



Preface

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 two hundred years ago, and things certainly haven’t gotten less complicated since then. In the early 2000s, we experienced a number of political complications, including three 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 and recession 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.