

# Introduction to Political Science and American Government

Conrad A. Mearns

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## 1 Quotes

A nation that hates politics will not long survive as a democracy. - E. J. Dionne

If you like laws and sausages, you should never watch either one being made. - Otto van Bismarck

Freedom for the pike is death for the minnows. - Isaiah Berlin

## 2 Further Reading

- Politics in the English Language by George Orwell

## 3 What is Political Science?

Politics is "Who gets what, when and how?" It is the resolution of peaceful conflict or rare and scarce things.

- Who — parties, individuals, citizens, institutions
- What — money, distribution, rights, symbolism
- Where and How — congressional legislation, court, executive order, voting

There are three kinds of statements to be made in Political Science

- Descriptive — True / False — things that can be perceived — "It is snowing"
- Evaluative — Good / Bad — normative, defines morals — "It is good that there are 100 senators"



## 6 On Defining Democracy

See James Madison's Federalist Paper 10.

"Democracy" has its roots from the Greek words *dēmos* and *-kratia*, meaning "the people" and "power / rule" respectively. The democracy we know isn't the Athenian democracy originally idealized, it's actually a Republic.

Athenian democracy is centered around what's popular, and participation.

That is to say, Athenian democracy requires more than just voting on ideas, it requires deliberation and constant confliction. People who follow this belief are Popular Democrats.

Elite Democrats are the proposed solution by James Madison. He argued that humans are, by nature, private and passionate. By forming groups, we try to impose our beliefs guided by emotion and passion - self interest. Elite Democrats are to be committed to formality and compromise for the perceived greater good of everyone affected.

## 7 On the Articles of Confederation

The Articles of Confederation gave sovereignty (supreme power and authority to govern itself) to each of the thirteen new states, with limited central control. The central government had power to "declare war, appoint military officers, sign treaties, make alliances, appoint foreign ambassadors, and manage relations with Indians." - Digital History.

This short and concise list of powers let citizen deference decrease, and led to Shae's Rebellion. The rebellion became a form of demonstration (though not intentionally) of the weaknesses each state had when government was small. It became apparent that the colonies needed to be united under a more powerful central government, which led to the current constitution.

The current constitution had some primary goals. One, limit the direct influence of the population in policy. Though undemocratic (by definition of democracy) this prevented low-information citizens from influencing policy for anything other than the public's good and wellness. Second, the central government needed a single form of currency, power to tax and coin money, and create new laws deemed necessary and helpful.

## 8 Creating a New Constitution

Possible ruling systems:

1. Toryism

Also known as European Conservatism, was generally ruled as a monarchy with a strict hierarchy. Citizens were born into positions of superiority or inferiority. Superiors had an obligation to influence policy for the benefit of inferiors, and inferiors had the obligation to abide.

## 2. Classical Republicanism

Based on true democracy, Classical Republicanism required active participation in creating agreements for the public good. It relied heavily on virtuous citizens (in this case, to be virtuous is to devote one's self to the public good. Corruption is when virtue is lost and politics is used for personal gain). This concept was pre-capitalism and anti-capitalism, as it required homogeneousness across all statuses.

Jefferson believed that all of the USA should be centralized around farming, and that manufacturing should be kept in Europe. This concept would allow for homogeneous citizens and stop citizens from becoming dependant on companies.

## 3. Classical Liberalism

To reflect free and equal judgement to citizens. The role of government in Classical Liberalism is to do the very least to protect citizen rights. It values order with justice, economic growth and moral and scientific progress. Every citizen is absolutely free to live how they want, and to be as politically involved as they want. Because of this freedom, authority can only truly be given at the consent of the citizens, often backed with voting and law.

Classical Liberalism is what the United States Constitution is based on. In the article, it lays the foundation for free and equal citizens to be protected by a transparent governing body. However, this system can lead to majority tyranny, as seen throughout history. Another emergence from this ideology was capitalism, which thrives by driving citizens to work for their own self interest.

# 9 James Madison's Federalist Paper 10

The focus of the piece was centered around what Madison calls factions. Interest groups that have adverse policy ideas at the expense of public good, or another faction. Madison pondered two possible solutions. One could either eliminate factions by limiting people's ability to assemble and communicate, or trust that a large diversity of opposing factions will keep them all at bay. For example, allowing and protecting all religions to prevent any single religion from gaining control of many government positions.

The effects of factions are also discussed. If a faction is a minority, adverse policy will get out voted most of the time. When a faction is large, however, a larger problem has to be faced, as large numbers for support does not make policy ethical or moral. It is for this reason that elections are staggered for House, Senate, and President seats. Change should always be resisted, to let time prove the policy is just and moral.

## 10 Public Opinion and Political Socialization

The American Creed - I believe in the United States of America as a government of the people, by the people, for the people; whose just powers are derived from the consent of the governed, a democracy in a republic, a sovereign Nation of many sovereign States; a perfect union, one and inseparable; established upon those principles of freedom, equality, justice, and humanity for which American patriots sacrificed their lives and fortunes. I therefore believe it is my duty to my country to love it, to support its Constitution, to obey its laws, to respect its flag, and to defend it against all enemies.

Tolerance is acceptance of disliked ideas. Comprromise is vital for a stable community, but where do these dispositions come from? Public Opinion is commonly used as a way to gauge these dispositions as time progresses, but it's only a majority collective snapshot. This snapshot can change as Cognitive Dissonance separates factions into more polarized, homogeneous groups. Influence and communication of opinions is generally organized into the following structure, the top being the most prioritized.

- American Creed or Political Culture
- Family
- Demographic Clustering
- School, Peers, Coworkers
- Media
- Government, Corporations and Business
- Individual Opinion

A system's democratic-ness can be determined by the congruence between public opinion and public policy.

Individuals may not fulfill "Real Citizen Values" of the democracy / republic due to ignorance or lack of interest. However, collectives of individuals combat ignorance by outreach and dispersion of information. This concept is known as Rational Ignorance.

## 11 On Media Influence

Like a hypodermic, Media is thought to be incredibly shaping. However, in truth we are 'protected' by our preconcieved ideas and opinions. Cognitive Dissonance prevents much of our preconceptions from changing. One theory describes us as an Obstinate Audience, that we are selective in what we watch

and enjoy. People get what people want out of the media, meaning we shape ourselves. The agenda of the media is the most critical to evaluate. The media cannot tell you how to think, but it can tell you what to think about. For example, after the 2016 Pulse shooting in Orlando Florida, the discussion could have been claimed to be either a terrorism issue (because the shooter had certain religious ties and a strong hatred for opposers) or a gun policy issue (because the shooter had been born in the US and a US Citizen, and spoke frequently about killing people). This frame can easily allow us to shape ourselves in one direction.

Media tends to bias liberal opinion: polls from journalists show an average of slightly left of center.

Media tends to bias conservative opinion: owned by six major corporations. These biases usually promote the status quo and Republicans running for office.

Media has a structural bias: most media companies need to make money off of advertising and marketing. This bias is in favor of ratings, which is why conflict is covered while consensus is not. "If it bleeds, it leads." Due to this bias, the media often oversimplifies topics to fit a graph, picture or scandal format.

## 12 Contemporary Conservatism

Values smaller government, less taxation, less regulation, and other concepts like the pro-life movement. Contemporary Conservatism is often described as a three legged stool, each leg being a core value by a particular individual or group.

1. Minimal Government in the Marketplace
2. Foreign Policy Hawks / Neo Conservatism / Strong military values
3. Social Conservation / Relying on the Government to Enforce Tradition

A core philosophy of freedom from this view is to have as little law as possible, and to prevent personal interference from other human beings. This often leads to a Nightwatchman State, where authoritative figures seek out wrongdoing and crime to protect this philosophy. Much of the philosophy of market regulation stems from the idea that the market can rid itself of poor regulation and discrimination naturally. This supposedly leads to Formal Equality of Opportunity, where people who start with different lives still have equal opportunity to successes and losses.

Efficiency in conservatism is the ability for prices (marketted or abstract) to influence our behavior for public good. Incentives to do good are given by inequality, the fear of being poor and the desire of wealth. This public good can easily become restricted, but in a general sense it's truly public. The distribution of resources is given either by chance, or by choice. When given by chance, they are merely resources happened upon like family wealth, good

neighborhoods, etc. Resources acquired by choice are ones that we work for, earn, or are given do to some other action of our own.

## 13 Contemporary Liberalism

Liberal views typically are derived from problems in conservative theory. Formal Equality of Opportunity starts to fall apart when circumstances such as birth place, gender and race are taken into account. Everyone has Equality of Opportunity, but not everyone can take advantage of this. Freedom, in this sense, is more restricted. It means that though there are no laws to prevent us from taking some sort of action, other worldly things such as money, or social convention can take that freedom away. Substantive Equality of Opportunity tries to solve this problem by providing more services to those who need it. For example, food stamps, Pell Grants, school lunches, etc. Freedom is focused about the ability to exercise, and not just the opportunity.

## 14 Linkage Institutions - Political Parties

A political party is a voluntary organization seeking to win political office in order to push, establish, and control policy. Linkage institutions act as a social bridge between citizens and representatives, provide factions for opposition, and work as a low cost mechanism for rational ignorance.

PIE - Party in Electorate. Least active people in a party. They simply respond to identifying with a party.

PIG - Party in Government. Individuals that hav strong party affiliation and hold government office.

POP - Party Organization Proper. Organizations need resources, these people provide time, skills, and money to the party.

7 groups of political affiliation, ranging from Democratic/Republican Strong, Weak, Independant Leaning, and Independant SD - WD - ILD - I - ILR - WR - SR

"Collective Goods" create a Free Rider problem. The idea is that public goods will be provided when others contribute, but as a rational self interest utility maximzer the individual doesn't. This individual still gains the public good, but generally the group of others have the same mindset, thus the good is not provided. This can be avoided by having small factions to hold individuals personally accountable, and by providing selectve, divisible incentives. These incentives can be

- Material - hats, belt buckes, magazine subscriptions, a pin, etc.
- Solidary
- Responsive - That "feel good" feeling

The best system for utilizing these incentives were Political Machines, which are now illegal / unoperational / inconvenient. Political Machines offered patronage jobs, jobs given to those who supplied to the success of the campaign the most. They offered preferments, gave more money / power / policy to bigger contributors. They gave personalized help to those who needed food, shelter etc.

Characteristics

- 2 Party System helps our plurality based voting system
- Decentralized
- "Responsible" because the party can take clear/distinct positions on topic. They are responsive towards events and accountable for their actions

Other Interest Groups

- Functions  
Voluntary groups of people with common interests  
Only promotes political members, does not contribute  
Special Interest = opposition
- Pluralist Analysis  
No majority rule - minority rule through interest groups by pressuring contending politicians

## 15 Election Meanings

1. Mandate - Some policy that is directed due to perceived public demand with policy promises.  
To what extent do elections give citizens power over policy?  
"Election success = public approval on policy"  
2016: Trump received 46 percent of the popular vote w/ 55 percent turnout. Only 25.3 percent of all available votes.  
Problems with mandates - very few people vote due to policy stances, and turnout is too low  
Optimistic and unrealistic. Too demanding of high turnout.
2. Elections are mostly symbolic exercises. Voters feel good that they voted, and elected officials make policy on their own.  
Public officials also bring with them, other officials with other policy stances that dismantle the validity of mandates.
3. Nixon - secret plan to end Vietnam War  
Trump - secret plan to end ISIS  
Higher turnout tends to favor democratic votes. Lower turnouts tend to favor republican votes.



Low turnout also gives more power to interest groups and political influence.

## 16 Turnout Explanations

Efficacy - ability to produce a desired result

- Attitudes - Mostly trust in the government, external and internal efficacy, and political affiliation.  
First noticeable decline in trust was in the 60's due to policy involving Vietnam
- Economics - cold calculation of cost and benefits to voting.  
 $E(UR_{T+}) - E(UD_{T+}) = B$  where  $E(UR_{T+})$  and  $E(UD_{T+})$  represent the expected utility in future time from the republican and democratic party respectively. The value of  $B$  suggests what direction a possible vote will go towards. A positive  $B$  leans republican, a negative  $B$  leans democratic, and a score  $B = 0$  has no preference.  
 $PB + D - C = V$  where  $P$  is the probability that the vote will matter,  $B$  is the benefit from above,  $D$  is the sense of duty to vote as a citizen, and  $C$  is the opportunity costs like time away from family or business. If  $V > 0$  then it's likely the individual will vote. Otherwise, it's likely they won't.

Based on both models, it becomes clear that lower income, less educated people with low status jobs are more likely to skip the polls. Due to this, most benefits target the middle class.

Ways to increase turnout from the economic model include ideas like

- Reducing the opportunity cost by making voting easier to access  
(See cases like Oregon where the state registers inhabitants by default)
- Create a national holiday dedicated to voting
- Make voting mandatory, and give people the option to cast blank ballots.
- Increase youth voting, as they don't vote proportionally to population size.