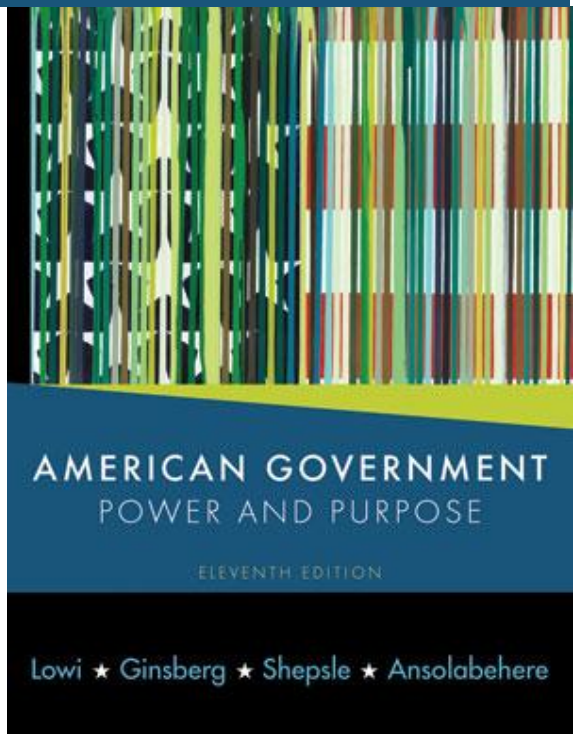
1 Five Principles of Politics

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

POWER AND PURPOSE

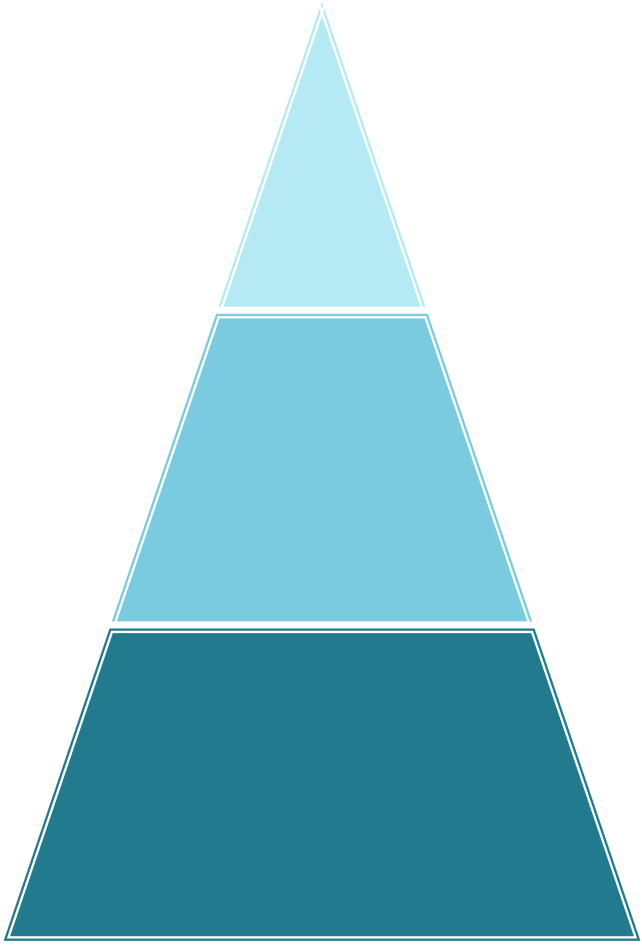
Lowi ◆ Ginsberg ◆ Shepsle ◆ Ansolabehere



Government Is Complex

American government is extraordinarily complex.

- It is divided **federally** with multiple levels of government at the national, state, county, city, and local levels.
- It is also subject to the **separation of powers** between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches (not to mention the subdivisions in each of those branches).



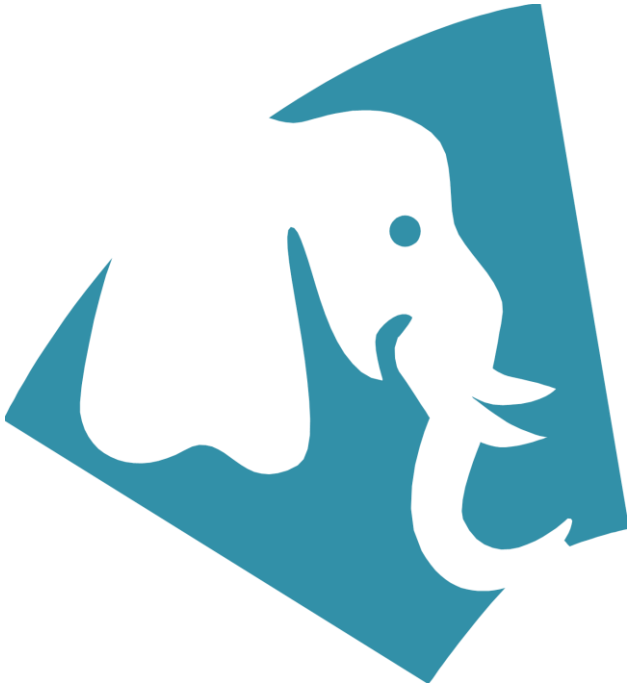
Government is everywhere

Americans have a traditional dislike and skepticism of “Big Government” that led to the division of governmental power both federally and among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches.

Nevertheless, American government has grown as interests on both the left and the right have championed its expansion.

Democrats and liberals are more apt to expand the government in the area of social programs and government regulation of business.

Republicans and conservatives are more likely to advocate expanding the government in the areas of defense, police powers, and social regulation.



What Is Government?

Definition: The institution in society that has a monopoly on the *legitimate* use of *force*.

Legitimacy, the widespread perception that the government has the right to rule, is enhanced by popular participation and consent of the governed.

Coercion is the government's use of force, including:

- Taxation
- Conscription

Why Is Government Necessary?

The **Hobbesian** view: Government exists to **maintain order**.

The **Lockean** view: Government exists to **protect individual liberty** and property.

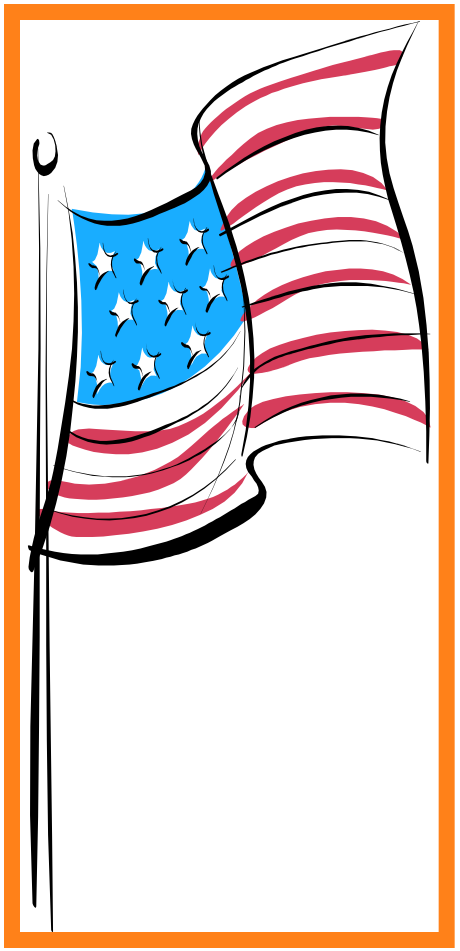
Among many others, David Hume argued that governments also exist to **produce public goods**.

The American State

Americans have come to empower the state to accomplish these multiple aims of government:

1. All states, including the United States, rely on coercion to govern.

2. Governments, especially constitutional governments, rely on legitimacy and consent to govern.



The Founders and a Powerful State

Despite their fears of "big government," the Constitution's framers established a central government far more powerful than the status quo and with a potential for significant growth.

"Government ought to be clothed with all the powers requisite to complete execution of its trust."

—Alexander Hamilton, *Federalist 23*

“Money is regarded, with propriety, as the vital principle of the body politic; as that which sustains its life and motion and enables it to perform its most essential functions . . . . A complete power, therefore, to procure a regular and adequate supply of revenue as far as the resources of the community will permit, may be regarded as an indispensable ingredient in every Constitution.”

— Alexander Hamilton
Federalist 30

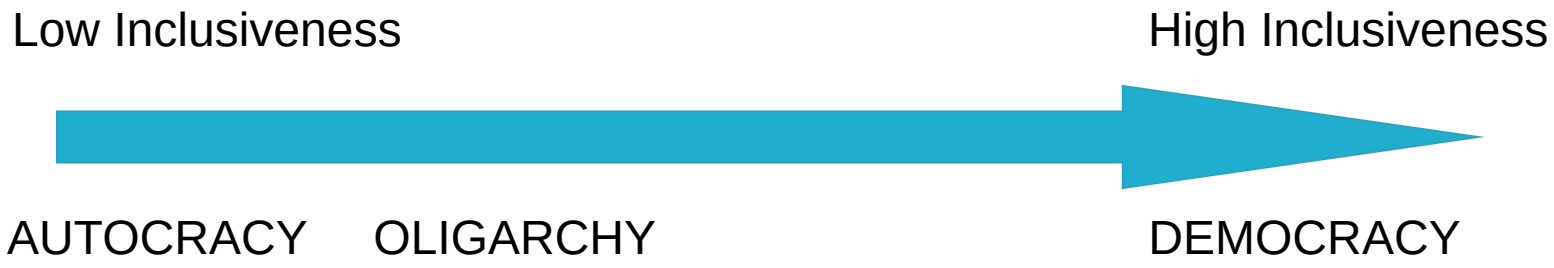
The American Government in Context

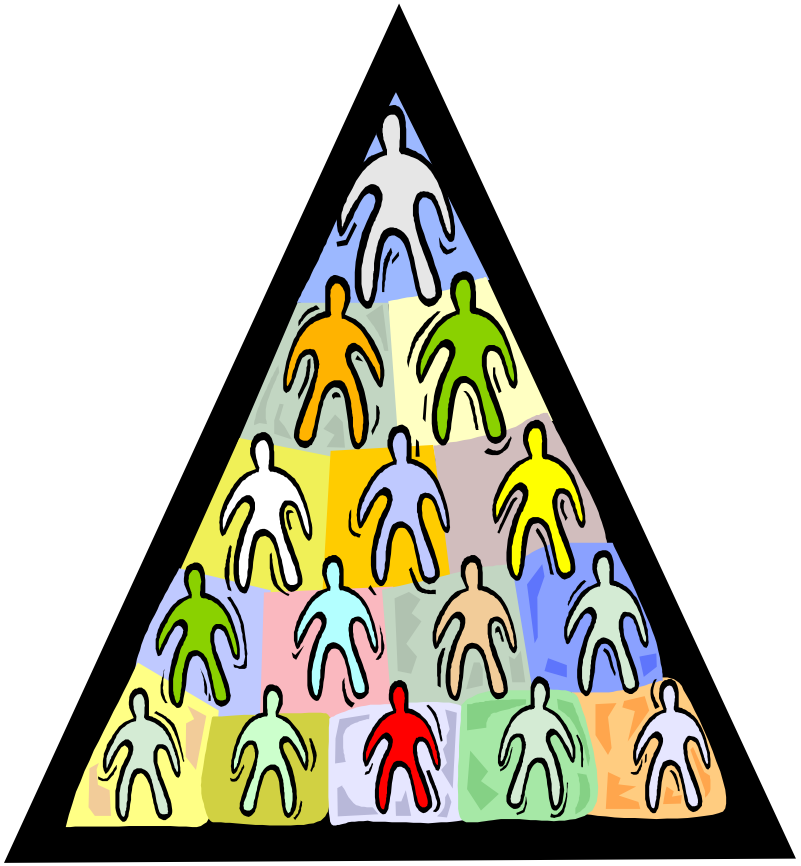
Inasmuch as American government, like all governments, relies on some mix of legitimacy and coercion, governments nevertheless differ in important respects.

Most notably, governments differ in respect to their **inclusiveness** and their willingness to **recognize limits** on their own authority.

Types of Government: Levels of Inclusiveness

Governments can be categorized in ascending levels of inclusiveness





Autocracies are governments controlled by one person.

Oligarchies are governments of the few.

Democracies are governments run by the people.

Types of Government: Recognition of Limits

Governments can also be categorized in descending order of the limits they recognize on their own authority.

Few Limits

Broad Limits

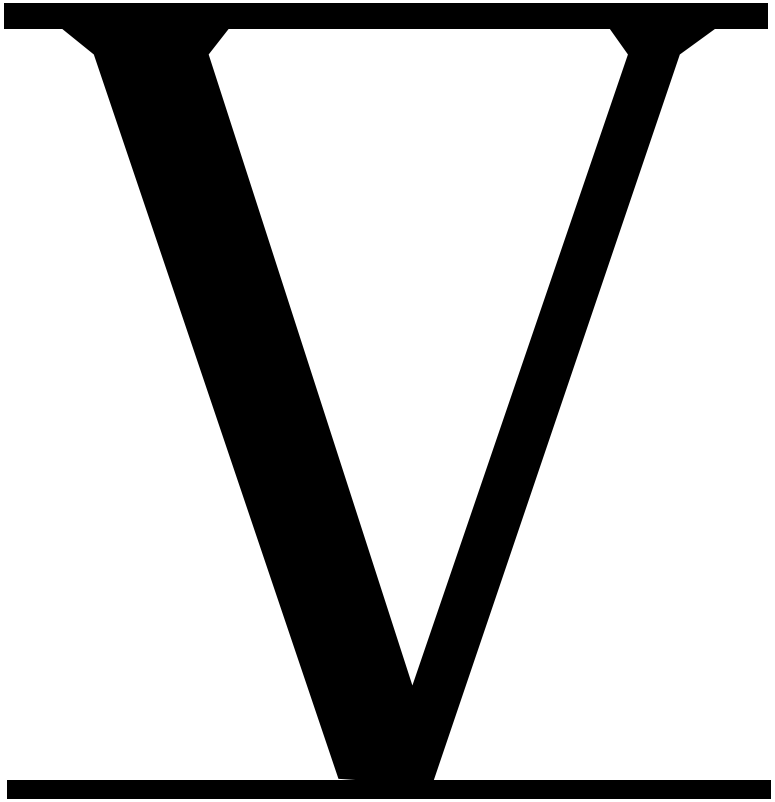
TOTALITARIAN AUTHORITARIAN CONSTITUTIONAL

Totalitarian governments recognize little or no limits on their authority.

Authoritarian governments recognize (often reluctantly) some limits on their authority.

Constitutional governments recognize and often codify broad limits on their authority.

An Introduction to the Five Principles of Politics



Throughout the semester, both the textbook and many class discussions will use the following five principles of politics to illuminate some of the central questions of American government and politics.

The Rationality Principle: All political behavior has a purpose.

1. Political behavior is goal-oriented.

2. Political actors make instrumental choices about how to act.

The Institution Principle: Institutions structure politics.

1. Institutions are the rules and procedures that provide incentives for political behavior.

2. Part script and part scorecard, institutions choreograph political activity by
   - Allocating **jurisdiction**
   - Setting the rules for making **decisions**
   - Influencing who sets the **agenda** and who has delegating authority
   - **Delegating** authority to particular actors

The Collective-Action Principle:
All politics is collective action.

1. Government requires collective social action.

2. Collective action is difficulty because individuals have different interests and goals.

3. Bargaining relationships—both informal and formal—help overcome impediments to collective action.

The Policy Principle: Political outcomes are the products of individual preferences and institutional procedures.

1. Outcomes are the products of the intermingling of individual goals and institutions.

2. Individuals have competing goals that are shaped, channeled, and filtered through relevant processes.

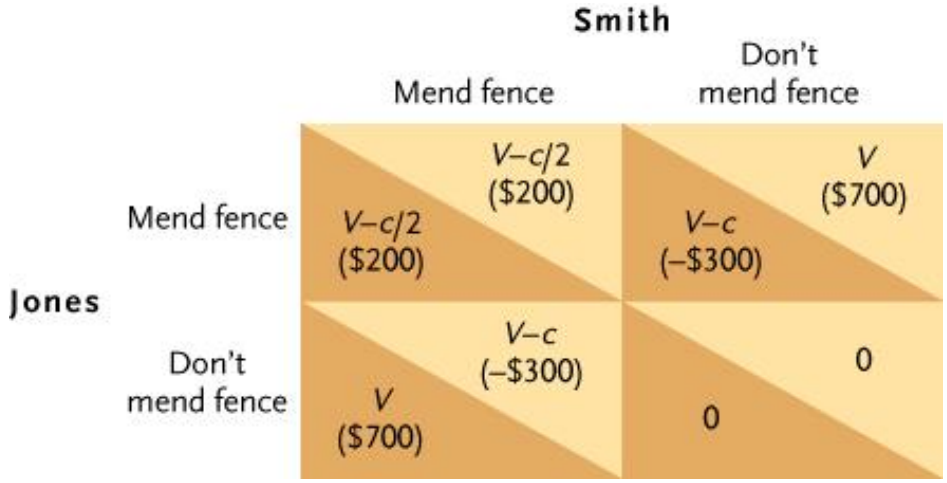
The History Principle: How we got here matters.

1. Historical processes shape institutions, and historical outcomes are the products of **path dependency**.

2. History provides a normative context by which we can understand and interpret political events and outcomes.

Additional Art for Chapter 1

A Collective Dilemma



Analyzing the Evidence

ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE

How Do Political Scientists Know What They Know?

The five principles introduced in this chapter provide a foundation for understanding and explaining the facts of political life. There are two things, however, that we need to appreciate before proceeding—things that political scientists regularly do in their analysis of politics. The first we have already mentioned earlier in this chapter. In order to make effective use of our principles, we need to know how to make analytical arguments; the assumptions we make about the structure of politics and the behavior of political actors decisively affect how we interpret the data of everyday political life. Our five principles of politics attempt to capture these assumptions; they constitute the raw input for reasoning about politics. Second, we need to understand how political scientists uncover facts about politics and what tools they use to analyze and interpret these facts. What data are relevant to an argument about politics? Where can we find such data? How do we learn things from these data? How do we test arguments about the data? In short, we need both an analytical frame of reference (as provided by the five principles) and a set of empirical tools that allow us to explore questions with this frame of reference and tease out conclusions from relevant data. This is what constitutes the *systematic* study of politics.

In each of the empirical chapters to follow, you will find an "Analyzing the Evidence" box, highlighting arguments and evidence on some of the subjects of that chapter. In this first "Analyzing the Evidence" section, however, we provide a more methodological discussion. Here we introduce some simple ways in which political scientists examine arguments about politics—ways in which political scientists know what they know. This is no more than a basic primer on how political scientists work with political data, but we believe you will find it helpful in assessing arguments and evidence in succeeding chapters.

Consider just a few arguments about American politics:

1. Most Americans have strong psychological attachments to parties, and they vote in line with their party attachments.
2. Members of Congress seek reelection, and they will vote for laws that majorities in their constituencies would also support.
3. The chief executive of a government—the president, governor, or mayor—is the most powerful person in that government, and on important policy questions will win more often than any other politician.

How should we think critically about such claims? What is the reasoning that sustains a claim, and what is the evidence to support it? What are alternative explanations? Throughout this book we will present some of the most important facts about American political behavior and government and discuss how they help us understand the motivations of individuals and the nature of politics.

Consider one of the most basic questions about voting. In elections, Americans face two main alternatives in the form of the two major political parties—the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. Each party promises to pursue distinctive economic policies. Since at least the 1930s, the Democratic Party has favored economic policies that redistribute income to poorer segments of society; Republicans, on the other hand, favor lower taxes and little or no redistribution. Such policies, if enacted into law, have real consequences for people's livelihoods. If those are the choices, it makes perfect sense to vote according to your economic self interest: Choose the party that maximizes your income.

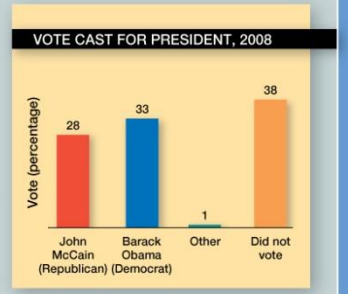
This is quite a compelling argument. Indeed, many economists take it as axiomatic that people vote to maximize their personal income or economic self-interest. On reflection, however, we see that other factors also affect election outcomes and voting, including personal qualities of candidates, important noneconomic issues, and even the force of habit. These other factors suggest alternative explanations, including the possibility that people try to choose the ablest individuals to serve in office, that people vote according to beliefs or ideologies or issues that bear little relation to their income, and that people vote in line with psychological attachments to parties that they developed in childhood.

The criterion for a good argument is how well it helps us understand reality. Is it consistent with past experience? Does it do a good job of predicting events, such as current legislative outcomes or a future election? How well does it fit current circumstances or repeated observations over time? Familiarity with some basic concepts and tools will help us grapple with these issues.

What are Data? The first step in any systematic study is to define terms. Often, research begins with a puzzling or sensational event. For example, elections are exciting events, and we want to understand many facets of them. Perhaps the central question about elections for political scientists is, Why do people vote the way they do? There is, in this example, a behavior that we generally want to explain, *vote choice*. We represent this general construct mathematically as a variable. A variable defines all possible outcomes that might have occurred and assigns them a unique label or value. Vote choice, for instance, may take four possible values or outcomes: Vote for the Democratic candidate, vote for the Republican candidate, vote for another party or candidate, or don't vote.[1]

The second step is to measure the behavior of interest. This stage requires the collection of data. Observation of a small set of events can be quite enlightening. We might, for instance, conduct in-depth interviews with a dozen or so people about how they decided to vote. However, we usually require more evidence to support a given claim; a small number of people might not be sufficiently representative.

Censuses and random sample surveys are staples of social science data collection. With a *census* we observe all individuals in the population at a given moment. Every ten years, the United States conducts a comprehensive enumeration of all people living in the country. The U.S. Constitution requires a decennial



Source: Federal Election Commission, www.fec.gov (accessed 7/6/09).

[1]We could complicate our analysis by expanding the number of potential descriptions of vote choice. For example, vote for Democratic presidential candidate and Democratic congressional candidate, Democratic presidential candidate and Republican congressional candidate, and so on. The set of categories or values that our variable can take on is an important decision the researcher must make.

Analyzing the Evidence

ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE (cont.)

census for the purposes of apportionment of seats in the U. S. House. Today, the census provides a unique and comprehensive view of the American population, including information on families, education levels, income, race and ethnicity, commuting, housing, and employment.[2] An election is a census of sorts, because it is a comprehensive count of all votes cast in a given election. Likewise, the set of all roll-call votes cast by members of Congress in a given session is also a census.

A *survey*, on the other hand, consists of a study of a relatively small subset of individuals. We call this subset a sample. One of the most important social science research projects of the second half of the twentieth century is the American National Election Study, or ANES for short. The ANES is a national survey that has been conducted during every presidential election and most midterm congressional elections since 1948 to gauge how people voted and to understand why. Today, many important surveys examine American society and politics, including the General Social Survey, the Current Population Survey, and the American Community Survey (all by the Census Bureau), and exit polls conducted by national news organizations.[3] Most of the information used by public policy makers, businesses, and academic researchers— including estimates of unemployment and inflation, television and radio ratings, and most demographic characteristics of the population (used to distribute federal funds)—are measured using surveys.

Summarizing Data. Communicating the information in a census or survey requires tools for summarizing data. The summary of data proceeds in two steps. First, we compute the frequency with which each value of a variable occurs. Frequency may be either the number of times that a specific behavior or value of a variable occurs or the percent of the observations in which it occurs. Second, we construct a graph or statistic that summarizes the frequencies of all values of the variable.

The *distribution* of a variable expresses the frequencies of the values of a variable. That distribution may be represented graphically with a bar chart (also called a histogram) or a pie chart. It may also be represented by a statistical table. On its horizontal axis, a *bar chart* displays all possible values of a variable; the heights of the bars equal the frequency or percent of cases observed for each value. In the 2008 U.S. presidential election, 38% of the people did not vote, 28% of the people voted for Republican John McCain, 33% of the people voted for Democrat Barack Obama, and 1% of the people voted for third-party candidates. The frequencies sum to 100 percent. It is common to restrict the analysis to voters only, in which case McCain won 45.7% of the votes cast and Obama won 52.9% of the votes cast, with the remaining votes scattered across other candidates. The bar chart on page 25 shows the histogram of the presidential vote in the 2008 election.

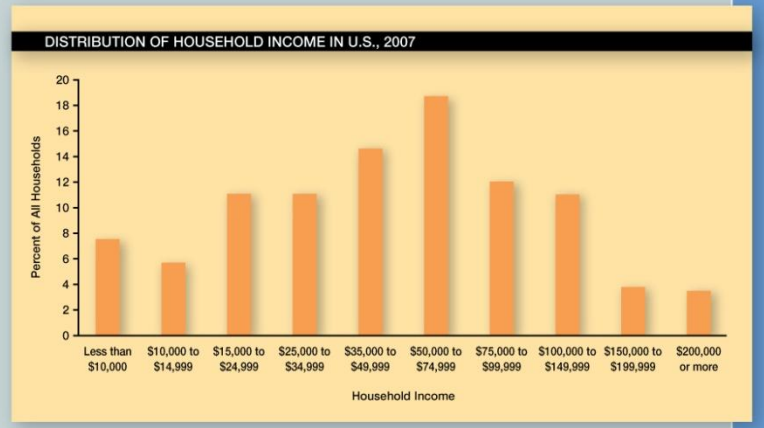
A *statistical table* displays the values of the variable along the left-hand side of the table and the frequencies to the right.

The distribution of income in the United States offers a somewhat different example. The U.S. Census offers many different definitions of income, so we must settle on one: household income before taxes and transfers. This variable takes a range of values from the smallest household income to the largest household income, and then reports frequencies by categories. Category 1 is "less than $10,000"; category 2 is "$10,000 to $14,999"; category 3 is "$15,000 to $24,999"; and so forth up to the top category, which is "over $200,000." All possible income levels are covered in this classification, and the categories can be ordered from lowest to highest. The histogram below presents the distribution of incomes in the U. S. population in 2007.

VOTE CAST FOR PRESIDENT, 2008

John McCain	28%
Barack Obama	33%
Other candidates	1%
Did not vote	38%

Source: Federal Election Commission, www.fec.gov (accessed 7/6/09).



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, www.census.gov (accessed 7/6/09).

Variables such as income can be characterized with statistics, such as the median or mean. In this example, the *median* is the value of household income such that half of all households have income below that value and half have income above it. Fifty percent of all cases have income above the median value, and fifty percent have income below it; thus, the median is also called the fiftieth percentile. The median household income in the United States in 2007 was $50,233. We can see this in the histogram by beginning with the lowest value and adding up the percentages associated with each successive value until the cumulated percentage equals 50 percent. The *mean*, or average, equals the sum of each household's income (or personal income of all people in the United States) divided by the number of households. Personal income totaled approximately $11.6 trillion in 2007, and there are 117 million households. So, in the United States in 2007, the average household income was $99,800.

Why do the mean and median differ? When we calculate the median, every household is equal. We merely count the percent above and below a certain income level. The mean value weights households according to their incomes; consequently, a household with $200,000 income contributes 10 times as much to the calculation of the mean as a household with $20,000. If there were only small differences in income among households, the mean would be very close to the median. The difference between the median and the mean thus provides a measure of inequality.

[2] www.census.gov
[3] All of these resources are publicly available. We encourage you to consult them on the Web or at the library.

Analyzing the Evidence

ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE (cont.)

The median is particularly important in thinking about voting. In an election involving two parties or candidates, it takes at least 50 percent of the votes to win. In a legislature, any bill must receive at least half of the votes of those present in order to pass. Suppose a piece of legislation directly affects people's incomes by taxing those with income above a certain level, say $75,000, and transferring that income to people who make less than that amount. Suppose also that people only care about their personal income when thinking about this bill. We may use the distribution of incomes to calculate directly what percent of people will support the bill and what percent of people will oppose it. If we use the data on the preceding page, we find that approximately one-quarter of households have income higher than $75,000, and three-quarters have income less than $75,000. If people voted only on the basis of their income—their economic self-interest—then 23 percent would oppose the tax bill and 77 percent would support it. In such a setting we can see that democracy would inevitably tax the rich.

Testing Arguments Using Data. The argument that democracy will tend to redistribute income depends on an important assumption—that people vote their economic self-interest. Is that assumption correct? Political science involves entertaining propositions, such as the claim that people vote their economic self-interest, and then testing those ideas using quantitative and other sorts of data.

Testing a claim or argument requires making comparisons: Compare the predictions from a given argument or proposition with data relevant to that idea. Usually, such conjectures take the form of a hypothesis that there is a strong relationship between two variables, such as income and the vote. To test for such a relationship, we examine how the distribution of one variable (called the dependent variable, in this case the vote) depends on the values of another variable (the independent variable). The difference in the outcome across values for the independent variable is called an *effect*.

In the case of income and vote choice, we want to know how much voting decisions depend on individuals' income levels. Compare two types of people—those who live in high-income households (income above $120,000) and those who live in low-income households (income below $15,000). Do these two types of people differ in the frequency with which they support policies that lead to greater income redistribution, and parties and candidates that favor such policies? As stated earlier, in the United States today, the Republican Party generally favors lower income taxes and less income redistribution, and the Democratic Party favors higher income taxes and more income redistribution. We therefore want to know if those in high-income households vote Republican at a much higher rate than those in low-income households. The difference in voting behavior between these two groups is the *effect* of income on the vote.

VOTE BY LEVEL OF INCOME IN 2008 NATIONAL EXIT POLLS

Income (% of people)	Obama	McCain	Other
Under $15,000 (**6%**)	73%	25%	2%
$15,000–30,000 (**12%**)	60%	37%	3%
$30,000–50,000 (**19%**)	55%	43%	2%
$50,000–75,000 (**21%**)	48%	49%	3%
$75,000–100,000 (**15%**)	51%	48%	1%
$100,000–150,000 (**14%**)	48%	51%	1%
$150,000–200,000 (**6%**)	48%	50%	2%
$200,000 or More (**6%**)	52%	46%	2%

Source: www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/polls/USP00p1 (accessed 5/21/09).

Tables offer a convenient way to display the relationship between two variables. As we saw earlier, a table presents all possible combinations of the values of two variables in a rectangular array. The top of the array corresponds to one of the variables and is divided into columns, one for each of the values of the variable. The left side of the array corresponds to the other variable and is divided into rows, one for each value of this variable. Each cell, then, corresponds to a unique pair of values of the two variables (the intersection of a given row and a given column). In our example the variables are income and vote choice. The first cell corresponds to survey respondents who voted for Obama and who are from families with income below $15,000. The cells in the table on page 28 correspond to the percent of people in each income group who chose Obama, McCain, or someone else.

To see whether the income gap in voting is indeed large, we can use the data in this table to examine the actual voting behavior of different sorts of individuals. The national exit polls in 2008 reveal that 73 percent of voters with income less than $15,000 chose Barack Obama (and approximately 25 percent John McCain). In contrast, 52 percent of those with income over $200,000 chose Barack Obama (and only about 46 percent John McCain). The difference in the support for Obama across these two income groups is 21 percentage points (73–52). This large difference reveals that income is associated with vote choice, but it is not absolutely determinative. In particular, no income group voted overwhelmingly Republican in this election.

Consider an alternative argument, offered by the political scientists Angus Campbell, Philip Converse, Warren Miller, and Donald Stokes in *The American Voter*. People have a psychological attachment to party from which they rarely deviate. This argument suggests that those who identify personally with one of the parties vote almost entirely along party lines. The following table shows that is true; the effect of party identity is much larger than the effect of income. Knowing someone's party identity provides a strong indicator of how he or she will likely vote.

VOTE BY PARTY IDENTIFICATION IN 2008 NATIONAL EXIT POLLS

	Obama	McCain	Other
Democrat (39%)	89%	10%	1%
Republican (32%)	9%	90%	1%
Independent (29%)	52%	44%	4%

Source: www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/polls/USP00p1 (accessed 5/21/09).

As we explore many alternative arguments about vote choice, we can make many different comparisons—Democrats versus Republicans, men versus women, college graduates versus high school graduates, and so forth. In each case, we begin by making a table of the frequencies and compute the percentages within each group that voted Democratic or Republican. Our goal is to find which, if any of these potential explanations, best accounts for the variation in voting. Throughout this book, we will consider other outcomes beside voter behavior, such as members' of Congress support for different types of legislation and the percent of times that the executive succeeds in passing legislation—in each case, what we know about these phenomena in American politic is informed by an analytical approach to evidence.

This concludes the presentation slides for Chapter 1: Five Principles of Politics

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