



Chapter 1

The Nature of Power, Politics, and Government

Why should you care about power, politics, and government?

■ 1.1 Introduction

The United States of America was born in an explosion of rebellion against **authority**. The Declaration of Independence, defending that rebellion, spit forth a list of all the British monarch's crimes against the American colonies. Clearly, many colonists had lost faith in the British **government**—if not in government in general. In his widely read pamphlet *Common Sense*, the colonial firebrand Thomas Paine expressed a viewpoint held by many colonial Americans:

Society in every state [condition] is a blessing, but Government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil; in its worst state, an intolerable one.

—Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, 1776

This general mistrust of government did not end with the American victory in the Revolutionary War. It continues to this day. In 2011, more than a thousand Americans were asked this question in an opinion poll sponsored by two news organizations, CNN and ORC International: *How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right: just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?*

Only 2 percent, or 1 person in 50, answered, "just about always." 13 percent responded, "most of the

The U.S. Capitol Building, located in Washington D.C.

Speaking of Politics

authority

The legal right or power to give orders and enforce rules.

government

Institutions and officials organized to establish and carry out public policy.

power

The ability to cause others to behave as they might not otherwise choose to do.

legitimacy

The quality of being accepted as an authority, often applied to laws or those in power.

public good

A product or service that is available for all people to consume, whether they pay for it or not.

nation-state

An independent state, especially one in which the people share a common culture. In a nation-state, people have a sense of belonging to one country, even if they have different ethnic backgrounds.

sovereignty

The right to exercise supreme authority over a geographic region, a group of people, or oneself.

politics

The process and method of making decisions for groups. Although generally applied to governments, politics is also observed in all human interactions.

institution

An established organization, especially one providing a public service, and the rules that guide it.



Americans may distrust government, but as this cartoon suggests, it is something people can't live without. Most groups of people, large and small, develop some form of government to help order their lives. The term government comes from a Greek word that means "to steer" or "to control."

time." About three fourths answered, "only some of the time." And a disgruntled 8 percent said, "never."

This distrust of government also shows up in popular movies and television dramas. Corrupt or power-hungry politicians are often the villains in action movies. The plot lines of some television shows center on conspiracies hatched by public officials at the highest levels of government. Conspiracy theories about government involvement in the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. continue to generate books and magazine articles even today.

Is this attitude that politicians and government in general cannot be trusted justified? Is government at its best, in the words of Thomas Paine, "a necessary evil"? Or is it necessary at all? To answer these questions, we must first figure out what government is and what it does. One way to begin is to examine the central concern of all governments: **power**.

■ 1.2 The Power to Rule

The power to rule can be gained—or lost—in many ways. In the 1100s B.C.E., the Shang dynasty ruled north central China. However, tough military campaigns against other nearby kingdoms eventually exhausted the Shang's fighting forces. In time, the neighboring Zhou, under a leader named Wu, took advantage of this weakness. From their lands to the west, the Zhou attacked and quickly overwhelmed the Shang defenses. The Shang ruler reportedly committed suicide, and Wu became his people's new ruler.

The history of China, like that of many countries, is filled with tales of the violent overthrow of one government after another. The history of the United States, on the other hand, reveals mostly peaceful transfers of power. Whether one looks at an ancient Chinese ruler or a modern American president, what they have in common is the power to rule. How they use that power, however, can vary greatly.

What Is Power, and How Is It Exercised?

Power is a difficult concept to define. People seem to know it when they see it, but they have a hard time pinning down exactly what it is. The sociologist Max Weber defined power as "the possibility of imposing one's will upon the behavior of other persons." In his book *Three Faces of Power*, economist Kenneth E. Boulding refers to power as "our capacity to get other people to do things that contribute to what we want."

That's about as simple as the concept gets. When scholars dig deeper into the sources, uses, and effects of power, the subject seems to expand in many different directions. There are five sources of power, ranging from persuasion to **coercion**, or the use of force. Governments throughout the ages have relied on each of these types of powers, often in combination.

Whatever its source, the power to rule can be used for positive or negative ends, or purposes. Through the centuries, some rulers have used their power to build cities, promote the arts, or feed the poor. Others have abused their power by looting their subjects' wealth, turning captives into slaves, and even committing mass murder.

In *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine characterized British rule of the colonies as “a long and violent abuse of power.” In his view, “a thirst for absolute power is the natural disease of monarchy.” A century later, British historian Lord Acton echoed Paine’s observations on the **abuse of power** when he wrote, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

How Does Power Relate to Authority?

People with the right to use power are said to have authority. But how do they get that authority? Sometimes it comes through tradition. For example, parents have authority over their children. Religious leaders have authority over their congregations.

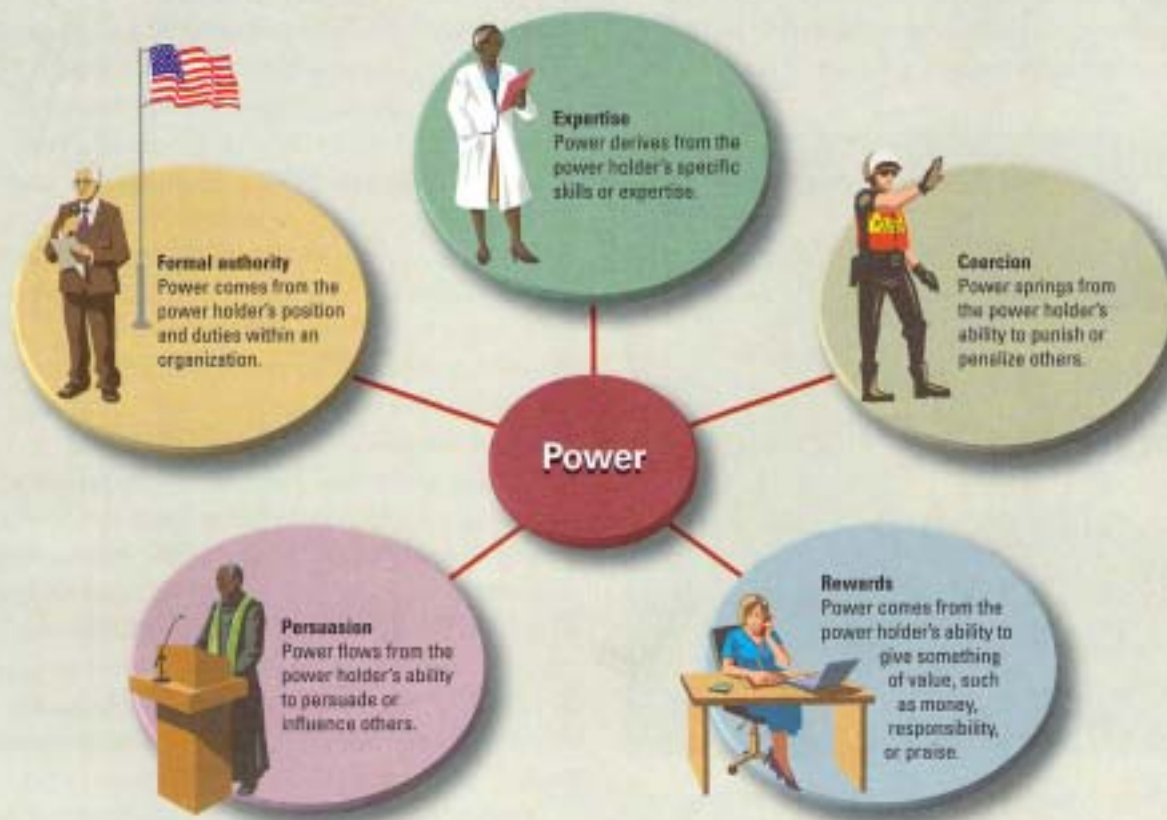
In the field of government, political scientists speak of **formal authority**, or power that has been defined in some legal or other official way. People with formal authority have the legal right to use power. The source of their authority might be a constitution, a contract, or another legal document. School principals have formal authority, as do police officers and presidents.

What Gives a Ruler Legitimacy?

Leaders whose power and authority are accepted as valid by the people they govern are said to have **legitimacy**. Legitimacy rises and falls depending on the willingness of those being led to follow those doing the leading. A military leader can seize power by force,

Five Sources of Power

This diagram shows five sources of power exercised by people in a variety of roles. Political leaders often combine these sources of power to get citizens to act in a certain way. For example, a president might speak to the nation (combining formal authority and persuasion) about offering tax breaks (a reward) to people who buy fuel-efficient cars.



as in the example of the Zhou leader, Wu. But to be considered a legitimate ruler, Wu had to convince the people he conquered of his right to govern them.

To enhance Wu's standing among the Shang, the Zhou introduced the **mandate of heaven**—a doctrine of legitimacy that would endure for more than 2,000 years. According to this doctrine, the Chinese ruler was the “son of heaven” and thus had authority over “all under heaven.” The ruler retained this right only so long as he ruled his subjects in a moral manner. If he failed to rule well, the mandate of heaven would pass to someone else. The Shang leader, they argued, had lost the mandate of heaven to Wu, who had been sent by heaven to unseat him.

In the 1500s, powerful European monarchs proclaimed a similar doctrine of legitimacy, known as the **divine right of kings**. This doctrine, like the mandate of heaven, held that monarchs represented God on Earth. Because their right to rule was divine, or God-given, monarchs did not have to answer to the people for their actions. God had granted them absolute power to govern as they saw fit.

Before long, some Europeans began to challenge this doctrine. The English philosophers Thomas Hobbes and John Locke popularized what became known as the **social-contract theory** of government.



The Mayflower Compact is an example of how a central government can stabilize a group of people. In addition to quelling revolts, the Mayflower Compact also became the foundation of the colonists' government once they landed at Plymouth.

According to this theory, the legitimacy of a government stems from an unwritten contract between the ruler and the ruled. Under the terms of this contract, the people agree to obey a ruler in exchange for the ruler's promise to protect their rights. A ruler who breaks this contract by abusing power loses legitimacy and should be removed from power.

■ 1.3 The Foundations of Government

In 1620, a group of English colonists arrived off the shore of Plymouth, Massachusetts. They hoped to settle there as a community. However, before their ship landed, some colonists threatened to split off from the others. To quell this revolt, the group's leaders demanded that all adult males sign a document promising to obey the rules and laws enacted by the group. This agreement, the Mayflower Compact, organized the signers into a “civil body politic,” or a government.

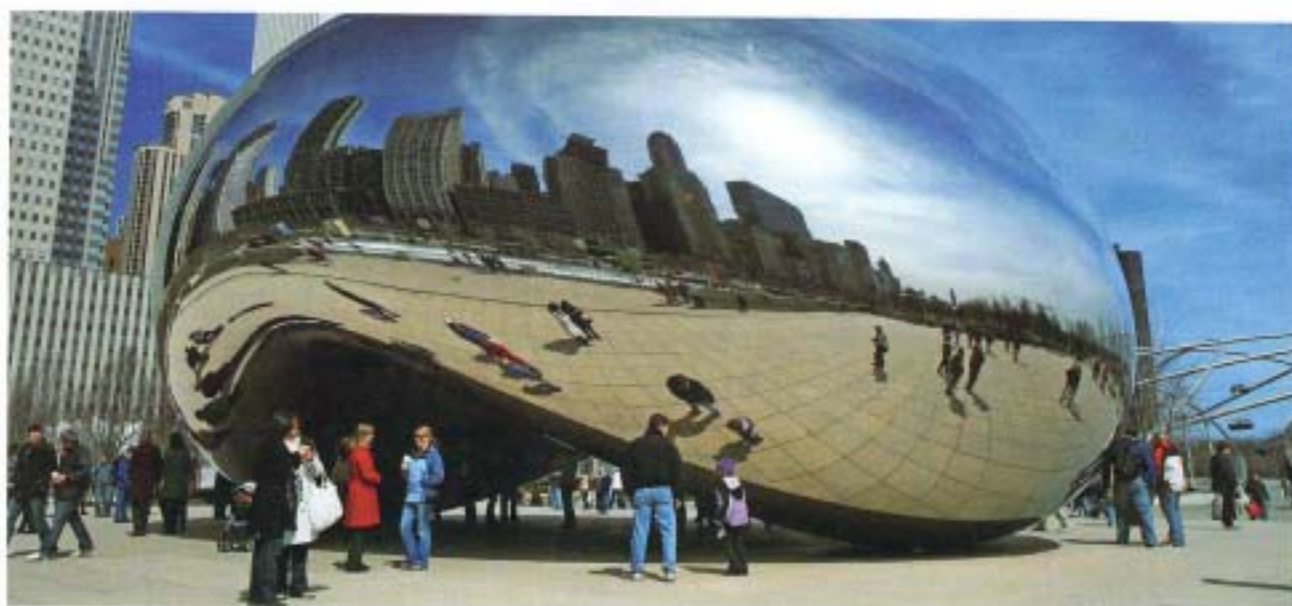
The Purposes of Government: Order, Protection, and Public Goods

Like the signers of the Mayflower Compact, groups of all shapes and sizes throughout history have felt the need for some sort of government. Government serves many purposes. Among the most important are maintaining public order, protecting life and property, and providing **public goods**.

Living in violent times, both Hobbes and Locke emphasized the need for government to preserve order and protect people's lives and property. Without such protection, wrote Hobbes, people would be condemned to live in “continual fear and danger of violent death.”

Today, governments are equally concerned with providing a wide range of public goods to their citizens. You benefit directly from public goods. Your community's schools, the roads you travel on to get to school, and the fire and police protection you enjoy are all public goods that you receive from your government. You also benefit from public goods when you visit a national park or feel safer knowing that our nation is protected by the armed forces.

Public goods have two key characteristics. First, more than one person can consume them without reducing the amount available to others. Consider



Public goods, such as Millennium Park in Chicago, Illinois, belong to all citizens. Government creates public goods, and citizens pay for them with their tax dollars. Unlike private goods, public goods are available to everyone. Once they are established, even people who pay no taxes are free to use them.

streetlamps. If you walk under a streetlamp, you do not reduce the ability of others to use its light. Second, once a public good is made available, all people have the right to use it. After being installed, a streetlamp shines its light on everyone.

Neither of these characteristics is true of private goods. Consider an apple that you buy at a grocery store. Once you take a bite of the apple, you have reduced the amount available to others. And since you own the apple, nobody else has a right to consume it. Your apple is a private good.

The Building Blocks of Government: Coercion and Revenue Collection

Governments throughout history have had two key powers that are essential for providing protection and public goods. These two building blocks of government are (1) a means of coercion and (2) a means of collecting revenue.

Coercion refers to the various ways in which government can use its power to force citizens to behave in certain ways. The most obvious means of coercion include the police, the courts, and the prison system. Governments use the threat of arrest and punishment to maintain public order and keep people secure in their homes and in public spaces.

Other means of coercion relate to involuntary services required of citizens. One example is conscription,

or a military draft, in which government compels young men and women to serve in the armed forces. Another involuntary service is jury duty, in which a panel of citizens decides an accused person's guilt or innocence.

The second building block of government is a means of collecting **revenue**. All governments need money to provide security and pay for public goods. They generally get that money from the people they govern or control.

The ways that governments collect revenue have varied historically. Ancient empires extracted **tribute**, or payments, from the smaller states they controlled. Such "gifts" of goods or money were a sign of submission from the smaller states. For much of its history, China received tribute from peoples on its borders. China also levied taxes on its citizens. Through taxation, the Qin dynasty acquired the resources it needed to build one of history's early public goods: the Great Wall.

Who Should Rule: The One, the Few, or the Many?

Governments take many forms. In the past, most governments, like that of China, were headed by a single, powerful ruler. In contrast, the ancient Greeks experimented with forms of government ranging from rule by the rich and powerful to rule by all male citizens.

Aristotle's Classification of Governments

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle sought to determine the best form of government. He considered the number of people who might take part in governing and the moral character of those who held power. He concluded that power spread out over a large number of people lessened the chances of tyranny—whether by a single, selfish leader or a thoughtless mob.

Who Holds Power

One



A Few



The Many



Rule Motivated by
the Common Good

Kingship

Government by
one virtuous ruler

Aristocracy

Government by
the virtuous few
for the good of all

Polity

Constitutional
government in
which everyone
has a share in
political power

Rule Motivated by
Self-Interest

Tyranny

Rule by one lawless
ruler

Oligarchy

Rule by the wealthy
few in their own
interest

Democracy

Rule by the poor in
their own interest

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, who is revered as the father of political science, thought deeply about who should have the power to rule. Aristotle was motivated by an interest in ethics, or proper conduct. This led him to an examination of many possible forms of government.

Aristotle categorized governments along two lines. One was how many people are involved in governing—one powerful ruler, a few upper-class aristocrats, or the mass of common people. The second was their motivation in making decisions. Ideal rulers, he said, cared about the common good. Corrupt rulers, in contrast, cared only about advancing their own selfish interests.

As a philosopher, Aristotle liked to consider ideal forms. The ideal form of government, he reasoned, was a monarchy led by a single, virtuous ruler. But Aristotle also prided himself on being a realist. Rule by a single person, he knew from experience, could easily lead to the abuse of power. He admitted that

Political writers, although they have excellent ideas, are often unpractical. We should consider, not only what form of government is best, but also what is possible and what is easily attainable by all.

—Aristotle, *The Politics*, Book IV

In the real world, Aristotle wrote, rule by the well-intentioned many would suit most societies. He called this kind of government a **polity**. In a polity, he argued, the best-qualified citizens, whether rich or poor, would dominate government.

Two thousand years after Aristotle wrote about government, the founders of the United States faced some of the same questions he had explored. Although they ended up creating a different kind of government than imagined by Aristotle, his writings strongly influenced their thinking.

The Governments of Modern Nation-States

When political scientists study government today, they are usually concerned with the larger and complicated governments of **nation-states**. All nation-states share these four characteristics:

Territorial integrity. A nation-state occupies a specific geographic territory, with internationally recognized boundaries.

Stable population. A nation-state has people living permanently within its boundaries.

Code of laws. The people of a nation-state agree to live under a common legal system.

National sovereignty. A nation-state is independent and self-governing.

The nation-state is a fairly modern political phenomenon. It merges two concepts: the nation and the state. A nation is a group of people who share a common ethnic origin, culture, and language. A state is a geographical area controlled by a single government.

The governments of modern nation-states are quite varied. In some, power is concentrated in the hands of one or a very few powerful leaders. In others, like the United States, power comes from the people and is broadly distributed throughout the government.

1.4 Politics and Political Activity

The idea that governments should provide public goods is not new. In the early American republic, federal and state governments supported the building of ports, roads, and canals to facilitate travel and commerce. These projects did not come together overnight. The idea for the Erie Canal, for example, was first proposed in 1724, when New York was still a colony. The first bill supporting the building of the canal reached the state legislature in 1787 but failed

Rule by the Many in the United States

In the United States, the people govern by participating in elections and politics. These graphs show the percentage of American adults who participated in political activities during the presidential election year of 2008. Can you see yourself doing all of these things or just a few?

Political Activity in the 2008 Presidential Election

Becoming Informed on the Campaign



Watched TV



Read newspapers

Becoming Involved in the Campaign



Displayed a campaign button or bumper sticker



Gave money to a campaign



Attended a political meeting



Worked for a party or candidate

Voting



Registered to vote



Voted



Tried to influence how others voted

Source: The ANES Guide to Public Opinion and Electoral Behavior, American National Election Studies, www.electionstudies.org.

to win passage. Construction finally began in 1817, but only after extensive debate, planning, report writing, compromising, and arm-twisting—in short, **politics**.

The political process that results in projects such as the Erie Canal is extremely complex. Yet political scientist Harold Lasswell was able to boil it down to just a few words. He famously described politics as the process of determining “who gets what, when, how.” People who participate in that process engage in many forms of political activity. But all political activity has a few common characteristics.

Political Activity Has a Purpose

Political activity can range from looking at a political cartoon to running for public office. Some political actions take little effort. Others require a significant amount of time, money, effort, and even courage. No matter how simple or difficult, political activity is purposeful. It is done for a reason.

Consider this situation. A city council is contemplating a proposal to build a new skateboard park in the community. Most residents care about children and want them to have recreational opportunities. For that reason alone, they at least follow the issue in the local newspaper. They might also discuss it with friends or co-workers.

Some citizens, however, are motivated to look more deeply into the proposal. One group, concerned that construction and insurance costs might cause their taxes to go up, speaks out against the proposal at city council meetings. Another group, believing that the skateboard park will make the town more attractive for young families, speaks up in support.

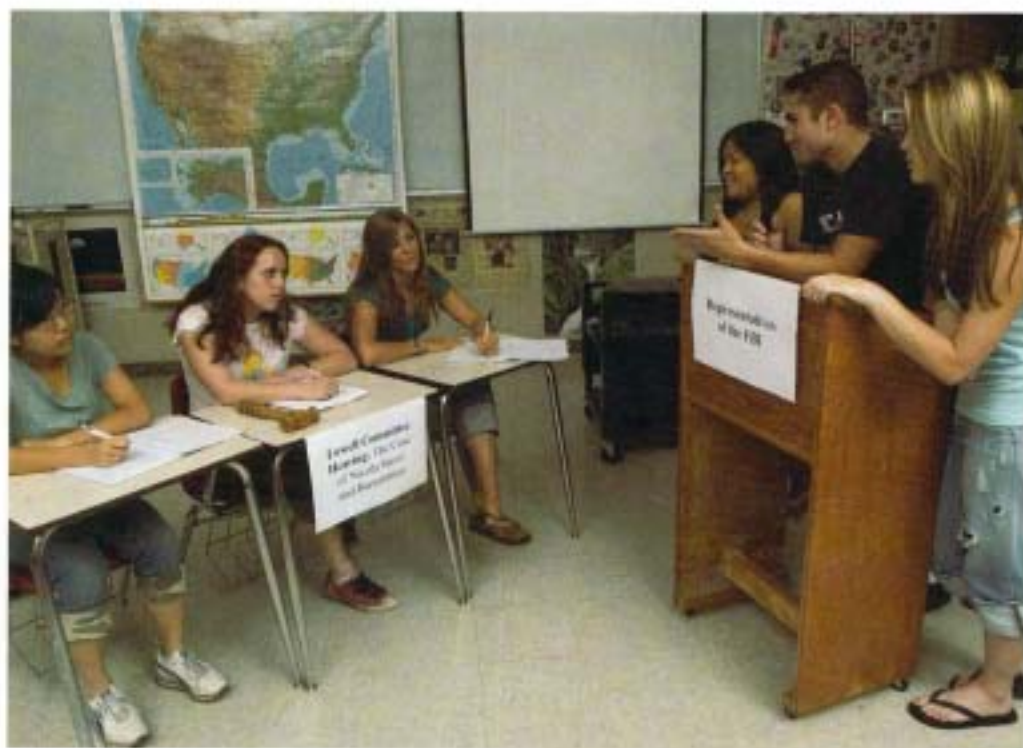
Prompted by their enthusiasm for the park proposal, a group of skaters and their parents become more actively involved. Some seek appointment to a study group that is reviewing the proposal. One parent even decides to run for a seat on the city council in the next election. For these citizens, the possible benefits of becoming politically active outweigh the costs in time, effort, and resources.

As this example suggests, political activity is intentional, not random. That is, people think through what they are trying to achieve and weigh the costs and benefits of the actions needed to achieve their goals.

Political Activity Involves Collective Action

Individuals can achieve many of their goals by acting on their own. But political activity is collective—it involves working with others to achieve shared goals.

Formal written rules guide the activities of political institutions, from Congress to your school's student council. Some scholars even argue that the rules *are* the institution. Without the structure these rules provide, they say, an institution could not function and might even cease to exist.



As the late American anthropologist Margaret Mead once wrote,

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

—Margaret Mead

Even when people share a common goal, acting collectively can be challenging. Once again, consider the proposed skateboard park. Skateboarding enthusiasts from around the city come together to plan how best to make their case. They all want the park to be built, but they do not agree on where it should be located.

Conflicts within a small group like this one can often be resolved through face-to-face negotiation, or informal bargaining. In large groups, bargaining sessions may follow more formal rules. In either case, for collective action to work, the people involved need to be prepared to seek and accept compromise.

Institutions Shape Political Activity

The **institutions** we live with also influence political activity. Institutions are organizations or sets of rules that shape the behavior of groups. They have a social purpose and permanence in human affairs. The family is an ancient institution. Its purpose now, as long ago, is to provide for the physical and emotional well-being of its members. Schools, hospitals, and governments are other old and familiar institutions.

Institutions establish routines for dealing with recurring problems. For example, when students misbehave in class, schools have standard procedures for dealing with the problem. In this way, institutions tend to limit conflict while encouraging the kind of cooperation that can lead to the solution of a problem.

Institutions also establish the rules, both written and unwritten, that shape political activity. These rules tell us who has the authority to make decisions, how decisions get made, and how we can influence those decisions.

In the scenario involving a proposed skateboard park, the community's political institutions shape how residents participate in the decision-making process. Some residents share their views in meetings. Others send e-mails to the city council. A few join a study group looking at alternative sites. But once a

decision is finally made, most people accept the result, believing that their voices have been heard in the process of determining "who gets what, when, how."

■ 1.5 Political Games People Play

Politics is serious business. Decisions made by governments can have a profound impact on people's health, wealth, and happiness. Yet politics is also a form of competition. Politicians and citizens who engage in political activity are all players in the "game of politics." Following are the goals and strategies of five political "games."

Horse Trading: Winning by Giving to Get

Horse trading is a classic American business. In the old days, traders brought their horses to a local market where interested buyers would examine them to determine their value. Horse traders were shrewd bargainers. Hearing the low bid, the trader might walk away in disgust only to suddenly turn on his heel and make a counteroffer—one much higher than the horse was worth. The buyer and seller would go back and forth until they reached a price they both agreed on.



Kentucky politician Henry Clay was a master player in the horse-trading game. He is shown here addressing the Senate in 1850 at a crisis point over the expansion of slavery. Clay, called the "Great Compromiser," worked out a win-win solution known as the Compromise of 1850. This compromise had something for both pro- and antislavery lawmakers to like.

Today, horse trading is another name for the kind of hard bargaining that goes on in politics. The key players are often politicians who want something that they cannot get without help from their political opponents. Often this “something” is a proposed law.

The objective of the horse-trading game is to achieve a “win-win situation,” in which both players walk away satisfied. The basic strategy involves giving up something one’s opponent wants in exchange for something of equal—or greater—value.

The famous Missouri Compromise was the result of horse trading in Congress. After much debate, the Northern states, which had abolished slavery, agreed to allow Missouri to enter the Union as a slave state. In exchange, the Southern states accepted a ban on slavery in much of Louisiana Territory and admission of Maine as a free state. This win-win compromise helped postpone the Civil War for several decades.

The horse-trading game is familiar to many children and parents. A teenager, for example, might negotiate to stay out an hour beyond normal curfew on a Saturday night in exchange for a pledge to help clean out the garage the next day. In this game, each side has given up something to get something else it wants.

Walkout: Winning by Refusing to Play

The walkout game is similar to horse trading in some ways. But instead of giving something to the opposition, players take something away—usually themselves. They walk out of the game and refuse to return until the opposition agrees to give them something they want.

The classic example of this strategy occurs in a pickup basketball or football game when the owner of the ball gets upset, perhaps about a disputed rule or a foul. The offended player picks up the ball and threatens to go home. This puts pressure on the other players to give in. They know that without the ball, the game cannot continue.

On a larger scale, the walkout game is commonly played by labor unions to back up demands for better pay and working conditions. If employers refuse those demands, union workers may choose to strike, or walk off their jobs. Without workers, businesses find it difficult to function. This puts pressure on the employer to come to terms with the union.

César Chávez successfully used walkout tactics in his struggle to improve the lives of California farmworkers. In 1962, Chávez, along with Dolores Huerta, founded the National Farm Workers



César Chávez played the walkout game with great effectiveness. His United Farm Workers strike against California grape growers quickly gained support from organized labor, religious groups, minorities, and students across the country. Chávez died in 1993, but his influence remains strong. In 1994, President Bill Clinton presented Chávez’s widow with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civilian award. Chávez, the president said, “faced formidable, often violent opposition with dignity and nonviolence. And he was victorious. César Chávez left our world better than he found it, and his legacy inspires us still.”

Association, later to become the United Farm Workers. Their goal was to convince growers to treat their workers fairly, with dignity and respect.

When growers refused to bargain with the new union, Chávez organized a strike of California grape pickers. In addition to the strike, he encouraged all Americans to boycott table grapes as a show of support. The strike and boycott lasted five years and brought national attention to the struggle of farmworkers for decent pay and working conditions. It also led to the first major labor victory for farmworkers in the United States.

Power Struggle: Winning by Being Smarter and Stronger than the Opposition

Politics often involves power struggles between people with very different goals. When engaged in such a struggle, clever politicians try to win by outfoxing or overpowering their opponents.

The strategies needed to win the power struggle game were first described by a 16th-century political philosopher named Niccolò Machiavelli. Machiavelli was born in Florence, Italy, and rose to a high position in the city's government. In that role, he faced the question of how wealthy Florence could best defend itself against enemy attacks.

After leaving government, Machiavelli studied this question more deeply. He examined the behavior of leaders, good and bad. From this, he developed ideas about how best to win the power struggle game.

In his most famous book, *The Prince*, Machiavelli described strategies that a prince, or ruler, could use to acquire power, create a strong state, and keep it safe from attack. In it he urged rulers to take a hard look at the world as it is, not as it ought to be. Italy at that time was plagued by political corruption, mercenary armies, and backstabbing politicians. Given this reality, a prince could not afford to look to Christian morality as his guide to action. As Machiavelli put it,

How we live is so far removed from how we ought to live, that he who abandons what is done for what ought to be done, will rather bring about his own ruin than his preservation.

—Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 1532

To play the power struggle game, Machiavelli wrote, a ruler needed to be as smart as a fox and as strong as a lion. He explained in *The Prince* that

The lion cannot defend himself against snares and the fox cannot defend himself against wolves. Therefore, it is necessary to be a fox to discover the snares and a lion to terrify the wolves.

As a player in this game, a prince had to be prepared to do whatever was necessary for the survival of his state. "In the actions of men, and especially of Princes," Machiavelli wrote, "the end justifies the means." He wrote that a prince must not hesitate to "destroy those who can and will injure him" and instill fear in others, even if this costs him the love of the people. "If we must choose between them," he advised, "it is far safer to be feared than loved."

So great was Machiavelli's influence on the study of politics that *The Prince* is still widely read today. Moreover, we often describe politicians who use cunning tricks and amoral tactics in the power struggle game as **Machiavellian**.



Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* was an early how-to book for rulers engaged in power struggles with other states. While he is often credited with the phrase "the ends justify the means," many students of his work don't believe he was literally advocating an "anything goes as long as it is for a good purpose" philosophy. The end he had in mind was "maintaining the state." A prince who did this, he wrote, "will always be judged honourable and praised by every one."



Here, President John F. Kennedy meets with his top military advisers during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. At times during this crisis, Kennedy behaved like a lion as he readied the military to attack Cuba. At other times, he behaved like a fox as he looked for ways to end the crisis peacefully.

President John F. Kennedy played the power struggle game with the Soviet Union during the Cuban missile crisis. The president viewed Soviet construction of missile bases in Cuba as a threat to the security of the United States. To end that threat, he employed both force and cunning.

On October 22, 1962, Kennedy ordered a naval quarantine, or blockade, of Cuba. The U.S. Navy prepared to forcibly board Soviet ships heading to Cuba and search them for missiles. The president also made plans to invade the island, if necessary, to remove the missiles.

Meanwhile, the president began negotiating with the Soviet Union. After several tense days, the Soviets agreed to remove the missiles on two conditions. First, the United States would promise not to invade Cuba. Second, it would remove its missiles from Turkey, a U.S. ally bordering the Soviet Union. Kennedy agreed publicly to the first condition and secretly to the second, thereby ending the crisis. By keeping the second condition secret, however, the president left the impression that he had forced the Soviets to back down simply by threatening war.

Demolition Derby: Winning by Wiping Out the Opposition

While the goal of the power struggle game is survival in a sea of enemies, the aim of demolition derby is the complete destruction of one's opponents. The game takes its name from car-crashing contests in which drivers use their vehicles as weapons to demolish the

other cars. The winner is the last car running at the end of the contest. In the political version of this game, players try to eliminate all real and perceived enemies.

The key players in demolition derby are those who command the means of force. They include military leaders, dictators, and monarchs. Players use a variety of strategies, ranging from fear and intimidation to murder and massacres, to wipe out the opposition.

The demolition derby game often ends in a bloodbath. This was the case in the century-long struggle for control of the Mediterranean region between ancient Rome and the North African city-state of Carthage. By the end of the first two Punic Wars, Rome had stripped Carthage of much of its military power. Yet Roman politicians continued to argue that "Carthage must be destroyed."

In the Third Punic War, Rome did just that. Its army totally demolished Carthage, burning the city to the ground. The 50,000 Carthaginians who survived this destruction were sold into slavery. According to legend, the Romans then plowed salt into the ground surrounding Carthage so that nothing would ever grow there again.

Civil Disobedience: Winning by Shaming the Opposition

At the opposite end of the spectrum from demolition derby players are those who forsake violence for the moral high road. The key players in the political game of **civil disobedience** are people of conscience, moral crusaders whose goal is to end some social or political evil. Their strategy involves publicly shaming the opposition. They accomplish this by deliberately disobeying what they consider an unjust law.

The word **civil** in this game's name means having to do with citizens. As the name suggests, the players in this game are usually ordinary citizens protesting an injustice. In this game, the protest typically involves an "in-your-face" but peaceful confrontation with authorities. By remaining nonviolent, the protesters hope to contrast their high moral vision with the unjust laws and actions of the government.

One of the most revered players of this game was Mohandas Gandhi, one leader of the struggle to free India from British colonial rule after World War I. Gandhi organized massive civil disobedience campaigns to protest the injustices of colonialism. His followers refused to work for the government,



Inspired by Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. brought the philosophy and tactics of the civil disobedience game to the U.S. civil rights movement. Civil rights demonstrators held marches without parade permits, sat at lunch counters reserved for “whites only,” and refused to sit at the back of the bus. This photograph shows how civil rights activists communicated their powerful messages through organized, peaceful protest.

pulled their children out of government schools, and blocked city streets so that nothing could move.

Gandhi was arrested many times and spent seven years in prison altogether. Each time he used his imprisonment to remind the world that taking action against an unjust government was the highest duty

of a citizen. In 1947, he finally won his great struggle when Britain granted India its independence.

The political game of civil disobedience is difficult to play. As Gandhi’s story shows, it takes courage, patience, and strength of character. But played well, it can produce amazing results.

Summary

Throughout our history, Americans have tended to be distrustful of power, government, and politics. Nonetheless, we look to our government to provide goods and services that we all want and need.

Power The term power is often defined as the ability to make people act in ways they might not otherwise choose to act. The power to influence others comes from many sources, from formal authority to coercion. Historically, rulers have used power for both good and ill.

Government Groups of people organize government to maintain order and provide public goods, such as roads and national defense. To fulfill these functions, governments must have the means to coerce the population and to extract revenue from it.

Politics When people work to influence the decisions made by groups, they are engaging in politics. Political activity is purposeful and involves collective action. Because politics involves competition, it is often described as a game. While most political competition is peaceful, it can turn deadly.

What is high-quality power—and how can you get it?

No one likes to feel powerless. But few of us think all that much about what power is and how to get it. This is not true, however, of the American writer and futurist Alvin Toffler. Toffler has spent much of his career studying how people have gained and used power throughout human history. In his book *PowerShift*, Toffler argues that there are three kinds of power—but only one is high-quality power for the 21st century.

As you read the excerpt, think about your own experiences with different kinds of power. Also ask yourself, If Toffler is right, how can I gain more high-quality power for myself?

From *PowerShift: Knowledge, Wealth, and Violence at the Edge of the 21st Century*

by Alvin Toffler

High-Quality Power

Most conventional assumptions about power, in Western culture at least, imply that power is a matter of quantity. But, while some of us clearly have less power than others, this approach ignores what may now be the most important factor of all: the *quality* of power . . .

No one doubts that violence—embodied in a mugger's switchblade or a nuclear missile—can yield awesome results. The shadow of violence or force, embedded in the law, stands behind every act of government, and in the end every government relies on soldiers and police to enforce its will . . .

But violence in general suffers from important drawbacks. To begin with, it encourages us to carry a can of Mace, or to crank up an arms race that increases risks to everyone. Even when it “works,” violence produces resistance. Its victims or their survivors look for the first chance to strike back.

The main weakness of brute force or violence, however, is its

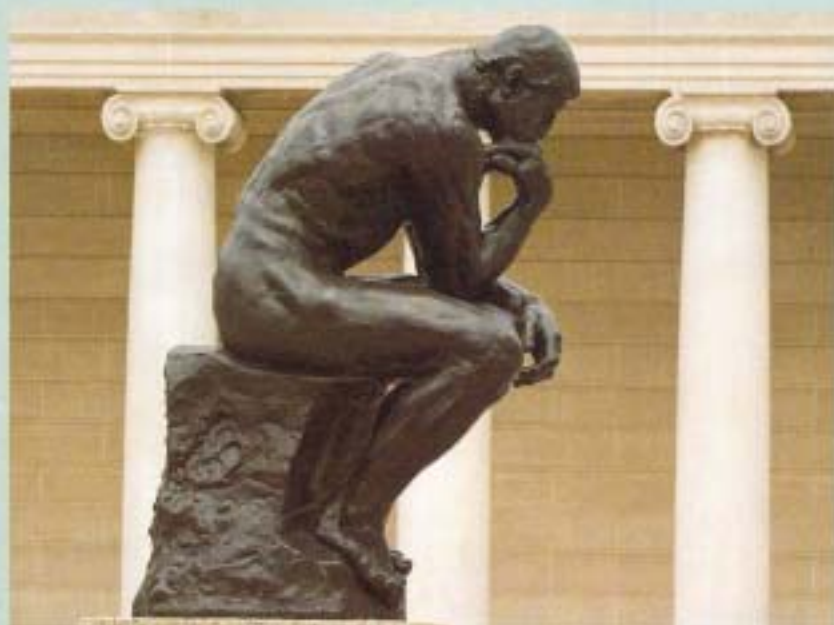
sheer inflexibility. It can only be used to punish. It is, in short, low-quality power.

Wealth, by contrast, is a far better tool of power. A fat wallet is much more versatile. Instead of just threatening or delivering punishment, it can also offer finely graded rewards—payments and payoffs, in cash or kind. Wealth can be used in either a positive or a negative way. It is, therefore, much more flexible than force. Wealth yields medium-quality power.

The highest-quality power, however, comes from the application of knowledge . . .

High-quality power is not simply clout . . . High quality implies much more. It implies efficiency—using up the fewest power resources to achieve a goal. Knowledge can often be used to make the other party *like* your agenda for action. It can even persuade the person that she or he originated it.

Of the three root sources of social control, therefore, it is knowledge, the most versatile, that produces what Pentagon brass like to call “the biggest bang for the buck.” It can be



used to punish, reward, persuade, and even transform. It can transform enemy into ally. Best of all, with the right knowledge one can circumvent nasty situations in the first place, so as to avoid wasting force or wealth altogether . . .

The Democratic Difference

Besides its great flexibility, knowledge has other important characteristics that make it fundamentally different from lesser sources of power in tomorrow's world.

Thus force, for all practical concerns, is finite. There is a limit to how much force can be employed before we destroy what we wish to capture or defend. The same is true for

wealth. Money cannot buy everything, and at some point even the fattest wallet empties out.

By contrast, knowledge does not. We can always generate more . . . Knowledge, in principle at least, is infinitely expandable.

Knowledge is also inherently different from both muscle and money, because, as a rule, if I use a gun, you cannot simultaneously use the same gun. If you use a dollar, I can't use the same dollar at the same time.

By contrast, both of us can use the same knowledge either for or against each other—and in that very process we may even produce still more knowledge. Unlike bullets or budgets, knowledge itself doesn't get

used up. This alone tells us that the rules of the knowledge-power game are sharply different from the precepts relied on by those who use force or money to accomplish their will.

But a last, even more crucial difference sets violence and wealth apart from knowledge as we race into what has been called an information age: By definition, both force and wealth are the property of the strong and the rich. It is the truly revolutionary characteristic of knowledge that it can be grasped by the weak and the poor as well.

Knowledge is the most democratic source of power.

Which makes it a continuing threat to the powerful, even as they use it to enhance their own power. It also explains why every power-holder—from the patriarch of a family to the president of a company or the Prime Minister of a nation—wants to control the quantity, quality, and distribution of knowledge within his or her domain . . .

The control of knowledge is the crux of tomorrow's worldwide struggle for power in every human institution.

Alvin Toffler has written several influential books, including Future Shock, The Third Wave, and PowerShift.