

Study Outline

Chapter 1: The Study of American Government

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

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