Introduction to Politics

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Evaluate the several explanations of political power
2. Justify the claim that political science may be considered a science
3. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of several theoretical approaches to political science
4. Contrast normative theories of politics to political science

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Chapter 1

What is Politics?

The explanation of political power can be seen through two different lenses:

1. Governmental context
2. Nongovernmental context (workplace, families, classrooms)

The general idea, however, remains this: politics is an ongoing competition between people, usually in groups, to shape policy in their favour.

As Renaissance Florentine philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) emphasised, ultimately politics is about power, specifically the power to shape others’ behaviour. Power in politics is getting people to do something they wouldn’t otherwise do — and sometimes having them think it was their idea. Some people dislike the concept of political power. It speaks of coercion, inequality, and occasionally brutality. Some speakers denounce “power politics,” suggesting governance without power, a happy band of brothers and sisters regulating themselves through love and sharing. Communities formed on such a basis do not last; or, if they do last, it is only by transforming themselves into conventional structures of leaders and followers, buttressed by obedience patterns that look suspiciously like power.

Political power seems to be built into the human condition. But why do some people hold political power over others? There is no definitive explanation of political power. Biological, psychological, cultural, rational, and irrational explanations have been put forward.

BIOLOGICAL

Aristotle said it first and perhaps best:

“Man is by nature a political animal.”

Aristotle’s words were ‘zòon polìtikon’, which can be translated as either “political animal” or “social animal.” Aristotle meant that humans live naturally in herds, like elephants or bison. Biologically, they need each other for sustenance and survival. It is also natural that they array themselves into ranks of leaders and followers, like all herd animals. Taking a cue from Aristotle, modern biological explanations, some of them looking at primate behaviour, say that forming a political system and obeying its leaders are innate, passed on with one’s genes. Some thinkers argue that human politics shows the same “dominance hierarchies” that other mammals set up. Politicians tend to be “alpha males”— or think they are.

The advantage of the biological approach is its simplicity, but it raises a number of questions. If we grant that humans are naturally political, how do we explain the instances when political groups fall apart and people disobey authority? Perhaps we should modify the theory: Humans are imperfectly political (or social) animals. Most of the time, people form groups and obey authority but sometimes, under certain circumstances, they do not. This begs the question of which circumstances promote or undermine the formation of political groups.

PSYCHOLOGICAL

Psychological explanations of politics and obedience are closely allied with biological theories. Both posit needs derived from centuries of evolution in the formation of political groups. Psychologists have refined their views with empirical research.

In the famous Milgram study, unwitting subjects were instructed by a professor to administer progressively larger electric shocks to a victim. The “victim,” strapped in a chair, was actually an actor who only pretended to suffer. Most of the subjects were willing to administer potentially lethal doses of electricity simply because the “professor” — an authority figure in a white lab smock — told them to. Most of the subjects disliked hurting the victim but rationalised that they were just following orders and that any harm done to the victim was really the professor’s responsibility. They surrendered their actions to an authority figure.

Psychological studies also show that most people are naturally conformists. Most members of a group see things the group’s way. Psychologist Irving Janis found many foreign policy mistakes were made in a climate of “groupthink,” in which a leadership team tells itself that all is well and that the present policy is working. Groups ignore doubters who tell them, for instance, that the Japanese will attack Pearl Harbor in 1941 or that the 1961 Bay of Pigs landing of Cuban exiles will fail. Obedience to authority and groupthink suggest that humans have deep-seated needs — possibly innate — to fit into groups and their norms. Perhaps this is what makes human society possible, but it also makes possible horrors such as the Nazi Holocaust and more recent massacres possible.

CULTURAL

How much of human behaviour is learned as opposed to biologically inherited? This is the very old “nurture versus nature” debate. For much of the twentieth century, the cultural theorists — those who believe behaviour is learned — dominated. Anthropologists concluded that all differences in behaviour were cultural. Cooperative and peaceful societies raise their children that way, they argued. Political communities are formed and held together on the basis of cultural values transmitted by parents, schools, churches, and the mass media.

Political science developed an interesting subfield, political culture, whose researchers found that a country’s political culture was formed by many longterm factors: religion, child rearing, land tenure, and economic development.

Cultural theorists see trouble when the political system gets out of touch with the cultural system, as when the shah of Iran attempted to modernise an Islamic society that did not like Western values and lifestyles. The Iranians threw the shah out in 1979 and celebrated the return of a medieval-style religious leader, who voiced the values favoured by traditional Iranians.

Cultural theories can also be applied to U.S. politics. Republicans try to win elections by 20 Chapter 1 articulating the values of religion, family, and self-reliance, which are deeply ingrained into American culture. Many thinkers believe economic and political development depend heavily on culture.

The cultural approach to political life holds some optimism. If all human behaviour is learned, bad behaviour can be unlearned and society improved. Educating young people to be tolerant, cooperative, and just will gradually change a society’s culture for the better, according to this view. Changing culture, however, is slow and difficult, as the American occupiers of Iraq and Afghanistan discovered. Culture contributes a lot to political behaviour, but the theory has some difficulties. First, where does culture come from? History? Economics? Religion? Second, if all behaviour is cultural, various political systems should be as different from each other as their cultures. But, especially in the realm of politics, we see similar political attitudes and patterns in lands with very different cultures. Politicians everywhere tend to become corrupt, regardless of culture.

RATIONAL

Another school of thought approaches politics as a rational thing; that is, people know what they want most of the time, and they have good reasons for doing what they do. Classic political theorists, such as Hobbes and Locke, held that humans form “civil society” because their powers of reason tell them that it is much better than anarchy. To safeguard life and property, people form governments. If those governments become abusive, the people have the right to dissolve them and start anew.

This Lockean notion greatly influenced the U.S. Founding Fathers. The biological, psychological, and cultural schools downplay human reason, claiming that people are either born or conditioned to certain behaviour and that individuals seldom think rationally.

But what about cases in which people break away from group conformity and argue independently? How can we explain a change of mind? A political system based on the presumption of human reason stands a better chance of governing justly and humanely. If leaders believe that people obey out of biological inheritance or cultural conditioning, they will think they can get away with all manner of deception and misrule. If, on the other hand, rulers fear that people are rational, they will respect the public’s ability to discern wrongdoing. Accordingly, even if people are not completely rational, it is probably for the best if rulers think they are.

IRRATIONAL

Late in the nineteenth century, a group of thinkers expounded the view that people are basically irrational, especially when it comes to politics. They are emotional, dominated by myths and stereotypes, and politics is really the manipulation of symbols. What people regard as rational is really myth; just keep feeding the people myths to control them.

The first practitioner of this school was Mussolini, founder of fascism in Italy; he claimed that human behaviour is learned as opposed to inherited. He was followed by Hitler in Germany.

A soft-spoken Muslim fundamentalist, Osama bin Laden, got an irrational hold on thousands of fanatical followers by feeding them the myth that America was the enemy of Islam. There may be a good deal of truth to the irrational view of human political behaviour, but it has catastrophic consequences. Leaders who use irrationalist techniques start believing their own propaganda and lead their nations to war, economic ruin, or tyranny.

The basis of all these interpretations of political power remains this: at different times in different situations, any one of them can explain power. In some cases, like the Independence of the American colony, the biological factors lead to the psychological, which in turn lead to the cultural (American colonies became culturally separate from Britain), the rational (foundation of a new order), and the irrational in the form of a seamless web. They all come together to form political power.

A common mistake that people make is regarding political power as something finite, when, in reality, power is a connection amongst people and the ability of one person to get others to do their bidding. Power is earned, not seized, which is why revolutionaries do not automatically gain legitimacy and authority when they snatch it away.

Power and politics, however, are not the same. Power is, instead, an enabling device to implement policies/decisions. If power becomes the goal of polices, it becomes brutal and self-destructive (like the Hitler regime).

What is Political Science?

Political science is a method of studying politics. It is the training in the calm, objective analysis of politics, which may or may not aid working politicians. The two professions compare like this:

| Politicians | Political Scientists |
| --- | --- |
| Love power | Are sceptical of power |
| Seek popularity | Seek accuracy |
| Think practically | Think abstractly |
| Hold firm views | Reach tentative conclusions |
| Offer single causes | Offer many causes |
| See short-term payoff | See long-term consequences |
| Plan for next election | Plan for next publication |
| Respond to groups | Seek the good of the whole |
| Seek name recognition | Seek professional prestige |

Aristotle, the founder of the discipline, calls politics “the master science”. Almost everything happens in a political context; the decisions of the ‘pòlis’ governed most other things. Politics is the study of “who gets what”. Politics is also intimately connected with economics, as a totally free-market system would ultimately self-destruct.

Political science, in conclusion, is an empirical discipline that accumulates quantified and qualitative data with which we can find persistent patterns. The study of politics accumulates knowledge.

The researchers of Political Science have viewpoints on current issues that mustn’t be biased. How exactly do they achieve this? A scholarly work should be reasoned, balanced, supported with evidence, and a bit theoretical.

REASONED

Any findings that support the researcher’s political views must be discarded as biased. You must spell out your reasoning, and it should make sense. Beware of structuring the study so that it comes out to support a given view.

BALANCED

Minimise bias by acknowledging other ways of looking at your topic. Criticise the previous studies and explain why they are incompetent or faulty. Admit that your viewpoint is one among several.

SUPPORTED WITH EVIDENCE

This evidence ranges from the quantified evidence of natural sciences to the qualitative evidence of humanity. Political science utilises both. Any statement open to interpretation/controversy should be supported with evidence. Evidence that has passed through the mind of someone else (a “secondary source”) is also crucial. You cannot keep your evidence (primary and secondary sources) a secret.

THEORETICAL

Scholarship should advance the discipline’s knowledge a bit. At a minimum, it should confirm or refute an existing theory. You must relate the description to some factor/factors supported with empirical evidence.

The Subfields of Political Science

Most political science departments divide the discipline into several subfields:

1. U.S. Politics = focuses on institutions and processes, mostly at the federal level but some at state and local levels. It includes parties, elections, public opinion, and executive and legislative behaviour
2. Comparative Politics = examines politics within other nations, trying to establish generalisations about institutions and political culture and theories of democracy, stability, and policy. It may be focused on various regions, as in “Latin American politics” or “East Asian politics.”
3. International Relations = studies politics among nations, including conflict, diplomacy, international law and organisations, and international political economy. The study of U.S. foreign policy has one foot in U.S. politics and one in international relations.
4. Political Theory = both classic and modern, attempts to define the good polity, often focused on major thinkers.
5. Public Administration = studies how bureaucracies work and how they can be improved.
6. Constitutional Law = studies the applications and evolution of the Constitution within the legal system.
7. Public Policy = studies the interface of politics and economics with an eye to developing effective programs.

What’s peculiar about Political Science is that is has a striking resemblance to History and Journalism. In the case of the French Revolution, a Political Scientist might compare several revolutions to discover what links them together.

A political scientist would not necessarily be interested in writing about today’s battle or interviewing a war refugee. Instead, political scientists might be interested in what causes wars generally or why some small conflicts result in major wars and others do not. Under what circumstances do civil conflicts lead to genocide? What forms of aid are most successful when faced with large numbers of refugees?

Political scientists seek to generalise where historians/journalists seek to explain an event’s unique circumstances.

There are several theoretical approaches to political sciences that come with their own strengths and weaknesses. Schools in the U.S. typically ask students to accumulate knowledge, but critics point out that knowledge is more than accumulating facts; the facts will not structure themselves into a coherent whole. This point was also made by Immanuel Kant.

Theories provide structure that give meaning to patterns of facts. The kinds of questions you ask and which ones you ask first are the beginnings of theorising. All theories bump into facts that contradict their explanations.

The development of Political Science in the U.S. was influenced by law, as from the late nineteenth century through the middle of the twentieth century, American thinkers focused mainly on institutions (the formal structures of government). Constitutions were the favourite subject for political scientists of this period, for they assumed that what was on paper was how the institutions would work in practice.

What shook this belief was the rise of the Soviet, Italian, and German dictatorships. Under stress, Germany’s Weimar Republic (1919-1933) collapsed due to its lack of commitment to democracy, despite the fact that it had looked good on paper.

These dictatorships forced political scientists to reexamine their institutional focus. Postwar American political scientists followed the tradition of the early 19th-century French philosopher Auguste Comte, who developed the doctrine of Positivism (the application of natural science methods to the study of society). Comtean positivism was an optimistic philosophy that held that, as we accumulate data by means of scientific observation, we will perfect a science of society and with it improve society.

BEHAVIOURALISM

Behaviouralists, as they are called, claim to concentrate on actual behaviour as opposed to thoughts or feelings. Behavioural studies were especially good in examining the “social bases” of politics, the attitudes and values of citizens, which go a long way toward making the system function the way it does. Their best work has been on voting patterns, for it is here they can get lots of valid data.

Many younger political scientists, some of them influenced by the radicalism of the 1960’s, complained that the behavioural approach was static, conservative, loaded with its practitioners’ values, and irrelevant to the urgent tasks at hand. Far from being “scientific” and “value-free,” behavioralists often defined the current situation in the United States as the norm and anything different as deviant. By examining only what exists at a given moment, behavioralists neglect the possibility of change; their studies may be time-bound. Behavioralists have an unstated preference for the status quo; they like to examine established democratic systems, for that is where their methodological tools work best. People in police states or civil conflicts know that honestly stating their opinions could get them jailed or killed, so they voice the “correct” views.

Perhaps the most damaging criticism, though, was that the behaviouralists focused on relatively minor topics and steered clear of the big questions of politics. Critics charged that behavioural studies were often irrelevant.

By 1969, many political scientists had to admit that there was something to the criticism of what had earlier been called the “behavioural revolution.” Some called the newer movement postbehavioural, a synthesis of traditional and behavioural approaches. Postbehaviouralists recognise that facts and values are tied together. They are willing to use both the qualitative data of the traditionalists and the quantitative data of the behaviouralists. They look at history and institutions as well as public opinion and rational-choice theory. They are not afraid of numbers and happily use correlations, graphs, and percentages to make their cases.

NEW INSTITUTIONALISM

In the 1970’s, political science partially pulled away from behaviouralism and rediscovered institutions. In the 1980’s, this was proclaimed as the “New Institutionalism.” Its crux is that government structures—legislatures, parties, bureaucracies, and so on—take on lives of their own and shape the behaviour and attitudes of the people who live within and benefit from them. Institutions are not simply the reflections of social forces.

Once you know these complex rules, some unwritten, you can see how politicians logically try to maximise their advantage under them. The preservation and enhancement of the institution becomes one of politicians’ major goals. Thus, institutions, even if outmoded or ineffective, tend to rumble on. The Communist parties of the Soviet bloc were corrupt and ineffective, but they endured because they guaranteed the jobs and perquisites of their members.

SYSTEMS THEORY

A major postwar invention was the “political systems” model devised by David Easton (1917–2014), which contributed to our understanding of politics by simplifying reality but in some cases departed from reality. The idea of looking at complex entities as systems originated in biology. Living organisms are complex and highly integrated. The heart, lungs, blood, digestive tract, and brain perform their functions in such a way as to keep the animal alive. Take away one organ and the animal dies. You cannot change just one component because that changes all of the others.

According to the Easton model, citizens’ demands, “inputs,” are recognised by the government decision makers, who process them into authoritative decisions and actions, “outputs.” These outputs have an impact on the social, economic, and political environment that the citizens may or may not like. The citizens express their demands anew—this is the crucial “feedback” link of the system—which may modify the earlier decision. Precisely what goes on in the “conversion process” was left opaque, a “black box.”

In some cases, the political systems approach fits reality. As the Vietnam War dragged on, feedback on the military draft turned negative. The Nixon administration defused youthful anger by ending the draft in 1973 and changing to an all-volunteer army. In the 1980’s, the socialist economics of French President François Mitterrand produced inflation and unemployment.

But in other cases, the systems model falls flat. Would Hitler’s Germany or Stalin’s Russia really fit the systems model? How much attention do dictatorships pay to citizens’ demands? To be sure, there is always some input and feedback. Hitler’s generals tried to assassinate him — a type of feedback. Workers in Communist systems had an impact on government policy by not working much. They demanded more consumer goods and, by not exerting themselves, communicated this desire to the regime. Sooner or later the regime had to reform.

How could the systems model explain the Vietnam War? Did Americans demand that the administration send half a million troops to fight there? No, nearly the opposite: Lyndon Johnson won overwhelmingly in 1964 on an antiwar platform. The systems model does show how discontent with the war ruined Johnson’s popularity so that he did not seek reelection in 1968. The feedback loop did go into effect but only years after the decision for war had been made. Could the systems model explain the Watergate scandal? Did U.S. citizens demand that President Nixon have the Democratic headquarters bugged? No, but once details about the cover-up started leaking in 1973, the feedback loop went into effect, putting pressure on the House of Representatives to form an impeachment panel.

Plainly, there are some problems with the systems model, and they seem to be in the “black box” of the conversion process. Much happens in the mechanism of government that is not initiated by and has little to do with the wishes of citizens.

The systems model is essentially static, biased toward the status quo, and unable to handle upheaval. This is one reason political scientists were surprised at the collapse of the Soviet Union. “Systems” are not supposed to collapse; they are supposed to continually self-correct.

We can modify the systems model to better reflect reality. By diagramming it, we logically change little. We have the same feedback loop: outputs turning into inputs. But by putting the “conversion process” of government first, we suggested that it—rather than the citizenry—originates most decisions. The public reacts only later. That would be the case with the Afghan War: strong support in 2001, but fed up ten years later.

Inside the “black box,” a lot more happens than simply the processing of outside demands. Pressures from the various parts of government — government talking mostly to itself and short-circuiting the feedback loop — are what Easton called “withinputs.” These two alterations, of course, make our model more complicated, but this reflects the complicated nature of reality.

RATIONAL-CHOICE THEORY

In the 1970’s, a new approach, invented by mathematicians during World War II, rapidly grew in political science — rational-choice theory. Rational-choice theorists argue that one can generally predict political behaviour by knowing the interests of the actors involved because they rationally maximise their interests.

An example is when, as U.S. presidential candidates take positions on issues, they calculate what will give them the best payoff. They might think,

“Many people oppose the war in Afghanistan, but many also demand strong leadership on defense. I’d better just criticize ‘mistakes’ in Afghanistan while at the same time demand strong ‘national security’.”

Rational-choice theorists enrage some other political scientists. One study of Japanese bureaucrats claimed you need not study Japan’s language, culture, or history. All you needed to know was what the bureaucrats’ career advantages were to predict how they would decide issues.

Many rational-choice theorists backed down from their know-it-all positions. Some now call themselves “neoinstitutionalists” (see above section) because all their rational choices are made within one or another institutional context. Rational-choice theory did not establish itself as the dominant paradigm but it contributed a lot by reminding us that politicians are consummate opportunists, a point many other theories forget.

Some rational-choice theorists subscribed to a branch of mathematics called game theory, setting up political decisions as if they were table games. A Cuban missile crisis “game” might have several people play President Kennedy, who must weigh the probable payoffs of bombing or not bombing Cuba.

Game theorists argue that constructing the proper game explains why policy outcomes are often unforeseen but not accidental. Games can show how decision makers think. We learn how their choices are never easy or simple. Games can even be mathematised and fed into computers. The great weakness of game theory is that it depends on correctly estimating the “payoffs” that decision makers can expect, and these are only approximations arrived at by examining the historical record.

All these theories and several others offer interesting insights. None, however, is likely to be the last model we shall see, for we will never have a paradigm that can consistently explain and predict political actions. Upon examination and criticism, the model usually fades and is replaced by another trend.

“Political Theory” versus Theory in Political Science

Departments of Political Science often house both political scientists and political theorists. Where political scientists study politics by trying to understand how things do work, political theorists approach the study of politics from the perspective of how things should work.

Although many claim that Plato founded political science, it’s important to remember that his “Republic” described an idea ‘pòlis’ by using a normative approach rather than the classically objective approach of political science (which seeks to understand how things do work). Aristotle (Plato’s student), however, was the first empirical political scientist and sent out his students to gather data from dozens of Greek city-states. With these data, he constructed his great work Politics which combined both descriptive and normative approaches. He used the facts he and his students had collected to prescribe the most desirable political institutions. Both Plato and Aristotle saw Athens in decline; they attempted to understand why and to suggest how it could be avoided.

Thus began a tradition that is still at the heart of political science: a search for the sources of the good, stable political system.

Most European medieval and Renaissance political thinkers took a religious approach to the study of government and politics. They were almost strictly normative, seeking to discover the “ought” or “should,” and were often rather casual about the “is,” the real-world situation. Informed by religious, legal, and philosophical values, they tried to ascertain which system of government would bring humankind closest to what God wished.

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) introduced what some believe to be the crux of modern political science: the focus on power. His great work “Il Principe” was about the getting and using of political power. He was a realist who argued that to accomplish anything good, the Prince had to be rational and tough in the exercise of power. the approach took root in Europe and contributed to the elite analyses of Mosca, Pareto, and Michels.

THE CONTRACTUALISTS

Not long after Machiavelli, the “contractualists” — Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau — analysed why political systems should exist at all. They differed in many points but agreed that humans, at least in principle, had joined in what Rousseau called a social contract that everyone now had to observe.

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) imagined that life in “the state of nature,” before civil society was founded, must have been terrible. Every man would have been the enemy of every other man, a “war of each against all.” Humans would live in savage squalor with “no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” To get out of this horror, people would rationally join together to form civil society. Society thus arises naturally out of fear. People would also gladly submit to a king, even a bad one, for a monarch prevents anarchy.

John Locke (1632–1704) came to less harsh conclusions. Locke theorised that the original state of nature was not so bad; people lived in equality and tolerance with one another. But they could not secure their property. There was no money, title deeds, or courts of law, so ownership was uncertain. To remedy this, they contractually formed civil society and thus secured “life, liberty, and property.” Locke is to property rights as Hobbes is to fear of violent death. Some philosophers argue that Americans are the children of Locke. Notice the American emphasis on “the natural right to property.”

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1788) laid the philosophical groundwork for the French Revolution. In contrast to Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau theorised that life in the state of nature was downright good; people lived as “noble savages” without artifice or jealousy (all the contractualists were influenced by not-very-accurate descriptions of Native Americans). What corrupted humans, said Rousseau, was society itself. The famous words at the beginning of his Social Contract: “Man is born free but everywhere is in chains.”

But society can be drastically improved, argued Rousseau, leading to human freedom. A just society would be a voluntary community with a will of its own, the general will (what everyone wants over and above the selfish “particular wills” of individuals and interest groups).

In such communities, humans gain dignity and freedom. If people are bad, it is because society made them that way (a view held by many today). A good society, on the other hand, can “force men to be free” if they misbehave. Many see the roots of totalitarianism in Rousseau: the imagined perfect society; the general will, which the dictator claims to know; and the breaking of those who do not cooperate.

MARXIST THEORIES

Karl Marx (1818–1883) produced an exceedingly complex theory consisting of at least three interrelated elements: a theory of economics, a theory of social class, and a theory of history. Like Hegel (1770–1831), Marx argued that things do not happen by accident; everything has a cause. Hegel posited the underlying cause that moves history forward as spiritual, specifically the Zeitgeist, the spirit of the times. Marx found the great underlying cause in economics.

* Economics

Marx concentrated on the “surplus value” — what we call profit. Workers produce things but get paid only a fraction of the value of what they produce. The capitalist owners skim off the rest, the surplus value. The working class/proletariat is paid too little to buy all the products the workers have made, resulting in repeated overproduction, which leads to depressions. Eventually, argued Marx, there will be a depression so big the capitalist system will collapse.

* Social Class

Every society divides into two classes: a small class of those who own the means of production and a large class of those who work for the small class. Society is run according to the dictates of the upper class, which sets up the laws, arts, and styles needed to maintain itself in power (Marx, in modern terms, was an elite theorist). Most laws concern property rights, noted Marx, because the bourgeoisie (the capitalists) are obsessed with hanging on to their property, which, according to Marx, is nothing but skimmed-off surplus value anyway. If the country goes to war, said Marx, it is not because the common people wish it but because the ruling bourgeoisie needs a war for economic gain. The proletariat, in fact, has no country; proletarians are international, all suffering under the heel of the capitalists.

* History

Putting together his economic and social-class theories, Marx explained historical changes. When the underlying economic basis of society gets out of kilter with the structure that the dominant class has established (its laws, institutions, businesses, and so on), the system collapses, as in the French Revolution and ultimately, he predicted, capitalist systems. Marx was partly a theorist and partly an ideologist.

Marx’s enduring contributions are

1. His understanding that societies are never fully unified and peaceful but always riven with conflict
2. That we must ask “Who benefits?” in any political controversy.

One of the enduring problems and weaknesses of Marx is that capitalism, contrary to his prediction, has not collapsed. Old industries fade, and new ones rise. Marx also missed that capitalism is not just one system — it is many. U.S., French, Singaporean, and Japanese capitalisms are distinct from each other. Marx’s simplified notions of capitalism illustrate what happens when theory is placed in the service of ideology: Unquestioning followers believe it too literally

Chapter 2

Political Ideologies

In the last century, many political scientists thought ideological politics was over in the United States; recent elections, however, show strong and growing ideological divisions.

Democrats denounce Republicans and this has caused bouts of ideological politics before. Probably few Republicans knew it, but they were based on classic liberalism, harkening back to Adam Smith’s 1776 admonition to get the government out of the economy. Democrats, on the other hand, had long emphasised government solutions for financial crashes, poverty, health care, and education. They were modern liberals, quite distinct from the classic variety. But what exactly is ‘ideology’?

An ideology is a plan to improve society. The economist Anthony Downs sees it as:

“A verbal image of the good society, and of the chief means of constructing such a society.”

Political ideologies are not political science, but commitments to change political systems. Ideologues make poor political scientists, for they confuse the “should” or “ought” of ideology with the “is” of political science. Ideologies are often based on political and economic theories but simplified and popularised to sell to mass audiences, build political movements, and win elections.

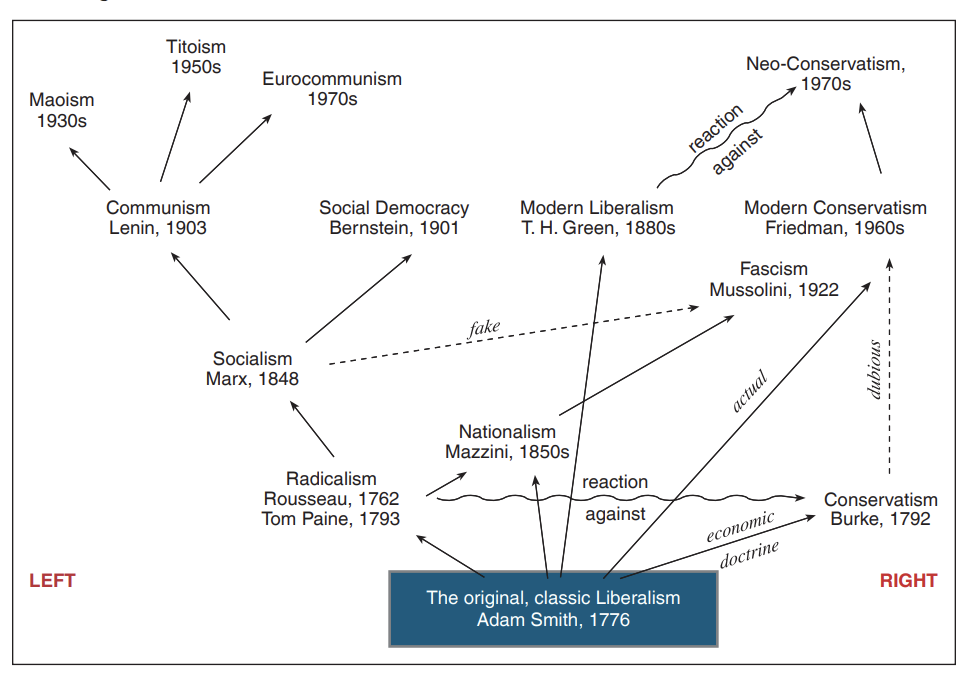
To fight and endure sacrifices, people need ideological motivation, something to believe in. Muslim jihadis, committed to a mix of salafiyya, tribalism, anti colonialism, and even a bit of socialism (see below), sacrificed their lives to kill Americans and fellow Muslims.

We tend to forget that more than two centuries ago, Americans were quite ideological, too, and beat a larger and better-equipped army of Englishmen and Hessians who had no good reason to fight.

Ideologies never work precisely the way their advocates intend. Some are hideous failures. All ideologies contain wishful thinking, which frequently collapses in the face of reality. Ideologues claim they can perfect the world; reality is highly imperfect. Ideologies, when measured against their actual performance, fall far short.

Liberalism

CLASSIC LIBERALISM

When talking about Liberalism, we should distinguish between Classic and Modern Liberalism. But before that, let’s talk about Adam Smith’s “The Wealth of Nations”.

Smith founded classic laissez-faire economics with the publication of his book. The true wealth of nations, Smith argued, is not in the amount of gold and silver they amass, but in the amount of goods and services their people produce.

Smith reasoned that this was not the path to prosperity. Government interference retards growth. If you give one firm a monopoly to manufacture something, you banish competition and, with it, efforts to produce new products and lower prices. The economy stagnates. If you protect domestic industry by tariffs, you take away incentives for better or cheaper products. By getting the government out of the economy, by leaving the economy alone (laissez-faire, in French), you promote prosperity.

Smith also said that free competition unsupervised by the government will not lead to chaos because the market itself will regulate the economy. Efficient producers will prosper and inefficient ones will go under. Supply and demand determine prices better than any government official. In the free marketplace, an “unseen hand” regulates and self-corrects the economy.

This ideology took the name liberalism from the Latin word for “free,” liber: Society should be as free as possible from government interference. Americans quickly took to classic liberalism, as it fit the needs of a vigorous, freedom-loving population with plenty of room to expand.

In the late 19th century, liberalism changed and split into modern liberalism and what we now call conservatism, which we discuss next. To keep our terminology straight, we call the original ideas of Adam Smith “classic liberalism” to distinguish it from the modern variety.

MODERN LIBERALISM

By the late 19th century, it was clear that the free market was not completely self-regulating. Competition was imperfect. The system produced a large underclass of the terribly poor, as depicted by Dickens. In short, the laissez-faire economy created some problems.

Thomas Hill Green (1836–1882) rethought liberalism. The goal of liberalism, reasoned Green, was a free society. But what happens when economic developments take away freedom? The classic liberals placed great store in contracts (agreements between consenting parties with little government supervision): If you don’t like the deal, don’t take it. Classic liberalism said, “let it be; wages will find their own level”. But what if the wage is below starvation level? Here, Green said, it was time for government to step in. In such a case, it would not be a question of the government infringing on freedom, but of the government protecting it. Green called this positive freedom.

Classic liberalism expelled government from the marketplace; modern liberalism brought it back in, this time to protect people from a sometimes unfair economic system. Modern liberals championed wage and hour laws, the right to form unions, unemployment and health insurance, and improved educational opportunities. To do this, they placed heavier taxes on the rich than on the working class.

In short:

CLASSIC LIBERALISM: Adam Smith’s “Invisible Hand” and laissez-faire theory; emphasis of freedom of speech and press

MODERN LIBERALISM: Positive freedom and taxes on the rich; also emphasis of freedom of speech and press

Conservatism

CLASSIC CONSERVATISM

If we want to talk about “Classic Conservatism”, we should look into the ideas of Edmund Burke (1729-1797). His idea of conservatism is very different from Modern Conservatism. He knew Adam Smith and agreed that a free market was the best economic system, and he opposed crushing the rebellious American colonists. So far, Burke sounds like a liberal.

But he strongly criticised how liberalism had turned into radicalism thanks to the revolutionaries in France. As is often the case, an ideology devised in one place becomes warped when applied to different circumstances. Liberalism in America was easy; once the English and their Tory sympathisers cleared out, it fell into place without resistance. But the revolutionaries in France tried to solve the problem with the guillotine and swept away all established institutions.

This, said Burke, was a terrible mistake. Liberals place too much confidence in human reason. People are only partly rational; they also have irrational passions. To contain them, society over the centuries has evolved traditions, institutions, and standards of morality, such as monarchy and an established church. Sweep these aside, warned Burke, and man’s irrational impulses burst out, leading to chaos, which in turn ends in tyranny far worse than the old system.

Institutions and traditions that currently exist cannot be all bad, Burke reasoned, for they are the products of hundreds of years of trial and error. People have become used to them. The best should be preserved or “conserved” (hence the name conservatism). They are not perfect, but they work. This is not to say that things should never change. Of course they should change, said Burke, but only gradually, giving people time to adjust. “A state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation,” he wrote.

Burke helped discover the irrational in human behaviour: Humans are often guided by passion rather than by reason. He saw that institutions are like living things; they grow and adapt over time. And, most important, he saw that revolutions end badly, for society cannot be instantly remade according to human reason. Although Burke’s ideas have been called an anti-ideology, they have considerable staying power.

MODERN CONSERVATISM

The branch of Liberalism that had stayed true to Adam Smith’s original doctrine of minimal government have become what we today call Modern Conservatives (in Europe, we call them neoliberals).

American conservatives got a big boost from Milton Friedman (1912–2006), a Nobel Prize–winning economist. Friedman argued that the free market is still the best, that Adam Smith was right, and that wherever government intervenes it messes things up. Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in the United States applied this revival of classic liberalism in the 1980’s with mixed but generally positive results.

Today’s conservatives contend that all markets are honest and self-correcting, certainly more so than government regulation, which they would roll back (very differently from how Adam Smith had seen markets). Republicans and the Tea Party also assume that markets are more efficient than government programs and would privatise many functions, such as running health care only through private insurers. Critics call this “market fundamentalism,” like a religious creed.

Modern conservatism also borrows from Edmund Burke a concern for tradition, especially in religion. American conservatives would put prayer into public schools, outlaw abortion and same-sex marriage, and support private and church-related schools. Modern conservatives also oppose special rights for women and minority groups, arguing that everyone should have the same rights. Modern conservatism is a blend of the economic ideas of Adam Smith and the traditionalist ideas of Edmund Burke.

CLASSIC CONSERVATISM: Edmund Burke

MODERN CONSERVATISM: Edmund Burke + Adam Smith

Socialism

Classic Liberalism dominated the 19th century, but critics deplored the growing gulf between rich and poor. Some did not believe that a few reforms would suffice; they wanted to overthrow the capitalist system. These were the socialists, and their leading thinker was Karl Marx, who wrote less as a scholar than a promoter of revolution. He hated the “bourgeoisie” long before he developed his elaborate theories.

An outline of his ideas appeared in his 1848 pamphlet “The Communist Manifesto”, which concluded with the ringing words: “The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workers of all countries, unite!” Marx participated in organising Europe’s first socialist parties.

Marx’s “Capital” was a gigantic analysis of why capitalism would be overthrown by the proletariat. Then would come socialism, a just, productive society without class distinctions. Later, at a certain stage when industrial production was very high, this socialist society will turn into communism, a perfect society without police, money, or even government. Goods will be in such plenty that people will just take what they need. There will be no private property, so there will be no need for police. Because government is simply an instrument of class domination, with the abolition of distinct classes there will be no need for the state. It will “wither away.” Communism, then, was Marx’s predicted utopia beyond socialism.

Marx focused on the ills and malfunctions of capitalism and never specified what socialism would be like, only that it would be much better than capitalism; its precise workings he left vague. This has enabled a wide variety of socialist thinkers to put forward their own vision of socialism and say it is what Marx really meant. This has ranged from the mild “welfarism” of social-democratic parties, to anarcho-syndicalism (unions running everything), to Lenin’s and Stalin’s hypercentralised tyranny, to Trotsky’s denunciation of same, to Mao’s self-destructive permanent revolution, to Tito’s experimental decentralised system. All, and a few more, claim to espouse “real” socialism.

These different interpretations of socialism caused first the socialist and then the communist movement to splinter.

SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

By the beginning of the 20th century, the German Social Democrats (SPD), espousing Marxism, had become Germany’s biggest party. Marx had disparaged conventional parties and labor unions; bourgeois governments would simply crush them. At most, they could be training grounds for serious revolutionary action.

But the German Social Democrats started succeeding. They got elected to the Reichstag and local offices; their unions won higher wages and better working conditions. Some began to think that the working class could accomplish its aims without revolution.

Eduard Bernstein developed this view. In his 1901 “Evolutionary Socialism”, he pointed out the real gains the working class was making and concluded that Marx had been wrong about the collapse of capitalism and revolution. Reforms that won concrete benefits for the working class could also lead to socialism, he argued.

In revising Marxism, Bernstein earned the name revisionist, originally a pejorative hurled at him by orthodox Marxists. By the time of the ill-fated Weimar Republic in Germany (1919–1933), the Social Democrats had toned down their militancy and worked together with liberals and Catholics to try to save democracy. Persecuted by the Nazis, the SPD revived after World War II and in 1959 dropped Marxism altogether, as did social democrats everywhere, and got elected more and more. They transformed themselves into centre-left parties with no trace of revolution.

What, then, do social democrats stand for? They abandoned state ownership of industry. Instead of state ownership of industry, social democrats use welfare measures to improve living conditions: unemployment and medical insurance, generous pensions, and subsidised food and housing. Social democracies have become welfare states: Welfarism would be a more accurate term than socialism.

There’s one catch, and that is that welfare states are terribly expensive. To pay for welfare measures, taxes climb (like in Denmark and Sweden). With those kinds of taxes, soon you are not free to choose how you live. U.S. liberalism is tinged with social democratic ideas on welfare. The left wing of our Democratic Party (e.g.: Bernie Sanders) resembles ideologically the moderate wings of European social democratic parties.

COMMUNISM

While the social democrats evolved into reformists and Welfarists, a smaller wing of the original socialists stayed Marxist and became the Communists. The key figure in this transformation was a Russian intellectual, Vladimir I. Lenin (1870–1924). He made several changes in Marxism, producing Marxism-Leninism, another name for Communism.

* Imperialism

Many Russian intellectuals of the late 19th century hated the tsarist system and embraced Marxism as a way to overthrow it. But Marx meant his theory to apply in the most advanced capitalist countries, not in backward Russia, where capitalism was just beginning. Lenin, in his seventeen-year exile in Switzerland, remade Marxism to fit the Russian situation. He offered a theory of economic imperialism, one borrowed from German revolutionary Rosa Luxembourg and English economist J. A. Hobson, who wondered why the proletarian revolutions Marx had predicted had not broken out in the advanced industrialised lands. They concluded that the domestic market could not absorb all the goods the capitalist system produced, so it found overseas markets. Capitalism had transformed itself, expanding overseas into colonies to exploit their raw materials, cheap labor, and new markets. Capitalism thus won a temporary new lease on life by turning into imperialism.

Imperialism had to expand, Lenin argued, but it was growing unevenly. Some countries, such as Britain and Germany, were highly developed, but where capitalism was just starting, as in Spain and Russia, it was weak. The newly industrialising countries were exploited as a whole by the international capitalist system. It was in them that revolutionary fever burned brightest; they were “imperialism’s weakest link.” Accordingly, a revolution could break out in a poor country and then spread into advanced countries. The imperialist countries were highly dependent on their empires. Once cut off from exploiting them, capitalism would fall. World War I, wrote Lenin, was the collision of imperialists trying to dominate the globe.

Lenin shifted the Marxian focus from the situation within capitalist countries to the global situation. The focus went from Marx’s proletariat rising up against the bourgeoisie to exploited nations rising up against imperialist powers. Marx would probably not have endorsed such a remaking of his theory.

* Organisation

Lenin’s real contribution lay in his attention to organisation. With the tsarist secret police always on their trail, Lenin argued, the Russian socialist party could not be like other parties — large, open, and trying to win votes. Instead, it had to be small, secretive, made up of professional revolutionaries, and tightly organised under central command. In 1903, the Russian Social Democratic Labor party split over this issue. Lenin had enough supporters at the party’s Brussels meeting to win the votes of thirty-three of the fifty-one delegates present. Lenin called his faction bolshevik (Russian for “majority”). The losers, who advocated a more moderate line and a more open party, took the name menshevik (“ minority”). In 1918, the Bolsheviks changed the party name to Communist.

In March 1917, a group of moderates seized power from the tsar, but they were unable to govern the country. In November, the Bolsheviks shrewdly manipulated councils (soviets in Russian) that had sprung up in the leading cities and seized control from the moderates. After winning a desperate civil war, Lenin called on all true socialists around the world to join in a new international movement under Moscow’s control. It was called the Communist International, or Comintern.

Almost all socialist parties in the world split; their left wings went into the Comintern and became Communist parties in 1920–1921. The resultant social democratic and Communist parties have been hostile to each other ever since. How much Marxism-Leninism did Soviet rulers really believe? They constantly used Marxist rhetoric, but many argued they were cynical about ideology and just used it as window dressing. The Soviets never defined their society as Communist — that was yet to come; it was what they were working on. It is we in the West who called these countries “Communist.”

In 1961, Soviet party chief Nikita Khrushchev rashly predicted “communism in our generation,” indicating that utopia would be reached by 1980. Instead, it declined, and at the end of 1991 the Soviet system collapsed.

* Maoism

In the 1930’s, Mao Zedong concluded that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had to be based on poor peasants and guerrilla warfare. This was a break with Stalin’s leadership, and after decades of fighting, the CCP took over mainland China in 1949.

Mao pursued a radical course that included a failed attempt at overnight industrialisation (the Great Leap Forward of 1958–1961), the destruction of bureaucratic authority (the Proletarian Cultural Revolution in 1966–1976), and even border fighting with the Soviet Union in 1969.

After Mao’s death in 1976, pragmatic leaders moved China away from his extremism, which had ruined China’s economic progress. A few revolutionary groups stayed Maoist: Cambodia’s murderous Khmer Rouge and India’s Naxalites. Maoism is an ultraradical form of communism.

* Titoism

Yugoslav party chief Josip Tito went the other way, developing a more moderate and liberal form of communism. Even though Tito’s partisans fought the Germans in Stalin’s name, Stalin did not fully control Tito, and in 1948 Stalin had Yugoslavia kicked out of the Communist camp.

During the 1950’s, the Yugoslav Communists reformed their system, basing it on decentralisation, debureaucratisation, and worker self-management. Trying to find a middle ground between a market and a controlled economy, Yugoslavia suffered economic problems in the 1980’s. Titoism might have served as a warning to Communist rulers who wanted to experiment with “middle ways” between capitalism and socialism. The combination is unstable and worked only because Tito was undisputed ruler; when he died in 1980, Yugoslavia started coming apart until, by the early 1990’s, it was a bloodbath.

NATIONALISM

The real winner among ideologies is nationalism, the exaggerated belief in the greatness and unity of one’s country. Nationalism is often born out of occupation and repression by foreigners. Nationalism has triumphed over and influenced all other ideologies, so that, in the United States, conservatism is combined with American nationalism, and, in China, nationalism was always more important than communism.

The first seeds of nationalism came with the Renaissance monarchs who proclaimed their absolute power and the unity and greatness of their kingdoms. Nationality was born out of sovereignty. Nationalism, however, appeared only with the French Revolution, which was based on “the people” and heightened French feelings about themselves as a special, leading people destined to free the rest of Europe. When a Prussian army invaded France in 1792, the “nation in arms” stopped them at Valmy; enthusiastic volunteers beat professional soldiers. The stirring “Marseillaise,” France’s national anthem, appeared that year.

Later, Napoleon’s legions ostensibly spread the radical liberalism of the French Revolution but were really spreading nationalism. The conquered nations of Europe quickly grew to hate the arrogant French occupiers. Spaniards, Germans, and Russians soon became nationalistic themselves as they struggled to expel the French. Basic to nationalism is resentment of foreign domination. Nationalism blanketed Europe in the 19th century and in the 20th century spread to Europe’s colonies throughout the world. It is in the developing countries that nationalism is now most intense.

By the mid–19th century, thinkers all over Europe defined the nation as the ultimate human value, the source of all things good. Italian writer Giuseppe Mazzini espoused freedom not for individuals (liberalism) but for nations instead. One achieved true freedom by subordinating oneself to the nation.

Nationalism arises when a population, often led by intellectuals, perceives an enemy or “other” to despise and struggle against. In the 20th century, this has often been a colonial power such as Britain, France, or the Netherlands, against whom, respectively, Indians, Algerians, and Indonesians could rally in their fight for independence. Nationalism holds that it is terribly wrong to be ruled by others.

Nationalism can lead to wars and economic isolation, but rapid economic growth needs foreign investment and world trade. More than any of the previous ideologies, nationalism depends on emotional appeals. The feeling of belonging to a nation goes to our psychological centre.

* Regional Nationalism

In recent decades, the world has seen the rise of another kind of nationalism: regional nationalism, which aims at breaking up existing nations into what its proponents argue are the true nations. Regional nationalism, too, is based on hatred of being ruled by unlike peoples.

FASCISM

In Italy and Germany, nationalism grew into fascism, one of the great catastrophes of the 20th century. One sign of a fascist movement is members in uniforms; they crave military structure and discipline.

Before World War I, Italian journalist Benito Mussolini was a fire-breathing socialist; military service changed him into an ardent nationalist. Italy was full of discontented people after World War I. In those chaotic times, Mussolini assembled a strange collection of people in black shirts who wanted to end democracy and political parties and impose stern central authority and discipline. These Fascists hated disorder and wanted strong leadership to end it.

Amid growing disorder in 1922, the king of Italy handed power to Mussolini, and by 1924 he had turned Italy into a one-party state with himself as Duce (leader). The Fascists ran the economy by inserting their men into all key positions. Italy looked impressive: There was little crime, much monumental construction, stable prices, and, as they used to say, “The trains ran on time.” Behind the scenes, however, fascism was a mess, with hidden unemployment, poor economic performance, and corruption.

With the collapse of the world economy in 1929, however, some thought fascism was the wave of the future. Adolf Hitler in Germany copied Mussolini’s fascism but had his followers wear brown shirts and added racism.

For Hitler, it was not just Germans as a nation who were fighting the punitive and unfair Versailles Treaty and chaos of the Weimar Republic; it was Germans as a distinct and superior race. Hitler did not invent German racism, which went back generations, but he hyped it. The racist line held that a special branch of the white race, the Aryans, were the bearers of all civilisation. A sub-branch, the Nordics, which included Germans, were even better. Nazis argued that the superior Nordics were being subjugated to the sinister forces of Judaism, communism, world capitalism, and even Roman Catholicism. This doctrine was the basis for the death camps.

Hitler was named chancellor (prime minister) in 1933 in a situation of turmoil and, like Mussolini, within two years perfected a dictatorship with majority German support. With Nazis “coordinating” the economy, unemployment ended and many working people felt they were getting a good deal with jobs, vacations, and welfare the regime provided. The Nazis’ full name was the National Socialist German Workers Party, but the socialism was fake. Hitler’s true aim was war, as war builds heroes.

For a few years, Hitler dominated Europe and started turning the Slavic lands of Eastern Europe into colonies for Germans—Lebensraum (living space). Nazi death camps killed some six million Jews and a similar number of Christians who were in the way. Was Hitler mad? Many of his views were widely held among Germans, and he had millions of enthusiastic helpers. Rather than insanity, the Nazis demonstrated the danger of nationalism run amok.

The word fascist has been overused and misused. Spanish dictator Francisco Franco, for example, was long considered a fascist, but he was actually a “traditional authoritarian,” for he tried to minimise mass political involvement rather than stir it up the way Mussolini and Hitler did. Brazilian President Getúlio Vargas decreed a fascist-sounding “New State” in 1937, but he was merely borrowing some fascist rhetoric at a time when the movement was having its heyday in Europe. Some right-wing American commentators denounce “Islamofascists” and “feminazis.”

The Ku Klux Klan in the United States is sometimes called fascist, and its members wear uniforms. The Klan’s populist racism is similar to the Nazis’, but the Klan strongly opposes the power of the national government, whereas the Nazis and Fascists worshipped it. Now some European anti-immigrant and anti-EU parties are tinged with fascism. Hungary’s Jobbik Party, which hates immigrants and Jews, parades in uniform.

Ideology in our Day

THE COLLAPSE OF COMMUNISM

By the 1980’s, worldwide Communism was ideologically exhausted. Few people in China, Eastern Europe, and even the Soviet Union believed it any longer. In the non-Communist world, leftists deserted Marxism in droves. Several West European Communist parties embraced “Eurocommunism,” a greatly watered-down ideology that renounced dictatorship and state ownership of industry. Capitalism was supposed to have collapsed; instead, it was thriving in the United States, Western Europe, and East Asia. Many Communist leaders admitted that their economies were too rigid and centralised and that the cure lay in cutting back state controls in favour of market economies.

Reform-minded Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev (who was in power between 1985–1991) offered a three-pronged approach to revitalising Soviet communism: glasnost (media openness), perestroika (economic restructuring), and demokratizatzia (democratisation). Applied haltingly and half-heartedly, the reforms only heightened discontent, for now Soviets could voice their complaints.

Starting in Eastern Europe in 1989, non-Communist parties took over. In the Soviet Union, a partially free parliament was elected and began debating change. Non-Communist parties and movements appeared. Gorbachev still could not make up his mind how far and fast reforms should go, and the economy, barely reformed, turned wildly inflationary. A 1991 coup failed, and by the end of the year the Soviet Union ceased to exist.

NEOCONSERVATISM

In the 1970’s, a new ideology emerged in the United States: neoconservatism, much of it from disillusioned liberals and leftists. As neoconservative writer Irving Kristol put it,

“A neoconservative is a liberal who’s been mugged by reality.”

Neoconservatives claimed that the Democratic Party had moved too far left with unrealistic ideas on domestic reforms and a pacifist foreign policy. Neoconservatives reacted against the Great Society programs introduced by Lyndon Johnson in the mid-1960’s that aimed to wipe out poverty and discrimination. Some liberals said the Great Society was never given a chance because funds for it were siphoned away by the Vietnam War. But neocons said it worked badly, that many of the programs achieved nothing. The cities grew worse; educational standards declined; medical aid became extremely costly; and a class of welfare-dependent poor emerged, people who had little incentive to work. Neocons spoke of negative “unforeseen consequences” of well-intentioned liberal programs.

Affirmative action gave racial minorities preferential treatment in hiring, sometimes ahead of better-qualified whites (this bothered lots of neocons). Many neoconservatives were horrified at the extreme relativism that had grown in the 1960’s. Simplistic ideas—such as “It’s all right if it feels good” and “It just depends on your point of view” and “multiculturalism” — drove many liberals to neoconservatism. Ironically, some neocons were college professors who had earlier tried to broaden their students’ views by stressing the relativity of all viewpoints and cultures. Instead, students became vacuous.

In the younger Bush administration, highly placed neocons promoted war with Iraq both to protect the United States and to pull the Muslim world into democracy. Many old-fashioned conservatives, who express more isolationist ideas, despise the neocons, some of whom now advocate “getting tough” with Iran and China.

LIBERTARIANISM

Slowly growing since the 1960’s is an ideology so liberal that it became conservative, or vice versa. Libertarians would return to the original Adam Smith, with essentially no government interference in anything. They would deliver what Republicans only talk about. They note that modern liberals want a controlled economy but personal freedom while modern conservatives want a free economy but constraints on personal freedom.

Why not freedom in both areas? Libertarians oppose subsidies, bureaucracies, taxes, intervention overseas, and big government itself. As such, they plugged into a very old American tradition and gained respectability. Although no libertarian candidates won elections, their Cato Institute in Washington became a lively think tank whose ideas could not be ignored. (One Cato paper deplored cities building light rail systems when buses are better and cheaper. The paper’s title: “A Desire Named Streetcar.”)

Some critics blame libertarian worship of unregulated markets for the reckless deals that produced the 2008 financial meltdown. Rep. Ron Paul (father of Sen. Rand Paul), who earlier ran for president earlier as a Libertarian, later attempted to gain the Republican nomination.

FEMINISM

Springing to new life in the 1960’s with a handful of female writers, by the 1970’s, the women’s movement had become a political force in the United States and Western Europe. Feminist writers pointed out that women were paid less than men, were not promoted, were psychologically and physically abused by men, were denied loans and insurance, and were in general second-class citizens.

The root problem was psychological, argued feminists. Women and men were forced into “gender roles” that had little to do with biology. Boys were conditioned to be tough, domineering, competitive, and “macho,” and girls were taught to be meek, submissive, unsure of themselves, and “feminine.” Gender differences are almost entirely learned behaviour, taught by parents and schools of a “patriarchal” society, but this could be changed. With proper child rearing and education, males could become gentler and females more assertive and self-confident.

Feminists joined “consciousness-raising” groups and railed against “male chauvinist pigs.” Feminism started having an impact. Many employers gave women a fairer chance, sometimes hiring them over men. Women moved up to higher management positions (although seldom to the corporate top). Working wives became the norm. Husbands shared in homemaking and child rearing. With more women going to college than men, many male-dominated professions saw an influx of women.

Politically, however, feminists did not achieve all they wished. The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the Constitution failed to win ratification by enough state legislatures. It would have guaranteed equality of treatment regardless of gender. Antifeminists, some of them conservative women, argued that the ERA would take away women’s privileges and protections under the law, would make women eligible for the draft, and would even lead to unisex lavatories. Despite this setback, women learned there was one way they could count for a lot politically: by voting. In the 1980 election, a significant “gender gap” appeared, and now women generally vote more Democratic than do men.

ENVIRONMENTALISM

Also during the 1960’s, environmentalism began to ripple through the advanced industrialised countries. Economic development paid little heed to the damage it did to the environment. Mining, factories, and even farms poisoned streams; industries and automobiles polluted the air; chemical wastes made areas uninhabitable; and nuclear power leaked radioactivity. To the credo of “growth,” environmentalists responded with “limits.” Love Canal, Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, and Beijing’s air seemed to prove them right. The burning of fuels and forests increases CO2 that may trap heat inside the earth’s atmosphere and change climates.

The ecologists’ demands were only partly satisfied with the founding of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1970. Industrial groups argued that EPA regulations restricted growth and ate into profits; under Republican presidents, the EPA was rendered ineffective. Energy production had to take first place over pristine environments, they argued.

Regulation was only part of the environmental credo. Many argued that consumption patterns and lifestyles in the advanced countries should change to conserve the earth’s resources, natural beauty, and clean air and water. Americans, only about 4 percent of the world’s population, consume a fourth of the world’s manufactured goods and energy. In addition to being out of balance with the rest of the world, this profligate lifestyle is unnecessary and unhealthy, they argued. “Greens” urged public transportation and bicycles instead of cars, whole-grain foods and vegetables instead of meat, and decentralised, renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar energy, instead of fossil- or nuclear-fuelled power plants.

Some environmentalists formed political parties, first the Citizens Party, then the Greens, but their main impact was within the two big parties, neither of which could ignore the environmental vote. In Western Europe in the 1980’s, especially in Germany and Sweden, Green parties were elected to parliament, determined to end nuclear power, toxic waste, and war. Many young Europeans found the Greens an attractive alternative to the old and stodgy conventional parties. U.S. environmentalists promote renewable energy such as wind, solar, and biofuels and work to limit use of fossil fuels, such as a pipeline to bring tar-sands oil from Canada. Environmentalists opposed the “fracking” of shale gas, which is cleaner than oil or coal but still pumps carbon into the atmosphere.

Is Ideology Dead?

In 1960, Harvard sociologist Daniel Bell (1919–2011) argued that the century-long ideological debates were coming to a close. The failure of tyrannical communism and the rise of the welfare state were producing what Bell called the “end of ideology”: there simply was not much to quarrel about. Henceforth, political debate would focus on almost technical questions of how to run the welfare state, said Bell, such as what to include under national health insurance.

In 1989, political scientist Francis Fukuyama went even further: not only had the great ideological debate ended with the victory of capitalist democracy, but history itself could be ending. Fukuyama did not mean that time would stand still but rather that the human endpoint propounded by Hegel was now coming into view. Not only had we beaten communism, suggested Fukuyama, there were no longer any other ideologies to challenge ours. With the end of ideology would come the end of history in the sense of the struggle of great ideas.

A glance at today’s news makes one doubt the Bell and Fukuyama theses. First, the collapse of communism in Europe by itself did not disprove Marx’s original ideas, although now Marxists carefully distance themselves from the Soviet type of socialism. Socialists still debate the possibility of a benign socialism. New and dangerous ideological challenges emerged just as communism collapsed, especially radical Islamism and China’s “authoritarian capitalism.” And free democracy itself houses numerous ideological viewpoints: free market or government intervention, more welfare or less, a secular or religious state, and spreading democracy abroad or avoiding overseas involvement. Fukuyama need not worry about boredom.

Chapter 3

The Difference between States and Nations

A nation is a population with a certain sense of itself, a cohesiveness, a shared history and culture, and often (but not always) a common language. A state is a government structure, usually sovereign and powerful enough to enforce its writ. With the addition of South Sudan in 2011, there are 194 states in the world. In most cases, states created their nations.

Institutionalised Power

Political institutions are the working structures of government, such as legislatures and executive departments. Institutions may or may not be housed in impressive buildings, although that can bolster their authority. The U.S. Supreme Court, even if it met in a tent, would be an important institution as long as its decisions were obeyed. It was not clear what the powers of the Supreme Court were to be when it began, but forceful personalities and important cases gave it power.

Authority is a fluid thing and requires continual maintenance. A political institution is congealed or partly solidified authority. Over time, people have become used to looking to political institutions to solve problems, decide controversies, and set directions. Institutions, because they are composed of many persons and (if they are effective) last many generations, take on lives of their own apart from the people temporarily associated with them. The permanency of institutions beyond the individuals running them gives the political system stability; citizens know who is in charge and what is permissible.

Institutions are bigger than individual leaders. Some dictators try to make themselves into institutions, but they fail. Dictators seldom build lasting institutions; they rarely institutionalisetheir personal power.

A basic way to study institutions is to locate the most powerful offices of a political system: Who’s got the power? Constitutions may help but do not tell the whole story; they evolve in practice, if not in wording.

Almost all countries are now republics, which does not necessarily mean good or democratic. Figurehead constitutional monarchies still reign symbolically but do not actually rule in Britain, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Spain, and Holland, which are happy with that status. Traditional working monarchies are still found in the Arab world, but may be doomed unless they can turn themselves into limited constitutional monarchies.

Effective, Weak and Failed States

Analysts see nations as classified into three categories:

1. Effective

Effective states control and tax their entire territory. Laws are mostly obeyed. The Government looks after the general welfare and security. Corruption is minor. These tend to be democracies with free and fair elections. Some include Japan, the U.S. and most European countries.

1. Weak

These are characterised by the penetration of crime into politics. The government does not have the strength to fight lawlessness, drug trafficking, corruption, poverty and breakaway movements. Justice is bought. Democracy is preached more than practised, and elections are rigged. Little is collected in taxation. Revenues from natural resources disappear into private pockets. According to the textbook, this involves much of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

1. Failed

These essentially have no national government, although some pretend they do. Warlords, militias, and drug lords do as they wish. There is no law besides the gun. Territorial breakup threatens. Education and health standards plunge. Only outside assistance and pressure keep these two countries from disappearing altogether. Some fear that Yemen, home to Islamist fighters, and the Central African Republic, wracked by Christian-Muslim war, are becoming failed states.

Unitary or Federal Systems

An important and basic institutional choice is the territorial structure of the nation: unitary or federal.

1. Unitary System

Accords its component areas little autonomy; most governance radiates from the capital city. They control local authorities and citizens’ lives more than federal systems do.

For example, France’s education ministry in Paris draws up school curricula in order to reduce regional differences in language and culture, which at one time were very strong. A century ago, a French education minister looked at his watch and proudly told an interviewer which Latin verbs were being conjugated all over France. Unitary states have national police forces and court systems, whose officers are appointed by the national government.

Centre-periphery tensions/regionalism grew in several countries during the 1970’s, and for several reasons. Economics was one. Local nationalists often claim that their region is poorer and shortchanged by the central government. The region may have a distinct language or culture that its people want to preserve. Many feel that important political decisions are not under local control, that they are made by distant bureaucrats. Often, regions harbour historical resentments at having long ago been conquered and forcibly merged with the larger nation. Some examples include the way Iraqi Kurds feel about Baghdad, or how Celtic Scots and Welsh feel about Britain.

| Pros | Cons |
| --- | --- |
| Centralisation of power, however, can be an advantage in facing modern problems. Clear lines of authority without excess bickering among units of government can be useful. In unitary systems, the capital can marshal economic resources and coordinate planning and development. Taxation is nearly the same nationwide, so firms and individuals do not flee to low-tax states, as in the United States. Education standards can be high and uniform, as in Japan. | Authority in unitary states can be absurdly over-centralised (local government may not be able to install a traffic light or bus stop without permission from the capital. This leads citizens to ignore local affairs and produces political alienation. |

1. Federal System

Federalism gives first-order civil divisions much autonomy while the central government runs areas that are inherently national. It is a difficult balancing act that varies among federal nations. The components of a federal system are typically represented in an upper house such as the U.S. Senate or German Bundesrat.

In federal systems, the central government has exclusive control over foreign, defence, and monetary policy. The states typically control education, police, highways, and other close-to- home affairs. Because the division of these powers is seldom clear or permanent, federalism rests on a delicate and changing balance between central power and local autonomy.

There are several reasons to form a federal union. The first is national security; small and weak states cannot defend themselves against powerful aggressors. The pooling of diplomatic and military resources of the states made Bismarck’s Germany a major power, for example.

| Pros | Cons |
| --- | --- |
| * Citizens are closest to their local governments, where they can influence officials and see how decisions are made (e.g.: U.S. states) | - Local governments may lack the money to finance programs, and their officials are sometimes incompetent and corrupt |

Federalism is not an easy system to maintain and does not necessarily solve the problems of large and diverse countries. We can see this with ex-Soviet Federalism, ex-Yugoslav Federalism and Canadian Federalism.

Could the three Communist federations — the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia — have devised a more genuine federalism that would not have fallen apart? Or were these federations of unlike components doomed from the start? The Communists, by pretending to have solved the “nationalities question,” merely suppressed it until it came out later.

Electoral Systems

Electoral systems are also important institutional choices; they help determine the number of parties, the ease of forming a stable government, and the degree of citizen interest in politics. There are two general types of electoral systems with many variations:

1. Single-Member Districts

The simplest electoral system is the Anglo-American **single-member district**, wherein one member of Parliament or of Congress is elected to represent the entire district by winning a plurality (not necessarily a majority) of the votes. Called “single-member districts with plurality win” or “first past the post” (FPTP), this system pushes interest groups and political factions to coalesce into two big parties.

If there were, say, four parties who received 25, 25, 24, and 26 percent of the vote, respectively, the last would win. Losing parties that are not far apart ideologically quickly recognise their advantage is to combine for the next election. Then this new party wins, forcing other small parties to combine. The message: Merge or lose. Third parties exist in such systems but without much hope of winning. They may have an impact as protest and pressure groups on the big parties.

| Pros | Cons |
| --- | --- |
| * Politics in FPTP systems tend to the centre of the political system; this inhibits the growth of extremism * Most FPTP systems also give a clear parliamentary majority to one party (called majoritarian system), so coalitions are rarely necessary | * FPTP creates an artificial majority in parliament, which makes governing easier, but does not fairly or accurately reflect public opinion/voting strength * The winner takes all * In some cases (U.S.) the party with the most votes nationwide fails to win a majority of seats, depending on how their votes are distributed across districts (e.g.: gerrymandering) |

1. Proportional Representation

These systems are based on multimember districts; each district sends several representatives to parliament, not just one. If the district is entitled to ten seats, each party offers voters a *party list* of ten candidates. Each voter picks one list, and the party gets seats in proportion to the votes it receives. If the party won 30 percent of the votes in a ten-member district, it would send the first three names on its party list to parliament. A party with 20 percent would send its first two names.

Rarely does the vote divide so neatly; one party might win 42 percent of eleven seats. Would it get 4.62 seats? How do you send a fraction of a person to parliament? The most common way to handle this is the d’Hondt mathematical formula, which slightly over-represents the larger parties at the expense of smaller ones.

To minimise the problem of splinter, nuisance, or extremist parties, PR systems require parties to win a certain percentage of the vote in order to obtain any seats at all. These are called “threshold clauses.” In Germany and Poland, a party must win at least 5 percent of the vote nationwide; in Sweden and Italy, 4 percent; in Israel, 3.25 percent.

| Pros | Cons |
| --- | --- |
| * The country’s legislature more accurately reflects public opinion and party strength * Parties can articulate ideologies and principles more clearly because they do not try to please everybody | * PR systems do little to fight party splintering, so they often lead to multiparty systems * If the largest party falls short of half the seats in PR systems, it must form a coalition with other parties; often these coalitions cannot decide on important issues |

States and the Economy

Yet another way to classify governments is how they handle the economy and how they face two key questions:

1. How much of the economy should the state own or supervise?
2. How much of the nation’s wealth should be redistributed to help the poorer sectors of society?

The answers produce four basic approaches to promoting the general welfare:

1. The Laissez-Faire System

The government owns little or no industry and redistributes little in the form of welfare programs. These countries follow Adam Smith, seconded by Milton Friedman, who argued that government interference in the economy decreases growth and prosperity. The theory here is that private enterprise and individual initiative make a nation both free and prosperous.

1. A Welfare State

This type of state owns little or no industry but does redistribute wealth to the less well-off. Sometimes known as “social democracies,” the welfare states of northwest Europe offer “cradle-to-grave” benefits in health insurance, child care, job training, and retirement funds. To pay for this, they charge the world’s highest taxes—in Sweden and Denmark some 50 percent of GDP. Industry, though, is private and moneymaking.

1. Statism

Statism is an old system that predates laissez-faire. In its current form, as in Russia and China, it is called *state capitalism*. In these systems, the state. is the number-one capitalist, owning and running much major industry but providing few welfare benefits.

Statism actually began when the French kings founded a powerful, centralised state that supervised industry for the sake of French wealth and power. Sometimes called by its French name *étatisme*, state capitalism typically includes state ownership of rail- roads, steel mills, banks, oil, and other big enterprises. Small and medium business is private and competitive.

Many developing countries followed statist models with the argument that only the government has the money, ideas, and talent to start up new industries. State-owned firms, however, are usually inefficient because they are run by bureaucrats and face little competition; often they operate at a loss and have to be subsidised by the national treasury.

1. A Socialist System

This system practices both state ownership and extensive welfare ben- efits. Exemplified by the former Soviet Union, government owns nearly all the means of production, claiming it runs the economy in the interests of the society as a whole. However, the collapse of Communist regimes (which called them- selves “socialist”; we called them “Communist”) indicates they worked poorly. Today, only North Korea and Cuba remain as (negative) examples of socialism, and their systems seem ripe for change.

In actual practice, governments often combine elements of these four systems. In our day, we have seen a massive shift away from state-owned industry in Eastern Europe, France, and Latin America. Welfare states like Sweden, feeling the pinch of too- generous benefits and too-high taxes, have elected conservative governments.

A basic American attitude is that government should be kept small. In much of the rest of the world, however, state power is accepted as natural and good. These attitudes lasted well into the twentieth century and are still present. Defeated by Germany in 1870–1871, the French elite used the state as an *agent of modernisation.*

*D*id it work? France did modernise greatly, but was this the fastest or most efficient way? Britain and the United States advanced further with minimal government supervision; competition within a free-market economy did the job faster and cheaper.

So, should government attempt to supervise the economy by providing plans, suggestions, industry-wide cooperation, insurance, and loans? The traditional American answer is “No, it’ll just mess things up.” Europeans and Canadians are amazed at the bitter controversy surrounding U.S. national healthcare insurance, something they implemented decades ago.

Even in America, however, the federal government has repeatedly pushed the U.S. economy forward by acquiring large territories, letting settlers homestead them, and giving railroads rights of way. In the 1930’s, the Tennessee Valley Authority brought electricity and flood control to much of the American South, an area that was largely untouched by industrialisation. Conservatives disliked the 2008 bailout of major financial institutions but most agreed it was necessary.

America, too, has used the state as an agent of modernisation and now has federal healthcare programs. One of the great questions of modern politics, however, is how much state intervention do we want?

Chapter 4

Constitutions and Rights

In common, everyday language, a constitution is a written document outlining the structure of a political system. Political scientists define “constitution” as the rules and customs, either written or unwritten, by which a government is run. Almost all nations have constitutions because they operate according to some set of rules. In chaotic, corrupt, or dictatorial systems, constitutions may not count for much (such as in Afghanistan and Congo).

Most constitutions now also specify individual rights and freedoms. Except for the U.S. Constitution, this has been a more recent thing. Canada got its Charter of Rights and Freedoms only in 1982. Britain got the equivalent only in 2000, when it adopted the European Convention on Human Rights. Before that, British rights and freedoms were not so clear.

Constitutions are also supposed to establish the forms, institutions, and limits of government and balance minority/majority interests. Not all function that way. Political scientists study not only what is written but what is actually practiced. The Constitution of the United States, for example, is very short and leaves much unsaid.

In contrast, most constitutions written since World War II have remarkable detail. The postwar Japanese constitution, which was drafted by the U.S. military government in five days in 1946 (they had been considering its elements for some time), contains forty articles on the rights and duties of the people alone, among them the right to productive employment, a decent standard of living, and social welfare benefits—a sharp contrast to the general values of “justice...domestic tranquility...common defence...general welfare...liberty” outlined in the American Preamble.

Britain may be able to get by with no written constitution, although the British government is thinking about drafting one. But most recently established nations commit themselves to long written constitutions that try to spell out everything in detail.

The Highest Law of the Land

Nations adopt constitutions to establish a supreme law of the land; they set the fundamental laws of society and are not meant to be easily revised. They are yardsticks by which activities of the government or the people are measured. A legislature can pass a law one year and repeal it the next, but amending the constitution is made deliberately much harder.

One of the hardest constitutions to amend (and has only been amended 27 times) is that of the U.S. The most common procedure requires the approval of two-thirds of both the Senate and the House of Representatives, then ratification by three-fourths of the state legislatures.

Constitutions, no matter how detailed, cannot cover every problem that may arise, so most provide for a constitutional court to interpret the highest law in specific cases. This concept of judicial interpretation of a constitution is a fairly new thing worldwide; it was pioneered by the United States and has spread only in recent decades. Accordingly, many of our examples are American.

Constitutional law must be interpreted for specific incidents. Who has the authority to decide what the general wording of a constitution means? Starting with the United States, now more than thirty nations give the power of judicial review to the highest national court. Such courts rule on the constitutionality of government acts and declare null and void acts they consider unconstitutional. To a large extent, a constitution is indeed what its interpreters say it is, but the possibility of too subjective an interpretation is a necessary risk with judicial review.

The courts do not always interpret the constitution in a consistent fashion. The Warren Court exemplified judicial activism, which refers to a judge’s willingness to strike down certain laws and practices. The opposite philosophy is judicial restraint, when a Supreme Court sees its job not as legislating but as following the lead of Congress.

Likewise, Germany’s Federal Constitutional Court is no stranger to controversy. Modelled after the U.S. Supreme Court, the German court is mandated to make sure all laws conform to the **Basic Law**. In 1975, the German court found that a law permitting abortions conflicted with the strong right-to-life provisions of the Basic Law and declared abortion unconstitutional. In 1995, it declared unconstitutional a Bavarian law requiring a crucifix in every classroom. In 2009, the German court warned that the European Union did not override German democracy and sovereignty.

Not all nations give their highest court the power to declare something unconstitutional; some reserve that power for the legislature. The British Parliament largely determines what is constitutional.

Constitutions and Constitutional Government

A constitution depends largely on the way it is interpreted. Two separate nations could adopt similar constitutions but have them work differently. Sweden and Italy have similar structures, but their political cultures are quite different, which is why written rules function differently.

Constitutionalism means that the power of a government is limited. We see its beginnings in the Magna Carta, which England’s nobles forced King John to sign in 1215. The Great Charter does not mention democracy; it merely limits the king’s power and safeguards the nobles’ rights.

Over the centuries, however, it was used to promote democracy and individual freedom in modern Britain, the United States, and Canada. In a constitutionally governed nation, laws and institutions limit government to make sure that the fundamental rights of citizens are not violated.

In contrast, a totalitarian or authoritarian government is not limited by its constitution; individuals and minority groups have little protection against arbitrary acts of government, in spite of what the constitution may say. In the 1970’s, the military regimes of Argentina and Chile “disappeared” (meaning tortured and killed) thousands of suspected leftists even though their written constitutions promised human rights.

Even a well-established democracy can throw out its civil liberties in a moment of exaggerated and groundless panic, such as the reaction against Muslims after 9/11 and the internment of some 110,000 Japanese Americans under Executive Order 9066.

The Purpose of a Constitution

Constitutions do several things:

1. A Statement of National Ideals

Preambles and lists of rights are symbolic statements: they indicate the values, ideals, and goals of those who draft the documents. Preambles are by nature very general and have dubious legal force. How are they interpreted? What does the U.S. Constitution mean by a “more perfect union,” “establish justice,” or “promote the general welfare”? Constitutions state national ideals, but the interpretation of these goals and values requires some decisions.

1. Formalisation of the Structure of the Government

A constitution is also a blueprint, a written description of who does what in government, defining the authority and limiting the powers of each branch and providing for regularised channels through which conflict may be resolved. In a system in which there is separation of powers, the constitution divides authority and responsibilities among the various branches of government; it also limits the power of each branch.

Constitutions also outline the division of power between central and regional or local governments. In a federal system, powers and responsibilities are divided between one national government and several provincial or state governments.

Most nations are unitary systems; that is, they do not divide power territorially but concentrate it in the nation’s capital. Unitary systems do not seek to “balance” powers between central and provincial, but they may give a little autonomy to counties (Sweden and Ireland) or prefectures (Japan). They may also remake and even erase existing provinces and localities; this is not true with federal systems, which cannot easily erase or alter their component states, each of which has a legal existence.

1. Establishment of the Legitimacy of the Government

A constitution may also give a government the stamp of legitimacy, something both symbolic and practical. Some nations will not recognise a new state until it has a written constitution, which they take as a sign of permanence and responsibility. The U.S. Articles of Confederation and, subsequently, the U.S. Constitution symbolised American independence.

Most constitutions were written shortly after major changes of regime and try to establish the new regime’s right to rule. A constituent assembly is a legislature meeting for the first time after the overthrow of one regime to write a new constitution. E.g.: The Spanish parliament elected in 1977 turned itself into a constituent assembly to repudiate the Franco system with the new 1978 constitution. That job done, it turned itself back into the Cortes, the regular parliament.

Can Constitutions Ensure Rights?

The Universal Declaration, patterned on the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen and on the American Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, affirms the basic civil and human rights that government may not arbitrarily take away. These include the rights to life and freedom of assembly, expression, movement, religion, and political participation.

The Universal Declaration also provides for many economic and cultural needs: the rights to work, to an education, to marry, to raise a family, and to provide for that family and the right to live according to one’s culture. These rights are almost impossible to enforce, and few have tried.

The fact is that rights and liberties are difficult to define, and all nations restrict civil liberties in some way. The problem of minority groups is worldwide. Europe’s most serious civil rights problem is with Gypsies, who are despised nearly everywhere.

Few nations are homogeneous; most have citizens from several racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, or linguistic backgrounds, and their civil or cultural liberties are often compromised. Haitians living in Florida or Chicanos in California are at a disadvantage unless they speak English. Indians and Pakistanis in Great Britain, Algerians in France, and Turks in Germany are under pressure to con- form to the dominant culture.

But the Universal Declaration states that minorities have the right to preserve their cultural uniqueness. Can/should it be enforced in these situations?

The Adaptability of the U.S. Constitution

Constitutions are modified by traditions, new usages, and laws. The U.S. Constitution does not mention political parties, yet the nation’s party system has become an established part of the American political process.

Likewise, the U.S. Senate now needs sixty votes instead of fifty-one votes to pass almost anything. Without sixty votes to stop them, senators now routinely filibuster and block legislation. Nothing in the Constitution specifies this; it just happened as the chamber angrily polarised in recent years. Judicial precedents and government traditions, too, make up the fundamental laws of a society.

Constitutions need some flexibility to adapt over time. The right to bear arms and freedom of expression illustrate the changing nature of the U.S. Constitution.

THE RIGHT TO BEAR ARMS

In 2008, the Supreme Court ruled for the first time that the Second Amendment’s “right to bear arms” is an *individual* right. The point has been and continues to be controversial. In 1939, the Court ruled in *United States v. Miller* against transporting sawed-off shotguns, and judges nationwide used Miller as the precedent to allow restrictions on gun ownership. But with *District of Columbia v. Heller* in 2008, the Court ruled that the District’s strict gun law violated the Second Amendment.

The Founding Fathers wanted to prevent any concentration of power that might flow from a standing national army. The Constitution’s “militia clauses” envisioned defence as largely in the hands of state “militias,” which would disperse power among the states and citizen militia members. To bolster this, Amendment II of the Bill of Rights (adopted in 1791) says,

“A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.”

The militia concept of citizen-based defence never came to much (the states did not want to spend the money), so Washington eventually turned the militias into the National Guard.

But is there also an *individual* right, apart from belonging to a militia, to have guns? Liberals and gun-control advocates claimed there is not, that the right pertains only to militias. Accordingly, states and municipalities can restrict gun ownership.

H*eller* opened the door to numerous Second Amendment questions that will drag on for years. Does it mean Americans can own any gun without restriction? Outside of the home? Concealed? Machine guns? Sawed-off shotguns? Cop- killer ammunition? How about suspected terrorists or deranged youths? Or do states and municipalities still have the power to impose reasonable restrictions, such as preventing guns from being brought into public meetings? Both *Miller* and *Heller* illustrate that a two-century-old constitution will be reinterpreted in response to new conditions and cases, such as murderous rampages of mentally unbalanced people who have no trouble buying guns.

Freedom of Expression in the United States

Amendment I of the U.S. Bill of Rights says:

“Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.”

We regard freedom of expression as a hallmark of any democratic nation. Citizens who think the government is bad or wrong may say so publicly. An antigovernment or anti-religion artwork should draw no interference or investigation from a government agency.

Whereas U.S. law tilts strongly toward free speech, most countries outlaw “hate speech” in the interests of domestic calm. In most of Europe, it is illegal to deny that the Holocaust happened. Particularly, the 2015 murder of twelve staffers of the Paris satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo* by Muslim extremists raised the question of free speech versus hate speech.

Free speech is not easy. Does it give a campus bigot the right to incite hatred of African American students? Does a newspaper have a right to publish information that might damage national security? Can a publicly funded museum reject artworks that offend some religious sensibilities? Americans believe in the right of free expression, but most agree that there are limits.

Before you decide that a case of offensive speech should or should not be protected by the First Amendment, remember the right to free speech would hardly be necessary to protect speech that offended no one. According to Justice Holmes, freedom of expression must also be restricted in cases in which statements or publications present a “clear and present danger” of bringing about “substantive evils,” which Congress has a right to prevent.

First Amendment controversies are never-ending. In 1971, a multivolume, secret Defence Department study of the decisions that led to the Vietnam War was leaked to *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, both of which started publishing a series of sensational articles based on the study.

The Nixon administration immediately got a court order blocking further publication on national-security grounds. In what became known as the *Pentagon Papers* case, the Supreme Court quickly and unanimously rejected the government’s claim that official secrets had been compromised. By that time, most Americans were fed up with the war.

Recently, some have argued that free speech has gone too far, especially if it deals in racism and pornography or if it throttles others’ speech in the name of “political correctness.” The Internet has opened vast new areas in this debate as it lets hate-filled, extremist messages circulate. The Islamic State successfully recruits online.

Free Speech and Sedition

Sedition is heavy criticism of the government or officials aimed at producing discontent or rebellion. The U.S. government has used sedition laws to suppress radical expression several times since the adoption of the Bill of Rights.

Congress passed the first Sedition Act in 1798, after the XYZ affair. It was aimed at the “Jacobins,” as American defenders of the French Revolution were called, at a time when the United States was in an undeclared naval war with France.

The Sedition Act was supposed to expire the day that President John Adams left office. The act was controversial, but it lapsed without any test of constitutionality in the Supreme Court.

The next Sedition Act came during the Civil War, when President Lincoln used his war powers to suppress Northern opponents of the war, who argued, among other points, “It’s a rich man’s war and a poor man’s fight.” The matter came before the Supreme Court, which declined to judge the legality of Lincoln’s actions, so they went untested. After the Civil War, all “political prisoners” were pardoned.

20TH-CENTURY SEDITION ACTS

During World War I, the Espionage Act of 1917 produced Justice Holmes’s “clear and present danger” doctrine. Socialists and pacifists were urging people to resist U.S. involvement in the war by refusing to serve in the army and to disrupt the war effort in other ways. The 1917 act prohibited any such attempts, and several were charged under it in 1919. In one case, the Supreme Court upheld the law on the grounds that free speech could be restricted if it created a “clear and present danger” to national security.

In the 1940’s and 1950’s, sedition acts were directed against Communists. The 1940 Smith Act, the most comprehensive sedition act ever passed, made it a crime to advocate the violent overthrow of the government, to distribute literature urging such, or to knowingly join any organisation or group that advocated such actions. The Smith Act aroused much controversy but was not put to a constitutional test until 1951, when the Supreme Court upheld the convictions of the leaders of the American Communist Party even though they had not been charged with any overt acts of force against the government. Since then, there have been other court rulings on the constitutionality of the Smith Act, and they have fluctuated.

The most stringent legislation against Communist subversion was passed during the McCarthy era after World War II, another red scare. The McCarran Act of 1950 (the Internal Security Act) barred Communists from working for the federal government or in defence-related industries, established a Subversive Activities Control Board (SACB) to enforce the act, and required SACB-designated organisations to register with the attorney general. Critics of the McCarran Act charged that the law not only encroached on the rights of free speech and free assembly but also violated the self-incrimination clause of the Fifth Amendment.

RIGHTS FOR “TERRORISTS”?

After 9/11, the Bush administration invented a new category for terrorist suspects who had been arrested: “unlawful enemy combatants.” Evidence against them was often vague. They were in a limbo between criminal suspects and prisoners of war and lacked the rights of either. They were harshly interrogated by means of torture.

When the 9/11 panic subsided, many wondered if this was constitutional. In 2004, the Supreme Court ruled that Guantánamo is effectively under U.S. laws. In 2006 and 2008, it ruled that suspected terrorists had habeas corpus rights. The court did not free any detainees or order any trials, but it did push the administration to decide whether they were criminal suspects or war prisoners. If the former, they get a trial; if the latter, they get treated under the Geneva Conventions.

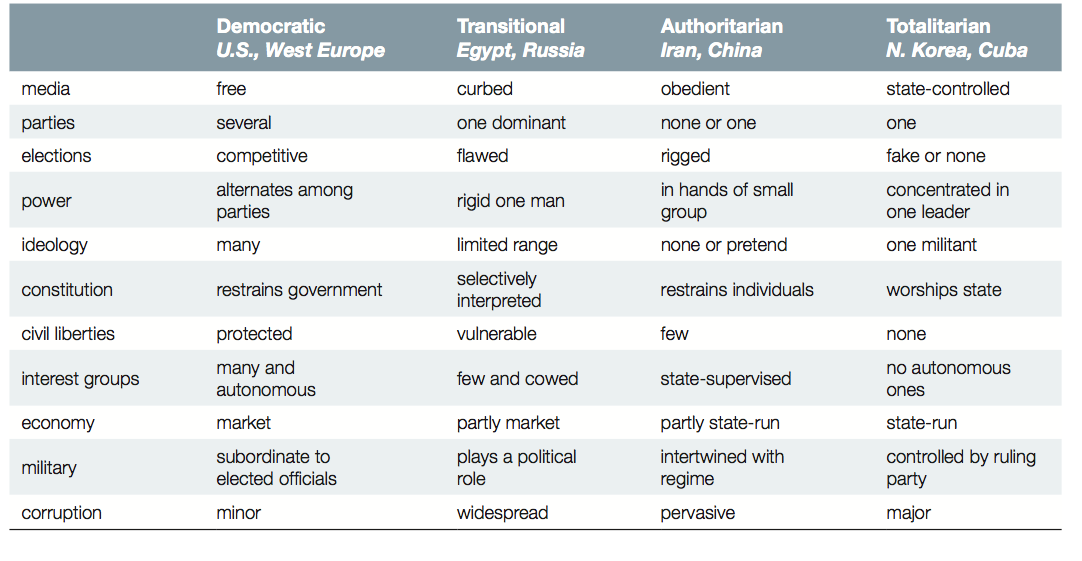
One fiery Islamist preacher in Yemen, who was born in the United States, used the Internet to encourage violence worldwide, and several answered his call, including a U.S. Army psychiatrist who killed thirteen fellow soldiers in 2009.

The history of government actions to curb speech or arrest suspicious persons in the United States indicates that the guarantees of the Bill of Rights have been interpreted to mean different things over time. When Congress, the president, and the courts perceive danger and threat, they tend to be more restrictive, in other times more permissive. Rights are highly context-dependent. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks of 2001, few Americans worried about detaining hundreds of suspicious people without due process.

We should remember this context dependency when we see legal restrictions on human and civil rights in other lands. Some regimes really are under siege; opponents want to overthrow them (often with good reason). And because elections are routinely rigged, the only way to overthrow such regimes is by extralegal means, which may include violence. In such situations, free speech may lead quickly to violent overthrow, which may be richly deserved.

Chapter 5

Regimes

Democracy is both contentious and contagious. It is not simple or easy. The debate between dictatorship and democracy will likely continue. The two, however, are not simply black and white; in between are many variations. Classification is difficult; the table below is just an attempt. Many countries are in flux, shifting between more and less democratic and vice versa, what the table calls “transitional” regimes.

Representative Democracy

Democracy has many meanings. Dictators misuse the word to convince subjects that they live in a just system. The Soviet Union used to claim it was the best democracy, and Libya’s Muammar Qaddafi claimed he embodied the precise will of his people.

Democracy does not always equal freedom. Elections, even free and fair ones as in Turkey and Egypt, can produce what is called **illiberal democracy**.

Democracy is a complex and carefully balanced system that needs thoughtful citizens, limits on power, rule of law, and human and civil rights. Not every country that calls itself a democracy is one, and not every country is capable of becoming one.

Some direct democracy continues in U.S. states through referendums on issues the legislature will not handle. Although referendums seem very democratic, their sponsors can oversimplify and manipulate issues, as Californians see with the scores of measures they face on every ballot. French President Charles de Gaulle called referendums to build his own power and bypass conventional politicians. Pakistan’s former president had himself confirmed in office by a 2002 referendum. Few were fooled.

Direct democracy is difficult to carry out because of the size factor. A national government that submitted each decision to millions of voters would be too unwieldy to function. Representative democracyevolved as the only workable system.

Modern democracy is not the actual setting of policy by the people. Instead, the people play a more general role. Democracy today is, in Lipset’s words,

“A political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials, and a social mechanism which permits the largest possible part of the population to influence major decisions by choosing among contenders for political office.”

Representative Democracy and Political Competition

In a democracy, the policymakers must obtain the support of a majority or a plurality of votes cast. Leaders are accountable to citizens. Elected leaders need to worry that they can be voted out.

No one has an inherent right to occupy a position of political power; he or she must be freely, fairly, and periodically elected by fellow citizens, either at regular intervals or at certain maximum time spans.

Most systems permit reelection, although some specify term limits. Reelection is the people’s means both of expressing support and of controlling the general direction of government policy. Term limits may cast a shadow on popular accountability; if leaders know they cannot return for another term, they might be less responsive to the will of the citizenry.

But voters must have a choice, either of candidates or parties. That means a minimum of two distinct alternatives. In Europe, voters have a choice among several parties, each of which tries to distinguish its ideology and policies. One-party or one-candidate elections are fake.

Americans are supposed to have a choice of two candidates, one for each major party, but most congresspersons run with little or no opposition, as campaign costs dissuade challengers from even trying. *Gerrymandering* by state legislatures guarantees most incumbents’ reelection. Even the United States is less than fully democratic.

The parties must have time and freedom to organise and present their case well before elections. A regime that permits no opposition activity until shortly before balloting has rigged the election. Likewise, denying media access stunts any opposition.

Much of democracy depends on the political freedoms in the months and years before the actual balloting takes place. Physical balloting can still be a problem. In some places (such as Russia in 2012 and in old Chicago), reliable people “vote early and often,” and votes are miscounted. Defective voting systems, such as Florida’s punch-card ballots in 2000, may negate the popular will. Elections by themselves do not equal democracy. Supposing they do is a common mistake.

Alternation in Power and Uncertain Electoral Outcomes

The reins of power must occasionally change hands, with the “ins” becoming the “outs” in a peaceful, legitimate way. No party or individual should get a lock on executive power. A system in which the ruling party stays in power many decades cannot really be democratic. Such parties say they win on popularity but often tilt the rules to ensure they stay in power.

Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington (1927–2008) proposed a “two-turnover test” to mark a stable democracy. That is, two electoral alter- nations of government indicate that democracy is firmly rooted.

Poland, for example, overthrew its Communist regime in 1989 and held free and fair elections (called “founding elections”), won by the Solidarity coalition of Lech Walesa. Some Poles, however, hurt by rapid economic change, in 1995 voted in a president from the Socialists, a party formed out of the old Communist Party. But after a while, they did not like the Socialists either and in 1997 voted in a right-of-centre party. Poland has had several turnovers and established its democratic credentials. Russia has never had a turnover.

One unstated but important function of alternation in power is control of corruption. An opposition party that hammers incumbents for corruption is a powerful corrective to the human tendency to misuse public office. Systems without alternation, such as Russia and China, are invariably corrupt.

Related to alternation in power, democratic elections must have an element of uncertainty, fluidity, and individual vote switching. Voting must not be simply by groups, where 100 percent of a tribe, religion, social class, or region automatically votes for a given candidate or party.

In such situations, the country may get locked in bitterness and intolerance. Some fear the U.S. *culture wars* are leading in that direction. A certain percent of the electorate must be up for grabs to keep politicians worried and attentive to the nation as a whole. An example could be the fact that Iraqi Sunnis and Shias mostly vote for different parties.

Popular Representation and Majority Decision

In representative democracies, the voters elect representatives to act as legislators and, as such, to voice and protect their general interest. Legislators usually act for given districts or groups. But how should they act?

Some theorists claim legislators must treat elections as mandates to carry out constituents’ wishes: what the voters want is what they should get. Other theorists disagree; constituents often have no opinion on issues, so representatives must act as trustees, carrying out the wishes of constituents when feasible but acting in the best interests of the whole.

As economist Joseph Schumpeter (1883–1950) argued against the mandate theory:

“Our chief problems with the classical (democratic) theory centred in the proposition that ‘the people’ hold a definite and rational opinion about every individual question and that they give effect to this opinion—in a democracy—by choosing ‘representatives’ who will see to it that the opinion is carried out.”

Of course, few people hold definite opinions on every subject. If they were asked to vote on nitrous oxide limits or reckless bank lending, few would vote. Representative democracy, therefore, does not mean that the representative must become a cipher for constituents; rather, it means that the people as a body must be able to control the *general* direction of government policy.

On any important government decision, there is rarely complete agreement. One faction favours something; another opposes. How to settle the question? The simple answer is that the majority should decide, the procedure used in the democracies of ancient Greece. However, our more modern and practical concept of democracy is that the majority decides but with respect for minority rights. To uphold such rights, an independent judiciary, one not under the thumb of the regime, is a necessity.

Furthermore, just as it is true that a minority view may grow over time until it is widely accepted, so may a majority view eventually prove unwise, unworkable, or unwanted. If minority views are silenced, the will of the majority becomes the “tyranny of the majority,” which is just as foreboding as executive tyranny.

Right of Dissent, Political Equity, and Popular Consultation

People must have the right to resist the commands of government they deem wrong or unreasonable. This right was invoked in 1776 in the Declaration of Independence. Henry Thoreau (1817–1862), in his opposition to the 1846 war with Mexico, made probably the most profound American defence of civil disobedience when he declared,

“All men recognise the right of revolution; that is, the right to refuse allegiance to, and to resist, the government, when its tyranny or its inefficiency are great and unendurable.”

Some look on civil disobedience as an individual act of conscience, but others seek to organise it and mobilise it. The most prominent American organiser was the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., whose 1960’s nonviolent civil-rights campaigns deliberately challenged racist local laws. The long-range consequence of his movement changed both the laws and the psychology of America. Without civil disobedience, minority claims would have gone unheard; Congress would have reformed nothing.

In a democracy, all adults are equally able to participate in politics: “one person, one vote.” In theory, all are able to run for public office, but critics point out that it takes a great deal of money — and often specific racial and religious ties — to really enter public life. Under the pressure of minority claims and civil disobedience, however, democracies tend to open up over time and become less elite in nature.

Most leaders realise that to govern effectively, they must know what the people want and must be responsive to their needs and demands. Are citizens disturbed by foreign wars, taxes, unemployment, or the cost of gasoline?

Intelligent leaders realise that they must neither get too far ahead of public opinion nor fall too far behind it. Leaders monitor opinion on a continuous basis. Public opinion polls are closely followed. The media can create a dialogue between people and leaders. At press conferences and interviews with elected officials, reporters ask “hot” questions. Editorials, letters to the editor, and “tweets” indicate citizens’ views.

Free Press

Dictatorships cannot tolerate free and critical mass media. One of the quickest ways to determine the degree of democracy in a country is to see if the media criticise government, tracked by Reporters Without Borders in its World Press Freedom Index. No criticism, no democracy.

The mass media provide citizens with facts, raise public awareness, and keep rulers responsive to mass demands. Without a free and critical press, rulers can disguise wrongdoing and corruption and lull the population into passive support.

Some Americans argue that the U.S. media go too far, that they take an automatic adversarial stance that undermines government authority and weakens the nation. In some cases this may be true, but in a democracy there is no mechanism to decide what “too far” is. The checks on reckless reporting are competing journals, channels, and blogs that refute each other in what has been called “the marketplace of ideas.”

Democracy in Practice: Elitism or Pluralism?

Even if all these democratic criteria are met political power will still not be evenly distributed; a few will have a lot, and many will have little or none. Political scientists see this unevenness of power as normal and unavoidable: elites make the actual decisions, and ordinary citizens, the *masses*, generally go along with these decisions.

The key dispute is how much elites are accountable to masses. Those who argue that elites are little accountable are *elite theorists;* those who argue that elites are ultimately accountable are pluralists. Italian political scientist Gaetano Mosca and German thinker Robert Michels both argue that any organisation, no matter how democratic its intent, ends up run by a small elite (“Iron Law of Oligarchy”).

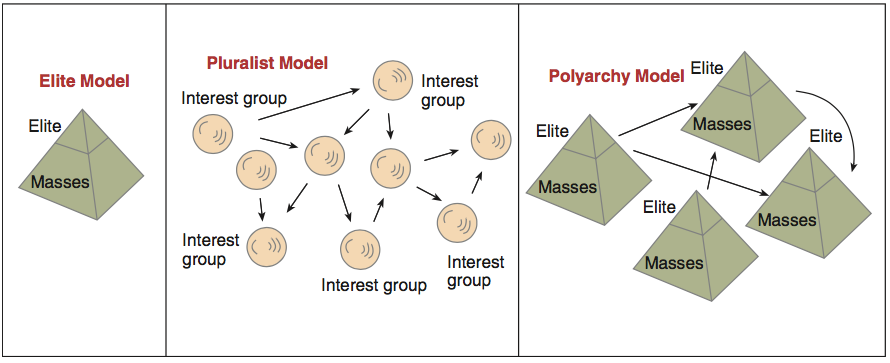
Contrary to what one might suppose, modern elite theorists are generally not conservatives but radicals; they decry rule by elites as unfair and undemocratic. Columbia sociologist C. Wright Mills (1916–1962) denounced the “Power Elite” in which big business gives money to politicians, politicians vote massive defence spending, and top generals give lush contracts to big business. This interlocking conspiracy was driving the United States to war, Mills predicted.

Money and connections give elites access to political power, emphasise elite theorists. In 2004, Yale graduates Bush (’68) and Kerry (’66) were both members of the super-elite and secretive Skull and Bones society. In 2012, both Obama and Romney were Harvard Law School graduates.

Look again, argue pluralists. The Cold War, not a power elite, drove defence spending, which declined sharply after the Soviet threat disappeared. Most politicians are of modest origins; few are from wealthy families (exceptions: both the Roosevelts, JFK, the Bushes, and Romney). Politicians may take big contributions, but they are usually attuned to what wins votes.

Pluralists say that politics functions through interest groups. Just about any group of citizens can organise a group to protest or demand something, and politicians generally listen. To be sure, if the group is wealthy and well-placed, it gets listened to more, but nobody has a hammerlock on the political system. Many argue that only a pluralist society can be democratic. Efforts to found democracies in societies without traditions of pluralism are like trying to plant trees without soil, as we have seen in Russia, where the long Communist rule erased most naturally occurring interest groups.

The pure elite theorist views society as a single pyramid, with a tiny elite at the top. The pure pluralist views society as many billiard balls colliding with each other and with government to produce policy. Both views are overdrawn. A synthesis that more accurately reflects reality might be a series of small pyramids, each capped by an elite. There is interaction of many units, as the pluralists claim, but there is also stratification of leaders and followers, as elite thinkers would have it.



Most stable countries have “conflict management” by elites (called “consociational democracy” by Arend Lijphart).

Totalitarianism

In totalitarian systems, elites are almost completely unaccountable; they lock themselves into power and are very difficult to oust, short of regime collapse, which we saw in Eastern Europe in 1989 and in the Soviet Union in 1991.

There is now little totalitarianism left. Its emphasis on total control, brainwashing, and worship of the state and its leaders has proven mistaken and inefficient. Few people are now attracted to such political models. Only North Korea remains as a pristine example of totalitarianism. Some thought it was the wave of the future, but it was a disease of the twentieth century. Most of our examples are historical, not current.

Totalitarian states of the twentieth century attempted to remould and transform every aspect of human life. Totalitarianism began with Lenin’s 1917 seizure of power in Russia. Mussolini in Italy in 1922 and Hitler in Germany in 1933 did the same. Note that all three countries had been deranged by WWI. Totalitarianism (a word coined by Mussolini’s supporters in the 1920’s) is a system in which one party holds total power and attempts to restructure society in accordance with party values.

Carl J. Friedrich (1901–1984) and Zbigniew Brzezinski (1928–) identified six features of totalitarian states:

1. An All-Encompassing Ideology

Totalitarians push an official theory of history, economics, and future political and social development. The ideology portrays the world in black-and-white terms and claims to be building a perfect, happy society, so anyone against it is an “enemy of the people.” All are supposed to believe and study the official ideology. Courses on Marxist-Leninist thought were required in all Communist states (and still are in China).

1. A Single Party

One party totally dominates politics, led by one man who establishes a cult of personality. Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, and Mao had themselves worshipped. Party membership is controlled — usually less than 10% of the population — and is supposed to be an honour. Membership brings privileges, and in return members strongly support the party.

Hierarchically organised, the party is either superior to or tied in with the formal institutions of government. Party functionaries hold all-important posts and impose at least outward conformity on all citizens.

1. Organised Terror

Security police use both physical and psychological methods to keep citizens obedient. The Nazi Gestapo, the Soviet NKVD under Stalin, and Mussolini’s OVRA had no judicial restraints. Constitutional guarantees either did not exist or were ignored, thus making possible secret arrests, jailing, and torture.

The threat of the “knock at the door” cows most of the population. Mass arrest and execution show the state’s power and the individual’s helplessness. Not counting deaths in war, perhaps 40 million died under Mao (mostly by starvation), some 11 million under Hitler, and 6 million to 9 million under Stalin.

1. Monopoly of Communications

The media in totalitarian states are strictly censored to sell the official ideology and show the system is working well under wise leaders. Only good news appears. Sinister outside forces are portrayed as trying to harm the system and must be stopped.

1. Monopoly of Weapons

Governments of totalitarian nations have a complete monopoly on weapons, thus eliminating armed resistance.

1. Controlled Economy

Totalitarian regimes control the economy. Stalin did so directly by means of state ownership and Hitler indirectly by means of party “coordination” of private industry. Either way, it makes the state powerful, for resources can be allocated to heavy industry, weapons production, or what- ever the party wishes. Workers can be kept in line, and consumer needs or wants are unimportant.

Just as there is no perfect democracy, neither is there perfect totalitarian dictator- ship. Often outsiders were overly influenced by the image of total control projected by these states. Visitors to fascist Italy were impressed by the seeming law, order, cleanliness, and purposefulness of what they thought was one-man rule. Actually, many Italians quietly ridiculed Mussolini; his organisations and economic plans were a shambles; and he wasn’t even in firm command of the country. The same goes for Communism and other regimes.

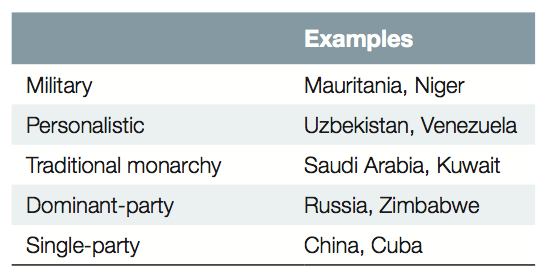
We tend to focus on communism, but right-wing totalitarianism — Italian Fascism and German National Socialism — was somewhat different. It developed in industrialised nations plagued by economic depression, social upheaval, and political confusion and demoralisation in which democracy was weak.

Right-wing totalitarianism does not want revolution; rather, it aims to block leftist revolution by strengthening the existing social order and glorifying the state. It attempts to get rid of those deemed foreign or inferior, as Hitler strove to annihilate Jews and Gypsies. Citizens are also directed toward national glory and war. Private ownership is generally permitted, but obedient cartels and national trade associations carry out party directives.

Authoritarianism

Authoritarianism and totalitarianism are often confused but are quite different. Authoritarian regimes are governed by a small group (usually a dictator or the army) that minimises popular input. They do not attempt to control everything. Many economic, social, religious, cultural, and familial matters are left up to individuals.

Most of the six points of totalitarianism discussed earlier are diluted or absent. Authoritarian regimes, for example, rarely have a firm ideology to sell. Some called the Saddam regime in Iraq totalitarian, but it was closer to authoritarian.

The main types of authoritarianism are:

Authoritarian regimes limit individual freedoms in favour of a hierarchical organisation of command, obedience, and order. Citizens obey laws and pay taxes that they have no voice in establishing.

Some trappings of democracy may exist for appearance’s sake. Rigged elections confirm the rule of the dominant party; opponents have no chance, and some are arrested. Legislatures rubber stamp the dictator’s laws, and puppet prime ministers and cabinets carry them out. The media and academia practice informal “self-censorship,” avoiding critical comments in order to keep their jobs. Louis XIV of France showed an early form of authoritarianism with his famous phrase: *“L’état c’est moi”* (“the state — that’s me”).

Some observers now see a new model, the “authoritarian capitalist” regimes of China and Russia, which allow partially market economies but tightly retain political control. Their selling points are economic growth and rising living standards, and most citizens accept them and show little interest in democracy. But what happens when growth stops, as it has in Russia?

Political scientist Jeane J. Kirkpatrick (1926–2006), President Reagan’s ambassador to the United Nations, argued that there is a difference between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. The former (such as Argentina, Chile, and Brazil) can reform, but once a totalitarian system (such as communism) takes over, the system cannot reform itself. Argentina, Chile, and Brazil did return to democracy in the 1980’s. Kirkpatrick’s thesis was borne out in the fact that the Communist regimes of the Soviet bloc never did reform themselves; they collapsed while trying to reform.

The big question of the twenty-first century: Is China’s rapidly growing economy producing an educated middle class that starts demanding democracy? Or can the regime forever buy off its people with rising living standards plus Chinese nationalism? China is developing problems, and many Chinese thinkers call for reforms, usually privately.

In the decades after World War II, the European empires granted their colonies independence. All the new nations, proclaimed themselves “democratic,” but it did not last long. The colonialists had never encouraged democracy. Democracy in the Western tradition grew out of individualism and a competitive market economy. The developing societies had preindustrial, traditional peasant economies that stressed families and tribes.

Levels of education and income were low, and most people were absorbed in the struggle to survive. Postcolonial leaders had typically picked up socialist views while students in Britain and France and argued that political and economic survival and growth need centralised power and planning. The leaders claimed that they knew what the people needed and rigged elections.

In this way, much of the Third World fell into authoritarianism under single parties. Such systems are usually terrible. Government officials push wasteful, unrealistic projects, stifle individual initiative by regulations and taxes, and crush critical viewpoints. Corruption stunts economic growth. In this way, such countries as Tanzania and Myanmar (Burma) impoverished themselves, ending up with neither democracy nor economic growth. Miscounted elections kept Mugabe in power as inflation topped 1,000,000 percent, most Zimbabweans were unemployed and hungry, and regime opponents were jailed or killed.

The Democratisation of Authoritarian Regimes

Since 1974, dozens of countries have abandoned authoritarian or totalitarian systems in favour of democratic systems, although recently some have slid backward. Still, around half the world’s nations are at least a bit democratic. The expansion of democracy from the previous two dozen countries, mostly in Western Europe and North America, became a major scholarly topic.

Two types of regimes contributed to the latest wave of democracy: authoritarian regimes that enjoyed strong economic growth and collapsed Communist regimes whose economic growth lagged. The fast-growth systems — such as Chile, Brazil, South Korea, and Taiwan — were politically authoritarian but developed private market economies.

The pro-growth regimes set macroeconomic policy (sound currency, low inflation, plenty of capital for loans) and exported to the world market. After a time, the growing economy transformed the whole society into a democracy, a process that illustrates modernisation theory: as countries improve from poor to middle income, they become ready for stable democracy. Democracy seldom lasts in poor countries — India is an exception, and Indonesia, after decades of dictators, is becoming democratic — but it works in most middle-income and richer countries..

Why should this happen?

1. Economic growth creates a large middle class, which has a stake in the system; they may wish to reform it but not overthrow it.
2. Education levels rise; most people are high-school graduates, and many are college graduates. They are no longer ignorant and do not fall for demagogues, extremist ideas, or vote buying.
3. People increasingly recognise their interests and express them: pluralism. They voice business, professional, regional, and religious demands. They can spot cruel, corrupt, or inefficient governments and do not like being treated like children. Urban, educated Russians showed this attitude in 2012.
4. Finally, the market itself teaches citizens about self-reliance, pluralism, tolerance, and not expecting too much, all attitudes that sustain democracy.

Gradually, if everything works right, the regime eases up, permitting a critical press, the formation of political parties, and finally free elections. Taiwan carried out this transition from 1984 to 2000 and is now a vibrant democracy, one whose elections are followed with great interest by mainland Chinese.

This transition does not work with petrostates (such as Saudi Arabia). Oil exports, because they concentrate wealth and power in the hands of a few, retard democracy. None of the twenty-three countries that get 60 percent or more of their export income from oil or natural gas is a democracy. And that includes petrostates with high per capita GDPs. The oil industry does not employ many workers. Citizens depend on the government for jobs and handouts and do not form an autonomous, pluralistic middle class. In other words, a high per capita GDP is not the same as a robust, educated middle class. Such countries, many around the Persian Gulf, are ripe for overthrow but not for democracy.

The collapse of Communist regimes shows the role of the economy in a negative sense. It was poor economic performance and slow growth, especially in comparison with the West and with the rapid-growth countries, that persuaded relatively liberal Communists, such as Mikhail Gorbachev (1931– ), to attempt to reform their systems.

They knew they were falling behind, especially in crucial high-tech sectors, and thought they could energise the system by bringing elements of the free market into an otherwise socialist economy. But communism, like other brands of totalitarianism, doesn’t tolerate reform. By attempting to control everything, as in Friedrich’s and Brzezinski’s six points, they have created a brittle system that can break but not bend. Once they start admitting that the system needed to be fixed, they admitted that they had been wrong. The ideology was wrong, single-party control was wrong, the centralised economy was wrong, and so on. The reform attempt turned into system collapse.

Democracy is not easy. It is a complex, finely balanced system that depends on a political culture that grows best under a market economy with a large, educated middle class and a tradition of pluralism. Centuries of religious and philosophical evolution prepare democratic attitudes. Iraq lacked all of these. Eventually Iraq or any other country can turn democratic, but it may take decades. Most scholars look forward to it, as there is strong support for the theory of the democratic peace, that no two democracies have ever fought each other. If this is true, a more democratic world means a more peaceful world.

Chapter 6

Political Culture

Each society imparts its norms and values to its people, who pick up distinct notions about how the political system is supposed to work and about what the government may do to them and for them. These beliefs, symbols, and values about the political system are the political culture of a nation—and it varies considerably from one nation to another.

The political culture of a nation is determined by its history, economy, religion, and folkways. Basic values, laid down long ago, may endure for centuries. Political culture is a sort of collective political memory. America was founded on the basis of “competitive individualism,” a spirit of hustle and looking out for oneself, which is still very much alive. The millennia-old Hindu emphasis on caste persists in present-day India despite government efforts to abolish it.

As defined by political scientist Sidney Verba, political culture is:

“The system of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols, and values, which defines the situation in which political action takes place.”

Much of this goes far back. Americans always liked minimal government. In Japan, where the vestiges of a traditional feudal class system still exist, those who bow first and lower indicate they are of inferior status.

Political culture and public opinion overlap, for both look at attitudes toward politics:

| Political Culture | Political Opinion |
| --- | --- |
| * Looks for basic, general values on politics and government * Looks for the underpinnings of legitimacy/the gut attitudes that sustain a political system * A political culture survey might ask how much you trust other people * Political culture uses the methods of anthropology and psychology in the close observation of daily life and in the deep questioning of individuals about their feelings | * Looks for views about specific leaders and policies * Seeks responses to current questions * A public opinion survey might ask if you think the president is doing a good job * Political culture studies can use history and literature to gain insights |

It used to be assumed that political culture was nearly permanent or changed only slowly, whereas public opinion was fickle and changed quickly. Recent studies, however, have shown that political culture is rather changeable, too. Periods of stable, efficient government and economic growth solidify feelings of legitimacy; periods of indecisive, chaotic government and economic downturn are reflected in weakening legitimacy.

Public opinion, if held long enough, eventually turns into political culture. In the 1960’s, public opinion on Vietnam showed declining support for the war. Over precisely the same time, confidence in the U.S. government also declined. Public opinion on a given question was infecting the general political culture, making it more cynical about the political system.

To be sure, a country’s political culture changes more slowly than its public opinions, and certain underlying elements of political culture persist for generations, even centuries. The French still take to the streets of Paris to protest perceived injustice, just as their ancestors did. Italians continue their centuries-old cynicism toward anything governmental.

Although not as firm as bedrock, political culture is an underlying layer that can support — or fail to support — the rest of the political system. This is one reason Russia’s attempt at democracy faded.

Even in America, not all citizens actively participate in politics. How, then, could Almond and Verba offer the United States as their model of a “civic culture”? One of their key findings was that participation need only be “intermittent and potential.” In effect, they offer a “sleeping dogs” theory of democratic political culture.

Leaders in a democracy know that most of the time, most people pay little attention to politics. But they also know that if aroused — because of scandal, unemployment, inflation, or unpopular war — the public can vote them out of office at the next election. Accordingly, leaders usually work to keep the public passive and quiet.

Following the rule of anticipated reactions (a rule according to which politicians form policies based on how they think the public will react), leaders in democracies constantly ask themselves how the public will likely react to their decisions. They are happy to have the public *not* react at all; they wish to let sleeping dogs lie.

This theory helps explain an embarrassing fact about U.S. political life, namely, its low voter turnout, the lowest of all the industrialised democracies. How, then, can the United States boast of its democracy?

Theorists reply that a democratic culture does not necessarily require heavy voter turnout. Rather, it requires an attitude that, if aroused, the people will participate — vote, contribute time and money, organise groups, and circulate petitions — and that elected officials know this. They fear a “Tea Party” developing that will vote them out.

Democracy in this view is a psychological connection between leaders and followers that tends to restrain officials. It is the potential and not the actual participation that makes a democratic culture.

The Decay of Political Culture

The political cultures of most of the advanced democracies have recently grown more cynical, and voter turnout has declined. More citizens saw politicians as corrupt and government institutions as ineffective. The steepest drop was in Japan, where the economy was stagnant for two decades. In the 1960’s and 1970’s — the years of the Vietnam War, Watergate, and inflation — U.S. surveys showed a sharp decline in trust in government.

A related development is America’s “culture wars,” a nasty polarisation between conservatives and liberals, who dislike and vote against each other. For two centuries, one spoke of the “Two Spains” because it was badly split by region and religiosity. Now America seems to be two countries. One is conservative, Christian, small-town, and living in the middle of the country; it votes Republican. The other is liberal, secular, urban, and living on both coasts; it votes Democrat (the “blue states”). Conservatives dislike gay rights, big government, taxes, and Barack Obama and watch Fox News. Liberals dislike big corporations, the death penalty, guns, and George Bush and watch MSNBC.

Richard Nixon first exploited this split to win the 1968 election, and it has grown deeper ever since. The causes of this polarisation are several and disputed. The 1960’s was a time of upheaval in which younger Americans repudiated authority with “drugs, sex, and rock-and-roll.” In reaction, what Nixon called the “silent majority” turned to conservative Christianity and the Republican Party, which espoused “family values.” This left behind a big gap between religious and secular America.

Another possibility is that America never psychologically recovered from the Vietnam War, and the anger returned with the Iraq War. The big spending of healthcare reform and bank bailouts inflamed conservatives. Economically and demographically, the coasts of America grew more than much of the centre (exception: Texas). If polarisation keeps growing, some fear for U.S. political stability. Dialogue between the Two Americas fails, as their views are visceral, not rational.

One factor much discussed was the decline of the American tendency to form associations, anything from volunteer fire departments to labor unions. In the 1830’s, Tocqueville noted,

“Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations.”

He was impressed by this tendency, for it was (and still is) largely absent in France, and he held it was the basis of American democracy, a point supported much later by the *Civic Culture* study. Some observers claim that these grassroots associations are fading. Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam noted, for example, that the number of people bowling has increased, but league bowling has declined. His article, “Bowling Alone,” caught much attention and controversy. Putnam argued the member- ship loss of many associations — unions, PTAs, Scouts, and fraternal orders — meant decline of our “social capital” and decay of civil society.

Those who see the decline of America’s voluntary associations, however, fear political and economic repercussions. With individuals demanding their “rights” without a corresponding sense of “obligations,” demands on government become impossible. Democracy becomes less a matter of concerned citizens meeting face to face to discuss a community problem than disgruntled citizens demanding “Gimme!”. Furthermore, argued Francis Fukuyama (who earlier brought us the “end of history” theory), trust or “spontaneous sociability” underpins economic growth and stability. If you can trust others, you can do more and better business with them. Hence, “high trust” societies tend to be prosperous, low trust societies not.

Political culture changes. It is a combination of long-remembered and deeply held values plus reactions to current situations. These changes are responses to government performance, which almost always falls short of promises.

Elite and Mass Subcultures

The political culture of a country is not uniform and monolithic. One can usually find within it differences between the mainstream culture and subcultures and differences between elite and mass attitudes. Elites in political-culture studies means those with better education, higher income, and more influence (several percent). Elites are much more interested in politics and more participatory. They are more inclined to vote, to protest injustice, to form groups, and to run for office.

Delegates to both Democratic and Republican conventions illustrate the differences between elite and mass culture. Many of the delegates have some postgraduate education (often law school), far more than average voters. Most convention delegates have annual incomes much higher than average voters. Delegates are also more ideological than average voters, the Democrats more liberal and the Republicans more conservative.

In other words, the people at conventions are not closely representative of typical voters. People with more education, money, and ideological convictions take the leading roles. There is nothing wrong with this; it is standard worldwide.

Why should this be so? Better-educated people show greater *political competence*; they know how to participate in political activity. They also show greater *political efficacy*, as in their self-confidence in writing to officials and the media, speaking at meetings, and organising groups. They feel that what they do has at least some political impact. The uneducated and the poor lack the knowledge and confidence to do these kinds of things. Many of them feel powerless. “What I do doesn’t matter, so why bother?” they think. Those at the bottom of the social ladder thus become apathetic.

The differences in participation in politics between elites and masses are one of the great ironies of democracy. In theory and in law, a democracy is open to all. In practice, some participate much more than others. Because the better-educated and better-off people (more education usually leads to higher income) participate in politics far more, they are in a much stronger position to look out for their interests.

It is not surprising that the 2001 tax cut favoured the wealthiest, who speak up and donate money; those lower on the socioeconomic ladder do not. There is no quick fix for this. The right to vote is a mere starting point for political participation; it does not guarantee equal access to decision making.

Minority Subcultures

Defining subculture is tricky, as not every group is a subculture. The Norwegian Americans of “Lake Wobegon,” Minnesota, do not form a subculture because their culture and politics are mainstream.

But African Americans do form a political subculture. They are poorer and less educated than whites, much more liberal and Democratic in voting. The 2012 election split over race, with a majority of whites for Romney and most nonwhites for Obama. In attitudes toward the criminal justice system, African Americans sharply diverge from whites.

African Americans tend to call the police killings of unarmed people of colour racism; fewer whites do. A new movement, “Black Lives Matter,” is convinced that the police are brutal and trigger-happy. Whites tend to see the police and courts as just and fair and believe that U.S. society has made great strides since the 1950’s in integrating African Americans, but a great gap remains.

Subcultures may dislike being ruled by the dominant culture. Many of the French speakers of Quebec would like to withdraw from Canada and become a separate country. The Bengalis of East Pakistan, ethnically and linguistically distinct from the peoples of West Pakistan, did secede in 1971. The Basques of northern Spain and the Roman Catholics of Northern Ireland are sufficiently different to constitute political subcultures.

Where subcultures are very distinct, the country itself may be threatened. The Soviet Union and Yugoslavia fell apart because citizens were more loyal to their ethnic groups than to the nation. Ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, by religion (Muslim) and language very distinct from their Serbian rulers, fought for and gained their independence.

Should a nation attempt to integrate its subcultures into the mainstream? Such efforts are bound to be difficult, but if left undone the subculture in later years may seek independence, as did the Tamils of Sri Lanka. The Spaniards in Peru who conquered the Incas let them retain their language and culture. But now the Spanish-speaking Peruvians of the cities know little of the Quechua-speaking Peruvians of the mountains. Any nonintegrated subculture poses at least a problem and at worst a threat to the national political system.

Starting in the 1870’s, France deliberately pursued national integration through its centralised school system. Many regions were backwaters and spoke strange dialects. The French education ministry sent schoolteachers into the villages almost like missionaries. The teachers followed an absolutely standard curriculum that was heavy on rote learning and on the glory and unity of France. Gradually, in the phrase of historian Eugen Weber, they turned “peasants into Frenchmen.” After some decades, a much more unified and integrated France emerged, an example of *overt political socialisation.*

Not all American groups have been so fortunate. African Americans and Hispanics are not fully integrated, but this too is changing. Should integration be hastened? This has been one of the great questions of post–World War II U.S. politics. With the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision, the Supreme Court began a major federal effort to integrate U.S. schools. It encountered massive resistance. In some instances, federal judges had to take control of local school systems to enforce integration by busing. The integrationist Kennedy and Johnson administrations argued that the United States, in its struggle against communism, could not field a good army or offer an example of freedom and justice to the rest of the world if some Americans were oppressed and poor. Integration was portrayed as a matter of national security.

By the same token, should language integration be forced? Should African Americans abandon black dialect in favour of standard English, and should Hispanics learn English? If they do not, they will be severely handicapped their whole lives, especially in employment. But some blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans cling to their language as a statement of ethnic identity and pride. The U.S. Constitution does not specify any national language, nor does it outlaw languages other than English. In some areas of the United States, signs and official documents are in both English and Spanish.

Political Socialisation

In the socialisation process, children acquire manners, speech, and convictions that often last lifelong. Although some is formally taught, most is absorbed by imitating others. In the same way, political socialisation teaches political values and specific usages.

What children encounter earlier usually outweighs all other factors. Attempts at overt socialisation by government and schools generally fail if their values are at odds with family orientations. Communist regimes such as Poland’s tried to inculcate socialist values in a child, but the family taught the child to ignore these messages.

Parents influence our political behaviour for decades. Most people see politics and vote as their parents did. More basically, the family forms the psychological makeup of individuals, which in turn determines many of their political attitudes. It imparts norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes such as party attachment and trust or cynicism about government. Almond and Verba found that those who remembered having had a voice in family decisions as children had a greater adult sense of political efficacy.

1. The School

More deliberate socialisation occurs in school. Most governments use history to inculcate children with pride and patriotism. Communist nations also used schools to inculcate support for the regime.

The amount of schooling also affects political attitudes. Uniformly, people with many years of education show a stronger sense of responsibility to their community and feel more able to influence public policy than do less-educated citizens. People with more schooling are more participatory. College graduates are more tolerant and open-minded, especially on questions of race, than high-school dropouts, who are often parochial in outlook. Education imparts more open-minded attitudes, and educated people generally enjoy higher incomes and status, which by themselves encourage interest and participation.

1. Peer Groups

Friends and playmates also form political values. The relative strength of peer-group influence appears to be growing. With both parents work- ing, children may be socialised more by peers than by families. Upholders of “family values” see this as the underlying cause of youthful drug-taking and violence.

A different take suggests that in a mobile society, like the modern United States, parents often choose to live in a particular place near those similar to themselves. Conservatives lean toward suburbs and small towns near other conservatives seeking the same life. Liberals lean toward the same in big cities. Family socialisation can then be reinforced by peer groups who see the world similarly.

1. The Mass Media

Gaining in influence are the mass media, especially television. Many fear the influence is negative. Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam argues that heavy TV watching makes people passive and uninterested in community or group activities. American children watch thousands of hours of television (the “plug-in babysitter”) a year, some of it violent, and play violent video games. Some, including the National Rifle Association, charge this tends to make them heartless and violent, but this has not been proven.

As with schools, the mass media may be unsuccessful if their messages are at odds with what family and religion teach. Even Soviet researchers found that families were much bigger influences on individuals’ political views than the Soviet mass media. Iran’s mass media, all controlled by the shah, tried to inculcate loyalty to him, but believing Muslims took the word of their local *mullahs* in the mosques and hated the shah.

Mass media may also reinforce other forms of socialisation. In a household with conservative parents and conservative neighbours, the kids may also be exposed to conservative messages on Fox News.

1. The Government

The government itself is an agent of socialisation, especially if it delivers rising living standards. Many government activities are intended to explain or display the government to the public, always designed to build support and loyalty. Great spectacles, such as the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, have a strengthening effect, as do parades with flags and soldiers and proclamations of top leaders.

Chapter 7

Political Opinion

Public opinion is not the same as individual opinion. A woman’s opinion of her neighbour’s religion would not be part of public opinion, but her feeling on prayer in public schools would. Public opinion refers to political and social issues, not private matters.

Measuring public opinion is complex. Anecdotal evidence is a poor indication of public opinion, as we have no way of knowing if it is representative. Public opinion does not necessarily imply that citizens have strong, clear, or united convictions; such unity is rare. So-called public opinion often involves several small, conflicting groups, plus many who are undecided, plus an even larger number with no interest or opinion on the matter. On most subjects, public opinion is an array of diverse attitudes that can change quickly.

Public opinion often shows widespread ignorance. A solid majority told a 1991 poll that they supported the policy of Bush senior on Lithuania, but few knew where Lithuania was.

So, should survey numbers make policy?

Public opinion is important in a democracy. Elections provide only a crude expression of the public’s will. They may indicate what voters generally think of a candidate overall but rarely focus on specific issues. Public-opinion surveys may fill in the details so officials know what people think about specific problems, such as health care or a war. Public opinion can thus be seen as a backup and detailing device for inputting mass views into politics, a way to fine-tune elections.

But public opinion is often ignorant, fickle, and untrustworthy. Knowing this, public officials often try to create the public opinion they desire. British socialist Beatrice Webb long ago said:

“There is no such thing as spontaneous public opinion. It all has to be manufactured from a centre of conviction and energy.”

Public opinion can be led or manipulated by interest groups. Bringing grievances to public attention, especially when the media watch, can generate widespread sympathy.

Any government is vulnerable to public opinion. Mahatma Gandhi, by simple dramas of nonviolent protest, used public opinion to win independence for India.

Because of its volatility, public opinion should be just one of many factors governments use to determine public policy. You have to carefully weigh whether polls reflect true public opinion, whether public opinion is best for the country, and the consequences of doing something different from what the public wants. In a democracy, crossing public opinion could lead to losing the next election. Public opinion can even matter to an undemocratic regime, where leaders ignoring it can be overthrown.

Government by sheer violence and coercion cannot last long. Even Stalin’s Soviet Union, with all its brutal apparatus for suppressing dissent, depended first on the dream of a classless utopia and on Russian patriotism to repel the Nazi invader, and only secondly on the security police.

The Shape of Public Opinion

Social scientists can uncover roughly who thinks what about politics. No social category, of course, is ever 100 percent for or against something. We look for differences among social categories, the significance of which can be tested by the rules of statistics. Once we have found significant differences, we may be able to say something about salience, the degree to which social categories and particular issues divide public opinion of a country.

Karl Marx saw social class as massively salient. Workers, he predicted, would become socialists. Actually, only some of them did, but social class does matter, even in the relatively classless United States.

Social class can be hard to measure. There are two general ways:

1. The Objective Way

An objective determination asks people their annual income or judges the quality of the neighbourhood.

1. The Subjective Way

The subjective determination simply asks respondents what their social class is, which sometimes diverges from objective criteria.

CLASS

The way a person earns a living may matter more than the amount he or she makes, as different political attitudes grow up around different jobs. Sometimes social class works in precisely the opposite way envisioned by Marx. Highly educated professionals make some affluent U.S. suburbs quite liberal compared with the conservatism of poorer country dwellers.

Class matters, especially in combination with other factors, such as region or religion. In Britain, class plus region structures much of the vote; in France, it is class plus region plus religiosity (practicing Catholic versus non-practicing); in Germany, it is class plus region plus denomination (Catholic or Protestant). As Yale’s Joseph La Palombara put it, the question is “Class plus what?”.

EDUCATION

Educational level is related to social class, and this contributes to polarisation. Those with college degrees win the big bucks in fields like information technology and finance; those without have to scramble. The better off give their children more and better education, locking in their class position. Rising education costs prevent others from joining the educated classes, slowing the social mobility that allowed many Americans to rise during the postwar years.

Education in the United States often has a split political impact, meaning that educated people are more liberal on **noneconomic issues** but more conservative on **economic issues**. Survey data show that college-educated people are more tolerant, favour civil rights, and understand different viewpoints. But on economic issues, many of them are skeptical of efforts to redistribute income by higher taxes on the upper brackets and welfare measures. There are, to be sure, some educated people who are consistently liberal on both economic and noneconomic questions.

REGIONS

Every country has a south, goes an old saw, and this is true in politics. It is uncertain, however, whether a country’s south is more conservative or more liberal than its north. A country’s outlying **regions** usually harbour resentment against the capital, creating what are called centre–periphery tensions.

Often an outlying region was brought into the nation by force and has never been happy about it. Regional memories can last for centuries. Some regions feel economically disadvantaged by the central area and may have a different language, as in Spain’s Catalonia and Basque country, Wallonia in Belgium (the French-speaking south), Quebec, Slovenia in ex-Yugoslavia, and several parts of India and China. Once a region gets set in its politics, it stays that way for a long time.

RELIGION

Religion is often the most explosive issue in politics and contributes a great deal to the structuring of opinion. Religion can mean either denomination or religiosity. The more often a French person goes to Mass, the more likely he or she is to vote for a conservative party. One of the biggest divisions in Catholic countries is between clericalists and anti-clericalists. France, Italy, and Spain have long been split over this issue, with the conservative parties pro-Church and the parties of the left hostile to church influence. Religion also tends to overlap with ethnicity.

AGE

There are two theories on how age affects political opinions: the life cycle and generation theories. The first, widely accepted, holds that people change as they age. Thus, young people are naturally radical and older people moderate or even conservative. With few responsibilities, young people can be idealistic and rebellious, but with the burdens of home, job, taxes, and children of their own, people tend to become conservative. Young voters went strongly to Obama.

This life cycle theory does not always work because sometimes whole generations are marked for life by the great events of their young adulthood. Survivors of wars and depressions remember them for decades, and they colour their views on war, economics, and politics. Sociologist Karl Mannheim (1893–1947) called this phenomenon political generations. Many who lived through the Vietnam War were instinctively critical of the U.S. war in Iraq. Those who personally experienced the Depression of the 1930’s were more supportive of federal welfare measures than younger people who had been raised in postwar prosperity.

GENDER

Even before the women’s movement, gender made a difference in politics. Traditionally, and especially in Catholic countries, women were more conservative, more concerned with home, family, and morality. But as a society modernises, men’s and women’s views change.

Women work outside the home and develop their own perspectives on social and economic problems often at variance with male political views. In the United States, a **gender gap** appeared in the 1980’s as women became several percentage points more liberal and Democratic than men. Women liked federal programs for home and family and disliked the Republican emphasis on war and disdain for women’s rights.

RACE AND ETHNICITY

Race and ethnicity are related to region and religion but sometimes plays a distinct role, especially in the multiethnic United States, where some ethnic groups form political subcultures. America was long touted as a “melting pot” of immigrant groups, but ethnic consciousness lasts many generations.

Racial and ethnic politics changes over the decades. After the Civil War, most African Americans were Republican, the party of Lincoln. With Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, most African Americans became Democrats and stayed that way.

In the nineteenth century, American Jews were mostly Republican, for the Republicans criticised the anti-Semitic repression of tsarist Russia. The Jewish immigrants of the turn of the twentieth century, introduced to U.S. politics by Democratic machines such as New York’s Tammany Hall, went Democratic.

ELITE AND MASS OPINION

There is often a gap between *elite* and *mass* opinion. The mass public does not understand much about complicated issues but can react after decisions have been made. Elites, educated and influential people, usually have more complex and sophisticated perspectives. The masses often misunderstand and resent decisions. They know what hits them in the pocket book or infringes on their basic values and may lash out at perceived unfairness.

For example, when the 2008 financial meltdown threatened to unleash a major recession, economists, bankers, congresspersons, and a Republican president and Fed chief agreed on the need for federal programs to urgently lend billions to giant firms. But this was an elite consensus, and at first the public did not know how to react; it was far beyond most Americans’ expertise. By 2010, however, a majority opposed the *bailouts* — even though they had staved off a depression and were being repaid. They threatened electoral punishment against those who had voted for them, including Republicans. Particularly irk- some were the massive bonuses financial chiefs gave themselves.

In a European parallel, most elites understood that weaker members of the “eurozone” (the nineteen countries that use the euro currency) needed emergency financial support. Without it, they could collapse and endanger the whole European Union. Said German Chancellor Angela Merkel:

“If the euro fails, Europe fails.”

But average Europeans - especially Germans, who bore most of the financial burdens — were furious. They worked hard and lived within their means, so why should they bail out countries that had mindlessly run up huge debts?

Good public opinion studies, especially of complicated or specialised questions — such as foreign policy and finances — should always distinguish between elite and mass opinions.

Public-Opinion Polls

Many ways exist to measure the public’s opinion. Public opinion polls or **surveys** are designed to measure opinions so that we can say the results are reflective of a broader population. Published surveys, particularly in election years, are carefully watched. This is useful for policymakers and candidates.

But debate has developed over some of their political side effects. For example, do the polls give undue attention and influence to uncertain opinions? Do journalists create self-fulfilling prophecies by treating the polls as authoritative verdicts? Should public-opinion surveys be treated as a fair and democratic method of deciding public policies? Are polls reliable enough to determine policy? Who uses surveys, what purpose do they serve, and can we trust them?

Similarly, do the opinions people express really reflect how they feel about issues? Most people pay little attention to politics most of the time. They have weak interest in issues that do not directly touch them and acquire no information about most issues. With all of the uncertainties, can surveys reflect an accurate picture of what people are thinking?

So while a well-designed public-opinion poll is the best way to measure the public’s opinion, do not blindly follow poll data. There are limits to what you can learn from them. Policymakers must balance what they learn from polls with their own knowledge about the issues.

POLLING TECHNIQUES

The technique can be summarised as follows:

1. Sampling from a population

A pollster first has to decide whose opinions they want the survey to represent. Generally, polls are only interested in the opinions of adults, not kids. But not all adults’ opinions are of equal importance. Often, pollsters are only interested in the adults likely to vote in an upcoming election. Then they would be interested in the opinions of registered voters, or an even more select group: likely voters. The people the poll results represent is the population.

There are too many people in most survey populations to talk to all of them for a survey. Pollsters take a sample of the population and use the sample’s answers to the questions to infer the opinions of the whole population. As long as the sample is representative, inference is possible. For a sample to be representative, every member of the population has to have an equal chance of being selected for the sample. Then, statistics can show that a sample of 500, 1,000 or 1,500 people can represent the opinions of an entire population with a little wiggle room known as the margin of error, which goes down as the sample size gets larger.

The most basic way to create a representative sample is through a **simple random sample**. Imagine drawing names out of a hat with everyone in the population’s name in it. Pollsters often do somewhat more complex versions of random sampling like “cluster sampling,” which saves travel costs for in-person interviews, or “stratified sampling,” which ensures groups within the overall population are represented appropriately. Whatever sampling method is used, they must all meet the standard that each member of the target population has an equal chance of being selected for the poll to be valid.

1. Reaching the sample

The next step is to get the people in the sample, known as respondents, to answer the pollster’s questions. Surveying respondents in person is very expensive because of travel costs and is rarely used anymore in the United States. In developing countries where phones and computers are rare, in-person surveys may be the only possible way to do a survey.

The most common polling method in the United States is the telephone survey. Pollsters either use Random Digit Dialling (RDD), which randomly selects phone numbers in a targeted area code, or Registration Based Sampling (RBS), which uses samples of names from voter registration files. Each have their advantages and drawbacks. Telephone surveys are more affordable than in-person interviews, but the growing reluctance of people to answer their phone or pollsters’ questions (more on this below) threatens their reliability.

1. Asking the questions

The unbiased wording of questions to avoid slant- ing responses is also important. A slight difference in wording —“fight” sounds nastier than “face trial” — greatly shifts responses.

Public-opinion surveys are generally reliable, provided we recognise their limits. Being able to know who will vote is important for a pre-election poll. Many respondents who say they intend to vote actually do not. These voters and the undecideds are likely not to divide the same way as those who do vote and those already decided.

Public opinion is volatile, able to change quickly under the impact of events. Volatility can also result if pollsters ask questions that respondents know nothing about. People want to seem knowledgeable and will give an opinion to a question, even if they haven’t thought about the issue before. Pollsters must avoid accidentally measuring these non-attitudes. New or complex issues are the most likely to result in non-attitudes. That’s one reason why public opinion can seem so volatile on those kinds of issues. The public isn’t necessarily changing its mind — it’s just that respondents forget what they answered the last time they were asked about an issue they knew nothing about.

Another threat to the reliability of telephone surveys are increasing “no response” rates. Americans, harassed by telemarketers, decline or just hang up on callers asking anything. They use caller-ID to screen out any calls not coming from known numbers. With falling response rates, the survey is likely not random or representative. Pollsters have to continually update their methods as technology and public habits change.

American Opinion

One of the oldest and most important items in U.S. public-opinion polls asks how the president is handling the job — which is not necessarily how much people “like” the president. In practice, however, the respondent who likes the president will approve of the president’s job performance, so the term “popularity” is often used for this poll.

Typically, presidents start with high support and then decline. During their first few months to a year in office, they enjoy a **honeymoon** with the press and the public. High public approval makes it easier for presidents to get their agenda passed through Congress. Ironically, this early high public approval comes when the president’s team is the least experienced and less able to take advantage to achieve the president’s goals.

After some years, however, problems accumulate — the economy soars or foreign policies fail. This brings an approval low point. Presidents seldom leave office as popular as they were during their first year.

When presidents come under intense pressure or take a major action, their support enjoys a temporary upturn or “spike.” Americans rally to a president who faces a difficult decision and makes decisive responses. Political scientist John Mueller called these rally events.

Some suspect that presidents, especially later in their terms of office, deliberately try to appear decisive in a dramatic way to boost their sagging popularity. Foreign policy provides for dramatic moves and the best television coverage. A meeting with foreign leaders, a bold strike against terrorists, or the rescue of American hostages lifts support for a president. The highest support ratings of Presidents Truman, Kennedy, Nixon, Carter, Reagan, and both Bushes came with a dramatic foreign-policy event. Presidential approval based on one situation tends to spill over into other areas of presidential activity.

Is public opinion in the United State polarised?

Political scientists debate whether the divide between liberals and conservatives is just a flap among elites or whether the American public has lost its unimodal distribution and become bimodal on ideology. Some surveys show that many people still call themselves moderate and have liberal opinions on some issues and conservative opinions on other issues.

Some scholars caution that we should focus on those who pay attention to politics, not the uninformed. The politically engaged, to use political scientist Alan Abramowitz’s term, have polarised. Liberals and conservatives agree on less and less. A large majority of liberals prefer a bigger government that provides more service whereas equal numbers of conservatives prefer a smaller government providing fewer services.

We must again note the difference between *economic* and *noneconomic* liberalism. Americans are not very clear about what they mean by “liberal” or “conservative.”

Public opinion is fragmented; groups are interested in different questions. The attentive public, although relatively few in number, has great political impact because those who pay attention have ideas and articulate them, demonstrating political competence. Sometimes they can rouse the general public. The attentive public can act as “spark plugs” for the apathetic and slow- reacting general public.

This is why all regimes treat intellectuals with caution and sometimes with suspicion. Communist regimes expend great effort to ferret out a handful of dissident intellectuals. Relations between the White House and the news media are a cat-and-mouse game. Political elites, aware of the ignorance and low interest of the general public, may convince themselves not to pay much attention to public opinion.

The general public’s indifference and fragmentation mean that their views are often hard to discern and may have little impact on decision making. Elected leaders are apt to pay attention to the group with the most intensely held views.

The disproportionate influence of the attentive public and passionate opinion holders underscores one of the problems of public opinion. Often there is little “public” opinion—just the opinions of scattered and small groups who pay attention to issues and care intensely about them. When it comes to a question that deeply concerns them, however, many people do not want a simple head count, arguing that the majority view is ignorant or mistaken and should not be heeded.

Is Polling Fair, and should it Govern the U.S.?

Polls do not merely monitor public opinion; they also help make it. Critics charge that published or broadcast poll results can distort an election. For example, the news media may highlight polls showing one candidate leading another. Such publicity, claim underdog candidates, devastates their campaigns by making supporters and contributors lose interest. Poor poll showings, especially early in the campaign, are a self-fulfilling prophecy of defeat for some candidates. Those who lead in the early polls get more contributions, more news coverage, and thus more supporters.

One current controversy is the effect of “exit polls,” in which voters are questioned just as they leave the balloting place. With the three-hour time difference between the East and West Coasts, exit polls enable television to predict winners in the East while westerners still have hours in which to cast a ballot. Does the early prediction in the East persuade westerners not to bother to vote? Even if the early prediction of the presidential election is accurate, a falloff in voters could hurt state and local candidates who may have won if more people had voted. Some urge a delay in broadcasting the results of exit polls.

Considering the preceding discussion, it would seem in most cases that the United States should not be governed by polls. The wording of the questions and the selection of the sample can seriously skew results. The survey must be done by trained professionals using standardised questions and random samples. Polls designed to sway you are not worthy of response; hang up on them. The low rate of response to telephone surveys undermines their reliability. Equally serious are the problem of volatility and non-attitudes. What the public likes one year it may dislike the next. Decisions made on the basis of a survey may turn sour when the consequences sink in.

Polls, if done well, are useful snapshots of public opinion at a given moment but are no substitute for careful analyses and prudent anticipation.

Chapter 8

Political Communication

The *mass media* strongly influence politics. Scholars have long recognised the dependence of politics on communication. Political scientist Karl W. Deutsch (1912–1992) showed how modernisation and nationalism can be measured by the increase of mail, telephone calls, and newspapers. The more communication, the more modernisation (which does not prove which causes which). The political system and the communication system parallel one another; it is doubtful that one could exist without the other.

All political action is a reaction to communication. There are different levels and types of communication. **Face-to-face** communication is the most basic and effective for altering or reinforcing political opinions because it allows for dialogue whereas mass media cannot. Until the early 1930's, face-to-face communication was the main method of political campaigning. Candidates **stumped** (in the old days, many spoke from tree stumps) their districts and addressed small groups of voters, appealing for their support with the help of ward bosses, precinct captains, and political organisers. The rise of television has largely bypassed grassroots stumping, except as a means of getting free media coverage or for local office where a candidate can reach a relatively large share of the electorate in person.

The mass media reach an infinitely larger audience and therefore yield a greater voter or public-opinion return than face-to-face communication. A speech at even the largest rally is heard by only a few thousand, but the mass media are one-way communication.

Television may have eroded the role of *opinion leaders* as television news-casters and commentators become opinion leaders on a grand scale. Television not only transmits direct political messages but also indirectly changes society by bringing news and ideas into the homes of all.

Fewer Americans now are interested in news than they were one and two generations ago. Only about a third watch television news or read newspapers. And news is shifting from politics and world affairs to human interest and “news you can use” about health, business, and lifestyles. The causes of this decline are debated. Some see a shift in values, especially among a new and introspectivegeneration addicted to entertainment. Only terrorist attacks, involvement in war, or a financial meltdown can jolt them into paying attention to the real world.

The various modern media appeal to different audiences distinguished by education, income, and age. The more educated individuals are, the more media they consume. Age also affects mass-media usage. Older people pay far more attention to the editorial and news content of newspapers and magazines than do teenagers and young adults, who tend to use newspapers to follow sports, rock stars, and feature articles rather than hard news. Young people also love social media. The college student who keeps up on the news and editorial opinion is rare.

There are different types of modern mass media:

NEWSPAPERS

In 1910, the United States had more than 2,600 daily newspapers, and most American cities had two or more competing papers. Today, only about half that number remain, and few U.S. cities have two papers. Many major newspapers, long money losers, have drastically cut their staffs and Washington and overseas bureaus. Some have folded. As news on the Internet grows, many citizens prefer it but often do not get a variety of political and editorial opinion.

Journalism has a long tradition of objectivity in news reporting (not so on the editorial page). The profession’s own standards influence newspeople to present the news fairly and honestly. Regardless, blogs share no tradition of neutrality and are often wildly partisan, more activism than journalism. Some fear the demise of objective reporting.

How much political impact do U.S. newspapers have? Not as much as they used to. In the 1960’s, some 80 percent of Americans read a daily paper; now fewer than 30 percent do.

RADIO

Like newspapers, radio too has declined. Now three companies own half of America’s radio stations. Clear Channel Communications alone controls more than 1,200 stations.

Since the rise of television in the 1950’s, radio became less important, with two exceptions. Popular “talk radio” shows, often hosted by angry right-wingers, reinforce conservative views. Reinforcing liberal views, the radio magazine “All Things Considered” on National Public Radio offers world events, economics, politics, and critical opinions.

THE NEWS SERVICE

Most hard news in newspapers and on radio, and even a good deal of television’s news, is not produced in-house but comes from a printer hooked up to the New York offices of The Associated Press (AP), hence the old-fashioned name **wire service**.

The AP is a publishers’ cooperative, with members paying thousands of dollars a week in assessments based on their circulation. They also contribute local stories to the AP, which may rewrite them for national and even world transmission. The AP is one of the few news services not owned, subsidised, controlled, or supervised by a government. It is free of government influence and proud of it, but it too is in financial difficulty. Why buy information when you can get it free online?

No government controls the AP, but other problems limit its quality and influence. First, it moves fast; every minute is a deadline. This means it does little digging; its stories are often superficial. Second, until recently the wire services’ definition of news has been something from an official **source**. Most of its stories are carefully attributed to police, the White House, the State Department or Pentagon, and so on. The unstated motto was: If it’s not official, it’s not news, and if it is official, it must be true.

THE ELITE MEDIA

*The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal*, and *Financial Times* are read by a small fraction of the U.S. population, but they carry by far the most clout. Decision makers in Washington read them and take both their news stories and editorials seriously. Leading thinkers fight battles on their “op-ed” pages (opposite the editorial page). That is why these papers have influence out of all proportion to their circulation. They are the **elite media** because the people who read them are generally wealthier and better educated and have much more influence than readers of hometown papers. Many are *opinion leaders*, who transmit their views to other citizens. The elite press pursues “investigative reporting,” looking for government and partisan wrongdoing, something the average paper shuns for fear of lawsuits.

Social Media

The political impact of the Internet and social media is growing. You can look up whatever you want, but that is often “preaching to the converted,” to people who already like the candidate. The Internet may catch stories the conventional media overlook. Beholden to no one, blogs uncovered dubious political contributions, torture, warrantless surveillance, and the financial crisis earlier and deeper than newspapers or television. In comparison to the Internet, mainstream media can be remarkably incurious.

A generation raised on social media, however, supposes that they bring everything to light. They do not; someone — preferably an experienced reporter — still has to go out and dig up news that many prefer to keep quiet. Without the original input of news, social media are largely gossip. Conventional media point out that only they practice “quality journalism” by professionals who know their areas and check their facts. Newspapers and television boast of their “balance” (covering two sides of everything), something that does not interest blogs and tweets.

Will electronic media overall make well-informed citizens? Many doubt it. The Internet has drastically lowered the cost of entering the media world (just as digitised music has drastically lowered the cost of entering the music world).

Thousands now put out their own online magazines, most of them highly partisan. One study found that 85% of blog links were to those of the same political viewpoint. Thoughtful synthesis is not the Internet’s strong point. Digital media can undermine undemocratic regimes. Iranians mobilised by computer and cell phones against rigged 2009 elections. Young Tunisians, Egyptians, and Syrians used their cell phones to mobilise against dictatorial regimes.

Digital media’s unique feature that can support democratic participation is that it involves a two-way flow of ideas. Newspapers (except for letters to the editor), television, and even many websites convey information in one direction — from journalists to the public. Social media are more like conversations. The public can post comments to a news story, like a Facebook post or retweet an idea. The conversation about the original story can itself become the story if it “goes viral.” Does this deliver more meaningful democratic debate? Maybe, but sometimes they simply rehash media elites’ talking points.

The Giant: Television

When most people say “the media,” they mean television, for television still has the greatest impact. Young people, however, now get more of their news from the Internet and social media than from television. Some observers claim television, which focuses on “sound bites” of a few seconds, trivialises politics. Penetrating analysis is out; the catchy phrase is in.

TELEVISION NEWS

Television, by definition, favours the visual. “Talking heads” provide no more news than radio, although they do provide a sense of personality and hence credibility, an imitation face-to-face communication. News producers pay more attention to a news story with “good visuals” than without.

Television, like most of the rest of the U.S. news media, ignored the hatred that was brewing against Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak for years but caught the Cairo crowds chanting for his ouster in 2011. Television news is hooked on the eye-catching. Television is inherently a more emotional medium than the others; its coverage can go straight to the heart, bypassing the brain, as communications theorist Marshall McLuhan (1911–1980) observed.

Television camera crews are expensive to maintain in the field, especially overseas, so they usually arrive where the action is only *after* having read it on the AP wire or online. *Television needs to know in advance what’s going to happen; then it can schedule a camera crew.* This makes television news lopsided with press conferences, speeches, committee hearings, and official statements. Some critics call these **media events**, things that would not have occurred with- out television coverage. Moving into the coverage vacuum are amateur videos taken on cell phones, posted on YouTube, and picked up by television. Although the images are poor, they convey a sense of “being there,” an authenticity professional media cannot match. People worldwide watched protests in Turkey and Egypt and beheadings in Syria shortly after they happened.

Analysis is also not television’s strong point. An average news story runs one minute; a four-minute story is an in-depth report.

TELEVISION BY POLITICS

Television changed politics in several ways. Incumbency, especially in the White House, has always brought recognition, and television has enhanced this, but not always to the advantage of the **incumbent**. Television news is heavily focused on the president. Congress gets much less coverage, the courts even less. This deepens a long-term American tendency to president-worship. The president is seen as an omnipotent parental figure, a person who can fix all problems. That should make a president happy. But then the president fails to fix the problems, and ultra-critical media imply he is making them worse. The flip side of being treated as all-powerful is catching all the blame.

1. Nomination by Television

Television does much to nominate presidential candidates. With all eyes focused on the early presidential primaries, commentators grandly proclaim who is the “real winner” and who has “momentum.” The candidate thus designated as front-runner goes into the remaining primaries and the national convention with a **bandwagon** effect, enhanced recognition, and even more television coverage. In the nominating process, television has become a king-maker, so candidates arrange their schedules and strategies to capture as much television exposure as possible.

Television coverage of candidates focuses more on personalities rather than issues. Television, with its sharp close-ups and seeming spontaneity, gives viewers what they think is a true glimpse of the candidate’s character. While television is playing this major role in nominating and electing candidates, political parties are bypassed. Increasingly, candidates raise funds through their own team and use television to speak directly to voters. Because the leading contenders have already picked up their “momentum” going into the convention, they do not need party professionals to broker a nominating deal.

1. Television and Apathy

Observers have long suspected that television induces passivity and apathy. Harvard political scientist Robert D. Putnam, reviewing the decline of “civic engagement” in the United States, found that people born before World War II, are more trusting and more inclined to join groups and participate in politics. His reason: They were raised before the television age began in the 1950’s. Younger people, raised on television, lack these qualities.

A related charge is that television has lowered Election Day turnouts. Television saturates viewers so far in advance that they lose interest. The top two candidates sometimes sound so similar that many voters see little difference. Negative ads disgust many voters, who stop paying attention. Charges and countercharges come so thick and fast that the voter is cross-pressuredinto indecision and apathy.

1. Television ownership and Control

The U.S. government exercises the least control of communications of any industrialised country. Since the invention of the telegraph, Washington has stood back and let private industry operate communications for profit. In Europe, in contrast, telegraphy was soon taken over by the postal service, as were telephones.

For European nations, with traditions of centralised power and government paternalism, national control of electronic communications is as normal as state ownership of the railroads. Now European TV is partly state-run and partly private, and both of them face continual charges of politically partisan coverage.

The U.S. attitude of **non-paternalism** has led to the freest airwaves in the world, but it has also brought some problems. With the rapid growth of radio in the 1920s, the **electromagnetic spectrum** was soon jammed with stations trying to drown each other out. To bring some order, the Radio Act of 1927 designated the airwaves public property that should serve “the public interest, convenience and necessity.” The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which licenses broadcasters, does not supervise the content of programs. “Equal time” requirements once tried to ensure fairness, but they have been dropped.

Are we Poorly Served?

The U.S. mass media do not serve Americans very well. First, news coverage is highly selective, overly concentrating on some areas while ignoring others. The president gets in and out of helicopters, greets foreign leaders, travels overseas, and gets involved in scandals; all provide good television footage. Congress may get some attention when its committees face tense, controversial, or hostile witnesses.

Especially under-covered are the civil service and state governments. Myriad departments, agencies, and bureaus govern any country, but bureaucrats give boring interviews, and regulations are unintelligible. Still, many of next year’s news stories lurk in the federal bureaucracy.

Coverage of state governments may be even worse. Much of the problem here is that there are national media (the big networks and elite newspapers) and there are local media (your town’s stations and paper). But there are no state media, partly because states are not “market areas” (population centres) that advertisers try to reach. Accordingly, outside of state capitals, there is little news about state politics, even important items. To some degree, digital media coverage of state politics has filled that gap, but only for those that seek it out.

On the world scene, the news media wait for something to blow up before they cover it. Except for the elite media, there is little background coverage of likely trouble spots. We live in a tumultuous world, but the U.S. media pay little attention until the shooting starts. Providers of “good visuals” rather than analysis and early warning is the way they define their role, and this sets up Americans to become startled and confused.

The biggest problem with the U.S. media is that they do not give a coherent, comprehensive picture of what is happening in the world. Operating under tight deadlines, flashing the best action footage, and basing reports heavily on official sources, the media bombard us with many little stories but seldom weave them together into a big story.

What can be done?

The mass media do not provide *meaning*. Few reporters are equipped to explain historical background or long-term consequences. Reporters are expected to be generalists, to be able to cover anything.

Professional newspeople generally agree that the public is ill-informed and that their coverage could be wider and deeper. But the limiting factor, they emphasise, is the public itself. A handful of business journalists warned of trouble in the financial system, but most people were totally surprised at the 2008 meltdown. Few want to be well-informed, especially about things distant or complicated. Audience surveys find that people care least about foreign news and most about local news.

The Adversaries: Media and Government

The role of the press as critic in a democracy has long been recognised. In Russia and Mexico, journalists who investigate crime, corruption, and abuse of power are routinely killed, and few suspects are caught. Many news organisations there now practice “self-censorship” to stay open and alive.

Over the centuries, the press has criticised government. In the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, however, a new **adversarial** relationship between media and government emerged that is still with us. To be sure, not all the media entered into the fray; most newspapers with their wire-service stories continued to quote official sources. But the elite media and television often adopted hostile stances toward the executive branch.

The causes are not hard to see: Vietnam and Watergate. In both episodes, the executive branch lied to the media to soothe public opinion. Many media people resented being used and struck back with sharp questioning in press conferences and investigative reporting.

In Saigon, the U.S. military held afternoon press briefings, dubbed the “five o’clock follies,” in which upbeat spokesmen portrayed progress in the war. Journalists soon tired of the repetitive, misleading briefings and snooped around for themselves. They found a corrupt, inept Saigon regime that was not winning the hearts and minds of its people, a Vietcong able to roam and strike at will, and tactics and morale inadequate to stop them. One young *New York Times* reporter was so critical of the Diem regime that his stories undermined American confidence in Diem and paved the way for Diem’s 1963 ouster and murder by his own generals. Such is the influence of the elite media.

Does the press go too far? Some people are fed up at the high-handedness with which the media impugn all authority. The media seem to think they are always right, the government always wrong. Republicans charge that the media are strongly liberal. Radicals, on the other hand, charge that the media defer to the president and big corporations. There is some truth to both charges, but one should note that eventually most institutions come under media scrutiny.

Studies show that news reporters and writers indeed tend to be liberals and Democrats, and this sometimes shows up in their coverage. Owners of stations and newspapers, though, tend to be conservative and Republican, and they curb the liberal impulses of their employees. Radio talk shows tend to the angry right, documentary films and blogs to the radically liberal. Charges of media bias are hard to prove because you can usually show that the media mistreat all politicians, Republican and Democrat. The White House tries to keep a tight rein on information, which the media resent.

What is the proper role of the media in a democracy? That they can and should criticise is clear; this keeps government on its toes. But how much should they criticise? Should they presume wrongdoing and cover-up everywhere?

Chapter 9

Interest Groups

Republicans celebrated the decisions — made by the Court’s Republican majority — figuring they would gain a spending advantage, but the first victims of the decision were the 2012 Republican presidential hopefuls, whose super-PAC-funded primary contests denounced and caricatured each other, tarnishing the overall image of the party. Ironically, conservative intellectuals had originated the phrase “unforeseen consequences.” On election day, the super-PACs’ massive spending seem to have little impact, partly because Democrats also raise prodigious sums, and oversaturated voters may ignore the shrill exaggerations and accusations.

The super-PACs are just the latest iteration of well-funded interest groups influencing politics. Critics complain about the political dominance of the very wealthy, but in a democracy, there is nothing to stop it. To curb such influence would require limiting group inputs (including their freedom of speech) to the political process. Who would decide which groups should have how much influence? Anyone making that decision could seriously skew democracy.

The theory behind interest groups argues that, on your own, even in the finest democracy, you can do little. The solution: form a group of like-minded individuals. After hard work organising, fund-raising, and lobbying, you can start having an impact. In this view (a *pluralist* view), the crux of politics is groups. Rich individuals and corporations have major influence, average citizens little or none. Interest-group activity is especially strong in the pluralistic United States but is found everywhere, even in dictatorships, where groups quietly try to win the favour of the dictator.

he term *interest group* covers just about any collection of people trying to influence government. Some interest groups are transient, others permanent. Some focus on influencing a particular policy, others on broad changes. Some work through the executive or administrative agencies, others through the judicial or legislative sectors, and still others through public opinion. But all are non–publicly accountable organisations that attempt to promote shared private interests by influencing public-policy outcomes.

Interest groups are a bit like political parties. Both try to influence public policy, but interest groups do it outside the electoral process and are not responsible to the public. A party must win elections. Interest groups may influence the nomination of candidates who are sympathetic to their cause, but the candidates run under the party banner—not the interest group banner.

GOALS

Parties seek power though elections. Interest groups usually focus on specific programs and issues and are rarely represented in the formal structure of government. Instead, they try to influence legislators and executives. They often seek the favour of all political parties. Economic groups want the support of both Republicans and Democrats. Some interest groups favour one party.

NATURE OF MEMBERSHIPS

Political parties seek broad support to win elections and draw many interests into their ranks. Even the Republican Party includes people in all income brackets. Some groups link disparate groups, as when Roman Catholics and fundamentalist Protestants unite to oppose abortion.

For several reasons, including the length of a ballot, there are rarely more than a dozen or so political parties. But there is no limit on interest groups, and some countries, such as the United States, foster their growth.

Every advanced society is pluralistic, with many industrial, cultural, economic, educational, ethnic, and religious groups. Divergent interests lead almost automatically to group formation. In a pluralist democracy, a multiplicity of interest groups push their own claims and viewpoints, creating a balance of opposing interests that, in theory, prevents any one group from dominating the political system. In this optimistic view, government policy is the outcome of competition among many groups, which represent the varied interests of the people.

Interest groups, however, over-represent the better-off and businesses. Because some groups are rich and well-connected, the democratic playing field is not level. Critics argue that if group theory really operated, the poor would organise groups to get a bigger piece of the economic pie. But the poor, who have less education, are slow in forming groups to promote their interests. Better-off and better-educated people are more likely to participate in politics, and this includes organising and running interest groups and super-PACs.

Interest Groups and Government

Interest groups try to influence government. But what if there is little government, as in Afghanistan, where government writ does not extend much beyond the capital, Kabul? There are plenty of groups: tribes, clans, warlords, opium growers, and Taliban fighters, but we would not call their interactions “pluralistic”. Not all “interest group” activity is good or peaceful; it depends on the groups’ willingness to operate within the law, which in turn requires strong states.

Once government is funding something, the groups that benefit develop constituencies with a strong interest in continuing the programs. As government has become bigger and sponsored more programs, interest groups have proliferated. By now, virtually every branch and subdivision of the U.S. government has one or more interest groups watching over its shoulder and demanding more grants, a change in regulations, or their own agency.

Sometimes interest groups participate in government legislation and implementation. In Britain, “interested members” of Parliament are those who openly acknowledge that they represent industries or labor unions. This is not frowned on and is considered quite normal. Some Swedish benefits for farmers and workers are administered by their respective farm organisations and labor unions. Some call this **corporatism**, meaning interest groups taking on government functions. Top representatives of business, labor, and the cabinet meet regularly in Sweden to decide much public policy. Critics charge that this too-cozy relationship bypasses parliamentary democracy altogether.

Government calls many interest groups into life, for they are associated with government programs. There are farm lobbies because there are farm programs, education lobbies because there are education programs, and veterans’ lobbies because the government goes to war.

In 1938, as part of FDR’s program to get out of the Depression, Congress created the Federal National Mortgage Association — soon known as “Fannie Mae” — to underwrite home loans and encourage home purchases and construction. In 1968, Congress made Fannie Mae private, turning it into a regular corporation that makes money by buying banks’ mortgages, repackaging them, and selling them like bonds. To ensure competition in this important “secondary mortgage market,” Congress in 1970 created the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation (“Freddie Mac”), which is also private and does the same things as Fannie Mae.

Platoons of Fannie and Freddie lobbyists made sure Congress kept supporting the two mortgage giants. Critics described Fannie and Freddie as basically lobbying operations with mortgage side businesses. When the U.S. housing market turned sour in 2008, Congress quickly authorised unlimited taxpayer dollars to back up Fannie and Freddie, which were deemed “too big to fail”. Many criticised the bail-out that let Fannie and Freddie keep profits private but passed risks on to taxpayers.

This circular flow is common: Congress creates a program, the program creates an interest group, and then the interest group works on Congress to keep supporting it.

BUREAUCRATS AND INTEREST GROUPS

Government and interest groups are related in another important but sometimes overlooked way: Bureaucracies have become big and powerful interest groups. Civil servants are not merely passive implementers of laws; they also have input in the making and application of those laws. Much legislation originates in specialised agencies. Many of the data and witnesses before legislative committees are from the executive departments and agencies.

Bureaucracies develop interests of their own. They see their tasks as terribly important and demand bigger budgets and more employees every year. When was the last time a civil servant recommended abolishing his or her agency or bureau?

Government and interest groups were born twins. The more government, the more interest groups. To say that every political system has interest groups says little, for interest groups in different systems operate quite differently. One key determinant in the way interest groups operate is the government. Pluralism is determined not by the mere existence of groups, each trying to influence government, but by the degree to which government permits or encourages the open interplay of groups. Pluralism has a normative component, an “ought” or a “should.”

Effective Interest Groups

Interest groups flourish in pluralistic societies that have traditions of local self-governance and of forming associations. Where this is weak, interest groups have tough going. The more-educated and males (but that is changing) are more likely to belong to an interest group. Not all groups are political, but even nonpolitical groups, by discussion among members, have some political influence. In societies where many join groups, people have a greater sense of political competence and efficacy.

Many countries have tried reforms. Japanese reformers tried to break “money politics” and the extreme dependence of politicians on interest groups, but have not yet succeeded.

The United States has been reluctant to go to public financing of campaigns or campaign spending limits for several reasons:

1. There is the strong emphasis on freedom. The U.S. Supreme Court has interpreted the First Amendment to include dollars as a form of free speech. When a person gives money to a candidate or a candidate spends it, those are political statements that must not be curbed.
2. U.S. campaigns are much longer and more expensive than in other democracies, the result of our weak, decentralised parties and nominating system. In Western Europe, elections can be short and cheap because the parties are already in place with their candidates and platforms.
3. Given these two previous conditions, American legislators have not been able to find a formula for public financing that really works in the manner intended. Some efforts turn out to have negative unforeseen consequences.

Some individuals and **political action committees (PACs)** contribute to parties and interest groups not directly working for a candidate’s election campaign. This **soft money** funds groups that produce “issue ads” aimed *against* the other side without mentioning their own candidate’s name. Soft money thus contributes to the trend toward negative advertising in political campaigns.

It is now apparent that parties and candidates will work around whatever reforms or laws attempt to curb big money in politics. Critics fear that money politics is out of control. Defenders say this is just the workings of pluralist democracy and the amounts are peanuts compared with the overall U.S. economy. Can or should anything be done about interest groups and money? Some suggest we go to a European-type system in which parties are better organised and campaigns are short and relatively cheap. But that is simply not the U.S. nominating and electoral system, which is complex and long. And Europe’s interest groups still give plenty (sometimes under the table) to their favoured candidates.

Public financing of all candidates would be terribly expensive. Many U.S. taxpayers do not check off the option on their tax returns to contribute a few dollars to presidential campaigns, even though it costs them nothing. For the foreseeable future, it will not be possible to break the tie between big money and candidates in the United States.

Another alternative is to make it easier to know who is donating what to whom. Currently, campaigns must report where their donations come from, but the reports are not easily available in time for a candidate’s opponent or the media to share with the public. If reporting requirements were changed so that records for donations were made available online to the public immediately, then watchdogs could spread the word if a candidate received large donations from politically questionable sources.

The Rise of Single-Issue Groups

Perhaps the second greatest factor in the influence of interest groups (after money) is the intensity of the issue involved. The right issue can mobilise millions, give the group cohesion and commitment, and boost donations. Or, as with the super-PACS in 2012, it can persuade one wealthy individual to donate $100 million.

There have always been American interest groups pursuing one or another idealistic objective, but since the 1970’s the rise of **single-issue groups** has changed U.S. politics. Typically, interest groups have several things to say about issues, for their interests encompass several programs and departments. Organised labor tries to persuade government on questions of Social Security, medical insurance, education, imports and tariffs, and the way unemployment statistics are calculated. The **AFL-CIO** has a long-term, across-the-board interest in Washington. The same can be said for many business groups, such as the **NAM**.

But to the single-issue groups, only one issue matters, and it matters intensely. Typically, their issues are moral — and therefore hard to compromise — rather than material. The most prominent of them is the right to life, or anti-abortion, movement. The antiabortionists make life miserable for many legislators. They care about nothing else — where officials stand on taxes, jobs, defence, and so on. They want to know where they stand on abortion, and a compromise middle ground (the refuge of many politicians faced with controversial issues) is not good enough. Some elections turn on the abortion issue. Meanwhile, the pro-choice forces organise and grow militant to offset the pro-life forces. Other single-issue causes appear, such as prayer in public school and same-sex marriage. Taken together, these two and the abortion question are sometimes referred to as the “morality issue.”

Their size and the intensity of their members give groups clout. The biggest and fastest-growing U.S. interest group is AARP (formerly the American Association of Retired Persons), with some thirty-seven million members (one American in eight), many of them educated, forceful, and strongly committed to preserving and enhancing Social Security and Medicare. Both parties proclaim that they want to safeguard the two vast programs. When AARP speaks, Congress trembles.

Size alone, however, is not necessarily the most important element in interest-group strength. Money and intensity often offset size. The well-funded American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), supported not only by Jews but by many evangelical Christians, keeps Congress pro-Israel. The socioeconomic statusof members gives groups clout. Better-off, well-educated people with influence in their professions and communities can form groups that get more respect.

Money, issue, and size may not count for much unless people in government are willing to listen. The careful cultivation of members of Congress and civil servants over the years makes sure doors are open. When a group has established a stable and receptive relationship with a branch of government, it is said to enjoy, in the words of Yale’s Joseph LaPalombara, structured access (long-term friendly connection of interest group to officials).

But what happens when groups are shut out and have no access? Pluralists think this cannot happen in a democracy, but it does. African American and Native American militants argued that no one was listening to them or taking their demands seriously. Only violence in urban ghettos and on Indian reservations got Washington to listen. When the wealthy and powerful have a great deal of access, the poor and unorganised may have none. The consequences sometimes lead to violence.

Interest Group Strategy

Lobbying receives the most attention. The campaign contributions and favours to legislators given by corporations convince many that lobbyists buy Congress. Indeed, any major interest threatened by new laws spares no expense to make sure the laws are not passed, and they are usually successful. Big tobacco, for example, which is especially generous to incumbent Republican candidates, routinely blocks or dilutes antismoking legislation.

Recently, many Washington influence meddlers, to avoid having to register as lobbyists, call themselves “strategic consultants”. They do what lobbyists do, but they do not disclose their clients or their fees. By some estimates, there are as many of these unregistered consultants as there are regular lobbyists.

Depending on the issue, the executive branch may be a better interest-group target. The interest group may not need or want a new law, merely favourable interpretation of existing rules and regulations. For this, it turns to administrators. Antipollution groups, for instance, seek tighter definitions of clean air; industry groups seek looser definitions. Interest groups concentrate on the department that specialises in their area.

Interest groups employ many of the same tactics on executive departments that they use on legislators, including personal contacts, research, and public relations. Some provide money; in most of the world, corruption of public officials is the norm.

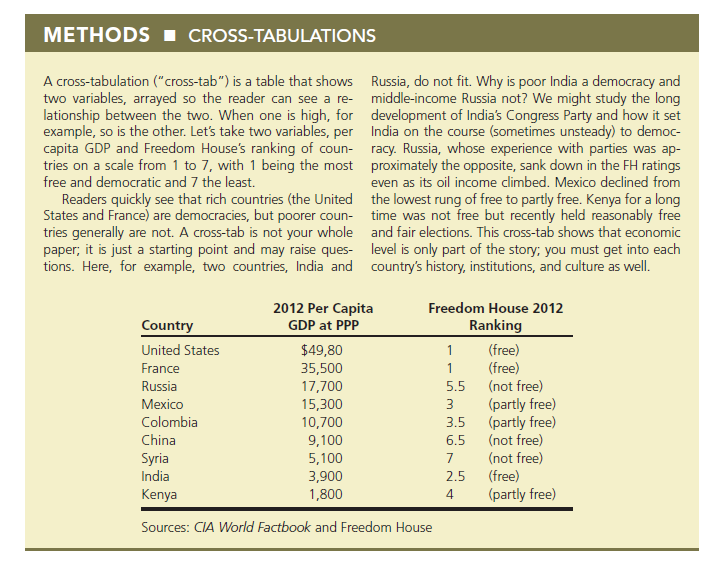
Interest groups may also use the courts. In countries where rule of law is strong, the courts become an arena of interest-group contention, as in Germany, where groups have taken cases on abortion and worker rights before the Federal Constitutional Court.

In recent years, the U.S. Supreme Court has dealt with several social issues brought to it by interest groups, including women’s rights, the death penalty, guns, and same-sex marriage. Interest groups use two judicial methods. First, they may initiate suits directly on behalf of a group or class of people whose interests they represent (such suits are commonly referred to as class actions). The second is for the interest group to file a “friend of the court” brief (amicus curiae) in support of a person whose cause they share.

Organised interests often take their case to the public with peaceful (sometimes) appeals. Even powerful interest groups realise the importance of their public image, and many invest in public relations campaigns to explain how they contribute to the general welfare and why their interests are good for the country. The gasoline lobby explained why environmental restrictions work against building new refineries.

Some interest groups maintain a low profile by promoting their objectives without advertising themselves. Such groups may plant news stories that promote their cause and quietly work against the publication of stories detrimental to them. The Tobacco Institute, for example, discreetly funds research that casts doubt on findings that smoking is bad for health.

Certain organisations, such as the American Cancer Society and the Heart Fund, may get free advertising space and time, but most interest groups do not, and many cannot afford to purchase such publicity. Such a disadvantaged group may hold demonstrations to publicise its cause. Some critics of Wall Street, totally outclassed by the financial and political resources of investment banks, felt that direct protest was their only option.

A group that loses faith in conventional political channels may see violent protest as its only alternative. The United States is no stranger to violent protests, which require a psychological buildup nurtured by poverty, discrimination, frustration, and a sense of personal or social injustice.

Does violent protest work? Perhaps it was no coincidence that the Great Society was passed during a period of U.S. urban riots.

Interest Groups: An Evaluation

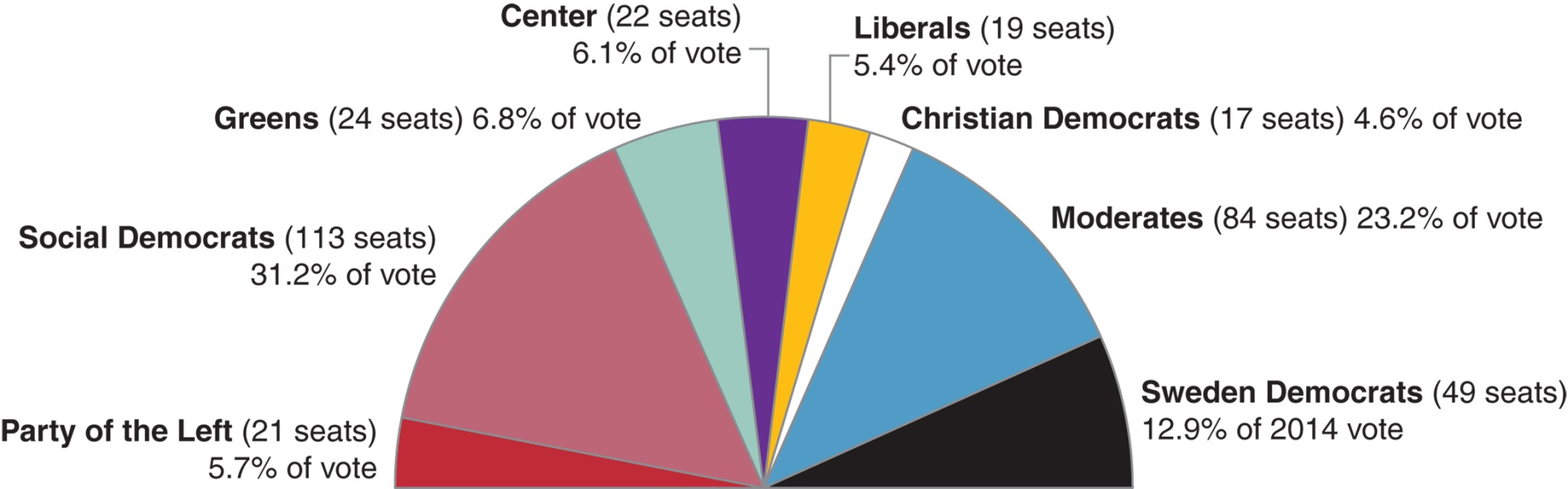
Interest groups are at the core of every democracy, but how well do they serve the needs of citizens? Interest groups help represent a wider range of interests in the legislative process, a good thing. Many smaller organisations, however, have neither the members nor the money to have any input.

There is a further problem: What about individuals who are not organised into groups? Who speaks for them? Many citizens are not members or beneficiaries of interest groups.

For this reason, the “citizens’ lobby” Common Cause was formed in 1970. Supported by donations, it won public funding of presidential campaigns, an end to the congressional seniority system, and disclosure of lobbying activities. In a similar vein, Ralph Nader set up several public-interest lobbies on law, nuclear energy, tax reform, and medical care. Although groups such as these have done much good work, they raise an interesting question: Can a society as big and complex as America’s possibly be represented as a whole, or is it inherently a mosaic of groups with no common voice?

Another problem is whether interest groups really speak for all their members or for a small, militant minority. Most interest groups are dominated by a few leaders who have stronger views than the people they claim to speak for.

Interest-group input may skew policy. The finance industry, for example, is a major interest group that contributes heavily to both parties and lobbies intensively. Since Reagan, Congress has generally delivered whatever the finance industry specified, and regulations and safeguards were rolled back so much of U.S. finance was little supervised. It was supposed to be “self-policing.” One result was the 2006 “**subprime** crisis” that turned into a world-shaking financial crisis in 2008.

The subsequent bailout of major financial institutions created a **scandal**, but it was nothing new; indeed, there is about one every decade. Interest groups compete with one another and in so doing limit the influence that any group can have on the legislature or a government agency. Interest groups may stalemate government action. Certain issues are “hot potatoes” because government action either way angers one group or another.

In two-party systems, especially, issues tend to be muted by political candidates who try to appeal to as broad a segment of the voting public as possible. The result is a gap between the narrow interest of the individual voter and the general promises of an electoral campaign — a gap that interest groups attempt to fill by pressing for firm political actions on certain issues. But how well do interest groups serve the needs of the average citizen? The successful interest groups, too, tend to be dominated by a vocal minority of political activists. In some cases, interest groups have become so effective that they overshadow parties and paralyse policymaking with their conflicting demands. The precise balance between the good of all and the good of particular groups has not yet been found.

Chapter 10

Parties

Political parties serve as links between citizens and government as a means to input citizens' demands into the political process. Political parties serve as links between citizens and government as a means to input citizens' demands into the political process. Parties can be classified on an ideological spectrum that ranges from far left to far right.

There are multiple types of party systems that can emerge and be classified based on the number of parties in the system. The electoral rules will have a dramatic effect on the number of parties that are active in the party system. There are some advantages to be found in the highly decentralised party structures of the United States.

Parties serve a host of functions in democratic societies; one of the most important is to serve as a bridge between citizens and government by serving as inputting devices that allow the interests of citizens to be heard and acted upon by government. In doing so, citizens feel that they have a mechanism for affecting policy. It also gives citizens the feeling that they have some power, which increases efficacy. It also serves to increase the legitimacy of government because it connects citizens to their government, which is at the core of democratic politics.

Political parties serve to aggregate diverse interests in society into larger interests. If politics were just interest groups in competition, there would be chaos as there would be no articulation of broad interests that would guide the general direction of policy. Contemporary parties are effectively loose coalitions of interest groups that have coalesced. The Democratic Party, for example, is a broad coalition of interests ranging from the centre to the far left of American politics.

Political parties also help new groups integrate into the political system. This helps give new groups both a pragmatic and psychological stake in the system. It can also help increase the loyalty of these new groups to the political system. This was in part the case of immigrants in the United States. It can also help prevent groups from becoming radicalised and violent.

Parties also serve as agents of socialisation by helping members learn to play the political game. This deepens their sense of trust in the system. It also can serve as a training ground for future leaders.

Parties also help to mobilise citizens to engage with politics. Parties are key players in helping citizens turn out to vote on election day, and there is a strong correlation between party strength and voter turnout. This might help explain low voter turnout rates in the United States. Parties produce a great deal of propaganda and some argue that this has the effect of turning citizens off of politics, but this propaganda serves the critical role of simplifying complex issues for citizens, making election choices clearer.

Parties are also the agents that organise government and the winning party has a great deal of latitude in not only setting government policy, but also in distributing government jobs. They also gain power in government itself. Some states, such as Britain, have more effective party control of government due to strength of their party. No party can ever totally control government. If they did it would be a dictatorship.

Parties in Democracies

Parties can either be centralised or decentralised. The level of centralisation affects the amount of control that the party leadership can exercise over its members.

CENTRALISED

States such as Israel have highly centralised parties that control the election lists and place loyal party members at the top of the list to ensure their election to parliament. The UK is also centralised but less so, and candidate selection is a process of negotiating between the national party and local constituency offices.

DECENTRALISED

Germany has decentralised national party control. Parties that have high levels of centralisation are much more coherent, ideologically consistent, and disciplined. The United States has a history of decentralised parties, which means that American parties are much less coherent. In addition, the candidates are much more independent of the parties. This has contributed to rifts and splits in U.S. political parties.

GOVERNMENT POLICY

When thinking about setting government policy, the question is: how successful is the majority in enacting its legislative agenda? Parliamentary systems are far more successful at this than presidential systems. This is because the government is the majority and the majority must resign if they cannot muster enough votes to pass their agenda. The high levels of decentralisation in the United States make this very difficult. Blue Dog (conservative) Democrats often vote against their own party and there is little the leadership can do to stop it.

European systems are much more conducive to responsible party government, which is when the majority presents a clear legislative proposal and then acts to pass it. In the United States, this can occur when there is a strong president whose party controls both houses of Congress, such as LBJ, but it is difficult.

American campaigns have become very expensive and as a result parties are heavily dependent on wealthy donors for their operating budgets. There is a great deal of concern about the lack of transparency in these relationships and the appearance of corruption. Many democratic states have tried to limit the amount of campaign donations. The United States allows taxpayers to designate a small portion of their federal tax returns for the presidential election fund as a method to publicly fund presidential elections; however, few Americans choose to donate, and even fewer candidates opt to take public funding. PACs have stepped in and filled in the gap.

Classifying Political Parties

A useful way to classify parties is by placing them on the ideological spectrum from left to right. Their placement is the sum of various policy positions held by the party.

Left-Wing parties generally want to nationalise major industries. Centre-Left parties favour welfare states. Centrist parties are generally liberal on social issues but conservative on economics.

Centre-Right parties want to rein in the welfare state in favour of free enterprise. Right-Wing parties want to dismantle the welfare state and break the power of labor unions. Far-Right parties are generally nationalistic and anti-immigrant.

COMMUNIST PARTIES

The classical Communist party structure of Lenin favoured the interlocking of a single party with the economic system of the state. The economy was not directly ruled by the party, though.

Under the Soviet system, the Central Committee of the Politburo was the heart of the system and made all the decisions that directed the economy and the state. Gorbachev worked to change the party system of the Soviet State because a single party that attempts to control everything develops problems over time; the Soviet system was rife with corruption and highly resistant to change.

The Soviet experience serves as a lesson to other single-party states that single-party systems that monopolise power are unworkable over time. Communist-type systems are inflexible and cannot adapt well to changing conditions. China has tried to avoid some of the Soviet problems by allowing private ownership of much of the economy.

The parties in Sweden's unicameral Riksdag (parliament) show a left-right ideological spectrum. Sweden uses proportional representation. Lacking a majority of Riksdag seats, the Social Democrats formed a minority coalition with the Greens and occasional support from smaller centrist parties.

Party Systems

Party systems are not the same as parties. Parties seek power; party systems are about the interactions of several parties with each other. Parties are the "trees"; party systems are the “forest”.

Party systems have an effect on the overall health of the political system of a state. System stability is affected by the number of parties in the system. System stability is affected by whether parties in the system are centre-seeking or centre-fleeing.

Party systems can also be classified based on the number of parties that exist within the system.

ONE-PARTY SYSTEMS

* Associated with totalitarian and authoritarian regimes
* Single party controls everything and is the only legal party
* When allowed, citizens repudiate one-party systems

DOMINANT-PARTY SYSTEMS

* Opposition parties contest elections, but the deck is stacked against them
* Dominant party can offer lots of incentives to supporters
* Dominant party controls television
* Opposition parties are deliberately kept weak

TWO-PARTY SYSTEMS

* Two parties each have a fair chance of winning
* Third parties exist but aren't competitive; they only serve to remind the major parties of voter discontent

MULTIPARTY SYSTEMS

* Several political parties that compete
* Can be unstable but not always

TWO-PLUS PARTY SYSTEMS

* Two major parties plus a third party that is competitive and relevant

FLUID PARTY SYSTEMS

* Party systems, usually in new and unstable democracies, that are fluid and inchoate
* Parties rise and fall quickly
* Often personalistic parties that have no overarching program or ideology

The Party System and the Electoral System

Competitive party systems are party systems that have at least two political parties in competition for power. The development of a party system is a complicated process that is heavily affected by each state's individual political history.

Some very different states have similar party systems. Japan and India are culturally different but both developed dominant-party systems. The political science question is why?

The single most important factor in determining a party system is the electoral system of the country. Single-member district systems tend to produce two-party or two-plus party systems, where only a plurality is needed to win and small parties cannot compete. This also encourages parties to avoid fragmentation.

Proportional representation systems use multimember districts and awards seats based on the proportion of the party vote and encourage parties to fragment and split as they can still win seats in parliament. Changing a country's election laws can change the party system.

The Future of Parties

Political parties are not what they used to be and are facing serious challenges. Membership in parties has been steadily declining over the years. Voters are considerably less loyal to political parties. Most parties have become mainstream, centrist, and similar.

As a consequence, other actors have assumed some of the major functions of political parities. These actors include the mass media, interest groups, and think tanks. This may not be a good thing overall.

The highly decentralised nature of U.S. political parties may foreshadow the future of other political parties around the world. U.S. political parties tend to be money-poor and heavily dependent on interest groups. The parties are highly decentralised and candidates are independent of the party and party leadership, often running against the party's leaders, depending on the district.

U.S. parties are extremely centrist and many voters feel as if they have little choice. Can anything be done to stop the decline of parties? Realistically, we can expect no change to the U.S. two-party system. There are advantages to decentralised parties; they are flexible, big-tent parties may be better able to process the demands of citizens, are less likely to fall into the hands of ideologues and may attract a broader variety of voters.

Chapter 11

Elections

Voter turnout in the United States is significantly lower than other advanced democratic states. Voter turnout is heavily influenced by a range of socioeconomic variables. Certain demographic groups are more likely to vote in certain ways than others in the United States.

The theory of electoral realignment, which seeks to explain changes in the party system, is subject to a range of criticisms. Candidates and parties can deploy a range of strategies when attempting to win elections.

But why do people vote?

Historically, American voter turnout is pretty low. Presidential elections averaged between 55% and 65% over the years. Non-presidential elections are far worse, averaging 40% or less. There were/are lots of reasons why people didn’t/don’t vote:

1. Many citizens feel their vote does not make a difference
2. Citizens feel there is a lack of quality candidates
3. No interesting, clear-cut choices due to the nature of the two-party system
4. Negative television advertising turns voters off by the end of the election cycle

Political scientists debate whether or not nonvoting is bad for democracy; one school says that low voting is bad for democracy and that nonvoting illustrates a lack of legitimacy, while the other school suggests that nonvoting means citizens are basically satisfied.

Americans vote less when compared to Europeans. The difference is in part due to automatic registration, the timing of elections, the ballots are simpler, and there are heavier limits and controls on television advertising.

In most democracies, the average voters are:

1. Middle-aged
2. Better educated
3. Urban
4. Likely to identify with a political party

Income and Education

Voter turnout is affected by both income levels and education levels. People with high income levels are much more likely to vote than those with lower income levels. People with higher education levels vote at higher rates than those with less education. The two factors are reinforcing — the higher your education level, the more likely it is that you will make more money.

A factor that explains the difference between the two demographics is efficacy. Higher education leads to a feeling that you at least have a little power and means to influence the system. Efficacy is much higher for citizens who are professionals and much lower for those in the working class. Education also has the effect of broadening interests and increasing the perception of having a stake in the system.

There is a puzzle of voting behaviour with respect to education. As education levels have increased, voter turnout has declined, which may mean that education as a predictive factor of voting behaviour means less than it used to. Some of this can be attributed to the effects of post-materialism in advanced societies.

Race is also a factor that affects voter turnout. Until recently, African Americans had a much lower turnout rate than other groups in society. The 1965 Voting Rights Act removed many of the barriers to voting that had kept turnout levels low.

Age is a factor that influences voter turnout, with young people voting at consistently lower rates than older citizens. Young people under the age of 25 are less likely to vote, and many (about ½) are not registered to vote. The 26th Amendment lowered the voting age to 18 in the United States, but young people still don't vote. Young people are less economically involved and therefore have lower voter turnout rates. This changes as they age, they pay taxes, and their stake increases.

Gender is a factor that influences voting. Traditionally, women have voted at lower rates than men, but this has changed in recent years, with women's turnout rates surpassing men’s. This is correlated with education rates increasing among women.

Urban areas have higher voting turnout rates than rural areas. This is a reflection in part of the higher turnout rates among people with higher levels of education, as urban areas have higher concentrations of people with higher levels of education. Polling stations are also nearer in urban areas than in rural, which makes voting much easier for many citizens.

Regional differences do matter in voter turnout as well. The southern U.S. used to have lower voter turnout rates than many other parts of the United States, but this has changed in recent years. Southern France has lower voter turnout rates than Northern France.

Who Votes How?

Voting is affected by multiple factors. Some of those factors are long-term in nature and some are short-term. Long-term factors affect how a person votes over the course of his/her lifetime, while short-term factors affect how a person votes in a given election.

PARTISAN IDENTIFICATION

The attachments that citizens feel toward a party for a long time, will influence how a citizen votes in elections. Citizens with strong party identification will habitually vote for one party. Citizens with weak party identification will be much easier to swing and may cross party lines.

A person's party identification is heavily influenced by their parents, and people will usually adopt the party ID held by their parents. Party identification is important in helping to ensure electoral stability. If party ID is stable, then politicians are able to anticipate what voters want and will work to deliver it. Weak party identification leads to volatility in voter preferences.

Party identification is important in helping to ensure electoral stability. Party ID used to be very important in European elections but seems to be weakening as a predictor of voting behaviour. This can be attributed in part to the decline in class voting in Europe, in addition to the effects of post-materialism.

Party identification is important in helping to ensure electoral stability. Groups that tend to identify with certain parties are called voting blocs, and politicians design their campaigns to try to win the blocs most likely to vote for them. No bloc is entirely solid, though.

CLASS VOTING

Social class is a determinant of voting behaviour, and people will support political parties based on how they perceive their social class. Class voting lower in the United States than in Europe, but still relevant. Two things that muddy class voting are working-class people who vote for conservative parties due to self-identification as middle-class, family traditions, or individual convictions, and middle- and upper-class citizens who vote for parties on the left due to a working-class family background or the effects of higher education. As a result, class voting is not as accurate of a predictor of voting behaviour as we we would like, although it is still extremely relevant.

REGIONAL VOTING

Some regions identify strongly with certain parties. This is especially true in states that have a core/periphery struggle. The Celtic fringe votes for the British Labour Party, while the southern U.S. has been solidly Republican since the 1980s, the Northeast votes solidly Democratic. Regional voting can change over time. The North/South voting patterns in the United States are now the reverse of the period following the Civil War.

RACE AND ETHNICITY

People of colour have become a growing electoral force in U.S. politics; this is especially true with the increased growth of the Hispanic population in the United States, the voting patterns of which seem to support the Democratic Party.

Racial minorities compose 28% of the electorate, in which people of colour are loyal to the Democratic Party, while working-class whites vote Republican. American political parties seem to be polarising along racial lines, which is not good for American democracy. How the mainstream parties, especially Republicans, will bridge this gap as yet is unclear.

RELIGIOUS BLOCS

This is the single strongest predictor in U.S. voting, with those who identify as being religious much more likely to be conservative and vote for Republicans. Other states have religious/secular divide as well, they are just not as pronounced as the United States’.

AGE GROUPS

Young people "catch the tide" of their youth and stay with it. Young people who socialised to politics during the Great Depression vote Democratic for most of their life. Reagan enthusiasm among young voters in the 1980’s gave them a permanent identification with the Republican Party. In the 2012 elections, young voters identified with Obama and it is likely that many of them will continue that identification through their lives.

GENDER GAP

The growing gap between the voting behaviour of men and women is becoming increasingly important in politics in the United States. Women used to be more traditional and conservative than men, but now are more liberal by several percentage points and consistently vote for Democratic candidates, something that helped the candidacy of Obama.

MARRIAGE GAP

Unmarried people are much more likely to vote for Democrats than are married people, who tend to be more conservative and vote for Republicans. The problem for Republicans is that fewer people are getting married, which is a product in part of post-materialism.

SEXUAL IDENTITY GAP

2012 was the first time exit polls asked about sexual orientation, so the data we have concerning this trend are relatively limited but still compelling. 5% identified as gay and three-quarters of those supported Obama, which seems to suggest that gays and lesbians have a strong identification with the Democratic Party, although as rights-based issues such as same-sex marriage get resolved and other issues become salient this may change.

URBAN VOTING

Big cities vote strongly liberal or left. This is due in part to both a high concentration of working-class voters as well as greater levels of education. Small towns and rural areas tend to vote conservative. The text argues that this is because these voters embrace conservative political values.

Electoral Realignment

Electoral realignment is a theory of critical or realigning elections that seeks to explain how party identification can change. In general, people retain party identification for years. However, according to realignment theory, certain watershed elections lead to voters dissolving existing, long-term partisan identifications in favour of new ones. Critical elections set the stage for the emergence of new issues, debates, and topics. This can lead to one party having dominance but not absolute control of government and the direction of public policy.

Republicans argued that sweeps of 1980 and 1984 were signs of a new realignment that would end the dominance of the Democratic Party at the national level. Party registration rose for Republicans and declined for Democrats; in addition, young people registered and voted Republican.

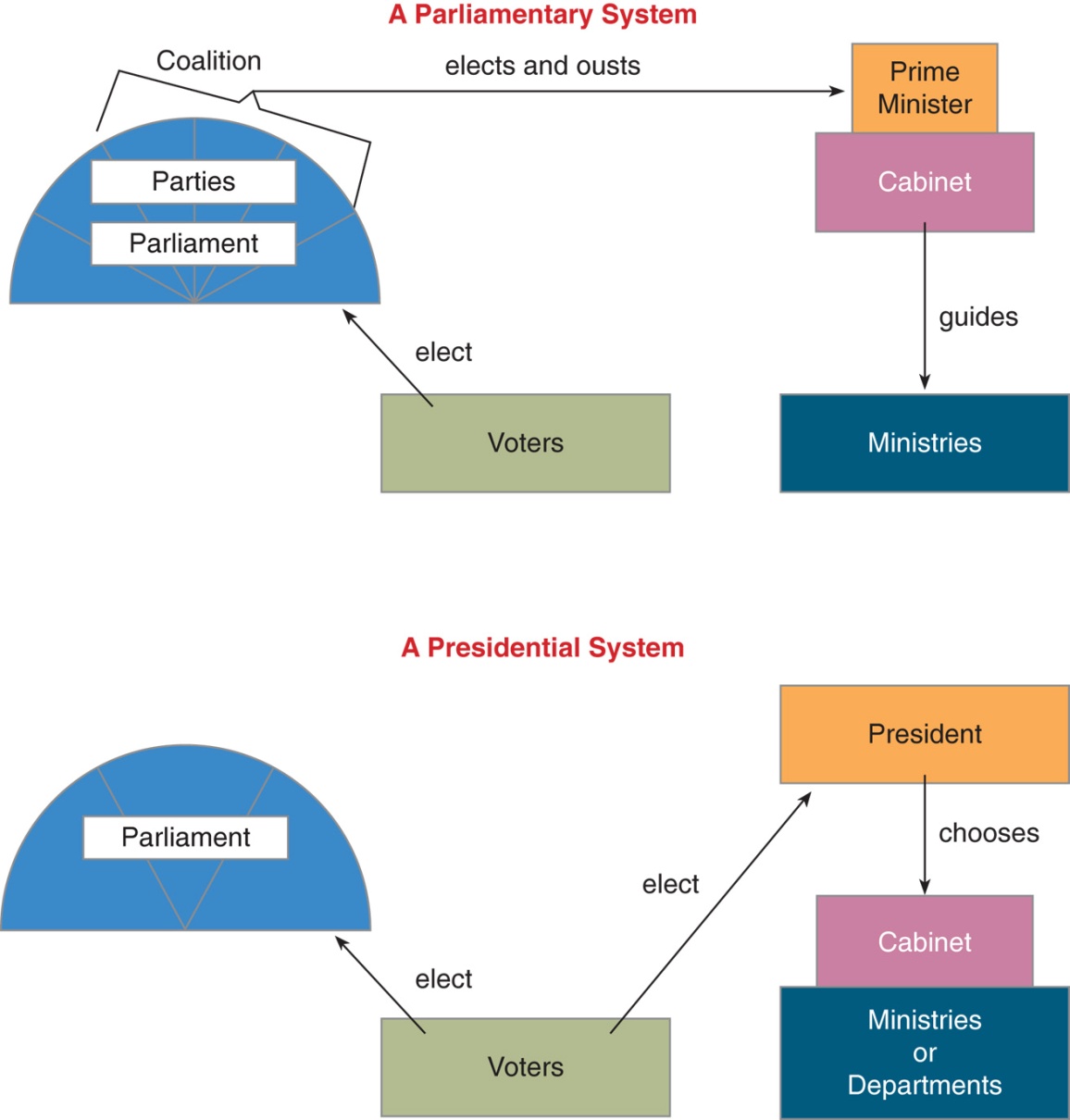
Democrats argued that 2008 and 2012 were realignments in their favour. his then speaks to one of the major difficulties of realignment theory. If there has been a realignment, it may be difficult to spot.

The problems with the realignment theory are that:

1. Some political scientists want to throw the whole theory out
2. Applies only to presidential elections
3. Americans sometimes choose to vote for divided government
4. Clinton and Obama victories based on the economy, which undermines realignment theory

What Wins Elections?

In modern elections, the rational choice of voters is heavily manipulated by candidate personality and the mass media. This means that modern parties showcase their leaders' personalities and that ideology is rarely mentioned or advertised.

It is the image of leaders that matters and candidates are presented as charismatic, calm, and caring (Reagan and Obama are great examples). Candidates who are optimistic about the country and its prospects tend to win.

The campaigns are also media intensive, with photo opportunities and a heavy emphasis on managing the candidate by professionals as the worldwide trend. This increase is due to the influence of mass media; television is the campaign. The television spot, an American invention, now dominates campaigns worldwide with:

1. The Jingle Clip (attention-grabbing)
2. The Ideological Clip (depicts ideas in images)
3. The Allegorical Quip (candidates are depicted as epic heroes)

Increasingly, elections are won by candidates with the best ads, which also means the candidates with the most money.

RETROSPECTIVE VOTING

Retrospective voting occurs when citizens vote based on their overall evaluation of the incumbent's performance. This looks at the last four years in retrospect and chooses a reward or punishment model and rewards the incumbent's party if things (especially the economy) are going well; punishes, however, the incumbent's party if things are going badly. An example is the financial meltdown of 2008 (people believed the Republicans mishandles the economy).

Candidate Strategies and Voter Groups

Candidates want to avoid alienating their home base and want to win swing/independent voters. This is a difficult task as candidates are pushed and pulled by competing forces. In the end, this pressure makes candidates and campaigns incredibly centrist. Candidates want to boost turnout among their supporters.

This is why presidential candidates focus on close, battleground states in the Electoral College. States that are lopsided for one party over the other get little time and money. Strategy reached high point in 2012 when presidential candidates campaigned in only ten swing states.

Candidates focus on winning key voting blocs to help sweep them to office. Blocs are not what they used to be and no bloc is truly monolithic. Other factors, such ideology and party ID, are tricky as well when it comes to mobilising blocs of voters. As a result, candidates try to align themselves with clusters of values instead.

Chapter 12

Legislatures

Parliaments have their origins in the early struggles to limit the power of absolutist monarchs. Presidential systems and parliamentary systems differ in whether power is separated or fused. Bicameral legislatures serve the function of dispersing power and allowing for different units to be represented in the legislative branch.

Legislatures do lots of things, but initiating legislation is no longer their primary function. Legislatures in general have been eclipsed by executives and the executive branch of government.

Political institutions become more differentiated and complex as they become more modern. Feudalism is where balance of power between the various institutions of government begins in the evolution of parliaments. Countries with limited government usually have experience with feudalism. This balancing act is seen in the oath of loyalty in Aragon to a new king.

Political institutions become more differentiated and complex as they become more modern. Absolutist monarchs begin to see their powers limited by fledgling parliaments in part because of their need for tax revenues. In exchange for power of the purse, monarchs gave nobles limited influence on royal policy. This serves as the basis for British, Swedish, and French parliaments. The French parliament soon forgotten as French monarchs turned to absolutism and the nobles in parliament failed to resist the solidification of governing power in the hands of the monarch.

By contrast, British and Swedish parliaments slowly expanded their powers and resisted monarchical attempts at absolutism. The English Civil War was a bloody struggle between parliament and the king, with the parliamentarians gaining the upper hand, beheading Charles I in 1649.

Various political philosophers have written on the importance of parliaments:

1. Locke

Parliament most basic and important institution

1. Montesquieu

The only way to ensure liberty is to divide government into two branches

PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEMS

Presidential systems show most clearly the idea of separation of powers between legislative and executive branches. Contrary to what most Americans believe, presidential systems are a minority of the world's systems. The President combines the roles of head of state and head of government, which in effect makes them the symbolic leader of the country in addition to the chief architect of the structure of public policy. The Presidents are elected (more or less) directly by the people; the United States still retains the slightly archaic indirect method of selection through the Electoral College. Presidents in general have a lot of power, and more importantly, they are not responsible to the legislature for their power or their term of office and as a result they are extremely difficult to remove from office. Even impeachment does not guarantee results, as evidenced by efforts to impeach Bill Clinton.

PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEMS

In parliamentary systems, the head of state is weak, symbolic, and distinct from the head of government. Citizens vote only for the legislature, not for the chief of government, who is a member of parliament and is the head of the party that holds a majority. As a consequence, the government is directly responsible to the majority in the legislature and the government can fall if the majority does not support its policies.

Separation and Fusion of Powers

The American system of separation of powers sets branches of government against each other and is an invitation to struggle. This has been useful in preventing tyranny as it has prevented any single branch of government from becoming too powerful. It also makes government slow and cumbersome.

Some scholars think that executive-legislative deadlock is common in presidential systems, as competing parties will control different branches of government at different times with no direct responsibility to each other.

European systems that developed after the United States are more modern and are based on the principle of fusion of powers. In this type of system it is hard to distinguish the legislative branch from the executive branch, as the executive branch comes from the legislature.

European systems that developed after the United States are more modern and are based on the principle of fusion of powers. Prime ministers are elected to parliament, like everyone else, before they can become the chief of government. Once their party is in the majority, they can become the chief of government. They form the cabinet that constitutes the government and is made up of other members of parliament. The cabinet is essentially a committee of parliament that oversees the formulation and implementation of government policy.

Question Hour in the British parliament is a process by which the opposition challenges the government and the majority with an eye toward winning the next election. This illustrates the link between the executive and the legislative branches.

THE ADVANTAGES OF A PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM

There are some advantages to the fusion of powers in a parliamentary system:

1. Cannot suffer from deadlock; what the majority wants the majority gets, because the executive and legislative branches are controlled by the same party
2. If there is a disagreement, a no-confidence vote can occur, which means no long, drawn-out political drama, which makes removing executives easier. No-confidence votes are rare though in most parliamentary systems nowadays

These systems, however, also have their disadvantages:

1. Votes in parliament can be closely predicted due to high levels of party discipline
2. Can be prone to coalition governments, which can be less stable in maintaining the coherence of the government (when no party has a majority, an alternative is to form a minority government that depends on the passive support of other political parties; leadership positions in coalition governments are split, and even if the government falls, it is not as bad as it sounds, as cabinets can be put back together through negotiations with other political parties or new elections can be held)
3. Parliamentary systems can be prone to immobilism because coalitions can get stuck over the same issues, which can lead to an inability to decide major issues

Bicameral or Unicameral?

Two-thirds of legislatures in the world have bicameral systems (two houses). In general, lower houses are much more powerful. Only in the United States are the two houses of the legislature co-equal, and some would argue that the U.S. Senate is actually more powerful than the House of Representatives.

A small number of legislatures are unicameral (one house). Some states, in an effort to deal with multi-ethnic and multi-racial populations, have experimented with multi-chamber legislatures (South Africa has three houses, while Yugoslavia has five).

The larger political development question is why would a state choose a bicameral system, which effectively divides governing power, over a unicameral system? The main reason for bicameralism comes from the institutional choice of federalism. In a federal system, the upper house represents component parts such as states or provinces while the lower house represents districts based on population.

Some states have upper houses that do not do very much, so the overall utility of upper houses unclear. A good example is the British House of Lords, which is a holdover from the early days of aristocratic privilege in the UK. Following the 1999 reforms, the Lords has been mostly a debating society with very little real governing power. Some countries, such as New Zealand, Sweden, and Denmark, decided that their upper houses served no purpose and abolished them.

But what do Legislatures actually do?

Most important bills originate in the government or administration. Most of the power of legislatures lies in the committee system, which can make or break legislative proposals. Committees are critical to the ability of legislatures to function. Public hearings are a mechanism for getting citizen and interest-group input on legislation. The United States has the most well-defined committee system, in part because of separation of powers.

Committees screen bills to help determine which ones are worthy of consideration. Interestingly, in parliamentary systems, a "government bill" is automatically important and thus evades the committee screening process.

In the 1970’s, U.S. reforms weakened the powers of the committee chairs, which had traditionally been appointed on the basis of seniority and ruled committees like small kingdoms, making the legislative process more difficult. Standing committees, which are relatively permanent, in the United States are based on partisan balance.

A Closer Look at Legislatures

Legislatures pass laws but rarely originate laws anymore, as those functions have shifted. Most of the legislative initiative rests with executive departments and agencies. This makes legislatures reactive institutions as they respond to the initiatives of others, as opposed to proactive institutions that initiate proposals. For example, in the United States the legislative power of the purse is a reaction to the budget proposed by the president, not by Congress.

As a result, lawmaking is not the most important thing that legislatures do. Legislators spend a great deal of time on constituency casework, in which they intervene on behalf of a constituent to help solve problems. The standard complaint is “where’s my check?”; constituency work is an important job for legislators as it is a mechanism to help legislators get reelected.

Supervision and criticism of government is another function. The British Question Hour is an example of this function, where the opposition challenges and questions the government on policy. U.S. administrations regularly change policy based on criticisms by Congress.

Education is another key sector. The televised Fulbright committee hearings on Vietnam provide a good example of how legislatures can work to keep citizens in the loop on matters of governance (should citizens choose to pay attention). All countries now carry extensive press reports on legislative activities and often televise legislative proceedings.

Let’s not forget representation. A large part of representation is psychological, which means that while legislatures may not not always represent the needs and concerns of citizens, at a minimum people need to feel like the legislature represents them.

THE DECLINE OF LEGISLATURES

While Locke believed that legislatures would be the most important party of government, legislatures no longer work the way that Locke envisioned, and this trend of the decline in the importance of legislatures has continued and grown. Some political scientists argue that expectations for legislatures were too high to begin with and the legislatures are prone to a range of problems that have contributed to this decline.

Parliamentary systems are very efficient in passing legislation but their very institutional nature makes them predictable and boring institutions. This efficiency has led to legislative atrophy.

By contrast, the U.S. system has no such problem with efficiency due to the near feudal nature of Congress and its ongoing struggles with the executive branch. Congress is more important and lively than most other legislatures, which is a good thing, but the U.S. system of separation of powers is also contributing to the decline of Congress because of conflict between the two houses in the legislative branch and partisan conflict within the houses themselves.

The 60-vote minimum to end a filibuster in the U.S. Senate is a clear structural disadvantage of the U.S. system. This turns the U.S. system into a vetocracy and can paralyse government in the United States.

Overspending

Capacity for overspending is inherent within legislatures. Everyone is generally in favour of a balanced budget, but all legislators want to spend money on their pet interests that are linked to reelection. What is good for the individual may not be good for the aggregate.

Congress has tried to impose limits on spending but they have been less than successful. Line-item veto transferred power to the presidency but was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. Imposed spending caps were routinely ignored although the recent sequester should prove an interesting test of Congressional resolve.

INCOMPREHENSIBLE LEGISLATION

The average U.S. law passed today is twenty pages (the 2010 Affordable Care Act was 2,400 pages minimum). Few Congresspersons read the bills for lack of time. Legislation cannot be short and simple because modern society is complex, but practically nobody can understand it.

LACK OF EXPERTISE

Because most legislators are not technical experts in matters of policy there is a lack of expertise in most legislative branches. This is not necessarily a bad thing as there is value in a citizen legislature.

However, a lack of expertise leads to a heavy reliance on experts from the executive departments, which diminishes the independence of the legislative branch. In fact, most legislatures have little independent research support. Only U.S. Congress, due to separation of powers, can generate its own data.

PSYCHOLOGICAL DISADVANTAGES

Citizens are more impressed with presidents and prime ministers than legislatures. Parliaments are seen as groups of people who simply squabble with each other. This can lead to presidential "worship" and a belief that president/executives are the most important political actors and are the engines of government.

The Absentee Problem and Decline of Parliaments

Most of the time, members of legislature are not present in the chamber; members are only really needed to vote, and often not even then. British party whips can get high turnouts for important issues and the Swedish use an electronic voting summons. U.S. legislators are required to be present to vote but can still be absent if their vote is paired with that of another absent legislator.

So what explains absenteeism?

Some of it is workload, and legislators are busy doing other things such as constituency work, fundraising, committee service, and campaigning. It is true that some legislators might just be lazy. There is a bigger issue and that is legislators themselves do not regard legislating as their chief function and have allowed much of their legislative authority to be usurped by other political actors.

Another contributing factor to the decline of parliaments is the lack of turnover. Many members become career, lifetime politicians who are reelected as often as they like, which means little new blood or fresh ideas. Is this a problem of democracy? Careerism in a legislative branch reduces the ability to innovate and respond to new trends in public opinion as members become increasingly out of touch. Parliamentary systems do allow for small parties to compete, however, which reduces some of the effects of careerism.

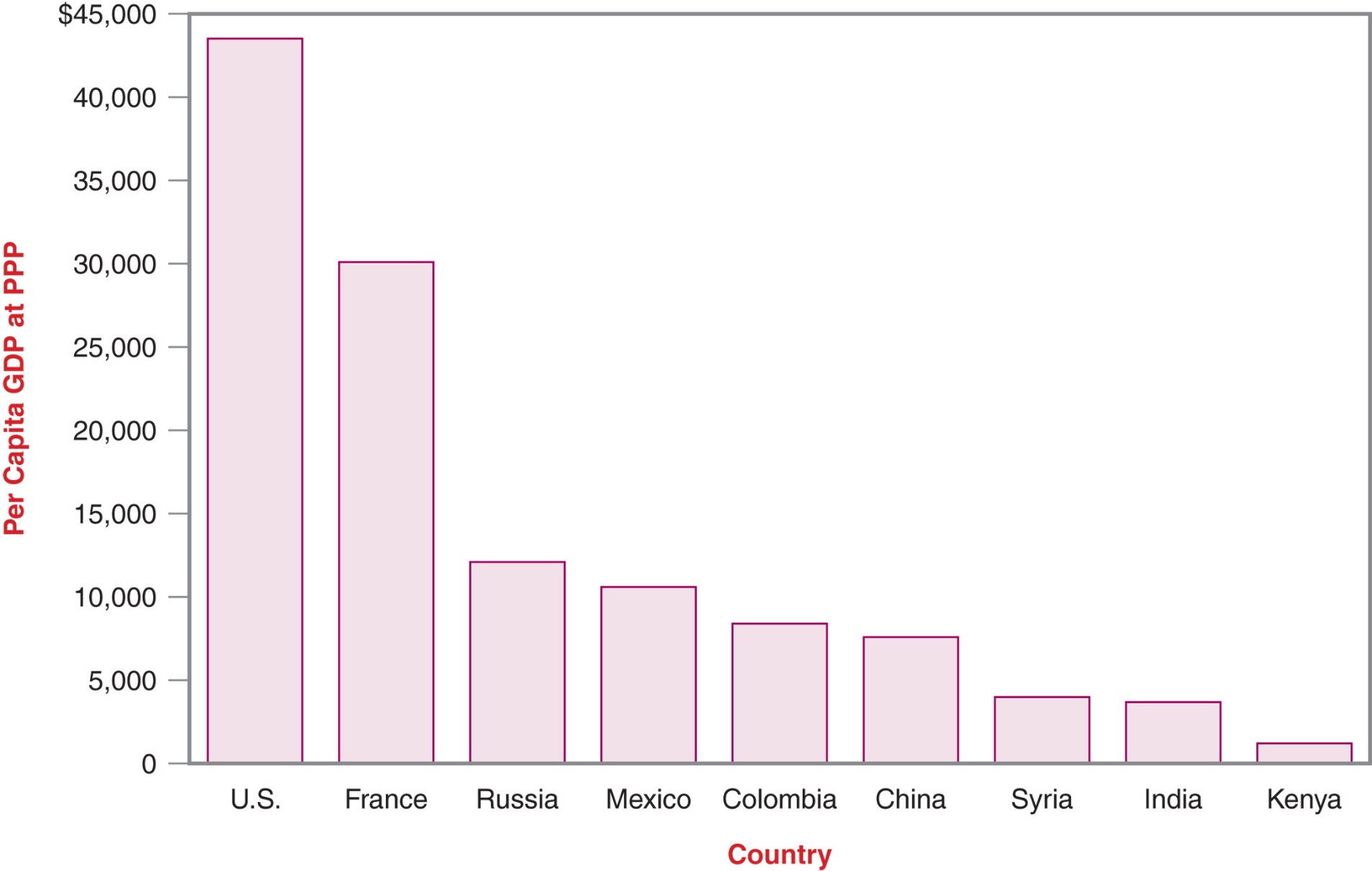
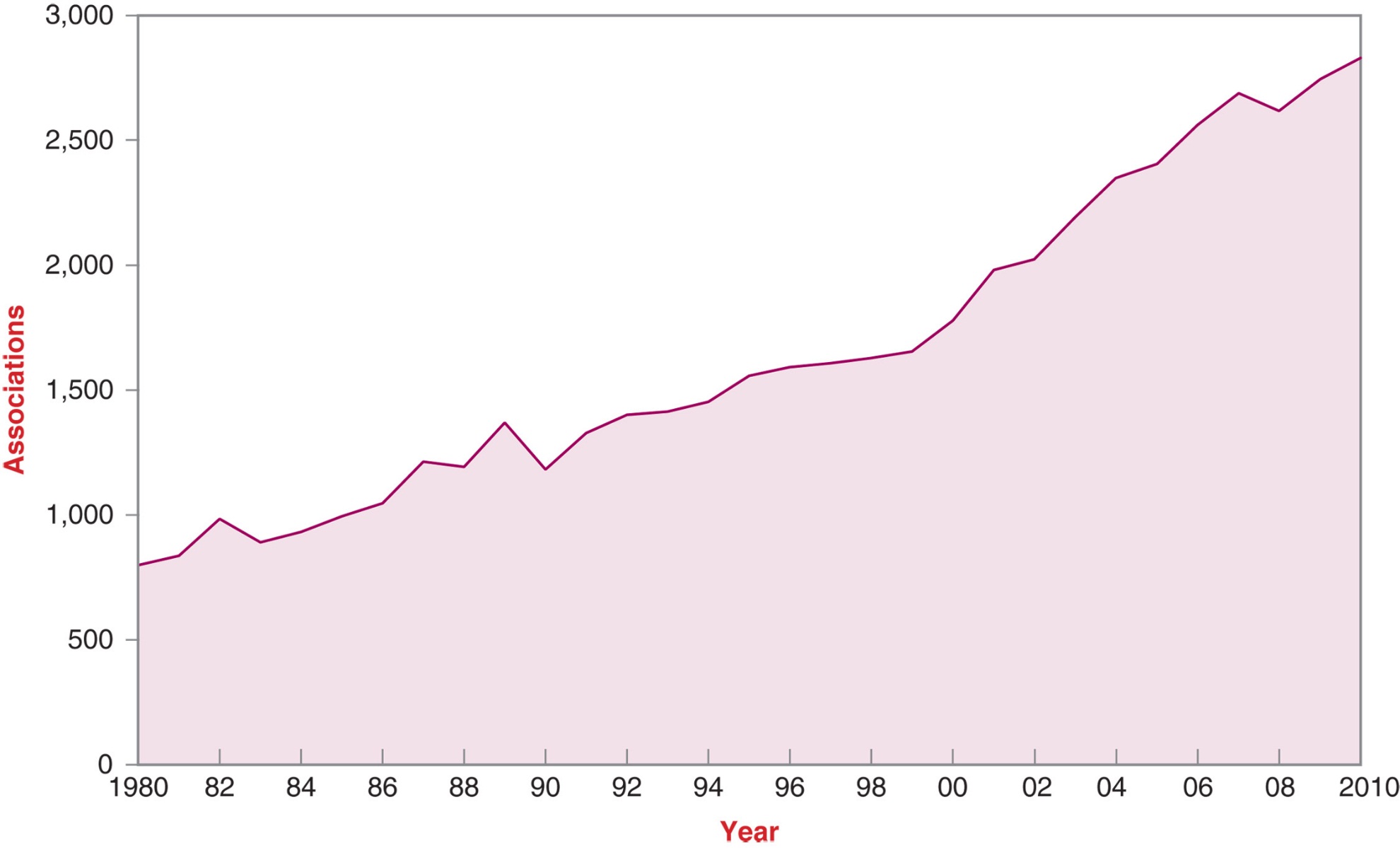
THE DILEMMA OF PARLIAMENTS

In the end, parliaments suffer from a dilemma that is well-illustrated by the recent post-Soviet experience in Russia. Following the transition, there was a deadlock between President Boris Yeltsin and the Duma, and this highlighted the dilemma of parliaments. To get things done, power must be concentrated; to keep things democratic, power must be dispersed.

In the end, parliaments suffer from a dilemma that is well illustrated by the recent post-Soviet experience in Russia. Russia needed reforms, but there was deadlock as Yeltsin wanted to go one way and the the Duma preferred a different course of action. Putin "solved" the problem by forming his own party, which now controls 2/3 of the Duma seats. Parliament is responsive to the president and there is no longer deadlock, but Russia is also no longer a democracy.

In the end, legislatures have atrophied and power has shifted to the executive branch.

Chapter 13

Executives and Bureaucracies

Presidents and prime ministers differ in many ways, including electoral responsibility and terms of office. There is a great deal of concern that the U.S. presidency has become too powerful at the expense of other branches of government. American cabinet secretaries differ in significant ways from their parliamentary counterparts.

Many people argue that bureaucratisation is inevitable due to the nature of organisations. Bureaucracies vary considerably between states, and due to their nature, they can become pathological in terms of how they function and make decisions.

When thinking about executives, it is important to note the difference between a head of state and a chief of government. The head of state is theoretically the top leader, but the duties are largely symbolic and they serve more to represent the nation as a symbol of unity. The chief of government is the real working executive and has meaningful political power within the system. In practice they guide government, run election campaigns, and head political parties. The United States combines the two offices in the institution of the presidency.

In parliamentary systems the chief executive is indirectly elected by the national legislature from its own ranks. Prime ministers are responsible to parliament and are secure in their seats if they represent a majority party. This means that there are no institutional limits beyond the support of the majority required for them to stay in office. They can be ousted by a vote of no-confidence or by a loss of the majority in the general election. This means the prime minister's strength is dependent on the stability of his or her majority in parliament.

Presidential systems bypass this by having a strong president who is not responsible to parliament and is elected separately for fixed terms. Presidential systems can suffer from the deadlock of democracy, which parallels parliamentary immobilism.

The British system is the "classic" of parliamentary systems. Monarch invites leader of majority party to form a government and become the prime minister. The prime minister appoints cabinet (the government) and sub-cabinet officials, all of whom are members of parliament and all represent important groups within the majority.

In theory the PM is the first among equals and guides cabinet to consensus on issues of policy. However, the PM is not just an equal partner. He or she has real power; for example, he/she can "shake up" cabinet by dismissing ministers. In practice, the British cabinet now frequently just concurs with decisions made earlier by the PM and a few key ministers.

Other Nations

GERMANY

The German parliamentary system is built around the idea of constructive no-confidence. The German chancellor is as strong as British PM in terms of setting policy and running cabinet.

One major difference between the two is the mechanism for removal. The German chancellor can only be ousted by a constructive vote of no-confidence, which is an attempt to avoid the parliamentary instability of the Weimar Republic. Parliament must have a cabinet ready to replace the ousted chancellor and it is much harder to replace than just oust, which means that chancellors are much more likely to remain in power. Executives in a constructive no-confidence vote system are stronger than those without.

FRANCE

France's system is “semi-presidential” and combines a working prime minister with a chancellor. Russia and China have similar systems. If both the president and the prime minister are from the same party there is no problem, as the president appoints a PM from his or her party and the parliament approves.

1986 and 1993 saw a socialist president with a conservative majority in parliament, which meant there was a chance that the majority would not approve the president's selection. This led to cohabitation. Gaullist (conservative) premiers appointed to handle domestic affairs and the president (socialist) handled foreign affairs.

This happened again in 1997 with a conservative president and a socialist premier. Cohabitation allows France to bypass legislative-executive deadlock that is common in presidential systems.

THE “PRESIDENTIALISATION” OF PRIME MINISTERS

Political scientists have noted the trend of the presidentialisation of prime ministers where prime ministers with stable majorities start to behave like presidents. This tendency is strong in Britain and Germany. In these situations, the personality of the PM is beginning to matter more than policy, party, or ideology.

Executives Terms

The terms of executives vary between presidential and parliamentary systems.

PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEMS

1. Presidential terms are fixed and in some cases limited in total numbers of terms that can be served
2. This makes presidents generally hard to remove from office until their term is expired
3. Can be impeached although the process is difficult and the outcome is not guaranteed

PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEMS

1. Prime ministers have no limit on their tenure in office as long as their party continues to win a majority in parliament
2. For example, Thatcher was in office 11 years; Kohl was in office 16 years

Prime ministers have an advantage in that they can dissolve parliament when it is most convenient in electoral terms for their party and hold new elections, which helps ensure that they can retain their majority in parliament. However, prime ministers can be ousted quickly if they lose the support of the majority.

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

In general, there are two different styles of executive leadership:

1. Hands-on

Jimmy Carter tried to supervise and manage nearly all aspects of his administration. This was the wrong approach, as executives scatter and exhaust themselves.

1. Hands-off

Ronald Reagan supervised little and delegated authority. He paid little attention to critical matters, letting important issues slide.

With respect to executive leadership, is there a middle ground?

President Franklin Roosevelt was a prime example of what is called “deliberate chaos”. For Roosevelt, this meant setting up multiple agencies and letting them clash to ensure that only really important matters hit his desk.

The Danger of Expecting too Much

Citizens expect chief executives to solve all the problems in the state but the reality is that executives cannot (and often do not) solve all the problems, which leads to disappointment among citizens. Successful executives are ones who can project moods of calm, progress, and optimism and serve as a guiding figure for the public.

Cabinets

Cabinets are the heads of the various executive agencies of the bureaucracy. In the United States, cabinet heads are called secretaries; in Europe they are generally referred to as ministers. The cabinet helps develop government policy on a range of issues.

The size of cabinets vary from state to state and there is no "right" size for a cabinet. The U.S. cabinet has historically been small and slow to change due to the American commitment to limited government. Economic shocks have led to a gradual expansion of the American cabinet.

There is a great deal of difference between ministers in parliamentary systems and secretaries in the American system with regard to cabinets:

1. Parliamentary system

Cabinet ministers come from parliament and continue to serve in parliament while they are in cabinets.

1. Presidential system

Department secretaries are usually not working politicians but lawyers, leaders in business, and academics.

Given these differences, is one better than the other?

Parliamentary cabinet members have a great deal of experience and can be criticised by the opposition in parliament. Presidential cabinet members bring a fresh perspective but can be naïve and run into difficulties with Congress. In the United States, cabinets are becoming less important and the cabinet meets infrequently. As a consequence most cabinet secretaries are "vice presidents in charge of spending”.

Bureaucracies

The term bureaucracy has negative connotations for most people. Max Weber, the German sociologist, studied bureaucracy, disliked it, but saw no way to avoid it as it was necessary to the functioning of modern organisations. A bureaucracy is any large organisation of appointed officials who implement laws and policies.

Bureaucracies have specific characteristics that Weber identified. These are ideal types:

1. Operate under rules and procedures
2. Organised into a hierarchy
3. Provide rationality, uniformity, predictability, and supervision to government

Another definition of bureaucracy is “permanent government”. Other officials come and go but bureaucrats spend their careers with government and have a lot of expertise. Bureaucracies are inherently conservative and hard to change.

THE UNITED STATES

Most civil servants work at the state and local levels of government. 15 percent of the total bureaucracy is at the federal level. At the federal level there are 15 cabinet departments that comprise 85-90 percent of the federal bureaucracy.

All federal agencies share a common model: Funded by Congress, headed by a secretary who is appointed by the president with the consent of the Senate. This creates a host of political loyalties among the cabinet secretaries. Because secretaries and undersecretaries are political appointees, they are technically not bureaucrats using Weber's definition.

Bureaucrats in the United States are powerful and may be more important in innovating laws than the public or Congress. A good example of this is cigarette package warning labels, which was a policy initiative that came from the bureaucracy.

Another source of bureaucratic power is that in the United States, departments carry out unclear laws and interpret the meaning and intent of those laws during the implementation process. Bureaucrats have a lot of knowledge, and that knowledge is power. Bureaucracies also develop constituencies, which make them very hard to eliminate as illustrated by Reagan's failed attempt to abolish the Department of Energy.

U.S. bureaucracy is small compared to other states, especially those in Latin America and Europe that have strong statist traditions.

Communist Countries, France, Germany, Britain and Japan

COMMUNIST COUNTRIES

The Soviet Union was one of the world's most bureaucratic states and it was the cause of its undoing. In this the Soviet state was ironic because Marxist theory maintained there was no need for Western-style bureaucracy, but it was quickly implemented by Lenin and increased by Stalin. Five-year economic plans for directing the economy were a clear effort at using the bureaucracy to manage and direct the entire Soviet economy.

The top Soviet bureaucrats were called the nomenklatura, who were a privileged elite, all of whom were members of the Communist Party.

This privileging mechanism made the Soviet bureaucracy very conservative by nature, as the best and brightest were recruited into the bureaucracy and then resisted changes that would affect their positions.

In China all officials are also party members. In theory this is supposed to fight corruption, but administration in China is dangerously decentralised, which makes corruption not only easier but more likely. Bureaucratic corruption is China's Achilles heel and could easily destabilise the state.

FRANCE

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, France set the pattern for the rest of Europe with its heavily bureaucratised state. Napoleon made the bureaucracy even more rational and effective, drawing on the model set forward by Richelieu. French bureaucrats are trained at the "Great Schools" that emphasise specialised training.

The power of French bureaucracy was increased due to the instability of the Third and Fourth Republics. As a result France is heavily bureaucratised and extremely centralised.

GERMANY

The German bureaucracy bears the stamp of the Prussian state nobility called Junkers, who controlled almost all civil service positions in Prussia and brought Prussian values, including loyalty to the state, to German administration, following unification under Bismarck.

This was a weakness during the Weimar Republic because bureaucrats had a contempt for democracy, which helped fuel a glorification of the state and militarisation.

Following the war, as Germany rebuilt democracy, there has been a strong commitment by German civil servants to democracy and democratic values. This is illustrated in part by the Interior Ministry and its programs to fight political extremism.

A final distinctive feature of German bureaucrats is that they tend to have the mentality of Roman law, neatly organised and fixed into codes.

BRITAIN

The United Kingdom has strong traditions of local self-government and dispersion of power, which has encouraged legislative control of administrative authority. Central government did not begin to run things until the twentieth century. In 1870, a merit-based civil service using competitive exams was established to fight corruption.

British ministers are accountable to parliament but real power is in the hands of the career "permanent secretary" and other career bureaucrats. The British bureaucracy more tightly controlled than U.S. bureaucracy. British bureaucrats pride themselves on being apolitical and on acting solely in the nation's best interest.

JAPAN

Japan provides an extreme example of “rule by bureaucrats”, a situation in which the bureaucrats are more powerful than, and often have a great deal of contempt for, elected officials.

The Japanese bureaucracy was based on the French model, so the bureaucracy was always powerful, and it became more powerful after World War II.

The key ministries are finance, industry, agriculture, construction, and trade, and they set much of the policy for the Japanese state. In Japan, the ministries are self-contained, which means they do not cooperate with each other and generally do not work for the good of the whole.

The long-term economic stagnation in Japan has contributed to a new generation of Japanese politicians trying to reform bureaucracy, but there has been little success.

The Trouble with Bureaucracy

As noted earlier, bureaucracy seems to be universally vilified and there are many different sources for this dislike of bureaucracy. For example, in France and Italy hatred of bureaucrats is part of political culture. In the U.S., the bureaucracy is frequently the target of hostile political rhetoric and labeled as inefficient and wasteful

The problem is simply that all the metrics that we would usually employ to evaluate a private program or business, such as efficiency, productivity, and profitability, are hard to apply in government programs.

Bureaucracy can exhibit particular pathologies that also contribute to the continual dislike of bureaucrats and bureaucratic organisations. For example, bureaucracies can develop signs of what is now called Eichmannism and “Parkinson's Law”. Eichmannism is the defence of "Just doing my job”, while Parkinson's Law is an expression that speaks to the inefficiencies with the pithy expression, "Work fills to expand the time allotted to it”.

Another source of frustration with bureaucracy is the apparent connection between corruption and bureaucracy. The more regulations that are in place, the more bureaucrats who are needed to implement them, which increases the opportunities for corruption.

Early theorists assumed the bureaucracy would never make public policy and believed that bureaucrats would be apolitical implementers of laws passed by legislatures. In practice the implementation of laws cannot be apolitical, which gives bureaucrats a lot of power even though they are not elected and are unaccountable to the public. Most nations now have bureaucrats who make public policy and are not publicly accountable.

Chapter 14

Judiciaries

There are many types of law:

CRIMINAL LAW

Modern criminal law is largely statutory and covers a specific category of wrongs that are considered social evils and threats to the community. Consequently, the state, rather than the victim, is the prosecutor, or **plaintiff**. Offences are usually divided into three categories. Petty offences, such as traffic violations, are normally punished by a fine. Serious but not major offences such as gambling and prostitution are misdemeanours, punishable by larger fines or short jail sentences. Major crimes, felonies, such as rape, murder, robbery, and extortion, are punished by imprisonment.

CIVIL LAW

Many statutes govern civil rather than criminal matters. In most English-speaking countries, common lawsupplements statutory law in civil cases. Marriage and divorce, inheritance, contracts, and bankruptcy are civil concerns. **Civil law** provides redress for private plaintiffs who can show they have been injured. The decisions are in dollars, not in jail time. Private individuals, not the state, conduct most civil litigation.

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

Written constitutions are usually general documents. Subsequent legislation and court interpretation must fill in the details. **Constitutional law** (indeed, law itself) is not static but a living, growing institution. The Constitution had not changed, but society’s conception of individual rights did.

ADMINISTRATIVE LAW

A relatively recent development, administrative law covers regulatory orders by government agencies. It develops when agencies interpret statutes, as they must. The federal government now codifies administrative regulations, and they fill many volumes.

INTERNATIONAL LAW

International law (IL) consists of treaties and established customs recognised by most nations. It is different because it cannot be enforced in the same way as national law: It has some judges and courts, but compliance is largely voluntary. IL is generally observed because it is in the interests of most countries not to break it. IL’s key mechanisms are **reciprocity** and **consistency**. Countries like being treated nicely, so they must extend the courtesy to others. They also do not like being accused of applying different standards to various countries, so they try to keep their dealings consistent. Some IL is enforced by national courts.

The Courts, the Bench, and the Bar

As legal systems developed, so did judicial systems, for they handle day-to-day administration of the law. Judicial systems are always hierarchical with different courts having specific jurisdictions.

U.S. COURT SYSTEM

The U.S. court system is unique, consisting of fifty-one judicial structures: the national system, comprising the federal courts, and fifty state systems. The federal system overlaps that of the states. The federal courts hear many cases in which the issue is one of state laws but the parties are residents of different states, the so-called “diversity jurisdiction.” Also, of course, they hear cases concerning federal laws. Conversely, issues of federal law (constitutional or statutory) may first arise in state courts. The Supreme Court of the United States can review the state court’s judgment on a federal question

Each of the fifty states has its own court systems, and those court systems handle perhaps 90% of the nation’s legal business. Most of their cases are civil, not criminal. Generally, state trial courts operate at the county level and have original jurisdiction in all civil and criminal cases. In rural areas, justices of the peace try minor matters. In urban areas, magistrate’s or police courts do the same. These local courts operate without juries (serious cases go to state courts), and most of their penalties are fines or short jail sentences.

JUDGES

1. Federal Judges

Federal judges are nominated by the president and must be approved by the Senate. To free them from executive and political pressure, they may serve for life unless impeached. Some federal judges owe their appointments to party affiliation, but most are well qualified. The attorney general lists eligible candidates; as vacancies occur, the president selects a few names from that list.

There is also a tradition known as senatorial courtesy where a president defers to a senator’s choice from his party when there is an opening for a judicial district in the senator’s state. The opposition party accuses the president of trying to fill the **bench** with incompetent partisans and often tries to block confirmation.

1. State Judges

State judges are either popularly elected or appointed, for terms ranging up to fourteen years. Both parties often nominate the same slate of judges so that the judicial elections have become largely nonpartisan.

Some argue that elected state judges turn into crowd-pleasing politicians with shaky judicial skills. Others counter that appointed state judges can be the governor’s political pals.

Comparing Courts

What role should judges play? Should they act as umpires, passively watching the legal drama, just ruling on disputed points of procedure? Or should they actively direct the trial, question witnesses, elicit evidence, and comment on the proceedings?

THE ANGLO-AMERICAN ADVERSARIAL AND ACCUSATORIAL PROCESS

English and American courts are passive institutions that do not look for injustices to correct or lawbreakers to apprehend. Instead, they wait until a law is challenged or a defendant is brought before them. The system operates on an **adversarial** and **accusatorial** basis:

1. In the adversary process, two sides (plaintiff and defendant) compete for a favourable decision from an impartial court. Courts do not accept a case that does not involve a real conflict of interest; the plaintiff must demonstrate how and in what ways the defendant has caused damage.
2. During the trial, the judge acts as an umpire. Both parties present their evidence, call and cross-examine witnesses, and try to refute each other’s arguments.
3. The judge rules on the validity of evidence and testimony, on legal procedures, and on disputed points.
4. After both sides have presented their cases, the judge rules on the basis of the facts and the relevant law. If a jury is hearing the case, the judge instructs its members on the weight of the evidence and relevant laws and then almost always accepts the jury’s verdict.

In criminal cases, the police investigate and report to a public prosecutor, often a county’s district attorney, who must decide whether to prosecute. The actual trial proceeds like a civil one, but the government is the plaintiff and the accused the defendant. Unless a jury has been waived, the jury determines guilt under instructions from the judge on laws and facts. The weakness of this system is that the decision often goes to the side that can hire the best attorney.

BRITISH COURTS

Britain’s court system was established by the Judicature Act of 1873 and largely continues common-law traditions. It is divided into civil and criminal branches.

British judges are nominally appointed by the monarch, but the choice is really the prime minister’s, based on recommendations of the lord chancellor, who presides over the House of Lords and is usually a cabinet member. British judges have lifetime tenure and are above politics. The British judiciary is not supposed to be a coequal branch of government.

The United States and Britain share a common legal heritage but with important differences. One is that in Britain the government hires lawyers to prosecute crimes. There are no professional prosecutors like U.S. district attorneys. American lawyers may take on any type of legal work, in or out of the courtroom, but British *solicitors* handle all legal matters except representing clients in court. That is reserved for a few specialised lawyers called *barristers.*

EUROPEAN COURT SYSTEMS

Based heavily on the French system, European courts, unlike British courts, do not have separate criminal and civil divisions. Instead, most European countries maintain separate systems of regular and administrative courts. European judges sit as a panel to rule on points of law and procedure, but at the conclusion of the trial they retire with a jury to consider the verdict and the sentence.

In code-law countries, judges play a more active role than in common-law countries. The prosecutor (French *procureur,* German *Staatsanwalt*) is an official who forwards evidence to an **investigating judge** (*juge d’instruction, Ermittlungsrichter*), a representative of the justice ministry who conducts a thorough inquiry (*enquête*), gathering evidence and statements. Unlike the Anglo-American system, these European magistrates first make a preliminary determination of guilt *before* sending the case to trial.

In European criminal procedure, the decision to **indict** is made not by a district attorney but by a judge, and the weight of evidence is not controlled by the adversaries (plaintiff and defendant) but by the court, which can take the initiative in acquiring needed evidence.

In an American or British court, the burden of proof is on the prosecution, and the defendant need not say one word in his or her defence; the prosecutor must prove guilt “beyond a reasonable doubt.” In code-law countries, the accused bears the burden of having to prove that the investigating judge is wrong.

Unlike a British or American trial lawyer, the French *avocat* or German *Rechtsanwalt* does not question witnesses; the court does that. Instead, he or she tries to show logical or factual mistakes in the opposition’s argument or case and sway the lay jury in the summation argument.

COURTS IN RUSSIA

Russia’s post-Communist legal system has continued much of the Soviet legal structure because most personnel were trained under the Communists. Now Russia is struggling to build “rule of law,” including “bourgeois” concepts, such as property law and civil rights.

In 1991, a Constitutional Court with fifteen justices was established, the first independent tribunal in Russian history. It can theoretically rule on the constitutionality of the moves made by the president and the State Duma. In practice, Russian presidents have so much power that the court is no counterweight to the executive. Newly rich *biznesmeny* and *siloviki* (strong men) hire *keelers* to remove anyone in their way, including members of parliament, journalists, and the competition. “The only lawyer around here is a Kalashnikov,” despaired one Russian, referring to the assault rifle.

Soviet law started with Marx’s idea that law serves the ruling class. Capitalists naturally have bourgeois laws designed to protect private property. Proletarians, theoretically in power in the Soviet Union, had socialist law to protect state property, which belonged to all society. Especially after the relaxation of Stalin’s climate of fear, theft of state property became the norm for Soviet economic life and helped bring down the system.

Some political cases never came to trial. Obedient Soviet psychiatrists diagnosed dissidents as “sluggish schizophrenic” and put them in prison-like hospitals without trial. Nobel Prize-winning writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn was simply bundled onto a plane for Germany in 1974 with no trial. Likewise, dissident physicist Andrei Sakharov was banished to a remote city in 1980 to get him away from Western reporters.

The Role of the Courts

Judicial review is more highly developed in the United States than in any other country, and Americans expect more of their courts than do other peoples. In no other country is the “courtroom drama” a television staple because few other countries have our dramatic courtroom clashes. Court structures in other Western democracies parallel the U.S. system, but they do not do as much.

THE U.S. SUPREME COURT

The U.S. Supreme Court’s power to review the constitutionality of federal legislative enactments is not mentioned specifically in the Constitution and has been vehemently challenged. Judicial review was first considered and debated at the Constitutional Convention of 1787.

Delegates suggested that, when in doubt, legislators might call on the judges for an opinion on a proposed law’s constitutionality. However, those who feared that such a power would give the Court a double check and compromise its neutrality challenged this position. he doctrine has never been universally popular, however. Strong-willed presidents have resisted the authority of the Court.

The courts that followed have been more cautious, reflecting the fact that most of their members were appointed by conservative Republicans. In recent years, conservative justices have mostly favoured restraint, though that was not always true.

THE SUPREME COURT’S POLITICAL ROLE

The Supreme Court’s rulings often become political issues, rarely the case in other countries. The U.S. Supreme Court plays an important political role, and the appointment of just one new justice changes split decisions from five to four against to the same number for.

THE VIEWS OF JUSTICE

Clearly, justices’ personal convictions influence their decisions. Historically, Supreme Court justices used to be **WASP** upper- or upper-middle-class males. Radical critics claimed that such judges could not appreciate the situation of the poor or oppressed. That picture has greatly changed. The first woman justice was appointed only in 1981; now there are three.

Other factors affect the justices’ rulings. They are older, averaging close to 70. Southern jurists have usually been more conservative on racial matters, though one of the strongest champions of civil rights was Alabama’s Hugo L. Black, who had been a member of the Ku Klux Klan in his youth.

The two most important influences on voting, however, seem to be party affiliation and the justice’s conception of the judicial role. Democratic justices are more likely to support liberal stands than are Republican justices and to see the Supreme Court as a defender of minorities and the poor.

Many justices see the Court’s role as standing firm on certain constitutional principles, despite public opinion. Justice Jackson put it this way:

“One’s right to life, liberty and property, to free speech, a free press, freedom of worship and assembly, and other fundamental rights may not be submitted to vote; they depend upon the outcome of no election.”

Changing public attitudes also influence Supreme Court justices. Another influence is colleagues’ opinions. Chief Justices John Marshall, Earl Warren, and currently John Roberts were able to convert some of their col- leagues to their judicial philosophies by force of personality and their judicial reasoning.

The Supreme Court’s Political Impact

In the opinion of some, as ninety-six Southern members of Congress put it, the Court overturned “the established law of the land” and implemented its “personal political and social philosophy”.

CIVIL RIGHTS

The Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown* (1954) triggered a revolution in American race relations — an area Congress had been unwilling to touch. In a unanimous ruling, the Court accepted the sociological argument of Thurgood Marshall (then attorney for the NAACP) that segregated public school facilities were “inherently unequal” because they stigmatised African American children and deprived them of the Fourteenth Amendment’s guarantee of equal protection.

The Court relied on the Fourteenth Amendment that no state may deny any person the equal protection of the laws. The sit-in became a major weapon in the civil rights struggle. In 1964, Congress followed the Court’s lead and passed the Civil Rights Act, which barred segregation in public accommodations such as hotels, motels, restaurants, and theatres. The Court led Congress.

CRIMINAL PROCEDURE

The Warren Court’s rulings in criminal procedure included *Mapp v. Ohio* (1961), wherein the Court ruled that evidence police seized without a warrant was inadmissible in a state court. In 1963, in *Gideon v. Wainwright*, the Court held that **indigent (having no money)** defendants must be provided with legal counsel. The majority (five to four) ruled that arrested persons must immediately be told of their right to remain silent and to have a lawyer present during police questioning.

LEGISLATIVE REAPPORTIONMENT

Equally important was the Warren Court’s mandating of equal-population voting districts. Until 1962, many states had congressional districts that overrepresented rural areas and underrepresented cities. In a series of decisions in 1962 and 1964, the Court found that unequal representation denied citizens their Fourteenth Amendment (equal protection) rights. The Court ordered that state legislatures apply the principle of “one person, one vote” in redrawing electoral lines, which many now must do after every census.

The Warren Court overthrew **Jim Crow** laws, rewrote the rules for criminal procedure, and redrew legislative maps. With the possible exception of the Marshall Court, it was the most active, groundbreaking Court in U.S. history.

THE POST-WARREN COURTS

The Burger Court (1969–1986) and the Rehnquist Court (1986–2005) were sometimes characterised as conservative, an effort to roll back the Warren Court. Actually, their decisions were not so clear-cut. Overall, there was a conservative drift but an unpredictable one.

The most controversial ruling of the century declared abortion was protected by the right to privacy in *Roe v. Wade* (1973), which came from the “conservative” Burger Court (with the chief justice concurring). The Burger Court in the 1978 *Bakke* case found that reserving quotas for African American applicants to medical school violated equal protection for whites.

The next year, however, in *Weber*, it found that quotas to help African American workers attain skilled positions were constitutional. In criminal law, the Burger Court issued some hard-line decisions. In 1984, it added a “good faith exception” to the *Mapp* rule, which excluded wrongfully seized evidence.

The Rehnquist Court both pleased and alarmed conservatives. In 1988, in a move that stunned the Reagan administration, the Court upheld the constitutionality of independent federal prosecutors, something the White House said interfered with the powers of the executive branch. The Court also ruled that burning the American flag could not be outlawed because it is a form of free speech.

The U.S. federal courts are an integral part of the policymaking apparatus — not just mechanical interpreters of law. Judicial decisions influence and are influenced by politics. Groups whose welfare depends on the court’s decisions will try to influence the court to adopt their point of view; groups that do not succeed with the president or Congress hope they will have better luck with the courts. Some have called the U.S. judicial system a back-up legislature or parliament of last resort, for it can take on issues the other branches fear. Without Supreme Court decisions leading the way, Congress would not have passed civil-rights bills and presidents would not have enforced them.

Chapter 15

Political Economy

Political economy is an old and flexible term. The classical economists of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries all wrote on what they called the **political economy**. In doing this, they were taking a leaf from Aristotle, who viewed government, society, and the economy as one thing.

The old political economists also had normative orientations, prescribing what government should do to promote a just prosperity. In the late nineteenth century, as economists became more scientific and numbers-based, they dropped “political” from the name of their discipline and shifted to empirical description and prediction.

Recently the term has revived, with partisan overtones. Radicals use the term “political economy” instead of Marxism (which is a hard sell these days) to describe their criticisms of capitalism and the unfair distribution of wealth among and within nations. Conservatives use the term to try to get back to the pure market system advocated by Adam Smith. We will avoid taking ideological sides and use the term to mean the interface between politics and the economy.

ECONOMICS

Economics undergirds almost everything in politics. Politicians get elected by promising prosperity and reelected by delivering it. Virtually all **public policy** choices have economic ramifications, and these can make or break the policy. A policy designed to boost favoured industries but that costs a great deal may not last.

With a growing economy, a country can afford new welfare measures, as the United States did in the booming 1960’s. With a slow economy, an administration has to run massive deficits and devise policies to spur economic growth. Whatever the issue, it will be connected to the economy. Some of the worst policy choices are made when decision makers forget this elementary point.

Nowadays, few thinkers, not even many conservatives, expect the government to keep its hands off the economy. Everyone wants the government to induce economic prosperity, and if it does not, voters may punish the administration at the next election, as happened in 2008.

A 1936 book by British economist John Maynard Keynes proposed to cure depressions by dampening the swings of the **business cycle**. During bad times, government would increase “aggregate demand” by “countercyclical spending” on public works and welfare to make **recessions** shorter and milder. An economy growing too fast should be cooled by raising taxes. Still, others doubt that the New Deal achieved anything lasting except debt and **inflation**.

Government regulation of the economy was out; the free market was in. Then the 2008 financial meltdown hit, and many economists quickly rediscovered Keynes.

Government and the Economy

What are some of our leading economic problems and government responses to them?

INFLATION

Inflation is the decline of purchasing power of a given currency over time. A quantitative estimate of the rate at which the decline in purchasing power occurs can be reflected in the increase of an average price level of a basket of selected goods and services in an economy over some period of time. The rise in the general level of prices, often expressed a a percentage means that a unit of currency effectively buys less than it did in prior periods.

TAX HIKE

A tax hike is the amount by which taxes are increased; “a tax increase of 15%”. An example is when President Johnson was reluctant to ask for a tax increase to pay for Vietnam for two reasons. First, he had just gotten a tax cut through Congress in 1964; it would have been embarrassing to reverse course the following year. Second, he did not want to admit that he had gotten the country into a long and costly war. By the time Johnson and Congress had changed their minds and introduced a 10% tax surcharge in 1968, it was too late; inflation had taken hold.

BALANCE OF PAYMENTS

This is the value of what a country exports compared with what it imports.

FLOATING THE DOLLAR

A **floating** exchange rate is a regime where the currency price of a nation is set by the forex market based on supply and demand relative to other currencies. This is in contrast to a fixed exchange rate, in which the government entirely or predominantly determines the rate.

WAGE-PRICE FREEZE

**Wage**-**price control** sets government guidelines for limiting increases in **wages** and **prices**. It is a principal tool in incomes policy. Nixon, for example, froze wages and prices to knock out inflation. The 1971 wage-price freeze was popular at first, but soon many complained that there was no corresponding freeze on profits so that businesses benefited unduly. A bigger problem with wage-price freezes, however, is that when they are removed, pent-up demand pushes inflation higher than ever.

OIL SHOCKS

International oil deals, like most international trade arrangements, were made with U.S. dollars. The dollar’s loss in value meant that the oil exporters were getting less and less for their black gold. The price of oil in the 1960’s was ridiculously low. As a result of the 1973 Mideast war, the members of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) were able to implement what they had been itching to do: quadruple oil prices. In 1979, in response to the revolutionary turmoil in Iran, they increased prices again.

STAGFLATION

Stagflation is a combination of slow growth plus inflation in the U.S. economy in the 1970’s. The manifold increase in petroleum prices produced inflation everywhere while simultaneously depressing the economy. Previously, economists had seen a connection between economic growth and inflation; as one went up, so did the other. In the 1970s, this connection was broken. Inflation hit double-digit levels (10% or higher), but the economy shrank and joblessness increased.

INTEREST RATES

An **interest rate** is a **percentage** charged on the total amount you borrow or save. If you're a borrower, the **interest rate** is the amount you are charged for borrowing money – a **percentage** of the total amount of the loan. You can borrow money to buy something today and pay for it later.

TAX CUTS

The term “tax cuts” can seem a little confusing because it's a broad term that covers a wide range of situations that result in a lower amount of tax collected by the government. The one thing all tax cuts have in common is that they change a preexisting tax law or implement a new one that effectively reduces the amount of tax you have to pay.

Again trying to stimulate the economy, President Reagan turned to an approach called “supply-side economics,” which focuses on investment and production rather than on consumer demand, as Keynesian policy does. The inspiration of supply-siders was the Kennedy idea that lowering tax rates stimulates economic growth and ultimately generates more tax revenue. Congress bought Reagan’s proposal and cut income taxes 25% over three years. Actually, this scarcely offset the “bracket creep” that American taxpayers had suffered as a result of inflation; their purchasing power had stayed the same, but they found themselves in ever-higher tax brackets.

BUDGET DEFICITS

A budget deficit occurs when expenses exceed revenue and indicate the financial health of a country. The government generally uses the term budget deficit when referring to spending rather than businesses or individuals. Accrued deficits form national debt.

Presidents Reagan and Bush 43 had presented Congress with budgets that featured both tax cuts and major increases in defence spending. Reagan figured this would force Congress to cut domestic and welfare spending drastically. But Congress cut little, and the U.S. federal budget reached record **deficits**.

TRADE DEFICITS

A trade deficit occurs when a country's imports exceed its exports during a given time period. It is also referred to as a negative balance of trade (BOT). The balance can be calculated on different categories of transactions: goods (a.k.a., “merchandise”), services, goods and services. Balances are also calculated for international transactions—current account, capital account, and financial account.

The United States, for example, has consumed more for the past several decades than it produced and imported much more than it exported. U.S. imports now top exports by some half a trillion dollars each year, around 3% of the GDP.

GOVERNMENT DEBT

**Government debt**, also known as **public interest**, **public debt**, **national debt** and **sovereign debt**, contrasts to the annual government budget deficit, which is a flow variable that equals the difference between government receipts and spending in a single year. The debt is a stock variable, measured at a specific point in time, and it is the accumulation of all prior deficits.

Government debt can be categorised as internal debt (owed to lenders within the country) and external debt (owed to foreign lenders). Another common division of government debt is by duration until repayment is due. Short term debt is generally considered to be for one year or less, and long term debt is for more than ten years. Medium term debt falls between these two boundaries. A broader definition of government debt may consider all government liabilities, including future pension payments and payments for goods and services which the government has contracted but not yet paid.

FISCAL CLIFF

The fiscal cliff refers to a combination of expiring tax cuts and across-the-board government spending cuts that create a looming imbalance in the federal budget and must be corrected to avert a crisis.

The idea behind the fiscal cliff was that if the federal government allowed these two events to proceed as planned, they would have a detrimental effect on an already shaky economy, perhaps sending it back into an official recession as it cut household incomes, increased unemployment rates, and undermined consumer and investor confidence. At the same time, it was predicted that going over the fiscal cliff would significantly reduce the federal budget deficit.

INEQUALITY

Since the 1970’s, Americans’ incomes have grown less equal and the middle class smaller. The rich get a bigger slice of the nation’s economic pie; the poor and much of the middle class get smaller pieces. Those with the right education and skills may do well, but those with a high-school education or less do poorly. **Offshoring**, much of it to newly industrialising Asia, cuts the number and pay of American blue-collar manufacturing jobs. Top executives and money managers are compensated extravagantly, and Republican tax cuts favoured the rich.

BUBBLES

Financial markets tend to produce “**bubbles**,” fast growth in investments that let people ignore risk—until the bubbles pop. Some economists blame alternating **manias** and **panics**, both heavily psychological, what Keynes called the “animal spirits” of investor irrationality. He urged government intervention to dampen both.

What is Poverty?

Defining poverty can be tricky. What’s “poor” currently might have been “comfortable” in previous eras. A U.S. Labor Department statistician devised a formula in 1963 that became standard, although many argue it is out of date. She found that families spent about one-third of their incomes on food, so a “poverty line” is three times a minimal food budget for non-farm families of four.

Liberals complain that the poverty line is set much too low; it can take two to three times that to survive in big cities, as rent and child care are now bigger items than food. Washington has considered updating the poverty line to match modern conditions, including a new category of the “near poor,” whose numbers swelled in the aftermath of the 2008 contraction. Conservatives point out that poverty figures do not include *non-cash* benefits transferred to the poor by government programs — food stamps, for example. Taking such benefits into account raises some poor families above the poverty line.

WELFARE VS ENTITLEMENTS

The federal budget is divided into two general categories: discretionary and mandatory.

1. Discretionary

Can be raised or lowered from year to year. Congress, for example, may decide to increase defence spending and cut highway spending.

1. Mandatory

Cannot be so easily changed; it is what the federal budget is stuck with from previous statutory commitments. Mandatory spending in turn is divided into interest payments on the national debt and **entitlements**; together they are around half of the federal budget.

Entitlements are extremely difficult to cut because people are used to them and expect them as a right. They are payments to which one is automatically entitled by law: When you turn sixty-five, you are entitled to Medicare, sixty-six (and rising to sixty-seven) for full Social Security. The only way to change entitlement expenditures is to change the law, a difficult task in the face of strong interests groups fighting to protect the entitlement.

Only a small fraction of federal payments is traditional “welfare” spending; more than 85% of spending goes to the middle classes in the form of Social Security, Medicare, government retirement plans, and farm price supports. What goes to poor families includes Medicaid, food stamps, and Supplemental Security Income.

Some people argue that if we eliminated “welfare” spending we could cut taxes, but “welfare” makes up such a small share of the budget that government spending would be affected very little and cuts would inflict hardship on society’s most vulnerable members, especially children.

But how did the U.S. welfare system come about?

In the mid-1960’s, President Lyndon Johnson launched his War on Poverty, aimed at creating a Great Society. Johnson, who had been the powerful Senate majority leader, got Congress to deliver almost everything he wanted. Then the Vietnam War, with its rising costs and acrimony, seemed to cut down the War on Poverty in its infancy. There wasn’t enough money for the growing programs, and the Great Society became discredited. Many of its programs were substantially trimmed or ended.

Conservatives hold that the undertaking was inherently infeasible, a waste of money that often did more harm than good, locking recipients into **welfare dependency** and encouraging a subculture of drugs and crime. Some poverty specialists, however, say the Great Society programs generally did succeed and lowered the U.S. poverty rate.

The Costs of Welfare

FOOD STAMPS

Begun as a modest trial program under Kennedy in 1961, the Food Stamp program was implemented nationwide under Johnson in 1964. Renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), it has grown significantly, and in 2015 some fifty million Americans (15% got an average of $134 a month per person. One-third of families headed by women receive food stamps.

The Carter administration simplified the program in 1977 by eliminating the provision that recipients *buy* the stamps at a discount with their own money. This policy had meant that the absolutely destitute could get no food stamps. Congress changed the law to eliminate the cash payment and the number of recipients expanded. Reagan, citing an apocryphal story of a young man who used food stamps to buy vodka, tightened eligibility requirements in an effort to eliminate fraud and misuse.

What should be done? The Food Stamp program became bigger than expected, but fraud and waste have not been major factors. Only a few recipients sold food stamps at 50 cents on the dollar to buy liquor and drugs, and all food stamps are now debit cards, which fights the fraud problem.

WELFARE REFORM

In 1996, President Clinton signed a major welfare reform to “end welfare as we know it.” This ended the old Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) that had begun as part of the 1935 Social Security Act. AFDC had provided federal matching funds to the states to help the poor; most of it went to single mothers. Many accused AFDC of promoting fatherless children and welfare dependency. Because many recipients were nonwhite, the issue became connected with the struggle for racial equality.

The 1996 reform replaced entitlement-type welfare payments with block grants to the states to spend fighting poverty as they saw fit. Recipients had five years to get off welfare. Many states developed **workfare** programs that required recipients to either take jobs or training. Workfare, which has been tried for years, does not always work and initially costs more than traditional welfare programs because it must provide both welfare and training for a while.

The 1996 reform came when the U.S. economy was excellent, and most people bumped off welfare found jobs. The unemployment rate for single mothers fell from around 48% during the 1980’s and early 1990’s to 28% in 1999. The total number of welfare recipients dropped from 12.2 million in 1996 to 5.8 million in 2000, a decline that does not necessarily mean they got out of poverty; they just got off welfare.

HEALTHCARE REFORM

The Democrats’ healthcare reform, the Affordable Care Act, was watered down and barely passed in 2010. It does not go nearly as far as most European and Canadian medical insurance and lacks a “public” option; it operates mostly through private insurers. Critics, not all of them Republicans, worry that the plan is too long, too complex, and too expensive.

Some say the giants Medicare and Medicaid, both enacted in 1965, offer warnings of how medical costs escalate. Medicare, a federally funded program for older people, now covers about half their healthcare costs for a federal expenditure of more than half a trillion dollars a year.

At least two factors induce exponential growth in medical assistance: more people become eligible and medical costs soar. Medicare is especially expensive, for all get it upon reaching age sixty-five, even rich people.

Hospitals and doctors, once they are assured of payment, have no incentive to economise. When in doubt, they put the patient in the hospital — at $1,000 and more a day — and order expensive tests. Some hospitals expanded into medical palaces, and some physicians got rich from Medicare and Medicaid.

Washington tried various ways of tightening up, but medical costs continued to climb. Recipients were required to contribute bigger “copayments” to hold down overuse. Hospitals and doctors were monitored on costs and on how long they kept patients hospitalised.

Health care and how to pay for it will be a major U.S. political quarrel for decades.

How Big Should Government Be?

Americans have the funniest ideas about where their tax dollars go. Many think most of the federal budget goes for welfare, which is not at all the case. Angry talk-show hosts suggest it goes to welfare and Medicaid fraudsters, but this percentage too is small. If you want to cut taxes and deficits, just what programs are you prepared to cut?

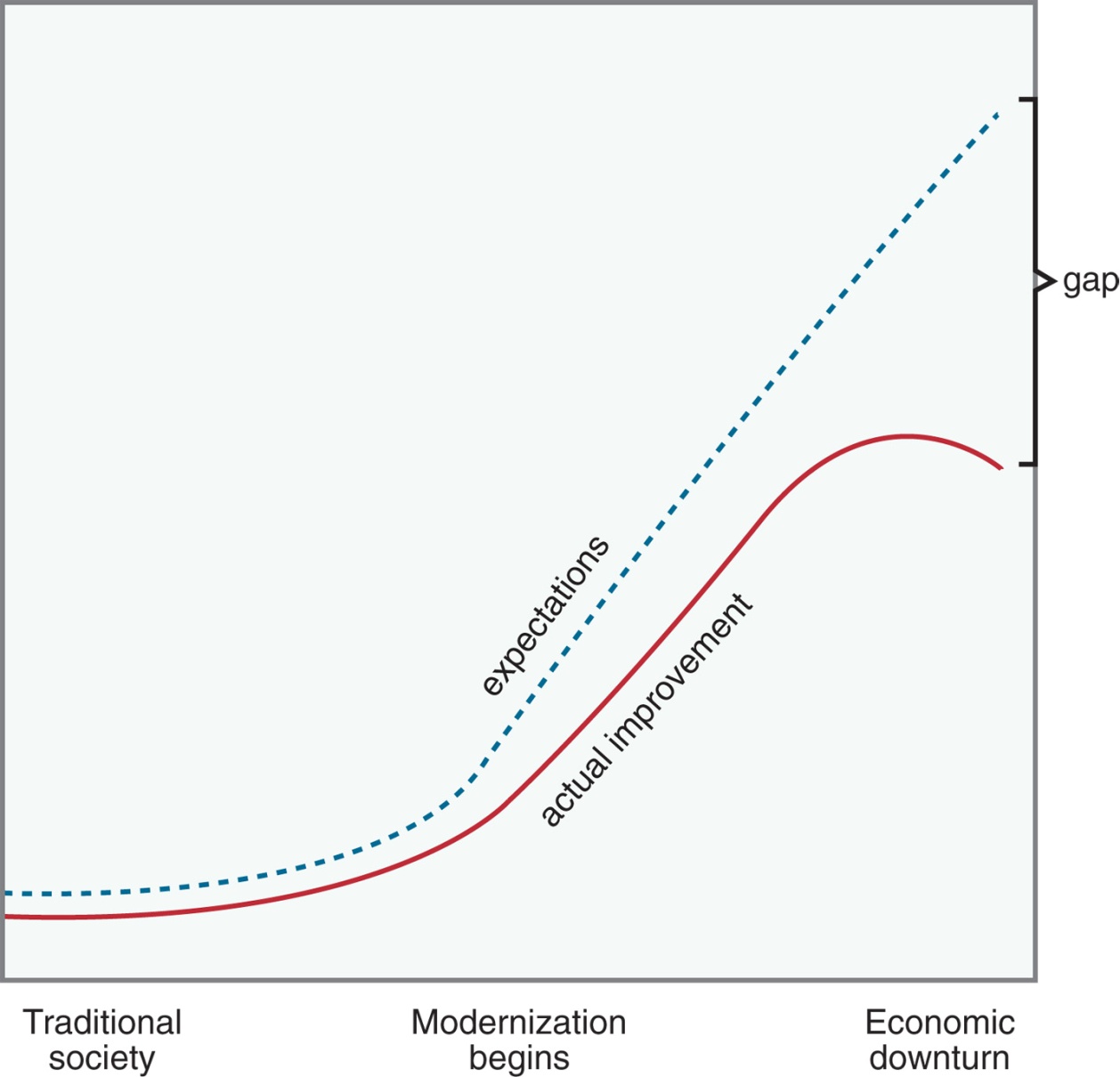
The American welfare state is small compared with that of other advanced industrialised countries. Should it get bigger? The American answer, rooted in its political culture, is to keep government small and to suspect and criticise the expansion of government power. But we also recognise that we need government intervention in the economy, education, energy planning, environmental protection, and health care.

Americans were in a quandary over the federal government’s role in the 2008 financial crisis. In principle, they disliked rescue packages. Both borrowers and lenders should pay for their mistakes, not taxpayers. If government assumes the **moral hazard** of bad loans, firms will just be encouraged in their risky behaviour. But the prospect of national economic collapse sobered many into recognising that government bailouts are sometimes necessary.

The general reluctance to expand government’s role, however, may redound to America’s long-term advantage. Government programs tend to expand, bureaucracy is inherently inefficient, and ending an entitlement program is all but impossible.

Chapter 16

Violence and Revolutions

Political systems break down as legitimacy begins to erode. There are several different types of political violence, which can overlap with each other. Terrorism is a specific type of political violence that seeks to weaken a hated authority.

Crane Brinton suggested that all revolutions go through similar stages. The recent waves of political violence can be analysed as revolutionary or post-revolutionary.

SYSTEM BREAKDOWN

Political scientists rarely used to pay attention to political violence and revolution because they generally believed that political systems were stable. The rash of political violence in the 1960’s changed that perspective and led to the argument that political systems do decay and break down over time. This decay is often marked by riots, civil wars, terrorism, coups, and authoritarian governments.

Breakdowns begin when legitimacy erodes. Legitimacy is the feeling by citizens that government should be obeyed. States with high legitimacy need few police, while states with low legitimacy are often subject to political violence. A good example of this is Northern Ireland, where legitimacy in the system of government eroded to the point that the British had to send in military troops. Generally, legitimacy erodes as government shows that it is ineffective in solving the myriad of problems.

VIOLENCE AS A SYMPTOM

Political violence does not necessarily mean that a revolution is near, and in fact, often government takes steps to avoid a revolution once political violence manifests. While violence is deplorable, it can illustrate deep problems within society; as such, it can serve a purpose by getting the government's attention.

There are different types of violence:

1. Primordial

Grows out of conflicts between basic communities. There are multiple examples, including conflict between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda. Primordial violence is not limited to the developing world and has occurred in states like Northern Ireland and Quebec.

1. Separatist

Ams at independence for the groups in question. It can sometimes be an outgrowth of a primordial conflict, like Tamil separatism in Sri Lanka and how Bengali independence from Pakistan led to the creation of Bangladesh.

1. Revolutionary

Revolutionary violence aims at overthrowing or replacing existing regimes. It is important to remember that revolutions seek to completely get rid of existing elites. The struggles against repressive governments during the Arab Spring is a good example.

Revolutionary violence also includes the category of counterrevolutionary movements, which are conservative attempts to crush revolutionary change, such as the Soviet attempts to crush liberalising movements in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968.

1. Coups

Coups are usually aimed against revolution, corruption, and chaos and are almost always conducted by the military. Occasionally, they are indirectly supported by key sectors of society. Coups usually involve little violence, at least initially, but can turn violent if the military senses opposition. Once a country has a coup, it is highly likely that it will have another one.

1. Issues

Finally, there is a catchall category called issue violence. Political violence that falls into this category is generally less violent than other forms of political violence. Examples of this might include the globalisation and austerity protests that have recently occurred.

Change as a Cause of Violence

Political violence can be sparked by the changes a country experiences as it goes through modernisation. As modernisation occurs, the transition away from the world of traditional stability leaves people worried, confused, and ripe for violent actions.

Economic change is often the most unsettling, and economic improvement can be just as unsettling as economic decline for people during this transition period. Certain groups feel passed by and become bitter. It's not poverty but relative deprivation. This means that violence and revolutions tend to occur when things are getting better, not worse in societies.

Other societal changes can spur unrest as well, such as shifts from subsistence to commodity farming, population growth, outdated political systems, and rising education levels that expose citizens to new ideas such as freedom and democracy. Population growth is related to civil unrest. Political system may be out of date. Rising education levels expose people to ideas such as freedom and democracy.

Terrorism and Revolutions

TERRORISM

Terrorism is a strategy to weaken a hated authority and it is not a new phenomenon, contrary to the perception of many Americans. Terrorist groups target governments that are hated and that they believe are usually corrupt and repressive. Muslim terrorists hate the United States because it supports these types of governments and consequently deploy terrorist tactics against the U.S. to effect political change.

Terrorists are not insane, but are rational in their selection of tactics to achieve their goals, which include recruiting new members, panicking the populations, and gaining publicity. In the end, remember that terrorist groups always have a reason for their actions.

Terrorism is a group activity. Individual acts of violence, even if they are political in nature, do not qualify as a terrorist activity. John Hinkley, who shot Reagan, was not a terrorist because he acted by himself.

Currently, the Middle East is a breeding ground for terrorists. There are material reasons for why terrorism is attractive in that region. High birth rates lead to large numbers of unemployed youths susceptible to the message of terror groups. Islamic terrorism can ultimately only be solved by modernisation.

There is some cause for concern because it really is only a matter of time before a terrorist group can develop a nuclear incendiary device. Another type of terrorism is state-sponsored terrorism, which occurs when states support the actions of terror groups around the world. The state itself can also be an agent of terrorism.

Does terrorism work?

Rarely, and if it does it usually is in conjunction with other strategies to effect political change. Currently, U.S. agencies are not well-positioned to fight terrorism, and terrorism is tricky to fight because it falls between war and crime. The good news is that Islamic terrorism is declining due to backlash from terrorist activities.

REVOLUTIONS

Revolutions are quick, dramatic system changes that throw out the existing elites. Small or moderate changes that leave the system intact are not revolutions. Revolutions do not have to be bloody. Many of the revolutions that saw the end of communist systems of governance in Eastern Europe were peaceful, such as the velvet revolution in Czechoslovakia and South Africa.

Revolutions do not just occur, they require organisations through which to focus frustrations. If these were absent, there would just be apathy and indifference.

Intellectuals and Revolutions

This is why intellectuals are important for revolutions, because they provide the organisation for revolutions. Certain factors predispose intellectuals to develop “revolutionary faith” — a belief that the current system can be replaced with something better. While common folks want improvement in material conditions, it is the convictions of intellectuals that cement revolutions together.

THE STAGES OF A REVOLUTION

1. The old regime decays

First the old regime decays as administration breaks down, taxes increase, and citizens no longer believe in government.

1. The first stage of revolution

The first stage of revolution occurs as committees, conspiracies, networks, and cells form, committed to overthrowing the old regime. A catalyst event occurs. The initial takeover is usually easy because government has essentially put itself out of business, which is what causes the revolution to occur in the first place.

1. Moderates take over

These are people who are connected with the old regime, but who oppose it, take over and initiate moderate, non-radical reforms. These reforms are not enough for extremists, who challenge the moderates' rule.

1. The extremists take over

The extremists drive the revolution to a high point where everything old is thrown out and the revolution goes mad; “the revolution devours its children”.

1. A “Thermidor” ends the reign of terror

This cooling off period is welcomed, similar to a convalescence after a fever. Often a dictator who resembles the original tyrants takes over to restore order—something most people welcome.

After the Revolution

In general, revolutions end badly. Revolutions often exchange one form of tyranny for another. For example, the Tsars were replaced by despotic Stalin, Castro threw out Batista only to further reduce freedom in Cuba, and there are similar fears in the Middle East following the Arab Spring.

But what about other revolutions that have occurred around the world?

AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Some scholars argue it was not really a revolution because it did not remake society and that in effect it was an example of separatist violence, a war of independence and not a revolution.

Hannah Arendt disagreed, arguing that the U.S. Revolution was a revolution and may be the only complete revolution in history because the old system of tyranny was replaced by new system of democracy. This was possible because the American revolutionaries did not have to wrestle with big social questions like the French. America was prosperous with a fairly equal distribution of wealth and as such avoided many of the excesses associated with revolutions.

FRENCH REVOLUTION

Most people agree about the ideas that guided the revolution but acknowledge that the revolution went wrong, which led to bloodshed and tyranny. The larger question is, was this avoidable? Most scholars now argue that the bloodshed was inevitable.

RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

Had Lenin lived, would communism have looked different? Did Stalin pervert Lenin's revolutionary vision? Most scholars now believe that Lenin was just as ruthless and bloodthirsty as Stalin and that Lenin was wrong from the start. Cambodia was the worst and most deadly revolution in history as the Khmer Rouge killed 1.7 million Cambodians.

VIETNAMESE REVOLUTION

The Vietnamese revolution went astray as after the war, the communist government turned Vietnam into one of the world's poorest countries. However, in 1995 the United States and Vietnam reestablished diplomatic ties and the Vietnamese economy engaged successfully with the world market and has now become relatively prosperous.

CUBAN REVOLUTION

The Cuban revolution has been a nagging thorn for American administrations. Castro continued to proclaim his regime revolutionary even though most citizens are over the shortages and restrictions. Under Raul Castro, reform seems possible.

Currently, there are few revolutionary movements around the world. At the beginning, movements are idealistic and believe they can bring about a just society once the oppressors are gone. After seizing power, the revolutionary regime discovers governing is harder than they thought and people are quickly frustrated as their situation in life does not change in any meaningful way. Consequently they want to throw the regime out.

In response, the regime becomes draconian and violent and attempts to lock itself into power while country falls further and further behind. Eventually a new generation comes to power and admits that changes have to occur.

Given that revolutions end badly, will we not see another major wave of revolutions? Not necessarily, as there is still plenty of injustice in the world and rage is the fuel of revolutions. Currently, the greatest source of rage is governmental corruption. The way to prevent revolutions is through reforms that address injustice and corruption, but this is never easy to do.

Chapter 17

International Relations

International relations differs from the **domestic politics** we have been studying: there is no world sovereign power over the nations to get them to obey laws and preserve peace. Compared with domestic politics, **international relations (IR)** is wilder and more complex. Sovereignty means being boss on your own turf and is the dominant force within a country. Criminals, rebels, and breakaway elements are, in theory, controlled or crushed by the sovereign, who now, of course, is no longer a monarch but the national government. Sovereignty also means that foreign powers have no business intruding into your country’s affairs. Their reach stops at your borders.

In practice, however, nothing is so clear-cut. Just because a nation is legally sovereign does not necessarily mean it really controls its own turf. Witness Ukraine recently: Ethnic Russian fighters with Russian arms seized Crimea and eastern Ukraine. European and U.S. threats did not dissuade Russia. Was Ukraine still “sovereign”?

Further, the idea that sovereignty precludes outside intervention doesn’t hold up. Small, weaker countries are routinely dominated and influenced by larger and more powerful countries. Eastern Europe during the **Cold War** was under Soviet control, and the small countries of Central America were under the watchful eye of the United States.

Still, the term has some utility. Where established, national sovereignty does bring internal peace, and most countries can claim to have done this. In dealing with other nations, countries still mostly do what they want. When North Korea tests its nuclear bombs, there is nothing that the rest of the world can do to stop it, although many protest.

Within a sovereign entity, there is law. If you have a grievance against someone, you do not take the law into your own hands. You take the person to court. In international relations, nearly the opposite applies: taking the law into your own hands is quite normal. Often there is no other recourse; no universally recognised authority exists to resolve disputes.

This important difference between domestic and international politics some- times exasperates skilled practitioners of one when they enter the realm of the other.

Power and National Interest

Lacking sovereignty, IR depends a lot on *power*: A gets B to do what A wants. Power is not the same as force. Force is the specific application of military might; power is a country’s more general ability to get its way and includes military, economic, political, cultural, and psychological factors. The best kind of power: rational persuasion. Some of the most important factors, however — such as a country’s military capability, the quality of its political system, and its determination — can only be estimated until it is involved in a war. The war then shows, at a terrible price, which side had more power.

In this situation, countries generally pursue their **national interest**, and this makes IR partly intelligible. If you know a country’s national interest — from its history, geography, economy, and current politics — you can understand much of its behaviour.

Countries see their national interests through different eyes. Most of the world sided with the United States after 9/11 and supported the U.S. overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The diplomat’s work is in finding and developing complementary interests so that two or more countries can work together.

Defining the national interest may be difficult. Intelligent, well-informed people may come up with opposite definitions of the national interest. Neoconservatives in the Bush 43 administration claimed taking out Saddam Hussein in Iraq was urgent, to prevent him from building **weapons of mass destruction (WMD)**. Critics countered that it was an unnecessary war.

Foreign policy is inherently an elite game, and elites usually define the national interest. Unless facing a war or major threat, most people pay little or no attention to foreign policy, which, before 9/11, was nearly absent in U.S. elections. Foreign-policy decisions, even in democracies, are made by perhaps a dozen people. Notice how, even in the United States, presidents and a few advisors make foreign policy and then announce it to the American people and to Congress, which usually goes along with it.

The Importance of Economics

Economics now looms large in IR, perhaps the biggest single factor. The big flaw in the Cold War bipolar model was that it all but left out economics, the very factor that brought down the Soviet Union.

In recent decades, controlled economies got a jolt from British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s attack on the welfare state and her promotion of capitalism. “Thatcherism” spread to many countries, leading to freer markets. Some countries — in large part because domestic interest groups strongly objected — resisted the encroachments of free markets; they tended to hide behind **tariffs** or **quotas**. And a few countries simply prohibit certain foreign imports.

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) aims at freer trade by cutting tariffs and other barriers. It has some powers of judicial settlement of disputes. Its predecessor before 1995, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), did the same thing but without enforcement powers. GATT and WTO have done much good. Tariffs are at an all-time low, and most goods flow over the globe, but now non-tariff barriers increasingly block trade, many of them concerning nonindustrial products.

If the WTO system were to break down and the world returned to protected markets, we could see another depression.

Some argue that **globalisation** is the big trend. Most countries participate in the world market, a largely capitalistic competition where goods, money, and ideas flow easily to wherever there are customers. The motto of a globalised system: “Make money, not war.” The few countries that don’t play, such as Cuba and North Korea, live in isolation and poverty. But there are problems with globalisation. Is it a cause or a consequence of peace?

Prosperity does not necessarily bring peace. Indeed, newly affluent countries often demand respect, resources, and sometimes territory. As China got richer, for example, it combed the globe for oil and mineral deals and defined its borders grandly, reaching far out into the South and East China Seas.

The prosperity offered by globalisation does not reach everyone equally. Often, new jobs go to poor countries to make products to sell to rich ones.

Why War?

Very broadly, theories on the cause of war divide into two general camps:

1. Micro

**Micro theories** are rooted in biology and psychology. They might explain war as the result of genetic human aggressiveness that makes people fight. In this, humans resemble other mammals. Most anthropologists reject such biological determinism, arguing that humans exhibit a wide variety of behaviour that can be explained only by culture, that is, learned behaviour. Psychologists explore leaders’ personalities, what made them that way, and how they obtained their hold over the masses and brought them to war.

These theories offer some insights but fall far short of explaining wars. If humans are naturally aggressive, why aren’t all nations constantly at war?

1. Macro

**Macro theories** are rooted in history and geography and concentrate on the power and ambitions of states. States, not individuals, are the key actors, argue macro theorists. Where they can, states expand, as in Russia’s push into the Caucasus, the U.S. “manifest destiny,” and the growth of the British Empire. Only countervailing power may stop the drive to expand. One country, fearing the growing power of a neighbour, will strengthen its defences or form alliances to offset the neighbour’s power. Much international behaviour can be explained by the aphorisms *Si vis pacem para bellum* (“If you want peace, prepare for war”) and “the enemy of my enemy is my friend”.

Theories in this category include:

* Balance of power

The oldest and most commonly held theory is that peace results when several states use national power and alliances to balance one another. Would-be expansionists are blocked. According to **balance-of-power** theorists, the great periods of relative peace have been times when the European powers balanced each other. When the balances broke down, there was war.

* Hierarchy of power

Other scholars reject the balance-of-power theory. Calculations of power are problematic, so it is impossible to know when power balances. Often periods of peace occurred when power was *out* of balance, when states were ranked hierarchically in terms of power. Then nations knew where they stood on a ladder of relative power. In transitional times, when the power hierarchy is blurred, countries are tempted to go to war. A big war with a definitive outcome brings peace because then relative power is clearly displayed.

Weaving micro and macro approaches together, some thinkers focus on “image” or “perception” as the key to war. It’s not the real situation (which is hard to know) but what leaders perceive that makes them decide for war or peace. They often misperceive, seeing hostility and threats from another country, which sees itself as merely defensive.

In misperception or image theory, the psychological and real worlds bounce against each other in the minds of political leaders. They think they are acting defensively, but their picture of the situation may be distorted. In our time, it is interesting to note, no country ever calls its actions anything but defensive.

A hopeful trend has appeared after the Cold War: The number and ferocity of wars have declined. The mass media show a lot of fighting, but careful counts by scholars show a world of less violence.

Keeping Peace

Whatever its causes, what can be done to prevent or limit war? Many proposals have been advanced; none have really worked.

WORLD GOVERNMENT

The real culprit, many claim, is sovereignty itself. States should give up some of their sovereignty (the ability to go to war) to an international entity that would prevent war much as an individual country keeps the peace within its borders. But what country would give up its sovereignty?

Without the teeth of sovereignty, the United Nations becomes a debating society, useful for diplomatic contact but little more.

COLLECTIVE SECURITY

The United Nations’ predecessor, the League of Nations, tried **collective security**. Members of the League (which did not include the United States) pledged to join in economic and military action against any aggressor.

It was a great idea on paper, but when Japan conquered Manchuria in 1931, the League merely studied the situation. Japan claimed the Chinese started it (a lie), and the other powers saw no point in entering a distant conflict where they had no interests. The League had no mechanism to make the other countries respond.

FUNCTIONALISM

Another idea related to world organisations is to have countries work together first in specialised or “functional” areas so they see that they accomplish more by cooperation than by conflict. Increasingly able to trust each other, gradually they will work up to a stable peace. **functionalism** should produce a “spillover” effect. Dozens of UN-related agencies now promote international cooperation in disease control, food production, weather forecasting, civil aviation, nuclear energy, and other areas. Even hostile countries are sometimes able to sit together to solve a mutual problem in specialised areas.

But there is no spillover effect; they remain hostile.

THIRD-PARTY ASSISTANCE

One way to settle a dispute is to have a **third party** not involved in the conflict mediate between the contending parties to try to find a middle ground. Third parties carry messages back and forth, clarify the issues, and suggest compromises.

Third parties can help calm a tense situation and find compromise solutions, but the contenders have to *want* to find a solution. If not, third-party help is futile.

DIPLOMACY

The oldest approach to preserving peace is through diplomatic contact, with envoys sent from one state to another. A good diplomat knows all the power factors and interests of the countries involved and suggests compromises that leave both parties at least partly satisfied. This is crucial: there must be willingness to compromise.

If successful, diplomats draw up **treaties**, which must be ratified and observed. If one country feels a treaty harms it, there is nothing to stop it from opting out.

PEACEKEEPING

Related to diplomacy is the use of third-party military forces to support a cease-fire or truce to end fighting. Wearing the blue berets of the UN, they helped calm and stabilise truces between Israel and its Arab neighbours and between Greeks and Turks on Cyprus. Some failed attempts include the UNPROFOR (the UN Protective Force) and the IFOR (Implementation Force).

Beyond Sovereignty

The end of the Cold War and of a violent century brought into question the basic point of international politics: is sovereignty slipping? Increasingly, the world community is acting in ways that infringe on the internal workings of sovereign states.

Starting with the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials in 1945–1946, international law increasingly discounts sovereignty as a cover for mass murder. The 1946 Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal and 1961 Eichmann trial in Israel reinforced the Nuremberg precedent. Mass murderers in Bosnia and Rwanda were tried before international tribunals.

After a broad, U.S.-led coalition booted Iraq out of Kuwait in 1991, UN inspectors combed through Iraq looking for the capacity to build WMD. The Baghdad dictatorship screamed that Iraq’s sovereignty was being infringed upon. Indeed it was, and most of the world was glad of it. Should the international community stand back while a tyrant develops the power to annihilate neighbouring countries?

The world seems to be changing, willing to move beyond sovereignty and toward some kind of order. The trouble is no one knows what kind of order. Could **supranational** (above-national) entities take on some of the responsibilities held previously by individual sovereign nations?

THE UNITED NATIONS

The UN functioned better after the Cold War than during it. But it still has problems.

As permanent members of the Security Council, Russia and China have the power to veto anything they dislike, such as leaning on Syria to stop killing its own citizens. Russia did nothing against Serbia, long regarded as a Slavic little brother. The UN has sent many peacekeepers to observe truces, as in the Middle East and Balkans, but these few and lightly armed forces from small countries were in no position to enforce peace.

THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANISATION

NATO was arguably the best defensive alliance ever devised. The former Communist countries of Eastern Europe were happy to join after the Soviet bloc collapsed; NATO assured their freedom and security. Since 1949, NATO coordinated Western Europe and North America to act as a single defender under unified command in the event of Soviet attack.

But the North Atlantic Treaty is limited in scope and does not apply anywhere else, not in the Middle East, Africa, the Balkans, or the Caucasus, which are “out of area.” NATO members can, to be sure, volunteer to serve in Afghanistan and Libya, but they can- not be counted on.

In short, there is no organisation that can seriously calm and stabilise world trouble spots. Should there be one, or should the civilised world put together a series of ad hoc arrangements, as the United States did in Afghanistan in 2001?

U.S. Foreign Policy: Involved or Isolated?

The Cold War created a **bipolar** system that was clear but dangerous: the Western allies against the Soviets. Many describe the current system as **multipolar**, a more complicated system, one that reawakened an old question: should the United States defend its interests on the near or far side of the oceans?

U.S. **foreign policy** tends to swing between **interventionism** and **isolationism**. Can we find a stable and moderate middle ground? Many scholars think not; they see a pendulum swing between over-involvement and under-involvement.

Some argue that since the 2003 Iraq War we have practiced **unilateralism**, losing allies and rejecting treaties that most countries want (against global warming, germ warfare, land mines, and other issues). If we practice unilateralism long enough, however, we may alienate our allies and isolate ourselves. Exercising too much U.S. power could actually lose us the power to influence others. Because isolationism connotes ignorance, some prefer the term **noninterventionism**, a reluctance to use U.S. forces overseas.

Foreign policy is one of the most difficult areas of governance because we have to take into account not only our own abilities and preferences but also those of dozens of other states. We can make two opposite errors (and often do), both related to the problem of *misperception* (discussed previously). First, we can underestimate the dangers we face. In the late 1930s, as the clouds of World War II gathered, we supposed that the oceans were our two great moats, shielding us from the war. Pearl Harbour jolted Americans out of isolation.

U.S. foreign policy faces a twin problem:

1. A messy outside world that often defies our influence
2. An American people and government little interested in or equipped for putting this world in order

We have recently been in a time of emotion and anger in our foreign affairs. This has led to oversimplifications and unanticipated consequences. Whichever side you take in a foreign-policy debate, panic or despair is seldom justified. Current threats are not trivial, but we must not panic over Islamist extremism, which will fade because, like communism, it cannot put food on the table.

The great task for your generation will be to define U.S. and Chinese national interests in compatible ways. Beware of misleading *analogies* that equate China to Imperial Japan or the Soviet Union. China is neither of these. Handled with calm and reason, the world can live in peace with a rising China. We made it through the Cold War; you will make it through the twenty-first century, which, with the spread of democracy, may turn out to be a relatively peaceful one.