

Preface

Economics, Ideology, and Politics

The need persists for widespread mastery of the political system John Quincy Adams once described as “the most complicated on the face of the globe.” Adams was writing about 200 years ago, and things certainly haven’t gotten *less* complicated since then. In the early 2000s we experienced a number of political complications, including two close and contentious presidential elections that geographically and ideologically divided our nation into “red” and “blue” states. We suffered a devastating terrorist attack on our own soil, plunging the nation into an open-ended and contentious “war on terror.” We went to war with Iraq for the second time in a dozen years. We saw the national economy reach great heights and disturbing lows, causing unemployment in the private sector and a return of enormous deficit spending in the public sector. How do we make sense of all of these ups and downs of economics, ideology, and politics? We think the best approach is to take seriously our understanding of the political system in which all of these events take place. To that end, we offer today’s students a comprehensive, readable, and balanced study of the context, structure, and process of American politics.

A distinguishing feature of this book is the explicit recognition that economics and ideology significantly influence American politics. No student or instructor in a course on American government is immune to the ideological and economic forces that help shape the perennial pursuit of power in a democracy. Nor is any class or instructor untouched by recurring problems ranging from budget deficits and health care to unemployment and the underclass. Economics and ideology, in one way or another, intersect nearly all of them.

This text highlights the importance of economics and ideology in the context of American government in several ways. The chapter on public policy and economics explores the relationship between politics and *economics*, as does a series of “Politics and Economics” boxes (described below) throughout the rest of the book. Students see how economic decisions have political consequences and how political decisions affect the economy. This is essential information in a day when economic topics frequently dominate electoral campaigns, television news, and conversation at the dinner table. However, the text assumes *no* prior knowledge of economics, and references to economic policy are free of confusing jargon.

Understanding differences among political beliefs is likewise essential at a time when the labels “liberal” and “conservative,” “left” and “right” are hurled about. Such terms can

be baffling, particularly because their meaning has not been constant. Consequently, the text underscores the importance of *political ideology*—the ideas people have about what government should or should not do and what kind of government they should have. This emphasis is reflected in a series of “Politics and Ideas” boxes (described below) that appear throughout the text. The chapter on political ideologies is nearly unique among shorter volumes on American government because it draws a road map that guides students through intellectual debates, past and present, in American politics. Additionally, the chapter that deals with civil liberties and civil rights probes ideological distinctions among Americans concerning fundamental freedoms. Such an encompassing survey of the spectrum of political ideas encourages students both to comprehend and to tolerate points of view other than their own, enabling them to gain further insight into political differences that exist nationwide.

Pedagogical Features

This textbook is not a “theme” or point-of-view book. Aside from emphasizing the importance of politics and political involvement, the book embraces no single ideological perspective; it does not attempt to make readers Democrats or Republicans, liberals or conservatives. To ensure a single voice in this presentation, one author has served as general editor.

The goals are knowledge of, and critical thinking about, American politics and government. Accordingly, we have designed the book to encourage students to *engage* the material. Passive reading is not enough. Understanding so important and complex a subject necessitates active intellectual involvement.

To aid in learning, this textbook incorporates several serviceable pedagogical features.

- “**Politics and Ideas**” boxes appearing throughout the text explore ideological topics in depth. They demonstrate how ideological divisions generate different political consequences. The text includes the following Politics and Ideas boxes:
 - Whose Constitution Is It?
 - College Students and Political Ideology
 - Textbooks and Children’s Ideas About American Politics
 - Media Monopolies?
 - Pluralism and Elitism
 - Two Ideologues Leave the Senate
 - A “New Kind of War”—The Ongoing War on Terrorism
 - A Six-Year Term for Presidents?
 - The Road to a New Cabinet Department
 - Political Ideologies and the Welfare State
 - Contrasting Approaches to Foreign Policy: Idealism, Realism, and Isolationism

- “**Politics and Economics**” boxes appearing through the text highlight special economics topics, illustrating the relationship between economics and politics. The text includes the following Politics and Economics boxes:
 - Handling A Hurricane: Federalism and Disaster Relief
 - Economic Status and Ideology
 - Economic Status and Party Identification
 - Turnout, Choice, and Economic Status
 - The President and Economic Policymaking
 - Regulation and Cost-Benefit Analysis
 - The Supreme Court and Economic Policy
 - The Ideology of Economic Policy

- “**Contemporary Controversies**” boxes are present in a few chapters to illustrate how the subject matter covered in the chapter carries over into disputes that divide the nation. The text includes the following Contemporary Controversies boxes:
 - America Attacked
 - Changing State Constitutions
 - How Much Affirmative Action?
 - Public Opinion and Terrorism: American Government in the Eyes of the World
 - Confidentiality of News Sources and Information
 - Can Politics Be Both Entertaining and Informative?
 - Campaign and Electoral Reform: A Comparative Perspective
 - An Election Gone Wrong?
 - Low Voter Turnout: A Comparative Perspective
 - Congress Shows Several Members the Door
 - Election 2008: A Presidential Election Breaks New Ground
 - Corporations and the Economy
 - Nuclear Power and the Environment
 - Can Presidents Take the Country to War on Their Own Authority?

- Study questions conclude the special boxed features to encourage critical thinking and further inquiry.

- Tables, graphs, and maps appear throughout the text to display both quantitative and conceptual data. Some illustrations present new data, while others summarize information covered in the body of the chapter.

- Web sites, featuring topics related to the chapter material, are found in the margins of every chapter.

- A box labeled “Chapter Objectives” begins each chapter by putting the key issues in context, and a summary, key terms, and a description of suggested readings conclude each chapter. The summary contains in numbered form the main points presented in the chapter. Key terms, in boldface, are defined in the margins at the point at which they are introduced in the chapter. Suggested readings are widely available primary and secondary sources that students may consult in pursuing topics in the chapter.

Supplements

The following supplements are available from the publisher: Instructor’s Manual, Test Bank, Transparencies, and Study Guide.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to express their appreciation to the many individuals who have offered helpful suggestions and criticisms for previous editions of this text. An introductory American government book can never hope to cover every important topic, but many generous reviewers have helped us make sure that not too many crucial issues were left unexplored.

We would also like to acknowledge the fine team at BVT Publishing that has made this book possible. We are especially grateful to Jason James, who has guided this project from its outset, and Lisa Paul, who has made sure that every word in this book appears just as it should—any remaining errors should likely rest squarely on the shoulders of the authors.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge our families, who have provided the inspiration and support necessary to see this project through to its completion. Specifically, we thank Jessica Bresler, Lin Carvell, and Jordan and Greg Rogoe; Rebecca, Philip, and Elizabeth Friedrich; Audrey, Christopher, and Matthew Karlesky; Ellen, Todd, and Claire Stephenson; and LB.

D. Grier Stephenson, Jr.
Charles C. Turner
Robert J. Bresler
Robert J. Friedrich
Joseph J. Karlesky