

Government in America: People, Politics, and Policy

Thirteenth Edition

Edwards/Wattenberg/Lineberry

Chapter 1
**Introducing Government in
America**

Introduction

- Politics and government matter.
- Americans are apathetic about politics and government.
- American youth are not likely to be informed about government and politics and rarely participate in politics.

Introduction

- The Political Disengagement of College Students Today (Figure 1.1)

Figure 1.1 The Political Disengagement of College Students Today

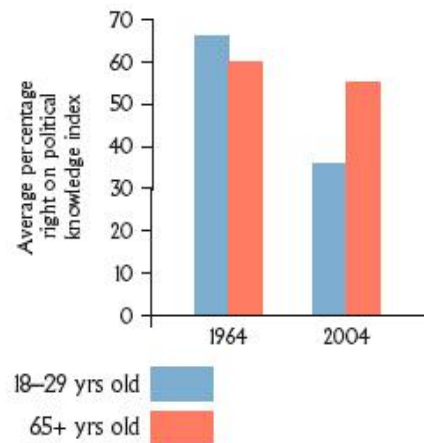
Source: UCLA Higher Education Research Institute.



Introduction

Figure 1.2 Age and Political Knowledge: 1964 and 2004 Compared

Note: Entries are based on the percentage of accurate responses to a series of eight questions in 1964 and six questions in 2004. In 1964, respondents were given credit for knowing that Goldwater was from Arizona, Johnson was from Texas, Goldwater and Johnson were Protestants, Democrats had the majority in Congress both before and after the election, Johnson had supported civil rights legislation, and Goldwater had opposed it. In 2004, respondents were given credit for knowing that the Republicans had the majority in the House and Senate before the election and for correctly identifying Dennis Hastert (Speaker of the House), Dick Cheney (vice president), Tony Blair (prime minister of Great Britain), and William Rehnquist (chief justice of the Supreme Court).



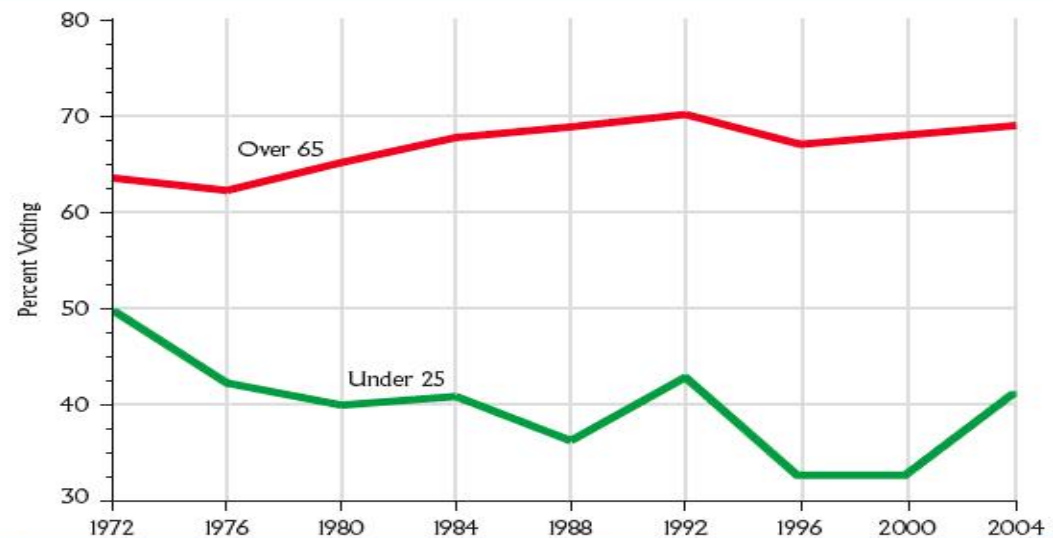
Source: Authors' analysis of 1964 and 2004 National Election Studies.

Introduction

- Presidential Election Turnout Rates by Age (Figure 1.3)

Figure 1.3 Presidential Election Turnout Rates by Age, 1972–2004

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Surveys. Data can be found at www.census.gov/population/www/socdema/voting.html.



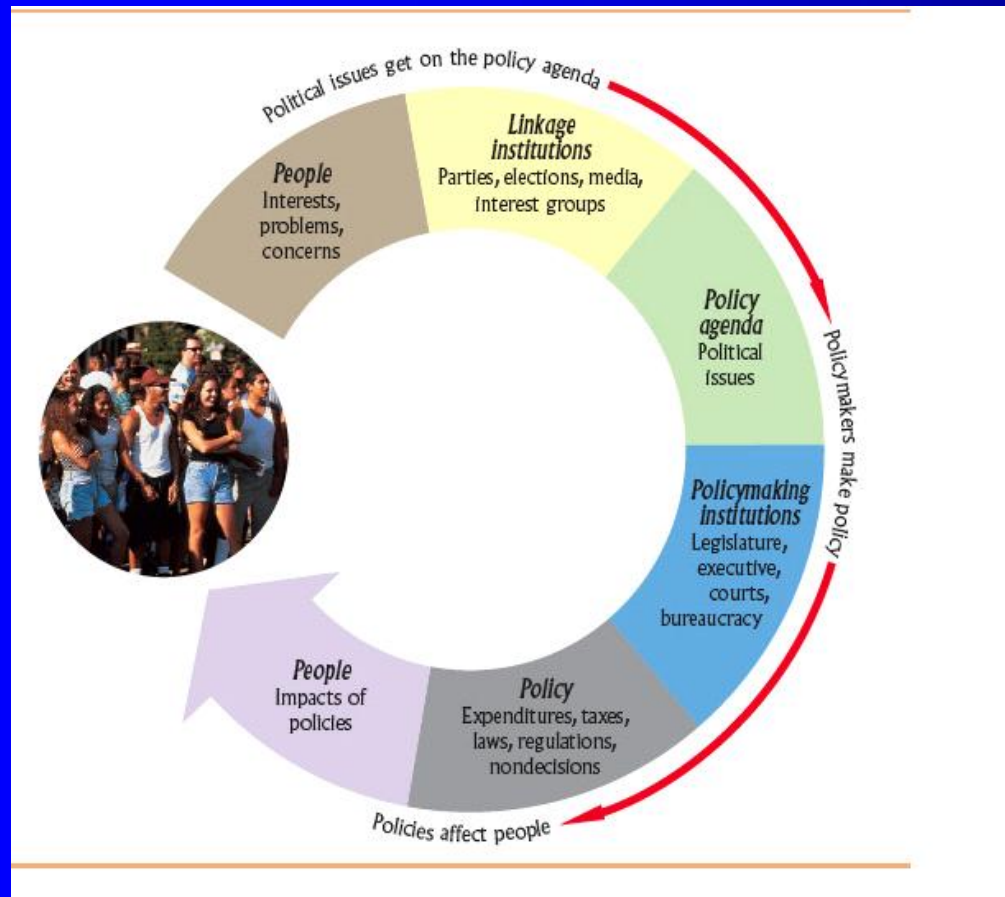
Government

- Definition: Government is the institutions and processes through which public policies are made for society.
- This definition leads to two basic questions:
 - How should we govern?
 - What should government do?
- Governments typically maintain a national defense, provide services, collect taxes, and preserve order.

Politics

- Definition:
 - Politics is the process by which we select our governmental leaders and what policies they produce—politics produces authoritative decisions about public issues.
- Also consider Lasswell's definition:
 - *Who gets what, when and how.*

The Policymaking System

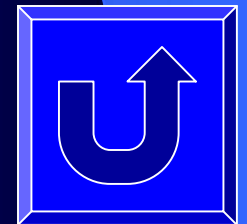


- The process by which policy comes into being and evolves over time

Figure 1.4

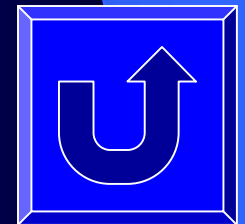
People

- Interests
- Problems
- Concerns



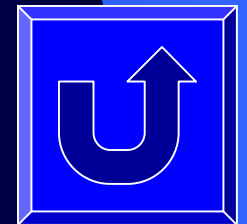
Linkage Institutions

- Definition: Linkage institutions are the political channels through which people's concerns become political issues on the policy agenda.
 - Political Parties
 - Elections
 - News & Entertainment Media
 - Interest Groups



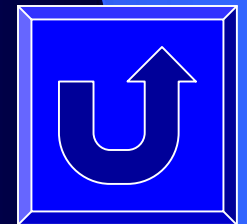
Policy Agenda

- Definition: The policy agenda are issues that attract the serious attention of public officials.
- Political issues arise when people disagree about a problem and how to fix it.
- Some issues will be considered, and others will not.
- A government's policy agenda changes regularly.



Policymaking Institutions

- Definition: Policymaking institutions are the branches of government charged with taking action on political issues.
 - Legislature (Congress)
 - Executive (President)
 - Courts (Federal and State)
 - Bureaucracies (Federal and State)

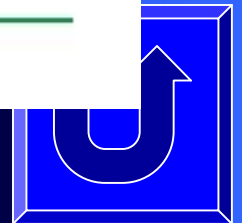


Policies Impact People

- Public Policy: a choice that government makes in response to a political issue

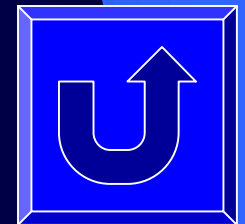
Table 1.1 Types of Public Policies

| TYPE | DEFINITION | EXAMPLE |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| Congressional statute | Law passed by Congress | Social Security Act |
| Presidential action | Decision by president | U.S. troops invade Iraq |
| Court decision | Opinion by Supreme Court or other court | Supreme Court ruling that school segregation is unconstitutional |
| Budgetary choices | Legislative enactment of taxes and expenditures | The federal budget |
| Regulation | Agency adoption of regulation | Food and Drug Administration approval of a new drug |



Policies Impact People

- Impacts of Policies:
 - Does it solve the problem?
 - Does it create more problems?
- Depending on the answer, policy impacts carry the political system back to its point of origin: the concerns of people.



Democracy

- Definition: Democracy is a system of selecting policymakers and of organizing government so that policy represents and responds to the public's preferences.
- Components of Traditional Democratic Theory:
 - Equality in voting
 - Effective participation
 - Enlightened understanding
 - Citizen control of the agenda
 - Inclusion

Theories of U.S. Democracy

- Pluralist Theory
 - A theory of government and policies emphasizing that politics is mainly a competition among groups, each one pressing for its own preferred policies
- Groups will work together
- Public interest will prevail through bargaining and compromise

Theories of U.S. Democracy

- Elite and Class Theory
 - A theory of government and politics contending that societies are divided along class lines and that an upper-class elite will rule, regardless of the formal niceties of governmental organization
- Not all groups equal
- Policies benefit those with money and power

Theories of U.S. Democracy

- Hyperpluralism
 - A theory of government and politics contending that groups are so strong that government is weakened.
- Groups control policy and prevent government from acting
- Difficulty in coordinating policy implementation
- Confusing and contradictory policies result from politicians trying to placate every group

Challenges to Democracy

- Increased Technical Expertise
- Limited Participation in Government
- Escalating Campaign Costs
- Diverse Political Interests (policy gridlock)

American Political Culture and Democracy

- Political Culture: An overall set of values widely shared within a society.
- American culture is diverse and comprised of:
 - Liberty
 - Egalitarianism
 - Individualism
 - Laissez-faire
 - Populism

Questions About Democracy

- People
 - Are people knowledgeable about policy?
 - Do they apply what they know when they vote?
 - Do elections facilitate political participation?
- Institutions
 - Is Congress a representative institution?
 - Does the president look after the general welfare?

Questions About Democracy

- Linkage Institutions
 - Do interest groups help the process, or do they get in the way?
 - Do political parties offer clear consistent choices for voters or do they intentionally obscure their positions?
 - Do media help citizens understand choices?

How Active is American Government?

- It spends about \$2.8 trillion annually
- It employs nearly 2 million people
- It owns one-third of the land
- It occupies 2.6 billion square feet of office space
- It owns and operates 400,000 nonmilitary vehicles

Questions about the Scope of Government

- Constitution and Federalism
 - What role does the Constitution's authors foresee for the federal government?
 - Does the Constitution favor government with a broad scope?
 - Why did functions of federal government increase?
 - Has a more active government constrained or protected civil rights and liberties?

Questions about the Scope of Government, continued

- Public and Linkage Institutions
 - Does the public favor a large, active government?
 - Do competing political parties force government to provide more public services?
 - Do elections control the scope of government?
 - Does pressure from interest groups create a bigger government?
 - Has the media helped control the size of government and its policies?

Questions about the Scope of Government, continued

- Elected Institutions

- Has the president been a driving force behind increasing the scope and power of government?
- Can the president control a large government?
- Is Congress predisposed to support big government?
- Is Congress too responsive to the public and interest groups?

Questions about the Scope of Government, continued

- Nonelected Institutions
 - Are the federal courts too active in policy making, intruding on the authority of other branches of government?
 - Is the bureaucracy constantly try to expand its budget or is it simply reflecting the desires of elected officials?
 - Is the federal bureaucracy too large and thus wasteful and inefficient in the implementation of policy?

Summary

- Young people are apathetic about government and politics, even though they affect everyone.
- Democratic government, which is how the United States is governed, consists of those institutions that make policy for the benefit of the people.
- What government should do to benefit the people is a topic central to questions of American government.