

# Study Outline

## Chapter 1: The Study of American Government

- I. What is political power?
  - A. Two great questions about politics
    - 1. Who governs: the people who govern affect us
    - 2. To which ends: in which ways government affects our lives
    - 3. And then how the government makes decisions on a variety of issues
  - B. Power
    - 1. Definition: the ability of one person to cause another person to act in accordance with the first person's intentions
    - 2. Text's concern: power as it is used to affect who will hold government office and how government will behave
    - 3. Authority: the right to use power; not all who exercise political power have it
    - 4. Legitimacy: what makes a law or constitution a source of right
    - 5. Struggles over what makes authority legitimate
    - 6. Necessity to be in some sense democratic in the United States today
- II. What is democracy?
  - A. Aristotelian "rule of the many" (participatory democracy)
    - 1. Fifth-century B.C. Greek city-state
    - 2. New England town meeting
    - 3. Community control in self-governing neighborhood
    - 4. Citizen participation in formulating programs
  - B. Acquisition of power by leaders via competitive elections (representative democracy)
    - 1. Sometimes disapprovingly referred to as the *elitist theory*
    - 2. Justifications of representative democracy
      - a. Direct democracy is impractical.
      - b. The people make unwise decisions based on fleeting emotions.
- III. Direct versus representative democracy
  - A. Text uses the term *democracy* to refer to *representative democracy*.
    - 1. The Constitution does not contain the word *democracy* but the phrase "republican form of government."
    - 2. Representative democracy requires leadership competition if the system is to work.
      - a. Individuals and parties must be able to run for office.
      - b. Communication must be free.
      - c. Voters perceive that a meaningful choice exists.
    - 3. Many elective national offices
    - 4. Most money for elections comes from special interests
  - B. Virtues of direct democracy should be reclaimed through
    - 1. Community control
    - 2. Citizen participation
  - C. Framers: "will of people" not synonymous with the "common interest" or the "public good"
    - 1. They strongly favored representative over direct democracy.
    - 2. Direct democracy minimized chances of abuse of power by tyrannical popular majority or self-serving office holders.
- IV. How is power distributed in a democracy?
  - A. Majoritarian politics
    - 1. Leaders constrained to follow wishes of the people very closely
    - 2. Applies when issues are simple, clear, and feasible
  - B. Elitism
    - 1. Rule by identifiable group of persons who possess a disproportionate share of political power
    - 2. Four theories of Elite Influence
      - a. Marxism: government merely a reflection of underlying economic forces
      - b. C. Wright Mills: power elite composed of corporate leaders, generals, and politicians
      - c. Max Weber: bureaucracies based on expertise, specialized competence
      - d. Pluralist view: no single elite has a monopoly on power; hence must bargain and compromise

- C. Cynical view that politics is self-seeking
  - 1. Good policies may result from bad motives
  - 2. Self-interest is an incomplete guide to actions (Alexis de Tocqueville on America)
    - a. September 11 and self interest
    - b. AFL-CIO and civil rights
  - 3. Some act against long odds and without the certainty of benefit
- V. Political change
  - A. Necessary to refer frequently to history because no single theory is adequate
    - 1. Government today influenced by yesterday
    - 2. Government today still evolving and responds to changing beliefs
  - B. Politics about the public interest, not just who gets what
- VI. Finding out who governs
  - A. We often give partial or contingent answers.
  - B. Preferences vary, and so does politics.
  - C. Politics cannot be equated with laws on the books.
  - D. Sweeping claims are to be avoided.
  - E. Judgments about institutions and interests should be tempered by how they behave on different issues.
  - F. The policy process can be an excellent barometer of change in who governs.