

SIXTEENTH EDITION

POWER & CHOICE

AN INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL SCIENCE

W. PHILLIPS SHIVELY AND DAVID SCHULTZ



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AN INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL SCIENCE

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ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD

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Preface



This book provides a general, comparative introduction to the major concepts and themes of political science. For a number of years, we have taught courses that attempted to accomplish this aim, and that experience showed us how badly we needed a text that is conceptually alive and that engages students with concrete examples of analysis without losing them in a clutter of definitional minutiae. That is what I (Phil) aimed for when I first wrote this book, and I've been very pleased at the response it has elicited. It is comparative in its theoretic focus and its method, but as it is primarily intended for American students, many of its instances and comparisons involve politics in the United States. All, however, are comparative. For David, who is taking over this book from Phil (who was his professor), this book is an effort to provide a basic overview of the discipline of political science, giving students a sense of the issues, concepts, and assumptions that talk about what we do and study as students of politics.

The title of the book, *Power & Choice*, indicates a subsidiary theme that recurs at intervals. We may view politics as (1) the use of power or (2) the production of a public choice. Often one or the other is heavily emphasized in approaching the subject. Marxism emphasizes politics as the use of power, while pluralism and much formal modeling work emphasize the emergence of public choices. For our present purpose, we have defined politics as the use of power to make common decisions for a group of people, a definition that obviously demands that one hold both perspectives simultaneously. At various stages of my presentation, I note instances in which an emphasis on just one of the two halves of the definition may yield a distorted interpretation.

Behind this subsidiary theme lies a broader theme that remains largely implicit—it is best if we conduct political analysis eclectically, rather than straitjacketing ourselves into a single approach. My own research (Phil) is squarely in the behavioral realm, for instance, but I found as I was working on this book that necessities of exposition and understanding pulled me toward a greater emphasis on policy and institutions than I had originally intended. For David, I believe that what we study should determine how we study it, and not vice versa. There are many ways of knowing, but still much of political science is empirical. I come from a background that includes a law degree, a Ph.D. in political science, and a master's degree in astronomy. Similarly, the state as an organizer of politics thrust itself more to the fore than we had anticipated. Distinctions that provide useful boundaries for research proved unhelpful in our efforts to build an understanding of politics among students. We think this is a healthy sign.

We present the material in the book topically and conceptually rather than on a country-by-country basis. However, to add the sort of detailed contextual grounding that students gain from a country presentation, we have included within each substantive chapter a couple of extended examples from countries that particularly display the conceptual material of that chapter. For instance, [chapter 3](#), which deals with the state, concludes with detailed sections on the establishment and maintenance of the Nigerian state and on the European Union. Similarly, [chapter 16](#), “Bureaucracy and the Public Sector,” gives detailed treatment to France and a comparison of bureaucratic cultures in Europe and Africa.

NEW TO THE SIXTEENTH EDITION

With the sixteenth edition begins the handoff of this book from Phil to David. The latter is reminded of Isaac Newton’s great quote when he said that he could see so far but he stood on the shoulders of the giants before him. I inherit a great book that stands the test of time, with so much right in it and so much with which I agree.

Over the decades since Phil first wrote this book, the world has proved to be a strange and wonderful place—even more than either of us realized at that time. The book has seen the joy and light of the young people who pulled down the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the darkness of the suicide attackers who destroyed the World Trade Center in 2001. As it has evolved across a number of editions during this time, very little that it started out with has remained unchanged. Its mood has also varied from time to time, but one thing that has been constant is my faith in people’s capacity to shape their futures through politics.

In this sixteenth edition there is, of course, a great deal of updating. When a book deals with all the states of the world, many things change over even a couple of years. We have updated the book to address the issues that the COVID-19 pandemic have raised, as well as the impact the Trump and Biden presidencies have had so far upon the world and its democracies, including challenges to it in states such as Hungary where illiberal democracy and nationalism are on the rise. We have also included discussion of the impact of death of George Floyd upon race relations in America, and how issues such as growing inequality are impacting politics. This edition adds examination of women’s economic development and the rising importance of LGBTQ issues globally.

More substantial changes include:

- A significant rewriting and reorganization of [chapter 2](#) on political ideologies to clarify the rise of Lockean-Liberalism and how it relates to American political ideologies.
- [Chapter 3](#) expands the discussion on the rise of the state and the challengers that nongovernmental organizations and nonstate actors play in contemporary politics, along with more attention to why states or democracies fail, such as in Myanmar.
- [Chapter 4](#) adds an example and discussion of women’s economic development.
- [Chapter 5](#) expands discussion of international political economy and economic globalization and the problems the pandemic posed for state and global economic policy.
- [Chapter 6](#) puts more emphasis on the problems of economic inequality and the way governments versus markets operate to deliver goods and services.
- [Chapter 7](#) expands upon discussion on the history and varieties of democracy and adds a section on the European Colors Revolutions.
- [Chapter 8](#) introduces a discussion on generational politics.

- **Chapter 10** adds a discussion on ranked choice voting as an electoral option and the chapter also includes an examination of women and political representation and gender quotas.
- **Chapter 11** now has a section on party change and critical realignments in U.S. politics.
- **Chapter 12** adds more discussion of pluralist theory and how it ties into interest group politics.
- **Chapter 13** adds discussion on the attack at the U.S. capitol on January 6, 2021, and a section on Black Lives Matter.
- **Chapter 14** adds an example of whether the United States should change to a parliamentary system to address the problems of political polarization it now faces.
- **Chapter 15** expands discussion on U.S. presidential power and also provides an example on whether the United States should keep or abandon the electoral college as a presidential selection mechanism.
- **Chapter 16** now includes a discussion on the universal problem of bureaucracy and how to control it.
- **Chapter 17** develops more fully the different types of legal and court systems in the world and adds a section on the importance of an independent judiciary to limiting governmental power.
- **Chapter 18** significantly expands, adding discussions on international relations theory; the rise of international law and international agencies such as the United Nations; international political economy; and a discussion on the rise of China and the challenge it poses to the United States globally.

Overall, the world has changed dramatically between the fifteenth and sixteenth editions. We have done our best to maintain all the continuities that all of you like while also addressing the changes in the world or in the structure of the book that you suggested. For the latter, we thank you.

SUPPLEMENTS

- **Test Bank.** For each chapter in the text, there is a test bank section that includes multiple choice, true/false, and essay questions. The Test Bank is available to adopters for download on the text's catalog page at <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781538151860>.
- **Lecture Notes.** These lecture outlines with graphics from the book will help instructors begin their class preparation and are fully customizable to meet individual needs. These slide decks are available to adopters for download on the text's catalog page, along with the Test Bank, at <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781538151860>.
- **Companion Website.** Accompanying the text is an open-access Companion Website designed to engage students with the material and reinforce what they've learned in the classroom. For each chapter, flash cards and self-quizzes help students master the content and apply that knowledge to real-life situations. Students can access the Companion Website from their computer or mobile device; it can be found at <https://textbooks.rowman.com/shively16e>.
- **eBook.** The eBook allows students to access this textbook anytime and anywhere they want. The eBook for *Power & Choice, Sixteenth Edition*, includes everything that is in the print edition, and features direct links to the Companion Website where students can access flash cards and self-quizzes to help test their understanding of the major concepts and terminology in each chapter. The eBook can be purchased at <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781538151860> or at any other eBook retailer.

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PART I

The Idea of Politics

1

Politics: Setting the Stage



MAJOR THEMES TO LOOK FOR IN THIS CHAPTER

- Politics is the making of common decisions, through the use of power. This definition implies two complementary emphases in interpreting politics: looking at politics as the search for a common choice and looking at politics as the use of power to achieve your ends.
- Power is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon.
- The state and its government are structures by which power can be organized and used very efficiently.
- Nonstate actors can deploy power that influences the state and government.
- The object of inquiry for political science is the study of power, but other forms of inquiry make look at similar phenomena.

Everyone knows something about politics, and many people know a great deal about it. It is an interesting, amusing, and moving spectacle that sometimes even supplants professional sports in the public eye. Political scientists, however, study politics and analyze it. This involves doing pretty much the same sorts of things that other people do who follow politics: we read the newspapers, listen to press conferences, and take part in political campaigns. However, we also do some things differently. We usually try to see both sides of any question and to keep our emotions in low key because emotions can cloud judgment. We borrow deliberately from other disciplines—such as economics, history, sociology, psychology, and philosophy—to help us understand what is going on politically. Above all, as you will see later in this chapter, we try to be precise about the meanings of the words we use. Many words having to do with politics—such as “liberal,” “represent,” and even “politics”—are quite complex, but most people use them unthinkingly. Political scientists are careful to analyze the varied meanings of such words and to use them precisely, partly because it is important to know exactly what we mean by the words we use and partly because careful examination of a richly complex word may teach us a great deal about the things it describes.

What do political scientists study? Over the years, we have seen work in which political scientists:

- Measured just how much it costs a country to lose a war;
- Devised a new system of voting in primaries that might have led to a different set of candidates for most presidential elections;
- Analyzed and explained the various styles that members of the U.S. Congress adopt in dealing with their constituents;

- Studied the spread of stem cell research laws across the states;
- Showed that the roots of successful government may go back to social institutions several centuries ago;
- Described the role that race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and religion have on politics and political attitudes;
- Investigated the connection between nonstate institutions such as the family or corporations have with politics.
- Showed why most nations ignore warnings about surprise military action by hostile nations; and
- Studied why democracies almost never wage war on other democracies.

These are the sorts of things in which political scientists engage. This book introduces you to the broad principles of what we have learned about politics, especially about the politics of democracies. I hope the study will sharpen and enrich the more general understanding of politics that you already have.

This first chapter, in particular, involves the precise definition of several words with which you are already somewhat familiar. We must examine these definitions because you should start your study with some basic terms in place. You may also find it intriguing to see complexity in words, such as politics, that have probably not struck you before as particularly complicated.

POLITICS

What is **politics**? What is it that makes an act political? Consider the following questions, all of which involve politics. What do these have in common?

- How was Hitler able to take power through a series of supposedly democratic elections?
- Why do democracies tend not to engage in war against other democracies?
- Why should workers sort letters the way their boss directs if they know a more efficient way?
- Why were southern blacks denied the vote and placed in segregated schools throughout the 1950s while their housing was not as segregated as that in the North?
- Should gays be barred from the military?
- Should native populations in the Amazon basin of Brazil be displaced in favor of economic development?
- Why does the United States have only two major political parties when most democracies have more?
- Should state and local governments have the right to force landholders to sell them land that they need for public purposes?
- Was Harry Truman right to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki?
- Why do people so often feel guilty about not doing what their parents want them to do?
- What impact did George Floyd's murder or the spread of the coronavirus pandemic have on the 2020 presidential election?
- Should transgender individuals be allowed to use public bathrooms that correspond to the gender they identify with, or only use those that correspond with the gender listed on their birth certificate?

These questions deal with politics. The questions about bosses, parents, and bathrooms may not have looked to you as if they belonged in this group, but their connection with politics should become clearer by the end of this chapter.

What is it that these questions have in common? There are two main things, and scholars have often used both as the defining characteristics of politics. First, all the questions involve making a common decision for a group of people, that is, a uniform decision applying in the same way to all members of the group. Second, all involve the use of power by one person or a group of people to affect the behavior of another person or group of people. Let us look at both of these in more detail.

POLITICS AS THE MAKING OF COMMON DECISIONS

Any group of people must often make decisions that will apply to all of them in common, as a group. A family must decide where to live, what sorts of rules to set for children, and how to balance a budget. A class in a college or university (including the instructor as part of the “class”) must decide on the required reading material, how to grade students, and the brightness of lights in the classrooms. A country must decide where to locate parks, what allies to seek out in war, how to raise revenue by taxing its citizens, how to care for the helpless, and many other things. Each of these requires setting common policy for the group, a single decision that affects all members of the group.

Not all human actions, of course, involve making a common policy for a group. When one brother teases another, he is not making a family policy, nor is a family member who decides to write the great American novel. A student who decides to read extra material on one section of the course (or, perhaps, to skip a bit of the reading) is not making a policy of the class. A person’s decision to build a new house is not part of any common national policy, although the country may have policies—on interest rates, the regulation of building, land use, and zoning—that affect this person’s decision. Facebook’s decisions on a search algorithm are not part of a common national policy, although a decision by it to bar a former president from having an account may have an impact on national policy. In some cases, it is possible for private individuals or organizations to affect national policy, even if only indirectly.

Those actions that contribute to the making of a common policy for a group of people constitute politics, and questions about those policies and the making of those policies are political questions. The political/nonpolitical distinction is not always easy to draw. The Facebook example in the preceding text is tricky because Facebook is so large that its decisions verge on being common policy for the whole United States, even though the company has no formal role in the nation’s government. In other words, one might argue that because the U.S. government tolerates the concentration of social media among a few giant corporations and because (as a result of this) the decisions of any one of them bulk large in American life, those decisions have a quasipublic character and are “sort of” political.

Another tricky aspect of the political/nonpolitical distinction is that it is a matter of perspective. Ford Motor Company’s design decisions are not political decisions for the United States, but they are political decisions for Ford’s stockholders, managers, and workers because they set a common policy for the company. But a decision by Ford to replace gas-powered engines in its vehicles with all-electric powered ones can both impact government policy and be an extension of it. A family’s decision to build a house is not a political decision for the country, but it is a political decision for the family as a group inasmuch as it involves a common policy for the family. “Company politics” is involved in Ford’s decision, and “family politics” is involved in the family’s decision. Neither, however, is a national political decision. Society consists of groups within groups within groups. Facebook and its employees are a group within the United States, and a family may be a group within the larger group of those dependent on Facebook. Politics exist within any of these groups whenever they make a decision that will apply to all the

members of the group. Depending upon which group you are thinking of, you may treat a given decision—the decision of the Clauski family to build a house—as either political or nonpolitical. The Clauski decision is political for the family as a group but not political for the country. However, the decision of many families or companies collectively might affect national politics, or at least local politics. Separating out when decisions do or do not affect politics is part of what one can call the “boundary problem.” That is, how do we draw a clean or clear line or boundary between things that are and are not political?

POLITICS AS THE EXERCISE OF POWER

A second characteristic of politics, one that runs through the questions at the start of this chapter, is that politics always involves the exercise of power by one person or persons over another person or persons. **Power** is the ability of one person to cause another to do what the first wishes, by whatever means. Politics always involves this: one person causing others to do what that person wants. Looking back at the questions, we note that Hitler rose to high office by convincing many Germans to vote for him, the U.S. Congress disagrees with the president so often about energy policy because the president does not have much power either to force or to convince Congress to go along with his wishes in that area, and so on. In such ways, each of these questions involves the power of one person or persons over others.

The two defining characteristics of politics, then, are that (1) politics always involves the making of common decisions for groups of people and (2) those decisions are made by some members of the group exercising power over other members of the group. Power can consist of a wide variety of tools that help one person affect the actions of another. Power may be stark, as when a police officer stops a demonstrator from marching up the street, or it may be subtle, as when a group of poor people, by their very misery, elicit positive governmental action on their behalf.



The Yomiuri Shimbun via AP Images.

The protestor confronting police in Hong Kong depicts power and choice in reality. The protestor exercises choice to demonstrate and confront the power of the state in the form of police.

We may exercise power as coercion when we force a person to do something he or she did not want to do, as persuasion when we convince someone that something is what she or he really wishes to do, or as the construction of incentives when we make the alternative so unattractive that only one reasonable option remains. The ability to exercise any of these forms of power may be based on all sorts of things—money, affection, physical strength, legal status (e.g., the power of a police officer to direct traffic), the possession of important information, a winning smile, strong allies, determination, desperation (which helped North Vietnam to defeat the United States in the 1970s), and many more. Any of these can help some people convince other people to act as they wish.

Many think power has to involve physical force or coercion. This is not always true. Steven Lukes once argued that there were “three faces to power”: decision making, non-decision making, and ideological. Decision-making power is the capacity to compel or make choices. An example of this is when a government body decides to raise or lower taxes. Non-decision making is preventing others from making decisions. An example of this is an interest group lobbying Congress not to pass a law or even hold a hearing on a topic. Ideological power is convincing others to go along with a decision by getting them to think that the choice they are making is correct for them, even though it is contrary to their interests. An example of this is when Karl Marx, a famous nineteenth-century radical thinker, argued that the ruling class was able to trick or convince the workers to support capitalism instead of socialism or communism.

It is not necessary to learn the specific bases of power we have listed here. They are meant to provide a sense of the variety and complexity of power, not as an exhaustive list of its important sources. The point is that all politics involves the use of power, and such power may take varied forms.

An Example of the Difficulty of Analyzing Power

Both because power is important to politics and because it is difficult to measure precisely how and when power is exercised, there are recurrent disputes within political science about how much power various groups have. A famous dispute of the 1950s and 1960s centered on American cities, about which scholars asked, “Is there a small group of people [the ‘downtown people,’ the political bosses, or what have you] who run things in American cities?” This might seem like a simple question, but it was difficult for political scientists to answer, and we still do not have a clear answer to it. In a broader form, the dispute has continued to this day.

The dispute started when in a study of Atlanta, Georgia, Floyd Hunter attempted to answer the question by asking journalists, officials, business leaders, and others who the most important people in the city were.¹ When his varied sources named roughly the same set of leaders, he concluded that Atlanta was run by a small group of insiders.

In response, however, Robert Dahl observed that Hunter’s respondents might all be mistaken, but mistaken in the same way; they might think that the downtown corporate elite ran Atlanta because that idea was part of the conventional wisdom about the city, but they might be wrong. That the downtown people had a reputation for power did not prove to Dahl’s satisfaction that they really had power; rather, he said, we must see power being used. As a response to the earlier Atlanta study, he performed a new study of his own based on New Haven, Connecticut.² He chose a set of major issues that faced the community, which included education and urban renewal, and recorded who participated in making decisions on each type of issue. He was restricting himself to observable power, so he had to ignore the possibility of indirect influence. Other than that, his procedure was straightforward. He found that quite different groups of people were active on the different issues. Parents and “society people” were especially involved in education, for example, while downtown people were especially involved

in urban renewal. He concluded that New Haven was not run by a single group of insiders but that all sorts of groups were involved, moving in and out of participation depending on what issue was up for decision.

Still a third position was then staked out in the dispute. Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz criticized Dahl's study of New Haven, noting that it is not enough just to see who has been active in various kinds of decisions but that we must also investigate why particular issues get raised in the first place.³ Perhaps the most important decision is the one that governs which issues will be brought before the public. For instance, during the period Dahl studied, New Haven did not consider any policies for taking over utilities and running them publicly, for breaking up the residential racial segregation of the city, or for cutting taxes. An ability to influence or control the public agenda in this way gives one great power over public policies. Who has this ability? Political leaders? The media? Teachers and professors? Bloggers? At this level, decisions may or may not be controlled by a small "power elite"; we simply cannot tell from a study designed as Dahl designed his. This is also the point that Lukes makes. Looking only at overt uses of power or formal decision-making institutions might mean we miss other forms of power that reveal how choices are made.

This question of which issues enter public debate is crucial to politics. Larry Bartels notes, for example, that the American people value economic equality and think of equality as one of the characteristic virtues of American society. Yet, economic inequality is greater in the United States than in almost any other prosperous, advanced economy in the world, and has increased sharply since 1980.⁴ How is it, then, that economic inequality has not become a major issue in the press or in popular opinion? Bartels shows that the failure to bring this issue to the fore has affected American politics profoundly.

Going even beyond the complexity that such control of agendas adds to the concept of power, Peter Digeser, drawing on the work of Steven Lukes, also suggested a "third face of power." Taking Bachrach and Baratz beyond the notion of an elite controlling the agenda of discussion about different groups' needs and wants, Digeser pointed out that the process they describe might consist of an elite controlling ideas and public opinion such that it does not even occur to some groups to want the things they should want: "Lukes contended that power could be exerted even if B consciously wants to do what A desires. Lukes claimed that if B acts contrary to her objective, real interest then power is being exercised."⁵ In other words, an elite might exercise power not just by preventing discussion of proposals it does not want to see on the table but by influencing what people want so that inconvenient proposals never occur to them in the first place. The test for Digeser (based on Lukes) was not whether people have proposals that never reach the table but whether the things people want are contrary to their real interests. Such a disjunction between people's wants and their real interests, for Digeser, is the footprint of elite power. That is to say, the elite maintains its power by controlling communications and ideas, such that people do not want (do not realize they need) things that threaten the elite. Of course, this becomes remarkably difficult to analyze because it requires us to identify what people really need as distinct from what they merely think they need. Academics, who have very distinctive values of our own, are not always in a good position to judge other people's "true" needs.

Notice how complex the question of power in American cities became in these exchanges. Hunter gave us a very straightforward assessment of Atlanta. Dahl complicated the issue by pointing out that in New Haven different types of people had dominant power with respect to different kinds of issues. Bachrach and Baratz reminded us that we must also consider who controls which issues will even come up for discussion. And Digeser added the consideration that this control might operate at an unconscious level, in

elite control of how people form their very desires. In the end, it is difficult to say anything general and conclusive about the concentration of power in our cities because it is difficult to study what might have been—what issues might have entered public discussion but did not. This series of studies illustrates clearly the inherent complexity of power.⁶

Although these studies certainly show that there are few blanket truths about power, one should not therefore conclude that power is impossible to study. Rather, an understanding of the complexity of power and the difficulty of measuring it can lead us to detailed examinations of very specific instances of power. In response to the Bachrach and Baratz article, for instance, several interesting studies appeared on the setting of agendas in American politics. These were a direct result of the argument that the most important power is that which decides what issues will be up for debate.

Despite the complexity and elusiveness of power, we can say that all politics is based on some form of power and that its sources may be highly varied. For most questions about politics, it is not necessary to specify in detail exactly what sort of power is involved. It is always helpful to bear in mind that you are dealing with power of one sort or another; but that realization may often serve rather as a background or setting for your analysis. We can address most of the questions posed at the opening of this chapter without conducting precise analyses of the power relationships that form contexts for the questions.

Power, and Interpreting Politics as Choice

Although power is difficult to pin down in observations, conceptually it is rather simple: one person manages, by some means or another, to get another person to do (or not do) what the first one wants. We have seen in the preceding text that identifying the “some means or another” can be difficult, but the concept is fairly simple.

When we seek to interpret politics as a “choice,” however, we find that the concept is a bit hard to get our minds around. Just what do we mean by choice? When we view a political outcome as a matter of choice, we explain the outcome by the fact that it was needed, either by society as a whole or at least by some politically significant figures. That is, the result came about because, to a significant set of people (possibly all the people), it should have happened, and they made some decision or took part in some action to realize it. On the face of it, this sounds mystical. We know that causation must always work forward in time, but here we say that the need for something brought about the actions that would produce it!

The choice interpretation, however, is really a shorthand for many factors that led various people to act, all of which had to do with the fact that they felt the need to bring something about.

Thus, you will see in [chapter 3](#) that one explanation (the “choice” explanation) for why powerful governments developed in the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries in Europe was that modern large-scale commerce and industry arose in Europe at about that time, and powerful governments holding sway over broad territories were necessary if the commerce and industry were to operate efficiently. This does not mean that in some mystical way the need called forth the strong governments. Rather, kings could extend and deepen their power because large, significant groups in the society (merchants, factory owners) felt that they would benefit from a strong king and supported him in extending his power. In other words, the need for strong governments brought them about—but not in some mystical way. Rather, many individual exercises of power brought about the “choice” outcome.

As another example, you will see in [chapter 14](#) that parliamentary government works most smoothly when prime ministers can control tightly how individual

members vote. As a result—in a “choice” interpretation—most parliamentary systems have developed tightly disciplined parties. This does not mean that the need, in some mystical way, produced the disciplined parties. Rather, over a number of years and by trial and error, prime ministers found that their lives were easier if their political parties were tightly disciplined, and they devised all sorts of rewards and punishments to keep their party members in line.

In principle, each of these examples could have been reduced to a large number of relatively small, individual power transactions. However, that would almost certainly have meant missing the forest for the trees. The central process running through all the individual power transactions was that patterns of behavior were reshaped to meet the needs either of society as a whole or of significant and powerful parts of society. A “choice” interpretation captures that truth in a way that analyzing thousands of small power transactions could not.⁷

We see that “choice” involves “power” because it is through power events that we reach the “choice” outcome. The “choice” perspective has some advantages, however. First, as we have seen in the preceding text, it is sometimes more efficient than power in helping us to see the big picture. Second, it emphasizes that politics meets needs. From a purely power perspective, we can easily lose the role of needs in shaping politics.

POWER AND CHOICE

Politics, then, consists of making common decisions for a group through the use of power. Although the concept involves some complexity, it will usually be clear to everyone concerned whether a given action is or is not political in this sense. From the two parts of our definition, there stem two basic ways of looking at how such common policies are made, and people often emphasize one or the other of these in evaluating any particular political action. In so doing, they may fail to consider how their viewpoint colors their conclusions. The two alternative viewpoints are as follows:

1. We may interpret political action as a way to work out rationally the best common solution to a common problem—or at least a way to work out a reasonable common solution. That is, politics consists of public choice. (Even though this perspective emphasizes the cooperative aspect of decisions, power will still be involved in the making of choices, as noted previously; if nothing else, the power to persuade will be involved, and, of course, some of the “public” will undoubtedly have had more power than others and will have tipped things in favor of their needs.)
2. We may interpret political action as a process through which some people are dominated by other people. That is, politics consists simply of the use of power. Here we often think of power simply as power through coercion. Yet in some cases, political action can involve a majority making decisions for an entire group, even if there is a minority that does not agree or participate. This would be an example of majority rule in elections in a representative democracy.

In other words, two people who observe the same political action from these opposing viewpoints might have different ideas of what is happening. For instance, a person operating from the choice viewpoint might look at the large number of people who fail to vote in American presidential elections and conclude that if such a large number of people have chosen not to bother voting, they must be tolerably satisfied with things as they are. Someone else, operating from the “power” viewpoint, might look at that same large number of nonvoters and conclude that American elections are

Lee Lorenz/The New Yorker Collection/The Cartoon Bank



flawed, that they are meant to give the appearance of popular choice without providing the voter with significantly different options (i.e., many voters do not bother to vote because their choices have been restricted).

Often, both viewpoints are partly accurate. Politics generally involves considering at least the broad needs of the group for whom policy is made: pure tyranny is rare and is difficult to maintain. At the same time, making a common policy generally means that one part of a group is dominating another part to at least some extent. In the previous presidential voting example, both characterizations probably have some truth to them.

It is good to bear these two perspectives in mind because we may then be able to avoid misjudging a particular political situation as all one or the other. For example, a college or university class is a group for which common policies must be made and in which a single person (the instructor) is formally charged with responsibility. Thus, the group's politics will largely consist of domination of the students by the instructor, based on the authority of her role as professor. However, the class is not solely or simply a system of domination because there are a number of informal mechanisms by which students participate in decision making. In short, the politics of a classroom also includes aspects of a rational working out of solutions to common problems. Such questions as the timing of tests, whether or not to close doors or leave the lights on, or the nature of special projects and examinations are often decided by the instructor in consultation with the students. In less direct ways, students—by their expressions of interest in taking or dropping the class—often influence the content or pace of a class. (Never underestimate the effect of paper shuffling two minutes before the end of a class.) Thus, although the politics of a classroom consist primarily of domination, there is also some element of a common search for solutions to common problems. We might overlook this if we were not alert to the two sides of politics.

An example of this problem is raised by Terry M. Moe, who argues that a popular theory (rational choice theory, which we will discuss in [chapter 5](#)) emphasizes “choice” too much at the expense of “power.” One of the concerns of this body of theory is the question of why institutions like Congress, the presidency, bureaucracies, and the like are set up as they are. Rational choice theory emphasizes voluntary choice in setting up such institutions; it sees them as evolving to solve problems of coordinating varied people’s actions to obtain coherent policies. This is clearly a “choice” perspective, in that it explains the way institutions are set up by pointing to their need for coherent policy making. But as Moe points out, while this benign view may be part of the story, institutions are also shaped by powerful political figures to get things they want. The absence of such a “power” perspective is a serious flaw in the theory.⁸

Additionally, Albert O. Hirschman argues that individuals have three options when confronting they dislike—exit, voice, or loyalty. They can withdraw or disengage, protest or let their views be known in some way, or remain silent. The choices that individuals have are shaped by institutions, as well as the choices they make. James C. Scott sees power among those often described as weak. In the face of direct threats from governments, they can take passive resistance measures such as work slowdowns as ways to express their choices. The point here is that power and choice are connected and not always easily separated or distinguished.

It is especially important to bear in mind these two points of view when we consider political actions about which we have strong feelings and about which we may expect to be prejudiced. Until the opening up of elections in the Soviet Union in the 1970s, for instance, Americans tended to dismiss elections in communist countries as simple fraud because voters could only vote for a single candidate, with no electoral competition for their votes. However, there was also evident in those elections a surprising element of broad participation in a search for common action. For instance, even during the period of noncompetitive elections, with only a single candidate on the ballot, 28 percent of Soviet citizens reported that they had at one time or another attempted to persuade others to vote as they did; 19 percent had contacted a state or national government official about some problem.⁹ “The weeks preceding the election see the formation of countless study circles, discussion groups, campaign meetings, door-to-door canvassing, rallies, demonstrations, and speeches.”¹⁰ There appears to have been something more to the Soviet Union’s uncontested elections than we were able to see at the time.

Another example of emotions leading us to think of politics not as an interplay among power and choice but just as one or the other is furnished by Iraq at the time of the Second Gulf War in 2003. The U.S. government focused so strongly on Saddam Hussein as a brutal dictator, ruling by the power of coercion, that they assumed victorious American troops would be greeted by jubilant crowds of grateful Iraqis. In their intense dislike of Saddam Hussein, they forgot that although he did indeed maintain his regime by unspeakable violence, the basis of his rule was more complex than that. He was not only a brutal dictator but, at the same time, also a focus of national unity and nationalism; some parts of the country had been favored by his regime (although others had suffered); and he was seen as having maintained order in a potentially violent territory. The resulting mixed reaction to American troops—relief at the end of Saddam Hussein’s oppression, but anger at the breakdown in security and the presence of a foreign army of occupation—caught the U.S. government by surprise and left it unprepared for the rise of a crippling insurgency. Similarly, after the terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001, and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan to oust the Taliban from power (who harbored the terrorist group that attacked the United States), many thought it would be easy to set up a new government that would

be stable and more free. Twenty years later, President Joe Biden called for the final U.S. troops to be withdrawn from that country. It was not clear that in a generation the United States had accomplished its goals to democratize the country or change loyalties or attitudes in Afghanistan.

Bearing in mind that there is almost always more to any political choice than just the exercise of power, or just the provision of a collective choice, helps us to remain alert to more varied possibilities even when we know we are strongly prejudiced about a subject.

To summarize this section of the chapter: politics consists of making a common decision for a group of people through the use of power. We may view any act of politics from two perspectives, either as a search for an answer to common problems or as an act by which some members of a group impose their will on other members of the group. It is important to remember that generally both viewpoints have at least some validity. It is especially important to remember this when we might be prejudiced about the subject at hand because keeping both viewpoints in mind can help us to avoid thinking about the subject in narrow, prejudiced ways. Power and choice, the two major themes by which we organize our views of politics, have provided the title of this book. They will recur from time to time in this book as we examine various aspects of politics.

The Concentration of Power in Leaders

The use of power is surprisingly universal, even in determining common decisions for very large groups of people. People around the world do not vary much in physical strength and intelligence. They are more or less equal in their basic talents. Yet, millions of them will fear and obey another person whose intrinsic capacities are little superior to theirs.

It is understandable that this should be so within families because of the weakness and inexperience of children. The adult members of a family are stronger than the children, and it is perhaps natural that they should be able to control them. However, it is astounding that large numbers of adults will grant this sort of control over their own actions to a military officer, a member of Congress, a dictator, or a religious leader. How is it that political power is so universal and often so concentrated in small numbers of people?¹¹

Simply posing the question in this way demonstrates once again that the bases of power must be varied and complex. Physical compulsion alone would not be sufficient to ensure the obedience that people all over the world give to their political leaders.

Authority and Government

The thing that makes it possible to concentrate power in this way is **authority**. A person (or a group of people) has authority if there is general agreement among those involved that she has the right to control certain decisions and that her decisions should be complied with in those areas. The concept of authority is related to another called **legitimacy**. Just because a person or an institution has power does not make its use legitimate. If there is general agreement that someone may use power, then they have the authority to do so and it will be viewed as legitimate. Various individuals or groups in a society have limited sorts of authority that extend over specific ranges of behavior. A parent has authority to tell children of a certain age when they should go to bed or with whom they should play, but as children grow older the range of activities over which a parent has authority dwindles until it disappears. A teacher in a classroom has the authority to tell students how they should prepare for classes, but the teacher does not have the authority to tell them whom they may date or what political candidate to support. A General Motors supervisor has the

authority to tell an assembly-line worker which bolts to tighten, but he cannot tell the worker how to spend coffee breaks; and when the worker resigns, the supervisor has no authority at all.

In contrast to such groups, a **government** is a group of people with ultimate authority within a territory. It is unique in society in that all its power involves authority and that, at least potentially, there is no limit to the range of activities over which it may exercise authority. Most governments impose some limits on their authority; for instance, the U.S. government, in its Constitution, rules out the exercise of authority over what religion people are to follow or what people are to say to each other. However, these limitations are self-imposed and not necessarily “natural” to governments. Many governments around the world, at one time or another, have claimed authority to tell people what religion they should follow, what they should or should not say to one another, what sort of sexual activity was permitted, what they might eat or drink, or the sports and recreation in which they could take part, or recently whether to wear face masks or get a vaccine to combat a pandemic. It is safe to say that there is no area of human activity over which some government or another has not at some time exercised authority. All governments claim authority to tell people what to do, the question is the range of issues or human activities that they have the authority to do this.

Authority is so pervasive and important because it is an efficient way to exercise power. It provides a “standard operating procedure” for power, in which a decision does not require any direct use of force, making of arguments, or construction of incentives. Authority allows smooth day-to-day decisions on many questions with minimal spinning of wheels. It may be backed up ultimately by the threat of coercion (the police will haul you off and punish you physically if you do not do what those in authority tell you to do), or it may be backed up ultimately by persuasion (if you keep your well clean, as the government tells you to do, you will be sick less often). However, if people do what the government tells them to do, without having to be coerced or persuaded, everything goes more smoothly and—at least from the government’s point of view—more satisfactorily. In general, authority does not require the actual use of coercion or persuasion to any great extent. No one has to stand at street corners to force cars to stop at red lights, and no one has to stand there to persuade them to do so. One of the things that makes a government so important to politics is that it has authority and therefore can ensure that people will comply with its commands with a minimum of expensive and time-consuming coercion or persuasion.

People do obey governmental authority and not always out of threats of force or coercion, but because they want to, as Lukes suggested. Actions against authority are by definition “outlaw” behavior and therefore extraordinary, so we can think of many vivid examples of refusals to obey authority—burglary, speeding on the highways, or tax evasion. The startling thing, however, is that few people steal things even when it would be safe to do so, most people drive at or near speed limit even though only a sprinkling of police are available to monitor what they are doing, and most people pay the taxes they owe. It is authority that makes this system of commands and obedience work as smoothly as it does, and this makes the modern state appear to us to be the most natural form of political organization.

Authority is not a simple thing that is either present or absent. Rather, it is a matter of degree. Remember, we stated that authority exists because it is “generally agreed on,” that is, most people believe it exists. There will probably never be a government for which every person agrees on the existence and range of the government’s authority. Sometimes when a government issues commands, a portion of the people do not accept its authority to do so. If enough people deny the authority of the government, there

is a problem. In the early part of the twentieth century, the government of the United States attempted to command people not to drink alcohol. So many people denied the authority of the government in this area that enforcement proved impossible and the law was eventually abandoned. More seriously, in the 1860s, the whole southern region of the United States denied that the national government had any authority over it at all. The states in that region set up their own new government instead, and it took a long and bloody Civil War to reestablish the authority of the U.S. government over them. In 1989 across Eastern Europe in countries such as East Germany, Hungary, and Poland the people decided that these communist government no longer had authority over them, and they hit the streets in demonstrations. Soon thereafter these governments fell and were replaced by new ones.

Legitimacy and Authority

The crux of government then, and of its ability to function effectively, is the government's wide-ranging authority to organize the lives of its people. Paradoxically, this authority exists only because the people believe it to exist and that it is appropriate. If authority were to fail, it might still be possible for a government to organize its people by coercion and persuasion but at such great cost that this approach could probably not be sustained. A pure tyranny, existing without the benefit of at least some degree of authority, probably could not last long.

It is crucial to a government that large numbers of its people should believe not only that it has authority, but that it properly *should* have that authority. As noted in the preceding text, we call the existence of this sort of feeling, to the extent that it does exist, the legitimacy of the government. Legitimacy, like authority, is a matter of degree. Not everyone in a state will necessarily always agree that its government is legitimate or that a given type of governmental act is legitimate. Much of the violence of politics in Afghanistan, for instance, is a result of a failure to agree on what sort of government is legitimate.

Sources of Legitimacy

How does a government achieve a reasonable degree of legitimacy? There are many ways by which the people's allegiance may be bound to a government so that it is considered legitimate.

1. *Legitimacy by Results.* First and foremost, a government may gain and retain legitimacy with its people by providing for them the things they most want: security against physical assault, security of their country's borders against invasion, pride in their nation, and economic security. If the government can provide these things, its legitimacy will be greatly strengthened. If it cannot, its legitimacy is likely to be called into question.

A good example of "legitimacy by results" is the rule of Adolf Hitler in Germany in the 1930s. In 1933, Hitler took power through dubious maneuvers and with at most a bare majority of support. The highest number of votes the Nazi party had received in a fully free election was 37 percent—enough to make it the largest party in the country but not a mandate for dictatorship. Once in power, Hitler could initially count on the free support of only about one-third of the Germans, and powerful forces were arrayed against him—the labor unions, the Catholic Church, and much of the army's general staff. Hitler was a monster, but what solidified his hold on Germany and gave him a degree of legitimacy by the end of the 1930s were the results of his early policies. He reduced unemployment by large-scale deficit spending; by some audacious bluffs, he outmaneuvered France and England and reestablished Germany as a great power; he built the autobahn system of superhighways; he even pioneered the Volkswagen

“beetle” automobile. In spite of his suppression of free speech, his oppression of Jews, and his crude party comrades, these accomplishments brought him widespread support from the German people. By the late 1930s, it probably would have been impossible for anyone to seek to overthrow his rule. It was not until 1944, when he had obviously lost World War II, that a group of generals were able to muster sufficient strength to try to depose him; even then, the attempt failed.

More recently, in 1999 Vladimir Putin was selected to be prime minister of the Russian Federation by then President Boris Yeltsin. Putin eventually became president at a time of economic crises. Part of his popularity among the Russian public for many years was that high oil prices provided revenue to his government and sustained a rising standard of living; he also provided stability and appealed to national pride. This happened at the same time that many of the democratic reforms in the country were being eroded and the country had effectively returned to single-party if not single-person rule again similar to the Soviet era.

2. *Legitimacy by Habit.* Once a government has existed for a while, people become accustomed to obeying its laws. People expect to operate under some government or other, and so whatever government is in place and has been obeyed in the past is likely to be regarded as legitimate—unless a particular crisis arises or some force (another state, perhaps) intervenes from outside. In other words, once a particular government has been in place for a while, and people have developed the habit of obeying it, it no longer has to perpetually justify its existence. Rather, the burden of proof lies with whoever would propose an alternative government. The existing government remains legitimate unless and until a compelling alternative comes along. We should not underestimate the importance of habit in maintaining governments in power.¹²

3. *Legitimacy by Historical, Religious, or Ethnic Identity.* Many governments enhance their legitimacy by the ties that exist between themselves and the people



Shawshots/Alamy Stock Photo.

Adolf Hitler examining a prototype model of his “people’s car,” the Volkswagen Beetle.

because of the government leaders' past accomplishments (their historic role) or because of the religious and/or ethnic similarity between the government leaders and the people.

This may be especially important when a government has not yet been in place long enough for the people to have developed the habit of treating it as legitimate and in which the many economic and social problems that plague most new countries make it difficult for the government to achieve legitimacy by results.

Many new governments are able to buy time by virtue of the status they acquired in leading the country into independence in the first place. George Washington was revered as the "father of his country" after his success as commander of the Revolutionary Army. He and his associates enjoyed a couple of decades in which the people of the United States regarded them as their natural government, and this allowed them to get the Constitution into place and establish among the people the habit of obeying it. Similarly, the Labor Party in Israel, the Congress Party in India (and more recently with religious and national appeals by Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Varanasi Party), the party of Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, and the National Liberation Front in Algeria had a breathing space in which the people accepted their governments because they had led the independence movements that established their states in the first place. A government may also use religious or ethnic ties to enhance its legitimacy. In Iran, the regime used its ties to the dominant Shiite Muslim sect and has played on antagonisms between the Persian majority in the country and the Arab populations in the rest of the Mideast to strengthen its legitimacy. Similarly, South Africa's former, white-dominated government long used whites' fears of blacks to strengthen its legitimacy among the white population.

4. *Legitimacy by Procedures.* Finally, a government may strengthen its legitimacy by following certain procedures in setting itself up—procedures in which many people have confidence, so that they will start off with a fund of trust for any government that has been established along these lines.

The best example of this is democracy—a system in which the citizens participate in selecting their leaders and perhaps also in determining the country's policies. Typically, democratic governments are chosen by competitive elections in which citizens vote to decide which of various alternative leadership teams are to govern. Because the resulting government has won broader support than any alternative, it gains a strong base of legitimacy. It is the government "of the people."

The procedures of democratic election are what give such a government a good part of its legitimacy. One may dislike particular leaders or think their policies unwise, but it is hard to argue with their right to govern as long as they have been selected by the proper procedures. In the United States, the electoral college is the system ultimately used to select the president. It is possible to win the electoral college and become president but not win the popular vote. This has happened several times in U.S. history, most recently in 2000 and 2016. While in both cases some argued that the electoral college winners, George W. Bush and Donald Trump, were not legitimate, most accepted the results as valid because the proper procedures were followed.

Democratic government is the preeminent example of legitimacy by procedures—so preeminent that dictatorships often imitate democratic procedures through staged elections. At other times, other procedures have served as the basis for legitimacy; all that is important is that the procedure be accepted as appropriate. Until a few centuries ago, for instance, and still in a few countries, it was accepted that political leadership was most properly passed on by inheritance. One king ruled; when he died, his heir became the new king. This procedure was so important as a basis of legitimacy that great care was taken to lay out precise rules of inheritance; if no clear heir was available, the result was sometimes civil war.

POLITICS OF THE STATE

One thing that has probably seemed odd to you in this chapter, right from its inclusion of family and workplace in the set of questions on page 3, is that we have defined some things as politics that we do not always think of under that heading. There is some variation in common usage of the word. We do not often think of family, workplace, or place of worship as political places, but we do sometimes think of them that way. When we refer to “office politics,” “campus politics,” and “church politics,” we mean activities that fit under the definition of politics presented in this chapter: the use of power to make common decisions for groups of people.

This broad use of the word “politics” fits the general definition presented in this chapter, but a much more common use of the word is narrower. If we say, “Frank went into politics,” or “I’m fascinated by politics,” we are not thinking of the family or corporation or place of worship. In this sense of the word, we are referring generally to the kind of politics that has to do with government of the state.

State has a special meaning in political science. It is not the same thing as the states of the United States; instead, it is what we commonly call a country. The United States is a state in this sense, as are France, Russia, Algeria, and Mexico. Political scientists prefer the word “state” to the more usual “country” because it is more precise. Except for the minor confusion of “states” in the United States, the word means just one thing. “Country,” however, can mean a state like France or Canada, a region or type of place (“cattle country”), or the opposite of urban (“I live in the country”).

We will look at the state in more detail in [chapter 3](#), but for now it is enough to note that the state is a particular kind of social group. Over the last few centuries, people have focused increasingly on the state of which they are citizens, and the state has determined more of what goes on in our lives. Several centuries ago, most people were almost unaware of the state in which they lived; they noticed it only if the king’s soldiers marched through their fields. At that time, many large geographic areas could hardly be said to have been organized as states at all. Gradually, states have become more thoroughly organized and have demanded more from us. First, states became the prime focus of peace and war, maintaining peace within their borders and waging war with other states. Then, states also became the organizers of commerce and industry within their borders, regulating prices and the quality of products, and constructing roads and canals. Only for the last several decades has the state generally been expected by its citizens to maintain stability in the economy, guarantee employment, and keep the value of currency stable. A couple of centuries ago, events in the economy were treated as “acts of God,” and the state was not much involved in them, but today, the state is generally held responsible for economic conditions. The responsibilities of the state continue to grow. In the future, might the weather, now treated as an “act of God,” become part of the state’s responsibility?

For better or worse, the state has become critically important to us, and its politics has taken on great importance. When we say “politics,” we usually mean “politics of the state.” Political science shares this general preoccupation with politics of the state. However, politics as state-centric is not exclusive. In international politics the European Union has become an important actor that is different from the states that compose it. The United Nations is also a major player in international politics. Neither are states, but they are important political actors nonetheless that cannot be ignored. Similarly terrorist organizations across the world are not states but they are important in domestic and international politics.

Although we will occasionally look at other sorts of politics in this book, we will direct most of our attention to the politics of the state. Remember the more general

meaning of politics, however, and remember that in dealing with the state we will be looking at politics only in one of its forms, albeit its most important and most complex form.

POLITICAL SCIENCE

Political science is the academic field that takes as its sole and general task the analysis of politics, especially the politics of the state. This definition raises two questions. The first is how political science is connected to politics, the second is about the object of inquiry and the boundary question.

When individuals run for office, a person votes, or a government makes decisions, this is politics. The people and individuals involved are political actors and institutions. Political science studies this. Political science is not the making of political or policy choices, but rather it is the study of this. Most of the time political scientists are not active participants in the state when they are studying politics, they are observers using special tools and techniques to describe, explain, and perhaps even predict what is going to happen.

What this means is that politics of the state is the “object of inquiry” for political scientists. By object of inquiry, one means what political scientists study, as opposed to anthropologists or economists, is something different than what the latter investigate. While this book’s primary focus is on the state as an object of inquiry, many political scientists will look also at family structures or, in the case of political theory, books, texts, or writings by authors as their focus to understand politics. As political scientists, we also may look at things that are also examined by journalists or economists, for example. The point here is that the ultimate boundaries of what is political science’s object of inquiry may not be as clear as some in the profession hope, and there may be some overlap with what other academic fields also study. Yet what will define the field of political science generally is both what we study, and the methods employed to do that.

There has been continuing debate over how “scientific” political science should be. Some political scientists think that politics is so complex and involves such basic personal values that we should not try to pin it down to exact regularities. Rather, we should interpret each political event and idea more or less in and of itself, though looking for patterns across events. Such political scientists would model themselves upon historians, who interpret a particular sequence of events more or less in and of itself, seeking to retain the richness of its detail while making a general patterned interpretation of what process unfolded through the events or, upon anthropologists, who interpret a particular society and culture more or less in and of itself, seeking to retain the richness of its detail while making a general patterned interpretation of it.

Other political scientists think that their discipline should be more scientific, seeking out the basic essence of regularities across a whole set of events, even though this means sacrificing some of the rich detail with which each single event is laden. They think that the way to explain and predict what happens in politics is to emphasize the underlying processes that a number of disparate events may have in common. These political scientists would model themselves on other social scientists such as economists, who analyze events simply as instances of general processes, which they treat in the abstract. Economists, for instance, prefer to deal at a general level with supply-and-demand theories rather than analyze specifically what happens in a given used car lot.

The first type of political scientists are sometimes called “interpretivists” (or often “qualitative”), the latter “behavioralists” (or “quantitative”). **Interpretive political scientists** are most likely to deal in historical and philosophical aspects of politics and

to seek detailed, nonnumerical information on a few cases. **Behavioralists** lean more toward looking for broad patterns across cases and using statistical analyses of numerical information. They find numerical information especially attractive because it distills a set of complex details down into something very simple and basic—a number. Therefore, because behavioralists are looking for simple descriptions of basic processes, they see it as more useful to summarize party competition in many congressional districts with a single index number for each district than to try to digest masses of biography, newspaper accounts, and other sources from a few congressional races.

Do not view this picture as black and white. Political science does not consist of two warring camps, and most political scientists combine some element of “interpretivism” with some element of “behavioralism.” However, there are different degrees of these among political scientists, which adds greatly to the range of analysis available in the field. It is also the case that different approaches or methods of study might produce different information. What we study might determine how we study it and what we learn.

Finally, there is a third camp out there that questions what it even means to be a science. Many see the classic method of science as doing controlled experiments to test hypotheses. Yet not all sciences can do controlled experiments. Astronomy cannot. What it means to be a science in biology is different from that in chemistry. Some also argue that science has more interpretation of facts or assumptions built into than many think. Without reviewing a large debate over the nature of what constitutes a science, there are some who question whether political science can ever be a science in the way that science is thought to be, or perhaps “real” or hard science is not objective as many contend. Somewhat humorously, some claim that political science studies the hard questions of power and the state, leaving the easy questions about atoms and cells to scientists!

Whatever their preferred way of gathering information about the political world, all political scientists tend to emphasize broad generalization and abstraction. Political scientists pursue generalization through theory. They generally seek to use an inductive method of gathering information from particular examples into more general claims about politics.

A **theory** is a statement linking specific instances to broader principles. **Empirical theories** are theories describing how things work in the world we observe. They are usually explanatory, that is, they have to do with why things happen as they do. This means they consist of causal statements of the form “X causes Y.” (For more on causation, see the discussion in the appendix, pp. A-3 to A-5.) An example of an empirical theory addressing one of the questions from page 3—why the United States has only two major political parties—would be, “Single-member-district-plurality (SMDP) electoral systems, by disadvantaging small parties, tend to reduce the number of political parties to two; since the United States has an SMDP electoral system, that tends to lead to a two-party system in the United States.” You will meet the SMDP electoral system in [chapter 10](#). For now, the point is that this is a causal statement (SMDP causes two-party systems) and it links the specific case (the United States, which has an SMDP electoral system) to a general principle.

Normative theories involve making a judgment about the world, not describing how it works. They address the question, “What should X be or do?” Again, these theories link specific cases to general principles. An example would be, “What sort of public health care plan should the United States have?” Normative theorists would answer this question by applying general principles, such as “governments should intervene as little as possible in people’s lives” or “societies are good to the extent that everyone has equal chances in life,” to the specific policy question.

The important thing to note here is that both of our major kinds of theory—normative and empirical—are statements that deal with specific instances by linking them to general principles. Our relatively strong reliance on theory is what sets political scientists apart from others, especially historians, who also deal with politics as a subject. Theories are the building blocks of political science, and you will find them throughout this book.

For practical purposes of curriculum and organization, the field of political science in the United States is divided into subfields according to the subjects in which political scientists specialize. The major subfields are as follows:

- *American political behavior*: The study of individuals and nongovernmental organizations involved in politics and of why they do what they do. Studies of public opinion, elections, interest groups, and political parties fall under this heading.
- *American political institutions*: The study of national governmental bodies, the Congress, the presidency, the bureaucracy, and—in part—the courts.
- *American public law*: The study of legal reasoning and of why courts hand down the decisions they do.
- *American public policy*: The analysis of the product of politics—the policies that are laid down.
- *American state and local politics*: The study of all the preceding, but at the level of “states” (such as California or Minnesota) and localities rather than the country as a whole.
- *Comparative politics*: The study of all the preceding in any place but the United States. To lump together all aspects of politics outside of the United States is parochial, but that is what usually happens. Political scientists in other countries are as bad. For example, Swedish political scientists have many subdivisions of the study of Sweden, as do the French for France, and the Japanese for Japan.
- *International politics*: The study of politics between states—the making of common decisions for a group of states, for example, through wars and diplomacy.¹³ “International politics” is the only subfield that does this; all the previously listed subfields deal with politics within states, not between them.
- *Political theory*: The history of ideas about politics and critical discussion of political values.

There are also other subfields, such as women and politics, political sociology, and race and politics among many others.

This book reviews the general findings of political science but blends U.S. politics and “comparative politics,” treating the politics of all parts of the world (including the United States) comparatively.

THE PLEASURES OF POLITICS

We have led you through some rather dry material in this chapter because it was necessary to start you off with clarity on a number of concepts. Frequently throughout this book you will find that we are working toward greater precision than we find in everyday language; this usually requires abstraction and may also seem a bit dry. We hope, however, that as we do this, you will remember—and we can communicate—what a fascinating and dramatic thing we are studying.

“The use of power to reach collective choices”—think what this phrase means. We are talking about struggles for the souls of nations. The “use of power” has meant eighteenth-century American author Henry David Thoreau going to prison to protest the U.S. invasion of Mexico; underground resistance by the Catholic Church and the Communist Party against Nazi occupation troops in World War II; students braving

police dogs and murderous assaults to integrate American businesses and public facilities in the 1960s; Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin juggling political coalitions to create democracy in the Soviet Union, where it had never been seen before; indigenous people in the mountains of Mexico confronting the government and the army to assert their rights; gay, lesbian, and transgender individuals fighting for equal rights; or Black Lives Matter demanding a change in police practices in the United States. “Collective choices” have included the invention of democracy as a way to accomplish government by the people; the development of public education, park systems, and public health; and also such horrors as the Nazis’ murder of millions of Jews and other “undesirables.”

We try in this book to write dispassionately about politics because it is easier to keep a clear head that way, but a love of politics lies behind all of it. One of us (Phil) switched from an English literature major to political science in the 1960s because he was excited by John Kennedy’s call for public service. He remained a news “junkie” and sometime participant in politics ever since. The other (David) switched from being a physics major to politics science in the 1970s because he was inspired by the desire to help the poor and he entered government service and has been involved in many ways at various levels of government. The things we will be analyzing in the pages that follow involve real people devoting their energies to things in which they believe. While you will learn how to analyze what is happening in these events and to deal with the events dispassionately, we hope you will not forget the humanity that is moving through them.

KEY TERMS

authority (p. 12)	normative theories (p. 19)
behavioralists (p. 19)	political science (p. 18)
empirical theories (p. 19)	politics (p. 3)
government (p. 13)	power (p. 5)
interpretive political scientists (p. 18)	state (p. 17)
legitimacy (p. 12)	theory (p. 19)

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is politics? What makes a decision political?
2. Of all decisions, only some are “common decisions.” What is a “common decision”?
3. What is power?
4. Why is power so hard to pin down in any specific instance?
5. What does it mean to interpret a political decision in terms of power? In terms of choice? Can varying interpretations differ in the degree to which they do each? Give an example.
6. What is authority? Why do governments rely so much on authority?
7. What is legitimacy, and how does it relate to authority?
8. Define each of the following: legitimacy by results, legitimacy by habit, legitimacy by historical/religious/ethnic identity, and legitimacy by procedures.
9. What is the politics of the state, and how does it relate to the more general concept of “politics”?
10. What defines the field of political science? Within political science, what distinguishes interpretive political scientists from behavioral political scientists? Is this a black-and-white distinction?

2

Modern Ideologies and Political Philosophy



MAJOR THEMES TO LOOK FOR IN THIS CHAPTER

- Political theory is a field within political science, and it seeks to answer basic normative yet persistent questions such as: What are the goals of politics? What is the best form of government? What is the nature of humans?
- An ideology is an organized set of related ideas that modify one another. Ideologies are useful to us in making sense of the things around us and presenting public arguments.
- “Conservatism” and “liberalism” as understood in the United States are two variants of a broader ideology, liberalism, that developed in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
- Liberalism, conservatism, and socialism developed in Europe to organize and express different groups’ needs in the wake of the social disruption of the Industrial Revolution. They remain important around the world in their own right and as building blocks for ideological variants.
- Religions are ideologies, in that they organize our ideas, but they also are identity groups, which gives them particular power in politics.

Many people have beliefs about politics. That is, they have some ideas perhaps about what they want government to do. They may support specific laws, back candidates for office, or be a member of a political party that represents some ideas. These beliefs may be conscious or unconscious, by that, one may like something or support a specific political party, policy, or idea and not know why or be aware they do. Beliefs may also be systematic or not. Again, it is possible for individuals to hold separate beliefs that may be in conflict or coherent. Perhaps one supports a prolife position when it comes to abortion but supports the death penalty for those accused of murdering people. Maybe the two positions make sense together or maybe not.

People can hold all types of beliefs or ideas, grouped together in various levels of coherence or organization. Much of political science seeks to study the attitudes or beliefs of individuals, seeking to understand how they change across variables such as age, income, or religion. Gathering this type of information is important to understanding politics, but public opinion or attitude surveys are different than a study of ideologies. They are also different from political theory or philosophy.

Within the discipline of political science there is a subfield called **political theory** or **political philosophy**. Courses in this subfield might examine topics such as feminist political theory; American political thought; and Ancient, Classical, Modern, or Contemporary political theory. One might even see more specific courses on topics or ideologies such as those on Marxism or Socialism, or on Democratic theory. What is the relationship between beliefs, ideologies, and political theory? Why is there a branch of political science devoted to political theory and how is it connected to the broader study of politics?

What Is Political Theory?

Kenneth Dolbear once argued that individuals can hold ideas or beliefs at different levels of depth or coherence.¹ At the deepest level would be a political philosophy or political theory. Below that might be an ideology, perhaps followed by beliefs. What do we mean by political theory or philosophy?

Imagine you and your friends are having a conversation about politics. One of you asks the question, What is the best form of government? Is it a democracy, a monarchy, or something else? Or someone asks, What are the goals of politics? Should it be promoting liberty for some or all? Is it promoting equality? If so, in what sense—equality of income or before the law? Or even imagine a talk that asks why we should have government at all, where someone says we do not need government because humans are naturally good and cooperative, and laws simply get in the way. Conversely, maybe you argue that humans are naturally self-interested or evil and therefore government, perhaps a powerful one, is needed to keep humans in line to promote social order. All these are good questions; they are the kind that political thinkers or philosophers have asked in the West (Europe and the Americas) for more than 2,000 years.

Dating back to the Ancient Greeks, if not earlier, there has been a long line of inquiry asking what might be called perennial questions about politics. These are basic questions about whether humans are by nature good or bad and, based on the answer to that question, determining the best form of government. Thinkers from the Ancient Greeks including Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle; or Romans such as Cicero; Medieval or Christian thinkers such as Saint Augustine or Saint Thomas Aquinas; or Moderns such as Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Mary Wollstonecraft, Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, and others have been interested in these questions, and they have sought to provide answers. They have tried to construct a more coherent vision of politics, arguing for a specific set of ideas that would provide a normative basis for what politics should be about, what government is supposed to do, or in some cases what or who is entitled to rule and how. In many cases these thinkers were also political activists who were not only trying to answer these basic questions but also bring about their vision through action. Traditionally, political theory thus was not simply an academic subfield but rather an important endeavor to address some questions over which there was presumably no single solution and whose answer may or may not be proven empirically. Political theory was a normative form of investigation, perhaps not on par with asking “What is the meaning of life?” but possibly close.

What is political theory then? This is not an easy question to answer. Consider three possible answers. Leo Strauss says that if philosophy is the quest for truth, then political philosophy is the search for political truth, including the good life.² It is a search for the good life, including the best form of political regime. Political philosophy is the replacement of political opinion with political knowledge.

Isaiah Berlin contends that political theory exists because there is no ultimate agreement about the ends and goals of society.³ There are disputes over how humans

should conduct themselves, why we should obey government and laws, and what place freedom and equality have in human affairs. There may also be disputes over what critical terms such as freedom and equality mean.

Sheldon Wolin argues that political theory is about contending conceptions regarding how to organize society.⁴ There are disputes over fundamental issues such as the purpose of government, who should rule, when coercion or force can be used to get people to obey the law, how power should be allocated, and what the reality of human nature is and how it might affect what government is supposed to do. Over time, some political thinkers, such as John Locke, have articulated epic theories on these subjects, providing a paradigm for social order and politics.⁵

Strauss, Berlin, and Wolin differ on the exact meaning and purpose of political theory and philosophy. However, there are certain commonalities to their interpretations of the concept. Political theory or philosophy is a normative enterprise or inquiry into the nature of government and politics. It examines the ends or goals of government, often seeking to form a vision they hope would be a blueprint for how society and politics should be ordered and structured. Political theory is not simply an effort to offer normative answers to these questions, but in some cases, it also has an action component that encourages its realization. Political theory perceived this way might contain an ethical component that encourages its achievement, or that urges readers to act. Political theory is the most inclusive and broadest way to think about politics in the sense of how to think about beliefs. Political theory is a worldview.

Yet below political theory there is a second-order level of thought that can be called *ideology*.

Most people approach politics through an **ideology**—an organized set of related ideas that modify one another. For instance, one person may believe that everyone is basically selfish, that politicians are all crooks, that a citizen owes nothing to the state, that it is all right to cheat on one's taxes, and that gun control is a bad thing because it keeps us from protecting ourselves. This is an ideology—a set of ideas about politics, all of which are related to one another and that modify and support each other.

Ideologies often contain many individual beliefs or ideas that are organized together and related in some way. For example, the belief that everyone is basically selfish helps provide a justification for the need to carry a gun, or the wish to cheat on taxes helps make one comfortable in the belief that the citizen owes nothing to the state, and vice versa. Another person may believe that individual freedom is very important, that government should regulate people as little as possible, that the United States should try to protect any people whose government is oppressing them, and that the U.S. government should not tell people whether they may carry guns. This is also an ideology: an organized set of ideas that modify and support each other. In this second example, the high value placed on individual freedom supports both a wish to protect human rights around the world and a reluctance to have the government regulate gun ownership.

Ideologies are useful to people, both for their own personal ease and satisfaction and for their public political activities. From the personal point of view, an ideology helps us reasonably easily and quickly to make sense of the varied political questions that come to our attention. In any given week, the news will raise questions about issues such as the control or deregulation of oil prices, the busing of schoolchildren to improve racial balance, the level of support for retired people in the Social Security system, the size of the military budget, or federal acquisition of land for parks and wildlife refuges. If we had to consider each of these issues anew, we would have an overwhelming task. However, if we approach each from the standpoint of a general

ideology that we have developed over time, the job is much simpler. Most issues will turn out to be instances of more general principles, and we can quickly settle them by applying those principles.

The new issue may also modify our ideology because an ideology is not carved in stone. For instance, devout Catholics who believe that the government should regulate people as little as possible may find themselves torn over the issue of legalized abortion and may modify some of their more general ideas about politics in light of the new issue. An ideology, then, while it is an organized set of ideas about politics that helps us to make sense of the plethora of political questions that face us, is not static. An ideology organizes ideas, but as it absorbs new ideas it evolves, too, and is slowly modified.⁶

An ideology also has public uses. In politics, we are typically concerned to convince others that a policy we favor is the right one. We usually have personal reasons for favoring the policy (we may want taxes to be cut because we are wealthy, oppose gun control because we like to collect guns, or favor national health insurance because we are poor), but these personal reasons are not usually good public reasons. People distrust a self-interested argument. Also, arguing for a policy by giving one's personal reasons for it would not win many allies; only those who are also rich could be convinced by the argument "I'm wealthy, therefore I want to see taxes cut." In political argument, we usually try to attract as many allies as possible to our position, and so personal reasons will not make good arguments. Ideologies, however, can serve this purpose very well. The wealthy person who argues that "government spending and taxation hamper individual initiative" may appeal to a great many people who, for various reasons, favor individual initiative.

Thus, we develop and maintain ideologies because of their usefulness to us in responding to events and their utility in public political argument. This is not a conscious, cynical process in which we deliberately frame an ideology to enlist allies in some cause or another. Rather, we are all comfortable with ideology and generally, over time, work out ideologies that fit our particular needs. Ideologies tend to take on a life of their own and guide their holders' political views in unanticipated ways. A business leader who feels that government should regulate as little as possible (for what we may think are obvious reasons) may find that this ideology also leads to positions—not particularly connected to self-interest—against the censorship of books in public libraries or the regulation of handguns.

An ideology helps us make sense out of politics for ourselves and gather allies for public argument. We develop our ideologies in such a way that they fit our needs and predispositions, reflecting what we want; but they also take on a life of their own and guide our decisions.

Overall, think of political theory, ideology, and belief as three levels of ideas that we as individuals or a group of individuals share. In all three there is a normative aspect to them, providing answers to specific questions about politics. In many cases, all three compel or seek to compel people to act or achieve or put into practice these ideas. For example, John Locke's views on government in part were the inspiration for the American Revolution in 1776 because his theory encouraged people to think they could rule or take power and not simply rely on a king or monarch to rule. Karl Marx's theory about capitalism, especially as modified by Vladimir Lenin, inspired communist revolutions across the world in the twentieth century. Over time, then, there have been many answers to some basic questions about politics, as noted in the preceding text, and, in fact, some argue that the history of political theory or political thought is a story of different answers to some perennial questions, different formulations of the same or different questions, or even disputes about the basic meaning of some terms such as liberty, equality, or justice.

AMERICAN IDEOLOGIES

All of us have some sort of ideology, or at least various ideas about politics that bear some sort of relationship one to another. However, not every ideology is equally neat and tidy, nor is every ideology worked out in equally full detail. Americans' ideologies tend to be more loosely organized than those of other people. In fact, Americans tend to admit exceptions and inconsistencies into their ideologies rather cheerfully. This is the case in part because American political ideology or thinking is influenced by many different writers and thinkers. Some have argued that American political thought is or was influenced by multiple founding values, all coming together to form an ideology.⁷

Two main ideologies are found among Americans: **American liberalism** and **American conservatism**. As we shall see, both of these ideologies are variants of a more general and well-worked-out ideology known as liberalism. This liberalism is mostly indebted to the British philosopher John Locke, whose 1689 book *Two Treatises on Government* influenced many of the American founders, such as Thomas Jefferson in the writing of the Declaration of Independence, as well as the drafting of the Constitution in 1787. Louis Hartz has argued that while other political theories or ideologies may have influenced our founders, liberalism was the dominant one and over time we have become more devoted to Lockean liberalism as a core ideology.⁸

American liberalism and American conservatism are simply differing versions that have sprung up in a predominantly liberal society. As you will see when we look at more established ideologies in the following text, we usually determine ideologies by an intellectual structure—a core value or values, from which we can derive a number of disparate policy positions by deduction. For instance, you will see that the core value of liberalism in its general (not American) sense is that the people are the government and get to establish its limits. Government is supposed to respect the individual liberty of people and treat everyone equally, at least in the eyes of the law. Liberal ideology endorses the idea that the government is accountable to the people and, as Thomas Jefferson said in the Declaration of Independence, we all have certain unalienable rights and that if the government we create does not honor them, we have a right to create a new government that does. Moreover, liberal ideology believes that all individuals should be able to develop their capacities to the fullest; from this it is possible to deduce arguments for issues such as the defense of free speech, for democracy, and for minimizing regulation when it comes to the economy. Because American political thought was dominated from the start by a general liberalism in this sense, Americans did not sort themselves out politically by competing deductive systems. Rather, ideologies in America have evolved as rival coalitions operating within a common intellectual structure.

American liberalism, for instance, has developed as a rather loosely held sense of support for underdogs, often placing emphasis upon promoting equality. As a result, concerns for economic equality are strong in American liberalism (the poor as underdogs), as is support for the interests of ethnic minorities, women, and LGBT people. Support for environmental protection is also part of American liberalism. And so is support for a fairly radical defense of freedom of expression, as exemplified by the American Civil Liberties Union.

American conservatism has traditionally emphasized individual liberty, seeing greater limits being placed on government. This has led to such positions as support for the right to own guns without regulation, the right of consumers to make their choices free of government oversight, and the right of businesses to operate with a minimum level of governmental regulation. In recent decades, American conservatism has added to these concerns a desire to maintain common values of morality and spirituality, and opposition to legalized abortion.

American liberalism and American conservatism are not tidy ideologies. A simplistic way of viewing the two is that the former favors more government regulation and involvement in people's lives and the economy, the latter less. Liberals want more government action to address issues such as the 2019–2021 COVID-19 pandemic by requiring people to wear masks, get vaccinated, or close businesses. Conservatives think the opposite. But in some cases, conservatives want more government action, such as to restrict abortions or use of drugs for recreational use. Neither liberals nor conservatives are really consistent or coherent in their views on government, equality, and liberty. It is also sometimes hard to see logical connections among the various attitudes detailed. It frequently happens that an American political figure is “liberal” on some of these issues and “conservative” on others. American labor unions, for example, have generally been quite concerned about issues of equality but have not been equally concerned about an issue such as abortion rights. There are many other complexities as well. For example, American conservatives generally favor free trade but are also concerned about the repression of religion in China. This leaves them to grapple with the question of what sort of trade relations the United States should maintain with China.

Both ideologies are therefore mixtures, representing marriages of political convenience, and it is difficult to find strict internal coherence among the various parts of either one.

The two American ideologies have been shaped as coalitions partly by the American two-party system. As you will see in [chapter 10](#), the American system of elections forces Americans into a system of two large parties; small parties find it very difficult to establish themselves. As a result, Americans with a wide variety of ideas on different questions find themselves squeezed together into one or another of the two parties, along with a large number of people who may have different concerns. American ideologies are shaped by this process of squeezing into coalitions, at least as much as by an intellectualized process of deduction. One indication that this is what happens is the fact that sometimes an issue migrates between ideologies.

It is probably the case, for instance, that at the time of the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion, more American liberals than American conservatives opposed the decision. (Simply from historic patterns of immigration, there were more Irish, Italian, and Polish Catholics in the Democratic Party at that time than in the Republican Party.) Democratic Party gatherings at the time were often split about evenly on the issue. Strikingly, Senator Ted Kennedy—who would be a leading prochoice figure by the mid-1970s—favored protecting the unborn in 1971, on the eve of the Supreme Court decision.⁹ However, there was another part of the American liberal constellation of interests that could not easily coexist with a prolife position—the feminist movement. The presence of both positions within American liberalism proved untenable. Over the ensuing decade or two, large numbers of those opposing abortion drifted away from American liberalism, until eventually opposition to abortion lodged on the right and became one of the defining issues separating the two ideologies.

Similarly, protection of the environment was at least as much an issue for American conservatives in the 1950s as it was for American liberals. As conflicts between businesses and environmentalists intensified in the 1960s and 1970s, environmentalism partially migrated to American liberalism, although there is still a significant minority of environmentalist conservatives. In this case, it was never entirely clear which way things would go: business interests associated with American conservatism experienced conflicts with environmentalism, but so did trade unions connected with American liberalism. Key issues do tend to sort themselves out to one side or the other, however, and this is what happened to environmentalism. Today, conservatives and liberals fight over the reality, cause, and remedies of climate

change and whether the government should do anything. Additionally, especially after the death of George Floyd at the hands of a police officer in 2020, liberals and conservatives also differ over issues on police reform and racism. As we shall see, liberal and conservative ideology more than ever overlap with political party preferences, producing a level of political polarization that has a big impact on the U.S. government, elections, and public policy.

Foreign policy issues are especially fluid. A cynic might say that American liberals trend internationalist when a Democrat is president and isolationist when a Republican is president—and that American conservatives trend internationalist when a Republican is president and isolationist when faced with a Democrat. Republicans opposed (Democratic) President Clinton’s military intervention in former Yugoslavia and spoke scathingly of his “nation-building.” But after 2000, with a Republican president, it was the Democrats who opposed George W. Bush’s interventions. With a change in party control in 2008, liberal opinion shifted again; liberals’ opposition to continuing the war in Afghanistan softened because a Democratic president, Barack Obama, was leading the war effort. Positions on foreign policy seem to flip freely back and forth between American liberalism and American conservatism.¹⁰ In 2016 when Donald Trump became president he promoted an “America first” foreign policy that rejected much of the internationalism and multilateralism that had defined American foreign policy under Bush and Obama. But with the election of Joe Biden in 2020, many thought the United States would become more interventionist again; however, he announced the United States would pull out all troops from Afghanistan, something that Trump had promised.

American ideologies may be a bit untidy, but they still have real influence. Ideologies impact political campaigns and debates. Ideologies become embraced by political parties. These parties are elected and seek to make policy based on these ideologies. Political groups such as Black Lives Matter or interest groups such as the National Rifle Association act on ideologies and urge adoption of specific legislation as a result. Ideologies are ideas, and many fight over them because ideas do matter.

Over the past few decades, the intensity of ideological debate has strengthened markedly in the United States. We have described American ideologies as “untidy mixtures,” but they are still ideologies. We can see the intensity of ideology today in the very strong reactions (positive and negative) to President George W. Bush in the 2000s,



Frank Cotham/The New Yorker Collection/
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in the Tea Party movement in 2010, the very strong feelings for and against President Donald Trump as president, and groups such as Black Lives Matters or with efforts by some to support gay, lesbian, or transgender rights. There are even competing reactions on how to view the individuals who entered the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021. Some would contend they were legitimate protestors; others would argue they were criminals who sought to threaten members of Congress to protest the election of Joe Biden as president. Some see groups such as the Proud Boys or the alt-right as groups inspired not so much by liberalism or conservatism but perhaps by fascism or even other ideas or ideologies. We can see it in the contemporary sharp contestation over judicial appointments in the Senate that would have been almost pro forma in the 1960s and 1970s, and we can see it in the proliferation of ideologically based interest groups and think tanks.

It is not obvious why we should have come to feel so much more strongly about our loose ideologies in the twenty-first century than we did in earlier decades. In part, it may be because of new techniques and technology (direct mailings, focus groups, polling, social media) that have made it easier for ideologues to raise money and fire up their troops. In part, it may be because of the involvement of the newly active evangelical religious right, who have brought some of the emotion of religious belief into the political sphere. In part, it may be the addition to the political realm since 1973 of the issue of abortion that excites deep emotion and on which compromise is at best exceedingly difficult. Or the heightened emotions may be due to the partisan realignment of the 1960s and 1970s in which the conservative South moved to the Republican Party, leaving the two parties more cleanly divided along ideological lines than they had been, adding the emotion of partisanship to conflicts over ideology. But in the end, it is also because these ideologies do articulate real conflicts between real groups in the population. They may be primarily coalitions rather than intellectual systems—less neat systems of ideas than the more general liberalism, conservatism, and socialism that we describe in the next sections. But as systems of conflict, they are just as real as those more tightly knit intellectual systems. In short, there are real differences between “American conservatives” and “American liberals.”¹¹

LIBERALISM

Louis Hartz along with a group of what is known as consensus historians have argued that American politics has been dominated by the values of liberalism as they were espoused by John Locke and the political tradition he created. This ideology or set of political values will be referred to as Lockean-**Liberalism**. Others claim that throughout American history there have been other ideologies outside of the liberal tradition. This is no doubt correct, but the dominant political ideologies still were significantly influenced by this liberalism. Liberal values of liberty, equality, and limited government form an important part of the political culture of the United States and have informed political debates and policy choices. In [chapter 8](#) the concept of political culture is examined in more detail. For now, simply think of this as Lockean-Liberalism.

The two American ideologies are variants of **liberalism**, one of the three great ideologies that developed in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This liberalism along with conservatism and socialism are three ideologies that have provided the framework for most political debate throughout the world since then.

Liberalism evolved in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries in reaction to the political order of medieval Europe. This political order was influenced significantly by Christianity and a religious order that supported monarchies across the continent that gave kings and queens nearly absolute power within their domain. As

Christianity developed out of the ashes of the Roman Empire in the fifth century and later, a variety of doctrines emerged to determine what matters were of concern to the Catholic Church and the pope and what were left for secular rulers to address. A variety of doctrines emerged, but among them was the doctrine of “Two Swords” that said the church was to handle spiritual matters; it developed a body of ecclesiastical law for those purposes. Secular rulers were entrusted to handle all other matters. This distinction was simple in theory but more complex in reality.

The church was very powerful, and all the rulers across Europe were members. Popes and bishops held significant influence over royalty, often threatening them with excommunication if they disobeyed. Kings and queens were coronated with the blessing of the church. Because under Christian doctrine popes were considered God’s representative on earth and the church was seen as the City of God (taking the name from Saint Augustine’s fifth-century book by the same name), monarchs were seen as acquiring their authority to rule from popes who gave them the blessing of God to rule. Taking away the blessing of the church, kings and queens were effectively powerless and lacked the right to rule.

At the same time the medieval world was Christian, dominated by the church, it was also based on the concept of feudalism. Feudalism was a political arrangement with a strict hierarchy of order. There were kings (occasionally queens) whose authority to rule was tied to land or property. Each king had those below him swear to support and defend him and in return were given land. Below each of these individuals were people such as serfs or slaves who were attached to the land. Their labor helped support local rulers or nobility who in turn supported the king.

A farmer or serf paid heavy taxes to his local patron and had to provide labor for roadbuilding or service in war. In many parts of Europe, the farmer was not allowed to leave his land and move elsewhere without the permission of his patron. Farmers were also required to offer the patron formal social respect and deference. In return, the patron was supposed to provide his farmers with protection and with help in times of illness or want. Such industry as existed was organized in guilds, which laid down strict rules for manufacturing an item, the maximum number of items produced, and the amount to charge for them. Trade in many items was subject to ancient rules: the king might have a monopoly on trade in a commodity such as salt, for instance, or a particular town might have the enduring right to receive all imports of some specific item. Jews were a pariah group, banned from many occupations and generally forbidden to own land.

For our present purposes, two things are important about these arrangements: (1) people were bound to each other in complex and cumbersome systems of domination and (2) the arrangements were static, difficult to change. Ownership of the land, feudal privileges, the rights of the church, the political role of the king and nobility, and the power of the guilds all were granted in perpetuity and could only evolve slowly.

This political order gradually changed. The Protestant Revolution of the sixteenth century led by religious figures such as Martin Luther and John Calvin challenged church orthodoxy and the power of the pope. Eventually Protestantism split and evolved as a separate Christian sect or religion not beholden to the pope. Kings and queens now claimed their authority to rule not indirectly from God, but instead asserted that they received their power directly as divinely sanctioned.¹² They also claimed power over church affairs, including the ability to control the appointment of religious officials. In effect, they held the secular and spiritual swords. As a result, absolute monarchies emerged in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Biblical passages were used to support this new order. The Fifth Commandment from the Bible—honor thy father and mother—was one way to support

royal power. Kings and queens were like parents, and God said they must be obeyed. Second, the story of Adam and Eve from Genesis was invoked. The passage in Genesis that declared God created Adam and gave him dominion over Eve and the world was invoked to declare kings have absolute power sanctioned by God.

This absolutism that located all political power in kings was what liberalism attacked. It came with local nobility who first revolted against the king with claims that he had too much authority. For example, in 1215 English nobility forced King John of England to sign the Magna Carta. This document forced the king to concede power. But several centuries later members of the nobility formed the basis of a parliament to challenge monarchical authority. Economic changes also were happening. The static agricultural world of the Middle Ages gave way to the rise of commerce and trade. Technologies and means of production evolved. The economic world of the Middle Ages gradually was challenged by the emergence of capitalism and the rise of a new class of merchants who also resented the power of the crown to restrict and control commercial activity.

The new commercial and industrial leaders chafed under the static restrictions of medieval society. To carry on large-scale trade and manufacture, it was often necessary to move commodities over great distances; laborers had to be gathered at large factories, which often involved moving people from one end of the country to another; canals and roads had to be built, which would run through many different patrons' domains; prices and the nature of goods often had to be adjusted to reflect changing needs and technology; and science and invention had to be free to pursue truth wherever they found it, regardless of orthodoxy. These requirements collided with the organization of preindustrial medieval society. The new and increasingly powerful commercial and industrial elite cast about for ways to make society more fluid and manageable. One helpful solution, as we shall see in [chapter 3](#), was the invention of the modern state as a way to organize politics and government. Another was the appearance of liberalism.

Liberalism was not introduced by the commercial and industrial leaders. Rather, it was invented by intellectuals such as John Locke (1632–1704) who provided the intellectual and ideological response to the political values that sustained royal prerogative and power.¹³ Instead of political power coming directly from God and investing kings with absolute power, Locke argued in his 1689 *Two Treatises of Government* that there was a distant past where no government had existed. Individuals lived in a state of nature where they possessed natural rights to life, liberty, and property. Because of the inconveniences of this state of nature individuals gradually agreed among themselves to form a government with limited powers to protect their rights. They also reserved a right to revolution to disband the government if it did not respect their rights.

Locke's arguments here saw government as being created by the people using a social contract. This contract limited royal power, placed the ultimate political authority in the people, and it was a secular government promoting liberty and equality. While some have questioned who all were parties to this original social contract, with Charles Mills and Carole Pateman seeing people of color and women excluded, overall this new form of social contract reasoning provided the ideological ammunition to support a rising merchant class and parliament as they challenged the king.¹⁴ This liberalism also provided support for concepts such as individual rights, constitutionalism, representative democracy, and eventually a separation of church from state (John Locke was also the author of the 1689 *A Letter Concerning Toleration* urging limits on the use of political power to enforce religious doctrine).

Liberalism posits as the highest good of society the ability of members of that society to develop their individual capacities to the fullest. That is, in a good society, all individuals should be able to develop their minds, musical talents, athletic abilities, or