

Chapter 1 Should We Care about Politics?

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In any form, democracy is both an imperfect system and a complex idea that entails a few basic prerequisites: participation by the people, the willing consent of the people to accept and live by the actions of government, and the recognition that everyone has basic rights that government can't take away. Prerequisites for democracy might not always hold if people choose not to participate, or if they end up unknowingly participating without giving consent.

For a democracy, or any political system, to function effectively, there has to be agreement on the rules, as well as on the way the system will be organized, and citizens have to accept the basic principles it's based on. Representative democracy depends heavily on holding free elections and keeping elected officials accountable to the voters.

Americans generally respect the authority of a victorious candidate to assume the jurisdiction to act with the authority of the office to which he was elected. Unlike authority, which is granted by virtue of holding an office, legitimacy is partly inherited and partly earned. One source of legitimacy evolves over time and is rooted in the way we come to accept an office and by extension its occupant as being rightful and appropriate. The German sociologist Max Weber suggested this kind of legitimacy is rooted in tradition and law—that after hundreds of years, for instance, we have come to accept the presidential winner as the legitimate occupant of that office for a period of four years, under a plan set up long ago in the Constitution.

The legitimacy an official inherits is usually at its peak at the start of a term of office and is often the reason for the “honeymoon” or grace period we tend to give new officials. Political figures can undermine their legitimacy through their actions because, unlike authority, legitimacy is partly earned. When the legitimacy of authority figures is brought into question, doubts about their right to act as they did will naturally arise.

Elected officials can use their authority and legitimacy to exercise power, although their ability to do so is hardly automatic. Power is about getting others to act the way you want them to, even if they prefer to act otherwise, in order to determine who gets what, when, and how. The tools of power are resources, which can encompass a wide range of things, such as a politician's personal charm, the information supplied to members of Congress by a lobbyist, or the promise of campaign money.

Power relationships are among the most fundamental relationships found at every level of politics from the White House to school boards. Quite often, a mutually beneficial exchange of resources gets others to act in a way they might not have intended. In the American political system, the exercise of power is about mutual benefit.

Some people believe that the resources that most influence political officials are concentrated in the hands of a few, giving a small group disproportionate power to determine political outcomes. Others point to the way Americans like to join groups and feel that the resources held by groups with broad memberships greatly influence the decisions that come out of the political process. Pluralism and elitism present divergent and mutually exclusive ways of understanding who holds power. It may be tempting to say that they both describe our political system, but you shouldn't lose sight of the fact that pluralism and elitism assume the system is structured in entirely different ways.

Individuals in American society make choices between liberty and equality. These are normative choices that involve judgments about what to value and what to willingly trade-off to achieve those values.

In the United States, many value political equality on the assumption that ensuring everyone the same right to vote and equal rights under the law promotes equal opportunity. In truth, people have neither equality of opportunity nor equality of outcome in America. One place where equal opportunity breaks down is in the unequal economic and social outcomes of women and historically disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups because unequal outcomes are supposed to be a product of our different talents, interests, and abilities, not our physical or ethnic differences.

When wealth is more equitably distributed across the population there is less disparity between economic classes. If wealth were equally distributed across the population, there would be no economic classes. In reality, we're very far from equal outcomes in the United States. The top 10 percent of the population dwarfs the bottom 90 percent in average income, and the top one-tenth of one percent overshadows everyone.

Whether you should personally care about politics is a normative judgment. It's also a personal matter that you'll probably approach differently from your friends. You'll make a judgment that depends in part on how much you think politics matters in your life. No one else can make that judgment for you.

MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. In theory, democracy requires participation by the people and the recognition that everyone has basic rights. In practice, in the United States
 - A. most people participate all the time.
 - B. some groups have been denied basic political freedoms.
 - C. people do not participate all the time, but they are always aware of when their actions have political consequences.
 - D. people of color, women, and young people have traditionally had a greater say over political decisions than other groups.
2. A political system in which everyone has a personal say in what government does is called a
 - A. direct democracy.
 - B. representative democracy.
 - C. republic.
 - D. social democracy.
3. Which of the following is partly inherited and partly earned?
 - A. power
 - B. legitimacy
 - C. custom legitimacy
 - D. authority
4. The jurisdiction to propose legislation, grant clemency to prisoners, and negotiate a state's budget are all examples of a governor's
 - A. authority.
 - B. power.
 - C. legitimacy.
 - D. resources.

5. The public's reaction to George W. Bush following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 illustrates
 - A. inherited authority.
 - B. inherited legitimacy.
 - C. earned legitimacy.
 - D. earned authority.
6. Power might be exercised through the use of each of the following except:
 - A. authority.
 - B. coercion.
 - C. promises.
 - D. threats.
7. A person who subscribes to the theory of pluralism believes that power can be exercised by
 - A. bureaucrats.
 - B. corporate leaders.
 - C. military leaders.
 - D. voters.
8. When Thomas Jefferson wrote, "all men are created equal," he was referring to
 - A. equality of opportunity.
 - B. equality of outcome.
 - C. equality of outcome for white males of European heritage.
 - D. economic equality.
9. Nations like Norway and Sweden, where government policies attempt to reduce disparities between rich and poor, might be said to value
 - A. elitism.
 - B. equality of opportunity.
 - C. equality of outcome.
 - D. political equality.
10. Absolute liberty:
 - A. would require absolute equality.
 - B. would demand social responsibility.
 - C. would result in chaos.
 - D. would require choices.
11. The concern for the rights of others in society is called
 - A. equality of opportunity.
 - B. equality of outcome.
 - C. liberty.
 - D. social responsibility.
12. People tend to feel strongly about the trade-offs between liberty and social responsibility when
 - A. they engage in power relationships.
 - B. they act like pluralists.
 - C. they make normative judgments.
 - D. their personal liberty is at issue.

13. In 2011, women were paid _____ of what men in comparable jobs were paid—a difference that amounts to over \$700,000 dollars for the average fulltime woman worker over the course of her working life.
- 42 percent
 - 62 percent
 - 82 percent
 - 92 percent
14. In 2011, the bottom 20 percent of American households combined for only 3.2 percent of all income, while the top 20 percent received more than _____.
- 50 percent
 - 40 percent
 - 30 percent
 - 20 percent

ANSWERS TO MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

#	Correct
1.	B
2.	A
3.	B
4.	A
5.	C
6.	A
7.	D
8.	A
9.	C
10.	C
11.	D
12.	D
13.	C
14.	A

TRUE/FALSE QUESTIONS

- A democracy is said to exist in societies where the actions of regular citizens, like voting and joining groups, mask the real power exercised by elites.
- Political and social satire provide a means for interacting with democracy by encouraging people to think about what government is doing.

3. In order for a statement to be classified as being empirical, it must be based on the assessment of data or the analysis of information, without regard to value judgments.
4. Power is exercised when resources other than money are used to achieve a desired outcome.
5. In the American political system, the exercise of power is about mutual benefit, which means that lawyers with expertise and computer firms that make contributions to congressional candidates can be influential if they have resources that are desired by others in the political process.
6. Next to money, information is the lifeblood of many interest groups and it has also become one of the foremost tools of power in today's world because members of Congress and bureaucrats can't survive without it.
7. One way in which a political system can be characterized by pluralism is to have the government respond to the many voices expressed through group membership.
8. A majority of the world's representative democracies typically reject any form of equality of outcome that values using government policy to minimize social class distinctions found in society.
9. Choices between liberty and equality are normative choices that involve judgments about what to value and what to willingly trade off to achieve those values.
10. The great diversity of America is both a strength and a complicating factor for the nation's politics.

ANSWERS TO TRUE/FALSE QUESTIONS

#	Correct
1.	False
2.	True
3.	True
4.	False
5.	True
6.	True
7.	True
8.	False
9.	True
10.	True

GLOSSARY QUIZ

1. The right to act in an official capacity by virtue of holding an office like president or member of Congress.
2. A government created by the people over whom it rules.
3. Democracy without representation, where each eligible individual participates in decision making.
4. Losing or being denied the legal right to vote by intentional or unintentional means.
5. A form of equality of outcome that values using government policy to minimize the economic disparities found in society.
6. The theory that government responds to a small, stable, centralized hierarchy of corporate and academic leaders, military chiefs, people who own big media outlets, and members of a permanent government bureaucracy.
7. Any statement based on the assessment of data or the analysis of information, without regard to value judgments.
8. Widespread public acceptance of the official standing of a political figure or institution.
9. The ability to pursue your ends and objectives, tempered by socially defined boundaries and limited government impediments.
10. Any statement that invokes a judgment or evaluation.
11. The theory that government responds to individuals through their memberships in groups, assuring that government is responsive to a wide range of voices.
12. Establishing political and legal rights on the basis of the individual, so that everyone has the same right to vote and is equal under the law.
13. The process of determining who gets what, when, and how.
14. The ability to make others act in a way that they otherwise might not have done.
15. A form of democracy in which eligible individuals choose others to make decisions on their behalf.
16. Any nation with provisions for the selection of representatives who make decisions on behalf of those who select them.
17. Anything of value to others that can be used to sway another individual.
18. Concern for the protection of the rights of individuals in a community or society, at the expense of some degree of personal liberty.
19. Provides people with comparable advantages for succeeding in life, regardless of the unequal outcomes that may result.
20. Levels the social and economic inequities among people, rather than attempting to give people comparable advantages for succeeding in life.

ANSWERS TO GLOSSARY QUIZ

1. authority

The right to act in an official capacity by virtue of holding an office like president or member of Congress.

2. democracy

A government created by the people over whom it rules.

3. direct democracy

Democracy without representation, where each eligible individual participates in decision making.

4. disenfranchised

Losing or being denied the legal right to vote by intentional or unintentional means.

5. economic equality

A form of equality of outcome that values using government policy to minimize the economic disparities found in society.

6. elitism

The theory that government responds to a small, stable, centralized hierarchy of corporate and academic leaders, military chiefs, people who own big media outlets, and members of a permanent government bureaucracy.

7. empirical

Any statement based on the assessment of data or the analysis of information, without regard to value judgments.

8. legitimacy

Widespread public acceptance of the official standing of a political figure or institution.

9. liberty

The ability to pursue your ends and objectives, tempered by socially defined boundaries and limited government impediments.

10. normative

Any statement that invokes a judgment or evaluation.

11. pluralism

The theory that government responds to individuals through their memberships in groups, assuring that government is responsive to a wide range of voices.

12. political equality

Establishing political and legal rights on the basis of the individual, so that everyone has the same right to vote and is equal under the law.

13. politics

The process of determining who gets what, when, and how.

14. power

The ability to make others act in a way that they otherwise might not have done.

15. representative democracy

A form of democracy in which eligible individuals choose others to make decisions on their behalf.

16. republic

Any nation with provisions for the selection of representatives who make decisions on behalf of those who select them.

17. resources

Anything of value to others that can be used to sway another individual.

18. social responsibility

Concern for the protection of the rights of individuals in a community or society, at the expense of some degree of personal liberty.

19. equality of opportunity

Provides people with comparable advantages for succeeding in life, regardless of the unequal outcomes that may result.

20. equality of outcome

Levels the social and economic inequities among people, rather than attempting to give people comparable advantages for succeeding in life.

SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS

- 1-1. List several activities that constitute ways of directly or indirectly interacting with the political process.
- 1-2. What prerequisites for democracy was Abraham Lincoln addressing in Gettysburg Address when he spoke of government of the people, by the people, and for the people?

- 1-3. How does a direct democracy differ from a republic?
- 1-4. What is authority and how is it derived?
- 1-5. According to sociologist Max Weber, what is one source of political legitimacy?
- 1-6. Explain how public officials might undermine their legitimacy.
- 1-7. Describe how legitimacy differs from authority.
- 1-8. What is power?
- 1-9. What is the relationship between power and resources?
- 1-10. What is the relationship between power and politics?
- 1-11. Provide one example each of an empirical and normative statement.
- 1-12. Distinguish pluralism from elitism.
- 1-13. Explain why pluralism and elitism are mutually exclusive ways of understanding who exercises power in society.
- 1-14. What is equality of opportunity?
- 1-15. Explain why Americans tend to value policies that promote equality of opportunity, such as programs that encourage equal access to education.
- 1-16. How is political equality related to equality of opportunity?
- 1-17. How do disparities in outcome based on gender, racial and ethnical characteristics raise questions about whether equality of opportunity works in practice the way it is supposed to work in theory?
- 1-18. What is liberty?
- 1-19. Identify five types of equality and briefly explain how they relate to liberty.
- 1-20. Briefly discuss the tension between personal liberty and social responsibility.

ANSWERS TO SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS

- 1-1. Examples of activities that constitute ways of interacting with the political process are: voting; consuming political and social satire; joining groups that lobby government officials; obeying (or not obeying) the law; making political contributions; attending college; visiting a national park; paying sales tax on grocery items; utilizing public works like subways, airports or sewer systems. (Section 1.1)
- 1-2. Lincoln was referring to the basic prerequisites for democracy: participation by the people, the willing consent of the people to accept and live by the actions of government, and the recognition that we all have basic rights that government can't take away. (Section 1.2)

- 1-3. Every citizen participates in decision-making in a direct democracy. A republic is based on representation, where citizens elect representatives to make decisions on their behalf. (Section 1.3)
- 1-4. Authority is the right to act in an official capacity. It is derived by holding an office like president or member of Congress after having achieved that office through legitimate means. (Section 1.4)
- 1-5. According to Weber, legitimacy is rooted in tradition and law, as over time people in a society come to accept an established political office and by extension its occupant as being rightful and appropriate (Section 1.5)
- 1-6. Public officials can undermine their legitimacy through their actions, especially actions that violate their authority. (Section 1.6)
- 1-7. Unlike authority, which is granted by virtue of holding an office, legitimacy is partly inherited through tradition and law and partly earned through the behavior of office-holders. (Sections 1.4 through 1.6)
- 1-8. Power is the ability to make others act in a way they otherwise might not have done. (Section 1.7)
- 1-9. Resources are the tools of power, which may be used by individuals to achieve a desired outcome. (Section 1.7)
- 1-10. If power is the ability to make others act in a way they otherwise might not have done, then it is utilized in relationships among people, and politics is what happens in those relationships – the process of determining who gets what, when, and how. (Section 1.7)
- 1-11. Any factual statement is empirical (i.e., the American flag contains three colors: red, white and blue). Any value judgment is normative (i.e., the United States is better suited to representative democracy because of its vast size). (Section 1.7a)
- 1-12. Pluralism is the theory that government responds to individuals through their membership in groups, assuring that government is responsive to a wide range of voices. Elitism is the theory that government responds to a small, stable, centralized hierarchy of corporate, academic, media and military leaders. (Section 1.7a)
- 1-13. Pluralism and elitism present divergent and mutually exclusive ways of understanding who holds power because they assume the system is structured in entirely different ways. People who subscribe to the theory of elitism believe that the actions of regular citizens, like voting and joining groups, simply mask the real power exercised by elites. People who subscribe to the theory of pluralism believe that the wide distribution of resources in society drives the decisions government officials make. (Section 1.7a)
- 1-14. Equality of opportunity values giving people comparable advantages in life, regardless of the unequal outcomes that may result. (Section 1.8)
- 1-15. Valuing equality of opportunity is consistent with supporting government efforts to make the “starting line” more equal for people. That’s why Americans usually support government programs to help underprivileged kids have access to higher education, because education is considered the gateway to opportunity. (Section 1.8)

- 1-16. Because equality of opportunity assumes an equal starting point for everyone, it follows that everyone would need the same political rights. This is why Americans generally value political equality and believe that everyone should have the same political and legal rights as everyone else. If all votes count the same and if everyone has the same rights in a court of law, the theory goes, then the playing field isn't tilted toward some groups and away from others. (Section 1.8)
- 1-17. In theory, equality of opportunity is supposed to be blind to gender, racial and ethnic characteristics. Unequal outcomes which are the expected result of valuing opportunity over results are supposed to derive from reasons that have no bearing on these differences. When systematic differences in outcome are apparent across gender, racial or ethnic groups, it suggests that some groups face obstacles to achievement or are disadvantaged because they are different. (Section 1.9)
- 1-18. Liberty is the ability to pursue your ends and objectives, tempered by socially defined boundaries and limited government impediments. (Section 1.10)
- 1-19. Five types of equality were identified: opportunity, outcome, political, social and economic. Equality of opportunity, which requires people to have the freedom to pursue desired ends, necessitates liberty and assumes the level playing field provided by political equality. Equality of outcome restrains liberty through government efforts to reduce social and economic inequities. Therefore, equality of opportunity and political equality are most aligned with liberty, whereas equality of outcome, social equality and economic equality are not. (Section 1.10)
- 1-20. Because our actions constantly affect other people, and because it's human nature to want to pursue our desires and objectives despite this, personal self-interest can conflict with the rights of the broader community. These conflicts involve trade-offs between liberty and social responsibility, or the concern for the rights of others in society. Through government, we endeavor to draw the boundaries that determine where individual liberty stops and the needs of society start. (Section 1.11)