

AP Government Chapter One: Introducing Government in America

The Nature of Political Power and Authority Edwards, Wattenberg, Howell; 2017 ed.

Summary:

The two great questions about politics covered repeatedly in our textbook are a) “HOW should we govern?”, and b) “What should government DO?” pg. 7; Edwards.

Another way to think about it is this: who decides where society’s resources are distributed? Who benefits and who pays? All societies have needs and wants, be it building roads, helping the less fortunate, keeping the nation safe, etc. Politics is the process through which the decisions are made to deal with these needs and wants. POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT MATTER. Pg. 1; Ch. 1

The question of who governs is the question of who has power, which is defined as the ability of one person (or government) to cause another person to act in accordance with the first person’s intentions. Power is found in all human relationships; however, we are primarily concerned with its exercise in the United States federal government. People who exercise power may also have authority—which is the right to use power. Some authority is formal authority—the right to use power vested in a governmental office. Power and authority must be based on legitimacy—what makes a law or constitution a source of right.

Democracy is a word used in at least two ways in the discussion of government. One interpretation approximates Aristotle’s definition of the “rule of the many.” Aristotle was a Greek philosopher two thousand years ago that wrote extensively on the nature of government. This system, also called direct or participatory democracy, was practical in the Greek polis (small city-state—and by the way, very few men were able to participate), but survives today only in a few circumstances, such as the New England town meeting. Still, some have argued that the initiative and the referendum allow a substantial measure of direct democracy in modern political systems.

Another interpretation focuses on the election of leaders who then govern all members of the society. Representative democracy involves leaders acquiring power by means of a competitive struggle—election—for the people’s vote. Sometimes called the elitist theory of democracy, this sort of government is supported by those who feel that it is impractical for the public to make policy across a vast array of issues and that people often decide large issues on the basis of fleeting passions or emotions. For this sort of government to function, it is necessary that there are competing elites and free communication.

An Outline for your note-taking:

- ✓ Page 13 has an important statement: “... the desires of the people should be replicated. . . .” finish this quote, and let’s focus on this idea. WHAT are they really talking about here?
- ✓ Do NOT focus on Robert Dahl’s ideal of democracy, under the 5 red dots on pgs. 12-13.
- ✓ Do NOT focus on the section titled The Challenges to Democracy, pgs. 15-16.
(Great photo of the Adelson’s, though. Check out the \$ numbers.)

✓ Do NOT focus on any of the chapter AFTER pg. 19. Do NOT use section 1.5.

Objectives:

The purpose of this chapter is to give the student a preview of the major questions to be asked throughout the textbook and to introduce key terms. After reading and reviewing the material in this chapter the student should be able to do each of the following:

1. List the two basic questions to be asked about government in the United States (or any other nation) and show that they are distinct questions.
2. Explain what is meant by power and by political power in particular. Relate the latter to authority, legitimacy, and democracy.
3. Distinguish between the two concepts of democracy mentioned in the chapter, explaining in which sense the United States government is democratic.
4. Differentiate between majoritarian politics, pluralist theory, hyperpluralism, and elitist politics. Be able to explain these theories of WHO governs.

Chapter One Vocab

Know the definitions, be able to give an example where appropriate, and be able to use in a sentence that demonstrates you know the meaning of the term. You may need to look some of these up in sources other than your book. **The definitions given in the text book are often very accurate and complete. Be able to recall these terms for the vocabulary quizzes. Vocab quizzes may be fill in the blanks with no test bank available to you.**

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| 1. government | 16. hyper-pluralism |
| 2. politics | 17. policy gridlock |
| 3. Harold Laswell's definition? | |
| 4. political participation | NOT in the textbook: (Powerpoints from class – and readings) |
| 5. policy making system | |
| 6. linkage institutions | 18. Power |
| 7. policy agenda | 19. Authority |
| 8. policy making institutions (4?) | 20. Legitimacy |
| 9. public policy | 21. Direct or participatory democracy |
| 10. democracy | 22. Representative democracy |
| 11. majority rule | 23. bureaucratic theory |
| 12. minority rights | 24. Civil Society |
| 13. Representation | 25. initiative |
| 14. elites and the power elite theory | 26. referendum |
| 15. pluralism and the pluralist theory | 27. recall |