



This is “Preface”, article 4 from the book [21st Century American Government and Politics \(index.html\)](#) (v. 1.0).

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Preface

Our text is a comprehensive introduction to the vital subject of American government and politics. **Governments**¹ decide who gets what, when, how (See Harold D. Lasswell, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How*, [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1936]); they make policies and pass laws that are binding on all a society's members; they decide about taxation and spending, benefits and costs, even life and death.

Governments possess **power**²—the ability to gain compliance and to get people under their jurisdiction to obey them—and they may exercise their power by using the police and military to enforce their decisions. However, power need not involve the exercise of force or compulsion; people often obey because they think it is in their interest to do so, they have no reason to disobey, or they fear punishment. Above all, people obey their government because it has **authority**³; its power is seen by people as rightfully held, as legitimate. People can grant their government **legitimacy**⁴ because they have been socialized to do so; because there are processes, such as elections, that enable them to choose and change their rulers; and because they believe that their governing institutions operate justly.

Politics⁵ is the process by which leaders are selected and policy decisions are made and executed. It involves people and groups, both inside and outside of government, engaged in deliberation and debate, disagreement and conflict, cooperation and consensus, and power struggles.

1. The institutions, offices, and individuals whose decisions are legitimate and thus enforceable on society.
2. The ability to gain compliance from others.
3. Power seen as rightfully held, as legitimate.
4. People's acceptance of a political system and belief that the government's decisions should (usually) be obeyed.
5. The process by which leaders are selected and policies made. It involves people and groups inside and outside of government in struggles for power.

In covering American government and politics, our text

- introduces the intricacies of the Constitution, the complexities of federalism, the meanings of civil liberties, and the conflicts over civil rights;
- explains how people are socialized to politics, acquire and express opinions, and participate in political life;
- describes interest groups, political parties, and elections—the intermediaries that link people to government and politics;
- details the branches of government and how they operate; and
- shows how policies are made and affect people's lives.

A Media Approach

Appreciating and learning these subjects can be a challenge. Inspired by students' familiarity with mass media and their fluent use of new communication technologies, such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, live streaming, and the iPad, we have chosen an approach that connects our subject matter with these media and technologies.

Many students acquire political information from the dramatic and dynamic news cycle with its twenty-four-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week coverage of events. More and more students obtain news online, including from the websites of mainstream news organizations such as the *New York Times* and CNN. But the web also provides them with information that repeats, amplifies, challenges, or even contradicts the news they get from the mainstream media.

Many students connect with government and politics through media entertainment. They watch *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, *The Colbert Report*, and the late-night television talk shows of Jay Leno, David Letterman, and Conan O'Brien. They tune in to television and radio commentators such as Glenn Beck, Bill O'Reilly, Rachel Maddow, and Rush Limbaugh. They watch television competitions, reality shows, dramas, and comedies, most of which have political aspects. They may have seen one or more of Michael Moore's polemical documentaries (e.g., *Fahrenheit 9/11*), or a movie about social issues, such as *Crash*. They may have listened to music with political messages, for example Lee Greenwood's *Proud to be an American* and Bruce Springsteen's *Born in the USA*. They may read the satirical newspaper *The Onion*.

Although most political information still *originates* in the mainstream media—newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and movies—even these media are being transformed by new forms of communication. Information can now be transmitted much more quickly and subjected to far more individual control, initiative, and choice than ever before. Digital technologies support new media formats, such as blogs, podcasts, and wikis, which blend interpersonal with mass communication, through e-mail and instant messaging.

Yet students are often unfamiliar with the causes of the media's contents, especially the importance of ownership, profits, and professionalism. They may not fully grasp the influence on the media of outside forces, such as interest groups, political parties and candidates, and policymakers, most of whom are media savvy and use the new technologies to try to maximize their positive and minimize their negative coverage.

We have therefore organized our text to connect students' media-saturated daily lives to the world of politics and government. We want students to learn how the media interact with and depict the American political system; to recognize the similarities and differences between these media depictions and the real world of government and politics; and to understand the consequences these interactions and depictions can have for the public, politics, government, and public policies. We want students to learn how the media, including new media, can help them intervene productively in politics and get things done.

Incorporating the Media

We devote Chapter 1 "Communication in the Information Age" to detailing the system of communication, the organization of media, and the transmission of information in the United States. Then we integrate relevant mass media and new-media material throughout every chapter.

Each chapter opens with an anecdote that ties media to the particular institution, process, or policy area under study. For example, Chapter 4 "Civil Liberties" starts by showing how the television reality show *Cops* depicts the police as working effectively to stop crime but downplays the civil liberties of individuals, including the rights of the accused.

Each chapter presents the most common media depictions of its subject. In some chapters, a few depictions dominate: most news coverage portrays the US Supreme Court and its decisions as above politics (except when the president has nominated a new member); and the entertainment media depict the judicial system unrealistically. In other chapters, depictions are split. For example, in Chapter 4 "Civil Liberties", we see that journalists' diligent defense of the civil liberties that are central to their job does not carry through to their stories about crime or war.

Boxes

Each chapter contains two boxes designed to reveal how the media are involved in and influence politics.

The “Enduring Image” box captures a chapter’s subject visually. Instantly recognizable, these images are part of our media-induced collective memory of government and politics. Each box explains the original meaning of the image, why it was so important, and its contemporary relevance. For example, the enduring image in Chapter 8 "Participation, Voting, and Social Movements" is of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. making his “I Have a Dream” speech from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to the vast crowd participating in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in August 1963, at the height of the civil rights movement.

The media do not simply hold a mirror up to political reality. A “Comparing Content” box presents differences among media depictions of a subject. The box may compare a political event to reports about it in the news, compare depictions of the same political event in various media outlets, or compare changes in media depictions over time. For example, the content-comparison box in Chapter 11 "Campaigns and Elections" shows how and explains why portrayals of candidates in fiction and documentary films are dramatically different.

Interactions and Effects

Within each chapter, we cover the interactions between people in the media and those involved in politics and government—specifically in the institutions, processes, or policy areas described in that chapter. These interactions help explain why some depictions are more common in the media than others. Thus in Chapter 13 "The Presidency" we describe how the media, particularly the White House press corps, are organized to report on the presidency. Then we discuss how presidents and their staff devise and deploy communication strategies and tactics to try to manage the media to obtain positive coverage.

We then identify the probable results of these interactions and depictions. For example, in Chapter 11 "Campaigns and Elections", we discuss their effects on the election prospects of the presidential candidates.

Pedagogical Aids and Supplements

Each section of every chapter includes learning objectives, key takeaways, and key terms. These specify what material in that chapter is critical, both when read the first time and when reviewed.

For those students who want to explore a particular topic further, each chapter includes an annotated set of readings, an annotated list of noteworthy fiction and nonfiction films, and other visuals that depict the chapter's subject.

Each chapter also contains photographs, tables, and figures that we use to further our discussion. Captions explain each one's political meaning. We include links to video and audio clips, political and media websites, and research databases to further enrich the teaching and learning experience.

What Our Text Does and Does Not Do

Our text is a comprehensive introduction to American politics and government; it covers all the basics. Then it goes beyond the basics to explain how and why, in this information age, government and politics are most commonly depicted in the media.

In each chapter, we compare the reality of American government and politics with the media's most common depictions (acknowledging that there are differences between and among the media and in their political content). We show that the depictions range from accurate and revealing to inaccurate and misleading. We distinguish the telling accounts and insights from partial truths, false impressions, and distortions.

We do not inflate the importance of the media. We recognize that much of politics and government occurs under the media's radar screen and that the consequences of the media's coverage vary widely.

We avoid the temptation of gee-whiz utopian celebrations of new technologies. Rather, we discuss their possibilities, their limitations, and their dangers: they can and do lower the costs of political activity and organization but do not necessarily turn people into thoughtful, full-fledged activists.

Finally, we recognize that people variously accept, ignore, reject, or rework the media's contents. Above all, in today's information age, they are able to hash and rehash the meaning and impact of what is covered and not covered in the media.

Our Concern for Civic Education

One of our goals in writing this book is to encourage students to participate in civic life. In appropriate chapters, we add a "Civic Education" box showing how young people have become involved in politics, government, and the making of public policies, as well as how the media, old and new, can help and hinder civic work.

We hope that our students will come to understand, appreciate, question, and criticize the realities of American politics and government and the media depictions of these realities. We also hope that they will learn how to use the media to intervene effectively in the American political system on their own terms.

The Plan of the Book

Chapter 1 "Communication in the Information Age" describes the communication system of the United States; accounts for its contents of news, entertainment, and opinion; discusses how people in politics and government interact with and respond to the media; and considers the importance of the new media.

Chapter 2 "The Constitution and the Structure of Government Power" covers the foundations and structures of authority established by the US Constitution in 1789. We explain the origin, contents, development, and contemporary importance of the Constitution, noting that while American society has changed greatly in the last two centuries, the political system established by the Constitution still underlies and determines much of American government and politics. Next, in Chapter 3 "Federalism", we describe American federalism and its complex interweaving of national, state, and local governments. Chapter 4 "Civil Liberties" and Chapter 5 "Civil Rights" cover the conflicts and disputes, debates, and decisions over the constitutional provisions establishing Americans' liberties and the right to be free of discrimination. Throughout this first part of the book, we show that the US communication system is intimately linked to, and has often buttressed, these foundations of American government and politics.

The following part of the book focuses on the public. Chapter 6 "Political Culture and Socialization" describes American political culture and how Americans acquire their politically relevant values, beliefs, attitudes, and opinions. Chapter 7 "Public Opinion" covers public opinion. Chapter 8 "Participation, Voting, and Social

Movements" describes the many ways that Americans participate in politics. These chapters explain how and when the media are and are not a resource for the public in making sense of and influencing politics and government.

The third part of the book describes the three intermediaries—interest groups (Chapter 9 "Interest Groups"), political parties (Chapter 10 "Political Parties"), and campaigns and elections (Chapter 11 "Campaigns and Elections")—that connect the people to government and also link officials within government. Participants in these intermediaries often rely heavily on the media for much of their information, while also seeking to avoid media coverage of their less appealing activities.

The penultimate part of the book examines the central institutions of the federal government—Congress (Chapter 12 "Congress"), the presidency (Chapter 13 "The Presidency"), the federal bureaucracy (Chapter 14 "The Bureaucracy"), and the federal judicial system (Chapter 15 "The Courts")—taking them in order of their appearance in the Constitution. People in these institutions spend considerable time, energy, and resources in dealing with the media, although the ways in which they do so vary depending on their responsibilities and powers and on the media's highly uneven interest in their actions.

The book's final part brings all of these strands together to analyze policymaking and the contents of public policies. Chapter 16 "Policymaking and Domestic Policies" describes the policymaking process and looks at social and economic policies. Chapter 17 "Foreign and National Security Policies" is concerned with foreign and defense policies. We show where the media have, and have not, been influential in shaping policy outcomes in the United States.

Our ultimate goal is for students to increase their knowledge of the people, processes, institutions, and policies that make up the American political system; to become more aware of the influence and political effects of the old and new media; and to understand how they, as members of the public, can participate in politics.