

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING GOVERNMENT IN AMERICA



CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. Introduction (pp. 2-8)

II. Government (pp. 8-10)

A. The institutions that make authoritative decisions for any given society are collectively known as government.

B. Two fundamental questions about governing serve as themes of this book.

1 How should we govern?

2 What should government do?

C. All national governments have certain functions in common:

1 Governments maintain national defense.

2 Governments provide public services called public goods.

3 Governments preserve order.

4 Governments socialize the young.

5 Governments collect taxes.

III. Politics (p. 10)

A. Politics determines whom we select as our governmental leaders and what policies they pursue.

B. The ways in which people get involved in politics make up their political participation.

C. Single-issue groups are so concerned with one issue that their members will cast their votes on the basis of that issue only.

IV. The Policymaking System (pp. 11-13)

A. People Shape Policy

The policymaking system is the process by which policy comes into being and evolves over time. (See Figure 1.4)

Political parties, elections, interest groups, and the media are key linkage institutions that transmit the preferences of Americans to the policymakers in government.

The policy agenda consists of the issues that attract the serious attention of public officials and other people actively involved in politics at a given time.

A political issue arises when people disagree about a problem or about a public policy choice made

to fix a problem.

Policymakers work within the three policymaking institutions (the

Congress, the presidency, and the courts as established by the U.S. Constitution).

B. Policies Impact People

Every decision that government makes—a law it passes, a budget it establishes, and even a decision not to act on an issue—is public policy. (See Table 1.1)

Policy impacts are the effects that a policy has on people and on society's problems.

V. Democracy (pp. 14-23)

A. Defining Democracy

1. Democracy is a means of selecting policymakers and of organizing government so that policy reflects citizens preferences.

B. Traditional Democratic Theory

1 Equality in voting

2 Effective participation

3 Enlightened understanding

4 Citizen control of the agenda

5 Inclusion

6 Democracies must practice majority rule and preserve minority rights.

7 The relationship between the few leaders and the many followers is one of representation.

C. Three Contemporary Theories of American Democracy

1 Pluralist theory states that groups with shared interests influence public policy by pressing their concerns through organized efforts.

2 Elite and class theory contends that societies are divided along class lines, and that an upper-class elite pulls the strings of government.

3 Hyperpluralism contends that many groups are so strong that government is unable to act.

D. Challenges to Democracy

1 Increased Technical Expertise

2 Limited Participation in Government

3 Escalating Campaign Costs

4 Diverse Political Interests (policy gridlock)

E. American Political Culture and Democracy

1 Political culture consists of the overall set of values widely shared within a society.

2 Liberty

3 Egalitarianism

4 Individualism

5 Laissez-faire

6 Populism

F. Preview Questions About Democracy

VI. The Scope of Government in America (pp. 23-26)

A. How Active Is American Government?

B. Preview Questions about the Scope of Government

VII. Summary (p. 26)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying Chapter 1, you should be able to:

- 1 Describe what government is and what governments do.
- 2 Understand how politics is the struggle over "who gets what, when, and how."
- 3 Identify the important features of the policymaking system and explain how public policies are the choices that government makes—and declines to make—in response to political issues.
- 4 Understand the nature of democratic government and traditional democratic theory, and the key questions concerning democracy.
- 5 Distinguish among the three contemporary theories of American democracy and politics (pluralist, elite and class, and hyperpluralist) and identify some of their strengths and weaknesses.
- 6 Understand the nature of American political culture and identify the elements of the American creed.
- 7 Understand the nature of the scope of government in America and the key questions concerning the scope of government.

The following exercises will help you meet these objectives:

Objective 1: Describe what government is and what governments do.

- 1 Define the term "government."
2. What are the two fundamental questions about governing that serve as themes throughout the textbook?
3. List the five functions that all national governments perform.

Objective 2: Understand that politics is the struggle over "who gets what, when, and how."

- 1 Define the term "politics."
2. Give examples of the "who," "what," "when," and "how" of politics.
Who:
What:
When:
How:

Objective 3: Identify the important features of the policy system and explain how public policies are the choices that government makes, and declines to make, in response to political issues.

- 1 Draw a diagram of how a policy system works.
2. List four key linkage institutions in a democratic society.

- 2 Define the term "policy agenda."
- 3 How does a government's policy agenda change?
5. List the four major policymaking institutions in the United States.

4 Define the term "policy impacts."

Objective 4: Understand the nature of democratic government, traditional democratic theory, and the key questions concerning democracy.

- 1 Define the term "democracy" as used in this text.
2. List the five cornerstones of an ideal democracy.

2 Explain what is meant by majority rule and minority rights.

Objective 5: Distinguish among the three contemporary theories of American democracy and politics (pluralist, elite and class, and hyperpluralist) and identify some of their strengths and weaknesses.

1. Complete the following table comparing pluralist, elite and class, and hyperpluralist theories according to who holds the power and how policy is made.

Theory	Who Holds Power	How Policy is Made
Pluralist		
Elite and Class		
Hyperpluralist		

2. List the major challenges facing American democracy.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

Objective 6: Understand the nature of American political culture and identify the elements of the American creed.

- 1 What is “political culture” and why is it crucial to understanding American government?
 2. List the five elements of the American creed according to Seymour Martin Lipset.

- 2 Explain what is meant by a “culture war.”

Objective 7: Understand the nature of the scope of government in America and the key questions concerning the scope of government.

- 1 Make a list of items that illustrate the scope of American government.
- 2 What is gross domestic product and how does the term illustrate the scope of American government?

KEY TERMS

Identify and describe:

government

public goods

politics

political participation

single-issue groups

policymaking system

linkage institutions

policy agenda

political issue policymaking institutions public policy democracy

majority rule

minority rights

representation

pluralist theory

elite and class theory

hyperpluralism

policy gridlock

political culture

gross domestic product

Compare and contrast:

government and politics policy agenda and public policy policymaking system and linkage institutions

policymaking system and political issue democracy and traditional democratic theory majority rule and

minority rights democracy and representation

pluralist theory, elite and class theory, and hyperpluralism

Name that term:

1 Something in which any member of society can share without diminishing the supply to any other member of society.

2 It consists of subjects and problems getting the attention of government officials and their associates.

3 This is a choice that government makes in response to an issue on its agenda.

4 This arises when people disagree about a problem or about public policy choices made to combat a problem.

5 Political parties, elections, and interest groups are the main ones in the United States.

6 The effects a policy has on people and on society's problems.

7 The most fundamental aspect of democratic theory.

8 According to this theory of American government, many groups are so strong and numerous that the government is unable to act.

9 This problem is magnified when voters choose a president from one party and congressional majorities from the other party.

10 A key factor that holds American democracy together.

11 The total value of all goods and services produced annually by the United States.

USING YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Identify and discuss, in your own words, the important features of the policymaking system. Take a problem (such as AIDS, racial discrimination, or crime) and describe how it might be dealt with in this system, from how it becomes a political issue to the policies that could be made in

response to it and

their impact on people. Discuss different ways in which the problem could be dealt with based on beliefs about the appropriate role of government. State your own view as well.

2 Collect some current examples of politics and policymaking that illustrate, support, or refute aspects of the three theories of American democracy. Use Internet news sources, newspapers, and/or news magazines in your search. Briefly describe what you discover. Based on your understanding of the three theories and the evidence you have collected make an initial judgment of the applicability of each theory to political and policy realities in America. As you continue to learn about American politics and policymaking, see how your perceptions change.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

1 Define government and identify the functions that governments perform. What is the role of politics in government?

2 What are the principal choices that governments face when confronting policy problems? Illustrate your answer with an example of a policy that poses tough choices. Explain how government makes policy even when it chooses to do nothing.

3 What are the principle components of the policymaking system? Explain how a political issue travels through the policymaking system by using an example.

4 What is the definition of democracy? What are the basic principles of traditional democratic theory? What problems might emerge when the theory is put into practice?

5 Compare, contrast, and critically evaluate the three theories of American democracy: pluralist theory, elite and class theory, and hyperpluralism.

6 Summarize some of the major challenges facing American democracy today. Briefly state your opinion as to how serious these challenges are and how they might be met.

7 What is meant by political culture? What is the nature of the American political culture? In your opinion is America experiencing a "culture war"?

8 In what ways might it be said that American government is "big"? How active is American government and why does government grow?