

SECOND EDITION

# Introduction to **POLITICAL SCIENCE**

---

HOW TO THINK FOR YOURSELF ABOUT POLITICS

---

**CRAIG PARSONS**



# Introduction to Political Science

How to Think for Yourself  
about Politics

**SECOND EDITION**

**Craig Parsons**

*University of Oregon*



Please contact <https://support.pearson.com/getsupport/s/contactsupport> with any queries on this content.

Copyright © 2021, 2017 by Pearson Education, Inc. or its affiliates, 221 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030. All Rights Reserved. Manufactured in the United States of America. This publication is protected by copyright, and permission should be obtained from the publisher prior to any prohibited reproduction, storage in a retrieval system, or transmission in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise. For information regarding permissions, request forms, and the appropriate contacts within the Pearson Education Global Rights and Permissions department, please visit [www.pearsoned.com/permissions/](http://www.pearsoned.com/permissions/).

Acknowledgments of third-party content appear on the appropriate pages within the text, which constitute an extension of this copyright page.

PEARSON, ALWAYS LEARNING, and REVEL are exclusive trademarks owned by Pearson Education, Inc. or its affiliates in the U.S. and/or other countries.

Unless otherwise indicated herein, any third-party trademarks, logos, or icons that may appear in this work are the property of their respective owners, and any references to third-party trademarks, logos, icons, or other trade dress are for demonstrative or descriptive purposes only. Such references are not intended to imply any sponsorship, endorsement, authorization, or promotion of Pearson's products by the owners of such marks, or any relationship between the owner and Pearson Education, Inc., or its affiliates, authors, licensees, or distributors.

#### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

**Names:** Parsons, Craig, author.

**Title:** Introduction to political science: how to think for yourself about politics / Craig Parsons.

**Description:** Second edition. | Hoboken, NJ: Pearson, 2021. | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Summary: "Politics pervades every aspect of our lives as human beings. As Aristotle said, we are "political animals"— Provided by publisher.

**Identifiers:** LCCN 2020006627 | ISBN 9780135710104 (paperback) | ISBN 9780136597896 (ebook)

**Subjects:** LCSH: Political science. | Political science—Philosophy.

**Classification:** LCC JA71 .P3394 2021 | DDC 320—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020006627>

ScoutAutomatedPrintCode



#### **2nd Edition Access Code Card:**

ISBN-10: 0-13-570308-5

ISBN-13: 978-0-13-570308-3

#### **2nd Edition Rental:**

ISBN-10: 0-13-571010-3

ISBN-13: 978-0-13-571010-4

#### **2nd Edition Instructor's Review Copy:**

ISBN-10: 0-13-570668-8

ISBN-13: 978-0-13-570668-8

# Contents

Preface  
About the Author

## 1 Introduction

Introduction: Is Politics to Blame?  
Seeing Politics in the World  
    Why Escaping Politics Is a Dead End  
From Politics to Political Ideologies  
and Political Science  
Three Explanatory Approaches in  
Political Science  
    Alternative 1—Rational-Material  
    Explanation: A Clash of Interests  
    Alternative 2—Institutional Explanation:  
    Playing by the Rules of the Game  
    Alternative 3—Ideational Explanation:  
    Beliefs and “Culture Wars”  
Alternative Methods to Test and Support  
Explanations  
    Quantitative Methods: Sorting  
    “Cross-Case” Patterns  
    Qualitative Methods: “Within-Case”  
    Detective Work  
    Experiments: Manipulating Relationships  
    Game Theory and Simulations: Exploring  
    Artificial Environments  
Conclusion and Overview of Subfields  
in the Study of Politics  
    Review of Learning Objectives 23 • Great  
    Sources to Find Out More 25 • Develop Your  
    Thinking 25 • Keywords 26

## 2 Political Philosophy and Its Offshoot: Political Science

Introduction: The Backstory to Today’s  
Political Alternatives  
Political Theory in the Ancient World:  
Plato, Aristotle, and Contemporaries

ix Political Theory from the Renaissance  
xiv into the Enlightenment: Machiavelli to  
Rousseau 31  
1 The Emergence of Social Science in the  
Nineteenth Century 36  
2 Rational-Material Beginnings: Liberal,  
Marxist, and Realist Variants 36  
3 Institutional and Ideational Beginnings:  
Tocqueville, Durkheim, and Weber 41  
6 The Emergence and Diversification of  
Political Science 45  
8 Extending Rational-Material Traditions  
Institutionalism: Human-Made Obstacle  
Courses 49  
10 Rational Choice: Sharpening the Logic of  
Material and Institutional Explanations 50  
12 The Return of Ideas and the Arrival of  
Psychology 51  
14 Conclusion: Putting Theories into Practice 53  
18 Review of Learning Objectives 54 • Great  
Sources to Find Out More 56 • Develop Your  
Thinking 56 • Keywords 57

## 3 Ideologies 58

The Language and Boundaries of  
Political Life 58  
What Is (and Isn’t) Ideology? 59  
21 What Do You Know? Political Knowledge 59  
What Are You Expected to Think? Public  
Opinion and Political Culture 60  
The Liberal Tradition 63  
Classical Liberalism and Modern  
Liberalism 64  
27 Modern Conservatism and Its Variants 68  
Older Alternatives to the Liberal Tradition:  
28 Socialism and Fascism 75  
Socialism and Its Variants 75  
28 Fascism 78

## Newer Alternatives to the Liberal Tradition: Environmentalism and Islamism

- Environmentalism
- Political Islamism

## Conclusion: Putting Ideologies into Practice

Review of Learning Objectives 88 • Great Sources to Find Out More 89 • Develop Your Thinking 90 • Keywords 90

## 4 States

### Fitting into a World of States—Or Not

### Organizing a World of States: Definition and Origins of State Sovereignty

- The Principle of State Sovereignty
- The Origins of States
- States, Nations, and the Nation-State

### Variations among Nation-States

- Unitary and Federal States
- Citizenship: Defined by Inheritance or Residency?
- “Failed” States

### Challenges to the Nation-State Model

- Migration
- Globalization
- Human Rights, International Law, and International Organizations

### Political Ideologies and the State

- The State as Source of Security, Belonging, and Stability
- The State as Framework for Rights and Representation
- The State as Source of Oppression and Exclusion

### Explaining a Case: The Whys of Afghanistan’s

### Struggles with Statehood

- The Rational-Material Story
- The Institutional Story
- The Ideational Story

### Conclusion: Why the State Matters to You

Review of Learning Objectives 122 • Great Sources to Find Out More 123 • Develop Your Thinking 124 • Keywords 124

## 5 Governments 125

- 81 Democracy Is the Best Kind of Government ...
- 82 Right? 126

- 83 Governments, Authority, and Power 126

- Authority: Traditional, Charismatic, and Rational-Legal 127

- 87 Power: Relying on Effectiveness and Force 128

- The Spread of Democracy 130

- Liberal Democracies 133

- 91 Representation of the People 134

- 92 How Rights Support Meaningful Representation 136

- 92 Supporting Liberal Democracy with Tradition and Effectiveness 139

- 93 Illiberal Democracies 140

- 97 “Managing” Democracy for Effective Government 141

- 101 Hypocrisy and Success across Illiberal Democracies 142

- 101 When Voters Are More Illiberal than Governments 145

- 104 Authoritarianisms 147

- 105 Principles of Unlimited Authority 148

- 108 Defending Unlimited Power in Practice 150

- 110 Political Ideologies and Liberal Democracy 154

- 111 Liberal Democracy as Freedom, Voice, and Compromise 154

- 113 Liberal Democracy as Veiled Oppression 155

- 114 Mainstream Critiques of Liberal-Democratic Flaws 156

- 115 Explaining a Case: Understanding the Whys of Chinese Authoritarianism 157

- 118 The Rational-Material Story 158

- 119 The Institutional Story 158

- 119 The Ideational Story 158

- Conclusion: Why It Matters to Understand the Many Forms of Government Authority 160

- 21 Review of Learning Objectives 160 • Great Sources to Find Out More 162 • Develop Your Thinking 163 • Keywords 163

<b>6 Individual Participation and Collective Action</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>7 Inside Liberal Democracy I: Representation.</b>	<b>201</b>
Students Take Action (or Don't): Who's Ready to Rumble?	165	Does Democratic Representation Mean Majority Choice or Something Else?	202
The Many Forms of Individual Participation and Collective Action	165	Alternative Principles of Representation	203
How Can People Act in Politics? A Menu of Options	167	Voting Rules: How Citizens Choose	204
Individual Expression	167	The Majoritarian Option: "SMP"	205
Collective Action: Voting and Joining	168	The Proportional Option: "PR"	207
Collective Action: Activists and Political Professionals	171	Modified Majoritarian and Proportional Rules	209
Collective Action: Rebels, Revolutionaries, and Terrorists	175	Descriptive Possibilities in Voting	210
Who's Acting with Whom? Framing and Identity Politics	177	Political Parties: Intermediaries of Representation	213
"It's the Economy, Stupid!": Class and Concrete Complaints as the Foundation for Collective Action	177	Parties as Organizers of Debate and Action	213
Identity Politics of the Left: Race, Gender, and Sexual Identity	179	Party Systems, Voting Rules, and Social Divisions	216
Identity Politics of the Right: Race, Social Conservatism, and the Urban/Rural Divide	181	Variations in Party Strength	218
National Patterns in Individual Participation and Collective Action	183	Elected Offices: Executives and Legislators in the Presidential Model	221
United States: Bowling Alone or Bowling ... Differently?	183	The Presidential Model and the Separation of Powers	222
France: The Rebellious Republic	187	Presidentialism and Principles of Representation	224
China: Petitioning and Participation within Constraints	188	The Case for Presidential Representation	224
Political Ideologies and Participation	191	Elected Offices: Executives and Legislators in the Parliamentary Model	226
Participation in the Liberal Tradition: Pursuing "Our Own Good in Our Own Way"	191	The Parliamentary Model of Fusion of Powers	226
Communitarians and More Critical Challenges	193	Parliamentarism and Principles of Representation	229
Explaining a Case: Understanding the Whys of Low Voter Turnout in the United States	194	The Case for Parliamentary Representation	230
The Rational-Material Story	195	Political Ideologies and the Design of Representation	235
The Institutional Story	195	Explaining Cases: Understanding the Whys of Iraqi Sunnis and Representation	236
The Ideational Story	195	The Rational-Material Story	237
Conclusion: Why Understanding Political Participation Matters to You	197	The Institutional Story	237
Review of Learning Objectives 197 • Great Sources to Find Out More 199 • Develop Your Thinking 200 • Keywords 200		The Ideational Story	237
		Conclusion: Why It Matters for You to Understand Alternatives in Representation	239
		Review of Learning Objectives 240 • Great Sources to Find Out More 241 • Develop Your Thinking 243 • Keywords 243	

<b>8 Inside Liberal Democracy II: Power and Policymaking</b>	<b>244</b>	Abstract Political-Economic Systems: Market versus Command Economies	294
Who Holds Policymaking Power?	245	Political-Economic Systems in the Real World	295
Executives and Legislators in Policymaking	245	The Varying Political Shape of Mixed Economies	298
The Classic Executive-Legislative Division of Labor	246	The United States: “The Chief Business of the American People Is Business”	298
Why Parliamentaryism Doesn’t Mean Policymaking Parliaments	247	Germany: Redistribution, Codetermination, and Bank Finance in the Social Market Economy	300
The Impact of Legislative Rules and Resources	249	Malaysia: Intervention for Capitalist Growth	304
Unelected Policy Experts: The Power of Bureaucrats	252	Different Economies, Different Political Choices	305
The Bureaucratic Model	253	Political Ideologies and Political Economies	307
The Bureaucrat-Politician Relationship in Principle and Practice	254	Markets as Naturally Good	308
Civil Service and Bureaucratic Prestige	257	Markets as Naturally Bad	309
Politicization and Appointees in the Bureaucracy	260	Markets as Crafted Political Institutions	310
Unelected Legal Experts: The Power of Judges	263	Explaining a Case: Uncovering the Whys of German Redistribution	313
The Power and Ambiguity of Law	263	The Rational-Material Story	313
Judicial Power and Everyday Justice	266	The Institutional Story	313
Judicial Review and Judges as Policymakers	271	The Ideational Story	314
American Political Ideologies and Unelected Authority	277	Conclusion: Why Understanding the Politics of Economies Matters to You	316
Unelected Expertise as Modern Tyranny	277	Review of Learning Objectives 316 • Great Sources to Find Out More 318 • Develop Your Thinking 319 • Keywords 319	
Unelected Expertise as Source of Wisdom and Stability	280		
Explaining Cases: Uncovering the Whys of the Weak American Bureaucracy	282	<b>10 Economic Development and Growth</b>	<b>320</b>
The Rational-Material Story	282	Freer Markets, More Growth?	321
The Institutional Story	282	Basics of Market-Based Growth	321
The Ideational Story	283	Minimal Elements of Market-Based Development and Growth	324
Conclusion: Why Understanding Policymaking Matters to You	284	Common Problems in Economic Policy	326
Review of Learning Objectives 285 • Great Sources to Find Out More 287 • Develop Your Thinking 288 • Keywords 288		Development: Alternative Pathways from Poverty	332
<b>9 Political Economies</b>	<b>289</b>	Open Markets and the “Washington Consensus”	333
Good Times, Bad Times: Are Economies Like the Weather?	290	Dependency and “Import Substitution Industrialization”	336
Nuts and Bolts of Economies	290	Asian Models of Export-Led Development	338
Concrete Features of Economies: Wealth, Industrialization, Inequality	291		



Growth: Alternative Strategies in Developed Countries	341	The Challenges of Democratization	385
The Age of Neoliberalism	342	Economic Growth and Democracy's Foundations	386
The Great Recession Reopens Debates	345	The Challenge of Double Transitions	388
Complaints about Inequality and Government Action	347	Deals with the Devil? Opposition, Pacts, and Democratic Consolidation	389
The Trump Presidency Scrambles Economic Debates	350	Benefits and Costs of International Support	391
Political Ideologies and Economic Growth	352	Political Ideologies and the Promotion of Democracy	392
Why the Freest Markets Deliver the Most—and Most Just—Growth	352	Democracy Promotion as the Key to a Just and Safe World	392
Why Targeted Intervention in Markets Delivers More Justice and More Growth	353	Democracy Promotion as Risky, Arrogant, or Disingenuous	394
Just Say No: Rejecting Markets or Rejecting Growth?	355	Explaining Cases: Uncovering the Whys of the Arab Spring	396
Explaining a Case: Uncovering the Whys of the Taiwanese Miracle	357	The Rational-Material Story	397
The Rational-Material Story	358	The Institutional Story	397
The Institutional Story	358	The Ideational Story	397
The Ideational Story	358	Conclusion: Why the Future of Democratization Matters to You	399
Conclusion: Why Understanding the Politics of Growth Matters to You	360	Review of Learning Objectives 399 • Great Sources to Find Out More 401 • Develop Your Thinking 402 • Keywords 402	
Review of Learning Objectives 360 • Great Sources to Find Out More 362 • Develop Your Thinking 363 • Keywords 363			
<b>11 Political Change: Authoritarianism and Democratization</b>	<b>364</b>	<b>12 Political Violence: War and Terrorism</b>	<b>403</b>
Toppling Dictators Is Easier than Building Democracy	365	Has the Threat of Major War Disappeared?	404
Inside Authoritarianisms	366	The Rise (and Fall?) of Major War	404
Organizational Bases of Concentrated Control	366	The Expansion of War into the Twentieth Century	405
Not Grandpa's Authoritarianism: Managed Accountability and "Hybrid Regimes"	370	War in the Bipolar Era: Globally Cold, Locally Hot	407
How Authoritarians Fall	373	After the Cold War: War Gets Smaller—So Far	411
War and International Pressure	373	The Age of Terrorism	419
Economic Crises and Authoritarian Transitions	375	The Invention of Terrorism	419
Economic Success and Challenges to Authoritarianism	377	The Partial Intersection of Radical Islamism and Terrorism	421
Organization and Authoritarian Vulnerability	379	A War on Terror?	423
Collective Action and "Contagion"	384	The Roots of International Violence	426
		Human Nature and Violent Conflict	426
		Governments, War, and the Democratic Peace	428
		Culture, International Society, and Violence	429
		Anarchy and the International Balance of Power	431



Political Ideologies and International Violence	433	Regional Organizations and the Remarkable European Union	463
All Is Fair in Love and War	434	Globalization's Effects at Home	465
Fighting Only the Good Fight: Just Wars	435	Economic Winners and Losers in the Rich Countries	466
Is One Man's Terrorist Another Man's Freedom Fighter?	437	Economic Winners and Losers in the Developing World	469
Explaining a Case: Understanding the Whys of the 2003 Invasion of Iraq	439	Globalization and National Democracy	471
The Rational-Material Story	439	Political Ideologies and Globalization	473
The Institutional Story	439	Why Globalization Means Freedom, Innovation, and Progress	473
The Ideational Story	440	Why Globalization Means Inequality and Oppression	474
The Psychological Story	440	Goldilocks Globalization: Can We Get It Just Right?	476
Conclusion: Why Understanding Political Violence Matters to You	442	Explaining a Case: Uncovering the Whys of U.S. Government Trade Policies	478
Review of Learning Objectives 442 • Great Sources to Find Out More 444 • Develop Your Thinking 445 • Keywords 445		The Rational-Material Story	479
<b>13 Globalization and Governance</b>	<b>446</b>	The Institutional Story	479
Is a "Flatter" World Better?	447	The Ideational Story	479
The Changing International Political Economy	448	Conclusion: Why Understanding Globalization Matters to You	481
Trade	449	Review of Learning Objectives 481 • Great Sources to Find Out More 484 • Develop Your Thinking 484 • Keywords 485	
Foreign Direct Investment and Outsourcing	453		
Globalized Money	456		
International Law and Organizations	458		
The Rise of International Law and Human Rights	458	Glossary	486
Global International Organizations and the United Nations System	461	Notes	492
		Index	502

# Preface

Politics pervades every aspect of our lives as human beings. As Aristotle said, we are “political animals.” Unfortunately, many people aren’t very comfortable with that status. They wish they could avoid politics, often because they find it threatening and hard to understand: a shifting, conflictual space of complex ideas and hidden agendas. This book is designed to help students become more comfortable political animals. It does so by helping them to become conscious critical thinkers about a wide range of political topics. It teaches them how—not what—to think about politics.

The first step to that goal is to recognize that avoiding politics makes no sense. *Politics* is just a word for processes of collective decision making among people, and unless we live alone on a desert island, those processes always surround us. As a rough analogy, politics is an inescapable aspect of our lives like physical health. Our health can be good or bad, but having “no” health makes no sense. Politics too can be good or bad in many ways, but it cannot simply go away. We cannot live among other human beings without being bound up in processes of collective decision making. Just as neglecting our health can only have bad consequences, so avoiding politics can only bring us missed opportunities and subjugation to other people.

The second step to that goal is to identify a set of tools that students can use to sharpen their own political thinking. This is very hard for most people to do without help, because politics is a shifting, often-conflictual space of complex ideas and possibly hidden agendas. The set of tools must be diverse—students need to try their hands at many cuts into politics—but also organized and bounded, so that the new student is not overwhelmed.

In other words, what students need to make politics their own is a structured sense of political

alternatives. Alternatives are the foundation of all critical thinking; we cannot argue coherently for or against one view without knowing something about others. For critical thinking about politics in particular, we must be aware of three kinds of alternatives:

- Alternative arrangements of political *practice*: how is politics organized and experienced differently around the world?
- Alternative beliefs in political *ideologies*: what are different views of the good and the bad in politics?
- Alternative logics of political *explanations*: what different kinds of stories can we tell about why people act politically as they do?

For these alternatives to coalesce into a tool kit that students can take away from their studies, they must be presented in systematic and cumulative ways, especially with respect to ideologies and explanations. Though the options in political practices vary widely from topic to topic—the possibilities in representation form one menu, for example, while the choices in economic policies form another—our major ideologies and the major logics of explanation in political science stretch across these areas. The core organization of this book, then, is to apply a recurring set of major ideologies and explanatory approaches as we survey political arrangements and practices across space and time: the state, forms of government, participation, representation, policymaking, political economy and development, authoritarianism and democratization, war and terrorism, and the trends of globalization.

The key strengths of this organization are that it is simultaneously more structured and

more open-ended than any other introductory text on politics:

- The largest part of each chapter covers practices “on the ground” that form the empirical content of comparative politics, American politics, and international relations.
- Attention to contrasting political ideologies in every chapter creates connections to basic political theory.
- Short but substantive examples of alternative explanations in every chapter offer an accessible entry point into theoretical debates across the empirical subfields.
- Across the whole book, a consistent emphasis on alternatives within all these spaces promotes awareness of our diverse world, of our diverse discipline, and of students’ freedom and responsibility to figure out what they think about politics.

The book also includes other structured and cumulative supports for learning:

- Each chapter invites students to consider how to evaluate explanations with cross-case (quantitative) and within-case (qualitative) methodological approaches and evidence.
- Evocative photos, charts, and graphic figures strengthen the text with anchors for visual learning.
- Explicit learning objectives head each section and lead students into review questions, journal-writing assignments, and end-of-chapter summaries.

Finally, it is important that this framework responds not just to pedagogical challenges but to broader challenges of our era as well. In a time of low trust in government and rising distaste for politics, we must invite students to engage these subjects in a way that is both supportive and open-minded. In a period when political science has diversified to the point that some faculty members question any connection to their colleagues,

we need a coherent but ecumenical introductory frame that emphasizes both our unity and our diversity as a field. My hope is that this book realizes these immodest goals to some small degree.

## New to the Second Edition

Today’s world is pretty different from the one in which this book was first written. This is most obvious at home in the United States, thanks to the election of President Donald Trump in 2016. Trump shook up the norms of the presidency, many of his own Republican Party’s positions, most of America’s foreign relationships, and the architecture of global trade. But other parts of the world have seen profound developments too. The British voted to leave the European Union. Chinese President Xi Jinping consolidated extraordinary control of his vast nation. Russia systematically tampered with democratic elections around the world. North Korea’s Kim Jong Un simultaneously threatened nuclear war and enjoyed chummy photo shoots with President Trump. Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and other Middle Eastern players made Machiavellian moves in entangled regional wars. Parts of Africa boomed while others languished. India and Pakistan rattled swords over the disputed region of Kashmir. And so on.

But in a world that seems to be changing so rapidly, it is all the more important to understand the fundamental and largely unchanging building blocks of thinking about politics. This book’s menu of basic alternatives still provides our touchstones: big options in political practices and institutions, political ideologies, and political-science theories to explain them. While retaining that framework, this second edition includes many updates and improvements to connect it to students’ evolving lives and environment:

Chapter 1 now introduces explanatory traditions in political science by discussing how to explain the long shutdown of the U.S. federal government in early 2019.

Chapter 3, on ideologies, includes new and extended treatment of strands of conservatism and how they relate to Trump, plus discussion of “democratic socialism” on the American Left.

Chapter 4, on states and nations, gives stronger attention to the roots of tension over migration.

Chapter 5, on governments, tracks the evolving varieties of illiberal democracies and authoritarianism.

Chapter 6, on political participation, includes a substantial new section on framing and identity politics.

Chapter 7, on representation, addresses the push for a “National Popular Vote,” among other updates.

Chapter 9, on political economy foundations, discusses more extensively how today’s Left of the Democratic Party relates to socialist ideas.

Chapter 10, on the politics of development and growth, offers a major new discussion of debates over inequality and government intervention.

Chapter 11, on political change and democratization, addresses the politics around the nuclear deal with Iran and both the centralization and vulnerabilities of Xi Jinping’s rule in China.

Chapter 13, on globalization, features attention to how and why American policies on “free trade” shifted under Trump.

Just as important as any of these substantive changes, the book’s charts and data have been thoroughly revised. The Revel edition also includes far more Social Explorer features—allowing students to explore data relationships and visualization—as well as a new series of supportive videos that connect strongly to the text.

## Revel™

Revel is an interactive learning environment that deeply engages students and prepares them for class. Media and assessment integrated directly within the author’s narrative lets students read, explore interactive content, and practice in one continuous learning path. Thanks to the dynamic

reading experience in Revel, students come to class prepared to discuss, apply, and learn from instructors and from each other.

Learn more about Revel  
[www.pearson.com/revel](http://www.pearson.com/revel)

- **Current Events Bulletins** feature author-written articles that put breaking news and current events into the context of each chapter.
- **Videos** bring to life chapter contents and key moments in politics.
- **Social Explorer interactive figures** allow frequent updates with the latest data, toggles to illustrate movement over time, rollover data that students can explore, increasing students’ data literacy and analytical skills.
- **Assessments** tied to primary chapter sections, as well as full chapter exams, allow instructors and students to track progress and get immediate feedback.
- **Integrated Writing Opportunities**, helping students reason and write more clearly, are offered in several forms:
  - **Journal prompts** ask students to synthesize and apply what they have learned.
  - **Shared writing prompts** encourage students to think critically about the concepts and challenges laid out in the chapter. Through these discussion threads, instructors and students can explore multiple sides of an issue by sharing their own views and responding to each other’s viewpoints.
  - **Essay prompts** are from Pearson’s Writing Space, where instructors can assign both automatically graded and instructor-graded prompts. Writing Space is the best way to develop and assess concept mastery and critical thinking through writing. Writing Space provides a single place within Revel to create, track, and grade writing assignments; access writing resources; and exchange meaningful, personalized feedback quickly and easily to improve results.

# Learning Management Systems

Pearson provides Blackboard Learn™, Canvas™, Brightspace by D2L, and Moodle integration, giving institutions, instructors, and students easy access to Revel. Our Revel integration delivers streamlined access to everything your students need for the course in these learning management system (LMS) environments. Single Sign-on: With single sign-on, students are ready on their first day. From your LMS course, students have easy access to an interactive blend of authors' narrative, media, and assessment. Grade Sync: Flexible, on-demand grade synchronization capabilities allow you to control exactly which Revel grades should be transferred to the LMS gradebook.

## Revel Combo Card

The Revel Combo Card provides an all-in-one access code and loose-leaf print reference (delivered by mail).

## Supplements

Make more time to engage with your students with instructor resources that offer effective learning assessments and classroom engagement. Pearson's partnership with educators does not end with the delivery of course materials; Pearson is there with you on the first day of class and beyond. A dedicated team of local Pearson representatives will work with you to not only choose course materials but also integrate them into your class and assess their effectiveness. Our goal is your goal—to improve instruction with each semester.

Pearson is pleased to offer the following resources to qualified adopters of *Introduction to Political Science*. Several of these supplements are available for instant download on the Instructor Resource Center (IRC); please visit the IRC at [www.pearsonhighered.com/irc](http://www.pearsonhighered.com/irc) to register for access.

- **Test Bank**  
Evaluate learning at every level. Reviewed for clarity and accuracy, the Test Bank measures this material's learning objectives with multiple-choice and essay questions. You can easily customize the assessment to work in any major learning management system and to match what is covered in your course. Word, PDF, and BlackBoard versions are available on the IRC, and Respondus versions are available on request from [www.respondus.com](http://www.respondus.com).
- **Pearson MyTest**  
This powerful assessment generation program includes all of the questions in the Test Bank. Quizzes and exams can be easily authored and saved online, and then printed for classroom use, giving you ultimate flexibility to manage assessments anytime and anywhere. To learn more, visit [www.pearson-highered.com/mytest](http://www.pearson-highered.com/mytest).
- **Instructor's Resource Manual**  
Create a comprehensive road map for teaching classroom, online, or hybrid courses. Designed for new and experienced instructors, the Instructor's Resource Manual includes learning objectives; lecture and discussion suggestions; activities for in or out of class; research activities; participation activities; and suggested readings, series, and films as well as a Revel features section. Available within Revel and on the IRC.
- **PowerPoints**  
In order to support varied teaching styles while making it easy to incorporate dynamic Revel features in class, two sets of PowerPoint Presentations are available for this edition: (1) A set of accessible lecture PowerPoint slides outline each chapter of the text. (2) An additional set of the lecture PowerPoint slides includes LiveSlides, which link to each Social Explorer data visualization within the Revel product. Available within Revel and on the IRC.

# Acknowledgments

This book could not have been completed without contributions from many people. My first Pearson editor, Vikram Mukhija, helped me figure out what book I wanted to write. My first development editor, Angela Kao, taught me how to write a textbook. Later, development editor Barbara Smith Vargo helped clarify the writing and connect it with powerful visuals. Pearson editor Charlyce Jones-Owen shepherded the book gracefully through the final stages. For the second edition I'm especially grateful for help on charts, videos, and other supportive features from Dea Barbieri and Megan Vertucci. Crucial research assistance came from Clay Cleveland, Cary Fontana, Leif Hoffmann, Alberto Lioy, Kelly Littlepage, and Benedikt Springer. A great many colleagues helped me work through challenges along the way, among whom Burke Hendrix stands out for helping me do less damage to political theory.

Many valuable comments also came from reviewers during the various stages of developing this text, including: Jean Abshire, Indiana University—Southeast; James Allan, Wittenberg College; Ashley Biser, Ohio Wesleyan University; Ji Young Choi, Ohio Wesleyan University; David Claborn, Olivet Nazarene University; Steven Collins, Oklahoma State University—Oklahoma City; Rosalyn Cooperman, University of Mary

Washington; Mark Croatti, The George Washington University; David Darmofal, University of South Carolina; Denise DeGarmo, Southern Illinois University; Mark Druash, Tallahassee Community College; Julie Hershenberg, Collin College; Will Jennings, University of Tennessee; Andrei Korobkov, Middle Tennessee State University; Mariely López-Santana, George Mason University; Jadon Marianetti, Santa Fe College; Lynn M. Maurer, Southern Illinois University; Allyn Milojevich, University of Tennessee; K.C. Morrison, Mississippi State University; Nicholas P. Nicoletti, University of Buffalo; Jonathan Olsen, University of Wisconsin—Parkside; Bobby Pace, Community College of Aurora; David Plazek, Johnson State College; Delia Popescu, LeMoyne College; David E. Sturrock, Southwest Minnesota State University; John W. Sutherlin, University of Louisiana—Monroe; Katrina Taylor, Northern Arizona University; Lee Trepanier, Saginaw Valley State University; Mark Turetzky, Gavilan College; Kimberly Turner, College of DuPage; Adryan Wallace, University of Hartford; Winn W. Wasson, University of Wisconsin—Waukesha; John P. (Pat) Willerton Jr., University of Arizona.

Lastly, I could not make it through this kind of project without the constant support of my wife, Kari, and my children, Tor, Margaux, and Gwen.

*Craig Parsons*

# About the Author

Craig Parsons is a professor of political science and a specialist in comparative European politics at the University of Oregon. After growing up in Chico, California, he earned degrees from Stanford University, Sciences Po Paris, and the University of California, Berkeley. His authored or edited books include *A Certain Idea of Europe* (Cornell University Press, 2003), *The State of the European Union: With US or Against US* (Oxford University Press, 2005), *Immigration and the Transformation of Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), *How to Map Arguments in Political Science* (Oxford University Press, 2007), and *Constructing the International Economy* (Cornell University Press, 2010). He has also published many articles and book chapters on the European Union, national-level European politics, the U.S. Congress, and a variety of theoretical and methodological issues in political science.



# Chapter 1

## Introduction



Matthew Kaplan/Alamy Stock Photo

Office workers in Washington, D.C. rally to protest the shutdown of the federal government in January 2019. The sign asks politicians to stop political in-fighting and “just do their jobs.”



## Learning Objectives

- 1.1** Define “politics” and explain why it is an inescapable part of human existence.
- 1.2** Explain the difference between the descriptive study of politics, normative engagement with political ideologies, and the focus of political science on explaining politics.
- 1.3** Summarize the logic of the three main approaches to explaining political action and recognize the logics in examples of explanatory arguments.
- 1.4** Identify the four main methods that political scientists use to test and support their explanations.
- 1.5** Identify the main subfields in the study of politics.

---

## Introduction: Is Politics to Blame?

---

“Politics” gets a bad rap today. Even politicians don’t seem to like it. The apparent evil of politics was on full display during the fight over the U.S. federal budget in winter 2018–2019 that brought the longest government shutdown in American history. At one point, former President George W. Bush called on President Donald Trump to “put politics aside” to end the standoff. Trump—like Bush, a leader of the Republican Party—used the same terms to denounce his opponents, accusing Congresspeople in the Democratic Party of “playing politics.”

Their negative characterization of politics is normal. Trump’s predecessor, Democratic President Barack Obama said the same thing when he began his first term back in 2009. “I don’t expect a hundred percent agreement from my Republican colleagues,” he said in his inaugural address, “but I do hope that we can all put politics aside and do the American people’s business right now.” Citizens use this language too. During a previous battle between Democrats and Republicans that shut down the federal government in 2013, for example, one resident of Reno, Nevada, told his local newspaper, “It’s all about politics, and to me that’s very frustrating.” Another Nevadan commented, “It’s just about politicians jockeying for position to advance their own agendas in the future. That’s all it is.”<sup>1</sup>

One of the few things that Americans can agree on today, it seems, is that *politics* causes many of America’s problems. We use the word to evoke an image of infighting and counterproductive power struggles. Seen from this angle, “politics” rears its ugly head when the rightful concerns of citizens get turned over to “politicians.” These political creatures focus mainly on power, the perks of office, and media attention. They whip up unnecessary fights that derail the practical solution of real problems. Healthy people who want to live productive lives, meanwhile, try to avoid active engagement with the nasty political realm. A good life in a good society would be as free of politics as possible—right?

Wrong. This book starts from the idea that this conception of politics is unhelpful. The hunger for power, infighting, and media flash are certainly parts of the political scene, but they are not the essence of politics. In fact, politics is an essential part of your everyday life. Rather than seeing it as a separate arena to be blamed for unwelcome intrusions into your affairs, think of it like other basic and inescapable parts of human existence, such as health or interpersonal relationships. You can have good health or good relationships; you can have bad health or bad relationships. Neither is ever perfect; both are partly out of your control. But both are always basic parts of your life. The same is true of politics. To reject it, as the antipolitics rhetoric suggests, is to turn your back on conscious thinking about what you believe, the problems and challenges you face, and how you and others might solve them. It also discourages you from putting any effort into understanding the political world around you: a complex context, and not always pretty, but one that shapes almost every facet of your life whether you recognize it or not.

To do well in your own life, you must reclaim politics as an essential part of it. This book will help you do so. ■

# Seeing Politics in the World

## 1.1 Define “politics” and explain why it is an inescapable part of human existence.

To reclaim politics, we must first define it. *Politics is the making of collective decisions.* It is what happens, in some shape or form, when people engage with each other to govern their interactions. Unless you live alone on a desert island, you are part of many political arenas. Family members make collective decisions about how to support each other’s lives, like paying for a college education and what is expected in return. In a sports team, club, religious organization, or even an informal circle of friends, you are part of ongoing negotiations about what the group does together. In any job, you are part of an organization or network of people who must coordinate and govern themselves to produce results. And then, of course, there is the most explicit level of politics—what the term “politics” makes us think of most—which is government. In and around government, people interact to make collective decisions about infrastructure like roads, airports, and irrigation; a system of laws, courts, and police to maintain social order; the provision of education, medicine, and hospitals; foreign relations in trade, diplomacy, and defense; safety regulations for food, cars, or toys; rules for institutions that support a sophisticated economy, such as banking or insurance; and many other things that affect our lives. Even beyond the level of national government, your life is affected by global politics in international trade, cooperation, and conflict.

You might quickly object: “I may be surrounded by all these political processes, but that does not mean I should not try to escape them!” You may not feel like you are significantly involved in most levels of collective decision making—especially not the large-scale politics of the U.S. government or the wider world. But let’s consider what “escaping politics” would actually mean.

## Why Escaping Politics Is a Dead End

Most collective decision making in and around your life is certainly not entirely open, equal, and participatory. Whether the context is your family, your university, your town, or the corridors of power in Washington, D.C., some people usually play a bigger role in collective decision making than others. Many people feel like they have some of the smaller roles, which is one reason why they long for a world “without politics.” They imagine that if they could just make all of their own decisions, they would feel less excluded or controlled by others. This kind of liberated life is what political philosophers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) envisioned the “**state of nature**” to be—that is, the human condition in an imaginary time before the emergence of oppressive social organization and government.

**state of nature**  
An imagined time prior to the development of society or politics.

Few Americans realize it, but this longing for a state-of-nature world without politics is even more powerful in the United States than in most other countries. This country was founded by people who left a Europe governed by kings and queens and sailed far away in pursuit of various goals: religious freedom and political liberty, in many cases, but also land and personal opportunity. Most of the founders saw overly powerful governments as the big problem in politics, and looked for ways in which a new U.S. constitution might bolster individual rights, lessen the scope of centralized decision making, and “check and balance” the collective decision making they considered unavoidable. Settlers colonized vast territories that were sparsely populated and rich in resources, leading them to believe that a tough individual or family could thrive largely on their own on that frontier. From these origins came a political discourse that criticized government and politics for obstructing and intruding on our individual pursuit of happiness. It idealized a state-of-nature existence without governmental restraints.

But the notion of escaping into a “state of nature” would not actually appeal to most people if they thought about what it would be like. The average life span in the American colonies was less than thirty years. It didn’t get much over forty years for settlers on the frontier during the 1800s.<sup>2</sup> In today’s world, not many people ship themselves off to desert islands or the Alaskan wilderness for obvious reasons: life is not easy without a fair number of other people to ease the burden of getting clean water, growing food, building shelter, making clothing, or caring for those who are ill. Nor would most people want to forgo all the things that you can gain as part of a larger society: law and order, education, roads and other infrastructure, and so on, not to mention the opportunities for trade that bring you iPhones, mountain bikes, movies, extra-soft toilet paper, haircuts, and a million other products and services.

Maintaining access to the benefits of modern life involves collective decision making to organize and govern society. Once you are in a social context, even if you feel like you have been assigned a bit part in a production dominated by others, attempts to “escape” collective decision making tend to lead to two kinds of bad outcomes. One is that other people become even more dominant because you have left the field to them. The other is that things just fall apart and the benefits of interacting begin to disappear. This can happen at any level of collective decision making, from your family on up to the U.S. government and beyond. If you feel powerless in your family and try to escape its collective decision-making process, you find yourself with a family that dissolves or is dominated all the more by other family members. By not engaging with the governance of your club or religious group, you arrive at similar results. The same is true of the big institutions of government: pursue the fantasy of a world without politics and you do not end up “free” from politics and government; you end up with *worse* politics and government. As one saying goes, “Just because you do not take an interest in politics does not mean politics won’t take an interest in you.”<sup>3</sup>

The interpretation of U.S. history suggested by an antipolitics state-of-nature discourse is similarly misleading. In many ways, it gets the story backward. The Founding Fathers did not try to escape politics. They were political thinkers who proclaimed loudly and clearly that they sought consciously to engage politics in a whole new way. They tried very deliberately and carefully to build a different *kind* of collective decision making—a different sort of politics—where individuals could have greater liberty and equality. They saw that individual freedom is not what is left when you take away politics and government; to the contrary, they needed to construct a kind of collective decision making that supported individual freedom.

To see this fundamental point in a more concrete way, speculate for a moment on why life in Arizona is so different from life in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is one of the poorest, most insecure countries in the world. Though it has hugely promising resources, its government is barely able to hold an election or administer basic services to most of its territory. Arizona's geography is no more hospitable than central Asia. Like the least-fertile parts of Afghanistan, it has a mostly desert landscape with little water and no coastline. But life in these places is radically different: Arizonans are roughly 100 times richer on average than Afghans. According to various measures of individual freedom around the world, like those from the Heritage Foundation<sup>4</sup> or Freedom House,<sup>5</sup> Arizona, like the United States in general, scores near the top while Afghanistan scores near the bottom. While Afghanistan is one of the largest sources of refugees fleeing to other countries, people are literally dying to get into Arizona across the Mexican border.<sup>6</sup> It is rather obvious that the difference between the two is not that Arizona represents a state of nature with "less" politics and government. In most ways that we can measure, Arizona is much "more" controlled by a coherent politics and government than Afghanistan. But "less" and "more" are not the right terms; no one would dispute that Afghanistan has exceedingly complex politics. A better way to capture the fates of these two land-locked zones is that their radically different kinds of collective decision making have given their citizens radically different life experiences. The differences, good and bad, lie in the *kind* of politics, not in the presence or absence of politics.

A first step to reclaiming politics, then, is to see that wherever there is human interaction, there are inescapable processes of collective decision making. Politics is essential to construct the kind of safe and comfortable life that most people pursue, no matter how much we might daydream of an adventurous,



Kellie L. Folkerts/Shutterstock

The U.S.–Mexico border fence near Nogales, Arizona, forces migrants to find less fortified openings into the United States. Many continue to die every year from the heat while attempting to cross long stretches of desert.



autonomous existence in a state of nature. Once you recognize the presence and impact of politics in the world, you can begin to organize it, analyze it, and understand how it matters to you. And to see and understand politics around you, you need to grasp concepts from political science and political philosophy.

## From Politics to Political Ideologies and Political Science

### 1.2 Explain the difference between the descriptive study of politics, normative engagement with political ideologies, and the focus of political science on explaining politics.

Like health, relationships, and other essential parts of life, politics is often messy and complicated. Even if the antipolitics rhetoric is wrong to equate politics with “fighting for the sake of fighting,” people in politics *do* argue and disagree. These disputes, whether in your family, on talk radio, in the White House, or at the United Nations, often lead people to “spin” things to fit their views. Sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously, they selectively use information to support their side. Overall, it may seem like there is no truth at all to be found in politics. How, you might wonder, can you study such a free-for-all collection of disagreements and spin?

It may also seem that no one can help answer that question, since even the experts on politics cannot agree on what to think about it. Although politics is a domain as essential as health, you can rely more heavily on your doctor for concrete guidance because doctors have a fairly strong consensus about how to cure an infection, set a broken bone, or deal with asthma. By contrast, experts on politics do not have much of a strong or specific consensus on anything. Political experts debate a set of strongly different views of how to understand the political world.

It is in that set of strongly different views, though, that the study of politics offers the way forward. To reclaim politics, you must become a critical thinker: someone who can understand, criticize, and defend certain views about the political world against others. *The foundation of all independent, critical thinking is the ability to imagine alternative points of view.* Once you can imagine a few different viewpoints, you can choose one or more of them and defend your choices intelligently. Studying the main views of politics thus gives you the crucial tools to reclaim politics. It will not tell you exactly *what* to think about politics—you will still have to make your own choices—but it will teach you *how* to think and talk about politics in a useful, engaged, and critical way.

The study of politics helps you become a critical thinker by imagining political alternatives from three angles:

1. First, it can help you see some of the different ways of organizing and acting in politics. This is the challenge of **political description**, asking: what are some of the ways that people have set up and understood their political

**political description**  
The task of grasping how political life and action are organized.

lives, whether locally, nationally, or globally? You need to describe some of the different kinds of governments, constitutions, political beliefs, political parties, public policies, and so on to be able to imagine what options exist for your political choices. Political practices around the world suggest a menu of possibilities against which to compare your own experiences.

2. Second, the study of politics can help you engage the good and bad aspects of the politics around you, and to think about your political values and goals. This is the challenge of **political philosophy**, the effort to evaluate the good or bad in political life. It centers on **normative** ideas about how the political world *ought* to be, though it also builds in **analytic** or explanatory concepts about how we think it actually *is*. In everyday politics, the alternatives of political philosophy manifest themselves as **political ideologies** that structure our debates. By learning about different ideologies and the philosophical ideas behind them, you gain a set of alternatives to inform your choices.
3. Third, the study of politics can help you explain why you and people around you have ended up with certain options on the menu of political possibilities. This is the challenge of **political science**, the systematic effort to explain why politics works as it does. Explanation is the heart of what most experts on politics do, and they can provide you with useful ways to quickly, roughly imagine some alternative answers to “why” questions about politics. When political scientists look at any political situation (in your family, university, town, state, the United States, globally, and so on), they pose the same set of basic questions about why people might be acting and speaking the way they are. These questions are rooted in different views of the core of political action: different fundamental stories we can imagine about why we see certain patterns of collective decision making in the world. Though political scientists rarely agree fully on which story is right about any situation, they share this basic set of options for thinking about what lies behind political action. You can learn to use these tools to translate the messy-looking world of politics into a small, organized set of “why” possibilities.

Familiarizing yourself with these three kinds of alternatives can be deeply empowering. In learning about political description, you get a more concrete sense of what your own life is like as you contrast it to other possibilities. In learning about political ideologies, you gain the ability to quickly brainstorm the alternatives to any single judgment that is put before you. If someone tries to persuade you of a view based in one ideological approach, quick consideration of some alternatives tells you what might be wrong or incomplete about the case they are making. In learning about political science explanations, you find that the same basic approaches can apply to any political context, from interacting with your family and friends up to issues in global politics. You become able to look at a newspaper (or website, or blog, or however you get information) and

### **political philosophy**

The project of evaluating the good and bad in politics, addressing both how politics works and how it should work.

### **normative argument**

Argument about how things ought to be, not about how they are.

### **analytic argument**

Argument about how things are or how they change, not about how they ought to be.

### **political ideologies**

The versions of political philosophies that people use to organize political debates and action, like liberalism or conservatism.

### **political science**

The systematic effort to explain why politics works as it does.



roughly, quickly grasp the main things that might be going on behind a story. Wherever you find yourself tangling with collective decision making—in the policies of your university or employer, at a school board meeting, as you think about military service or donating to charities, and of course as you consider voting choices or other engagement with government—you are able to look at the people around you and guess at what is animating their political choices.

In these ways, the study of politics can carry you beyond the narrow, distant way in which people often relate to their political surroundings. Without these tools, people often peer in on the political realm through a small window of selective, semiconscious views. A broader, more critical engagement with political alternatives may or may not lead you to change any views you hold today—perhaps it will just help you to better appreciate and defend your initial leanings—but it will remove the narrow window between you and politics. It will allow you to reclaim politics as a comprehensible part of your world and to empower yourself with a better understanding of the choices you can make.

In the next section, we explore three basic approaches to the least familiar challenge in reclaiming politics: explanation. For your critical thinking, it is just as important to tackle the two other kinds of challenges addressed in this book—describing the political world and engaging with political ideologies. But the core terrain of explanatory political science is likely to be especially new to you, so it calls for a bit of introduction.

## Three Explanatory Approaches in Political Science

### **1.3 Summarize the logic of the three main approaches to explaining political action and recognize the logics in examples of explanatory arguments.**

Everyone has at least some experience in seeing and describing politics around them. You have picked up a few descriptive facts about presidents, political parties, and other things in U.S. politics, and probably a smattering of facts about other places too. There is much more to learn about how to see the political world and its menu of alternatives, but the basic notion of seeing and describing it is not a foreign one.

Everyone has also been exposed a bit to engaging with political ideologies. You are aware that some political concepts sound good to you (perhaps democracy? Human rights? Liberty? Equality? Free markets?) and some bad (maybe dictatorship? Oppression? War? Exploitation?). You may attach good or bad judgments to “Republican” or “Democrat” and other labels. You will need a deeper and broader sense of alternative ideologies to arrive at well-informed engagement, but judging also comes fairly naturally to us all.

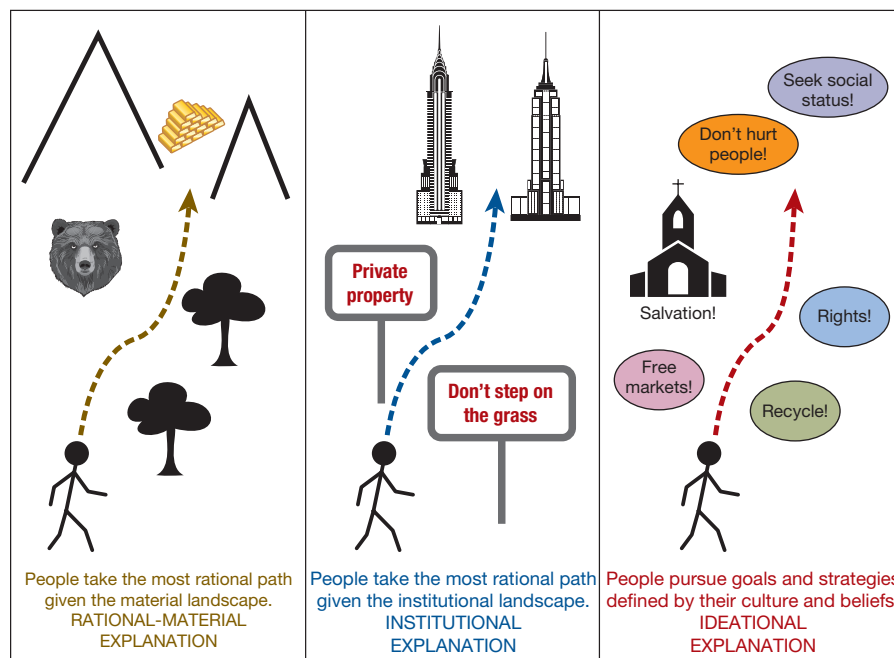
You may not have much experience, however, with explaining politics. For most people, it is challenging enough to keep a descriptive eye on political events

and an engaged eye on how events relate to their ideological views; explaining *why* things are happening is hard even to imagine. Since explanation is the least familiar piece of the study of politics, and also because it is the core of the discipline of political science, this introductory chapter gives it some special attention.

Explanation also calls for special treatment because, at first glance, it is far from obvious to know how to organize political science into a small, useful set of explanatory alternatives. If you read a selection of what political scientists write, a simple set of approaches will not jump out at you. Instead, you find a long, confusing list of academic terms that political scientists use to label the stories they tell: “structural,” “institutional,” “rationalist,” “constructivist,” “realist,” “liberal,” “Marxist,” and many others. Fortunately, though, only a few main explanatory traditions lie underneath all the labels. Whatever political scientists call their arguments, their views sort into three main kinds of stories used to explain politics. Once you get some sense of these three ways of thinking about how politics works—three basic views that prompt you to question, “*Is that* what is going on here?”—you have the main tools that political scientists apply to any political situation. When you are comfortable with these tools, you can get a little fancier: there are variations on each kind of story, and the three stories can be combined in interesting ways. But even if you go no further than the simple versions of the main options, you will be much better equipped to understand politics and think critically about it.

These three explanatory options are built around simple thoughts (see Figure 1-1). When we see someone making certain political choices, one

**Figure 1-1** Three Ways to Explain What People Do in Politics



possible explanation is that he or she is doing what anyone else would do if placed in the same place in the material landscape. Consider the figure on the left: given a forest on one side, predators on another, and rumors about gold mines through the mountain pass ahead, any rational person would head for the hills. On the other hand, his or her choices might actually be more like the figure in the middle, who is channeled in certain ways by the rules and organizations that people have built. Human-made rules and structures, often called “institutions,” create obstacle courses of incentives that reward or punish us for acting in certain ways. The third major possibility is that his or her political choices are motivated and shaped by his or her culture and beliefs, like the figure on the right. This last kind of explanation suggests that a person might do many different things in his or her material or institutional surroundings, and what really shapes a person’s choices is how he or she *interprets* what he or she wants and how to get it.

To introduce these three explanatory approaches more concretely, let’s return to a real-world example that came up at the beginning of the chapter. From December 22, 2018 to January 25, 2019, the U.S. federal government closed nine federal departments. The shutdown followed a fight between President Trump, who mainly sought Congressional approval to spend \$5 billion on a border wall with Mexico, and members of Congress—most, though not all, Democrats—who saw the wall as a bad idea. When previous deals on government spending ran out on December 22 and the two sides failed to agree on a new deal, the government had to close its doors. About 800,000 government workers were told not to come to work. Millions of private sector contractors stopped work on government-funded projects. Many businesses suffered because they depend on government services: Airlines could not put new planes in service because the Federal Aviation Administration could not certify they were safe. Alaskan fisherman faced losses because no one could issue permits to start their season. Experimental treatments for kids with cancer were put on hold. By some estimates, \$11 billion evaporated from the economy overall and longer-term effects were much more costly.<sup>7</sup> Why? Why did American leaders shut down the U.S. government?

## Alternative 1—Rational-Material Explanation: A Clash of Interests

The simplest story about the 2019 shutdown describes it as a clash between different groups in American society pursuing their own advantage. In this view, the standoff basically reflected a divide between Americans who gain or lose from President Trump’s agenda. Though the fight took place between political leaders, both Trump and his adversaries were just representing fairly concrete dividing lines in society and the economy. Citizens who would benefit concretely from Trump’s agenda encouraged him to push his agenda. Those who would