

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.