will just have to suffer. Others, observing that suffering, will be motivated to save more and sooner.

Public choice theory in particular says that government's economic decisions are mostly aimed at making things better for government officials, rather than for society as a whole, such as helping officials get re-elected. A fair amount of research has shown that presidents, for example, take steps to pump up the economy just before elections (it also shows that they don't really have much success at moving the economy forward that quickly). And the steps that government might take—raising government spending to boost demand—might lead to inflation and higher budget deficits down the road.

However government intervenes, whether by regulation, taxation or subsidies, makes markets less efficient—it raises costs, which fall on businesses and consumers. Government is particularly bad at picking winners and losers—60 years of communism showed us just how bad government can be at producing goods and services. Taken to its extreme, government control of the economy limits innovation, raises prices or leaves goods in short supply, and limits incentives for people to work harder.

Why aren't governments as efficient as markets? Governments simply respond to different signals than do markets. Whereas markets operate largely on the basis of supply and demand, governments by nature have to care about who has a job and whether people have enough to eat. That makes them egalitarian, but it doesn't always make them very efficient. During the 1980s oil boom years in Alaska, state government, hoping to diversify the state's energy-dependent economy, spent a lot of money on small business development projects. That included, for example, an entrepreneur who was trying to develop a dog-powered clothes dryer. The state apparently spent so much money (before oil prices tumbled in the late 1980s) that a popular bumper sticker in Anchorage read "Please, God, just once more. We won't piss it away this time."

As usual, there's some truth to all of this. Many people will probably be more careful about things if government isn't there to bail them out. Moreover, using government to plan economic outcomes, including production and pricing decisions, has a very poor track record.

The Case for Intervention

Government's decisions are far from perfect, and probably never will be perfect for everybody. And that's part of the problem with arguing against government intervention. Few decisions, including non-decisions, leave everybody better off. And the people who didn't think to save for retirement have a cost to society as well as to themselves. For public choice theory to work, people have to be rational—always making the right decision and acting in their own best interests. That's a big assumption, and you only have to look around (or in the mirror) to know that we're all rational only part of the time.

And while conservatives may argue that the market will indeed sort things out in the long run, waiting for that to happen has costs as well, in terms of human misery. Odds are, your life isn't better if your neighbor's is worse, or we wouldn't find that the poorer parts of most places on earth have higher rates of crime, drug and alcohol abuse, and people who just aren't living happy lives. You can, for example, pretty much correlate K–12 test scores with income levels; children from wealthier neighborhoods do better in school.

The people who most famously wrote in favor of the greatest reliance on unfettered markets—Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek, Ayn Rand and Milton Friedman, for example—wrote at a time when the alternative to a market economy appeared to be communism. Communism didn't work that well, although, frankly, its political problems (the unchecked power of the state) probably outweighed its economic problems (substandard goods in short supply, and a lack of economic freedom). But is an unfettered market or an all-powerful state the only options available? Perhaps not.

The kind of minimalist government that some folks still call for was also tried, in the United States in the 1800s. Government then, particularly in the post-Civil War era, didn't do much with regard to the economy. There were no child labor laws, no minimum wage, no workplace safety standards, no overtime, no unemployment insurance, no bank deposit insurance—nothing except the market. The courts largely barred either states or the federal government from regulating anything to do with the economy. As a consequence, there was no social safety net, and if the economy went south, people suffered. In the Depression of 1893, some people simply starved to death. When I end up arguing with libertarian students, which I do, I usually say "we tried a libertarian government, and it didn't work so well."

So let's further consider the case for intervention. The argument for the government taking an active role in the economy has a number of reasons behind it. First, the playing field isn't very even in a capitalist economy. Everybody doesn't start from the same point on the track. If you don't have any money or any opportunity to begin with, such freedom of choice is small consolation. And completely unregulated markets tend to lead to great concentrations of wealth in very few hands, which often means some citizens become much more equal than others. If you live in a state with initiatives, you have already seen wealthy interest groups use the initiative process to get state law changed to benefit them. Consequently, some people favor at least some limited government intervention to address market failures and externalities.

Governments can intervene in market failures through taxes to penalize unwanted activities; through subsidies (such as tax credits) to encourage activity such as pollution abatement; through price regulation; and through regulation of business practices such as safety regulations, anti-pollution laws and anti-trust enforcement. Each of these has costs and benefits, and there will always be argument as to which way the scales tip on every government action.

The argument for doing this is that the market by itself won't sort out pollution, poverty and the distribution of power. Markets by themselves don't account for the cost of environmental damage, traffic, rising home prices and loss of open space. They tend to concentrate wealth and power, posing challenges to effectively functioning democratic institutions. But what about government's storied inability to make good decisions? One might argue that we shouldn't let the perfect be the enemy of the good. Government intervention won't ever be perfect, but if it can be better than non-intervention, its lack of perfection isn't a reason not to intervene.

To my mind, unfettered markets make no more sense than an unfettered state. Again, you'll have to decide what you think this is right. Do the benefits of government involvement outweigh the costs, or do the costs overwhelm the benefits? You may feel differently than I do, and that's OK. You get to make up your own mind on this, and you should understand that there are rational arguments to be made both for intervention and for not intervening. Everything the government does or doesn't do with regard to the economy imposes costs and bestows benefits upon different groups of people in every country. My hope is that whatever you decide, you will have some idea about why you believe that philosophy, and that you understand what it means.

Government to the Rescue?

As much as some business people (and many conservatives) like to complain about government meddling in the economy, a lot of that meddling comes at the request of business. Adam Smith, the father of modern capitalism, recognized this in one of the more overlooked sections of The Wealth of Nations: Left to themselves, businesses will try to use government to rig markets and limit competition. Markets aren't immune from politics, and a lot of politics is about economics. So much, in fact, that in my mind, it looks like this:

My Second Law of Political Economy: Politics is economic competition, carried on by other means.

How is this true? Well, most pieces of legislation passed by national and local legislatures have some economic impact. Some largely social/moral issues—such as abortion or gay marriage—aren't really economic issues, but everything dealing with taxes, spending, regulation, monetary policy and economic development has a big economic impact. Moreover, in most nations, firms in every sector of the economy actively seek legislation that helps them and hurts competitors. Such laws are a form ofregulation. For example, licensing requirements probably do protect consumers against bad business practices, but they also restrict the supply of doctors and lawyers and thereby raise the price of those services. This leads to:

My Fourth Law of Political Economy: Everyone favors competition, except when it applies to them.Since you might be wondering, the First Law of Political Economy is the decision will be made in the direction of the greatest value. Usually, that's money. So, if we look at lots of government decisions, we tend to find that they make those decisions with an eye to what will generate or protect the most wealth. Particularly at the local level, for example, cities are more likely to block development of apartment complexes because they will drive down the value of single-family homes in the same neighborhood. And the homeowners vote more often than the renters do. If you think back to our discussion of interest groups, you may remember the Fourth Law: Economic interests will be politically dominant to the extent that they are economically dominant. So, firms that make a lot of money and employ a lot of people tend to have more political clout than those who don't. (See below.) The Fifth Law is: All life is politics. In other words, wherever you go, it's who you know that matters.

For example, a few years back more than a dozen state attorneys general joined in a "consumer" lawsuit against Microsoft, alleging anti-competitive practices. Every state had one thing in common: Each was home to one of Microsoft's competitors. (I've never seen a consumer lawsuit more devoid of consumers.)

So the intersection between government and business is substantial. Economist Robert A. Leone recognized this in his Iron Law of Public Policy: Every government action creates winners and losers in the marketplace. Smart business people know this, and act accordingly. As we'll see more clearly when we talk specifically about regulation, businesses often seek regulation to limit competition and keep prices higher than they would be without it.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Government intervention in the economy imposes both costs and benefits.
- Businesses often seek government intervention to limit competition and raise prices.

EXERCISES

1. What are the costs and benefits of speed limits? What would be the alternative?
2. Think of something you think government should be doing in the economy, or something you think it shouldn't be doing. What would be the costs and benefits of that change in government policy?

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8.7: Measuring the Economy- GDP and Inflation

Learning Objectives

1. Understand gross domestic product and other measures of national wealth.
2. Understand the causes and effects of inflation.

Whether we decide to intervene in the economy usually has something to do with how it's performing. In order to tell how the economy is performing, we have to be able to measure it. In broadest terms, we measure the economy by Gross Domestic Product (GDP). That's the total of all goods and services produced in any nation's economy. It's only part of the story, but it's a big part.

For example, the United States, at around $14 trillion, has the world's biggest economy measured by GDP. China is No. 2 at a little more than $5 trillion. But if we divide that by the number of people living in each country—giving us per capita GDP—the richest country on earth is tiny Luxembourg, at $118,000 per person. The U.S. ranks no better than ninth (depending on whose data you use), while China slips all the way to 94th.

Then again, we might think about what things cost in each country. If the cost of living is cheaper in, say, Iowa than it is in New York City, you don't need to make as much money to live comfortably. Economists call this concept purchasing power parity (PPP), and if we apply that to GDP, the top three economies are the European Union, the United States, and China.

Another way we might judge the economy is by the Gini coefficient, a statistical measurement named for its inventor, the early 20th century social scientist Corrado Gini. Gini's coefficient measures the dispersion of wealth, so that zero means everybody has the same wealth, with 1 meaning, in essence, one person has everything and nobody else has a dime. By the Gini coefficient, wealth is most evenly distributed in Sweden (0.23 Gini score), and most unevenly distributed in Namibia (0.72 Gini score). The United States' score is 0.45, better than most of South America but worse than all of Europe.

Figure 8.3

Charts TK: Nations of the world by GDP, PPP, per capita GDP, and by Gini coefficient.

However it is measured, GDP gives a benchmark by which to tell how the economy is doing. If GDP shrinks for two consecutive quarters (six months), that's a recession, and you will live through more than one of those in your lifetime. More on that in a moment. About 70 of GDP is consumer spending, 10–20 percent is investment (business) spending, and 20–30 percent is government spending. Real GDP is adjusted for inflation. Inflation is measured via the Consumer Price Index and a number of other indexes. More on that in a moment as well.

GDP also allows us to compare how the economy is doing at different points in time. A "record" budget deficit may not be so remarkable if it's, in fact, a smaller percentage of the overall economy than was an earlier, apparently smaller deficit. It's always important in looking at current and past numbers to compare them to the size of the economy and the wages and prices of that time.

Inflation

Another factor in understanding the economy is inflation. Inflation is a general rise in the level of prices. Since World War II, it has been a near constant feature of most economies around the world.

Inflation has three basic causes:

1. Cost-push: If there's a shortage of goods or inputs for goods, prices will rise if demand remains constant. You've already seen this in your lifetimes with oil and gasoline. When supply is interrupted, say, by a storm that shuts down refineries on the Gulf Coast, supply falls and prices rise.
2. Demand-pull: If demand exceeds supply, prices will rise. So, turning to gasoline once again, people drive more in the summer as the weather improves and folks go on vacation. So, typically gasoline prices will rise after Memorial Day and fall after Labor Day, when school resumes and the weather begins to get worse. High government spending in the late 1960s, when the economy was already doing well, may have contributed to inflation in the 1970s.

In both of these instances, markets will take care of the problem. Remember the law of supply: As prices rise, suppliers want to sell more of a good. The Arab Oil Embargo of the 1970s greatly restricted the supply of oil to the western world. Prices doubled and tripled in less than a decade. But higher prices made other sources of oil more economical to recover (such as the oil underneath the North Sea between Britain and Norway), and prices eventually came down. And don't forget the law of demand: As prices rise, consumers want less of a good. In the latest run-up in gas prices, consumers stopped buying gas-guzzling vehicles and began to demand more high-mileage alternatives. More people take the bus or carpool. So the market tends to sort this kind of inflation out.

3. Printing too much money: Governments can cause inflation if they print too much money. This happened in Germany in the 1920s, when inflation got so high that restaurants stopped printing menus because prices were rising throughout the day. In more recent times, Argentina and Zimbabwe have struggled through bouts of prolonged inflation, as their governments simply printed too much money. Printing too much money can let the government spend more, which puts more cash in circulation, which makes everyone feel richer, temporarily. But if we all suddenly had more cash, we'd likely spend some of it, in the process bidding up prices.

Inflation isn't usually good for an economy. It makes people feel somewhat helpless when they see prices rising all the time; it punishes savers, investors and lenders. Your savings account loses value as inflation increases; your investments also may be worth less. Lenders such as banks and other financial institutions see their loans lose value because they're being paid back with cheaper dollars or euros or yuan. Conversely, borrowers are helped by inflation because their loan payments tend to stay the same even as their incomes rise with inflation. (That's why banks began to offer adjustable rate mortgages—ARMS—for house loans. The rate can be adjusted up or down depending on inflation.) Inflation is especially hard on the poor and people on fixed incomes, because rising prices eat away at their purchasing power. Wealthier people may be able to shift their mix of investments to account for inflation (such as inflation-linked bonds). The poor don't tend to have investments (or they wouldn't be poor). Finally, inflation complicates business planning. So all in all, it's not a good thing.

Another thing to remember about inflation is that it can make things seem more expensive than they are. Remember the idea of purchasing power parity—what does something cost relative to the incomes of a particular time and place? So when we talk about the price of something, there's the money price, which is the nominal price, and the real price, which is the price accounting for inflation. We should always ask, what does a good or service cost today in constant dollars? The relative price is the price in terms of other goods and services. We also often consider the price adjusted for inflation, in order to tell if it's more expensive now or earlier. For example, $3 a gallon gasoline may seem very expensive, but when you account for inflation, gasoline was more expensive both in 1918 and in the early 1980s. Similarly, while *Avatar* is listed as the top grossing film of all time, if you account for inflation (and hence the difference in relative ticket prices), the clear winner is *Gone With the Wind*.

In the United States, we measure inflation by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), and by the Producer Price Index (PPI). As their names imply, the CPI is a measurement of inflation for consumer goods, and the PPI measures the price businesses receive for their products. Both are measured by the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. Researchers from the BLS survey prices around the country, using a "market-basket" approach—a hypothetical list of things consumers might normally buy. The CPI includes a national average and several regional averages, to account for differences in costs of things in different parts of the country. It's not bad measure, but because it is a laundry list of items, it's not perfect. For example, if the price of clothing is rising, and you're not buying any new clothes at the moment, the stated inflation rate is different from what you might be experiencing. The bureau also provides a "core" rate of inflation, subtracting out changes in the cost of food and energy. Those prices tend to be more volatile, experiencing wider swings in price over shorter periods of time. On the other hand, as everybody has to buy food and energy, the "core" rate may not be all that important.

Inflation doesn't normally occur during recessions, because people are spending less money, so there's less upward pressure on prices.The British economist A.W.H. Phillips suggested that there was a trade-off between inflation and unemployment, which became known as the Phillips Curve. Then some folks went out and tested inflation versus unemployment, to see if there was in fact a correlation. There was none. However, considering only these two statistics leaves out everything else that might be influencing either inflation or unemployment at the moment. Experience at least tells us that most of the time, if unemployment is high, we get less inflation, and if more people have jobs, prices may get pushed up. However, on occasion, a nation can experience inflation and a weak economy, which is calledstagflation. This is the worst of all possible worlds: You've lost your job, and prices are rising. This only seems to happen if the inflation is driven by cost-factors. So, in the U.S. in the mid- to late 1970s, a soft

economy meant high unemployment and the Arab oil embargo caused inflation by driving up the price of oil. (Rising or falling energy prices affect nearly everything else, since our society is so energy dependent.) Economists even came up with a “misery index,” combining numbers for inflation and unemployment.

It’s a particularly vexing problem for policy makers, because the usual fixes tend to make one or the other problem even worse. So, doing something to spur demand and raise employment levels may make the inflation worse; curbing demand to battle inflation will make the employment problem worse. In the long run, the market will sort out the inflation problem, because high prices will attract investment and eventually either more supply or alternatives to the high-priced goods. In the case of the U.S. in the 1970s, the answer was to raise interest rates to curb demand and crush inflation. That produced a very deep recession as well. As always, there were tradeoffs. The long-term solution to both problems is gains in productivity, but most people don’t want to wait that long for an answer. More on that in a moment.

The opposite of inflation is deflation, which is when prices fall. This can be a good thing when it means prices are falling because firms’ costs are falling. The price of many electronic goods, from calculators to computers to smart phones, has fallen over the last several decades, as the start-up costs have been covered and firms have become more efficient at producing them. On the other hand, if prices are falling because of falling consumer demand, that means firms are selling goods at a loss. If firms can’t cover their costs, they go out of business, workers lose their jobs, and the whole economy takes a downward plunge. Few things scare economists and policy makers more than that kind of deflation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The economy is measured by GDP, the total value of goods and services in an economy.
- Inflation can come from one of three sources. For the most part, inflation is bad for the economy.
- Stagflation is both inflation and recession, whereas deflation is falling rather than rising prices. Neither of these is good for the economy.

EXERCISES

1. Think of the last thing you purchased and how much you paid for it. Go tohttp://www.usinflationcalculator.com/ and see what it would have cost in the year you were born.
2. What causes stagflation? What kinds of things can solve it?

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8.8: Government and the Economy

Learning Objectives

1. Understand why governments make economic policy.
2. Understand the importance of productivity.

Why would government want to get involved in the economy? Nearly every government—conservative or liberal, managed or market-driven—has the same objective: Creating the conditions whereby people can live materially satisfying lives. (As I explained to students in China once, people all over pretty much want the same things: Food, clothing, a roof over their heads, maybe some nice clothes to look pretty on the weekend.) Consequently, most governments typically have three goals in terms of economic management: full employment, price stability and economic growth. If citizens have jobs, they're happier; if prices are rising too fast, they're less happy. Growth allows these things to happen even as population grows, and also means higher standards of living. Growth sometimes gets a bad name, though it doesn't necessarily mean that the suburbs are sprawling across the forests, fields and farms. Full employment, meanwhile, doesn't mean zero unemployment. It means that everybody who wants a job has one. In practical terms, that means 3–4 percent unemployment, as some people will be between jobs and some people may be just taking a break. Price stability means a relatively low level of inflation, say, under 3 percent. And if the economy is doing well, the party in power gets the credit and gets to stay in office a while longer.

Economic growth is an increase in the output of goods and services. It tends to mean more jobs and higher incomes for people, and also access to goods and services on which to spend that income. It's worth noting that there are in fact only two sources of economic growth: gains in population, and gains in productivity. Gains in population tend to mean an increase in demand, which drives up prices and encourages more supply. Firms hire more workers, who have more income to spend on themselves and their families. Gains in population, however, also generate externalities—more pollution, less open space, more traffic, higher housing prices (a great thing if you're selling a house, not such a good thing if you're buying one).

Aside from Chairman Mao in China after World War II, governments typically no longer actively encourage population growth as a matter of policy. Population tends to grow when times are better, as people can afford families, such as during the Baby Boom that followed the post-World War II economic expansion in the United States. In more recent times, however, in industrialized nations such as the U.S., Japan and Europe, birth rates have fallen. Whereas in agricultural societies more children can mean more farmhands, in industrial societies children are an expense. A couple of kids is good; a bunch can get kind of spendy.

Productivity

The key to economic growth is gains in productivity, and governments do try to actively encourage that. Productivity is output per worker. It's very important—you can track the ups and downs of the U.S. economy by watching what productivity is doing. Slow or no growth in productivity means lower profits for businesses, and when business profits are down, they hire fewer people and pay the people they have less money. Why is this so important? If a worker is more productive—produces more goods per hour worked—production costs fall and profits rise. Gains in productivity mean that you're producing a greater number of widgets with the same resources. That means higher profits, which usually means greater wealth for more people.

Gains in productivity come from better skills; better equipment and/or processes (including specialization of labor); finding new sources of natural resources; innovation (a change in the way resources are used); or eliminating waste. Steel plows, for example, greatly improved the productivity of agriculture by allowing the plowing of more land. (Before this, plows were usually made of wood, which meant they couldn't break up the ground of many kinds of soil to allow planting.) In another example, prices fell throughout the 1800s with the rise of the industrial revolution, despite gains in wealth and population (which usually drives up prices). More goods were produced by machine instead of by hand, so output increased even as prices fell.

Because there are limits to everything, and technological innovation is unpredictable and tends to plateau, improvements in productivity can't just be ordered up from Amazon.com. Productivity in the U.S. soared after World War II, but then flattened in the 1970s. Productivity turned up again in the 1990s, and the economy boomed, but that boom didn't survive the 2000s.

Any way you look at it, productivity is one of the keys to economic success. So part of the question we need to answer is, how do government policies foster or discourage productivity?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Most governments want to achieve economic growth, full employment and stable prices.
- Gains in productivity a major source of economic growth.

EXERCISES

1. Think about where you work, or have worked. What kinds of things might affect the productivity of the business and workers there?
2. How could a nation grow its economy without driving up prices (inflation)?

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8.9: Budgets and Fiscal Policy

Learning Objectives

1. Understand how budgets are created
2. Understand how fiscal policy can affect economic performance
3. Understand why earmarks are not a big deal, but Social Security and Medicare are

Modern governments spend a lot of money (including efforts to boost productivity). In most states, governments raise and spend money through budgets. That makes budgets, for the most part, a matter of law. For the United States, and most countries, and for any state or local government to raise and spend money, the legislative body of that government must pass a law authorizing how much money will be spent and for what purpose. So, in the U.S., Congress (both the House and the Senate) must agree on a spending bill that authorizes government agencies to spend money in any particular way. Budgets can be a single, large bill containing many categories of spending, or they can be broken up into different bills allowing different kinds of spending. So if you hear or read that Congress has passed a defense appropriations bill, that means they have approved a spending plan for the Defense Department, and through them, all the spending that will take place on behalf of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines.

The federal budget, passed by Congress and signed by the president, spends more than $3 trillion dollars a year, close to one quarter of GDP. The federal budget is paid for by taxes, earnings, transfers and borrowing.

Figure 8.4 [federal budget expenditure and revenue charts]

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Budgets typically have two parts: revenue (how much money is coming in) and expenditure (how much money is going out). (A revenue package may come in a separate bill, but budgets are built on the assumption that enough revenue will be available to pay for the spending.) If revenue exceeds spending, that's a budget surplus. If spending is greater than revenue, that's a budget deficit. As we will see, each situation has a mixed effect on the economy. The accumulated deficits are called the national debt.

Figure 8.5 [national debt chart]

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For the most part, governments don't just print money when they need more. They either cut spending, or raise taxes, or they borrow. Do you have a Savings Bond? You are helping to fund the U.S. national debt. Governments issue bonds, which are bought by investors. The bonds pay interest, and after so many years, usually 10 or 20, the investor gets his or her initial investment (principal) back. Investors buy bonds because they are backed by the faith and credit of the issuing government (so U.S. or Canadian bonds are a safer investment than, say, bonds from Zimbabwe or Afghanistan). Governments often also use bonds to fund capital improvements, such as public buildings or transportation projects. The contractors want to get paid right away; the government uses tax revenue to pay back the investors who lent them the money for the project.

One thing you may have heard in recent times is that China lends us money to fund our budget (and/or trade) deficit. That's not quite the case. Because China has a trade surplus with the U.S. they end up holding more dollars than they know what to do with. So part of what they do is to buy U.S. government treasury securities. It's a safe place to park your money. But funding the budget deficit doesn't depend on Chinese investment. The U.S. government does not borrow directly from China; China buys T-bills and Treasury notes on the open market.

Deficits get perhaps a little more attention than they deserve of late, perhaps because during the George W. Bush administration Congress was persuaded to cut taxes and keep spending high. The Bush administration argued that tax cuts would stimulate the economy by putting more money in the hands of more consumers. It's not clear how much effect this had. Supporters said that helped keep the economy moving; critics tended to say that most of the tax cut went to the wealthiest Americans, who were unlikely to raise their consumption or investment more than they were already doing. The one thing the tax cuts did do was make the budget deficit grow.

Figure 8.6 [deficits as a percentage of GDP]

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Then, in the interest of jump starting the economy, President Barack Obama got Congress to increase spending even more. This also was controversial. Conservatives, including members of the so-called Tea Party movement, criticized the president for making the budget deficit larger (the deficits of the Bush years were apparently OK). Supporters pointed out that without the stimulus, the economy likely would have done worse.

Budget deficits obviously can't grow forever, and no rational person suggests that they should or will. At some point, if nothing else, people will stop lending you money. Conservatives argue that heavy borrowing by government "crowds out" private investment (making it harder or less likely that private firms will get loans or invest in productive enterprises), but there's basically no evidence that this ever happens. A big budget deficit—government spending extra money—can cause inflation if the economy is already booming. But if it's not, that doesn't appear to happen. We've had big budget deficits for the last 10 years, but, aside from an occasional spike in oil prices, very little inflation.

Fiscal Policy

Taxes and spending—in essence, the budget—is one way that government can influence economic performance. This is called fiscal policy. In the most basic terms, fiscal policy is using the government's power to tax and spend to try to influence economic outcomes.

Prior to the 1930s, prevailing economic theory urged policy makers to leave things alone, an economic philosophy often referred to as laissez-faire (French for to leave alone). The Great Depression, however, challenged the assumptions of this theory, since it lingered on for more than 10 years. Despite a relatively hands-off economic policy, the economy did not recover on its own. Unemployment was high, business profits were low, and although top executives' salaries continued to grow, the wages of most Americans did not. Unemployment was as high as 30 percent.

The economist most associated with active fiscal policy was John Maynard Keynes, a British economist who wrote about this idea in the 1920s and 1930s. He said that when consumer and business spending fell (remember that a drop in aggregate demand is what causes recessions, ultimately), government could restore the economy's vigor by spending to make up the gap. Keynes even spoke to President Franklin Roosevelt, who, despite his promises of "bold, persistent experimentation" to end the Depression, wasn't a very forward thinking person when it came to economics. He had little use for Keynes' ideas. Keynes thought it would be good for government to run a temporary budget deficit to boost demand and get the economy moving again. He also thought that when times are good, you should use the resulting budget surplus to pay off the debt you acquired during the recovery phase.

Why would fiscal policy stimulate the economy? Increasing government spending would increase total demand, leading businesses to sell more product, thereby boosting profits and, hopefully, wages and employment. That increase should multiply throughout the economy, as those business owners and their employees now will have more money, and they, too, are likely to spend some of it. Depending on what government spends on, it's a temporary fix. Opponents of fiscal stimulus would argue that in the long run the economy will fix itself, if left alone. Keynes' famous response was, yes, but in the long run, we're all dead.

Fiscal policy takes many forms:

- Employment: The U.S. government, for example, employs several million people at a variety of tasks. Those people spend their government paychecks on normal consumer items, such as housing and food, and add to the total demand for goods and services in the economy, while providing services that people often say they want, everything from defense to police and fire services to public education.
- Transfer payments: The government processes transfer payments such as money sent to recipients of Social Security, welfare, and unemployment compensation. This raises the income and hence the consumption of people who might otherwise not be spending as much money. This raises overall demand in the economy.
- Government consumption: The government buys a large amount of goods and services. This provides jobs for the people who make and sell the goods that government buys, from defense-related materiel to health care and construction equipment.

In more recent times, President Obama's stimulus package provided money for infrastructure spending, and money to states and local government to permit them to balance their budgets without slashing services and payrolls. Leading up to the 2012 presidential campaign, Republicans liked to call it "the failed stimulus package," but people who weren't running for president tended to argue that the stimulus, together with actions taken by the Bush administration in 2007–2008, had kept us from slipping into another Great Depression. Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman said that the only problem with the stimulus package

was that it wasn't big enough. He estimated that the stimulus needed to be about twice as big to push the economy toward full recovery.

It seems to make a difference what government spends our money on. Transfer payments eliminate a lot of human suffering. Before Social Security, for example, senior citizens were overwhelmingly poor. Defense spending tends to be less stimulating (and that's not the same thing as non-stimulating) to the overall economy, because the items purchased, such as tanks, don't then circulate elsewhere in the economy. Spending on infrastructure—such as building schools, bridges, roads, ports and other public facilities—may do the most to stimulate the economy since the results—better education or transportation networks—can help the economy to be more productive overall. Spending on education, particularly post-K–12 education and training, also tends to help the economy. The GI Bill, which after World War II allowed millions of American veterans to return to college, provided a huge boost to the post-war economy, by training an entire generation of engineers, scientists, doctors, lawyers, business people and teachers. (Before World War II, not so many people went to college. After World War II and the GI Bill, people expected to.)

Earmarks

One of the budgetary categories you may have heard something about are congressional earmarks. Earmarks are amendments to bills moving through Congress that contain money for projects in a representative's home district or in a senator's home state. They've generated a lot of heat and noise because some of them look like boondoggles, and a lot of them have been described as boondoggles. But one person's doggle is another person's boon. So, for example, in one of the most infamous examples, Ketchikan, Alaska's "bridge to nowhere" actually would have connected the city to the island where its airport is located. That project is controversial even in Ketchikan. I asked a friend of mine who lives there about it and he replied, "Do you want to see me start a fight?" But many of the examples listed as boondoggles don't look so bad once you understand them. In my own neighborhood, an earmark project that repaved a beat-up stretch of suburban arterial, adding sidewalks and a turn lane, was listed on a Colorado Republican senator's list of the worst projects in the country. Apparently, one of his staff had interviewed a restaurant owner whose business was hurt by the traffic disruptions caused by the project. I contacted the senator's office to ask when they'd actually visited the project. I never heard back from them.

But what you should know about earmarks is that they total less than 1 percent of the entire federal budget. We could make them all go away tomorrow and the federal budget deficit would be nearly as big as ever. So while earmarks are a convenient whipping boy for opponents of federal spending, they're not a significant source of fiscal calamity.

Social Security and Medicare

Another controversial budget category is Social Security. It is the main retirement program for most citizens of the United States. Most industrialized nations have some sort of public retirement program. Today, more than 100 nations—for Algeria to Zimbabwe—have public retirement programs that operate more or less like Social Security. People pay in something, and get something out when they retire. Arguably, it has been one of the most successful and popular programs in the United States, but still not without controversy as the nation's demographics evolve toward an older average population.

Social Security got its start in the Great Depression. With the advent of more modern medicine and public health campaigns, average lifespans in the U.S. increased by 10 years from 1900 to 1930. Meanwhile, beginning in 1920, more people lived in cities than on farms for the first time in the nation's history. So, people were no longer self-sufficient farmers who lived several generations in one home, but increasingly were urban dwellers who lived in single-family homes and apartments. With the onset of the Great Depression and high unemployment, many older people lost their jobs. Although some states had public pension systems, it was hard to qualify for them and most of them were woefully underfunded.

Enter Social Security. The early years of the Great Depression led to a lot of reform, including the Social Security Act of 1935. People started paying Social Security taxes in 1937, with payments kicking in over the next three years. At the time, life expectancies after retirement were not great, so few people if any anticipated that people might, someday, collect benefits for 30 years after retirement. In fact, when the act was passed, the life expectancy for a man born in 1930 was only 58 (62 for women), and the retirement age for benefits was 65. Now, on the other hand, if you were born in 1990, you should expect to live at least another 15 years if you're a man and nearly 20 years if you're a woman. That puts a strain on the system. In recent times, there are at least 35 million people over the age of 65 in the United States, and the great majority of them are collecting Social Security.

And part of the reason for that is Social Security. In 2008, Social Security provided more than $600 billion in benefits to more than 50 million Americans, plus another $43 billion paid to 7.5 million people receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI), a 1974 program that seeks to cover people who may not have qualified for Social Security. Once Congress adopted automatic Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs) in the 1970s, Social Security served to virtually eliminate the incidence of poverty among senior citizens. And as everybody pays in, and everybody who worked enough in their lifetimes qualifies, for a long time Social Security was described as the "third rail" of American politics—a reference to the electrified "hot" rail that powers some transit trains. Touch it, and you die.

In more recent times, some conservatives have taken aim at the program. President George W. Bush proposed letting people invest part of their own Social Security tax payments in whatever they wanted. The Great Recession of 2007–2009, which saw the stock market tumble, called the wisdom of that into question, but even before then, voters seemed inclined to reject the president's proposal. (It was never very popular in public opinion polls. And it's worth noting that both Social Security and Medicare have much lower expense ratios than do their private sector counterparts [Wall Street investment firms and private insurance companies]. So it's not a given that the private sector would provide these services more efficiently.)

In 2011, another Texas governor, Republican presidential candidate Rick Perry, called Social Security a Ponzi scheme. Charles Ponzi was a con man who was famous in the 1920s for promising high returns on small investments. Ponzi paid off the earlier investors with later contributions. As long as his fund kept growing, he could keep his investors happy. But eventually somebody figures out that the emperor is indeed, buck naked, and the whole scam collapses. The same thing happened with financier Bernie Madoff in the 2000s. (Ponzi and Madoff both ended up in prison.)

Is Social Security a Ponzi scheme? Current contributions do go to pay current expenses, in a way. For all of its history, Social Security's contributions have gone into a trust fund, which invests the proceeds in U.S. government treasury securities, one of the safest but not always the best-paying investment in the world. As the nation ages—more older people living longer relative to the number of young people still working—the demands on the trust fund grow relative to the amount of money going into it. In theory, it won't ever run out of money, but the trust fund could be exhausted by somewhere between 2036 and 2049, depending on who's doing the estimating. That could mean a decrease in benefit levels.

It's not impossible to fix this. Several options are available:

- Raise the retirement age. If people have to work longer, they'll pay more into the system. And, with life expectancies rising, more people are working longer, sometimes just for something to do.
- Raise the tax rate. Never a very popular solution, but one option nonetheless.
- Raise the income threshold. Because wages are taxed for Social Security only up to the first $106,800 you make, there's a lot of untapped income potential out there. Again, a politically challenging option because Americans, in general, don't want to pay more taxes.

Medicare is a slightly different story. It operates much like Social Security—working people pay taxes into a trust fund that provides insurance coverage. It was created by Congress in 1965, at a time when only half of seniors had any kind of health care coverage (and 30 percent still lived in poverty).

And nobody needs health care quite like senior citizens do, so there are great demands on the system. Medicare's trust fund could run dry by 2024, a situation exacerbated by Congress and President George W. Bush adding a prescription drug benefit—without any increase in funding—in 2003. The plan also barred Medicare from bargaining with drug companies (the Veterans Administration gets to bargain and pays half for drugs what Medicare pays).

Again, the solutions are similar to those found in Social Security—some combination of higher taxes and lower benefits. In recent years, Democrats have proposed broader health care reform that would spread the risk among more people. Insurance programs work best when they cover a broad base of people. Republicans, on the other hand, have proposed privatizing the whole operation, which would mean senior citizens pay much more out of pocket for health care expenses.

Taxes

Taxes: The other side of fiscal policy is taxes. Taxes redistribute income from those who have to those who don't by funding the above-mentioned activities; they also are used to discourage some activities (such as taxes on cigarettes and liquor) and encourage others (like the income tax mortgage interest deduction, which helps make housing more affordable for many people).

The nature of the taxes used to fund the government also has an impact on the economy. Taxes can beflat, progressive or regressive.

- A flat tax is just that—everybody pays the same rate. Flat taxes are the darlings of the ultra-rich, since many of them would pay less tax than they do now. Flat taxes also are regressive, however. Let's say the tax rate is 10 percent. Ten percent of Bill Gates' income would be much more money than would 10 percent of my income or yours. But that 10 percent would mean a lot more to someone who makes a lot less. Someone making $1 million a year, although paying $100,000 in taxes, still would have $900,000, on which, we might guess, he or she still would live pretty well. But 10 percent of the income of someone making $40,000 a year—$4,000—would be much more of a hardship for that person. Taxes are regressive when they take a bigger share of low-income people's money than they take of wealthy people's money.
- Progressive taxes are those that take a progressively larger share of someone's income. The federal income tax is graduated, because depending on your income, you may pay 15–35 percent. (Not the whole 35 percent—the top marginal rate is only applied to your earnings over a given threshold, say $100,000. So the 15 percent applies to the first $20,000 or so of everyone's income, and the additional rate—in a series of steps—applies only to what you earn over that.) When the top marginal rate was 70 percent, that appeared to have encouraged people to find ways to legally hide their money from the government, as opposed to investing it and making more money. Parking your money in an off-shore bank account in the Cayman Islands doesn't do much for the U.S. economy (although it's good for the Caymans); investing in almost anything in the U.S. tends to do more good.
- Any tax that charges everybody the same, regardless of income, is regressive. So a flat tax is regressive, as are most sales taxes.

Tax cuts also can be a tool of fiscal policy. A tax cut can put more money in consumers' pockets, thus encouraging spending; a tax hike can help cool the economy off by doing the opposite. Despite the claims that tax cuts will spur economic growth, they don't seem to have that affect. Tax cuts in the early 1960s, in the early 1980s, and in 2001 and 2003 all failed to make the economy grow much. In the last example, the Bush administration said the tax cut would so spur the economy that the budget deficit would disappear, but as with Ronald Reagan's tax cuts of the early 1980s, that didn't happen. The budget deficits just got bigger. What Reagan was arguing, and what Bush was perhaps unwittingly agreeing with, is called supply side economics. Supply side economics were the brainchild of Arthur Laffer, once an economics professor at the University of Southern California. At a party with a journalist, Laffer drew what became called the Laffer Curve on a cocktail napkin (I'm not making this up). Laffer's idea had some logic to it. He suggested that if taxes were too high, economic activity would be discouraged. And if they're too low, the same thing happens. If they're too high, people don't get enough reward for their efforts. If they're too low, government doesn't provide enough services to allow the economy to function. The question remains, however, where we might be on the curve—are taxes too high, too low, or just about right? President Reagan's argument at the time was that taxes were too high, so that cutting them would spur economic activity and actually generate more tax revenue. Instead, Reagan oversaw bigger deficits than those he inherited from his predecessor, Jimmy Carter.

Who Pays the Most Taxes?

How you answer this question depends on how you slice the economic pie. It's an important question because taxes allow the government to pay for the services and benefits that people say they want. And as Americans, in general, don't like taxes, it's a subject of never-ending debate.

First of all, everybody pays something. One of the Fox News buzz phrases about taxes of recent vintage has been that a flat tax would give everybody "a skin in the game," borrowing a metaphor from the world of golf (which I still don't understand). The truth of the matter is that while some people make so little money that they effectively pay no federal income tax, everybody who works pays payroll taxes, which contribute to the Social Security and Medicare trust funds. Everyone also pays sales tax in the 45 states that have such a tax. And taxes such as property taxes get passed on to people who rent in the form of higher rent. So everybody, it would appear, has a skin in the game.

As noted elsewhere in this chapter, the United States has a graduated income tax, which means the more you make, the higher your tax rate. The higher tax rate is only applied to income over a certain level. So if the basic rate is 10 percent on your first $8,500 of earnings, everybody pays that, regardless of their total income. The top marginal rate is 35 percent on incomes over $379,150. But no one pays that rate on all their income. People who earn more than $1 million a year, for example, pay an average total rate of 24 percent. The top 400 wage earners in the country paid 18.1 percent in 2008.

Upper income earners do pay the most federal income taxes. The top 1 percent of wage earners—people earning more than $380,000 a year—pay 19 percent of the total federal income tax bill in a typical year. The bottom 50 percent—people earning less than $33,000 a year—pay only 2.7 percent of total federal income tax. (The fact that half the country makes less than $33,000 a year ought to jump out at you, as it raises a whole host of other issues.)

And this is where things get complicated. The top 1 percent also control 50 percent of the nation's total wealth and earned a little over 20 percent of the nation's total personal income. Wealth in this case includes stocks, bonds, real estate—anything of measurable value. The top 20 percent control more than 80 percent of the nation's wealth; the bottom 20 percent is worth effectively zero (meaning that, if anything, they have debt, not wealth). Meanwhile, the very richest Americans—those making more than $10 million a year, pay only about 25 percent of their income in taxes. So while they pay a lot of tax, they still have a lot to live on.

If you take all federal taxes, most of the money comes from the middle class—people earning between $34,000 and $140,000—a year, paying slightly more than 50 percent of the total tax bill. That includes all other federal taxes, including the payroll taxes for Social Security and Medicare.

People who think taxes are too high look at the numbers on share of personal income taxes; people who think they're too low look the relative tax burden. The argument for lower taxes tends to be that with more money in their pockets, the wealthy classes will invest more and make the economy grow. The argument against lower taxes, aside from their effect on the federal budget deficit, tends to be that the so-called job creators aren't really letting much of the wealth trickle down. Corporate profits rose 16 percent from 2001–2007, but average wages rose less than 1 percent over the same time period. You will, as always, have to make up your own mind as to who's right in this debate.

Another common complaint is that the U.S. has the highest corporate tax rate in the world, which is more less true in any given year (tax rates do change). But few U.S. firms, if any, pay this rate, thanks to a generous array of allowable deductions and credits. According to the Tax Policy Center, a non-partisan research outfit, the total tax burden in the U.S. is a little over 25 percent of GDP. The next six biggest economies in the world have a higher tax total tax burden (almost 34 percent) and the 34 countries of the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) average 34.7 percent. Americans pay slightly more in income taxes, less in corporate taxes, more in property tax and much less in sales taxes than do citizens in other countries.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Budget deficits can have a mixed impact on the economy.
- Fiscal policy can be used to stimulate economic activity.
- Tax increases and tax cuts, a part of fiscal policy, can be used to stimulate the economy or cool it down.

EXERCISES

1. What tax rate would discourage you from working more?
2. What do you think the government should spend money on? What do you think it shouldn't spend money on?

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8.10: Monetary Policy

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the operation of the Federal Reserve.
2. Understand the impacts and limitations of monetary policy.

Another way in which government can affect economic performance is by controlling the supply of money in circulation. This is called monetary policy.

The Wonderful World of Money

First, a word about money. Humans have been using money as a means of exchange for a long time. Early forms of money have ranged from rare shells to cocoa beans; rare metals such as gold and silver also have long been popular. Money is a store and standard of value—it allows flexibility and lowers transaction costs by serving as a medium of exchange. Without money, we'd have to barter. There are groups who promote barter relations between people and businesses, but in order for barter to work, I must have exactly what you want in equal value to what I want, and you have to have exactly what I want. So money greases the wheels of the economy. It's much easier to just give someone money in exchange for a good or service, versus finding exactly what they want in trade.

Money needs to be portable, divisible, uniform and durable. Gold and silver hence became popular as money because they are soft metals and easy to make coins and bricks out of; they are durable; and you can weigh them to determine if they are what they claim to be.

But they're heavy. As trading relationships between cities grew in medieval Europe, it became easier to send a paper note representing the value of the gold involved from, say, Florence to Milan, rather than shipping all that gold. Eventually people began to just trade the paper notes; hence paper money was born in the west. (The Chinese also used paper money at different times in their history, but often returned to silver and other metals.)

Gold Bugs

For a long time, paper money was somewhat looked down upon, as the paper has less intrinsic value than does gold. So, typically, paper money was backed by gold; for much of the 19th century, you could go to a bank and trade your paper for gold.

You will hear the occasional critic claim that we should be back on the gold standard, or some other commodity standard. This would severely limit the money supply, which tends to limit inflation. But this also presents certain problems. If you can't change the money supply, you can't prime the economic pump when necessary. Moreover, if there's not enough money in circulation, the economy is less likely to grow, if only because people hoard money (at that point, by definition, it is a scarce commodity). Some scholars assert that the world faced a 20-year depression from the 1870s to the 1890s because there was a shortage of money, a situation rescued only by the discovery of gold in South Africa and elsewhere in the 1880s and 1890s. In the 20th century, most nations, including the United States, jettisoned the gold standard, so that now paper money is the main standard of value. Fans of gold argue that prices have far outstripped the gain in value of gold, but the truth of the matter is that gold is much less valuable now than it was 100 years ago. And paper money, also sometimes called fiat money (and not because you can buy an Italian car with it), is backed by something—by the strength of the economy that issued the money. Around the world, currency values fluctuate along with the performances of the underlying economies.

What matters most about money is how much is in circulation. Money is measured in a couple of categories:

- M1—Cash money, which includes 2–3 percent coins, 25–30 percent paper currency and the rest in checking accounts.
- M2—this includes M1 plus savings accounts and certificates of deposit (CDs).

The Money Supply

Different schools of economic thought disagree on how much the money supply matters. Monetarists say it's the only thing that matters; others say it doesn't matter at all. Neither of these points of view makes much sense to me. The evidence is that it does matter, but it's not the only thing that matters.

True story: A group of couples with young children formed a babysitting co-op. This way they could have babysitters they knew and trusted, and be able to have an occasional evening out. So the group printed up coupons, each good for one evening of babysitting, and gave each couple two coupons. In a short period of time, people were going out less than they had before they formed the co-op. The reason was simple: money, in the form of the coupons, was in such short supply that no one was willing to spend any coupons. Everyone was willing to babysit, but nobody wanted to part with the scarce coupons. Eventually they issued more coupons and people started going out again. At one point, however, they had too many coupons in circulation, and nobody wanted to babysit because there were so many coupons available. So it took a few tries to reach a point where the price of babysitting was neither too high nor too low.

Nonetheless, the world is never entirely free of gold bugs, who argue that a return to the gold standard is the answer to the nation's economic woes. For example, sometime Libertarian/Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul proposes to do away with the Federal Reserve. (And if not gold, some other basket of commodities.) As we've already noted, a fixed money supply would stop inflation. It also would contract the economy right along with prices. With less money, less business will be done. Gold Monday likely would look a lot like Black Tuesday did in 1929. It would also rob the country of the ability to use monetary policy as a tool, both against inflation and recessions.

Managing the Money Supply

Most nations have a central bank that is in charge of managing that country's money supply. In the U.S., the money supply is largely controlled by the Federal Reserve Board (the Fed). The Federal Reserve Act was passed by Congress in 1913, creating the Federal Reserve System. The nation had been without a central bank since the 1830s, when President Andrew Jackson blocked congressional efforts to renew the charter of the Bank of the United States. As a consequence, the money supply was under the control of large private banks (and the mining industry, since any new gold strike meant that more money would be in circulation). The nation thus suffered a serious economic downturn about every dozen years or so, which, by the Panic of 1907, prodded government to leaders to take action and create the Fed.

The Fed is an odd mix of public and private. It's a government agency; its top officials are appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate, but it's also a private bank run by private bankers. By not being subject to election, it is hoped the Fed will make the tough choices needed to keep the economy moving, and not worry so much about short-term political pressure.

The Fed has a chairman and vice chairman, and a board of governors, plus 12 regional Fed banks scattered across the country. The Fed controls the money supply through setting the discount rate, reserve requirements, and through open market operations.

- The reserve requirement tells banks how much of their customers deposits they can lend out and how much they have to keep on hand. A lower reserve requirement gives banks more leeway to make loans. Typically, the reserve requirement is around 20 percent.
- The discount rate is the rate the Fed charges member banks (and nearly all U.S. banks are members of the Federal Reserve system) on short-term loans. A higher rate of interest makes money more expensive, which means banks will charge more for loans to their customers. And if you remember the law of demand—at higher prices, consumers want less of a product—you can see that higher interest rates mean less borrowing and less economic growth.
- Open-market operations: This is the Fed's most common tool. The Fed buys and sells U.S. Treasury securities (remember all those bonds the government sells to fund the deficit?) to influence interest rates and the money supply. If the Fed buys securities (in the open market), investors have more cash in their hands. Under these circumstances, money is more plentiful, loans are cheaper, and economic activity can pick up. If the Fed sells U.S. government bonds, investors have less cash in hand—the money supply shrinks, loans become more expensive, and economic activity slows down.

Why would the Fed do that? The Fed is assigned with two sometimes conflicting tasks: Ensuring economic growth and keeping a lid on inflation. If the economy overheats, inflation can result. As basically a bunch of bankers, the Fed detests inflation, and will try to kill it by tightening the money supply. But if the economy is stagnant or shrinking, increasing the money supply can help nurse it back to health.

Does this work? Sometimes, and sometimes remarkably effectively. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, inflation in the U.S. topped 10 percent. It was killing banks and lenders, destabilizing commerce and industry, and making consumers feel helpless as their savings and investments were eaten up by rising prices. The Fed, under Chairman Paul Volcker, engaged in an experiment in strict

monetarism. Strict monetarists believe that the only thing that matters is the precise growth rate of the money supply. So the Fed put the brakes on that, interest rates soared, and the inflation dragon was at least temporarily caged if not slain. As with most policy choices, there were tradeoffs. High interest rates hurt the auto industry (often, you have to borrow money to buy a car) and all but killed the housing industry, which may be as much as 25 percent of the U.S. economy (you borrow a lot of money to buy a house). Inflation went away, replaced by the steepest recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s (and the deepest economic downturn until the Great Recession of 2007). By the mid-1980s, however, the Fed ended its monetarist experiment and the economy began to recover.

Expansionary monetary policy can have a positive effect on the economy. In 1987, easy Fed monetary policy kept a stock market tumble from becoming anything more than a blip. Expansion by the Fed also helped the economy recover in the early 1990s. In the Great Depression, tight money policy probably helped contribute to the worst economic era in the nation's history.

Nonetheless, monetary policy doesn't always work. What the Fed can control is the money supply, not demand. And while cheap money encourages people to borrow, nobody's borrowing if they're afraid they won't be able to repay the loans. Businesses in particular don't borrow to expand production if nobody's buying in the first place. So, despite constant efforts by the Fed amid the Great Recession of 2007, the economy didn't fully recover because nobody was borrowing anyway. Arguably, things could have been much worse without the Fed's actions, but at some point, lower interest rates and plenty of available money becomes the equivalent of pushing on a string: the back end moves, but the front end of the string goes nowhere.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The Federal Reserve Board controls the money supply in the U.S. Most nations have a central bank that performs a similar function.
- Monetary policy can make the economy heat up or cool down, but monetary policy by itself may not be enough to encourage consumer or business demand.

EXERCISES

1. What tools does the Fed use to influence economic outcomes?
2. Why might monetary policy sometimes not help the economy recover?

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8.11: Regulation

Learning Objectives

1. Understand the trade-offs involved in the regulation of the economy.
2. Understand some of the ways in which the government regulates economic activity.

The third area of government intervention in the economy is perhaps the most controversial:regulation. Regulation imposes both costs and benefits on consumers and businesses, and frequently represents substantial tradeoffs between economic efficiency and protecting people and the environment. Regulation both helps and hampers economic performance. Too much regulation can choke an economy, but it is also arguable that no regulation will allow too many market failures (and no amount of reading Ayn Rand will change that). People too often look at either the costs or the benefits; let's try to consider both.

Regulation shows up in a variety of ways, from standardized weights and measures to workplace safety rules. Regulation imposes costs and benefits; it both helps and hurts economic performance. Ironically, a lot of regulation comes at the request of the regulated, oftentimes as a way to limit competition and create economic profits. More about all of this as we go.

Weights and measures is a good example of just what regulation does. Standardizing a pound—so that when you buy a pound of flour, you know you're getting a pound, has costs and benefits. The cost is the equipment needed by the flour mill to be certain that every bag comes out the same. The benefit is lower transaction costs for the consumer—you don't have to bring a scale with you to check the merchant's measurement. But while most regulation does pretty much the same thing—lowering some costs while raising others—much of it is more controversial than the weight of a pound.

The Evolution of Regulation: Is That Any Way to Run a Railroad?

In the United States we have had economic regulation since colonial days, from standardized weights and measures to rules about who could do what to whom. The adoption of the U.S. Constitution, however, limited the ability of states to regulate commerce that crossed over their borders, in one stroke of the pen creating one of the world's widest-ranging free markets. This played no small part in both the development of the nation and its growing wealth.

However, by the late 19th century, amid the industrial revolution, people began to notice various market failures, or at least the uneven rewards that markets sometimes dole out. Farmers, whose biggest problem was most likely too much debt and falling food prices (prices fell throughout the 19th century as productivity rose), clamored for regulation of railroads. They believed that railroads were charging too much to haul agricultural products. Railroads were the dominant interest group of the late 19th century—railroads were the only way to move goods east to west.

The power of railroads demonstrates my Third Law of Political Economy: Economic interests are politically dominant to the extent that they are economically dominant. And although the railroads were often badly run, they did enjoy high profits as long as they didn't have much competition (and in the late 19th century, there were no highways, no airplanes, not even the Panama Canal). Because railroads were a dominant economic interest—you pretty much had to use them to ship anything—they had political power, particularly in northern and western states. That led them to dominate state legislatures, which at that time elected U.S. Senators. So railroads had a lot of pull in the U.S. Senate, which then as now could say yes or no to presidential nominations to the federal courts. Consequently, the courts consistently ruled that neither the states nor the federal government could regulate railroads, and railroad interests dominated national politics.

The railroads, Congress, courts and constituents battled it out in court and at the ballot box, until finally in 1887 Congress created the Interstate Commerce Commission. Over the next few decades, the ICC was given enough teeth to regulate the prices and practices of not only railroads, but also the trucking and bus industries, so that until the 1970s, there was little price competition among freight haulers. Unfortunately for the railroads, they became heavily regulated just when competition finally appeared, in the form of trucks, highways, aircraft, faster steamships and the Panama Canal. Railroads were hurt so badly by regulation that America's rail system went from the finest in the world to one of the most pathetic, and only recently have rail firms begun to recover.

Airlines underwent a similar bout of regulation beginning in the 1930s, but they asked for regulation from the federal government to end "ruinous" competition and preserve the industry. For the next 40 years, only rich people flew, and the prices charged were the same for everyone. Airlines competed only on service, and only two new routes were approved at a time when the nation's population was on its way to doubling.

Finally, in the 1970s, economists and policy makers began to realize that all this regulation had created a highly inefficient transportation sector, whose products and services were overpriced and whose businesses were badly run.

Deregulation came on in a big way in the 1970s and 1980s. This has made business more challenging for all transportation firms, but that's what competition is supposed to be about, isn't it? The transition has been painful; lots of airlines and trucking companies went out of business, and profits for the remaining carriers fell. The answer might have been to not regulate such businesses in the first place—where there's room for competition, markets can usually sort things out—but hindsight is easy, isn't it?

On the other hand, safety regulation has made workplaces safer and more predictable; environmental regulation has made the environment cleaner. Critics of regulation like to point to the cost of such regulation, but they never bother to add up the savings in workers who aren't injured, in lakes and rivers that you can swim in again (and that don't catch fire, as some did in the 1970s), and in lower health care costs from cleaner air. The fact that regulation sometimes goes too far doesn't lead to the conclusion that zero regulation is better still. One only has to think of the recent problems with dangerously bad food imported from China to understand, for example, the importance of food safety regulation.

This is, of course, my opinion, and you needn't agree. At a minimum, regulation represents a lot of tradeoffs. Regulation imposes costs and benefits on everyone. Costs are higher for producers, which they usually pass on to consumers. On the other hand, some costs are lower for producers because, if they're adhering to the law, they should face lower legal costs, and their costs won't be different than their competitors if everyone faces the same regulations. Costs for consumers, in terms of safety and predictability, also are lower. The same is true for regulation of workplace safety—higher costs in terms of compliance, lower costs in terms of fewer work hours lost to injury; and for pollution and environmental damage—higher costs for meeting pollution requirements, for both producers and consumers, and lower costs for society from less environmental damage and health problems.

Electric Dreams: the Life and Times of Regulation and Deregulation

From the time Thomas Edison figured how to make a practical electric light bulb, electricity had a huge impact on human existence. In a few decades, we went from a world lit only by fire (to borrow the historian William Manchester's phrase) to one where people could and did stay up later, because there was light. How to accommodate this new wonder in terms of business models and regulation quickly became a lightning rod issue for both business and government.

As we've already discussed, public enterprises such as power and water districts arise in part because they are what are called natural monopolies—the market is more efficiently served by one provider. That's because it wouldn't make financial sense for firms to build a separate set of water, power or sewer lines every time a business or homeowner switched from one provider to another. Natural monopolies such as these tend to be regulated—state agencies rule on pricing decisions by private firms that are natural monopolies; in the case of public firms such as a local water district, they have an elected board of directors who can be unelected if they don't do a good job of both maintaining the system and keeping rates low. For much of the 20th century, this was the prevailing wisdom.

Whereas deregulation of airlines made flying a lot cheaper for everyone, some deregulation hasn't worked as well. Deregulating trucking and airlines was a success for consumers if not for the deregulated firms. In the midst of the euphoria over deregulation, some folks began to argue that traditionally regulated monopolies such as electric utilities also could be deregulated.

What changed? During the first half of the century, electric rates fell as generating became more efficient. Utilities, usually regulated at the state level, didn't have to go state utility commissions to ask for rate hikes. (Utilities had in fact sought state-level regulation so as to avoid tangling with big-city political machines, who could and would just say no to business.) So even though they weren't always very well run (such as including the cost of their political activities in their electric rates, which was pretty much illegal all over the country), no one complained because electricity only got cheaper. But as technological improvements reached a plateau, costs stopped falling at a time when electric service was expanding and population was booming. By the 1960s, rates were rising. Consumers complained, and eventually got state legislatures to fund consumer advocates. Now, when utilities

asked for rate hikes, there was somebody there who could tell the state utility commission that perhaps this rate hike wasn't justified. By the 1970s, utilities started losing rate cases.

And so they sought deregulation, arguing that it was possible to have competition for electric service (through a somewhat complicated method called "retail wheeling," by which the electricity in your outlet came from the same generator, but somebody else got paid for it). More than 20 states toyed with the idea, and about a dozen went for it.

It didn't work all that well. In the most egregious example, the state of California saw its electric rates soar and rolling blackouts become a regular feature of the electric landscape. Electric generating firms (surprise!) said they had to pull generating equipment off line for maintenance (thus restricting supply and raising the price). California's system was particularly badly designed—firms bid into the market with offers of service, and the highest price bid was the price that everybody got. Seven electricity suppliers eventually all pled no-contest to charges of rigging the market.

But even outside of California, things haven't gone so well. Prices generally have risen and there isn't much competition, except for the largest consumers of electricity. Why? Simple supply and demand. A residential household just doesn't buy enough electricity to make it worth a generator's while to spend the time and money to win that account. And you probably don't spend enough on electricity to make you want to shop around. (The promise of deregulation was competition and cheaper electricity. But some states went so far as to institute temporary price caps—limits on the price of electricity—and some even barred people from switching electric suppliers more than once a year. So, what kind of market needs a price cap? And what kind of market is it if you can't shop around?)

When to Regulate?

What we might learn from all of this, once again, is that where's room for real competition, markets can work. But where there isn't, some regulation might be in order. The other, overall point to understand is that the government plays a large role in the economy, and that regulation is one part of that. We should at least ask who is hurt and who benefits from any given piece of regulation; what are the costs and benefits of regulation; and does this regulation address a market failure or simply interfere with the efficient operation of the market? So, for example, I tend to think that gasoline price regulation (which people call for every time the price goes up at the pump) merely interferes with an otherwise functioning market, whereas air traffic safety regulations tend to ensure that airlines have no temptation to cut corners in order to make more profits. But you, as always, will have to make up your own mind on this.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Regulation imposes both costs and benefits on consumers, producers and on society as a whole.
- Regulation can be used to limit competition, which can raise prices. It also can limit prices where there wouldn't otherwise be competition.
- Businesses sometimes oppose but sometimes seek regulation.

EXERCISES

1. Think of an economic activity in your area. How is it regulated? (For example, food safety regulations that impact the college cafeteria.) What would it mean if it had more or less regulation?
2. Should governments impose more or fewer regulations on economic activity? Why?
3. What is the rationale for regulating a business? When might that be a good idea or a bad one? What kinds of things might we think about when thinking about regulation?

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

9: International Relations

9.1: The Challenges of the State System
9.2: Theories of International Relations
9.3: The Problem of Morality
9.4: Post-Cold War International Relations
9.5: The Nuclear Question, Revisited

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9.1: The Challenges of the State System

Learning Objectives

In this section you will learn:

1. How the concept of sovereignty affects international relations.
2. The formal difference between a nation and a state.

In the world in which we live, the globe is divided up into sovereign nations. Remember that asovereign state is one in which the state in the form of the government is the highest earthly power—there's no place to appeal a decision of the state except the state itself. So a sovereign state has defined borders that are respected by its neighbors, and control over its own territory. In this part of the discussion, when we use the term "the state," we really mean a sovereign nation, not a political subdivision such as a U.S. or Mexican state. States in federal systems such as the U.S. and Mexico are formally referred to as sovereign states, but they are still ultimately dominated by national governments.

And this is where the challenges of international relations begin. In much of our discussion of politics, it is presumed that the state holds power and uses it as the people who control the state see fit. The power may be divided into different branches and levels of government, or not divided; through mechanisms such as elections different people may assume power and state policies may change as a result of those elections. This presumption of a kind of state and a kind of allocation of power casts the study and practice of politics in a certain light. There is a way to resolve disputes; ultimately, somebody has the power to say yes or no and, absent violent revolution, everybody has to go along. But in a world of truly sovereign states, which recognize no higher authority than themselves, the system is best described asanarchy: Ultimately, nobody is really in charge. And that is a different ballgame.

So first, let's be clear once again on the term sovereign: A sovereign state is said to be the ultimate authority within its own boundaries, borders that are respected by its neighbors. The government is legitimate in the eyes of the citizens, who generally obey the law. The United States is a sovereign nation; so are France and Indonesia. Most of the 192 recognized nations on earth are in fact sovereign nations.

Somalia, on the east coast of Africa, isn't quite. The nation is currently divided into three parts. First is the erstwhile legitimate government of Somalia, which controls very little of the country, mostly in the south, and is beset by various warlords and religious factions. In the middle is a functioning state calling itself Puntland, which does not seek independence from Somalia but, at this point, might as well be. In the north is a state calling itself Somaliland, which is largely functioning as a sovereign nation although few other countries currently recognize it as such.

This world of sovereign states came together in a treaty called the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. That treaty ended the 30 Years War, literally a three-decade-long conflict between Catholic and Protestant rulers and their subjects that tore apart what is now Germany and caused widespread suffering across Europe. Throughout history, people have found creative and largely pointless reasons for killing each other. But the upshot of the treaty was that states had a right to order their affairs, in this case the largely northern, Protestant principalities of Germany and what was then called the Holy Roman Empire. The treaty, in effect, created the notion of sovereignty as an acknowledged fact of international law and diplomacy, and the Europeans exported the idea from there to the rest of the world.

European colonialism, as when the European nation states carved up Africa at the end of the 1800s, forced sovereignty onto sometimes disparate groups of people that had previously been more or less sovereign nations in their own parts of the continent. Only two African states—Liberia, which had been carved out earlier in the century by freed American slaves, and Ethiopia, which had been successfully fending off invaders for a thousand years—survived the onslaught. Although Africa had long been home to a number of substantial kingdoms and empires, the Europeans by the late 1800s had taken a technological leap forward that allowed them to conquer the continent in a few decades. The redrawing of the African map lumped together groups of people who had previously been part of different states, creating political challenges when the Europeans were forced out after World War II.

A world comprising sovereign states means that there is no overarching world power that can tell them what to do. Why not, then, a world government to sort everything out? First, most if not all the sovereign states would have to agree, and both political leaders and ordinary citizens tend to dislike having someone else tell them what to do. The farther away that someone is, the less they like

it. Visions of black helicopters and invading U.N. troops were the stuff of many Americans' paranoid nightmares in the 1970s and 1980s, despite the lack of any reality to this fear. Even if such a government could be established, the variety and diversity of the world would make it very difficult to rule, even in a highly democratic state. A world government would have to keep control and settle local and regional disputes, becoming, in the process, as despotic as the states it replaces, if not more so.

So, what we are left with are a lot of sovereign states, and a world system that is based on that single fact. And as there is no referee or overarching power, one state can erase another, as when Prussia and Russia effectively erased Poland, once the biggest state in Europe, from the map in 1795. The Poles, and their language, culture and traditions remained, but the Polish state did not reappear until 1918. This does not mean that a state can act without consequence. When Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, states from around the world united in the effort to drive the Iraqis out and re-establish Kuwaiti sovereignty. Later in the same decade, Europeans and Americans joined to end ethnic cleansing in what was then Yugoslavia. So no state operates in a vacuum.

What remained of Poland after its 18th century partition, and what most defines a place such as Somalia today, is a nation. In the precise terminology of international relations, a state has defined borders, but a nation has a cultural, linguistic or ethnic similarity among a group of people. A nation is a sense of community among a group of people; that group of people may want to control themselves politically and become a nation as well. So, for example, the Kurds, of whom around 30 million live in the Middle East, are a nation but not a state. They are divided chiefly between Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Iran, comprising the largest single ethnic group in the world without its own state. Kurdish separatists have fought for independence in Turkey, and all but carved out a sovereign state in the north of Iraq. But at the moment, the Kurds remain a nation, and not quite a state.

Sometimes, we speak of a nation-state, an entity which combines elements of both these things. The United States, perhaps alone among the states of the world, is a nation based on an ideology rather than an ethnicity. Still, the U.S. is sometimes given to nationalism, a sense of how to act and think, a sense of right and wrong, and a sense of separateness from others that includes a sentimental attachment to one's homeland. Americans are not unique in this regard, but do tend to exhibit it more than others. This is sometimes called American exceptionalism, or the belief that the United States is unlike other states and in fact has a special destiny in the world. In fact, all states are unique in their own ways. Whether the U.S. has a special role to play is for you to decide.

Sometimes the system is dominated by a hegemon—a single state that is powerful enough to exert some influence on world politics. Hegemony means leadership or dominance of one person or state over others. In the case of international relations, Great Britain exercised a degree of global hegemony in the 1800s; the United States has exercised a similar role in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. But a hegemon is not all-powerful, and the price of maintaining hegemony can be very high. Consequently, states are either stiving for hegemony, or for a balance of power, so that no hegemon arises. The anarchic system is world politics is in fact anti-hegemonic, as it resists attempts by any one power to take over the whole world.

States interact through diplomacy, international law and war. The Prussian military strategist Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831) referred to war as "War is merely the continuation of policy by other means." Clausewitz wasn't completely a warmonger, so his famous quote probably shouldn't be taken to mean that he thought it was OK to go on the warpath. However, in contemporary international politics, war can be seen as the failure of policy, given the extraordinarily high cost of modern warfare.

To that end, states often prefer to find other ways to solve disputes. For that reason states pay some attention to international law, which seeks to constrain the behavior of states. International law exists through treaties and agreements negotiated by states, and through rule-making mechanisms in multinational agencies and groups. They also attempt, through diplomacy, to try to convince other states to make choices that will be beneficial to the state, the region or the world. Diplomacy works when both sides are rational, in the sense that they each have some understanding of their own self-interest. We will see examples of efforts to achieve change in this way later in this chapter.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The world is a collection of autonomous, sovereign states, which creates a world system that is effectively anarchic in nature.
- States interact with each other through international law, diplomacy and, sometimes, war.

EXERCISES

1. What makes a state sovereign? The world has a number of states that want to be sovereign but are not universally recognize by other states. Why not?
2. Consider the idea of American exceptionalism. Is the United States truly different from other countries, with a special destiny? Why or why not?

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9.2: Theories of International Relations

Learning Objectives

In this section you learn about:

1. Realism, liberalism, constructivism, feminism and neo-Marxism as ways of explaining international relations.
2. Considering other factors to explain why states behave the way they do.

The study and practice of international relations has led international relations scholars to suggest different ways that states might and should behave with regard to their neighbors around the world.

Realism

Realism suggests that states should and do look out for their own interests first. Realism presumes that states are out for themselves first and foremost. The world is therefore a dangerous place; a state has look out for No. 1 and prepare for the worst. When George W. Bush convinced the U.S. Congress that he should send in U.S. soldiers into Iraq in 2003 and take out Saddam Hussein, this was realism in action. Realism suggests that international relations is driven by competition between states, and states therefore do and should try to further their own interests. What matters, then, is how much economic and especially military power a state has. When your neighbor misbehaves, you can't call the police.

Classical realists say this is just human nature. People, by nature, are at some level greedy and insecure and behave accordingly. So even if you're not greedy and insecure, you have to behave that way, because that's the game. Structural realists say it's more about how the world is organized—an anarchic system creates the Hobbesian state of nature, referring to the 16th century English philosopher who justified the existence of the state by comparing it to a somewhat hypothetical "state of nature," a war of all against all. So states should seek peace, but prepare for war.

This tends to make national security look like a zero-sum game: Anything I do to make myself more secure tends to make you feel less secure, and vice versa. A realist might counter that a balance of power between states in fact preserves the peace, by raising the cost of any aggression to an unacceptable level.

Realists argue that war, at some point, is inevitable. Anarchy persists, and it isn't going away anytime soon.

Liberalism

Liberalism suggests in fact states can peacefully co-exist, and that states aren't always on the brink of war. Liberal scholars point to the fact that despite the persistence of armed conflict, most nations are not at war most of the time. Most people around the world don't get up and start chanting "Death to America!" and trying to figure out who they can bomb today. Liberalism argues that relations between nations are not always a zero-sum game. A zero-sum game is one in which any gain by one player is automatically a loss by another player. My gains in security, for example, don't make you worse off, and your gains in anything don't make me worse off. Liberal theory also points to the fact that despite the condition of anarchy in the world, most nations are not at war, most of the time. So the idea that international relations must be conducted as though one were always under the threat of attack isn't necessarily indicative of reality.

There are different flavors of liberalism. Liberal institutionalism puts some faith in the ability of global institutions to eventually coax people into getting along as opposed to going to war. Use of the United Nations, for example, as a forum for mediating and settling dispute, will eventually promote a respect for the rule of international law in a way that parallels respect for the law common in advanced democracies. Liberal commercialism sees the advance of global commerce as making less likely. War isn't actually very profitable for most people, and it really isn't good for the economy. Liberal internationalism trades on the idea that democracies are less likely to make war than are dictatorships, if only because people can say no, either in legislatures or in elections. Consider that public protest in the U.S. helped end U.S. involvement in Vietnam—that kind of thing doesn't always happen in non-democratic states.Although it can. Argentina's misadventures in Las Malvenas—the Falkland Islands—led to protests that brought down a longstanding military dictatorship and restored democracy to the nation in 1982. Together, these three are sometimes called the Kantian triangle, after the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), who outlined them in a 1795 essay,*Perpetual Peace*.

Figure 9.1 [To Come] Prisoner's Dilemma Chart

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The liberal argument that states can learn to get along is somewhat supported by the work of Robert AxelrodRobert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*. New York: Basic Books, 2006., who used an actual experiment involving a lot of players and the prisoner's dilemma game to show how people and perhaps states could learn to cooperate. The prisoner's dilemma is a fairly simple game that is useful for understanding various parts of human behavior. In this game, you have two players, both prisoners. Each player has two choices: Defect to the authorities and rat out the other player in exchange for a reduced sentence, or cooperate with the other player and go free. If the players each defect they get 1 point apiece; if they cooperate they get 3 points apiece. If, however, one player cooperates and the other defects, the defector gets 5 points and the cooperator gets zero. Given that set of constraints, in a realist world, both players defect and score only 1 point each. The best result would be for both to cooperate, go free, and generate the most points between them. In the Axelrod experiment, the game was iterated or repeated, so that in a round-robin featuring dozens of players, each player played the other player multiple times. The players were all notable game theorists, and each devised a particular strategy in an attempt to win the game. What Axelrod found was the player in his experiment who used a strategy called "tit-for-tat" won. Tit-for-tat simply began by cooperating, and then did whatever the other player did last time in the next round. In a repeated game, which certainly describes relations between states, players eventually learned to cooperate. Axelrod cites real world examples of where this kind of behavior occurred, such as the German and Allied soldiers in the trenches of World War I, who basically agreed at various times not to shoot each other, or to shell incoming shipments of food. As the soldiers came to understand that they would be facing each other for some time, refraining from killing each other meant that they all got to live.

Constructivism

Constructivism is another and also interesting way of looking at international relations. It may tell us more about why things are happening the way they do, but somewhat less about what we should do about it. Constructivism argues that culture, social structures and human institutional frameworks matter. Constructivism relies in part on the theory of the social construction of reality, which says that whatever reality is perceived to be, for the most part people have invented it.Of course, if the theory were entirely true, then the very idea of the social construction of reality would also be socially constructed, and therefore potentially untrue. To the extent that reality is socially constructed, people can make choices. Hence the constructivist argument is, in part, that while the world system is indeed a form of anarchy, that does not demand a realist response to foreign policy. People can choose to otherwise. So constructivists might argue that the end of the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union was at least in part a decision by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev to change his thinking. He attempted then to ratchet down tensions with the U.S., and to liberalize Soviet society.Bova, 2012, p. 26. The fact that the Soviet Union promptly disintegrated doesn't change that.

2.4 Combining theories to explain: The Cuban missile crisis

Although constructivism can be a bit mushy, some clear versions of it are quite interesting and useful in helping to understand why states behave the way they do. Realism tends to treat states as single, rational actors—as though the state were a single being, behaving in a consistent fashion with a constant eye to its own interest. As detailed by the scholar Graham AllisonGraham Allison, Essence of Decision, 1971., the rational actor model of analysis sees states nearly as single organisms, pursuing policies with some planning and coherence. Allison used the 1963 Cuban missile crisis, in which the United States and the Soviet Union nearly came to blows over the Soviets' efforts to put nuclear-armed missiles in Cuba, to explain how other factors could explain why states behave the way they do. Allison suggests two other models. In the organizational process model, the regular behavior and processes of government agencies (bureaucracies) tends to dictate how and why things happen in government. So, for example, one of the ways in which U.S. officials were able to figure out that the Soviets were building missile sites was from aerial reconnaissance and satellite photos of the sites. Despite the fact that the Soviets were trying to keep the missiles a secret, so they could be set up and ready to go if the Soviets should have to confront the U.S. in anyway, the sites they were building looked just like all the Soviet missile sites they'd ever built.

In the governmental politics model, internal political struggles can lead to decisions that may at least be questionable. In this case, Soviet President Nikita Khruschev may have been pushed by internal political forces to put missiles in Cuba. President John F. Kennedy faced internal pressure for air strikes on the Soviet sites in Cuba, but resisted them.

In the end, the two sides were able to negotiate their way out of the standoff and ratchet down the rhetoric. The Soviets pulled the missiles out of Cuba; the U.S. pulled missiles out of Turkey—like Cuba for the U.S., right on the Soviets' doorstep—and promised not to invade Cuba. What's also useful and interesting about Allison's work is that it shows how using different theories together can explain why states behave the way they do. Putting missiles in Turkey and Cuba was a realist approach to international affairs. A constructivist view can tell us why things happened the way they did: The culture and politics of the U.S. and the Soviet Union led them to make decisions, and respond to each other's decisions, in ways that can't be viewed as entirely rational. And, finally, the solution came from a somewhat liberal approach to policy: Sit down, talk it out, reach an agreement and pull back from the brink. Although in succeeding decades where the missiles were placed became less of an issue, as each side developed weapons that could hit any spot on the globe from anywhere else, despite all the weapons, nobody fired a shot. Despite more than five decades of nuclear tension, threats and military buildup, the world failed to blow itself up.

Feminism

Realism, liberalism and constructivism may be the three most prominent theories of international relations, but they are by no means the only ones or the most important. Feminist scholars look at international relations through the prism of gender relations, noting that for much of human history, women have been relegated to a sideline role in politics and government. This isn't wise: More than half the people in the world are women. Nonetheless, males have dominated both the study and practice of international relations, but feminist scholars note that women's roles as wives, mothers and workers have made all of that possible. Also, a female perspective on foreign policy might be different.Feminist theory sometimes argues that having more women in positions of power could change things, as women may be more likely to believe peace through international cooperation is possible.

Feminist international relations theory has variants, of course. Liberal feminism wants to ensure that women have the same opportunities in society as do men, so that means liberal in the broader sense of general support for democratic capitalism. Critical feminism, on the other hand, sees capitalism as the source of women's oppression, and seeks to create new structures for society. Cultural or essentialist feminism stresses the differences in how women view and think about the world. It argues that women's approach to the world would be more likely to bring peace and avoid conflict.

As usual, there's probably some kernel of truth in all of these ideas, and places where we could find cases that contradict these notions. Clearly, for example, women tend to be less involved in violent crime, and women in some parts of the world are being sold into slavery and prostitution, where their lives are largely controlled by men. On the other hand, it was a female politician, former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who marshaled her country's military to go to war with Argentina and reclaim the Falkland Islands in 1982. But while history is full of valiant female warriors and strong leaders—from the Trung sisters and Trieu Thi Trinh of Vietnam, to Joan of Arc, and Queen Elizabeth I—they are much less common than are men famous for their conquering exploits. And the women warriors, generally, are famous for having defended their homelands as opposed to conquering somebody else's. While some men have felt threatened by the rise of feminism in the last 60 years, it really is an opportunity to look at the world in a slightly different way, perhaps shedding some light on why things happen the way they do.

Neo-Marxism

Neo-Marxists look at international relations through the perspective of our old friend Karl Marx. Remember that Marx saw the world in terms of its productive relations, so that the way in which we organize production determines social and political relations as well. Neo-Marxist theory applies this to international relations, and tends to argue that capitalism drives states to compete and attempt to dominate each other.

For example, under the variant known as Marxism-Leninism, named after the Russian revolutionary leader, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–924), world relations are really defined by the desire for industrial nations to develop both sources of raw materials and markets for finished products (what Lenin called the core and the periphery). Lenin was writing at a time when most of Africa had been carved into colonies by the European powers, and the British Empire still stretched from Africa to India to Hong Kong, so there was some evidence for what he was saying. The collapse of the Soviet empire and China's turning away from purely Marxist economics has taken some of the steam out of the Marxian railroad of history, and we may not agree with Marx and Lenin's suggestion that a socialist dictatorship is a necessary step on the road to nirvana. But it could be wrong to completely reject their analysis. Economic problems and conflicts do continue to inform international relations, and states do continue to try to acquire raw materials as well as markets for finished goods. China, for example, is investing heavily in Africa to lock up supplies of

minerals for its growing manufacturing sector. The Chinese apparently aren't always the best employers. To the extent that they mistreat African workers, the states where this happens will face the competing demands of a big country that is paying them a lot of money for resources, and the needs of its own citizens who work for the Chinese.

Neo-Marxists might point to this an example of where liberal commercialism is really just the capitalist class protecting its own. China is nominally still a communist state, but its economic system is really much more a sort of state-sponsored capitalism. Capitalism, Neo-Marxists argue, in its relentless quest for rising profits, leads to the degradation and impoverishment of workers. The realist explanation of U.S. policy with regard to Central America is that the U.S. propped up right-wing dictatorships there because they opposed communism. The other explanation was that U.S. commercial interests, such as the United Fruit Company, pushed to maintain their stranglehold on the banana industry. This helped lead, for example, to a CIA-sponsored coup in Guatemala 1954. The company had convinced the U.S. government that the democratically elected Guatemalan president was pro-Soviet. What is known for sure is that he was promising to redistribute land to Guatemalan peasants, which would have threatened the company's monopoly on the banana trade.

In the view of neo-Marxist analysis, the Cold war was about the threat to U.S. business interests. The same would be true for the first and second Gulf Wars, with the U.S. fighting Iraq in part to preserve access to Middle Eastern oil. The United States intervened when Iraq invaded Kuwait much more quickly than it intervened in the former Yugoslavia, when Serbs were killing Bosnian Moslems in much greater numbers than Iraqis were killing Kuwaitis. Neo-Marxism also is realist in its orientation, since it presumes that conflict and potential between states is the reality of international affairs. But in their eyes, that conflict is driven by the conflict between business interests and workers.

Combining Theories to Explain: Mexico and the Drug Wars

Let's look at these perspectives using Mexico as an example. Many of Mexico's foreign policy issues involve the United States. The U.S. is Mexico's biggest trading partner; Mexican workers in the U.S. send back a lot of money to their families still in Mexico; and U.S. drug policy has helped lead the Mexican government into an ongoing war with drug lords. That in itself raises a question: Why does Mexico persist in fighting the drug war when drug consumption is a much bigger problem for the United States than it is for Mexico?

From a realist perspective, Mexico is not in a position to go to war with the U.S., so working with the U.S. seems a much more likely alternative. As Mexico's overall economy is so dependent on sales to and from the U.S., Mexico will do what it can to protect and preserve an open trading relationship between the two nations. A liberal perspective might suggest that Mexico put pressure on the U.S. to address its own consumption problem, while continuing efforts to bring the drug lords to heel. A constructivist approach might suggest that the real problem for Mexico is poverty and the disparity of wealth in the country; it is generally not rich people who go out and decide to sell illegal drugs. It might also suggest that Mexico's leaders can and should make choices that differ from what realism or liberalism might suggest. A feminist analysis might suggest that Mexico's somewhat patriarchal society leads it to overlook more peaceful avenues to solving the problem. A neo-Marxist take on it all would suggest that the capitalist nature of Mexico's economy virtually ensures an unequal distribution of wealth, leading the poor to seek other means of empowerment, and the rich to seek to maintain the system that helped them become rich in the first place. There may be some truth to all of these ideas; you will have to decide what makes sense to you.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Realism suggests that because of the condition of anarchy in the world, the world is a dangerous place, and states should prepare accordingly.
- Liberalism suggests that rather than focusing on war, states should seek to use diplomacy, international institutions, and commerce as ways of building peaceful relationships with other states.
- Constructivism suggests that human institutions often influence states to make certain choices, blinding them to other foreign policy options.
- Feminist theory looks at international relations with an eye to gender relations, stressing both the historical role and the potential role women can play in foreign policy.
- Neo-Marxist theory suggests that productive relations—capitalism—causes states to compete with each other for scarce resources, negatively affecting workers in the process.

EXERCISE

1. In 2001, following 9/11, the U.S. invaded Afghanistan. Which theory of international relations would account for this action? Using the other theories, what else might have been done instead?

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9.3: The Problem of Morality

Learning Objectives

In this section you will learn:

1. The difficulty of basing foreign policy on moral standards.

Another conundrum of international relations is that private morality and the morality of public policy may not always coincide. On a personal level, most of us wouldn't kill somebody. But with the state's exclusive legal franchise on violence, states do send their soldiers off to kill other people, without penalty back home. Rightly or wrongly, states view that use of force as serving a higher purpose—preserving the state—that outweighs the personal rejection of murder as a tool of policy.

Some would argue that public morality—how states behave—should match how people expect to behave all the time. So a state is never justified in supporting tyranny in another state just to serve its own interests, nor should it commit acts overseas that it would never tolerate at home. Others argue that since a state must provide security to its citizens, it may be compelled to take extraordinary actions to preserve that security.

Sometimes the morality question appears to be 50 shades of gray. In the early 1980s, U.S. policy toward El Salvador was a subject of much debate inside the United States. Vietnam was still fresh in people's minds, so it was a period when we were less likely to send in the Marines to try to clean things up. Nonetheless, the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union was still smoldering, and the U.S. found itself supporting a right-wing government that wasn't noted for its respect for human rights and liberties. The opposition appeared to have Marxist leanings, so the U.S. government presumed they would support the Soviet agenda and export revolution to other non-communist states in Central and South America. The Salvadoran government, meanwhile, allowed if not encouraged right-wing paramilitary "death squads" to chase after the left-wing revolutionaries who opposed the government. So the U.S. found itself in the morally ambiguous position of supporting a government whose practices ran counter to much of what the United States says about itself.

A leftist professor at a seminar at the time emphatically declared that "A just person does justice," implying that a good person would oppose the U.S. position and thereby support the rebels. But if you were to look carefully at the situation, may not have been as black-and-white as that professor tried to paint it. How does a just person do justice when justice in general appears to be in short supply?

In the case of El Salvador, it might have been possible for U.S. leaders to make other choices. The Salvadoran civil war, as it became to be known, was driven by poverty and extreme inequality of wealth. When civil unrest over extreme poverty and lack of economic opportunity grew, the government responded by violently cracking down on protests. The war lasted from roughly 1979 to 1992, with at least 70,000 people killed. Military successes by the rebels eventually led to peace negotiations and the rebel groups have since been allowed to participate in the political process.

From the U.S. point of view, the Carter and Reagan administrations saw evidence of the threat of Soviet and Cuban influence among the rebels. Now that the fog of the Cold War has cleared somewhat, that assessment may have been exaggerated; other accounts say that the main rebel groups were not interested in Soviet-style communism. The other issue for the U.S., operating from a realist perspective, was that failing to support the Salvadoran government would send the wrong message to both allies and to states on the fence amid the Cold War. A liberalist or constructivist approach to the problem, however, might have counseled putting pressure on the Salvadoran government to positively address the issues that were driving the rebellion in the first place.

The same ambiguity confronted U.S. citizens who opposed or supported U.S. efforts in Vietnam. While it was one thing to protest, say, the Vietnam War, it was quite another to argue that the Vietnamese communists were simply good-hearted revolutionaries along the lines of the American Founding Fathers. This was perhaps as nearsighted as blind support for the South Vietnamese government, which was also not a shining example of classical liberalism. But in the 1960s and 1970s, a number of opponents of the war tried to paint the Viet Cong as simple revolutionaries fighting to free their homeland. In fact, the war was as much about North Vietnam's desire to reunite the country as it was about communism, and the north quickly marginalized the Viet Cong when they succeeded in defeating the south in 1975. The communist rulers of the reunited Vietnam proceeded to kill a lot of people, and sent a lot of people to camps for "re-education," and generally curtailed civil and economic liberties. Unless you were a diehard

Marxist, these were not the good guys any more than the South Vietnamese government had been the good guys. Since then, while Vietnam's economy has since been liberalized, its political system has not. For example, journalists in Vietnam still get thrown for writing stories that are critical of the government.

Contrast El Salvador with Nicaragua, where at about the same time the U.S. pulled the plug on an oppressive, anti-communist dictator only to see a Marxist government take over and oppress different groups of people. This time the U.S. found itself supporting the rebels, while the new Nicaraguan government sought to limit civil and economic liberties of its citizens. One could argue that this was the right thing for them to do, or not. In any case, the resulting war eventually led to elections, and the somewhat Marxist Sandinistas were peacefully removed from power. an war; any close examination of the situation should have revealed a decided lack of white hats and good guys on either side. Again, the U.S. in this instance took a realist view of the situation and looked out for its own interests first. This happened even after Congress barred U.S. funding for the Contra rebels in Nicaragua; the Reagan administration began to secretly sell weapons to Iran, using the profits to fund the Contras. The U.S. ultimately got what it wanted—a non-Marxist government in Nicaragua—at a significant cost in human lives there.

The question remains, however, of how a "just person does justice" when justice is in short supply. So it can be a bit of a challenge to argue that foreign policy should be absolutely moral, because human beings can justify almost anything as moral. Any war probably looks like a just war to the people who are waging it. Granted, there is a line that we shouldn't cross. No sane person argues that something like the Holocaust is moral, and the assumptions that underlie arguments for "a just war" may be absurd. But what is unconscionable in one setting may appear necessary in another.

These are the kinds of choices policymakers face, although that doesn't mean that morality can't enter into their decisions. During the Bush administration, U.S. officials, working overseas in places such as the Guantanamo Naval Base in Cuba, used what amounted to torture to extract information from suspected terrorists being held there. International law forbids torture under any circumstances; Bush administration officials said it was justified so as to prevent further terrorist attacks on the U.S. In retrospect, many of the hundreds of detainees apparently were not terrorists, and the information gained from various forms of what amounted to torture was of questionable value. Bush administration officials argued otherwise, though the bulk of the evidence appears to be side with critics of the Guantanamo operation. It did put the U.S. the awkward position of appearing to ignore treaties, such as the Geneva Conventions, which protects the rights of war prisoners, to which the U.S. is a signee.

KEY TAKEAWAY

- Morality is not entirely absent as a concern in foreign policy, but can be difficult to define and apply.

EXERCISES

1. What do you think is justified in terms of foreign policy behavior? Are there situations where a state would be justified in taking extraordinary measures to protect its citizens?
2. To what extent should a powerful state such as the U.S. look out for itself first? Is that simply a wise policy, or simply a too-narrow definition of what U.S. interests are?

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9.4: Post-Cold War International Relations

Learning Objectives

In this section you will learn:

1. The role and function of intergovernmental organizations.
2. The role and function of actors outside of the formal state, such as non-governmental organizations and multinational corporations.

The end of the Cold War in the early 1990s changed the foreign policy equation radically. Gone, or at least greatly reduced, was the nuclear standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union. It has been replaced by a somewhat multipolar world, in which the United States is the dominant military power, but finds itself among competing power centers in Europe, China, India and Russia, with radical change occurring in the Middle East and North Africa, potential conflicts with Iran, and the threat of global terrorism a reality since the tragedies of 9–11.

So while this is a world still defined by anarchy, it is not a world that appears to sit on the edge of some version of World War III. The issues that define foreign policy may have more to do with resource allocation and environmental protection than with negotiating a nuclear standoff. So the end of the Cold War coincided with and perhaps accelerated the rise of other organizations who are now players in the field of international relations. While some of these institutions grew out of the end of World War II, their role in the world perhaps been magnified since the 1990s.

International Institutions

Even as the Cold War dragged on, the nations of the world created international forums for attempting to address disputes between nations. World War I, the war to end all wars, as it was known at the time, prompted the victors to create an international body known as the League of Nations. At its peak, it included 58 nations, and created a number of forums for addressing political and economic issues. It lasted from 1920 to 1942, and suffered immediately from the failure of the United States to join. The U.S. became rather isolationist following World War I, the end of which created only an uneven peace and seemed to foster as many problems as it solved. Nonetheless, the league represented the high point of intrawar idealism, built on a belief that nations could talk instead of shoot, and that diplomacy would solve more problems than would bombs. Despite its best intentions, it was largely powerless, and the member nations failed to act when Italy invaded Italy unprovoked in 1935. The league effectively collapsed with the start of World War II.

Following the end of the war, however, the nations gathered to try it again, creating the United Nations in 1947. The U.N., headquartered in New York City, declared its support in its charter for a broad range of human rights, and attempted to provide a multilateral forum for talking things out. Although every member nation gets one vote, a certain number of decisions must be funneled through the 15-member Security Council, which consists of five permanent members, including the U.S., France, China, Russia and the United Kingdom. The other 10 members are elected by the General Assembly to two-year terms, with each region of the globe represented on the council.

The five permanent members each has veto power, and can block action by the council. And since the members are often taking what can only be described as a realist perspective on their approach to foreign policy, Russia may seek to block concerted action in war-torn Syria, where it has interests, just as the U.S. will block U.N. resolutions to condemn Israel's handling of the Palestinian question.Which is, in case you've missed it, whether there will ever be a fully sovereign Palestinian state. The Security Council's permanent membership is overwhelmingly white and western. One suggestion has been to add Brazil, India, Germany and Japan (sometimes called the G-4) as permanent members, plus perhaps one African and one Arab state. The existing permanent members haven't exactly jumped on that bandwagon, as doing so would reduce their power on the council. The U.S. supports adding Japan and perhaps India; the Chinese oppose adding Japan. Great Britain and France have supported adding the entire G-4.

The U.N., through its member nations and its various branches, has had some success. Member nations have contributed combat troops for peacekeeping missions, which attempt to separate belligerent groups in one country or region so as to forestall all-out war. It has in fact, since its inception, negotiated 172 peace settlements that have prevented all-out war in various parts of the world. U.N.-led efforts, via the World Health Organization, to stamp out various diseases have met with some success, as few

nations will object to efforts to end deadly diseases such as smallpox. U.N. cultural efforts have probably also helped preserve important historical sites all over the world, and have at least underscored the importance of preserving some of our shared past. So while the U.N. hasn't managed to end war, it has not been an abject failure.

The U.N. includes the International Court of Justice, which has been used to settle disputes between nations. It has 15 justices elected from the U.N. General Assembly, and while the Security Council has the ability to enforce its decisions, council members may also veto that action. Consequently, the court has acted with mixed success. In 1984, for example, the court ruled that U.S. efforts in Nicaragua in fact violated international law; the U.S. ignored the decision. In other instances, the court has been able to help solve border disputes between nations. Special courts also have been established by the U.N. to try war criminals from conflicts in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia.

Other international organizations have had some impact globally, particularly in economic areas. TheWorld Bank and the International Monetary Fund have attempted to spur economic developments and end poverty, with decidedly mixed results. Critics abound on both the left and the right. Conservative critics say they waste too much money; liberal and left critics say it simply helps cement the economic dominance of the western world. Sometimes they fund projects that make sense, such as wastewater treatment projects around the world, while at other times, they support efforts, like digging a canal to flood a seasonal river in Africa to produce fish in the desert, manage only to produce the most expensive fish in the world. Similarly, the World Trade Organization (WTO), which is basically a forum for resolving trade disputes and for encouraging open trade, is neither all good nor all bad.

Not every intergovernmental organization (IGO) is global in scope. The world is peppered with regional organizations, ranging from the European Union (EU) to the Organization for African Unity.

Figure 9.2 [To Come]: Intergovernmental Regional Organizations

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The EU is particularly noteworthy. It grew out of the end of World War II, beginning with a customs union to ease trade between Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. From there it grew into trade agreements over coal and steel, to the European Common Market, and finally to the EU in 1993. It now has 27 member states in a political and economic union. While not quite the United States of Europe, it does have an elected parliament with the ability to make some common law for the entire group, and a common currency, the euro. Travel and trade over national borders is greatly eased, and crossing from one EU state to another is now little more complicated than crossing from one U.S. state to another.

No other intergovernmental organization is quite that extensive. For example, ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Countries, has 10 member states and focuses on promoting economic development and shared expertise and resources. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a relic of the Cold War. Originally created to help forestall Soviet aggression in Europe, it remains a mutual defense pact between the U.S., Canada and much of Europe. An attack on one member is regarded as an attack on all, so that the U.S. response to 9.11 was in fact at NATO response.

To the extent that international institutions work at all, it is because nations adhere to what the institutions say. While a hard-line realist perspective would encourage ignoring the U.N. or the WTO, a liberal perspective would suggest that nations go along if only because it's in their interest for others to do the same. A nation can't very well expect another nation to observe the rule of law if it doesn't do so itself. International law therefore works because of reciprocity—each state expects the others to behave the same way, so it adheres to the law to encourage others to do the same.

Non-Governmental Organizations

Non-governmental organizations, or NGOs as they are often known, are essentially groups of citizens, often of multiple nationalities, who work together to try to achieve social change on a global scale. So in one way they are international interest groups, lobbying for change with the governments of the world. But they also often are groups who take action, working for better treatment for political prisoners (Amnesty International), better health care (Doctors Without Borders), or better access to clean water (Rotary International and WaterAid).

NGOs rely on moral suasion—compelling governments to do what is right and learning to see that as in their own self-interest. They also rely on fund-raising in wealthy countries so they can deliver services and help people in less-fortunate parts of the world.

They can and do make a difference, from building schools in Ethiopia to providing clean drinking water in Angola and Bangladesh. Governments sometimes get unhappy with the representatives of NGOs and kick them out, but like a pesky wasp, they will try to come back when possible. In democratic states, NGOs take on the role of interest groups who then push for particular approaches to foreign policy.

Multinational Corporations

The largest companies on earth now span the globe. McDonald's has restaurants in 100 countries; Wal-Mart and its French counterpart, Carrefour, can be found around the world. Ford builds cars in the U.S., Canada and Europe; General Motors models are produced in both Detroit and Shanghai. Airbus is attempting to circumvent competition with Boeing by building a plant in the U.S., and Toyota, Nissan and Honda have built cars in both the U.S. and Japan for nearly 30 years.

So, realistically, these companies and the people who run them owe their allegiance to no country in particular. They are merchant princes now, whose interests are scattered around the globe and whose reach is consequently that broad. This makes it harder for sovereign states to clamp down on their activities. The era of global capital means they are fluid and mobile. They can leave if they have to. Of course leaving a market entirely poses problems for sales, and the reason firms locate in multiple markets is to develop sales in those markets. But as the goal of those firms, as with most if not all firms, is to make a profit, they become political players in trying to get sovereign states to keep markets open and trade flowing, regardless of what other costs that might entail.

Multinational corporations may move operations to nations with lower human rights or environmental standards; companies moved factories from the Philippines when that nation adopted more worker-friendly labor laws. On the other hand, rising standards of living and more wealth represented by those jobs tend to eventually put pressure on governments to improve human rights and environmental conditions, though that can take a long time.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The post-World War II and post-Cold War eras have seen the rise of extra-governmental organizations, and intergovernmental organizations, as major players in international relations.

EXERCISE

1. Identify and research an NGO. What is this organization's objective? In what countries does it operate? What is its annual budget and where does it get its funding? Does it appear to be successful?

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9.5: The Nuclear Question, Revisited

Learning Objectives

In this section you will learn:

1. How the nuclear question has changed but remains a feature of international relations.
2. The challenges of applying economic sanctions as an instrument of foreign policy.

Despite all that has changed in the last three decades, nuclear weapons issues persist into the 21st century. The nations that admittedly have nuclear weapons—the United States, China, Russia, Britain and France—have signed a nuclear non-proliferation treaty, in hopes that the weapons will not be spread elsewhere. Nonetheless, Israel has them and Iran is trying to develop them; North Korea has them although it lacks a consistent delivery system. India has them and so does its arch-rival Pakistan. And still, since their sole usage in World War II, nobody has used them in war.

In fact, weapons of mass destruction have never been used except against people who don't have them. Poison gas was used by both sides in the First World War. At the time it was the most horrible weapon ever devised. The Italians under Mussolini used them against Ethiopia when they conquered that country in 1935–36. So there was great fear that World War II would see renewed use of these weapons. And yet neither side did. In fact, at one point U.S. forces inadvertently fired gas-laden artillery shells at some Italian troops. They immediately contact the Italians and apologized, and there was no reprisal. They were not used again until Saddam Hussein used them against rebel Shiites and separatist Kurds who attempted to overthrow him following the First Gulf War in the early 1990s. Moreover, since the end of the Cold War, the number of nuclear weapons has declined from 65,000 in 1985 to under 25,000 at present.

Still, the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran causes no small concern in the west. The Iranians claim their nuclear program is for energy generation only, although western analysts dispute this claim. The quixotic government of Iran, which combines democratic elements with an Islamic theocracy, makes no secret of its desire to wipe Israel off the map. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has said, among other things, that Iran's enemies are seeking to create drought in the country by destroying rain clouds before they reach Iran. He also has claimed that the Holocaust and the deaths of six million Jews never happened. Moreover, Iranian support for terrorist groups makes western leaders fear that they will give them a bomb, with resulting destruction that would make 9–11 seem trivial by comparison.

The realist perspective on this problem, which some conservative American and pro-Israeli politicians have advocated, would be to attack Iran and try to destroy its nuclear program. Allowing Iran to develop nuclear capabilities would not only allow it to attack Israel, a U.S. ally, but also to dominate its neighboring states and threaten the world's supply of oil. An Iran-Israel nuclear war would threaten to grow into a much broader conflict, with dire consequences for everyone, including the U.S.

The liberal approach would be necessarily different. The fact that Iran is a big country and that the nuclear program is spread all over it doesn't seem to deter the realist line of thinking, even as U.S. military leaders suggest we are very unlikely to take out all of their nuclear development sites. President Ronald Reagan once spoke of what he called "constructive engagement," by which we would work with another state to try to coax them along to where we want them. But while the Reagan administration advocated this approach with allies, such as South Africa, then non-communist but still driven by the racist policy of apartheid, the president and his advisers never seemed to try this with anyone they really disagreed with.

The advantage of constructive engagement—tempting and cajoling the other side into doing what you want them to do, as opposed to just trying to force them—is that it maintains the moral high ground for the U.S., and doesn't antagonize relations with most other Muslim states. So the liberal approach would be to talk first and shoot last, and hope it never comes to that.

President Barack Obama, in contrast to George W. Bush, tried this approach with Iran, and it's difficult to say what it achieved. Like North Korea, Iran's government seems intransigent when it comes to negotiations. And like North Korea, they may be using the threat of attack by western powers as a way of maintaining legitimacy in the eyes of a restive populace, including a lot of young people who have a hunger for western goods and culture and who don't march around shouting "Death to America!" Given that the Iranian regime's real goal may be something other than or at least in addition to nuclear weapons, they may see it in their interests to continue the standoff with the U.S. and other western powers for the foreseeable future.

Part of the response of the west to Iran has been economic sanctions, by which states agree to suspend or limit trade in some or all goods with the targeted state. Sanctions are difficult to make work. First, they have to affect the leadership of the country. So Iranian voters would have to vote out the ruling factions in government, who then would change course for Iran's nuclear program. Given that religious authorities in Iran control who makes the ballot, this seems unlikely. For the most part, sanctions tend to hurt ordinary people more than they hurt governments. Sanctions also need to target third-party states, who may not be part of the sanctions effort and would prefer to continue trading with the target state. So while the U.S. the EU and a host of other nations have halted trade with Iran in everything from military hardware to oil equipment, Iran continues to trade with China. The sanctions on oil technology appear to be having some impact on the Iran's economy, but the Iranian government continues to drag its feet over its nuclear program. Multiple U.N. resolutions also have called upon Iran to give up the program, with little effect.

Does this mean this relatively liberal approach to Iran should be abandoned for military action? Not necessarily. Military action comes with its own costs, and wouldn't necessarily end Iran's nuclear ambitions. The combination of diplomatic pressure, economic sanctions and offers of economic aid may yet do the trick.

Contrast this with the approach to North Korea. One of the world's last communist states, it has nuclear weapons and an economy that is so bad its citizens face the constant threat of malnutrition and starvation. It has test-fired missiles over Japan, and still has occasional small-scale military clashes with South Korea. Three generations of rule by the Kim family have been maintained by rigorous control of public information, painting a picture that whichever Kim is in power is the only thing that stands between the people and annihilation by foreign powers (the United States). This further complicates negotiations with the north because pressure from the outside, and North Korea's resistance, helps cement the state's legitimacy at home. Consequently, the reason for the north to have nuclear weapons is precisely to invite the attention of foreign powers. Nonetheless, despite agreement among the Russians, Chinese, Americans, South Koreans and Japanese that the north should end its nuclear program, no one is threatening military action. The South Korean government favors reunification with the north, but is willing to wait for it to happen. Perhaps they think that North Korea's economy is so bad that the state will eventually collapse from within.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The nature of nuclear weapons issues has changed since the end of the Cold War.
- Economic sanctions face certain challenges to be effective, but can have an impact on targeted nations if there is widespread compliance with the sanctions.

EXERCISE

1. What different approaches could be used in dealing with Iran or with North Korea? Which approach would you favor and why?

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

10: Applying What You've Learned- Three Issues

10.1: Trade
10.2: Debt and Deficits
10.3: The Environment

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10.1: Trade

Learning Objectives

In this section you will learn:

1. How international trade works, and what it means to people.
2. How international trade affects politics.

Trade is a controversial issue because it can make some people richer and some people poorer. Trade has great benefits as well as costs; it is neither all good nor all bad. Trade can mean lower prices, higher quality and more selection for consumers. It can force domestic producers to be more efficient. It can also cost people jobs, drive down wages in some industries, and contribute to environmental damage. The thing we might understand most fundamentally about trade is that it tends to help a lot of people a little, and to hurt a few people a lot. Keep that in mind as we explore the topic of international trade.

Free trade—trade with limited or no barriers between nations—has been a widespread policy goal since World War II. Trade barriers erected at the outset of the Great Depression helped make the depression worldwide and perhaps contributed to the rise of Nazism, fascism and World War II. So beginning first with an international agreement known as the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) in 1947, the nations of the world have worked to lower trade barriers. Make money, not war has been the battle cry of the current era.

In political science terms, this approach to international relations has been called liberal commercialism. If the nations of the world are interconnected through commerce, the reasoning goes, they will be less likely to make war. Is this true? In 1909, before World War I, Sir Norman Angell wrote a well-regarded book arguing that war was not really profitable for anyone. His argument has sometimes been misunderstood as saying commercial ties will make war less likely. That didn't prove to be true; World War I, however, wrecked the economies of Europe for decades. But economic ties at least raise the cost of war, and that was Angell's point.Sir Norman Angell, *The Great Illusion*. New York: Cosimo Classics, 2010. The fact that 100 years later, the book remains in print, ought to suggest something about the power of Angell's arguments.

That GATT was replaced in 1995 with the *World Trade Organization*, or the WTO, which attempts to set the terms of international trade. It has the unenviable job of trying to balance the desire for open markets against nations' desires to preserve jobs and the environment. It has provoked riots and protests around the world, but trade continues unabated. Like all international organizations, it lacks a serious enforcement capability, but nations have generally abided by its terms, if only because they want other nations to do the same.

A good example of how free trade can work is the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which was adopted between the U.S., Canada and Mexico in 1992. NAFTA was spurred by Mexico, as that nation's leadership came to realize that 80 percent of their economy was tied up in buying from and selling to the United States. Any disruption to that relationship would spell economic catastrophe for Mexico, so they sought an agreement with the U.S. to cement that trade relationship. NAFTA provides for no tariffs, and a way of resolving trade disputes through negotiation. Although the presidential candidate H. Ross Perot—who had a potential free-trade zone at an old airport that was likely to be worth a lot less if NAFTA was approved—once described the impending flight of jobs to lower-wage Mexico as destined to produce "a giant sucking sound," the tariff or tax on imports from Mexico before NAFTA was only 3 percent. A 3 percent tariff was not preventing anybody from moving a factory south of the border. Mexico has weaker environmental laws than the U.S., but diversifying development away from Mexico City was likely to help that issue. In any event, higher wages in Mexico are likely to mean, in the long run, less illegal immigration to the U.S. and more wealth with which to deal with problems such as environmental damage. That being said, 20 years of NAFTA has not radically altered the political or economic landscape of North America. The agreement has failed to produce either all the benefits or all the costs that were both promised and warned about when it was adopted. And that's the story in general with the results of free trade: Not as good as promised, not as bad as predicted.

Figure 10.1 [To Come] Trade between Canada, U.S. and Mexico

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The Logic of Trade

Why trade to begin with? Why not produce what you need at home and preserve jobs in the process? There is an economic logic to trade, and that's one of the reasons why it's not all bad.

The idea that underpins international trade is the theory of comparative advantage. All of the arguments for global trade are based on this one theory. Like a lot of theories, there is evidence for it and evidence against it.

The most basic way to understand comparative advantage might be to put it this way: Make what you're good at, and buy what you're not good at. On a purely personal level, this should be easy to understand. We're not all equally good at everything. Let's say you major in accounting at college, and become proficient. You pass your CPA exam, and get a good job with a firm or even go out and start your own firm. One of things that will happen is that you will spend a lot of time at work as well as making a living wage. Your time is about to become more valuable. So, when you were a starving college student, perhaps you changed the oil in your car yourself because you could do it and save the money you would have spent at Minute Monkey or some other local oil change business. But, comparatively speaking, as a successful CPA, in some ways it makes more sense to pay a nearby mechanic to change your oil, because he's better and faster at it than you are and your time is really better spent on a client's tax return, or better spent just not working.

That's comparative advantage: Do what you're good at, and pay somebody else to do the other stuff. This translates to national economies as well. In the classic hypothetical situation, we have a two-person economy consisting of Bob and Carly.

Figure 10.2 [To Come] Comparative Advantage with Broccoli and Cabbage

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This economy consists of two commodities: broccoli and cabbage. Now Bob can produce two broccoli and three cabbages in a given time period, whereas the ever-resourceful Carly can produce three broccoli and five cabbages. So, at first glance, things don't look good for Bob. But under the theory of comparative advantage, Carly should make cabbages and Bob should produce broccoli. Why? Whereas Carly has an absolute advantage in both products, she stands to gain the most by making cabbages. She gives up more by producing broccoli. Bob thus should make broccoli, because he gives up less to do so. He thereby has a comparative advantage in broccoli.

There are clear examples where this is true. It would be possible to grow citrus fruit in Canada, perhaps in heavily climate-controlled greenhouses. But it would be very expensive fruit. Better for Canada to grow trees and produce lumber, and leave oranges to Florida, Mexico and Brazil. Nobody argues with this kind of comparative advantage, rooted as it is in geography and climate.

But in fact most trade is in similar kinds of goods, such as automobiles and parts, aircraft and parts, heavy equipment and raw materials. Rich nations trade with other more often than anybody trades with poor nations. Canada remains the United States' biggest trading partner, and among the biggest category of what we trade with each other is automobiles and parts, which are produced in abundance on both sides of the border.

And even then, trade gets tricky. Softwood trees such as spruce, pine and hemlock grow well on both sides of the border, and despite their generally rosy relationship, the U.S. and Canada are frequently in dispute about softwood lumber exports. U.S. lumber producers argue that Canada's low taxes on timber harvests constitute an unfair advantage. Canadian timber producers will argue that they need that tax break in order to compete with more productive forests south of the border. Both sides want to preserve jobs in the timber and wood products industries; both sides face lobbying pressure both from workers and business owners.

These kinds of trade disputes get even more complicated with more complicated products. Take commercial jetliners, for example. During World War II, the U.S. produced most of the Allies' heavy bombers, which meant that U.S. firms left the war poised to seize a comparative advantage in producing large commercial aircraft. Some European firms attempted to build commercial jet transports, but they weren't as good as the planes built by U.S. manufacturers such as Boeing, McDonnell Douglas and Lockheed. The DeHavilland Comet, the first commercial jet transport, tended to come apart in mid-air, which was not very popular with passengers or pilots.

Building commercial aircraft, however, was a point of national pride for the Europeans, as well as a potential source of jobs and a way to maintain technological and engineering skill. So firms from Great Britain, France, Germany and Spain joined to form what

became known as Airbus. Airbus was heavily subsidized by the governments of the member firms—literally billions of dollars in "loans" that, apparently, will never be repaid—and Airbus was able to become competitive in the commercial jetliner market. Essentially, they pushed McDonnell Douglas and Lockheed out of that business, so that only Boeing and Airbus remained as dominant competitors in the large jetliner business. What's important to understand here is that if you invest enough money, you can buy a comparative advantage. The theory of comparative advantage would have said that the Europeans shouldn't build jets, and the Japanese shouldn't build cars, and the Chinese shouldn't be building anything. Theory, however, provides few jobs and pays no taxes.

It doesn't always work; the French once spent a lot of money trying to develop a domestic computer industry, without much success. However, the ability to buy a comparative advantage undercuts the entire theory, since making what I'm good at may depend on how much I'm willing to invest in becoming good at making it.

It should also be noted that virtually no nation has built its economic success on free trade. The U.S. and Europe built up their economies in the 1800s in large part via protectionism—limits on imports while trying to maximize exports to other countries, while protecting jobs and profits in domestic industries. The roaring success stories of the last half century—Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore—pretty much did the same thing. To a lesser extent, China has practiced the same approach to trade and economic development.

Pro-free trade economists would argue that if other governments want to subsidize the heck out of their products, we should sit back and enjoy the lower prices. This, however, creates the Wal-Mart conundrum. Wal-Mart, which gets about 80 percent of what it sells from China, is in fact a very efficient firm that offers lower prices on many products. However, it also pays very low wages and offers few affordable benefits to the majority of its employees. Wal-Mart has even gone to so far as to coach their employees on how to apply for public assistance, because many of them earn so little they qualify for some kinds of welfare benefits. So, to some extent, the lower prices are offset by the low wages. Low prices are of limited consolation if you're not making any money to begin with.

The Case Against Trade

There are a number of arguments against trade, not all of which make sense, but which are worth considering:

It promotes low wages. This is true domestically, since if a factory threatens to move overseas, it's usually in pursuit of lower wages. However, while workers overseas are making less than their American or European counterparts, they're probably making more than they were before, or they wouldn't have taken those jobs. So in other countries it may force wages up. Meanwhile, workers in the countries which lost the jobs typically don't make as much as they did in their old jobs.

It promotes poor working conditions. This much seems to be true. The wages in overseas factories in nations such as China are generally good by local standards. However the working conditions can be terrible—long hours, no overtime, dangerous conditions. In fact, it looks a lot like factory conditions in Europe and America in the late 19th and early 20th century, conditions that were only addressed through extraordinary political efforts that included legalizing unions and creating workplace safety laws. Chinese workers frequently are unionized, but like non-communist Chinese political parties, they are powerless.

It costs countries jobs. There's certainly some truth to this. The United States lost more than 800 shoe factories between 1972 and 1992, and very little clothing is made in the U.S. anymore. These were not, on the whole, highly paid jobs, but if it was your job and it walked away, this couldn't have been much fun.

The United States in particular has been slow to do anything about lost jobs. In the 1980s, the Reagan administration had a trade assistance program for people who lost their jobs due to trade, but it was nearly impossible to qualify for and helped very few people. Only recently has government stepped up to try to help people who need to be retrained for new work. Nonetheless, in general, the jobs that people find after trade displacement don't pay as well as the jobs they lost. On the other hand, there's also a structural problem that has little to do with trade: Manufacturing employment has been falling worldwide for decades—it simply takes fewer people to make a widget than it used to.

The infant industry argument: To get an industry going, it may be necessary to protect it from competition until it gets on its feet. The evidence is not good that this works, however; only Harley-Davidson, among major American companies, has successfully used protective measures to recover from a down period and become profitable again.

The strategic industry argument: Without protection of vital national industries, a nation may lose capacity in important sectors such as shipping and shipbuilding. For a nation that sees itself as having global interests, such as the United States, this has to be a serious concern.

Similarly, some economists argue that nations should not do so much to protect domestic agriculture, probably the most protected sector in the global economy. Much to the frustration of poorer countries whose economies are still heavily dependent on agriculture, richer nations still erect substantial barriers to trade in food and agricultural products. Part of that is because farmers are usually politically influential—farm-region and farm-state legislators tend to be cohesive and focused on farm issues, and basically nobody hates farmers. It's hard to dislike someone whose job is growing food. But perhaps more importantly, a nation that couldn't feed itself would be vulnerable to any kind of interruption in trade—either war or natural disaster. Allowing one's food domestic food supply to wither away, strategically speaking, is pretty much like putting a gun to your own head.

Overspecialization could leave a nation's economy vulnerable to downturns in a particular sector. This has been especially true for nations that have relied on a particular industry, such as nations whose foreign earnings depend on sales raw materials, such as minerals such as tin or copper. If copper prices fall, you're in trouble.

Nations who let their industries wander away to other countries also lose technological expertise and industrial infrastructure that makes it harder for them to participate in the next big thing, whatever that might be. As with food, disruptions in supply could then mean difficulty in acquiring products that people want.

Dumping: An exporting nation could engage in dumping—selling goods at below cost to drive competitors out of business. There's some evidence that this happened with Japan and television sets in the United States. There's less evidence in other industries, such as steel. What's also apparent is that U.S. firms failed to build on their comparative advantage in many industries after World War II. They got greedy, and didn't push their advantage with new technology and more innovative ways to pay workers to get wages to reflect actual costs and profits.

Environmental damage: This could be the single biggest argument against unfettered trade. For example, in the United States, the next bite of food you take traveled an average of 1,500 miles to get your plate. The pollution generated by transporting stuff around the world that could be produced closer to home—such as manhole covers from India to the West Coast of the U.S.—is one of the leading sources of greenhouse gases, which appear to be the main source of climate change. More about that later. Trade also can result in localized environmental degradation, such as cutting down tropical hardwood forests to produce chopsticks for the U.S. and Asia.

The Political Dimension of Trade

In terms of politics, nations are faced with conflicting demands. On the one hand, trade has helped economies grow and lifted more people around the world out of poverty. Domestic political interests push for both more trade—such as firms that export a lot—and for less trade, such as firms that must compete with foreign producers, and also labor groups who hope to see their members continue to have jobs.

This has led to an ongoing movement for fair trade, which usually means that the foreign producer has been fairly treated and paid. So, if you buy certified fair trade coffee, the grower in Burundi or Costa Rica is supposed to have been paid a better-than-market price for his crop. The market price is the price per pound currently being offered on world coffee markets, and markets don't much care if you're in the poorhouse or a millionaire. In commodities markets, such as wheat and coffee, the crop is worth what somebody is willing to pay for it, and not a dime more.

So governments around the world face conflicting demands when it comes to trade. To date, free trade advocates have been winning, despite widespread citizen protests against trade and globalization. Remember Sell's First Law of Political Economy: The decision is made in the direction of the greatest value. Usually that's money. So if increased trade makes somebody richer, the interest groups that represent those people will successful pressure government to keep trade barriers down. Governments have the idea of liberal commercialism on their side, so that makes it easier to accept the idea that more free trade will be better for everybody. And once free trade is established, the cost of reversing it gets added to the balance sheet. Limiting imports and thereby raising their prices won't be any more popular than watching jobs get shipped overseas.

Trade Deficits and Currency Exchange

The one trade issue about which you shouldn't lose any sleep is the trade deficit. If a nation exports more than it imports, it has a surplus. If it imports more than it exports, it has a deficit. The United States has run a trade deficit since the 1960s. If, personally, you had in essence spent more than you earned over the last 50 years, you would either be broke or heavily in debt, and maybe both. However the U.S. trade deficit is in fact a tiny portion of the U.S. economy and hence not a major issue.

For example, in 2010 the total size of the economy was $14.6 trillion. The total trade deficit was $497.9 billion. That's about 3 percent of the total economy. We run a trade deficit in goods, which is partially offset by a surplus in services and by earnings of U.S. firms from overseas operations.

Left alone, this situation will resolve itself. Ultimately a U.S. trade deficit forces the value of the dollar down. Our trading partners end up holding more dollars than they know what to do with, and that surplus of dollars means they are worth less. Money is a commodity like any other. Meanwhile, the currency of the nation with the trade surplus gains in value, since there's a higher demand for that currency from nations who want to buy that country's goods and services. Those shifting currency values, by themselves, would address trade imbalances. For the nation with a weaker currency, imports become more expensive since it takes more dollars to acquire the equivalent amount of yen or euros. Exports, meanwhile, become cheaper for foreign buyers, since they need fewer euros to get the right amount of dollars. So exporting firms are helped, although consumers will see higher prices.

That's all true if currency values are allowed to float on open markets. An issue between China and the rest of the world is that China has tended to assign its currency at a fixed exchange rate relative to the dollar and the euro, for example. As China has been running a trade surplus, the yuan would normally be rising in value against the dollar and the euro, making Chinese exports more expensive but lowering the price of imports for Chinese consumers. Why are they doing this? Because the Chinese Communist Party maintains legitimacy in part through providing continuing economic growth, and a slowdown in its export-driven economy would mean higher unemployment and more civil unrest. So the U.S. and Europe continue to push China to let the yuan float, and the Chinese keep holding back. As serious as this issue sounds, you should keep in mind that if the yuan did float, it would only address about 3 percent of the U.S. trade deficit with China.

Trade Policy Options

Presuming that we might be most concerned about the jobs issue, what should be done about trade? For much of modern history, the usual answer was tariffs, which are simply taxes on imported goods. Tariffs raise the price of imports, and make domestic goods more cost-competitive. The GATT and the WTO have largely done away with tariffs, which isn't necessarily a good thing. When, as in the 1800s, tariffs were up to 50 percent of the price of a good, they did indeed reward inefficiency among domestic producers and make it difficult for foreign firms to compete. However a low tariff, say 2–3 percent, wouldn't penalize or reward anybody too much, and the money could be used to help people who lost their jobs because of trade.

Truly protective tariffs, which would make imports unaffordable, are expensive. They cost a lot of money, hundreds of thousands of dollars per job for jobs, such as those at textile mills, that don't actually pay all that well. Unfortunately, tariffs have been replaced by non-tariff barriers, which still make products more expensive but don't produce any revenue. In short, they leave consumers holding the bill.

Non-tariff barriers include quotas, which are limits on the number of units that can be shipped into the importing country. U.S. steel firms, which emerged from World War II with a comparative advantage over the rest of the world, failed then to invest in new products and processes and so fell behind Europe and Japan. Producers in Europe and Japan, having been destroyed by the war, were forced to build new mills with the latest technology. U.S. firms responded by getting quotas on steel imports. Foreign steel makers responded by moving into specialty steel, where U.S. firms had previously held an advantage, and so they lost that business too. American steel manufacturers have limped into the 21st century after dominating the 20th.

Another form of non-tariff barriers include health and safety requirements. The Japanese protected that country's tiny and nearly sacred apple industry safe from competition with U.S. apples by barring imports for fear of an infestation of the coddling moth, which can in fact devastate orchards. It wasn't until U.S. producers shipped apples packed in nitrogen gas—so that no pests could live—that the Japanese finally opened up that market. The Japanese did the same with various arcane measurements on automobiles, contending that U.S. cars were not safe. Of course, it didn't help that Japan is a right-hand drive market, and U.S. cars exported to Japan still had the steering wheel on the left side.

A nation also could simply devalue its currency, declaring a low official exchange rate to raise the price of imports and lower the price of its own exports. This in effect is what China has done. Nations also engage in export subsidies: using various financial means to make buying your products cheaper for foreign customers. The U.S. uses the Export-Import Bank to make loans to buyers of U.S. products, particularly Boeing aircraft. Finally, nations rely on domestic content legislation: Laws that dictate that a given product will have so much "domestic content," that is material or parts that come from the importing nation. Sometimes also called offset agreements—we'll buy your jets if you buy enough parts from us—these are supposed to be outlawed under the WTO. And if you believe this, I'd like to sell you your neighbor's car. He said it would be OK. Honest.

In fact, the WTO is supposed to address all these kinds of barriers, but as we've seen, nations have all kinds of strategic and domestic political reasons for resisting free trade when it comes to imports but being all for it when it comes to exports. For example, WTO-style free also makes it more difficult for a nation such as the U.S. to bar imports of fish that are captured in an unsustainable way. It is these kinds of environmental issues that may create the biggest political challenges of the current century.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Trade is neither all good nor all bad.
- Trade imposes both costs and benefits on states and consumers. It can provide greater selection, quality and better prices for goods; it can also cost people jobs and lower wages in countries that lose jobs. It also can add to environmental damage around the world.

EXERCISE

1. Think of the last thing you bought. Where did it come from? How far did it travel to get to you? Could you have bought the same product closer to home? What would that have meant in terms of price or quality?

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10.2: Debt and Deficits

Learning Objectives

In this section, you will learn:

1. How the European debt crisis came to be.
2. How much the U.S. budget deficit matters.

A current problem is many parts of the world is debt. Nations spend a lot of public money to provide people with the services they say they want. If tax revenues exceed expenditures in these public budgets, the nation has a budget surplus. If, however, spending exceeds revenue, nations have a budget deficit. Nations fund budget deficits in one of two ways—either by printing money, which is fortunately fairly rare anymore, or by borrowing on the open market. If you have a U.S. Savings Bond, you are helping the fund the federal budget deficit. Governments sell bonds, which are financial obligations that come in specific denominations ($1,000, $5,000 and $10,000 for U.S. treasury securities) to cover expenditures in the short term. Investors lend money to governments by buying the bonds, collecting interest payments for the life of the bond and getting their initial investment back when the bond matures, in say 10 or 20 years.

Figure 10.3 [To Come] International budget deficits

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Part of the recent debt problem has been in Europe. In 1999, 17 nations in Europe adopted a single currency, the euro. The goal was that by lowering the transaction costs that follow from having to turn francs into deutschmarks, the single currency would in fact raise gross domestic product (GDP) by 1 percent. That may not sound like a lot, but 1 percent across an economy that's bigger than that of the United States is both a lot of money and a huge economic gain.

As always, however, there were tradeoffs. It meant that all the member nations of the Eurozone would have the same monetary policy. In practical terms, this means the monetary policy of the German central bank, since they are the biggest economy in Europe. The Germans, dating back to their experience of hyperinflation in the 1920s—which helped Hitler take power—are fairly obsessed with keeping inflation at bay. But what's good for one country might not be good for another. One nation wants to control inflation; another nation wants monetary stimulus. Under the Eurozone, that's not happening.

For whatever reason, the economies of northern Europe—Germany, France, the Netherlands, Sweden—are stronger than the economies of southern Europe, in particular Spain, Italy and Greece. So the latter three nations have been running larger budget deficits. But without the ability to engage in monetary policy on their own, they cannot inflate their currencies so as to pay back their debts with cheaper money.

Why are these governments budgets' so out of whack? In Greece, for example, tax evasion is apparently a way of life, so that the Greek government is not collecting all the taxes it should. Government benefits are extraordinarily generous, so people retire after age 50, and even more taxable earnings are lost to the state. It should be easy to see why the government pays out such benefits: Government largesse is a key source of maintaining legitimacy in the eyes of voters. Voters come to view this every-day-is-Christmas approach to governing as a social contract, and change becomes difficult to achieve.

As Greece's debts have mounted, lenders begin to demand higher interest rates so as to cover the risk of Greece defaulting on its debts. Default would mean that investors lose a lot of money. You might be tempted to think, "sucks to be them," but the losses would mean investors would be more wary of loaning money to anybody, raising borrowing costs all over the world, and making the global economy shrink. Even in the U.S., a Greek default would have echoes, beginning with higher interest rates on credit cards and on home and auto loans. In short, it would be a lose-lose situation.

European policy makers, particularly the leaders of Germany and France, have responded by bailing out the Greeks, the Spaniards and the Italians, in exchange for tight "austerity" budgets, in which government spending is greatly reduced. The problem with this is that quick, large-scale reductions in government spending will mean that those three economies go toward if not into recession, impacting their neighbors and trading partners as well as making the governments' revenue problems even worse.

The Greeks could pull out of the Eurozone, but that would mean high inflation on imports and a substantial whack to the Greek economy. So there are no easy answers here, at least until the Greek government can convince people that what they need to do is pay their taxes. But, the world over, telling people that they need to tighten their belts and pay their taxes is never politically very popular. And saying “revenue enhancements” instead of taxes doesn’t fool as many people as perhaps it once did.

The American Problem

The United States faces a somewhat similar problem with regard to its budget deficit, although the U.S. economy is much larger than the Greek economy, giving the U.S. a lot more wiggle room when it comes to monetary and fiscal policy. The U.S. budget deficit is not nearly as serious as, say, the Greek deficit, and the U.S. can still engage in monetary policy to suit the needs of the moment.

Nonetheless, the budget deficit became a very big political issue in the 2012 presidential campaign, with Republicans decrying the deficits of the Obama administration. Where did they come from?

In 2001, George W. Bush became president and inherited a budget surplus. He convinced Congress to pass rather substantial tax cuts, thus reducing revenue and ending the surplus. Then, following 9.11, the president and Congress got the U.S. involved in two wars, and the budget deficit returned with a vengeance.

And then came the financial meltdown. With low interest rates in the 2000s, and a financial industry that discovered it could make a lot of money on the fees on home loans to people who couldn’t really afford them, the nation got a bubble in the housing market. A bubble is when investment exceeds potential in a particular market. In the case of housing, which represents about a quarter of the entire U.S. economy, the bubble was of substantial proportions, perhaps $1.4 trillion. This was fine as long as housing prices continued to rise, but as with any bubble, prices could not and would not rise forever. In 2007, prices began to fall, and the housing market collapsed. People could no longer sell their homes for more than they paid for them. Once your home is worth less than you paid for it, you are unable to sell it any price. As a home represents the single largest investment most people will ever make, overall wealth in the economy shrank and the entire economy went into recession.

Economists expected a recession; we’ve had lots of bubbles before, most recently in internet and technology stocks in the late 1990s, and going all the way back to railroads in the 1800s. People lose their jobs, some wealth evaporates, and eventually the economy recovers and we move ahead. It’s not pretty, but since the Great Depression, we’re usually able to recover in a year or so.

But this time, the problem was much bigger than a typical bubble. People used to say “safe as houses” with regard to home loans, because financial institutions subjected prospective borrowers to intense scrutiny. The loans are then bundled into blocks of loans, and resold to big borrowers who want a safe, profitable place to park their money. So the new bundled home loans, which included loans to people who were likely to default, were sold to investors all over the world.

What economists didn’t realize was that the biggest banks had made side bets on the mortgage loans. Called derivatives, because they derive their value from the value of something else, such as a bundle of home loans, they were unregulated bets on which way the market would go. In some instances, banks even bet against the people they were lending to (without telling them, of course). In some senses, these were insurance policies on the loans. But if everybody files a claim at once, you have a problem. Say I’m Lehman Bros., a big Wall Street investment bank. I’ve sold billions in bundled home loans to investors. Then I go to AIG, the world’s largest insurance firm, and buy an insurance policy on the loans, in case they go bad.

Then say everybody else does this. (They did.) Then say many of the loans go bad. (They did.) With everybody having bet the same way, like everybody betting on the same horse at the race track, there’s nobody left on whom to lay off the risk. And so instead of a $1.4 trillion mortgage bubble, we were faced with a $60 trillion derivative bubble, or more than four times the size of the entire U.S. economy. It’s worth noting that U.S. investment banks had lobbied heavily to prevent the regulation of the derivatives market in the 1990s. So the derivatives bubble threatened to destroy the financial system and provoke a second Great Depression.

Even with bailouts of the banking system and a fiscal stimulus package to help right the economy, the United States still endured the steepest recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Increased federal expenditures and reduced state, federal and local revenues meant a bigger budget deficit. As of 2012, the economy hasn’t fully recovered, with private sector job gains offset by reductions in public sector employment.

So how important is the budget deficit? As a percentage of GDP, the U.S. budget deficit is slightly higher than Greece's, both at around 10 percent. Then again, at $15 trillion, the U.S. economy is 50 times larger than Greece's. So the scope of the problem is not quite the same. We should understand that no one in or near government in the United States, Republican or Democrat, conservative or liberal, thinks the United States can sustain that level of deficit forever. Nor do they plan to.

Conservatives propose to cut spending and taxes and shrink the overall size of the federal government. If they just proposed cutting spending, this would help balance the budget, but cutting taxes as well will probably not fix the deficit. First, cutting spending would lower overall demand in the economy, threatening the push the nation back into recession. The argument for cutting taxes is that lower tax rates will help the economy grow, but tax cuts have a somewhat uninspiring record for spurring economic growth. It's not difficult to grasp how they should work: Tax cuts mean more money in people's pockets, which, hopefully, they will go out and spend, creating more economic activity and percolating throughout the economy. Firms get more business, place more orders and hire more people. However, that doesn't happen as often as you might expect. The problem could be that tax cuts most often come in response to a soft economy. So that people who have jobs, despite having more money in their wallets, are afraid that they, too, will get laid off or have their hours cut, so rather than spending the money, they save it. Increased saving is not bad for the economy, or for people, but it doesn't generate the rapid bounce that policymakers are hoping for.

Liberals propose to address the deficit by raising taxes and trying not to bust the piggy bank on spending, while maintaining public investment in things such as infrastructure and public education. They argue that this kind of spending will in fact make the economy grow more than tax cuts will. In their defense, it was the combination of a growing economy, small tax increases and restraint on federal spending that allowed Democrat President Bill Clinton and a Republican-controlled Congress to balance the federal budget in the 1990s. On the other hand, government has to have the political will to spend on things that will generate economic recovery, and it has to be just as willing to use any budget surplus in the future to reduce the deficit. None of that is a given.

Are budget deficits a problem? As then-Vice President Dick Cheney said, responding to criticism of the Bush-era budget deficits, "Deficits don't matter." Or maybe they do, as in 2012 the budget deficit was a big campaign issue for many Republican candidates. In political terms, deficits seem to matter more if somebody else is responsible. The usual argument against deficits is that if the federal government borrows too much, it will crowd out private sector borrowing, hurting the economy. There is no evidence that this ever happens. A more serious problem is that the bigger the deficit, the more of the federal budget that is spent on interest on the debt. That leaves less money available for everything else, from investment to tax cuts.

U.S. Debt Abroad

A third complaint you may hear is that the trade deficit and budget deficit together mean we have to borrow money from China. China holds around $1.2 trillion of the United States' total outstanding debt of around $14 trillion. Nonetheless, repeat after me: We do not borrow money from China. First, China holding U.S. debt is not a remarkable thing. In fact, foreign nations hold close to half (47 percent) of outstanding U.S. debt. Why? Because they end up holding more dollars than they know what to do with in their foreign currency accounts. They could use the money to buy things, or invest, and one safe place to invest is U.S. government treasury securities. If you were left more Euros than you know what to do with, you might buy Eurozone bonds. Ditto for yen and Japanese bonds, or Canadian dollars and Canadian bonds. At this point, you probably only buy Greek bonds if you're feeling frisky and risky. It's important to note that no foreign investor, public or private, buys U.S. debt instruments directly from the U.S. Treasury. They buy them in the open market, sold by other investors such as the large banks that participate in Treasury auctions.

There is small potential risk in having foreign states holding U.S. debt. If, for example, China were to dump its U.S. debt holdings on the world market, the value of the dollar would fall and U.S. consumers would experience inflation in the price of imported goods. And that would mean that they would buy fewer Chinese-made goods as well, hurting China along with the U.S. For better or worse, the U.S. and Chinese economies are currently joined at the wallet if not the hip.

What is likely to happen with the U.S. deficit? Most U.S. states by law must balance their budgets, and so they have tried various methods to restrain spending. However, items such as sunset laws and line-item vetoes also have proved incapable of reining in spending. A line-item veto allows an executive the ability to strike only part of a bill as opposed to the whole thing. States where governors have line-item vetoes do not have budgets noticeably more in balance than do states without. Sunset laws require legislatures to reauthorize state agencies, or they go the way of the sunset. But sunset laws typically haven't been effective at ending the lives of government agencies, which tend to find new reasons to exist once their original tasks are complete. Congress

went so far as to give the president a line-item veto in 1996, but the Supreme Court invalidated it as an unconstitutional delegation of budgetary power to the executive branch. In 1985, the Gramm-Rudman Act, named for its two authors, was to pare down non-essential spending when Congress failed to balance the budget. However this was voided by the courts because it gave executive power to the Congressional Budget Office, which is simply a tool of Congress.

Rest assured that the deficit dilemma will not persist forever. American politics look like this: There's a lot of posturing, particularly in election years, and then the problem gets serious enough that Democrats and Republicans come to some kind of compromise, so that between growth, taxes and spending restraint, the budget is balanced again. The simple answer then becomes using the resulting budget surplus to buy back and retire the debt, at least to a more manageable level. And sometimes that looks like the harder task.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Nations can sustain budget deficits for a while, but not forever.
- Too much debt raises borrowing costs for the government and leaves less money available for other things.

EXERCISE

1. Look at the U.S. federal budget. What categories of spending would you cut? What would be the consequences of those cuts?

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10.3: The Environment

Learning Objectives

In this section you will learn:

1. Why climate change appears to be a problem.
2. Why doing something about it is politically difficult.
3. How resource shortages pose political problems, but also invite market-based solutions.

Perhaps the most difficult political issue of our time is the environment. Although some people try to cast this as a scientific issue, there's actually less scientific disagreement over the challenges of the environment than you may realize. As with everything in life, and especially in this book, you will have to make up your own mind; in the meantime, I won't hide anything I believe from you.

Resource Shortages

The unfortunately common idea that conservation—using less of finite resources, or using them more efficiently—means a lower standard of living, is generally wrong. Conservation means not wasting resources needlessly. It doesn't mean living like a medieval peasant or a caveman. Equally unfortunate is the notion that running out of a particular resource, such as oil, will result in society reverting to a dark and distant past when, as the historian William Manchester put it, our ancestors lived in a world lit only by fire.

Indeed, it was a sad day in the mid-1800s when the world ran out of whale oil and everyone had to live in darkness. In fact, electricity really did revolutionize human existence. Electricity expanded the day wherever it went. Before electricity, people tended to go to bed a lot earlier, and the night shift was a largely unheard of event. The advent of the internal combustion engine and automobiles saved major cities the world over from a sea of horse manure and, often, abandoned dead horses.

The point is not that technology will save us from resource shortages, but markets might. A shortage of any resource raises its price and thereby makes substitutes more affordable and desirable. In your own lifetimes, higher gasoline prices have prompted consumers to seek and auto makers to provide hybrid and electric cars. The documentary *Who Killed the Electric Car* misses the key point that at the time, the economics of building a new technology car didn't justify the expense of developing and selling that vehicle. One could argue that General Motors and other auto makers were a bit shortsighted in not pushing the idea further, but at the time it was essentially a market-based decision, and not terribly surprising.

So there's good news and bad news on the energy front. First the good news: For 200 years, until the mid-19th century, whale oil was the chief source of lighting for much of the United States, and in some other parts of the world. And yet the demise of the whaling industry didn't plunge the nation into darkness. People discovered uses for oil from the ground, such as refining it into kerosene, and gave the whales a break. The great advantage of oil and its derivative fuels, such as diesel oil, gasoline and kerosene, which is used in jet fuel, is that they are energy dense: They pack a lot of energy into a small volume.

What has many people's knickers in a twist at the moment is Hubbert's Peak. M.K. Hubbert was a Shell Oil geologist who, back in the 1950s, predicted that U.S. oil production would peak about 1967. Derided by experts at the time, he was pretty close to perfect in his estimate. Using Hubbert's methods, others have now predicted when world oil production will peak. Estimates have ranged from 2004 to 2112, with the gloomiest group aiming for sometime this decade.

Someday, we will run out of oil. With China and India's economies blooming into fuel-burning, car-driving splendor, consumption of oil is rising. There are a couple of rocks in the path of this wheel of misfortune, however. First, the estimates all depend on how much recoverable oil you assume is out there. Estimates range from 1.8 trillion to nearly 4 trillion barrels.

It was probably easier for Hubbert to estimate how much U.S. oil was left, if only because the OPEC nations—the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, which includes the nations of the Middle East—tend to try to keep the wraps on just how much oil they have in the ground. Nor do the estimates include oil from the tar sands of Alberta or the oil shale of Colorado. As prices rise, reclaiming those becomes profitable. The average estimate is for oil production to peak about 2037, including 2 percent annual growth in consumption. This seems like a reasonable guess.

Left alone, oil prices will rise, which will make substitutes such as hydrogen fuel cells more economical. Markets aren't good at everything, but they are very good at allocating resources. Expensive oil eventually means more transportation choices. It's no

accident that higher prices have coincided with more offerings of hybrid gas-electric vehicles for sale. Moving from a petroleum-based economy to one based on another source of energy will have costs, but they are likely to be gradual and spread across the nation and the world.

Such a transition also will have benefits. Automobiles continue to be a major source of air pollution and greenhouse gases. And that's what markets aren't good at: dealing with the unintended consequences (externalities, in economese) of economic activity, such as pollution.

The pressure is thus on policymakers in governments the world over to plan for the day when in fact oil becomes scarce. The challenge there is the up-front cost of developing new technologies, and whatever technologies the government chooses to support means that some technologies will not be supported. Remember the role of interest groups in government; the people who have put their money on the technologies not chosen will campaign both to get government support and to block support for the other technologies. It is possible right now to reduce one's dependence on oil. Brazil, the fifth largest country in the world with the sixth largest economy, essentially imports no oil from anywhere, as they have developed fuel alcohol production to the point where they don't need foreign oil. In Brazil's case, they rely on sugar cane, a relatively cheap feedstock from which to distill alcohol.

The Corn Problem

In the United States, in contrast to Brazil, we heavily subsidize the production of corn, a lot of which gets turned into ethanol, which gets added to gasoline to produce a slightly cleaner burning fuel. The problem with ethanol is that it takes nearly as much energy to produce alcohol from corn as you get from the alcohol produced. It's not very efficient. Corn also requires copious amounts of nitrogen to grow, which then washes into the Mississippi River basin and into the Gulf of Mexico, where the overabundance of nitrates is slowly turning the gulf into an underwater desert. Meanwhile, a lot of the corn is fed to cattle in industrial feedlots to help fatten them up before they are slaughtered. Unfortunately, beef cattle can't properly digest corn, so if they're not pumped full of antibiotics, they become sick. The overuse of these antibiotics is quite likely breeding strains of drug-resistant bacteria, since, like our ancestors who survived the plague in the Middle Ages, some of the bacteria will simply survive the assault of antibiotic drugs. These bacteria eventually will be consumed by humans who may then become ill.

This raises the question of why the U.S. adopted this policy. First, the corn farmers are not inherently evil people. They are, like most of us, just trying to make a living. Agricultural subsidies in the United States were ratcheted up during the Nixon Administration, when inflation was high and food prices in particular were rising. Oil prices were rising, and energy costs tend to affect everything else. A policy that provided for more affordable food would help the government maintain legitimacy, and so it was pursued. Farm-state members of Congress would of course be very supportive of such policy, because their constituents are likely to be very connected to and reliant upon the farm economy.

But say that current U.S. policymakers recognized what was going on and found themselves on the corns of a dilemma. How could they respond? Simply ending subsidies for corn and for ethanol production would impact a lot of people and their jobs, and so the corn lobby, the ethanol lobby and the farm-state legislators would all work to keep that from happening. Whether you think this is right or wrong, you should not be surprised that this is how politics works. People seek to preserve and advance their own interests.

The answer might be to pay the farmers to do something else, such as grow a better feedstock, such as sugar beets, from which alcohol can be produced more cheaply and with less environmental impact. The challenges here are that 1. People don't like change and 2. This would have a substantial up-front cost. So even if the government were able to offer a low-cost conversion to another way of making a living for some corn farmers, there would be resistance.

It's worth noting that some resource shortages aren't as easily dealt with. Overfishing of the world's oceans has caused many fish populations to collapse, threatening a major source of food for the world. Although nations by themselves can check this through various methods, when the problem spills over into disputes between nations, the situation gets trickier, as we'll see with the question of water.

Water

Another resource issue is water, in particular fresh water. Current estimates suggest that one-fith of the world's population lacks consistent access to clean drinking water. Moreover, several large aquifers are steadily running dry. Aquifers are the often-gravelly spaces under the ground where rainwater collects. Ever since human beings figured out how to dig wells, people have been tapping

aquifers to get water for drinking and irrigation. Along with rivers, aquifers are one of the chief sources of usable water. But now, with population growth and thereby rising demand for water, the Ogallala aquifer, which stretches from the Dakotas to Texas and irrigates one-fifth of U.S. farmland, is being depleted faster than rainfall can fill it up. Aquifers in Africa, the Middle East and China face the same problem. Water is being pumped out of the ground in the world's largest city, Mexico City, at such a rate that the city is literally sinking into the earth.

Rivers pose additional challenges. Rivers are useful for raising fish, generating power, irrigation, and capturing fresh water for drinking. However any one use reduces the amount available for any other use. Hydroelectric dams generate clean electricity, but greatly decrease the numbers of fish, since even with fish ladders, fish returning to spawn upriver get there in much lower numbers. Running more water through the turbines for electricity affects both fish and the water available for irrigation and consumption; diverting more water for irrigation or consumption impacts fish and electricity.

People the world over waste a lot of water. In the city of Phoenix, Ariz., two rivers flow into the city, and none flow out, even as citizens' lawns remain green and outdoor malls employ battalions of nozzles spraying mist to keep the walkways cool for shoppers. Estimates are that the United States loses 7 million gallons a day to leaky pipes and faucets; another estimate says England and Wales are wasting 20 percent of their treated water through leakage. And these are developed countries. Worldwide, estimates range as high as 60 percent.

Meanwhile, 2.6 billion people in the world live without adequate sewage treatment, and another chunk of the world's sewage system needs repair and upgrading. Sewage treatment helps prevent disease and limits the pollution of groundwater, which could further extend drinking water resources.

The importance of sewage treatment can't be overstated. On Hood Canal, near where I live, houses are on septic systems, which leak into the canal, creating a zone of water devoid of oxygen, and hence devoid of fish. The easy answer would be replace the septic tanks with a sewage treatment facility. The technology is fairly simple: Pipes run from people's homes to the treatment facility, where the effluent is pumped into a vat, slowly stirred by a large agitating blade, like you'd find in a washing machine, and bacteria do their job. Primary sewage treatment involves one vat; secondary treatment involves two. Tertiary treatment, which is both expensive and uncommon, can remove 99 percent of impurities. Experiments with running sewage through mini-canals of swamp plants, has produced drinkable water as well. But even adequate secondary treatment systems would do a lot to prevent water pollution and improve human hygiene, and create at least temporary construction jobs all over the world.

So why doesn't this happen? At this point, you should be able to break down the steps of seeing the political challenges of making something like this happen, even with the obvious benefits involved. First, none of this would be free. Somebody will have to pay. In the U.S., homeowners can jointly agree to pay the cost of hooking up to a sewer line. That can cost thousands of dollars per home, money people may not have or may not want to spend. Otherwise government will have to step in and foot the bill. Local or national legislatures will have to vote to allocate funds, and sources of revenue will have to be found. And all for a project that, while important, lacks the excitement of more obvious economic development projects, or the immediate gratification of a new bridge or highway. We should note that the World Bank has helped finance wastewater treatment projects in several locations around the world.

Some scholars predict that the relatively near future could see wars over water allocation. The technological fix, desalination of seawater, is growing in use but still very expensive. Nations might solve the problem within their own borders. Leaking pipes and faucets and excessive irrigation consume an apparently frightening amount of water, as you may discover when you own a home of your own one day. But disputes between nations over water allocation poses greater challenges. Remember that unlike within the borders of a sovereign state, where the authority of the government can, ultimately, impose a solution, between states there is no higher authority. Anarchy prevails because no one is in charge.

Once again, domestic politics complicates a bilateral or multilateral solution. A treaty with a neighboring state to share a water resource will provoke some opposition inside each state, and it's an open question as to whether those interest groups will compel a change in policy. Moreover, the realist perspective on the part of the stronger state may suggest thumbing the collective nose at the weaker state and sharing less of the water, if any at all.

Market forces will help; increasing shortages of water will raise prices and encourage conservation, while making desalination more affordable. Of course, inland communities and states without ready access to ocean water will face greater challenges than will coastal states. Areas where desalination plants already are a major source of drinking water, such as Dubai on the Persian Gulf

and Key West, Florida, have plenty of water close at hand. Either way, states will face increasing pressure to do something more. If states can force themselves to think ahead, so that water allocation and resource development can be planned an implemented on a regional and global scale before tempers become too hot and lines are drawn in the spreading desert sand, there may be a way past this problem. States that successfully navigate the water course may also find ways to convince their neighbors that the solution is one that somehow makes the well wider and deeper.

Climate Change

Climate change may be the most important issue of our time, and also the most challenging. The great majority of scientific research and evidence suggests that it's happening, and that human activity is a major contributing factor. The evidence against climate change tends to come from scientists who have been paid by the energy industry.See, for example, Oreskes and Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2010. The argument that some people make, that people who believe that climate change is both a problem and a manmade problem simply want to lower our standard of living, is absurd from every angle. Nobody really wants a lower standard of living. Even people who contrive to live "off the grid," in homes that are largely energy self-sufficient, are not really trying to live like our pioneer ancestors. It's difficult to imagine what profit there could be to people who argue that climate change is a serious issue that should be dealt with.

How do we know there's climate change? Ice and snow have been piling up on Greenland for at least 110,000 years. The ice includes tiny pockets of air. By drilling and taking core samples from lower strata in the ice, scientists are able to tap those tiny air pockets and see what the atmospheric composition was like in previous millennia. What they have found is that the amount of carbon in the atmosphere has never risen so far so fast as it has since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution in the 1800s. That's when humans began cutting down forests and burning large amounts of fossil fuels such as coal and oil. They're called fossil fuels because they were created from layers of vegetation laid down millions of years ago, which then was compressed by layers of sediment piled on top over time. The pressure turned the decaying vegetation into coal, oil and natural gas. As we noted earlier, fossil fuels have the great advantage of being energy dense—they pack a lot of power into a very small space. A coal fire, for example, burns much hotter than a wood fire; steam engines became much more powerful and efficient when they changed from burning wood to burning coal, and more efficient still when they burned oil. In many ways, they made the modern world possible.

They do, however, release large amounts of carbon into the atmosphere, which creates the greenhouse effect. A greenhouse works because it traps heat inside, raising the average temperature and allowing you to grow plants out of season, for example. On a global scale, however, this means average higher temperatures worldwide, as evidenced by steadily retreating glaciers around the world.

This phenomenon led to the use of the term global warming, which is probably unfortunate because the real effect includes not just global warming but more temperature extremes everywhere, including colder temperatures in some places and warmer temperatures in others. It also means more and more powerful storms, more droughts in some areas, and rising sea levels, threatening coastal communities and islands around the world. In a worst-case scenario, the arctic ice cap melts at the North Pole, releasing massive quantities of frozen carbon now held in check under the ice cap, greatly raising average temperatures and radically altering the biosphere. Trees, as we know them, likely would disappear. And, among other places, goodbye, Florida; so long, Seychelle Islands; adios, Aruba.

In any event, scientists now speak of climate change as opposed to global warming. We've known this for a while; the second Bush administration suppressed a study by government scientists who concluded both that climate change is real and that people are causing it. One study concluded that it would only really impact food production, but that in itself should be enough to be cause for alarm. By one estimate, climate change will lower world GDP by 1–3 percent, and that is a lower standard of living for everybody.

Figure 10.4 [To Come] Per Capita Carbon Emissions by Country

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Do we know that all these terrible things will come to pass? We don't, but it's a big bet to make that they won't. Assuming all this is true—and at the moment, it doesn't appear to be a big assumption—it will require global policy solutions. It's unlikely that the market forces by themselves will address this. As valuable as clean air and more stable temperatures are, they are hard to put a price tag on. The production of greenhouse gases is a classic free-rider problem. Any one of us can do something to lower our

carbon footprint, but the individual (or nation) assumes all the cost of doing that and shares the benefit with everybody else for free. Under that scenario, few people are likely take on that expense. Once again, absent a world government the power to enforce the decision, anarchy prevails and nations do not unilaterally change policy.

In 1997, the nations of the world went to Japan and negotiated what became known as the Kyoto protocol. To date, 191 nations signed the agreement to lower their output of greenhouse gases, but the two big kids on the block—the U.S. and China—have not complied. Profit and legitimacy seem to be the two drivers. In the case of China, the legitimacy of the government largely relies on continued economic growth. China's booming economy is every hungry for more electricity, so China keeps building coal-fired electric plants and gets nearly 70 percent of its electricity from coal. Burning coal is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions. Reducing its reliance on coal would cause at least short-term dislocations in China's energy supply and threaten the country's stability.

Coal is the leading source of the world's energy, including 68 percent in China and 50 percent in the U.S. Technology to create energy from "clean coal" is at best decades away. No one is even sure if solutions such as sequestering carbon emissions from coal in abandoned mine shafts would even work. The excess carbon produced does eventually filter to the ground, including seawater, which is becoming more acidic and less hospitable to fish as it happens.

Again, it's probably not helpful to look at coal companies or coal miners as inherently evil. Coal mining is a dangerous and therefore well-paid occupation. U.S. states with big coal interests will feature members of Congress who will stand by their constituents in the coal industry and try to protect them from being put out of business by the government. A lot of jobs and profit are at stake, and those things are important too. Unlike oil, we're apparently in little danger of running out of coal anytime soon.

Alternatives are uncertain at the moment. The process known as fracking is getting more natural gas, a much cleaner-burning fuel, out of the ground, but threatens underground drinking water sources in the process. Nuclear power is actually remarkably safe, overall, but when things go wrong, as at Chernobyl and more recently in Japan, they go wrong in a big way. Consequently safe nuclear power is one of the most expensive forms of electricity available. Hydropower from dams is very clean, but poses all kinds of other challenges, as we've already noted. Biofuels don't add more new carbon to the atmosphere but require substantial resources, such as water, to produce.

Economists in the last few decades suggested a market-based solution to help deal with carbon emissions, generally known as cap-and-trade. Under cap-and-trade, government sets a lid (the cap) on allowable carbon emissions. So, major carbon producers such as factories and power plants pay a tax on higher emissions, or get a credit if they fall below the cap. They can sell those credits on the open market to firms that go over, who thereby avoid the tax. This puts a market value on pollution, and gives firms an incentive to clean up even as it rewards clean producers. It has been used with some success in the western United States, and in Europe. The Europeans, however, dealt with the cap in part by moving the most-polluting factories to India and China, and that's one of the problems. Unless it's a global system, a major polluter can simply relocate to someplace where there's no cap. It also doesn't address a major source of pollution—individual people and their households. Non-point source pollution, as it's known, is in some ways harder to deal with. One nasty factory could be cleaned up directly; a million smoky car exhausts is a different sort of challenge.

It's not difficult to imagine a world where every house features solar panels and some kind of windmill on the roof, and a hydrogen fuel cell in the back yard. And therein lies the policy challenge: a high short-term cost in exchange for a long-term benefit that many people will not live to see. As with corn farmers, the answer for coal producers may be to pay them to do something else. But that requires revenue, in the form of taxes from people who may very well question why they have to spend money to convince other people to stop producing a product they don't see as affecting their immediate lives. And as soon as government starts picking winners, it also is picking losers, and nobody likes to be on the losing side.

This chapter is a bit of a downer, but ignoring problems, like ignoring exams, doesn't make them go away. The broader point is that all of these problems will require something in the way of policy solutions, which is government's job. Perhaps you can now see that within one country, such problems are challenging enough; in the global society, convincing a collection of sovereign states that they all need to take the same steps may be even more difficult.

None of this is impossible; human beings have a remarkable ability to adapt. Remember that your ancestors, wherever they were from, were the clever ones, the resilient ones, the ones who could cope with and make the best of change. Your ancestors were the ones who figured out how to survive. So you come into this world with a very, very good genetic history. As college students

perhaps just beginning your way in the world, you should at least understand that this is the world you are inheriting. And perhaps understanding the business of politics and government will help you navigate that world a little more skillfully.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Resource shortages often are dealt with effectively by markets. Rising prices for a resource can make alternatives more affordable and hence more available.
- Items on which it is more difficult to put a price, such as clean air, are less amenable to market-based solutions, and may require government intervention to address.

EXERCISES

1. Assume for a minute that you agree that climate change is both caused by humans and is a problem, what would you do about it. Presuming that governments have to involved in policy solutions, what groups in society would have to be convinced to go along? What would it take to convince people that these kinds of changes are in their own self-interest?
2. Contact your local water provider. Do they have estimates on how much water is being wasted within their service area? What plans do they have to deal with this?

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Glossary

access | The opportunity to meet with and communicate with policymakers.

ad watches | Media and academic efforts to analyze campaign ads and point out their inaccuracies.

adjudication | Applying rules and precedents to individual cases in an adversarial setting with a defense and prosecution.

administrative presidency | Political scientist Richard Nathan's term for the tactics presidents use with the bureaucracy to implement policy goals blocked by Congress.

affirmative action | Efforts made or enforced by government to increase percentages of racial and ethnic minorities, and women, in higher education and the workplace.

agenda setting | Conditions are seen as requiring government attention and action.

agenda-setting | The power of the media to tell the public what subjects and issues to think about.

Agents of socialization | Individuals and institutions, including family, school, peer group, and mass media, responsible for imparting political orientations through the socialization process.

Agents of socialization | Individuals and institutions, including family, school, peer group, and mass media, responsible for imparting political orientations through the socialization process.

amendments | Proposed changes to a bill.

amendments | Proposed changes to a bill.

American exceptionalism | Conviction that America's vast frontier offered boundless opportunities for individuals to achieve their goals.

American exceptionalism | Conviction that America's vast frontier offered boundless opportunities for individuals to achieve their goals.

Americans with Disabilities Act | Legislation passed by the US Congress guaranteeing that no individual will be excluded from the benefits of any program or activity that received public funding because of a handicap.

Americans with Disabilities Act | Legislation passed by the US Congress guaranteeing that no individual will be excluded from the benefits of any program or activity that received public funding because of a handicap.

amicus curiae brief | Brief raising additional arguments, filed by a third party to a lawsuit.

amicus curiae brief | Brief raising additional arguments, filed by a third party to a lawsuit.

Anti-Federalists | The name applied to those who opposed ratification of the Constitution.

Anti-Federalists | The name applied to those who opposed ratification of the Constitution.

apolitical | Above and beyond politics and partisanship.

apolitical | Above and beyond politics and partisanship.

appropriations bills | Bills that provide the funding for a department or agency program.

appropriations bills | Bills that provide the funding for a department or agency program.

Article I of the Constitution | The article that enumerates the powers of Congress.

Article I of the Constitution | The article that enumerates the powers of Congress.

attack dogs | Journalists whose stories about government and politics are highly negative and focus on blunders and disasters, scandals and corruption.

attack dogs | Journalists whose stories about government and politics are highly negative and focus on blunders and disasters, scandals and corruption.

attitudes | Persistent, general orientations toward people, groups, or institutions.

attitudes | Persistent, general orientations toward people, groups, or institutions.

battleground states | States that are highly contested where either candidate could win in a presidential election.

battleground states | States that are highly contested where either candidate could win in a presidential election.

beats | Institutions, organizations, and subjects that a reporter is assigned to cover regularly.

beats | Institutions, organizations, and subjects that a reporter is assigned to cover regularly.

Beliefs | Ideas that are considered to be true by a society.

Beliefs | Ideas that are considered to be true by a society.

benevolent leader | A concept in which young children consider the president to be a personal friend who will do good things for the nation.

benevolent leader | A concept in which young children consider the president to be a personal friend who will do good things for the nation.

Bennington College | Longitudinal study of women who attended Bennington College during the Great Depression of the 1930s and were politically socialized by their teachers and student colleagues.

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bicameral legislature | Congress consists of two bodies: (1) the House of Representatives whose membership is based on proportional representation and (2) the Senate, whose membership is based on equal representation.

bicameral legislature | Congress consists of two bodies: (1) the House of Representatives whose membership is based on proportional representation and (2) the Senate, whose membership is based on equal representation.

bicameralism | The practice of having two separate chambers within the legislature; in the Constitution, this means that Congress is made up of a House of Representatives and a Senate.

bicameralism | The practice of having two separate chambers within the legislature; in the Constitution, this means that Congress is made up of a House of Representatives and a Senate.

Bill of Rights | Constitutional sections guaranteeing specific liberties from infringement by the new government; more precisely, the first ten amendments to the Constitution, passed by Congress in 1789 and ratified by 1791 to fulfill the Federalists' campaign promise during the state conventions ratifying the Constitution.

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Bill of Rights | The first ten amendments to the Constitution, adopted in 1789 and ratified in 1791.

Bill of Rights | The first ten amendments to the Constitution, adopted in 1789 and ratified in 1791.

Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA) | Also known as McCain-Feingold, this federal law placed limitations on soft-money contributions by political committees and prohibited corporations and labor unions from advocating for or against a candidate via broadcast, cable or satellite prior to presidential primaries and the general election.

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Blogs | Online diaries whose authors post information, including ideas and opinions.

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bowl alone | The idea, put forward by political scientist Robert Putnam, that television is making Americans a nation of watchers rather than doers.

bowl alone | The idea, put forward by political scientist Robert Putnam, that television is making Americans a nation of watchers rather than doers.

budget | A statement of the president's policy goals and priorities for the next fiscal year. It consists of receipts and expenditures.

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bureaucracy | An organization marked by hierarchical division of labor, internal specialization, and adherence to fixed rules.

bureaucracy | An organization marked by hierarchical division of labor, internal specialization, and adherence to fixed rules.

C-SPAN | The cable network that provides gavel-to-gavel coverage of congressional floor proceedings, committee hearings, and special events.

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cabinet | The group of advisors to presidents made up of the secretaries of departments (e.g., secretary of defense) and the heads of agencies given cabinet-level status by the president.

cabinet | The group of advisors to presidents made up of the secretaries of departments (e.g., secretary of defense) and the heads of agencies given cabinet-level status by the president.

cabinet departments | The major administrative units responsible for specified broad areas of government operations, headed by a cabinet secretary appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate.

cabinet departments | The major administrative units responsible for specified broad areas of government operations, headed by a cabinet secretary appointed by the president and confirmed by the Senate.

Candidate image | Those aspects of a candidate's background, experience, and personal qualities that are presented to the public in order to influence people's voting decisions.

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Candidate-centered minor parties | A minor party formed around a candidate who is able to rally support based on her own message.

Candidate-centered minor parties | A minor party formed around a candidate who is able to rally support based on her own message.

candidate-centered politics | Rather than relying heavily on party support, candidates form their own campaign organizations when running for office.

candidate-centered politics | Rather than relying heavily on party support, candidates form their own campaign organizations when running for office.

capitalism | An economic system that emphasizes a free market, individual entrepreneurship, and limited government intervention in the economy and produces economic inequality.

capitalism | An economic system that emphasizes a free market, individual entrepreneurship, and limited government intervention in the economy and produces economic inequality.

Capitalist economic values | Values that emphasize the need for a free-enterprise system, open business competition, private ownership of property, and limited government intervention in business affairs.

Capitalist economic values | Values that emphasize the need for a free-enterprise system, open business competition, private ownership of property, and limited government intervention in business affairs.

carpetbagger | A politician who runs for office from an area where he or she has lived for only a short time and has few community ties; stems from a derogatory term coined after the Civil War referring to Northerners who went South to profit from the Reconstruction, carrying "carpet bags" for luggage.

carpetbagger | A politician who runs for office from an area where he or she has lived for only a short time and has few community ties; stems from a derogatory term coined after the Civil War referring to Northerners who went South to profit from the Reconstruction, carrying "carpet bags" for luggage.

categorical grants | Grants through which states and localities spend national funds on programs to meet the precise purposes Congress specified.

categorical grants | Grants through which states and localities spend national funds on programs to meet the precise purposes Congress specified.

caucuses | Meetings held by party members to select candidates who will run for office.

caucuses | Meetings held by party members to select candidates who will run for office.

Christian Right | A loose coalition of evangelical Protestants who share common ideological beliefs, such as support for traditional marriage and a pro-life position on abortion.

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civic duty | The responsibility of a citizen to take part in community life.

civic duty | The responsibility of a citizen to take part in community life.

civil disobedience | Deliberate, nonviolent violation of laws that people consider to be unjust, committed in order to draw attention to a cause.

civil disobedience | Deliberate, nonviolent violation of laws that people consider to be unjust, committed in order to draw attention to a cause.

Civil liberties | The rights and freedoms of individuals that government may not infringe on, mostly listed in the Bill of Rights.

Civil Rights Act of 1964 | Legislation passed by the US Congress with the goal of guaranteeing African Americans equal rights under the law.

Civil Rights Act of 1964 | Legislation passed by the US Congress with the goal of guaranteeing African Americans equal rights under the law.

civil rights movement | A social movement begun in the 1950s to combat discrimination against African Americans.

civil rights movement | A social movement begun in the 1950s to combat discrimination against African Americans.

civil service | Government employment that would be awarded on the basis of qualifications rather than party loyalty.

civil service | Government employment that would be awarded on the basis of qualifications rather than party loyalty.

civil service | The administrative civilian workforce employed by the federal government.

civil service | The administrative civilian workforce employed by the federal government.

civil unions | Alternative to same-sex marriage, whereby a state does not allow same-sex couples to legally marry but allows them to apply for legal recognition of their relationship; this gives them the rights and privileges of marriage in that state.

civil unions | Alternative to same-sex marriage, whereby a state does not allow same-sex couples to legally marry but allows them to apply for legal recognition of their relationship; this gives them the rights and privileges of marriage in that state.

Civil War Amendments | The three amendments added to the Constitution (Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth) after the Civil War to establish the legal status and rights of the newly freed slaves.

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cloture | A motion to limit consideration of a bill and close debate.

cloture | A motion to limit consideration of a bill and close debate.

CNN Effect | Media depictions of events abroad that encourage or compel US policymakers to intervene by sending aid or even troops.

CNN Effect | Media depictions of events abroad that encourage or compel US policymakers to intervene by sending aid or even troops.

Cold War | The rivalry and consequent arms race between the United States and its allies and the Soviet Union and its allies, which lasted from the end of World War II until the late 1980s.

Cold War | The rivalry and consequent arms race between the United States and its allies and the Soviet Union and its allies, which lasted from the end of World War II until the late 1980s.

collective action | Cooperative activities by groups in pursuit of a common goal.

collective action | Cooperative activities by groups in pursuit of a common goal.

commerce clause | The section in the Constitution that gives Congress the power to "regulate Commerce with foreign nations, and among the several States and with the Indian tribes."

commerce clause | The section in the Constitution that gives Congress the power to "regulate Commerce with foreign nations, and among the several States and with the Indian tribes."

Committee of the Whole | The entire House when it meets to consider a bill.

Committee of the Whole | The entire House when it meets to consider a bill.

Communication | The process of transmitting or exchanging information. It can involve asserting, arguing, debating, deliberating, contacting, pressuring, appealing to, cajoling, and addressing.

Communication | The process of transmitting or exchanging information. It can involve asserting, arguing, debating, deliberating, contacting, pressuring, appealing to, cajoling, and addressing.

competitive federalism | An approach to federalism that stresses the conflict and compromise between national, state, and local governments.

competitive federalism | An approach to federalism that stresses the conflict and compromise between national, state, and local governments.

concurrent powers | Powers that the Constitution specifies that either national or state governments may exercise.

concurrent powers | Powers that the Constitution specifies that either national or state governments may exercise.

confederation | A political system in which a government acts as a unit superior to the states but is dependent on their consent.

confederation | A political system in which a government acts as a unit superior to the states but is dependent on their consent.

conference committee | A committee that works out differences between House and Senate versions of a bill.

conference committee | A committee that works out differences between House and Senate versions of a bill.

Congressional Budget Office | Provides expert budgetary advice to Congress.

Congressional Budget Office | Provides expert budgetary advice to Congress.

congressional oversight | The process by which Congress monitors the activities of government agencies.

congressional oversight | The process by which Congress monitors the activities of government agencies.

Connecticut Compromise (also known as the Great Compromise) | The solution worked out by delegates from Connecticut to create a bicameral legislature, with one chamber (the Senate) representing states, and the other (the House of Representatives) representing the people in districts of equal population size.

Connecticut Compromise (also known as the Great Compromise) | The solution worked out by delegates from Connecticut to create a bicameral legislature, with one chamber (the Senate) representing states, and the other (the House of Representatives) representing the people in districts of equal population size.

constituent service | Members of Congress help people in their home districts deal with problems and negotiate government bureaucracy.

constituent service | Members of Congress help people in their home districts deal with problems and negotiate government bureaucracy.

constitution | A system of fundamental laws and principles that prescribe the structure and functions of the government.

constitution | A system of fundamental laws and principles that prescribe the structure and functions of the government.

Constitutional Convention | The gathering of delegates from twelve of the thirteen states who met in Philadelphia from June to September of 1787; originally authorized by the Continental Congress to consider amendments to the Articles of Confederation, they ultimately drafted the Constitution that replaced it.

Constitutional Convention | The gathering of delegates from twelve of the thirteen states who met in Philadelphia from June to September of 1787; originally authorized by the Continental Congress to consider amendments to the Articles of Confederation, they ultimately drafted the Constitution that replaced it.

containment | The US policy of vigilance and alliances to prevent the spread of Communism.

containment | The US policy of vigilance and alliances to prevent the spread of Communism.

convenience sample | Respondents to unscientific polls who are self-selected.

convenience sample | Respondents to unscientific polls who are self-selected.

convention delegates | Party regulars who attend the national nominating conventions and choose the presidential nominee.

convention delegates | Party regulars who attend the national nominating conventions and choose the presidential nominee.

critical elections | An election where a minority party becomes the majority party following electoral victory and remains dominant for an extended period of time.

critical elections | An election where a minority party becomes the majority party following electoral victory and remains dominant for an extended period of time.

cross endorsement | The minor party practice of backing candidates who appear on a ballot under more than one party label.

cross endorsement | The minor party practice of backing candidates who appear on a ballot under more than one party label.

Daisy Ad | A famous ad, produced by Democratic presidential candidate Lyndon Johnson' s campaign against Republican Barry Goldwater in 1964, that appealed to voters' fear of a nuclear attack.

Daisy Ad | A famous ad, produced by Democratic presidential candidate Lyndon Johnson' s campaign against Republican Barry Goldwater in 1964, that appealed to voters' fear of a nuclear attack.

de facto segregation | Separation of the races that occurs by social practice.

de facto segregation | Separation of the races that occurs by social practice.

dealignment | A decline in party strength that occurs when party loyalty decreases and voters base their decisions on short-term, election-specific factors.

dealignment | A decline in party strength that occurs when party loyalty decreases and voters base their decisions on short-term, election-specific factors.

Debates | Formal meetings between candidates running for office, typically moderated by an impartial party, that allow candidates discuss issues and policy positions.

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Declaration of Independence | The document drafted by Thomas Jefferson and adopted by the Continental Congress in revised form in 1776, which declared the independence of the thirteen colonies from Britain.

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delegated powers | Presidential prerogatives accorded by legislation, where Congress gives authority under the powers given to it by the Constitution.

delegated powers | Presidential prerogatives accorded by legislation, where Congress gives authority under the powers given to it by the Constitution.

Deliberative polling | A technique that brings people together to discuss issues with experts and other citizens in order to arrive at more informed opinions.

Deliberative polling | A technique that brings people together to discuss issues with experts and other citizens in order to arrive at more informed opinions.

deterrence | The assumption that US possession of nuclear weapons would hold the Soviet Union in check by threatening it with destruction should it engage in nuclear aggression.

deterrence | The assumption that US possession of nuclear weapons would hold the Soviet Union in check by threatening it with destruction should it engage in nuclear aggression.

Digital polls | Polls administered through Internet platforms and smartphones that run the gamut from sophisticated surveys to quick polls.

Digital polls | Polls administered through Internet platforms and smartphones that run the gamut from sophisticated surveys to quick polls.

disadvantaged groups | Those who historically have had little or no economic, social, and political power and who have been singled out for discriminatory treatment in politics and society.

discretionary spending | Government funds expended for education, law enforcement, energy programs, and the like.

discretionary spending | Government funds expended for education, law enforcement, energy programs, and the like.

dissenting opinion | Decision by one or more Supreme Court justice that disagrees with the majority decision.

dissenting opinion | Decision by one or more Supreme Court justice that disagrees with the majority decision.

divided government | A situation, increasingly common in recent years, where the presidency and at least one chamber of Congress are controlled by different parties.

divided government | A situation, increasingly common in recent years, where the presidency and at least one chamber of Congress are controlled by different parties.

Divided government | A situation in which the chief executive is of a different political party from the majority in the legislature.

Divided government | A situation in which the chief executive is of a different political party from the majority in the legislature.

double jeopardy | The practice of putting someone on trial a second time for a crime after their acquittal; prohibited by the Fifth Amendment.

double jeopardy | The practice of putting someone on trial a second time for a crime after their acquittal; prohibited by the Fifth Amendment.

due process clause | Section of the Fifth Amendment that prohibits the federal government from depriving individuals of "life, liberty or property without due process of law."

due process clause | Section of the Fifth Amendment that prohibits the federal government from depriving individuals of "life, liberty or property without due process of law."

détente | US policy of cooperating with the Soviet Union within the context of continuing competition and conflict.

détente | US policy of cooperating with the Soviet Union within the context of continuing competition and conflict.

echo chamber | The idea that people pay attention to media that conforms to their ideological views to the exclusion of media that offer alternative perspectives.

echo chamber | The idea that people pay attention to media that conforms to their ideological views to the exclusion of media that offer alternative perspectives.

Egalitarianism | Doctrine emphasizing the natural equality of people in society.

Egalitarianism | Doctrine emphasizing the natural equality of people in society.

elastic clause | The constitutional provision that Congress shall make all laws that are "necessary and proper" for executing their powers, which has been used to expand its authority; also known as the "necessary and proper" clause.

elastic clause | The constitutional provision that Congress shall make all laws that are "necessary and proper" for executing their powers, which has been used to expand its authority; also known as the "necessary and proper" clause.

Electoral College | The body of electors chosen by states to select the president and vice president of the United States.

Electoral College | The body of electors chosen by states to select the president and vice president of the United States.

Electoral College | The 538 electors who choose the president and vice president by majority vote.

Electoral College | The 538 electors who choose the president and vice president by majority vote.

embedded | The Defense Department's innovation of placing reporters with military units during the Iraq War.

embedded | The Defense Department's innovation of placing reporters with military units during the Iraq War.

eminent domain | Government's power to take private land for public use.

eminent domain | Government's power to take private land for public use.

enduring minor party | A minor party that has existed for a long time and regularly runs candidates for office.

enduring minor party | A minor party that has existed for a long time and regularly runs candidates for office.

equal protection clause | The section of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution that requires states to ensure "equal protection of the laws" to all individuals.

equal protection clause | The section of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution that requires states to ensure "equal protection of the laws" to all individuals.

Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) | Failed attempt to amend the Constitution to mandate equal treatment of women and men.

Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) | Failed attempt to amend the Constitution to mandate equal treatment of women and men.

equality of opportunity | The right of each individual to the same chance to get ahead in society.

equality of opportunity | The right of each individual to the same chance to get ahead in society.

establishment clause | Section of the First Amendment that prohibits the government from recognizing an official religion.

establishment clause | Section of the First Amendment that prohibits the government from recognizing an official religion.

ex post facto laws | Laws prohibited by the Constitution that retroactively make a legal act a crime.

ex post facto laws | Laws prohibited by the Constitution that retroactively make a legal act a crime.

exclusionary rule | Judicial rule applied to federal and state courts that prohibits the use of evidence in trial when it is not legally obtained.

exclusionary rule | Judicial rule applied to federal and state courts that prohibits the use of evidence in trial when it is not legally obtained.

exclusive powers | Powers that the Constitution grants to the national or state governments and prevents the other level from exercising.

exclusive powers | Powers that the Constitution grants to the national or state governments and prevents the other level from exercising.

executive agreements | Agreements that the president enters into with other states; unlike treaties, they do not require the consent of the Senate before becoming law.

executive agreements | Agreements that the president enters into with other states; unlike treaties, they do not require the consent of the Senate before becoming law.

executive communication | A message from the president, a Cabinet member, or an agency head to the Speaker of the House or president of the Senate recommending that Congress address a policy or budgetary issue.

executive communication | A message from the president, a Cabinet member, or an agency head to the Speaker of the House or president of the Senate recommending that Congress address a policy or budgetary issue.

Executive Office of the President (EOP) | An umbrella organization started in 1939 by Franklin D. Roosevelt for various presidential staff agencies, many established by law.

Executive Office of the President (EOP) | An umbrella organization started in 1939 by Franklin D. Roosevelt for various presidential staff agencies, many established by law.

executive orders | Directives to administrators in the executive branch on how to implement legislation already enacted; courts treat them as having the status of law, but they may be superseded by congressional legislation.

executive orders | Directives to administrators in the executive branch on how to implement legislation already enacted; courts treat them as having the status of law, but they may be superseded by congressional legislation.

Exit polls | Face-to-face interviews with voters taken as they leave the voting booth to determine their candidate preference in the election and their positions on issues.

Exit polls | Face-to-face interviews with voters taken as they leave the voting booth to determine their candidate preference in the election and their positions on issues.

factions | James Madison's term for groups that pursue their self-interest or individual preferences above the public good.

factions | James Madison's term for groups that pursue their self-interest or individual preferences above the public good.

federal bureaucracy | That part of the executive branch outside the presidency that carries out laws and regulations.

Federal Elections Commission (FEC) | The institution that oversees campaign finance, including campaign contributions and candidate expenditures.

Federal Elections Commission (FEC) | The institution that oversees campaign finance, including campaign contributions and candidate expenditures.

Federal Register | The government publication that prints all rules and decisions made by agencies.

Federal Register | The government publication that prints all rules and decisions made by agencies.

Federal Reserve Board (the Fed) | The body that supervises the US banking system and executes monetary policy.

Federal Reserve Board (the Fed) | The body that supervises the US banking system and executes monetary policy.

Federalism | The allocation of powers and responsibilities among national, state, and local governments and the intergovernmental relations between them.

Federalist No. 10 | James Madison's essay in the *Federalist Papers* that deals with the need to guard against the danger of factions whose interests might be at odds with those of the wider community.

Federalist No. 10 | James Madison's essay in the *Federalist Papers* that deals with the need to guard against the danger of factions whose interests might be at odds with those of the wider community.

Federalist papers | A series of essays written by Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, published in New York newspapers during the debate over the ratification of the Constitution; they are generally understood to offer the fullest logic behind the creation of the Constitution.

Federalist papers | A series of essays written by Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, published in New York newspapers during the debate over the ratification of the Constitution; they are generally understood to offer the fullest logic behind the creation of the Constitution.

feeding frenzy | Often excessive coverage by the media of every aspect of a story.

feeding frenzy | Often excessive coverage by the media of every aspect of a story.

fighting words | Speech, not protected by the First Amendment, that provokes people to immediate attack or acts of violence.

fighting words | Speech, not protected by the First Amendment, that provokes people to immediate attack or acts of violence.

Fiscal policy | Government economic policy involving taxation and spending.

Fiscal policy | Government economic policy involving taxation and spending.

Focus groups | Facilitators convene a small group of subjects to engage in a structured discussion about a topic.

Focus groups | Facilitators convene a small group of subjects to engage in a structured discussion about a topic.

folklore | Legends and stories shared by a nation.

folklore | Legends and stories shared by a nation.

framing | The central idea or theme with which media personnel organize a story and thus give it a point of view.

framing | The central idea or theme with which media personnel organize a story and thus give it a point of view.

franking privilege | The ability of Congress members to post mail without cost.

franking privilege | The ability of Congress members to post mail without cost.

free exercise clause | Section of the First Amendment that prohibits the government from barring individuals from freely practicing religion.

free exercise clause | Section of the First Amendment that prohibits the government from barring individuals from freely practicing religion.

front-load primaries | Primaries that states hold early in the process in order to increase their influence over who secures the presidential nomination.

front-load primaries | Primaries that states hold early in the process in order to increase their influence over who secures the presidential nomination.

gaggle | The White House press secretary's 9:30 a.m. meeting with reporters, neither formal nor public; an important "dry run" for the on-the-record afternoon briefing.

gaggle | The White House press secretary's 9:30 a.m. meeting with reporters, neither formal nor public; an important "dry run" for the on-the-record afternoon briefing.

gender gap | The difference that exists between men's and women's political participation.

gender gap | The difference that exists between men's and women's political participation.

general election | An election, typically held after the political parties have chosen their nominees through caucuses or primaries, that decides who will hold an office, such as a congressional representative or president.

general election | An election, typically held after the political parties have chosen their nominees through caucuses or primaries, that decides who will hold an office, such as a congressional representative or president.

gerrymander | To draw congressional districts in such as way as to give one political party the advantage in electing its candidates.

gerrymander | To draw congressional districts in such as way as to give one political party the advantage in electing its candidates.

going public | Presidents give a major address to promote public approval of their decisions, advance their policy objectives, or to defend themselves against accusations.

going public | Presidents give a major address to promote public approval of their decisions, advance their policy objectives, or to defend themselves against accusations.

government corporations | Agencies that provide services for which they charge fees, usually under a government-granted monopoly, with the hope they will be fiscally self-sustaining.

government corporations | Agencies that provide services for which they charge fees, usually under a government-granted monopoly, with the hope they will be fiscally self-sustaining.

Governments | The institutions, offices, and individuals whose decisions are legitimate and thus enforceable on society.

grants-in-aid | The national government's provision of funds to states or localities to administer particular programs.

grants-in-aid | The national government's provision of funds to states or localities to administer particular programs.

grassroots lobbying | A strategy pursued by interest groups to influence elected officials by having their constituents contact them.

grassroots lobbying | A strategy pursued by interest groups to influence elected officials by having their constituents contact them.

Great Depression | The period of high unemployment, severe decreases in business activity, and falling prices in the United States that started in 1929 and ended with the onset of World War II.

Great Depression | The period of high unemployment, severe decreases in business activity, and falling prices in the United States that started in 1929 and ended with the onset of World War II.

hate crime | An attack on a minority because of his or her race or sexual orientation, which sometimes results in death.

hate crime | An attack on a minority because of his or her race or sexual orientation, which sometimes results in death.

Heroes | People who, in theory, embody the best of what a country has to offer and thereby define a nation's political culture.

Heroes | People who, in theory, embody the best of what a country has to offer and thereby define a nation's political culture.

Horse race coverage | News-media election coverage that emphasizes who is winning and losing the race.

Horse race coverage | News-media election coverage that emphasizes who is winning and losing the race.

House majority leader | Second in the majority party hierarchy, the majority leader works with the Speaker of the House to set the legislative agenda, coordinate committee activity, and schedule legislation for consideration.

House majority leader | Second in the majority party hierarchy, the majority leader works with the Speaker of the House to set the legislative agenda, coordinate committee activity, and schedule legislation for consideration.

House minority leader | The head of the party with the fewest members in the House who conveys the minority party's positions on issues and courts the press.

House minority leader | The head of the party with the fewest members in the House who conveys the minority party's positions on issues and courts the press.

Impeachment | Congress's power to remove executive officers and judges from office for "treason, bribery and high crimes and misdemeanors."

Impeachment | Congress's power to remove executive officers and judges from office for "treason, bribery and high crimes and misdemeanors."

implementation | The process of applying general policies to specific cases in order to put legislation or rules into effect.

implementation | The process of applying general policies to specific cases in order to put legislation or rules into effect.

implied powers | Unlisted powers to the national government that are logical extensions from powers expressly enumerated in the Constitution.

implied powers | Unlisted powers to the national government that are logical extensions from powers expressly enumerated in the Constitution.

impressionable years | Period from late adolescence to early adulthood when people begin to think more seriously about politics and can take part in meaningful ways, such as by voting.

impressionable years | Period from late adolescence to early adulthood when people begin to think more seriously about politics and can take part in meaningful ways, such as by voting.

incumbency advantage | The advantage generally enjoyed by sitting members of the House of Representatives in getting reelected to office due to better organized campaigns, greater name recognition, more funding, and support from interest groups.

incumbency advantage | The advantage generally enjoyed by sitting members of the House of Representatives in getting reelected to office due to better organized campaigns, greater name recognition, more funding, and support from interest groups.

independent executive agencies | Agencies similar to cabinet departments but usually with smaller jurisdictions.

independent executive agencies | Agencies similar to cabinet departments but usually with smaller jurisdictions.

individualism | Principle emphasizing the centrality and dignity of the individual and her or his capacity for free action.

individualism | Principle emphasizing the centrality and dignity of the individual and her or his capacity for free action.

indoctrination | Process of instructing people to conform to particular doctrines, principles, and ideologies.

indoctrination | Process of instructing people to conform to particular doctrines, principles, and ideologies.

inflation | A rise in prices.

inflation | A rise in prices.

information | Facts, knowledge, and views that people communicate about subjects and events. It encompasses news, opinion and commentary, and the contents of entertainment.

information | Facts, knowledge, and views that people communicate about subjects and events. It encompasses news, opinion and commentary, and the contents of entertainment.

inherent powers | Presidential prerogatives claimed by presidents as implied by either the office of the president itself or the provisions of the Constitution.

inherent powers | Presidential prerogatives claimed by presidents as implied by either the office of the president itself or the provisions of the Constitution.

initiative | A process whereby voters propose and pass laws to amend the state constitution or place a proposal on an election ballot.

initiative | A process whereby voters propose and pass laws to amend the state constitution or place a proposal on an election ballot.

insider strategies | Tactics used by members to work behind the scenes in Congress to forge coalitions while avoiding press scrutiny.

insider strategies | Tactics used by members to work behind the scenes in Congress to forge coalitions while avoiding press scrutiny.

Interest groups | Organizations that, on behalf of an interest or ideal, try to influence politics and public policies.

Interest groups | Organizations that, on behalf of an interest or ideal, try to influence politics and public policies.

intermediary institutions | Institutions that have, largely informally, arisen to bridge the gap between the government and the people or the gaps among the three branches.

intermediary institutions | Institutions that have, largely informally, arisen to bridge the gap between the government and the people or the gaps among the three branches.

Internationalism | Belief that US national interests are best served by involvement with foreign countries.

Internationalism | Belief that US national interests are best served by involvement with foreign countries.

investigative reporting | Intensive research by journalists usually into subjects that those involved don't want exposed.

investigative reporting | Intensive research by journalists usually into subjects that those involved don't want exposed.

iron triangles | Congressional committees or subcommittees, bureaucratic agencies, and interest groups that together dominate policymaking in a policy area oftentimes with little visibility.

iron triangles | Congressional committees or subcommittees, bureaucratic agencies, and interest groups that together dominate policymaking in a policy area oftentimes with little visibility.

Isolationism | Belief that US national interests are best served by avoiding involvement with foreign countries.

Isolationism | Belief that US national interests are best served by avoiding involvement with foreign countries.

issue advocacy | Advertising campaigns that focus on legislative policies.

issue advocacy | Advertising campaigns that focus on legislative policies.

issue publics | People who focus on particular public policy debates and ignore other issues.

issue publics | People who focus on particular public policy debates and ignore other issues.

Jefferson's Manual | The rule book developed by Vice President Thomas Jefferson in 1799 to help carry out his responsibilities as president of the Senate that also was adopted by the House.

Jefferson's Manual | The rule book developed by Vice President Thomas Jefferson in 1799 to help carry out his responsibilities as president of the Senate that also was adopted by the House.

judicial activism | Judicial philosophy whereby judges are willing to substitute their policy views for the policy actions or inaction of the other branches of government.

judicial activism | Judicial philosophy whereby judges are willing to substitute their policy views for the policy actions or inaction of the other branches of government.

judicial restraint | Judicial philosophy whereby judges decide cases on the narrowest grounds possible by, for example, deferring to the legislature's decisions.

judicial restraint | Judicial philosophy whereby judges decide cases on the narrowest grounds possible by, for example, deferring to the legislature's decisions.

judicial review | The power of the Supreme Court to render acts of Congress or decisions of the executive null and void on the basis that they violate the Constitution.

judicial review | The power of the Supreme Court to render acts of Congress or decisions of the executive null and void on the basis that they violate the Constitution.

judicial review | The authority of the federal courts, especially the Supreme Court, to decide whether a state or federal law violates the US Constitution.

judicial review | The authority of the federal courts, especially the Supreme Court, to decide whether a state or federal law violates the US Constitution.

Kennedy-Nixon debate | The first-ever televised presidential debate between Vice President Richard Nixon and Senator John F. Kennedy in 1960.

Kennedy-Nixon debate | The first-ever televised presidential debate between Vice President Richard Nixon and Senator John F. Kennedy in 1960.

lap dogs | Journalists when the government's perspective (overwhelmingly) dominates their news stories.

lap dogs | Journalists when the government's perspective (overwhelmingly) dominates their news stories.

latent interests | Shared goals that an interest group can organize people to pursue.

latent interests | Shared goals that an interest group can organize people to pursue.

law clerks | Assistants to Supreme Court justices, selected to assist them in researching cases, deciding which ones to accept, and drafting opinions.

law clerks | Assistants to Supreme Court justices, selected to assist them in researching cases, deciding which ones to accept, and drafting opinions.

Legislative campaign committees | Party committees that finance and manage congressional elections.

Legislative campaign committees | Party committees that finance and manage congressional elections.

legislative liaison | Now called the Office of Legislative Affairs, an office consisting of presidential staffers whose job is to interact with and lobby members of Congress.

legislative liaison | Now called the Office of Legislative Affairs, an office consisting of presidential staffers whose job is to interact with and lobby members of Congress.

Legislative parties | The internal party organizations within each house of Congress.

Legislative parties | The internal party organizations within each house of Congress.

legitimacy | People's acceptance of a political system and belief that the government's decisions should (usually) be obeyed.

libel | Defamatory publication unprotected by the First Amendment; to win a libel suit, public figures must demonstrate "actual malice" revealed by a "reckless disregard for the truth."

libel | Defamatory publication unprotected by the First Amendment; to win a libel suit, public figures must demonstrate "actual malice" revealed by a "reckless disregard for the truth."

line of the day | The issue or stance designated by the White House and sent to the remainder of the executive branch and to the media that day.

line of the day | The issue or stance designated by the White House and sent to the remainder of the executive branch and to the media that day.

line-item veto | The power, available to most state governors but not to the president, to reject parts of a bill.

line-item veto | The power, available to most state governors but not to the president, to reject parts of a bill.

Live polls | Polls that record people's opinions about an event as it is unfolding; the results are depicted simultaneously with video of the event.

Live polls | Polls that record people's opinions about an event as it is unfolding; the results are depicted simultaneously with video of the event.

lobbying | Activities that lobbyists perform, such as informing, persuading, and pressuring in order to influence policymakers to support a group's interests.

lobbying | Activities that lobbyists perform, such as informing, persuading, and pressuring in order to influence policymakers to support a group's interests.

loose constructionism | Judicial philosophy embodying the view that the Constitution requires interpretation to respond to changing public needs.

loose constructionism | Judicial philosophy embodying the view that the Constitution requires interpretation to respond to changing public needs.

mandates | Directives from the national government to state and local governments, either as orders or as conditions on the use of national funds.

mandates | Directives from the national government to state and local governments, either as orders or as conditions on the use of national funds.

mark-up | Process of revising a bill.

mark-up | Process of revising a bill.

mashup | A digital presentation that combines material from a variety of sources, such as voter-produced campaign videos that combine existing footage of candidates with original content.

mashup | A digital presentation that combines material from a variety of sources, such as voter-produced campaign videos that combine existing footage of candidates with original content.

Mass media | Well-established communication formats, such as newspapers and magazines, network television and radio stations, designed to reach large audiences.

Mass media | Well-established communication formats, such as newspapers and magazines, network television and radio stations, designed to reach large audiences.

mass membership organizations | Political parties that require people to pay dues to belong, which is not the case for American parties.

mass membership organizations | Political parties that require people to pay dues to belong, which is not the case for American parties.

material incentives | When people join a group for the goods and services it provides.

material incentives | When people join a group for the goods and services it provides.

Medicaid | Program that finances medical and long-term care for low-income and disabled adults and children.

Medicaid | Program that finances medical and long-term care for low-income and disabled adults and children.

Medicare | Federal program of medical benefits to those over sixty-five.

Medicare | Federal program of medical benefits to those over sixty-five.

meetups and tweetups | Meetings of voters during campaigns that are organized through social media.

meetups and tweetups | Meetings of voters during campaigns that are organized through social media.

melting pot | Metaphor used to describe how immigrants from many different backgrounds come together in the United States and that assumes that the distinct habits, customs, and traditions of particular groups disappear as their members assimilate into the larger culture.

melting pot | Metaphor used to describe how immigrants from many different backgrounds come together in the United States and that assumes that the distinct habits, customs, and traditions of particular groups disappear as their members assimilate into the larger culture.

merit system | The practice of classifying positions in the civil service according to technical standards and of naming civil servants to lifetime appointments based on tests or advanced training.

merit system | The practice of classifying positions in the civil service according to technical standards and of naming civil servants to lifetime appointments based on tests or advanced training.

microtarget | To use a marketing strategy in which potential political activists are identified and solicited on the basis of their demographic characteristics and consumer behavior.

microtarget | To use a marketing strategy in which potential political activists are identified and solicited on the basis of their demographic characteristics and consumer behavior.

microtargeting | Use of computers and mathematical models to identify people's vote preferences based on a variety of factors ranging from their partisan preferences to their purchasing history.

microtargeting | Use of computers and mathematical models to identify people's vote preferences based on a variety of factors ranging from their partisan preferences to their purchasing history.

Midterm elections | Elections held in nonpresidential election years that often are viewed as a referendum on the performance of the sitting president or the party controlling the House or Senate.

Midterm elections | Elections held in nonpresidential election years that often are viewed as a referendum on the performance of the sitting president or the party controlling the House or Senate.

minor party | Also known as a third party, it is an organization that is not affiliated with the Democrats or Republicans, contests in a limited number of elections, and does not receive large pluralities of votes.

minor party | Also known as a third party, it is an organization that is not affiliated with the Democrats or Republicans, contests in a limited number of elections, and does not receive large pluralities of votes.

minority party | The party in Congress holding a minority of the seats in the House or Senate; the minority party forms an organized opposition to the majority party.

minority party | The party in Congress holding a minority of the seats in the House or Senate; the minority party forms an organized opposition to the majority party.

Miranda rights | List of rights that the police must tell suspects if their confessions are to be admitted as evidence in court.

Miranda rights | List of rights that the police must tell suspects if their confessions are to be admitted as evidence in court.

mobilize | To encourage, even inspire, individuals to engage in political behavior and action.

mobilize | To encourage, even inspire, individuals to engage in political behavior and action.

muckraking journalists | Reporters in the late 1800s to early 1900s who employed an aggressive and dramatic style to expose corruption through newspaper exposés.

muckraking journalists | Reporters in the late 1800s to early 1900s who employed an aggressive and dramatic style to expose corruption through newspaper exposés.

Multiculturalism | An appreciation of the unique cultural heritage of racial and ethnic groups in the United States, some of whom seek to preserve their native languages and lifestyles.

Multiculturalism | An appreciation of the unique cultural heritage of racial and ethnic groups in the United States, some of whom seek to preserve their native languages and lifestyles.

mutual assured destruction | Deterrence by being able to absorb a nuclear attack and have enough nuclear weapons left over to inflict an unacceptable level of damage on the enemy.

mutual assured destruction | Deterrence by being able to absorb a nuclear attack and have enough nuclear weapons left over to inflict an unacceptable level of damage on the enemy.

national nominating conventions | Meetings held by political parties to formalize the selection of their candidates for president and vice president and to establish a party platform

national nominating conventions | Meetings held by political parties to formalize the selection of their candidates for president and vice president and to establish a party platform

National party committees | The central authority in the organizational hierarchy of American political parties.

National party committees | The central authority in the organizational hierarchy of American political parties.

national party nominating convention | A convention held by political parties to select their presidential candidate and develop the party's platform.

national party nominating convention | A convention held by political parties to select their presidential candidate and develop the party's platform.

national security advisor | Leading advisor to the president on national security and foreign policy.

national security advisor | Leading advisor to the president on national security and foreign policy.

National Voter Registration Act | A law that allows citizens to register to vote at motor vehicle and social services offices; also known as the "motor voter" law.

National Voter Registration Act | A law that allows citizens to register to vote at motor vehicle and social services offices; also known as the "motor voter" law.

New Deal | The program instituted by President Franklin Roosevelt to lead the country out of the Great Depression; it included the creation of jobs and executive agencies to oversee the economic recovery.

New Deal | The program instituted by President Franklin Roosevelt to lead the country out of the Great Depression; it included the creation of jobs and executive agencies to oversee the economic recovery.

New England town meeting | A form of direct democratic participation as characterized by meetings of entire communities in New England during the colonial period.

New Jersey Plan | The alternative to the Virginia Plan, offered by William Paterson of New Jersey, with reduced national powers and a single legislative body representing the states.

New Jersey Plan | The alternative to the Virginia Plan, offered by William Paterson of New Jersey, with reduced national powers and a single legislative body representing the states.

New media | Forms of electronic communication made possible by computer and digital technologies.

New media | Forms of electronic communication made possible by computer and digital technologies.

News | Reports by journalists of selected events commonly involving violence, conflict, disasters, and scandals.

News | Reports by journalists of selected events commonly involving violence, conflict, disasters, and scandals.

news icon | Through extensive media coverage, something or someone symbolizes a situation that then is put on the policy agenda.

news icon | Through extensive media coverage, something or someone symbolizes a situation that then is put on the policy agenda.

Nineteenth Amendment | Amendment to the Constitution added in 1920 that grants and protects women's right to vote.

Nineteenth Amendment | Amendment to the Constitution added in 1920 that grants and protects women's right to vote.

No Child Left Behind Act | President George W. Bush's policy, enacted into law, to improve education.

No Child Left Behind Act | President George W. Bush's policy, enacted into law, to improve education.

objectivity | In news reporting, impartiality and fairness, and the reporting of facts without opinion and including different sides of an issue.

objectivity | In news reporting, impartiality and fairness, and the reporting of facts without opinion and including different sides of an issue.

Office of Communications | The part of the White House Office devoted to long-term planning of communication, headed by the director of communications.

Office of Communications | The part of the White House Office devoted to long-term planning of communication, headed by the director of communications.

Open-ended questions | Items on a questionnaire that allow respondents to reply to a question in their own words.

Open-ended questions | Items on a questionnaire that allow respondents to reply to a question in their own words.

outsider strategies | Members court media publicity in order to achieve their legislative goals.

outsider strategies | Members court media publicity in order to achieve their legislative goals.

overlapping membership | The theory that when people belong to several interest groups, they encourage negotiation and compromise and thereby limit any one group from dominating areas in which its interests are paramount.

overlapping membership | The theory that when people belong to several interest groups, they encourage negotiation and compromise and thereby limit any one group from dominating areas in which its interests are paramount.

overrides | The congressional power to enact legislation over a president's veto by a two-thirds majority in each chamber.

overrides | The congressional power to enact legislation over a president's veto by a two-thirds majority in each chamber.

parachute in | When national reporters come from the networks to cover a local event.

parachute in | When national reporters come from the networks to cover a local event.

partisan identification | A person's long-term attachment to a particular political party.

partisan identification | A person's long-term attachment to a particular political party.

Party coalitions | Groups that have long-term allegiances to a particular political party and whose members vote for that party consistently in elections.

Party coalitions | Groups that have long-term allegiances to a particular political party and whose members vote for that party consistently in elections.

party committees | Committees established by the two major parties to perform specific tasks, such as recommending members to serve on committees and conducting issue research.

party committees | Committees established by the two major parties to perform specific tasks, such as recommending members to serve on committees and conducting issue research.

Party identification | A person's affiliation with a political party that can be a strong predictor of his vote choice in an election.

Party identification | A person's affiliation with a political party that can be a strong predictor of his vote choice in an election.

party in government | The organized party members who serve in office, such as members of the Democratic and Republican parties in Congress.

party in government | The organized party members who serve in office, such as members of the Democratic and Republican parties in Congress.

Party machines | Partisan command structures headed by bosses who exacted loyalty and services from underlings in return for jobs and favors; machines were found primarily in cities.

Party machines | Partisan command structures headed by bosses who exacted loyalty and services from underlings in return for jobs and favors; machines were found primarily in cities.

patriotism | Love of one's country and respect for its symbols and principles.

patriotism | Love of one's country and respect for its symbols and principles.

Payne Fund studies | Research conducted between 1929 and 1933 that demonstrated the influence of movies on young people's attitudes about racial groups, war, and crime.

Payne Fund studies | Research conducted between 1929 and 1933 that demonstrated the influence of movies on young people's attitudes about racial groups, war, and crime.

per curiam decisions | Short, unsigned opinion by the Supreme Court, usually for cases it decides without oral argument.

per curiam decisions | Short, unsigned opinion by the Supreme Court, usually for cases it decides without oral argument.

photo ops | Staged events designed to depict a candidate favorably in the media.

photo ops | Staged events designed to depict a candidate favorably in the media.

plea bargain | Agreement whereby a defendant agrees to plead guilty in return for a lighter sentence, a reduced charge, or both.

plea bargain | Agreement whereby a defendant agrees to plead guilty in return for a lighter sentence, a reduced charge, or both.

pluralism | The theory that interest groups' competition leads to policy balance through compromise and negotiation.

pluralism | The theory that interest groups' competition leads to policy balance through compromise and negotiation.

podcasts | Digital audio or video pieces distributed by political campaigns, parties, and interest groups about a candidate, issue, or event that can be accessed conveniently on a computer or handheld digital device.

podcasts | Digital audio or video pieces distributed by political campaigns, parties, and interest groups about a candidate, issue, or event that can be accessed conveniently on a computer or handheld digital device.

police powers | Inherent powers that states hold to protect the public's health, safety, order, and morals.

police powers | Inherent powers that states hold to protect the public's health, safety, order, and morals.

policy adoption | The relevant institutions of government enact a formulated policy.

policy adoption | The relevant institutions of government enact a formulated policy.

Policy evaluation | Assessing a policy's effectiveness.

Policy evaluation | Assessing a policy's effectiveness.

policy formulation | Policies proposed to solve an issue on the agenda.

policy formulation | Policies proposed to solve an issue on the agenda.

Policy groups (factions) | Specialized coalitions in Congress that promote a particular agenda.

Policy groups (factions) | Specialized coalitions in Congress that promote a particular agenda.

policy implementation and administration | Development of the specific standards and procedures that fulfill the intent of the policy.

policy implementation and administration | Development of the specific standards and procedures that fulfill the intent of the policy.

policy platforms | Plans outlining political party positions on issues and the actions that leaders will take to implement them if elected to office.

policy platforms | Plans outlining political party positions on issues and the actions that leaders will take to implement them if elected to office.

political action committee (PAC) | Funds associated with business or labor organizations or with politicians and created in order to finance candidates' campaigns.

political action committee (PAC) | Funds associated with business or labor organizations or with politicians and created in order to finance candidates' campaigns.

political action committees (PACs) | Organizations for raising and contributing campaign funds.

political action committees (PACs) | Organizations for raising and contributing campaign funds.

political action committees (PACs) | Organizations for raising and contributing campaign funds.

political action committees (PACs) | Organizations for raising and contributing campaign funds.

Political culture | Collective ideologies, values, beliefs, norms, assumptions, and patterns of behavior that characterize a particular country.

Political culture | Collective ideologies, values, beliefs, norms, assumptions, and patterns of behavior that characterize a particular country.

political efficacy | An individual's perception that she can make a difference in politics and governmental affairs.

political efficacy | An individual's perception that she can make a difference in politics and governmental affairs.

Political efficacy | Individuals' feeling that they can or cannot personally influence government and politics.

Political efficacy | Individuals' feeling that they can or cannot personally influence government and politics.

Political legitimacy | Having faith in the integrity of the political system and processes.

Political legitimacy | Having faith in the integrity of the political system and processes.

Political participation | Actions directed explicitly toward influencing the distribution of social goods and values.

Political participation | Actions directed explicitly toward influencing the distribution of social goods and values.

Political parties | An enduring organization under whose label candidates seek and hold office.

Political parties | An enduring organization under whose label candidates seek and hold office.

political self | Sense of personal identification with the political world, which includes belonging to a community and knowledge of the shared beliefs and values of the members of that community.

political self | Sense of personal identification with the political world, which includes belonging to a community and knowledge of the shared beliefs and values of the members of that community.

Political socialization | Process through which people develop the attitudes, values, beliefs, and opinions conducive to becoming good citizens in their country.

Political socialization | Process through which people develop the attitudes, values, beliefs, and opinions conducive to becoming good citizens in their country.

political tolerance | Willingness to allow groups with whom one disagrees fundamentally to exercise their constitutionally guaranteed freedoms.

political tolerance | Willingness to allow groups with whom one disagrees fundamentally to exercise their constitutionally guaranteed freedoms.

Politics | The process by which leaders are selected and policies made. It involves people and groups inside and outside of government in struggles for power.

pork barrel spending | Legislation that provides funding for projects that benefit a member of Congress's district.

pork barrel spending | Legislation that provides funding for projects that benefit a member of Congress's district.

postconvention "bounce" | A temporary increase in opinion-poll standings experienced by presidential nominees immediately following the national nominating convention.

postconvention "bounce" | A temporary increase in opinion-poll standings experienced by presidential nominees immediately following the national nominating convention.

precedent | A previous court decision used to guide and justify the Court's decision in a similar case.

precedent | A previous court decision used to guide and justify the Court's decision in a similar case.

preemption | President George W. Bush's policy, exemplified in the war against Iraq, of removing threats before they harm the United States.

preemption | President George W. Bush's policy, exemplified in the war against Iraq, of removing threats before they harm the United States.

president pro tempore | The second-highest ranking member of the Senate after the vice president who presides over the Senate in the absence of the vice president.

president pro tempore | The second-highest ranking member of the Senate after the vice president who presides over the Senate in the absence of the vice president.

presiding officer | The Constitution designates the vice president as the president of the Senate; when the vice president is absent, the majority leader of the Senate becomes the president pro tempore and presides over the Senate.

presiding officer | The Constitution designates the vice president as the president of the Senate; when the vice president is absent, the majority leader of the Senate becomes the president pro tempore and presides over the Senate.

press officers | People scattered through the bureaucracy who serve as official spokespersons for their agencies.

press officers | People scattered through the bureaucracy who serve as official spokespersons for their agencies.

prestige committee | The most powerful congressional committees; in the House these include Appropriations, Budget, Commerce, Rules, and Ways and Means; in the Senate these include Appropriations, Armed Services, Commerce, Finance, and Foreign Relations.

prestige committee | The most powerful congressional committees; in the House these include Appropriations, Budget, Commerce, Rules, and Ways and Means; in the Senate these include Appropriations, Armed Services, Commerce, Finance, and Foreign Relations.

priming | When media (news stories) ascribe responsibility for a problem to a person or institution.

priming | When media (news stories) ascribe responsibility for a problem to a person or institution.

prior restraint | A practice, forbidden by the First Amendment, whereby government can prevent publication.

prior restraint | A practice, forbidden by the First Amendment, whereby government can prevent publication.

probability sampling | A method of selecting survey participants at random.

probability sampling | A method of selecting survey participants at random.

proportional representation (PR) systems | Elections are held for multiple seats in a district, allowing seats to be distributed according to the proportion of the vote won by particular political parties.

proportional representation (PR) systems | Elections are held for multiple seats in a district, allowing seats to be distributed according to the proportion of the vote won by particular political parties.

public assistance (welfare) | Government aid to those in need.

public assistance (welfare) | Government aid to those in need.

public diplomacy | US policymakers' efforts to gain the approval and support of policymakers in foreign countries.

public diplomacy | US policymakers' efforts to gain the approval and support of policymakers in foreign countries.

Public interest groups | Organizations that work for the common good as they define it, such as, for consumers, the environment, or the family or reform of government.

Public interest groups | Organizations that work for the common good as they define it, such as, for consumers, the environment, or the family or reform of government.

Public judgment | A type of public opinion where people carefully consider the range of viewpoints and policy consequences of issues.

Public judgment | A type of public opinion where people carefully consider the range of viewpoints and policy consequences of issues.

public opinion | People's collective preferences on matters related to government and politics.

public opinion | People's collective preferences on matters related to government and politics.

public relations | Techniques designed to promote an interest group's activities, image, and policy preferences positively.

public relations | Techniques designed to promote an interest group's activities, image, and policy preferences positively.

pundits | People who offer their opinion or commentary on political issues through the media.

pundits | People who offer their opinion or commentary on political issues through the media.

push poll | Not a legitimate poll but a marketing technique disguised as a poll that is designed to influence respondents' opinions about candidates and issues through leading questions.

push poll | Not a legitimate poll but a marketing technique disguised as a poll that is designed to influence respondents' opinions about candidates and issues through leading questions.

quick poll | An online poll, usually consisting of one or two questions, that is asked of a nonrepresentative, self-selected sample of respondents.

quick poll | An online poll, usually consisting of one or two questions, that is asked of a nonrepresentative, self-selected sample of respondents.

rally phenomenon | The president's approval rating rises during periods of international tension and likely use of American force.

rally phenomenon | The president's approval rating rises during periods of international tension and likely use of American force.

reasonable accommodation | Federal policy mandating employers and schools to find ways to make it possible for people with disabilities to have equal access to employment and education.

reasonable accommodation | Federal policy mandating employers and schools to find ways to make it possible for people with disabilities to have equal access to employment and education.

recall | An election that allows voters to remove an elected officeholder.

recall | An election that allows voters to remove an elected officeholder.

recess appointments | Judicial or executive appointments made by the president while Congress is out of session that do not require Senate confirmation; they last until the end of the congressional session.

recess appointments | Judicial or executive appointments made by the president while Congress is out of session that do not require Senate confirmation; they last until the end of the congressional session.

redistributive policies | Policies whereby those who pay the taxes usually do not receive the service paid by the taxes.

redistributive policies | Policies whereby those who pay the taxes usually do not receive the service paid by the taxes.

referendum | A process whereby the state legislature refers a proposal to citizens who vote to either approve or reject the measure.

referendum | A process whereby the state legislature refers a proposal to citizens who vote to either approve or reject the measure.

regulatory commission | An agency charged with writing rules and arbitrating disputes dealing with some specific part of the economy, with appointees having greater independence from Congress and the president.

regulatory commission | An agency charged with writing rules and arbitrating disputes dealing with some specific part of the economy, with appointees having greater independence from Congress and the president.

retail politics | Campaign activity, also known as field operations, in which candidates engage in person-to-person encounters with potential voters.

retail politics | Campaign activity, also known as field operations, in which candidates engage in person-to-person encounters with potential voters.

right of first recognition | The right of the Senate majority leader to speak on the floor before all other Senators.

right of first recognition | The right of the Senate majority leader to speak on the floor before all other Senators.

Rituals | Ceremonial acts performed by the people of a nation.

Rituals | Ceremonial acts performed by the people of a nation.

robo-polling | Administering automated polls by phone using a recorded voice to ask the question and requiring respondents to answer by pressing the touch pad on their telephone.

robo-polling | Administering automated polls by phone using a recorded voice to ask the question and requiring respondents to answer by pressing the touch pad on their telephone.

Rule of Four | Rule stipulating that at least four justices of the Supreme Court must vote to accept an appealed case before it can be heard.

Rule of Four | Rule stipulating that at least four justices of the Supreme Court must vote to accept an appealed case before it can be heard.

rule of law | The premise that government is based on a body of law, agreed on by the governed, this is applied equally and justly.

rule of law | The premise that government is based on a body of law, agreed on by the governed, this is applied equally and justly.

rulemaking | The process by which agencies issue statements that implement, interpret, and prescribe policy in an area authorized by legislation passed by Congress.

rulemaking | The process by which agencies issue statements that implement, interpret, and prescribe policy in an area authorized by legislation passed by Congress.

sacred document | A revered manuscript given exalted status; applied to the Constitution.

sacred document | A revered manuscript given exalted status; applied to the Constitution.

scoops | News obtained ahead of other reporters.

scoops | News obtained ahead of other reporters.

selective incorporation | Supreme Court's application of the protections of the Bill of Rights one by one to the states after it has decided that each is "incorporated" into (inherent in) the Fourteenth Amendment's protection of liberty against state actions.

selective incorporation | Supreme Court's application of the protections of the Bill of Rights one by one to the states after it has decided that each is "incorporated" into (inherent in) the Fourteenth Amendment's protection of liberty against state actions.

Senate minority leader | The head of the opposing party in the Senate, who works closely with the majority leader on scheduling business while also developing strategies for his party to promote its policy objectives.

Senate minority leader | The head of the opposing party in the Senate, who works closely with the majority leader on scheduling business while also developing strategies for his party to promote its policy objectives.

Senate whips (assistant floor leaders) | Senators who work to devise party strategies on policy issues and to ensure party unity on Senate votes.

Senate whips (assistant floor leaders) | Senators who work to devise party strategies on policy issues and to ensure party unity on Senate votes.

seniority | Long-standing members of Congress, especially in the Senate, hold leadership positions and have more influence over decision making than their junior colleagues.

seniority | Long-standing members of Congress, especially in the Senate, hold leadership positions and have more influence over decision making than their junior colleagues.

separate but equal | The doctrine, endorsed by the Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and repudiated by *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), that racial segregation was constitutional as long as all races were treated equally.

separate but equal | The doctrine, endorsed by the Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and repudiated by *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), that racial segregation was constitutional as long as all races were treated equally.

Separation of powers | The doctrine whereby legislative, executive, and judicial powers are placed in distinct, at least partially autonomous, institutions.

Separation of powers | The doctrine whereby legislative, executive, and judicial powers are placed in distinct, at least partially autonomous, institutions.

sexual harassment | Form of discrimination on the basis of sex and gender that consists of unwelcome sexual advances or sexual conduct, verbal or physical, that interferes with a person's performance or creates a hostile working environment.

sexual harassment | Form of discrimination on the basis of sex and gender that consists of unwelcome sexual advances or sexual conduct, verbal or physical, that interferes with a person's performance or creates a hostile working environment.

signing statement | The president claims the right to ignore or refuse to enforce laws, parts of laws, or provisions of appropriations bills that Congress has enacted and he has signed into law.

signing statement | The president claims the right to ignore or refuse to enforce laws, parts of laws, or provisions of appropriations bills that Congress has enacted and he has signed into law.

single-issue groups | Organizations with the goal of promoting action on behalf of particular causes.

single-issue groups | Organizations with the goal of promoting action on behalf of particular causes.

single-issue minor parties | A minor party that exists to promote a particular policy agenda.

single-issue minor parties | A minor party that exists to promote a particular policy agenda.

single-member district plurality system | Also known as first-past-the-post or winner-take all, the system in which the highest vote getter in a district in federal and most state legislative elections gains a seat in office.

single-member district plurality system | Also known as first-past-the-post or winner-take all, the system in which the highest vote getter in a district in federal and most state legislative elections gains a seat in office.

Smart mobs | Acts of civic disobedience or protest organized through digital communication technology.

Smart mobs | Acts of civic disobedience or protest organized through digital communication technology.

social insurance | Government invests individuals' mandatory payroll deductions in a trust fund to be distributed according to specific criteria (e.g., age).

social insurance | Government invests individuals' mandatory payroll deductions in a trust fund to be distributed according to specific criteria (e.g., age).

social media | Digital media platforms that allow users to create and share content easily and that have been used in elections to share candidate information and videos, organize events, and collect campaign donations.

social media | Digital media platforms that allow users to create and share content easily and that have been used in elections to share candidate information and videos, organize events, and collect campaign donations.

Social movements | Large groups of people with common concerns who have mobilized to actively pursue political objectives.

social networks | Associations of friends and acquaintances, based on trust and goodwill, that are able to work together to achieve common goals.

social networks | Associations of friends and acquaintances, based on trust and goodwill, that are able to work together to achieve common goals.

Social Security | Social insurance program for the elderly.

Social Security | Social insurance program for the elderly.

Socioeconomic status | People's levels of education, income, and occupation, which are strongly linked to patterns of political participation.

Socioeconomic status | People's levels of education, income, and occupation, which are strongly linked to patterns of political participation.

solicitor general | Justice department official responsible for presenting the position of the presidential administration before the courts.

solicitor general | Justice department official responsible for presenting the position of the presidential administration before the courts.

solidary incentive | When people join a group for friendship and belonging.

solidary incentive | When people join a group for friendship and belonging.

sound bites | Brief phrases uttered by candidates that are designed to be compelling and fit into news stories.

sound bites | Brief phrases uttered by candidates that are designed to be compelling and fit into news stories.

Speaker of the House | The top-ranking member and presiding officer of the House of Representatives.

Speaker of the House | The top-ranking member and presiding officer of the House of Representatives.

sphere of consensus | General agreement about the causes of and how to respond to a crisis.

sphere of consensus | General agreement about the causes of and how to respond to a crisis.

spin | To interpret information to support one's point of view, or at least to put the best face on events.

spin | To interpret information to support one's point of view, or at least to put the best face on events.

spin | The practice of providing an interpretation of events or issues that favors a particular side, such as the Democratic or Republican party.

spin | The practice of providing an interpretation of events or issues that favors a particular side, such as the Democratic or Republican party.

spiral of cynicism | A cycle of distrust of government and politics created by the media's scandal-ridden coverage of government and politics.

spiral of cynicism | A cycle of distrust of government and politics created by the media's scandal-ridden coverage of government and politics.

spoilers | A minor-party candidate who takes away enough votes from a major-party candidate to influence the outcome of the election while not winning the election himself.

spoilers | A minor-party candidate who takes away enough votes from a major-party candidate to influence the outcome of the election while not winning the election himself.

spoils system | Also known as patronage, a system in which voters were rewarded for their party loyalty and votes with jobs and favors dispensed by party leaders.

spoils system | Also known as patronage, a system in which voters were rewarded for their party loyalty and votes with jobs and favors dispensed by party leaders.

spoils system | The term given by its detractors to the practice started by President Andrew Jackson in 1829 of a new president replacing all civil servants with party faithful.

spoils system | The term given by its detractors to the practice started by President Andrew Jackson in 1829 of a new president replacing all civil servants with party faithful.

sponsor | The member of Congress who introduces a bill.

sponsor | The member of Congress who introduces a bill.

standard operating procedures (SOPs) | Recurring routines to manage particular cases.

standard operating procedures (SOPs) | Recurring routines to manage particular cases.

straw poll | An informal poll, often used to gauge opinions about candidates, that is administered haphazardly and without attention to proper sampling methods.

straw poll | An informal poll, often used to gauge opinions about candidates, that is administered haphazardly and without attention to proper sampling methods.

strict constructionism | Judicial philosophy of applying the Constitution according to what the judges believe was its original meaning to a reasonable person when it was framed.

strict constructionism | Judicial philosophy of applying the Constitution according to what the judges believe was its original meaning to a reasonable person when it was framed.

Subcommittees | Committees under the standing committees that handle specific aspects of legislation and policy.

Subcommittees | Committees under the standing committees that handle specific aspects of legislation and policy.

subcultures | Distinct groups associated with particular beliefs, values, and behavior patterns and existing within the overall framework of the larger political culture.

subcultures | Distinct groups associated with particular beliefs, values, and behavior patterns and existing within the overall framework of the larger political culture.

subprime mortgages | Loans to buy a house or apartment made to someone usually unqualified to receive them.

subprime mortgages | Loans to buy a house or apartment made to someone usually unqualified to receive them.

sunshine laws | Laws passed by Congress to open hearings to the public and the press.

sunshine laws | Laws passed by Congress to open hearings to the public and the press.

super delegates | Delegates to the Democratic National Convention who are party luminaries, members of the Democratic National Committee, governors, and members of Congress. These delegates do not have to run for delegate in caucuses or primaries.

super delegates | Delegates to the Democratic National Convention who are party luminaries, members of the Democratic National Committee, governors, and members of Congress. These delegates do not have to run for delegate in caucuses or primaries.

Super Tuesday | A Tuesday, usually in February or March, when a large number of states hold their presidential primary elections.

Super Tuesday | A Tuesday, usually in February or March, when a large number of states hold their presidential primary elections.

support activities | Passive forms of politics involvement, such as attending a concert on behalf of a cause.

support activities | Passive forms of politics involvement, such as attending a concert on behalf of a cause.

supremacy clause | Clause in Article VI of the Constitution stating that the Constitution and all federal laws are "the supreme Law of the Land."

supremacy clause | Clause in Article VI of the Constitution stating that the Constitution and all federal laws are "the supreme Law of the Land."

supremacy clause | The section in the Constitution that specifies that the Constitution and all national laws are "the supreme law of the land" and supersede any conflicting state or local laws.

supremacy clause | The section in the Constitution that specifies that the Constitution and all national laws are "the supreme law of the land" and supersede any conflicting state or local laws.

survey | A questionnaire typically administered by academic or government researchers to a representative sample people drawn from a larger population.

survey | A questionnaire typically administered by academic or government researchers to a representative sample people drawn from a larger population.

Swift Boat ad | An ad produced by the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, challenging Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry's Vietnam War record, that aired during the 2004 election.

Swift Boat ad | An ad produced by the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, challenging Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry's Vietnam War record, that aired during the 2004 election.

symbolic participation | Routine or habitual acts that show support for or dissatisfaction with the political system.

symbolic participation | Routine or habitual acts that show support for or dissatisfaction with the political system.

Symbols | Objects or emblems that represent a nation.

Symbols | Objects or emblems that represent a nation.

Tea Party | A loosely organized, conservative-leaning grassroots movement that qualifies as a political party as candidates run for office under its label.

Tea Party | A loosely organized, conservative-leaning grassroots movement that qualifies as a political party as candidates run for office under its label.

Tea Party | A grassroots movement with conservative leanings that emerged in 2009 to protest government taxing and spending policies.

Tea Party | A grassroots movement with conservative leanings that emerged in 2009 to protest government taxing and spending policies.

temperance movement | A movement that prompted Congress to pass the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919, instituting Prohibition, which forbade the sale or transportation of alcohol. Prohibition was repealed in 1935.

temperance movement | A movement that prompted Congress to pass the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919, instituting Prohibition, which forbade the sale or transportation of alcohol. Prohibition was repealed in 1935.

three-fifths clause | Constitutional provision that, for purposes of representation, only 60 percent of the enslaved population would be counted.

three-fifths clause | Constitutional provision that, for purposes of representation, only 60 percent of the enslaved population would be counted.

tweetup | An online or offline meeting organized via the microblogging platform Twitter.

tweetup | An online or offline meeting organized via the microblogging platform Twitter.

two-party system | A party system like that in the United States, where nearly all elected offices are held by candidates associated with the two parties that are able to garner the vast majority of votes.

two-party system | A party system like that in the United States, where nearly all elected offices are held by candidates associated with the two parties that are able to garner the vast majority of votes.

two-step flow model | A communication model where the media disseminate information that is processed by opinion leaders, who simplify messages and pass them on to opinion followers.

two-step flow model | A communication model where the media disseminate information that is processed by opinion leaders, who simplify messages and pass them on to opinion followers.

umbrella organizations | Party organizations that accommodate a wide range of groups and interests.

umbrella organizations | Party organizations that accommodate a wide range of groups and interests.

values | A society's shared convictions about what is just and good.

values | A society's shared convictions about what is just and good.

veto | The president's power to reject a bill by not signing it into law.

veto | The president's power to reject a bill by not signing it into law.

video-sharing platforms | Digital media that allow people to post campaign-related videos and share them with others through links, e-mail, and social media.

video-sharing platforms | Digital media that allow people to post campaign-related videos and share them with others through links, e-mail, and social media.

Vietnam syndrome | Post-Vietnam assumption by US policymakers that Americans would not support military action if it resulted in significant casualties to US troops.

Vietnam syndrome | Post-Vietnam assumption by US policymakers that Americans would not support military action if it resulted in significant casualties to US troops.

Virginia Plan | James Madison's initial working draft at the Constitutional Convention, containing strong national powers, a popularly elected bicameral legislature, and a weak executive elected by the legislature.

Virginia Plan | James Madison's initial working draft at the Constitutional Convention, containing strong national powers, a popularly elected bicameral legislature, and a weak executive elected by the legislature.

watchdogs | Journalists when their news stories hold people in power accountable by scrutinizing and reporting their statements, activities, claimed accomplishments, and failures.

watchdogs | Journalists when their news stories hold people in power accountable by scrutinizing and reporting their statements, activities, claimed accomplishments, and failures.

Watergate hearings | Senate investigation in 1973 into the burglaries at the Democratic National Committee headquarters that led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon.

Watergate hearings | Senate investigation in 1973 into the burglaries at the Democratic National Committee headquarters that led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon.

Wedge issues | Issues that cut across party lines and that can be used by candidates to attract voters who affiliate with the opposition party.

Wedge issues | Issues that cut across party lines and that can be used by candidates to attract voters who affiliate with the opposition party.

whips | Members who promote party unity in voting.

whips | Members who promote party unity in voting.

Whiskey Rebellion | In 1794, farmers on the western frontier protested against a tax on whiskey that was part of Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton's plan to eliminate the national debt; the rebellion was suppressed by an army dispatched by the newly formed national government.

Whiskey Rebellion | In 1794, farmers on the western frontier protested against a tax on whiskey that was part of Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton's plan to eliminate the national debt; the rebellion was suppressed by an army dispatched by the newly formed national government.

White House Office (WHO) | An organization within the EOP that contains the president's personal advisors and staffers.

White House Office (WHO) | An organization within the EOP that contains the president's personal advisors and staffers.

white primary | Democratic Party primary elections in certain Southern states that permitted only whites to vote.

white primary | Democratic Party primary elections in certain Southern states that permitted only whites to vote.

WikiLeaks.org | An organization that exposes the secrets of governments, corporations, and other institutions.

WikiLeaks.org | An organization that exposes the secrets of governments, corporations, and other institutions.

wire services | Agencies, particularly the Associated Press (AP), that cover and transmit news stories from throughout the world to their subscribers, resulting in similar coverage in many of the news media.

wire services | Agencies, particularly the Associated Press (AP), that cover and transmit news stories from throughout the world to their subscribers, resulting in similar coverage in many of the news media.

Women's Educational Equity Act | Legislation passed by the US Congress to guarantee women the same educational opportunities as men and that includes Title IX, which requires schools to remove barriers to females' full participation in sports.

Women's Educational Equity Act | Legislation passed by the US Congress to guarantee women the same educational opportunities as men and that includes Title IX, which requires schools to remove barriers to females' full participation in sports.

women's movement | A social movement that began with the goal of seeking women's suffrage and extended to other aspects of women's equality.

women's movement | A social movement that began with the goal of seeking women's suffrage and extended to other aspects of women's equality.

work horse | A member of Congress who works behind the scenes to carry out the business of the institution and get legislation passed.

work horse | A member of Congress who works behind the scenes to carry out the business of the institution and get legislation passed.

writ of certiorari | Petition asking the Supreme Court to review a case.

writ of certiorari | Petition asking the Supreme Court to review a case.

"527 committees" | Advocacy groups that can receive and spend unlimited amounts of money in elections as long as they do not coordinate with candidates' campaign organizations or political parties in support of or opposition to a candidate.

"came out of the closet" | Gay or lesbian individuals who, having previously denied or concealed their sexual orientation, now publicly announce it.

"Checkers" speech | A speech delivered by vice presidential candidate Richard Nixon during the 1952 presidential campaign. The speech was a defense against media reports that he had misused funds given to him by supporters.

"DIG" (dismiss as improvidently granted) | To refuse to hear a case after initially accepting it. Supreme Court justices may change their minds about hearing a case without giving any reason.

"murder boards" | Sessions in which nominees for the Supreme Court are coached by administration officials on how to respond successfully to tough questions from senators at their hearings.

"soft money" | Funds contributed to political parties for get-out-the-vote drives, party-building activities, and issue advertising that was not subject to contribution or expenditure limitations as long as it was not used directly for candidate advertising.

"to bork | To defeat a Supreme Court nominee by means of a lobbying and public relations campaign using and facilitated by the media.

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