

MARINES IN COMBAT U.S. Marines of the 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines, attend to a colleague badly wounded by artillery fire on the Baghdad Highway Bridge, April 7, 2003. This photograph is part of a sequence taken during three days when the 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines of the USMC attacked and captured the Diwanya Bridge, also known as the Baghdad Highway Bridge, prior to driving into Baghdad and pulling down the statue of Saddam Hussein.



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POLITICS, GOVERNMENT, AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

◆ Politics and Government Defined ◆ Government Functions ◆ Kinds of Governments ◆ The Stakes of Politics ◆ Politics in a Changing World ◆ Approaches to Political Understanding ◆ Conclusion: Why Study Political Science?

The U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 had major repercussions for international relations and domestic politics. It was a major issue in the 2002, 2004, and 2006 elections in the U.S., it had significant effects on a national election in Spain in March 2004, it strained relations with several key U.S. allies, it changed the role and perceived influence of the United Nations, and it affected the price and availability of oil in international markets. The war has raised new questions about media coverage of military activity, the role of partisanship in U.S. foreign policy, the conflict between due process rights and military activity, and the practicality of building democracy in non-democratic political cultures.

Wars are perhaps the most consequential events in human affairs. Economists, historians, environmental analysts, experts in international law, anthropologists, and many others can help to shed light on the causes and consequences of wars, and their contributions are essential. However, political science research is arguably the discipline most central to understanding the war against Iraq. Every major international or political incident is unique, but the problems and questions that political scientists have studied for generations help to explain what happened and why.

For example, political scientists have studied the idea of a "balance of power" in international conflict for centuries, and insights from research on how this factor influenced decision-making in previous wars may help us understand this one. A great deal of research has been done on the effect of political culture on political development and the prospects for democracy. Electoral systems vary in terms of how well election results reflect citizen preferences, and political scientists have studied this problem in a wide range of settings. Policy makers and analysts will use the knowledge accumulated by political scientists to understand the situations leading up to the war and to make decisions about post-war Iraq for years to come.

While Iraq may be the most urgent issue at present, a great many problems suggest that the beginning of the twenty-first century is a period in which politics and government are particularly pressing subjects for study. Iran's apparent efforts to acquire nuclear weapons (which can be deployed on missiles that the Iranian military already has) continue to raise deep concerns in the international community. It is critical that we come to understand the domestic and international political factors leading Iran to take this step, and it is essential that nations and international organizations rely on accumulated knowledge about government and politics when they respond. The way governments work (or fail to work) has tremendous effects on all of us.

At the same time, we should not lose sight of the fact that politics does not explain *everything*; in fact, many of the best things in life have little or nothing to do with politics. Personal relationships, the satisfaction of learning and working, artistic achievement and enjoyment, the challenges and deep fulfillment of raising a child—we can experience all of those things without doing anything "political." In fact, most aspects of our day-to-day lives do not necessarily involve political institutions, issues, and movements. There is much more to life than politics.

Politics and government have to do with *public* policies and *public* decision making, concerns that most people think about only occasionally. Yet, political decisions do have a huge impact beyond purely "governmental" matters. Political decisions frequently affect parenting, for example. In most countries, the government determines what material children must learn in school and when they will learn it. Often the government mandates what kinds of health-related precautions parents and teachers must take to

protect students and what kinds of discipline and religious training children can be given in public schools. Most governments restrict artistic expression to some degree, both to limit exhibitions seen as improper in their cultures and to restrict the dissemination of ideas that may foster dissent and disloyalty.* Virtually everywhere, government regulates membership in selected professions (including not only law and medicine but also plumbing, architecture, and many other fields), limiting and often forcing career choices. Governments are the only organizations that may legally apply the death penalty to their citizens. And, of course, when nations decide to make war on one another, virtually all aspects of their citizens' personal lives may be drastically changed.

Why politics has such pervasive effects is itself a controversial matter. Some contend that government is extensively involved in our lives because much of what people do as individuals affects the economic opportunities of others, the environment, or public safety, and citizens demand that government take action to control those effects. For example, government policies in many countries restrict industrial development because of problems with pollution. Private actions often have public consequences, and many governments regulate those consequences. The nature of modern life thus accounts for a growing governmental role, as societies turn to government to safeguard widely shared interests in an increasingly complex, technological age.

The role of government may also grow for other reasons. Large numbers of citizens in many countries feel that government should be used as a tool to enforce and strengthen certain moral principles. In the United States, contending groups vigorously debate the morality (and legality) of abortion, while in Saudi Arabia the government restricts a woman's right to drive a car. In these and many other instances, people demand government actions that reflect their moral or religious positions, and many governments respond by enacting new restrictions and regulations.

Governments also apply power in pursuit of economic objectives. Sometimes this power is used to stimulate economic growth and opportunity, or to reduce economic inequality, and in other cases government power is employed to increase the wealth of individuals or groups that have gained access to political power. The British National Health Service, established shortly after World War II, is an example of the use of government power to reduce economic inequality; various laws passed under the Somoza regime (1937–1979) in pre-revolutionary Nicaragua employed government power to maintain a privileged status for the ruling family and its allies, making inequality more severe.

In short, government can be beneficial or devastating, but its significance is growing almost everywhere. Given the potential impact of government on so much of our lives, it is important to understand something about how government works, how it changes, how it can be influenced, and why different forms or designs of government operate differently.

Political science is the effort to shed light on these questions through careful, systematic, and informed study.

* On February 20, 2006, an Austrian court sentenced David Irving, a British writer, to three years in prison for having written a book in 1989 that denied the existence of gas chambers in the notorious Nazi death camp at Auschwitz. Governmental restrictions on free speech are found in modern democracies, not only in dictatorial regimes in developing countries. And, in March 2006, the government of Afghanistan arrested one of its citizens for converting to Christianity, a crime that could lead to the death penalty for those convicted. The individual was released, following mounting international pressure, and was exiled to Italy.

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT DEFINED

The study of political science requires that we define *politics*, *political power*, *influence*, and *government*—terms about which most students have definite opinions. Consequently, academic definitions of politics and government may strike us as abstract and sterile, often because they are designed to distinguish between popular and scholarly uses of the terms. Definitions in political science are also intended to help us recognize that the scope of our concerns is broad—the terms we employ must apply to systems very different from our own if we are to discover and understand the basic elements of political life. The definitions of two terms are particularly important: *politics* and *government*.

Politics

People commonly use the term **politics** in a negative or pejorative sense, as in "There's only one explanation for her being appointed to be the new ambassador—*politics*"; or, simply, "It's back to '*politics* as usual.'" These statements imply something very basic about politics. A decision was "political" if influence or power was involved in making it. The negative connotation that often surrounds "politics" derives from the idea that a decision about something *should* have been made objectively, on the basis of merit, quality, achievement, or some other legitimate standard. When we find that influence and power had an effect on the decision, most people develop a very cynical attitude, accepting the idea that "politics" is synonymous with cheating or underhanded dealing.

Here are some alternative definitions coined by political scientists:

"Politics is the science of who gets what, when, and how."

Politics is "the authoritative allocation of values."

"Politics [is] . . . the activity by which differing interests within a given unit of rule are conciliated by giving them a share in power in proportion to their importance to . . . the whole community."

Politics is "the processes by which human efforts towards attaining social goals are steered and coordinated."

"Political science is the academic subject centering on the relations between governments and other governments, and between governments and peoples."¹

The most basic idea contained in these definitions is that politics involves decision making among people in some large group. (An isolated person on a desert island cannot meaningfully be said to act *politically*, although economists could model his or her decisions regarding the investment of time and resources and his or her consumption, and historians could chronicle his or her activities.) More important, the definitions also suggest that political decisions involve influence and power. We can thus contrast political decisions with decisions made through, say, scientific computation or religious revelation. Although some of us may wish that governments would make decisions with the same kind of precision and objectivity that a chemist uses to determine the atomic weight of an element, a key characteristic of political decisions is that they are made in less objective ways. That is what makes the study of politics so interesting, and it is also what sometimes makes politics a "dirty" word. Political decision making involves divergent interests, ideas, and preferences, and it applies power and

influence to resolve them. Politics, then, is the process of making collective decisions in a community, society, or group through the application of influence and power.

Government

When U.S. citizens think of government, they normally think of the president, the Congress, governors and state legislatures, mayors, and the courts and agencies that implement programs. In primitive societies, a few individuals may constitute the government. Government can be a vast, multifaceted, and complex arrangement, or it can be as simple as one village chieftain or tribal council. However, all governments wield *authority*. Government decisions are normally more coercive than decisions made by other forces in society. (For example, if the Japanese corporation that produces Lexus automobiles decides to make a different model, no one is compelled to buy it or to fund its production. However, if the British Parliament decides to purchase new aircraft for its navy, British citizens are compelled to “buy” the aircraft.)

A **government** is the people or organizations that make, enforce, and implement political decisions for a society.* Accomplishing these tasks involves the performance of certain basic *functions*, which we now explore in more detail.

GOVERNMENT FUNCTIONS

Because actual governments are so different in scale, complexity, and structure, many political scientists have found it useful to itemize the **government functions** performed, in one way or another, in all thriving political systems. Asserting that “all governments have a legislature, an executive branch, courts, and bureaucracies,” would imply that a government would have to follow the model of developed Western democracies in order to qualify as a “government.” However, identifying universal government *functions* helps us to appreciate that even when a government does not have institutions that seem familiar to us, it is still a government. It simply performs the basic governmental functions in different ways.²

Rule Making

Perhaps the most fundamental function of government is **rule making**—that is, making what are normally called *laws* or *orders* or even *constitutions*. These rules define what is legal and illegal, what actions are required, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens. In the United States, Congress (with participation by the president and sometimes the bureaucracy) performs this function; in China, the People’s Congress officially makes rules (although most legislative decisions are really made by top Communist Party leaders). Councils of elders often act in this capacity in traditional societies, and the king and his advisers establish rules in the monarchy in Saudi Arabia.

In some way, all governments perform the task of making rules for their citizens. Some rules apply to criminal behavior, others establish economic regulations, and still others create or change public services. A rule is simply an *authoritative act*.

* In the United States, *government* applies broadly to a vast array of national, state, and local institutions. In European parliamentary systems (for example, Great Britain, Italy, Norway), we may speak of “the Government” to apply specifically to the prime minister and cabinet serving at a particular point in time. Thus, when the Italians say that “the Government resigned today,” they are using the term in this more restricted sense.

Rule Execution

Rules must be enforced and carried out if they are to have impact; this is what we mean by **rule execution**. A government that proclaims laws and programs will not be very effective if it lacks the ability to put force behind its decision making. Some governments appear to have had the capacity to perform the former function without the latter. For example, many historians noted that the French Fourth Republic (1875–1940) had the ability to make rules (it had an energetic legislature) but that it had a terribly weak executive, a combination that led to protracted periods of instability. Many Latin American governments have passed social legislation in the areas of health care or agrarian reform, but they lack executive establishments capable of enforcing the law. The failure of some systems to thrive can thus be attributed partly to an inability to perform the basic function of rule execution.*

Rule Adjudication

Governments normally apply their laws to specific cases and individuals. If there is a law against murder, for example, there will be situations in which it will be necessary to determine whether a particular killing was murder, manslaughter, self-defense, or even an accident. Laws are frequently ambiguous. As a result, virtually all governments have some way of performing **rule adjudication**. Legal systems, usually with courts and judges, are established to apply and interpret laws that are made in general terms but that must have an impact at the individual level. In most modern societies, institutions for rule adjudication (courts) are at least partly distinct from the bodies that make the rules. In a tribal society or a traditional monarchy, a single governmental group may perform both functions.

Other Functions

Making, executing, and applying rules are the most basic functions of government, but other tasks must be performed for the system to operate effectively. Governments must be able to *communicate* with their citizens. People must be aware of laws if they are to obey them, and they must know about new programs if they are to participate in them. The leaders must also have some way of determining what people want, what they will support, and what they will not tolerate. Governments need some way to *recruit leaders*, perhaps through a party system or through a well-established routine of succession to the throne. It is also necessary that governments have some means of *extracting resources* (such as taxes, military service, or labor in public works projects) from their citizens.

Finally, a healthy political system has some means through which citizens come to support the basic principles and values of their government. Creating this foundation of involvement and awareness is referred to as the process of **political socialization**. Stable political systems also have some established ways for people to present demands for change. Interests must be expressed so that the government is able to take them

* Students of early-twentieth-century France point out that the system was held together during periods of political instability in the executive branch during the Fourth Republic (1946–1958) by its strong, stable bureaucracy. See Michael Crozier, *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), for the classic discussion along these lines.

into account in its decision making. Political parties, interest groups, and voting systems are some familiar mechanisms through which this function of **interest articulation** is performed.

The concept of government functions helps us to discover what to look for in our efforts to understand and evaluate actual governments. The concept also suggests that basic government functions can be performed in many ways and through many different governmental organizations or processes.

KINDS OF GOVERNMENTS

Governments may be classified in numerous ways. The kind of classification most of us probably encountered as children simply divided governments into free and unfree, or maybe even good and evil. Those concepts can be interesting to discuss, but political scientists have found it valuable to devise somewhat more precise classifications. The Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BCE) constructed one of the first classification schemes, one that focused on who was in charge and in whose interests the ruler ruled. (See Box 1-1.) Many other classification approaches have been devised, some emphasizing economic systems, others reflecting legal arrangements, and still others based on wealth, culture, or even size.

An often useful approach is to classify political systems on the basis of how *developed* they are. The United States, New Zealand, and Sweden have developed political systems, whereas those in Mexico, Nigeria, and Indonesia are termed *developing* (or, alternatively, *underdeveloped* or *less developed*). Unfortunately, the criteria for making these distinctions are often unclear. What determines whether Nigeria or the People's Republic of China is a developed or a developing nation? Are political development and economic development the same thing? If not, does political development require economic development? Was wealthy Kuwait on the eve of the 1990 Iraqi invasion a developed nation? (It was

Box 1-1

ARISTOTLE'S APPROACH TO GOVERNMENTS

Type of Ruler		Ruler Rules in Interest of:	
		Ruler	All Citizens
	<i>One</i>	Tyranny	Monarchy
	<i>Few</i>	Oligarchy	Aristocracy
	<i>Many</i>	Democracy	Polity

Aristotle's classification is remarkable for its combination of an empirically observable factor (is the ruler a single person, a small elite group, or the masses?) with a more value-laden factor (does the ruler rule in his or her own interest or in the interest of all?). Aristotle obviously felt that nations with any of these three governing systems could operate fairly or with great

injustice. His categories have suggested questions for political research for centuries.

One notable feature of Aristotle's classification is the assumption that democracy is a bad form of government; this concept was also on the minds of several of the framers of the U.S. Constitution, as we discuss in Chapter 11.

quite wealthy, but it had an ancient form of government.) Does Costa Rica's thriving democracy make it a developed nation (despite its poor economy)?

In their classic book, *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach*, Gabriel Almond and Bingham Powell offered one answer. Political systems are developed, they argued, if they can effectively and efficiently carry out the functions of government outlined earlier. To the extent that they cannot, undeveloped governments are often prone to political instability, violence, and military takeovers.³ We discuss the idea of political development in Chapter 15.

What Is Democracy? Political scientists often compare governments on the basis of how democratic they are. In practice, **democracy**, like political development, is a matter of degree, and so we speak of governments being "more" or "less" democratic. The degree to which a government is democratic depends on several related factors.

First, democratic government requires adherence to the principle of *political equality*. If large segments of the population are denied political rights by virtue of their race, family heritage, economic status, or religious affiliation, then political influence is not in the hands of the people, and the government thus fails to meet a basic principle of democracy. Governments can be undemocratic with respect to this principle in many ways: by giving special political power to the upper echelons of an economic elite or a ruling family, as in El Salvador or Kuwait; by excluding significant parts of society from political life, as South Africa did until the end of *apartheid*; by concentrating power in the hands of the military, as in Nigeria and Burma; or by putting nearly all political power in the hands of a political elite, as in North Korea, Cuba, China, Nazi Germany, and the former Soviet Union.

Even if political equality is generally secure, a government is not really democratic unless there is some process or mechanism through which the people have an opportunity to express their opinions. **Popular consultation** is thus a key component of democracy. It means that the people have a real opportunity to be heard and that this opportunity takes place regularly. (A country would not be very democratic, for example, if its next general election were scheduled for a date 20 years in the future.)

Finally, democracy requires substantial adherence to the principle of **majority rule**. This principle is simple but often controversial. It means that when citizens disagree about a political decision or candidate, as they virtually always do, then the decision made or the candidate selected will be the one preferred by the larger group of people. If a minority (an elite group of landed aristocrats or an exclusive religious leadership, for example) makes political decisions over the objections of the majority of a country's people, the government would not be very democratic.

It is important to recognize, however, that majority rule can lead to the violation of other democratic norms. What if the majority votes to deny electoral rights to a religious or racial minority? Such an action would violate the principle of political equality and would be undemocratic despite the fact that it was adopted through popular consultation and majority rule. Hence, if democracy is to be preserved, the majority must not be allowed to erase fundamental minority rights; democracy implies at least some *limitation* on majority rule. The relationship between majority rule and minority rights is a sticky problem, and it is a central challenge encountered by all democratic governments. As we will see later, although the United States generally appears democratic with respect to the principles of

political equality and popular consultation, several features of its Constitution limit majority rule.*

Democratic governments differ in many ways. They have widely varying degrees of government ownership of industry, their citizens engage in different levels and kinds of political participation, and they vary with respect to their economic development and the design of their institutions. Political scientists have devoted great attention, in particular, to the differences between the United States, with its divided powers and "checks and balances," and Great Britain, with its more streamlined, centralized institutions. Other scholars distinguish between *industrial democracies* (those with well-developed economies, such as Germany and France) and less economically developed democratic nations (for example, India and Venezuela), which are less able to provide fundamental services for their populations. We explore the great diversity among democratic governments in later chapters.

Nondemocratic governments also operate in many ways, but most political scientists recognize two well-established types. Both kinds effectively deny political equality, popular consultation, and majority rule, maintaining real political power in the hands of a ruling party, elite group, dictator, or family. The difference between the two types of nondemocratic regimes has to do with the government's long-term goals.

Authoritarian systems require only that citizens obey government edicts and limit their dissent. Africa, Asia, and Latin America have been replete with authoritarian governments in recent decades. Such governments may violently repress opposition groups and torture political prisoners, but ultimately the state simply insists that the people not challenge the orders of the ruling elite. The governments of Haiti and Indonesia are good current examples.

In contrast, **totalitarian systems** energetically seek to change the political thinking and the allegiance of their citizens. The governments of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, for example, sought to indoctrinate their populations into the dominant ideology (fascism or communism), a phenomenon not found in authoritarian regimes. Political recruitment and indoctrination take place in totalitarian regimes largely through a ruling party that dominates public affairs and much of private life as well. Totalitarian systems attempt to politicize virtually all pursuits, including sports and art, that are less constrained in democratic and even in authoritarian societies. For example, under the leadership of Mao Zedong in the 1960s, China's "top ten" pop songs often dealt with such unexpected topics as surpassing Great Britain in steel production or resisting Western imperialism. Without the government's influence and control, one would have expected that popular music would have addressed more typical subjects.

Although citizens have little voice in the affairs of either type of nondemocratic system, authoritarian governments often permit churches, unions, and some interest groups to retain relative independence as long as they do not challenge state authority. Totalitarian governments generally dominate and remove existing organizational features of a society in their attempt to permeate the totality of their citizens' lives.†

* See Dahl, Robert A., *How Democratic Is the American Constitution?* 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

† Totalitarianism is a twentieth-century political concept. Most analysts argue that totalitarianism is possible only in countries with the technology to support mass communications, rapid transportation, and the means to engage in active, comprehensive surveillance of their citizens. Thus, all nondemocratic governments before that century were simply authoritarian. For a classic discussion, see Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1966).

In fact, we might think of democratic, authoritarian, and totalitarian governments as ranging along a continuum; they differ in the degree of independence from government control that they allow individual citizens and groups in society. Democracies are often referred to as *pluralistic* because they permit the greatest diversity of political behavior and viewpoints.

It is important to understand that both democratic and nondemocratic governments can perform the basic functions of government. Both kinds of governments make, enforce, and adjudicate rules; they communicate with their citizens; and they establish some basis for political socialization. Interest articulation occurs in nondemocratic governments as well as in democracies (although smaller segments of citizens articulate a narrower range of demands in nondemocratic governments). Quite simply, whether it operates according to democratic principles or in violation of them, a government is still a government.

Nor are political systems static. Countries may change over time, moving from one form of government to another. During the 1960s and early 1970s, for example, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and a host of other democratic governments in Latin America collapsed under the strain of internal conflicts. Repressive authoritarian regimes, such as the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, were established throughout the region. In the 1980s, however, democracy was restored to most of the region. Some Eastern



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THE DEADLY TSUNAMI Indonesian men walk past the rubble of buildings destroyed by the Dec. 26 tsunami in Banda Aceh. Indonesia was the worst hit of 11 nations affected by the disaster, though conflicting figures of between 114,978 and 173,981 have been given for its death toll. This photograph was taken one month after the disaster struck.

European countries (Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic) that until recently were totalitarian are now fledgling democracies. On the other hand, Sudan, Nepal, and Russia, each of which was part of the movement toward democracy in the last two decades of the twentieth century, have slipped back toward authoritarianism. Other nations—Thailand, for example—continue to straddle the line between authoritarianism and limited democracy.

Politics and government constitute the scope of inquiry and analysis for political scientists. The preceding sections describe the kinds of things that political scientists study in their efforts to contribute to our understanding. Through the scientific study of politics we attempt to find out why some forms of government work better than others, how people influence government, how governments change over time, how economic systems influence politics, and many other related matters. Ultimately, however, questions about politics and government are important because of what is at stake when governments act (or fail to act).

THE STAKES OF POLITICS

Most of the important consequences that can be traced to governmental action or inaction fall into one of five categories:

1. The allocation of resources
2. Human rights
3. The physical environment
4. Public services
5. War and peace

These are the “stakes” of politics, the scope of concerns in which politics makes a difference. Although some specific issues may pertain to more than one of these categories, the categories identify distinct aspects of our lives in which government and politics are critical.

The Allocation of Resources

Although politics affects many other things, it is fair to say that the majority of political decisions have to do with the **allocation of resources**.

Government power often has a tremendous impact on how wealth is distributed and on the purposes to which scarce resources are devoted. The word *authoritative* in this definition is crucial. In many countries, a considerable share of national resources is allocated through economic exchange (investing, buying, and selling). This is the normal domain of economic analysis. Some get rich, and others become poor, through the economic choices made by consumers, workers, producers, and investors. In contrast, when governmental acts allocate resources, we refer to the allocation as authoritative.

The distinction is important. When Henry Ford applied assembly-line manufacturing methods to his auto plant, manufacturing costs plummeted, prices fell, and a huge increase took place in the number of people who could afford cars. The labor of thousands of people was diverted from agricultural production and small craft activities to auto assembly. Through an economic process of exchange, a large share of national resources—both materials and labor—was allocated to the manufacture of automobiles.

Yet this allocation was not *authoritative*, because the decisions creating it were made voluntarily—most importantly, by consumers.

In contrast, when the Japanese Diet passes the annual budget, it allocates resources from taxpayers to governmental programs and expenditures. A political decision may be made to increase funding for medical research or to decrease funding for transportation.

New laws may also increase or decrease the proportion of taxes to be paid by the richest and the poorest citizens. These decisions involve allocations, whether they have to do with tax rates or expenditures. And such allocations are authoritative—citizens are required to make the contributions, and the expenditures are made as a matter of law.* Although resource allocation in *all* countries is affected by both economic exchange and authoritative governmental acts, the relative importance of economic and political allocations is very different in different countries. Most of the resource allocation that takes place in Taiwan, for example, is driven by economic exchange. The public sector is relatively small. In Cuba the government directly influences the bulk of resource allocation by making decisions regarding what is produced, at what prices, and with which raw materials. The forces of *both* economic exchange and government authority are important in the United States, Great Britain, Mexico, France, Italy, and most other countries. We use the term *mixed economies* to describe such societies.

Political economy is the study of how political decisions affect economic conditions. Government actions that alter the allocation of resources constitute the basic concerns of political economy. Two basic political problems dominate the field. First, government decisions can fundamentally shift the balance of resources held by the poorest and the richest segments of the population. We discuss the issues of **income distribution** in more detail in Chapter 15. At this point, however, it is important to note that nations differ dramatically with respect to how wealthy they are, and with respect to how that wealth is distributed among rich and poor. See Table 15.1.

Many things contribute to the differences among countries with respect to wealth and the equality with which wealth is distributed. Natural resources, climate, population, access to transportation, and other such factors are obviously important. However, the nature of government and the policies governments enact are profoundly important. In fact, according to Nobel laureate Douglass North, institutions “are the underlying determinant of the long-run performance of economies.”⁴ Table 1.1 shows the differences among 13 selected countries with respect to governmental corruption, the strength of the rule of law, and the number of days that it takes, on average, to obtain government approval to start a business. As you will see, there are tremendous differences among governments with respect to these factors. In countries in which there is less governmental corruption, a more established rule of law, and more efficient approvals of business start-ups, there are lower infant mortality rates and more wealth. The quality of government makes a tremendous difference in the lives of citizens.

A great deal of the political conflict among people reflects different views regarding the extent to which government effort should be devoted to shifting the allocation of resources from one group of people to another. In developing nations, where gaps

* To qualify as authoritative, however, the allocation must be made under *legitimate* public authority. Resources are involuntarily “allocated” from one person to another when a burglar carries off your television and DVD player. It is coercion by *legitimate government power* that makes the allocation authoritative and thus distinctively political.

TABLE 1.1 DIFFERENCES AMONG GOVERNMENTS ARE ASSOCIATED WITH DIFFERENCES IN LIVING CONDITIONS

	Per capita income	Infant mortality	Control of corruption	Rule of law	Number of days to start a business
United States	\$39,710	6.5	92.6	92.3	5
Japan	\$30,040	3.3	86.2	89.9	31
France	\$29,320	4.3	88.7	88.9	8
Russia	\$ 9,620	15.4	29.1	29.5	36
Brazil	\$ 8,020	48.1	53.2	46.9	152
Thailand	\$ 8,020	38.5	49.3	51.7	33
Kazakhstan	\$ 6,980	54.9	9.9	17.4	25
Colombia	\$ 6,820	24.4	52.2	29.5	43
El Salvador	\$ 4,980	70.9	43.8	42.5	115
Philippines	\$ 4,890	36.0	36.5	32.4	50
Haiti	\$ 1,680	89.4	1.0	2.4	203
Burundi	\$ 660	85.8	6.4	6.4	43
Malawi	\$ 620	112.5	23.6	45.4	35

NOTE: *Per capita income* is measured in 2005 U.S. dollars. *Infant mortality* is the number of deaths to persons under 12 months of age per 1,000 live births. The *control of corruption* and *rule of law* measures are indicators of each country's *percentile rankings* on these measures. (For example, Brazil's score of 53.2 on the "control of corruption" variable means that Brazil scored higher than 53.2 percent of the countries, but 46.8 percent of the countries scored higher than Brazil.) For both of these measures, high scores signify better ratings than low scores. The *number of days to start a business* column indicates how long, in days, it is estimated to take to obtain government licenses and other approvals to start a business.

SOURCES: All data are from the World Bank and the CIA World Factbook. The World Bank material is from its *World Development Report 2006*, Table A3, available at http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2005/Resources/complete_report.pdf, its publication, *Governance Matters IV: Governance Indicators for 1996–2004*, available at <http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/governance/pubs/govmatters4.html>, and its *World Development Report 2005*, Table 1, available at http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2005/Resources/complete_report.pdf. Data on the number of days needed to start a business were taken from the World Bank's *Doing Business in 2005: Removing Obstacles to Growth*, available at <http://www.doingbusiness.org/documents/DoingBusiness2005.PDF>, pp. 89–91. The CIA World Factbook is available at <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>.

between rich and poor are often particularly sharp, conflicts between "haves" and "have nots" periodically unleash revolutionary forces (as in Nicaragua, the Philippines, and El Salvador). Extreme inequality in the distribution of income or land increases the likelihood of political instability in developing nations.

In industrial democracies, economic inequality is a less explosive issue but, nevertheless, the major parties in the United States, Great Britain, France, and Germany tend to define themselves primarily by their different positions on resource allocation. More generally, the distinction between "left" and "right" on the political spectrum is largely, although not entirely, a matter of differing positions on what government should do to alter the distribution of resources; those on the left favor more active efforts to redistribute income, whereas those on the right are either less supportive of, or hostile to, such efforts.

Governments are also heavily involved in resource allocations that, though involving large shares of wealth, do not alter the balance between rich and poor. These *intersector allocations* constitute a second set of concerns in the area of political economy. For example, import restrictions alter the allocation of resources. When a government restricts or severely taxes the importation of a particular good, the domestic manufacturers and workers who produce that good find that the demand for what they have to sell is

greater (because consumers can no longer buy the imports). Domestic resources that would otherwise be devoted to the production of other goods are then devoted to manufacture of the previously imported good. The trade restriction thus changes the allocation of resources from the production of one good to another, and it increases the income of the manufacturers and workers producing the protected good.

Of course, other groups realize a net decrease in wealth. When the state restricts importation of a good, the total supply of that good is reduced, and the price charged by domestic producers goes up. People who had paid \$14,000 for a car before import restrictions were in place may now have to pay \$18,000 for the same car. These people have experienced a net wealth reduction of \$4,000. The government has "allocated" thousands of dollars from consumers to those involved in the auto industry by enacting the change in trade policy.

Governments also allocate resources in other ways—by adjusting interest rates, changing tax rates and exemptions, nationalizing private industries, and controlling prices and wages. Using these and many other kinds of powers, governments have a

Box 1-2

GOVERNMENTS, CAPITALISM, AND DEMOCRACY

With the dramatic decline of communism at the end of the last century, citizens and scholars around the world have become increasingly interested in the possible connection between capitalism and democracy. Ardent advocates of capitalism have long argued that the economic freedoms of capitalism inevitably lead to political freedoms, and that a nation that enjoys genuine political freedom will always construct and maintain a market economy.⁵ Although cases can be found to support this argument, the actual record is not so clear.

Historically, the rise of liberal democracy (competitive elections with guaranteed civil liberties) evolved first in Britain and then spread to other parts of Western Europe and the United States at the same time that capitalism was emerging as the new economic system. The tendency of these political and economic systems to develop simultaneously was far from coincidental. As scholars from Karl Marx onward have recognized, it was the rising class of capitalist entrepreneurs and businessmen—often known as the bourgeoisie—who mounted the first major challenges to the political and economic power of the feudal or semi-feudal aristocracy that had previously dominated Europe. The bourgeoisie became the most powerful voice for parliamentary government, wider citizen participation in politics, and notions of guaranteed individual liberties.

In general, capitalism tends to produce democracy because the existence of an independent bourgeoisie in a capitalist society creates centers of economic power

independent of the government and makes it easier for political pluralism to flourish. For example, the students who organized China's short-lived democracy movement in 1989 were partly financed by the country's new class of independent businessmen. In a classic study, a leading scholar of political and economic development nicely summed it up by exclaiming "no bourgeoisie, no democracy!"⁶

However, not all capitalist countries are democratic and not all democracies are purely capitalist. From the 1960s through the 1980s, a number of East and Southeast Asian countries became models of capitalist economic development, with very high levels of growth, while at the same time maintaining relatively repressive dictatorships. These countries included South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia. From 1973 to 1990, Chile's president, General Augusto Pinochet, imposed one of Latin America's more brutal regimes. But, at the same time, led by U.S.-trained economists, the country developed what Nobel Prize-winning economist (and champion of unfettered capitalism) Milton Friedman hailed as one of the world's purest capitalist systems. Moreover, China today seems to be developing an essentially capitalist economy within the confines of an authoritarian, communist political system.

Examples of democracies that are not capitalist are harder to find, and it probably is true that no modern democracy has existed without some elements of capitalism. It should be noted, however, that a number of

tremendous capacity to change economic conditions. Governments can make societies richer or poorer; they can foster a more equal or a less equal distribution of wealth; they can hasten or retard the development of specific industries. Perhaps there is also a connection between government policies that encourage economic freedom and the emergence of democracy. (See Box 1-2.) In short, the widely varying economic conditions among contemporary nations reflect, in large measure, the political choices made by governments.

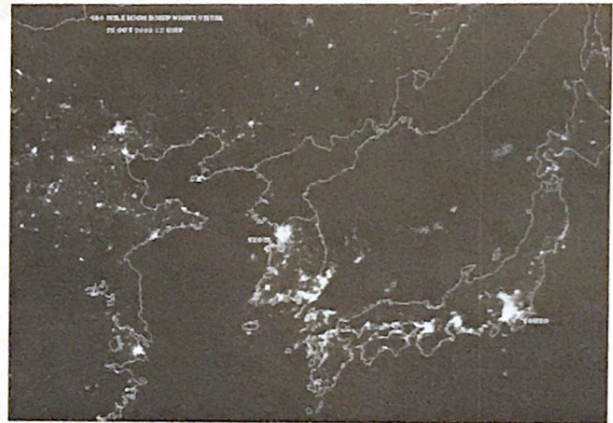
Human Rights

Although economic issues often seem to dominate politics, many of the political issues that most sharply divide us involve governmental policies in non-economic areas. In the United States, heated debates have focused on prayers in public schools, the achievement of racial balance in public and private organizations, the right to have an abortion, and the rights of homosexuals. In India, Lebanon, Northern Ireland, and

Western European countries have thrived under highly developed democratic political systems and mixed economic systems that combine elements of capitalism and socialism. Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland have some of the highest standards of living in the world, socialist welfare systems, and highly democratic politics. It could be argued that in the last years of the Soviet Union (see Chapter 13), President Mikhail Gorbachev's political reforms in the 1980s produced a country that was moderately democratic (competitive elections, multiple parties, a fairly free press, religious tolerance) with an economy that was still primarily state controlled (communist).

But these exceptional cases have proven to be somewhat transitory. Chile, Taiwan, and South Korea have all democratized. Russia's totalitarian political system eventually crumbled, and many analysts think that eventually China's will as well (though this may take a long time and not all experts feel it is certain to happen). Thus, although capitalist societies can be authoritarian, at least for a substantial number of years, and although Scandinavia's mixed economies coexist very smoothly with democracy, there is no question that in the long run capitalist economic systems and democratic political systems seem to reinforce each other.

It should also be noted that the wealth creation that characterizes capitalism may itself undermine democracy. Kevin Phillips, a controversial social critic often seen on public television in the United States, has argued along these lines in a recent book.⁷ He states that U.S. capitalism has led to a concentration of



THE LIGHTS ARE OUT This nighttime satellite photo provides a striking visual indicator of how different forms of government can create very different living conditions. Although the cities of Seoul, South Korea, Beijing, China, and Tokyo, Japan are very obvious, North Korea is almost completely dark. Its population is 22 million people, about 45% of the population of South Korea.

wealth that is much more pronounced than in earlier periods, and that it threatens the egalitarian conditions that were in place during the Founding period. If the wealthy become too powerful, according to Phillips, the political system will be less democratic.

In short, there is clearly an important connection between capitalism and democracy, but it is far too simple to claim that one always produces or requires the other.

Canada, conflicts over religious or language policies have sometimes erupted in violence. Governments have a tremendous capacity both to protect and to trample on the civil liberties of their citizens.

Nearly everywhere, there is always great disagreement regarding the nature and extent of **human rights**, and even when people agree that a particular right should be respected, they often differ about when and under what conditions the right may be appropriately abridged. A great deal of political conflict thus involves disputes regarding human rights.

Although issues of human rights can be approached in many ways, two kinds of rights can be distinguished according to how they relate to government. Some rights correspond to limits on government power and are thus called *negative rights*. Examples include the right to free expression, to religious freedom, to a fair trial before punishment, to travel, and so on. They are called negative rights because we enjoy them when government is *prevented* from certain actions. We have freedom of the press, for example, to the extent that the government is *not* free to limit what can be written, printed, or broadcast. In contrast, *positive rights* require governmental action. For example, if we feel that every person has the

Box 1-3

FOUR STATEMENTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

I. THE MAGNA CARTA (THE GREAT CHARTER) [EXCERPTS]

Signed by King John of England in 1215.

—No bailiff for the future shall, upon his own unsupported complaint, put anyone to his "law," without credible witnesses brought for this purpose.

—No freemen shall be taken or imprisoned . . . or exiled or in any way destroyed, nor will we go upon him nor send upon him, except by the lawful judgment of his peers or by the law of the land.

—We will appoint as justices, constables, sheriffs, or bailiffs only such as know the law of the realm and mean to observe it well.

—Wherefore we will and firmly order that the English Church be free, and that the men in our kingdom have and hold all the aforesaid liberties, rights, and concessions, well and peaceably, freely and quietly, fully and wholly, for themselves and their heirs, of us and our heirs, in all respects and in all places forever, as is aforesaid. An oath, moreover, has been taken, as well on our part as on the part of the barons, that all these conditions aforesaid shall be kept in good faith and without evil intent. Given under our hand—the above named and many others being witnesses—in the meadow

which is called Runnymede, between Windsor and Staines, on the fifteenth day of June, in the seventeenth year of our reign.

II. THE UNITED STATES BILL OF RIGHTS [EXCERPTS]

Adopted in 1791.

Amendment 1. Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press. . . .

Amendment 2. 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.

Amendment 4. The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated. . . .

Amendment 5. No person . . . shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law. . . .

Amendment 8. Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishment inflicted.

right to a job or to health care, the government must take steps to provide them to people who are unable to obtain private employment or to pay their own medical bills.

Both negative and positive rights are contained in the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights and in the U.S. Bill of Rights. (See Box 1-3.) We explore controversies about human rights in our discussions of ideology in the next chapter.

A special set of human rights issues involves the treatment of women. In many political systems, the rights of women are severely restricted. The infamous Taliban regime in Afghanistan, which was quickly toppled in 2001 by a coalition of forces led by the United States, placed severe restrictions on the education of women. Taliban policies and laws provided for physical beatings if women failed to observe a wide range of clothing requirements, and these punishments were regularly carried out. Women face restrictions on reproductive choices in China, many Latin American countries, and much of Africa. Although most factors affecting gender equality stem from cultural influences, government policies play a major role in reinforcing or reforming them.

Human rights are important in the stakes of politics because people care deeply about them. In some cases, one person's freedom injures another citizen (as when a

III. THE UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION ON HUMAN RIGHTS [EXCERPTS]

Adopted and Proclaimed by the General Assembly Resolution 217 A (III) of December 10, 1948.

Article 1: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

Article 2: Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status.

Article 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and the security of person.

Article 4: No one shall be held in slavery. . . .

Article 18: Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. . . .

Article 23: Everyone has the right to work, . . . to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.

Article 26: Everyone has the right to education.

Education shall be free. . . .

IV. THE CHARTER OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION [EXCERPTS]

Adopted on December 7, 2000

Article 8, Section 1: Everyone has the right to the protection of personal data concerning him or her.

Article 9: The right to marry and the right to found a family shall be guaranteed in accordance with the national laws governing the exercise of these rights.

Article 11, Section 1: Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority

Article 11, Section 2: The freedom and pluralism of the media shall be respected.

Article 13: The arts and scientific research shall be free of constraint. Academic freedom shall be respected.

Article 17, Section 1: Everyone has the right to own, use, dispose of and bequeath his or her lawfully acquired possessions. No one may be deprived of his or her possessions, except in the public interest and in the cases and under the conditions provided for by law, subject to fair compensation being paid in good time for their loss. The use of property may be regulated by law in so far as is necessary for the general interest.

Article 21: Any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited.

restaurant owner exercises the "freedom" to deny service to African Americans). Citizens are divided in many countries with respect to whether abortion should be legalized. Much of the disagreement has to do with a conflict, in the eyes of many citizens, between the right to privacy and the right of the unborn to live. At times there may be a basic moral conflict between the rights of those accused of crimes and the right of society to be safe from criminals.

In short, people disagree about human rights on many levels, and government action is often demanded either to secure or to modify those rights. Human rights even figure in foreign policy issues. In the United States, the government has been criticized for its present or past affiliation with regimes that have poor records on human rights. One of the justifications that the George W. Bush administration gave for its military action against Iraq was that country's horrendous human rights abuses, including mass murder and the use of chemical weapons against its citizens. In the 1990s, some critics urged the U.S. government to act more forcefully against the Chinese government for its massacre of students at Tiananmen Square in 1989. Especially when a concern for human rights conflicts with other national interests, such as international trade, political decision making becomes very difficult. How human rights should be defined and respected are issues that are very much at stake in political life.

 Box 1-4

ROSA PARKS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

In 2005, one of the most famous and widely respected civil rights pioneers in U.S. history died at the age of 92. Fifty years earlier, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama to a white person, thereby violating the law in effect at that time, which required African Americans to sit in the rear of buses (she was fined \$10 plus court costs of \$4). A 13-month boycott of the Montgomery buses ensued, a legal challenge was successful, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. became a national figure as a result of the incident.

The Rosa Parks story demonstrates that a single act of defiance can spark a revolution in a nation's respect for human rights. The law in Montgomery was eventually changed, as were similar laws in several other states. Moreover, national press coverage of the courageous action of this small, dignified woman helped many Americans, most of whom had never observed such blatant and official racist restrictions, see that major changes were needed in order to remove affronts to basic constitutional and moral values. As Rev. Jesse Jackson stated, "She sat down in order that we might stand up."



© AP/Wide World Photos

AN ARREST THAT MOVED A NATION A Montgomery (Ala.) Sheriff's Department booking photo of Rosa Parks taken February 22, 1956, after she was arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a bus for a white passenger on December 1, 1955.

The Physical Environment

Governments play a special role with respect to issues of environmental protection. Most goods and services can be produced entirely through private efforts because investors know that they can be paid for what they produce. But clean air and water, the elimination of toxic wastes, and protection of the natural beauty of the wilderness are “goods” that profit-seeking firms are not necessarily motivated to preserve. If we are to have environmental protection, most people feel that the government must act.

Protection of the environment thus depends almost entirely on governmental action. The continuing controversy over the “greenhouse” effect (the idea that Earth’s climate is becoming warmer because of various pollutants entering the atmosphere and because of the destruction of rain forests) is only the most spectacular illustration of the stakes involved—and of the inability of any institution except government to do anything about it.

Although virtually everyone favors protection of the environment, people differ greatly about the priority that environmental protection should be given and about who should pay for it. Should Brazil limit farming in rain forest regions if it means that destitute people in that area will have less food? Should auto makers be forced to produce more electric and hybrid cars, even if it means that consumers will be denied some of the choices they would like to have? In the long run, the quality of human life will be crucially affected by what governments do and fail to do concerning environmental protection.

Public Services

Governments do more than govern. People also look to government for important services—most notably, public education, public transportation, cultural amenities such as museums and libraries, and “infrastructure” support (road repair, street sweeping, and so forth). Although most people accept the need for government to play a role in providing these services, considerable controversy surrounds the scope and nature of this role.

For one thing, public services cost a great deal of money. Paying for them requires taxes, and some taxpayers are reluctant to support the provision of these services. Even the richest of nations can never afford to pay for all desirable services. A 1991 study found that, as estimated in that year, the U.S. Interstate Highway System needed at least \$750 billion in repairs, a level of spending made virtually impossible by federal budget problems and highly strained state and local budgets.⁸ The problem has not yet been solved. The Federal Highway Administration’s 2005 “Report Card” estimated that eliminating problems with bridges alone would cost \$9.4 billion annually for 20 years, and that another \$10 billion would be needed over the next dozen years to refurbish non-federal dams.⁹ Where will that money come from, and what other critical services (education, health care, defense) will be cut? In poor nations, with greater needs and far fewer resources, the choices are yet more difficult.

Provision of public services is also controversial because it can be a way to redistribute income or opportunities. An extensive public education system, such as that in the United States, increases opportunities for poorer children. In South Africa, where secondary education for blacks was limited, or in Colombia, where most secondary schools are private, education reinforces societal inequalities. Similarly, in all countries decisions about where to build roads may be determined by economic development priorities or by political influence. Some win, and others lose.

The government role in provision of public services thus relates to issues that transcend the often mundane concerns of road construction and water utilities. Basic political choices in these areas affect us, since much of the productivity of society depends on the quality of public services.

War and Peace

"War," according to Karl von Clausewitz, is "a real political instrument, a continuation of political commerce . . . by other means."¹⁰ Although a war might be started through some terrible accident, and although military leaders can start wars by taking sudden actions on their own, most wars begin as a result of deliberate policy choices made by political leaders. Those choices may be rational or irrational, well informed or grounded in miscalculation. (Saddam Hussein certainly miscalculated when he believed, in 1990, that he could invade and hold Kuwait. And, the U.S. government acted, in part, on faulty intelligence about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction program when it invaded that country in 2003.) The monumental consequences of war make questions of war and peace a central reason for concluding that politics matters.

We discuss several approaches to understanding the causes of war in Chapter 17. For now, it is important simply to appreciate Clausewitz's notion that war is a "political instrument." Wars can erupt when governments are moved to pursue a moral purpose, when they seek material gain, when they are anxious about their security, or when domestic pressures move them into conflict. In short, the same sets of conflicting passions, interests, and needs that influence political decision making in general are often involved, in one way or another, in the causes of war.

It is important to appreciate the extent to which government action can make a difference in each of the five areas we have outlined. Governments can help provide a basis for economic growth and opportunity, or they can condemn the vast majority of their citizens to poverty and hopelessness. They can plunge their citizens into devastating military conflicts, or they can contribute to peace. Governments can secure or destroy basic rights, protect or savage the environment, and provide or not provide needed public services.

A disinterested extraterrestrial observer, looking at Earth for the first time, would probably be startled by the vast range of conditions in which humans live throughout the planet. Different political choices, made by various kinds of governments, account for much of the diversity in the quality of human life. Perhaps that is why Aristotle referred to politics as the "master science"—political choices have effects, direct and indirect, on virtually everything.

POLITICS IN A CHANGING WORLD

The past quarter-century has been a period of especially momentous changes in political life. Many years from now, historians will write about the fall of communism in the early 1990s, noting that this event marked the end of the Cold War and the beginning of an era in which one country, the United States, became the world's only superpower. For nearly 50 years, virtually every incident, alliance, and issue involving foreign policy had been affected by intense rivalry between the communist and non-communist blocs, and millions saw Marxist-Leninist ideology as a worthy alternative

to democratic government. Beginning in 1989, all of this changed. People around the world were transfixed by pictures of German youth triumphantly climbing and dismantling the Berlin wall, the sounds of Romanian crowds challenging their nation's dreaded secret police (the *securitati*), and the dignity of Lech Walesa and Vaclav Havel as they led the governments of Poland and Czechoslovakia. The end of communism changed the world in profound ways.

It is arguable that the changes in Eastern Europe that began in the late 1980s were but part of a worldwide movement toward democracy. In Latin America, the same period witnessed the restoration of elected civilian governments in such erstwhile rightist military dictatorships as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay. In 1986, a popular uprising toppled the corrupt Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines, while elsewhere in Asia, authoritarian governments in South Korea and Taiwan moved toward limited democracy. Changes during this period in Africa were not limited to Mandela's success; elsewhere in that continent, a number of single-party regimes tentatively began to recognize opposition-party activity.

There are reasons to believe that the democracy movement is continuing. A Harvard-trained banker, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, was elected as President of Liberia in January 2006. She is the first woman to serve as head of state of any African country, and the election itself was widely regarded as a legitimate exercise of democracy. During the same month, the voters of Chile elected that country's first female head of state (Michelle Bachelet). If the overthrow of Saddam Hussein leads to a new era of peace and democratization in the Middle East (the outcome is currently far from certain), political scientists and historians will look back on this event as another critical moment in world history. The long-term trend is difficult to deny: As late as the 1970s, there were only 40 countries that could be considered democracies. Today, there are more than 120. Democratic pressures—largely limited to economically developed nations until the 1980s—have spread into all parts of the world, and most of the initial successes have proven enduring.

Nevertheless, serious problems threaten the further spread of democracy. Some contemporary analysts fear that the U.S. actions in Iraq and Afghanistan have only aggravated the tensions in the region, prompting an escalation of violence and instability that will become increasingly severe in years to come. At the time of this writing, the Iranians appear to be well on their way to developing nuclear weapons that can be deployed on missiles capable of reaching Israel, India, and parts of Europe. North Korea remains dangerous and unpredictable. The European Union, Japan, Korea, China, and the United States are still working through the uncertain waters of economic globalization, making it very difficult to predict even near-term developments in politics and economic policy. Given much of Africa's extremely low literacy rates, low GNP per capita, and lack of democratic traditions in national government, the prospects for democratization there seem limited. The futures of Cuba and China are far from clear, although many experts feel that democratic pressures will be hard to resist in the long run. Countries in East Asia, South America, and Eastern Europe (with some still authoritarian and others only marginally democratic) tend to offer better hopes for greater democracy. Even in those more developed countries, deeply rooted class tensions (as in Peru or Colombia) or ethnic hostilities (Bosnia or Malaysia) may undermine democratic forces.

In short, it is not entirely clear that a rosy democratic future stands before us. There is currently much instability among and within many nations. Furthermore, democracy does not solve all societal problems and in some cases may even open a

Pandora's box of new conflicts. In much of Eastern Europe, totalitarian rule held down a host of bitter ethnic rivalries: Serbs against Croats and Bosnians in the former Yugoslavia; Azerbaijanis against Armenians in the Soviet Union; Bulgarians against the Turkish minority in Bulgaria. Although the governments in these examples are probably semi-democratic at best, it is clear that the tenuous steps that have been taken in that direction have not produced a stable order. The weakening of harsh authoritarian controls has unleashed intense ethnic nationalism, often leading to bloodshed. The march toward stable democracy, if it is under way at all, is neither irreversible nor universal.

The knowledge and understanding accumulated through generations of political science research suggest that the growth of democratic government is rooted in societal forces more fundamental than the actions or vision of particular leaders, or the fallout from single events. Most political scientists conclude that economic growth creates greater social and political diversity as well as heightened political participation and awareness; that all governments need some degree of popular support; and that governments cut off from the pressures of competitive political influences are inherently unstable in the long run. Building on this understanding and related ideas, several leading political scientists and political economists anticipated the breakdown of communist rule as long ago as 1960.¹¹

Political science thus presents no clear or universally accepted vision of the future of politics in our changing world. However, there is some basis for predicting that economic growth will create democratic tendencies. Existing research indicates that countries with annual gross national products (GNPs) of under \$1,000 per year and literacy rates below 50 percent are very unlikely to achieve democracy. Several years ago, a political scientist found that countries above that economic threshold are far more likely to be democratic, provided that income and wealth are not highly concentrated in a limited number of hands (as in Brazil, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait).¹² Higher levels of economic development, accompanied by a reasonably equitable income distribution, accelerate literacy and the spread of information through newspapers, books, and broadcast media. Together, these conditions produce a more politically informed public, one more capable of holding elected officials accountable. Opinion surveys suggest that more educated populations are more likely to support democratic values.

It is clear that we are living in an era in which political life is both extremely important and highly volatile. As economic growth spreads (unevenly) through the world, and as nations become increasingly interdependent, we will find that the old conflict between communists and anticommunists has been replaced by a more complex pattern of economic, ethnic, and religious relations. The task of political science is to bring sound scientific inquiry to these problems.

Approaches to Political Understanding

The preceding sections present the scope of our concerns and explore why they are worth studying. It is important to understand, however, that political scientists approach their discipline in a variety of ways. More than most fields of study, political science is eclectic: It borrows from other fields to forge its own identity. Although political science enjoys a healthy diversity, it is also one of the most fragmented of academic disciplines.

The first effort to study political life was as a subtopic of *philosophy*. Those studying politics in this manner focus on questions pertaining to the origins of government, the

problem of human rights and justice under law, the idea of a “just war,” and other basic philosophical concerns. It is important to emphasize, however, that political philosophy includes several very different approaches. Most scholars claim that the field began in ancient Greece with Plato (427–347 BCE) and his student Aristotle. Essential elements of **classical political philosophy** include a distrust of democracy and an emphasis on the problem of designing a political community in accordance with principles of justice. **Modern political philosophy**—beginning with Machiavelli (1469–1527), Hobbes (1588–1679), Locke (1632–1704), and Rousseau (1712–1778)—is distinguished by its emphasis on individualism and its rejection of Plato’s search for an ideal state order. Both classical and modern political philosophy include a wide range of more specific perspectives.

The study of *law* was a second major influence on political science. Legal scholars study different approaches to interpreting laws and principles pertaining to how courts operate. Legal analysis is also relevant to questions about the powers of governmental institutions and their procedures. Much of political science through the first quarter of the twentieth century was influenced by legal thinking, and the term **formal-legal analysis** was used to describe pre–World War II political science. During this period, political scientists devoted themselves to issues of constitutional design and formal governmental institutions.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, some political scientists began to criticize philosophical and legal approaches to understanding politics. They argued that we could not fully account for policy choices by considering ethical concerns or legal powers and rights alone. Instead, we should observe actual political *behavior*. The “behavioral revolution” took firm root and, by the 1960s, was firmly established as the mainstream of the discipline. Perhaps the first shot in this revolution was fired in 1908 by Arthur Bentley in *The Process of Government*, an important book that argued persuasively for the observation of behavior in political research.¹³ In political science, this approach is known as **behavioralism**.

The behavioral approach to political science necessitated borrowing skills from other disciplines. When we observe behavior—in the form of voting, political demonstrations, voicing opinions, and so on—we usually need to quantify it. How many people voted in the last election, and what caused them to vote as they did? What kinds of people participated in the demonstrations? Analyzing data in a quantified form requires that political scientists have some familiarity with *statistics*. The emphasis on statistical analysis is readily apparent to students exploring political science journals for the first time. Political research often (although not always) involves the use of basic and even highly advanced statistical tools as scholars try to discover and identify patterns in the behavior they observe.

Contemporary political science also owes a great deal to *history* and *sociology*. These disciplines suggested basic questions for political science research. If we are attempting to find out why poor people vote less regularly than rich people, for example, research from sociology is helpful in that it identifies important influences on the behavior of people in different segments of society. Historical knowledge provides an essential context for exploring political changes in both domestic and international relations.

Particularly in the past twenty years or so, political scientists have increasingly drawn from *economics* in their work. (See Box 1-5.) Some have applied the economic concept of the rational, self-interested person in analysis of everything from voting to group membership. The rational choice school is controversial within the discipline

Box 1-5

"RATIONAL CHOICE" IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

Political scientists are hotly divided over the role of "rational choice" theory in their discipline. Drawn largely from economic theory, the rational choice approach begins with the assumption that individuals seek to maximize "utility" with their choices and behaviors. This assumption is rarely controversial in economics, where it is used to construct models pertaining to buying and selling oranges, computers, and "widgets," but some political scientists apply it to politics and government. For example, using rational choice logic, one analyst argued that party leaders should be expected to shape their ideological positions in ways that appeal to voters in the center of the ideological spectrum, where the party can "maximize" its votes, just as a retailer shapes a marketing campaign to maximize customers.

Although this example is hardly controversial, other applications are much more contentious. For example, some have used rational choice to construct theories of bureaucratic behavior, predicting that bureaucrats will have a natural urge to expand their agencies in order to increase their personal wealth. One of the most famous rational choice ideas is explored in Chapter 6 (Interest Groups). It holds that people will not willingly participate in collective political efforts because the rational person will realize that one person's contribution is inconsequential and because non-contributors will receive as much benefit from the group's success (if any) as contributors. Political scientists have also used rational choice logic in understanding the emergence of democracy in developing countries.¹⁴

Advocates of rational choice contend that the approach opens new avenues for understanding political institutions and individual behavior. Others insist that it oversimplifies motivations, that it contains a conservative ideological bias, and that it has not produced any meaningful predictions that could not be derived from other approaches. In a book provocatively

entitled *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory*, two members of the Yale Political Science Department argue essentially that rational choice theory has been a failure.* This volume prompted the publication of *The Rational Choice Controversy*, by another Yale political scientist, which includes essays both criticizing and defending rational choice theory.[†]

The dispute has become even more heated in the last few years. A full-fledged "movement" in political science, termed by its leaders the "Perestroika" revolt, emerged when a number of political scientists rebelled against the use of mathematical models and rational choice thinking, arguing that they made the profession's journals irrelevant and unreadable. Political science would be better served, say *Perestroika's* supporters, if researchers would emphasize social and political reality instead of abstract models borrowed from economics and the natural sciences, where they make more sense.**

Specialists in the field continue to argue over these questions. Moreover, some teachers even worry that introducing students to rational choice ideas—with their emphasis on self-interested motives—tends to undermine the development of a civic consciousness among students and teachers. On the other hand, a growing segment of the discipline remains convinced that understanding everything from voting to bureaucracies to elections requires a keen grasp of the choices that rational people make in pursuit of their interests. This debate will figure prominently in the future development of political science.

*Donald P. Green and Ian Shapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

†Jeffrey Friedman, ed., *The Rational Choice Controversy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

**See Kristen Renwick Monroe, *Perestroika! The Raucous Rebellion in Political Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

because many political scientists believe that it oversimplifies human motivations. But there is general agreement on the relevance of economic concepts and tools in the study of political behavior.

Perhaps in reaction to the dominance of behavioral method and the increasing influence of approaches using economic theory, a significant number of political scientists now argue that there is an important place for less-mathematical research methods.

This way of thinking is sometimes termed “postmodernism” or “postbehavioralist interpretivism.” Although it is not a very specific approach, its adherents share a conviction that the behavioralists and the rational choice analysts have allowed mathematical rigor to displace the politics in political science. Numbers can tell us some things, but they cannot reveal the whole sense of what is critical about political issues and events, and methods steeped in mathematics may even obscure or distort the essential political nature of the things they do measure, according to postmodernists.

Political scientists thus attempt to understand politics and government by using a wide range of approaches to study. Sometimes, the differences among political scientists with respect to their research methods can become rather heated, and a number of essays have been published attacking and defending various approaches. (See the list of suggested readings at the end of this chapter for some good examples.) We may hope that the decades-long debate over research methods in political science will prove to be useful in moving the discipline to refine and strengthen its ability to produce genuine understanding.

CONCLUSION: WHY STUDY POLITICAL SCIENCE?

Political science encompasses a wide variety of approaches. Sometimes the diversity is enriching and stimulating, but it must be acknowledged that political science is also a highly divided discipline. Some are quite vocal in disparaging the efforts of colleagues who use different tools or methods. Disagreements can be healthy, however, even when they are heated. The diversity and the energy that political scientists bring to their work reflect the deep interest they share in their subject. These are also reasons that political science is fascinating and so involving. The primary answer to the question “Why study political science?” is simply that it helps us understand the problems and issues that define public affairs. Studying political science is also an excellent foundation for careers in law, government, public administration, and other areas, but the most fundamental justification is that it helps us to become more effective participants in the civic life that increasingly affects our future. The passion for political understanding, shared among professionals and amateurs alike, is nicely captured in the following statement by a pioneering political scientist:

No one can deny that the idea is fascinating—the idea of subduing the phenomena of politics to the laws of causation, of penetrating to the mystery of its transformations, of symbolizing the trajectory of its future. . . . If nothing ever comes of it, its very existence will fertilize thought and enrich imagination.¹⁵



WHERE ON THE WEB?

<http://www.apsanet.org/>

The home page of the American Political Science Association provides information about important publications in political science, career opportunities, internships, and other resources.

<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/>

Housed at the University of Michigan, this site is the home page for the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. It provides a great deal of useful information for anyone interested in advanced political science research and data.