

**pluralist view** View that competition among all affected interests shapes public policy.

**creedal passion view** View that morally impassioned elites drive important political changes.

tures, executives, judges, bureaucrats) that no single group can dominate most, or even much, of the political process.

The fifth view maintains that while each of the other four views is correct with respect to how power is distributed on certain issues or during political "business as usual" periods, each also misses how the most important policy decisions and political changes are influenced by morally impassioned elites who are motivated less by economic self-interest than they are by an almost religious zeal to bring government institutions and policies into line with democratic ideals. Samuel P. Huntington articulated this **creedal passion view**, offering the examples of Patrick Henry and the revolutionaries of the 1770s, the advocates of Jackson-style democracy in the 1820s, the progressive reformers of the early 20th century, and the leaders of the civil rights and antiwar movements in the mid-20th century.<sup>19</sup>

## 1-3 Who Governs? To What Ends?

So, which view is correct? At one level, all are correct, at least in part: Economic class interests, powerful cadres of elites, entrenched bureaucrats, competing pressure groups, and morally impassioned individuals have all at one time or another wielded political power and played a part in shaping our government and its policies.

But, more fundamentally, understanding any political system means being able to give reasonable answers to each of two separate but related questions about it: Who governs, and to what ends?

We want to know the answer to the first question because we believe that those who rule—their personalities and beliefs, their virtues and vices—will affect what they do to and for us. Many people think they already know the answer to the question, and they are prepared to talk and vote on that basis. That is their right, and the opinions they express may be correct. But they also may be wrong. Indeed, many of these opinions must be wrong because they are in conflict. When asked, "Who governs?" some people will say "the unions" and some will say "big business"; others will say

a **pluralist view**.<sup>18</sup>

In the United States, they argued, political resources are broadly shared in part because there are so many governmental institutions (cities, states, school boards) and so many rival institutions (legisla-

"the politicians," "the people," or "the special interests." Still others will say "Wall Street," "the military," "crackpot liberals," "the media," "the bureaucrats," or "white males." Not all these answers can be correct—at least not all of the time.

The answer to the second question is important because it tells us how government affects our lives. We want to know not only who governs, but what difference it makes who governs. In our day-to-day lives, we may not think government makes much difference at all. In one sense that is right because our most pressing personal concerns—work, play, love, family, health—essentially are private matters on which government touches but slightly. But in a larger and longer perspective, government makes a substantial difference. Consider that in 1935, 96 percent of all American families paid no federal income tax, and for the 4 percent or so who did pay, the average rate was only about 4 percent of their incomes. Today almost all families pay federal payroll taxes, and the average rate is about 21 percent of their incomes. Or consider that in 1960, in many parts of the country, African Americans could ride only in the backs of buses, had to use washrooms and drinking fountains that were labeled "colored," and could not be served in most public restaurants. Such restrictions have almost all been eliminated, in large part because of decisions by the federal government.

It is important to bear in mind that we wish to answer two different questions, and not two versions of the same question. You cannot always predict what goals government will establish by knowing only who governs, nor can you always tell who governs by knowing what activities government undertakes. Most people holding national political office are middle-class, middle-aged, white, Protestant males, but we cannot then conclude that the government will adopt only policies that are to the narrow advantage of the middle class, the middle-aged, whites, Protestants, or men. If we thought that, we would be at a loss to explain why the rich are taxed more heavily than the poor, why the War on Poverty was declared, why constitutional amendments giving rights to African Americans and women passed Congress by large majorities, or why Catholics and Jews have been appointed to so many important governmental posts.

This book is chiefly devoted to answering the question, who governs? It is written in the belief that this question cannot be answered without looking at how government makes—or fails to make—decisions about a large variety of concrete issues. Thus, in this book we inspect government policies to see what individuals, groups, and institutions seem to exert the greatest power in the continuous struggle to define the purposes of government.



## HOW WE COMPARE

### Academic Freedom

You are reading a textbook on American government, but how is the freedom to study, teach, or do research protected from undue government interference? And how do European democracies protect academic freedom?

The U.S. Constitution does not mention academic freedom. Rather, in America, the federal and state courts have typically treated academic freedom, at least in tax-supported universities, as “free speech” strongly protected under the First Amendment.

In each of nine European nations, the constitution is silent on academic freedom, but various national laws protect it. In 13 other European nations, academic freedom is protected both by explicit constitutional language and by national legislation. But is academic freedom better protected in these nations than in either the United States or elsewhere in Europe?

Not necessarily. Germany’s constitution states that “research and teaching are free” but subject to “loyalty to the constitution.” Italy’s constitution offers lavish protections for academic freedom, but its national laws severely restrict those same freedoms.

The United Kingdom has no written constitution, but its national laws regarding academic freedom (and university self-governance) are quite restrictive by American standards.

**Source:** Terence Karran, “Freedom in Europe: A Preliminary Analysis,” *Higher Education Policy* 20 (2007): 289–313.

### Expanding the Political Agenda

No matter who governs, the most important decision that affects policymaking is also the least noticed one: deciding what to make policy *about*, or in the language of political science, deciding what belongs on the **political agenda**. The political agenda consists of issues that people believe require governmental action. We take for granted that politics is about certain familiar issues such as taxes, energy, welfare, civil rights, and homeland security. We forget that there is nothing inevitable about having these issues—rather than some other ones—on the nation’s political agenda.

For example, at one time, it was unconstitutional for the federal government to levy income taxes; energy was a nonissue because everyone (or at least everyone who could chop down trees for firewood) had enough; welfare

was something for cities and towns to handle; civil rights were supposed to be a matter of private choice rather

than government action; “homeland security” was not in the political lexicon, and a huge federal cabinet department by that name was nowhere on the horizon.

At any given time, what is on the political agenda is affected by at least four things:

- *Shared political values*—for example, if people believe that poverty is the result of social forces rather than individual choices, then they have a reason to endorse enacting or expanding government programs to combat poverty.
- *The weight of custom and tradition*—people usually will accept what the government customarily does, even if they are leery of what it proposes to do.
- *The importance of events*—wars, terrorist attacks, and severe or sustained economic downturns can alter our sense of the proper role of government.
- *Terms of debate*—the way in which political elites discuss issues influences how the public views political priorities.

Because many people believe that whatever the government now does it ought to continue doing, and because changes in attitudes and the impact of events tend to increase the number of things that government does, the political agenda is always growing larger. Thus, today there are far fewer debates about the legitimacy of a proposed government policy than there were in the 1920s or the 1930s.

For instance, in the 1930s, when what became the Social Security program was first proposed, the debate was largely about whether the federal government should have any role whatsoever in providing financial support for older adults or disabled citizens. In stark contrast, today, not a single member of Congress denies that the federal government should have a *major* role in providing financial support for older adults or disabled citizens or advocates ending Social Security. Instead, today’s debates about the program are largely over competing plans to ensure its long-term financial solvency.

Popular views regarding what belongs on the political agenda often are changed by events. During wartime or after a terrorist attack on this country, many people expect the government to do whatever is necessary to win, whether or not such actions are clearly authorized by the Constitution. Economic depressions or deep recessions, such as the ones that began in 1929 and 2007, also lead many people to expect the government to take action. A coal mine disaster leads to an enlarged role

**political agenda** Issues that people believe require governmental action.



Steve Wood/REX/Newscom

*Seeing first responders in action in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Americans felt powerfully connected to their fellow citizens.*

for the government in promoting mine safety. A series of airplane hijackings leads to a change in public opinion so great that what once would have been unthinkable—requiring all passengers at airports to be searched before boarding their flights—becomes routine.

But sometimes the government enlarges the political agenda, often dramatically, without any crisis or widespread public demand. This may happen even at a time when the conditions at which a policy is directed are improving. For instance, there was no mass public demand for government action to make automobiles safer before 1966, when a law was passed imposing safety standards on cars. Though the number of auto fatalities (per 100 million miles driven) had gone up slightly just before the law was passed, in the long term, highway deaths had been more or less steadily trending downward.

It is not easy to explain why the government adds new issues to its agenda and adopts new programs when there is little public demand and when, in fact, there has been an improvement in the conditions to which the policies are addressed. In general, the explanation may be found in the behavior of groups, the workings of institutions, the media, and the action of state governments.

## Groups

Many policies are the result of small groups of people enlarging the scope of government by their demands. Sometimes these are organized interests (e.g., corporations or unions); sometimes they are intense but unorganized groups (e.g., urban minorities). The organized groups often work quietly, behind the scenes; the intense, unorganized ones may take their causes to the streets.

For example, organized labor favored a tough federal safety law governing factories and other workplaces, not because it was unaware that factory conditions had been

improving, but because the standards by which union leaders and members judged working conditions had risen even faster. As people became better off, conditions that once were thought normal suddenly became intolerable.

On occasion, a group expresses in violent ways its dissatisfaction with what it judges to be intolerable conditions. The riots in American cities during the mid-1960s had a variety of causes, and people participated out of a variety of motives. For many, rioting was a way of expressing pent-up anger at what they regarded as an unresponsive and unfair society. A sense of relative deprivation—of being worse off than one thinks one *ought* to be—helps explain why so large a proportion of the rioters were not uneducated, unemployed recent migrants to the city, but rather young men and women born in the North, educated in its schools, and employed in its factories.<sup>20</sup> Life under these conditions turned out to be not what they had come to expect or what they were prepared to tolerate.

The new demands of such groups need not result in an enlarged political agenda, and they often do not produce such results when society and its governing institutions are confident of the rightness of the existing state of affairs. Unions could have been voted down on the occupational safety bill; rioters could have been jailed and ignored. At one time, this is exactly what would have happened. But society itself had changed: Many people who were not workers sympathized with the plight of the injured worker and distrusted the good intentions of business in this matter. Many well-off citizens felt a constructive, not just a punitive, response to the urban riots was required and thus urged the formation of commissions to study—and the passage of laws to deal with—the problems of inner-city life. Such changes in the values and beliefs of people generally—or at least of people in key government positions—are an essential part of any explanation of why policies not demanded by public opinion nonetheless become part of the political agenda.

## Government Institutions

Among the institutions whose influence on agenda-setting has become especially important are the courts, the bureaucracy, and the Senate.

The courts can make decisions that force the hand of the other branches of government. For example, when in 1954 the Supreme Court ordered schools desegregated, Congress and the White House could no longer ignore the issue. Local resistance to implementing the order led President Dwight D. Eisenhower to send troops to Little Rock, Arkansas, despite his dislike for

using force against local governments. Similarly, when the Supreme Court ruled in 1973 that the states could not ban abortions during the first trimester of pregnancy, abortion suddenly became a national political issue. Right-to-life activists campaigned to reverse the Court's decision or, failing that, to prevent federal funds from being used to pay for abortions. Pro-choice activists fought to prevent the Court from reversing course and to get federal funding for abortions. In these and many other cases, the courts act like trip wires: When activated, they set off a chain reaction of events that alters the political agenda and creates a new constellation of political forces.

Indeed, the courts can sometimes be more than trip wires. As the political agenda has expanded, the courts have become the favorite method for effecting change for which there is no popular majority. There may be little electoral support for allowing abortion on demand, eliminating school prayer, ordering school busing, or attacking tobacco companies, but in the courts elections do not matter. The courts are the preferred vehicles for the advocates of unpopular causes.

The bureaucracy has acquired a new significance in American politics not simply because of its size or power but also because it is now a source of political innovation. At one time, the federal government *reacted* to events in society and to demands from segments of society; ordinarily it did not itself propose changes and new ideas. Today, the bureaucracy is so large and includes within it so great a variety of experts and advocates, that it has become a *source* of policy proposals as well as an implementer of those that become law. The late U.S. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan called this the "professionalization of reform," by which he meant, in part, that the government bureaucracy had begun to think up problems for government to solve rather than simply to respond to the problems identified by others.<sup>21</sup> In the 1930s, many of the key elements of the New Deal—Social Security, unemployment compensation, public housing, old-age benefits—were ideas devised by nongovernment experts and intellectuals here and abroad and then, as the crisis of the depression deepened, taken up by the federal government. In the 1960s, by contrast, most of the measures that became known as part of Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society"—federal aid to education, manpower development and training, Medicare and Medicaid, the War on Poverty, the "safe-streets" act providing federal aid to local law enforcement agencies—were developed, designed, and advocated by government officials, bureaucrats, and their political allies.

Chief among these political allies are U.S. senators and their staffs. Once the Senate was best

described as a club that moved slowly, debated endlessly, and resisted, under the leadership of conservative Southern Democrats, the plans of liberal presidents. With the collapse of the one-party South and the increase in the number of liberal activist senators, the Senate became in the 1960s an incubator for developing new policies and building national constituencies.<sup>22</sup>

## Media

The national press can either help place new matters on the agenda or publicize those matters placed there by others. There was a close correlation between the political attention given in the Senate to proposals for new safety standards for industry, coal mines, and automobiles and the amount of space devoted to these questions in the pages of *The New York Times*. Newspaper interest in the matter, low before the issue was placed on the agenda, peaked at about the time the bill was passed.<sup>23</sup>

It is hard, of course, to decide which is the cause and which the effect. The press may have stimulated congressional interest in the matter or merely reported on what Congress had already decided to pursue. Nonetheless, the press must choose which of thousands of proposals it will cover. The beliefs of editors and reporters led it to select the safety issue.

## Action by the States

National policy is increasingly being made by the actions of state governments. You may wonder how. After all, a state can only pass laws that affect its own people. Of course, the national government may later adopt ideas pioneered in the states, as it did when Congress passed a "Do Not Call" law to reduce how many phone calls you will get from salespeople while you are trying to eat dinner. The states had taken the lead on this issue.

But there is another way in which state governments can make national policy directly without Congress ever voting on the matter. The attorneys general of states may sue a business firm and settle the suit with an agreement that binds the industry throughout the country. The effect of one suit was to raise prices for consumers and create a new set of regulations. This is what happened in 1998 with the tobacco agreement negotiated between cigarette companies and some state attorneys general. The companies agreed to raise their prices, pay more than \$240 billion to state governments (to use as they wished) and several billion dollars to private lawyers, and comply with a massive regulatory program. A decade later, the federal government

## 1-4 The Politics of Different Issues

**cost** A burden that people believe they must bear if a policy is adopted.

**benefit** A satisfaction that people believe they will enjoy if a policy is adopted.

passed laws that reinforced the states' regulations, culminating in the Family Smoking Prevention Tobacco Control Act of 2009.

became controversial because some people now perceived the recipients not as deserving widows but as irresponsible women who had never married. Whatever the truth of the matter, the program had lost some of its legitimacy because the beneficiaries were no longer seen as "deserving." By the same token, groups once thought undeserving, such as men out of work, were later thought to be entitled to aid, and thus the unemployment compensation program acquired a legitimacy that it once lacked.

Politics is in large measure a process of raising and settling disputes over who will benefit or pay for a program and who *ought* to benefit or pay. Because beliefs about the results of a program and the rightness of those results are matters of opinion, it is evident that ideas are at least as important as interests in shaping politics. In recent years, ideas have become especially important with the rise of issues whose consequences are largely intangible, such as abortion, school prayer, and gay rights.

Once an issue is on the political agenda, its nature affects the kind of politicking that ensues. Some issues provoke intense interest group conflict; others allow one group to prevail almost unchallenged. Some issues involve ideological appeals to broad national constituencies; others involve quiet bargaining in congressional offices. We all know that private groups try to influence government policies; we often forget that the nature of the issues with which government is dealing influences the kinds of groups that become politically active.

One way to understand why government handles a given issue as it does is to examine what appear to be the costs and benefits of the proposed policy. The **cost** is any burden, monetary or nonmonetary, that some people must bear, or believe they must bear, if the policy is adopted. The costs of a government spending program are the taxes it entails; the cost of a foreign policy initiative may be the increased chance of having the nation drawn into war. The **benefit** is any satisfaction, monetary or nonmonetary, that people believe they will enjoy if the policy is adopted. The benefits of a government spending program are the payments, subsidies, or contracts received by some people; the benefits of a foreign policy initiative may include the enhanced security of the nation, the protection of a valued ally, or the vindication of some important principle such as human rights.

Ordinarily, no president would propose a policy that would immediately raise the cost of oil and gasoline were likely to be exhausted unless higher prices reduced current consumption. But when a crisis occurs, such as the Arab oil cartel's price increases beginning in 1973, it becomes possible for the president to offer such proposals—as did Nixon, Ford, and Carter in varying ways. Even then, however, people are reluctant to bear increased costs, and thus many are led to dispute the president's claim that an emergency actually exists.

## Four Types of Politics

These entirely human responses to the perceived costs and benefits of proposed policies can be organized into a simple theory of politics.<sup>24</sup> It is based on the observation that the costs and benefits of a policy may be *widely distributed* (spread over many, most, or even all citizens) or *narrowly concentrated* (limited to a relatively small number of citizens or to some identifiable, organized group).

For instance, a widely distributed cost would include an income tax, a Social Security tax, or a high rate of crime; a widely distributed benefit might include retirement benefits for all citizens, clean air, national security, or low crime rates. Examples of narrowly concentrated costs include the expenditures by a factory to reduce its pollution, government regulations imposed on doctors and hospitals participating in the Medicare program, or restrictions on freedom of speech imposed on a dissident political group. Examples of narrowly concentrated benefits include subsidies to farmers or merchant ship companies, the enlarged freedom to speak and protest afforded a dissident group, or protection against competition given to an industry because of favorable government regulation.

The perceived distribution of costs and benefits shapes the *kinds of political coalitions that will form*—but it will not necessarily determine *who wins*. There are four types of politics, and a given popular majority, interest group, client, or entrepreneur may win or lose depending on its influence and the temper of the times.

### Majoritarian Politics: Distributed Benefits, Distributed Costs

Some policies promise benefits to large numbers of people at a cost that large numbers of people will have to bear (see Figure 1.1). For example, almost everyone will sooner or later receive Social Security benefits, and almost everyone who works has to pay Social Security taxes.

Such **majoritarian politics** are usually not dominated by pulling and hauling among rival interest groups; instead, they involve making appeals to large segments of voters and their representatives in hopes of finding a majority. The reason why interest groups are not so important in majoritarian politics is that citizens rarely will have

much incentive to join an interest group if the policy that such a group supports will benefit everybody, whether or not they are members of the group. This is the “free-rider” problem. Why join the Committee to Increase (or Decrease) the Defense Budget when what you personally contribute to that committee makes little difference in the outcome and when you will enjoy the benefits of more (or less) national defense even if you have stayed on the sidelines?

Majoritarian politics may be controversial, but the controversy is usually over matters of cost or ideology, not between rival interest groups. For example, there was intense controversy over the health care plan that President Barack Obama signed into law, but the debate was not dominated by interest groups and many different types of politics were at play (see Policy Dynamics: Inside/Outside the Box on page 17). The military budget went up during the early 1980s, down in the late 1980s, up after 2001, and down again after 2010. These changes reflected different views on how much we need to spend on our military operations abroad.

### Interest Group Politics: Concentrated Benefits, Concentrated Costs

In **interest group politics**, a proposed policy will confer benefits on some relatively small, identifiable group and impose costs on another small, equally identifiable group. For example, when Congress passed a bill requiring companies to give 60 days’ notice of a plant closing or a large-scale layoff, labor unions (whose

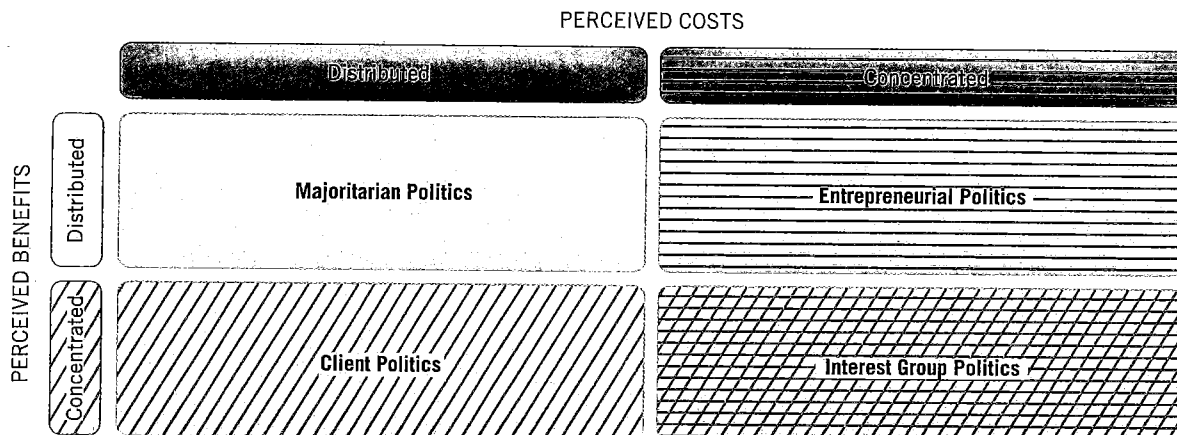
#### **majoritarian politics**

A policy in which almost everybody benefits and almost everybody pays.

#### **interest group politics**

A policy in which one small group benefits and another small group pays.

**FIGURE 1.1** A Way of Classifying and Explaining the Politics of Different Policy Issues



**client politics** A policy in which one small group benefits and almost everybody pays.

**pork-barrel legislation**

Legislation that gives tangible benefits to constituents in several districts or states in the hope of winning their votes in return.

**log-rolling** A legislator supports a proposal favored by another in return for support of his or hers.

members would benefit) backed the bill, and many business firms (which would pay the costs) opposed it.

Issues of this kind tend to be fought out by organized interest groups. Each side will be so powerfully affected by the outcome that it has a strong incentive to mobilize: Union members who worry about layoffs will have a personal stake in favoring the notice bill; business

leaders who fear government control of investment decisions will have an economic stake in opposing it.

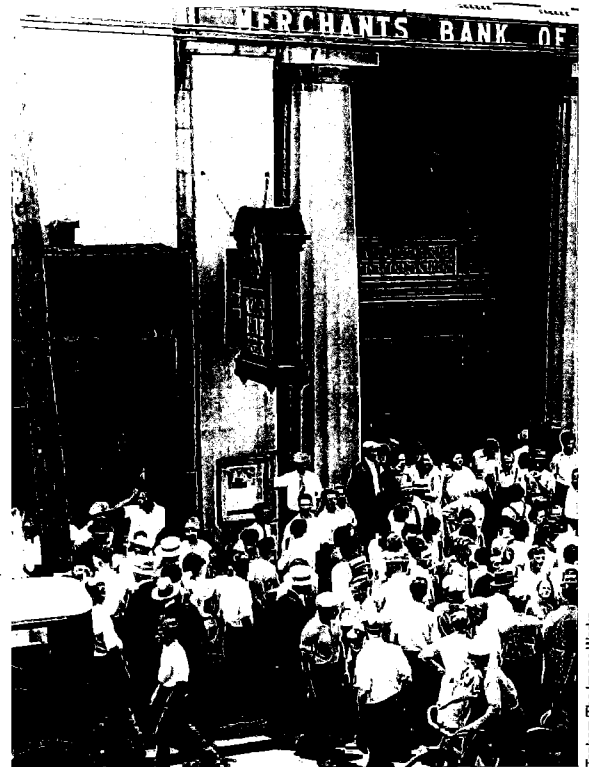
Interest group politics often produces decisions about which the public is uninformed. For instance, there have been bitter debates between television broadcasters and cable companies over who may send what kind of signals to which homes. But these debates hardly draw any public notice—until after a law is passed and people see their increased cable charges.

Though many issues of this type involve monetary costs and benefits, they can also involve intangible considerations. If the American Nazi party wants to march through a pre-dominantly Jewish neighborhood carrying flags with swastikas on them, the community may organize itself to resist out of revulsion due to the horrific treatment of Jews by Nazi Germany. Each side may hire lawyers to debate the issue before the city council and in the courts.

## Client Politics: Concentrated Benefits, Distributed Costs

With **client politics** some identifiable, often small group will benefit, but everybody—or at least a large part of society—will pay the costs. Because the benefits are concentrated, the group to receive those benefits has an incentive to organize and work to get them. But because the costs are widely distributed, affecting many people only slightly, those who pay the costs may be either unaware of any costs or indifferent to them because per capita they are so small.

This situation gives rise to client politics (sometimes called clientele politics); the beneficiary of the policy is the “client” of the government. For example, many farmers benefit substantially from agricultural price supports, but the far more numerous food consumers have no idea what these price supports cost them in taxes and



*During the Great Depression, depositors besiege a bank hoping to get their savings out.*

Topham/The Image Works

higher food prices. Similarly, for some time airlines benefited from the higher prices they were able to charge on certain routes as a result of government regulations that restricted competition over prices. But the average passenger was either unaware that his or her costs were higher or did not think the higher prices were worth making a fuss about.

Not all clients have economic interests. Localities can also benefit as clients when, for example, a city or county obtains a new dam, a better harbor, or an improved irrigation system. Some of these projects may be worthwhile, others may not; by custom, however, they are referred to as *pork-barrel projects*. Usually several pieces of “pork” are put into one barrel—that is, several projects are approved in a single piece of **pork-barrel legislation**, such as the “rivers and harbors” bill that Congress passes almost every year. Trading votes in this way attracts the support of members of Congress from each affected area; with enough projects a majority coalition is formed. This process is called **log-rolling**.

Not every group that wants something from government at little cost to the average citizen will get it. Welfare recipients cost the typical taxpayer a small amount each year, yet there was great resistance to increasing these benefits. The homeless have not organized themselves to get benefits; indeed, most do not even vote. Yet benefits are being provided (albeit in modest amounts). These



examples illustrate the importance of popular views concerning the legitimacy of client claims as a factor in determining the success of client demands.

By the same token, groups can lose legitimacy that they once had. People who grow tobacco once were supported simply because they were farmers, and were thus seen as both "deserving" and politically important. But when people began worrying about the health risks associated with using tobacco, farmers who produce tobacco lost some legitimacy compared to those who produce corn or cotton. As a result, it became harder to get votes for maintaining tobacco price supports and easier to slap higher taxes on cigarettes.

### **Entrepreneurial Politics: Distributed Benefits, Concentrated Costs**

In **entrepreneurial politics**, society as a whole or some large part of it benefits from a policy that imposes substantial costs on some small, identifiable segment of society. The antipollution and safety requirements for automobiles were proposed as ways of improving the health and well-being of all people at the expense (at least initially) of automobile manufacturers.

It is remarkable that policies of this sort are ever adopted, and in fact many are not. After all, the American political system creates many opportunities for checking and blocking the actions of others. The Founders deliberately arranged things so that it would be difficult to pass a new law; a determined minority therefore has an excellent chance of blocking a new policy. And any organized group that fears the loss of some privilege or the imposition of some burden will become a very determined minority indeed. The opponent has every incentive to work hard; the large group of prospective beneficiaries may be unconvinced of the benefit or regard it as too small to be worth fighting for.

Nonetheless, policies with distributed benefits and concentrated costs are in fact adopted, and in recent decades they have been adopted with increasing frequency. A key element in the adoption of such policies has been the work of people who act on behalf of the unorganized or indifferent majority. Such people, called **policy entrepreneurs**, are those both in and out of government who find ways of pulling together a legislative majority on behalf of interests that are not well represented in the government. These policy entrepreneurs may or may not represent the interests and wishes of the public at large, but they do have the ability to dramatize an issue in a convincing manner. Ralph Nader is perhaps the best-known example of a policy entrepreneur, or as he might describe himself, a "consumer advocate." But there are other examples from both ends of the political spectrum, conservative as well as liberal.

Entrepreneurial politics can occur without the leadership of a policy entrepreneur if voters or legislators in large numbers suddenly become disgruntled by the high cost of some benefit that a group is receiving (or become convinced of the urgent need for a new policy to impose

such costs). For example, voters may not care about government programs that benefit the oil industry when gasoline costs only one dollar a gallon, but they might care very much when the price rises to three dollars a gallon, even if the government benefits had nothing to do with the price increase. By the same token, legislators may not worry much about the effects of smog in the air until a lot of people develop burning eyes and runny noses during an especially severe smog attack.

In fact, most legislators did not worry very much about toxic or hazardous wastes until 1977, when the Love Canal dump site near Buffalo, New York, spilled some of its toxic waste into the backyards of an adjacent residential neighborhood and people were forced to leave their homes. Five years later, anyone who had forgotten about the Love Canal was reminded of it when the town of Times Beach, Missouri, had to be permanently evacuated because it had become contaminated with the chemical dioxin. Only then did it become widely known that there were more than 30,000 toxic waste sites nationwide that posed public safety risks. The Superfund program was born in 1980 of the political pressure that developed in the wake of these and other highly publicized tales of toxic waste dangers. Superfund was intended to force industries to clean up their own toxic waste sites. It also authorized the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to act speedily, with or without cooperation from industries, in identifying and cleaning up any sites that posed a large or imminent danger.

Superfund suffered a number of political and administrative problems, and only a few of the 1,300 sites initially targeted by the EPA had been cleaned up a dozen years after the program went into effect.<sup>25</sup> Regardless, Superfund is a good illustration of entrepreneurial politics in action. Special taxes on once largely unregulated oil and chemical companies funded the program. These companies once enjoyed special tax breaks, but as the politics of the issue changed, they were forced to shoulder special tax burdens. In effect, the politics of the issue changed from client politics to entrepreneurial politics.

#### ***entrepreneurial politics***

A policy in which almost everybody benefits and a small group pays.

#### ***policy entrepreneurs***

Activists in or out of government who pull together a political majority on behalf of unorganized interests.



## Policy Dynamics: Inside/Outside the Box

Superfund also thereby illustrates how dynamic the politics of policymaking can be. Once an issue makes its way on to the political agenda, the politics of the issue can remain stable, change a little or a lot, and change very slowly or quite suddenly. And policy issues can “migrate” from one type of politics (and one of the four boxes) to another.

By the same token, the policy dynamics of some issues are simply harder to categorize and explain than the policy dynamics of others. For instance, in the mid-2000s, 13 states amended their state constitutions to prohibit or further restrict gay marriage. In 2008, California voters approved a ballot measure, Proposition 8, banning gay marriage. But virtually all of these policies were enacted at a time when popular support for gay rights including same-sex marriage was rising. In 2001, by a margin of 57 percent to 35 percent, Americans opposed gay marriage; but, by 2013, a 49 percent to 44 percent plurality favored gay marriage. In 2012, President Barack Obama, having previously ordered an end to the ban on gays in the U.S. military, publicly declared his support for legalizing same-sex marriage. Surveys indicated that the only groups still harboring wide majorities opposed to same-sex marriage were evangelical Christians and adults born in 1945 or earlier.<sup>26</sup> In 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a 1996 law that allowed the federal government to discriminate against same-sex married couples, and two years later, the Court declared that same-sex marriages are constitutional.

So, how best can we categorize or explain the politics of this issue? Which type of politics—majoritarian, client, interest group, or entrepreneurial—were most important to policymaking? Why did state laws become more restrictive at the very time that both mass public opinion and elite opinion were trending toward greater acceptance? Do the still-unfolding policy dynamics of this issue fit neatly (or fit at all) in any of our four boxes? Start thinking about these questions; we revisit them in Chapters 3 and 6.

Finally, while the politics of some issues do fit neatly into one box or another, the politics of other issues reflect several different types of politics.

For example, most major pieces of social legislation reflect *majoritarian* politics—Social Security remains a prime example—but health care issues often have played out within all four boxes—majoritarian, client, interest group, and entrepreneurial—at once. This was certainly true of the politics of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010, better known as “Obamacare.” As we illustrate in our first Policy Dynamics: Inside/Outside the Box feature, the perceived

costs and benefits of the Obama plan affected the political coalitions that formed around it and involved all four types of politics.

## Understanding Politics

Whether pondering one’s own positions on given issues, attempting to generalize about the politics of different policy issues, or tackling questions about American government, institutions, and policies, an astute student will soon come to know what Aristotle meant when he wrote that it is “the mark of the educated person to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits.”<sup>27</sup>

Ideally, political scientists ought to be able to give clear answers, amply supported by evidence, to the questions we have posed about American democracy, starting with “who governs?” In reality they can (at best) give partial, contingent, and controversial answers. The reason is to be found in the nature of our subject. Unlike economists, who assume that people have more or less stable preferences and can compare ways of satisfying those preferences by looking at the relative prices of various goods and services, political scientists are interested in how preferences are formed, especially for those kinds of services, such as national defense or pollution control, that cannot be evaluated chiefly in terms of monetary costs.

Understanding preferences is vital to understanding power. Who did what in government is not hard to find out, but who wielded power—that is, who made a difference in the outcome and for what reason—is much harder to discover. *Power* is a word that conjures up images of deals, bribes, power plays, and arm-twisting. In fact, most power exists because of shared understanding, common friendships, communal or organizational loyalties, and different degrees of prestige. These are hard to identify and almost impossible to quantify.



Federal employees protest the 2013 government shutdown.



## POLICY DYNAMICS: INSIDE/OUTSIDE THE BOX

### Obamacare: All Four Boxes?

When Medicare was enacted in 1965, Democrats in the House and Senate voted for it by a wide margin, but roughly half of the Republicans in each chamber also supported it. But the 2010 health care bill was passed without any Republican support. In other words, the 1965 Medicare bill that President Lyndon Johnson signed into law had broad bipartisan backing, but the 2010 health care bill that President Obama signed into law had none. Using the model of the policy process explained in this chapter, here is a summary of how the costs and benefits of the Obama plan affected the political coalitions that formed around health care.

**Majoritarian Politics:** The bill was opposed by a majority of Americans for a variety of reasons. Many thought it too expensive (\$940 billion over 10 years) or worried about the government regulations the law contained.

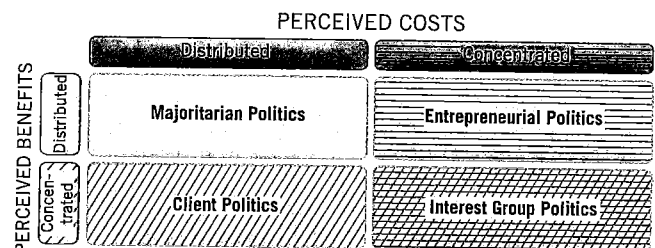
**Client Politics:** Drug manufacturers looked forward to having many new customers as more people owned health insurance. To get this benefit, the pharmaceutical companies agreed to pay up to \$85 billion in higher taxes. Many hospitals thought they would be helped by having more patients who could pay their bills with health insurance.

**Interest Group Politics:** Labor unions wanted health care coverage, but business firms were upset by the higher taxes and fees they would have to pay. Poorer people liked it, but those earning \$200,000 a year or more would see their taxes escalate. Older adults on Medicare and many doctors worried that the new law promised to cut payments to physicians, but the American Medical Association and the AARP (the largest organization representing senior citizens) endorsed the law.

**Policy Entrepreneurs:** In early 2010, the winners were President Obama and the Democratic leaders in the House who got a bill passed over popular and interest

group opposition. In the latter half of 2010, however, the winners were the Republicans who opposed "Obamacare" and used the issue on the way to sweeping GOP\* victories in the November 2010 elections. When the 112th Congress was seated in 2011, Republicans in the House made good on a pledge to vote for the out-right repeal of the new law (the symbolic bill died in the Senate), and several state attorneys general challenged the law's constitutionality in the federal courts (focusing mainly on the provision mandating that individuals purchase health insurance). In 2012, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the law's individual mandate, but ruled against certain other provisions of the law, including ones pertaining to changes in the federal-state program known as Medicaid, a program that was created in 1965 alongside Medicare (see Chapter 17 in full edition).

The Medicare law and the new health care law mobilized very different coalitions, in part because, between 1965 and 2010, Congress became a far more polarized institution (see Chapter 13). The "Obamacare" policy was based on a combination of majoritarian, client, interest group, and entrepreneurial politics. The politics of the issue was neither inside nor outside any one of the four boxes, but spread across all four.



\*"GOP" refers to "Grand Old Party," a widely used synonym for the Republican Party.

Nor can the distribution of political power be inferred simply by knowing what laws are on the books or what administrative actions have been taken. The enactment of a consumer protection law does not mean that consumers are powerful, any more than the absence of such a law means that corporations are powerful. The passage of such a law could reflect an aroused public opinion, the lobbying of a small group claiming to speak for

consumers, the ambitions of a senator, or the intrigues of one business firm seeking to gain a competitive advantage over another. A close analysis of what the law entails and how it was passed and administered is necessary before much of anything can be concluded.

This book avoids sweeping claims that we have an "imperial" presidency (or an impotent one), an "obstructionist" Congress (or an innovative one), or

**What Would You Do?****NEWS****Memorandum****To:** Governor Lucy Weber**From:** Professor Ili Grace Sousa**Subject:** Initiative repeal

You have supported several successful initiatives (life imprisonment for thrice-convicted violent felons, property tax limits), but you have never stated your views on the actual initiative process, and the repeal proposal likely will surface during tomorrow's news briefing.

**> Legal and Policy Experts Call for a Ban on Ballot Initiatives**

A report released yesterday and signed by more than 100 law and public policy professors statewide urges that the state's constitution be amended to ban legislation by initiative. The initiative allows state voters to place legislative measures directly on the ballot by getting enough signatures. The initiative "has led to disastrous policy decisions on taxes, crime, and other issues," the report declared.

**Arguments for a ban:**

1. Ours is a representative, not a direct, democracy in which voters elect leaders and elected leaders make policy decisions subject to review by the courts.
2. Voters often are neither rational nor respectful of constitutional rights. For example, many people demand both lower taxes and more government services, and polls find that most voters would prohibit people with certain views from speaking and deprive all persons accused of a violent crime from getting out on bail while awaiting trial.
3. Over the past 100 years, hundreds of statewide ballot initiatives have been passed in 24 states. Rather than giving power to the people, special-interest groups have spent billions of dollars manipulating voters to pass initiatives that enrich or benefit their own interests, not those of the public at large.

**Arguments against a ban:**

1. When elected officials fail to respond to persistent public majorities favoring tougher crime measures, lower property taxes, and other popular concerns, direct democracy via the initiative is legitimate, and the courts can still review the law.
2. More Americans than ever have college degrees and easy access to information about public affairs. Studies find that most average citizens are able to figure out which candidates, parties, or advocacy groups come closest to supporting their own economic interests and personal values.
3. All told, the 24 states that passed laws by initiative also passed thousands more laws by the regular legislative process (out of tens of thousands of bills they considered). Studies find that special-interest groups are severely limited in their ability to pass new laws by initiative, while citizens' groups with broad-based public support are behind most initiatives that pass.

**Your decision**☐ **Favor ban**☐ **Oppose Ban**

"captured" regulatory agencies. Such labels do an injustice to the different roles that presidents, members of Congress, and administrators play in different kinds of issues and in different historical periods.

The view taken in this book is that judgments about institutions and interests can be made only after one has seen how they behave on a variety of important issues or potential issues, such as economic policy, the regulation of business, social welfare, civil rights and liberties, and foreign and military affairs. The policies adopted or blocked, the groups heeded or ignored, the values embraced or rejected—these constitute the raw material out of which one can fashion an answer to the central questions we have asked: Who governs—and to what ends?

The way in which our institutions of government handle social welfare, for example, differs from the way other democratic nations handle it, and it differs as well from the way our own institutions once treated it. The description of our institutions in Part III will therefore include not only an account of how they work today but also a brief historical background on their workings and a comparison with similar institutions in other countries. There is a tendency to assume that how we do things today is the only way they could possibly be done. In fact, there are other ways to operate a government based on some measure of popular rule. History, tradition, and belief weigh heavily on all that we do.

Although political change is not always accompanied by changes in public laws, the policy process is arguably one of the best barometers of changes in who governs. Our way of classifying and explaining the politics of different policy issues has been developed,

refined, and tested over more than four decades (longer than most of our readers have been alive!). Our own students and others have valued it mainly because they have found it helps to answer such questions about who governs: How do political issues get on the public agenda in the first place? How, for example, did sexual harassment, which was hardly ever discussed or debated by Congress, burst onto the public agenda? Once on the agenda, how does the politics of issues like income security for older Americans—for example, the politics of Social Security, a program that has been on the federal books since 1935 (see Chapter 17 in full edition)—change over time? And if, today, one cares about expanding civil liberties (see Chapter 5) or protecting civil rights (see Chapter 6), what political obstacles and opportunities will one likely face, and what role will public opinion, organized interest groups, the media, the courts, political parties, and other institutions likely play in frustrating or fostering one's particular policy preferences, whatever they might be?

Peek ahead, if you wish, but understand that the place to begin a search for how power is distributed in national politics and what purposes that power serves is with the founding of the federal government in 1787: the Constitutional Convention and the events leading up to it. Though the decisions of that time were not made by philosophers or professors, the practical men who made them had a philosophic and professorial cast of mind, and thus they left behind a fairly explicit account of what values they sought to protect and what arrangements they thought ought to be made for the allocation of political power.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES .....

### 1-1 Explain how politics drives democracy.

Politics is the activity by which an issue is agitated or settled. Politics occurs because people disagree and the disagreement must be managed.

Disagreements over many political issues, including disputes over government budgets and finances, are often at their essence disagreements over what government should or should not do at all. Democracy can mean either that everyone votes on all government issues (direct or participatory democracy) or that the people elect representatives to make most of these decisions (representative democracy).

### 1-2 Discuss five views of how political power is distributed in the United States.

Some believe that political power in America is monopolized by wealthy business leaders, by other powerful elites, or by entrenched government bureaucrats. Others believe that political resources such as money, prestige, expertise, organizational position, and access to the mass media are so widely dispersed in American society, and the governmental institutions and offices in which power may be exercised so numerous and varied, that no single group truly has all or most political power. In this view, political power in America is