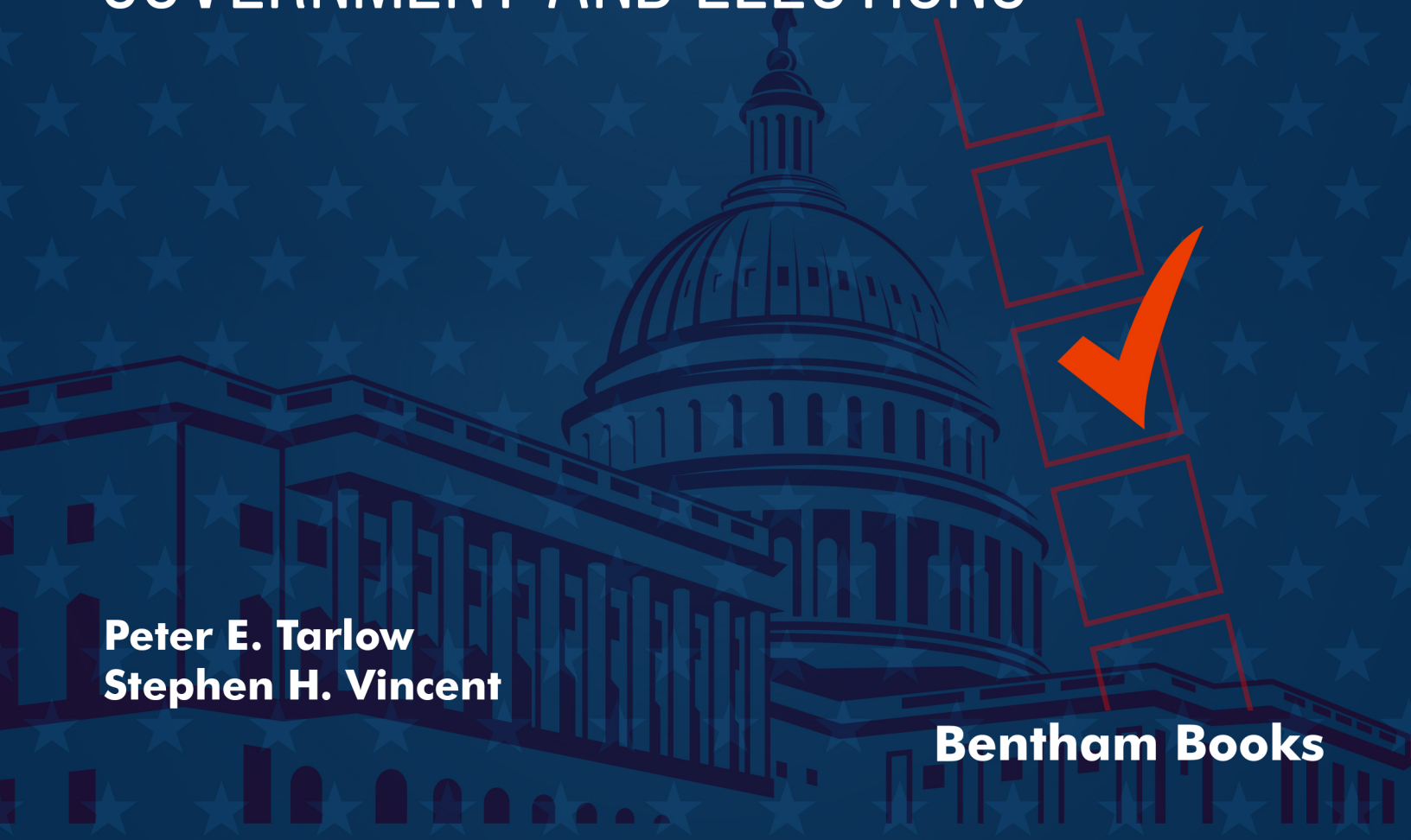




UNDERSTANDING THE U.S. GOVERNMENT:
A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING AMERICAN
GOVERNMENT AND ELECTIONS



Peter E. Tarlow
Stephen H. Vincent

Bentham Books

Understanding the U.S. Government: A Guide to Understanding American Government and Elections

Authored by

Peter E. Tarlow

&

Stephen H. Vincent

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Authors: Peter E. Tarlow and Stephen H. Vincent

ISBN (Online): 978-981-5274-07-3

ISBN (Print): 978-981-5274-08-0

ISBN (Paperback): 978-981-5274-09-7

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First published in 2024.

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FOREWORD

Every book is a journey. When I first open a new one, I like to scan the table of contents to get a feel of where the authors are trying to take me. When I opened *Understanding the U.S. Government: A Guide to Understanding American Government and Elections* and skimmed the table of contents, I must admit I began to sweat a little. The series of questions that Peter Tarlow and Stephen Vincent have used to frame this book instantly transported me back to the final exam of my high school civics class, which is not one of my prouder moments. Luckily, unlike that inconsiderate final exam, after raising my blood pressure with those questions, they gave me the answers!

This book is a wonderful reminder of things that are inspirational, confusing, mysterious, frustrating, and practical in our system of governance. More importantly, it is a great primer on how we as citizens can and should participate in that system. It reminds us that, in a successful democracy, “leaders are encouraged to do the will of the people”. Of course, that only works if those leaders know the will of the people. Our job is to tell them. And each of us, no matter where we sit on the political spectrum or how active we have been in our democracy up to this point, has the right and the privilege of making a crystal-clear statement with our vote.

I still remember the first year I voted. I asked myself a lot of the questions that are in the table of contents of this book. I felt stupid because I didn’t already know the answers, and I didn’t want to embarrass myself by asking someone. I would have loved to have this book available back then. It would have removed so many of the artificial concerns and self-doubts that kept me from fully embracing my ability as a citizen to make a difference in this country.

Shortly after I cast my first vote in a presidential election, I entered the United States Air Force. I spent the next 40 years trying to remain as apolitical as possible in my professional life. When I retired, I became the dean of a graduate school founded on the idea of public service as a noble calling, on the criticality of being part of the public solution, and on the imperative of serving your fellow citizens. Reading this book made me realize I had forgotten the answers to many of the questions the authors have addressed. It reminded me that “elections have consequences” and that the role ordinary citizens play in our democracy is the cornerstone of that democracy. It reminded me that the role I play matters. And it gave me knowledge that I need to play that role more capably in the future. I am confident it will do the same for you.

Every book is a journey...this one leads to a better America.

General (Ret.) Mark A. Welsh III
Texas A&M University
20th Chief of Staff, Air Force, United States

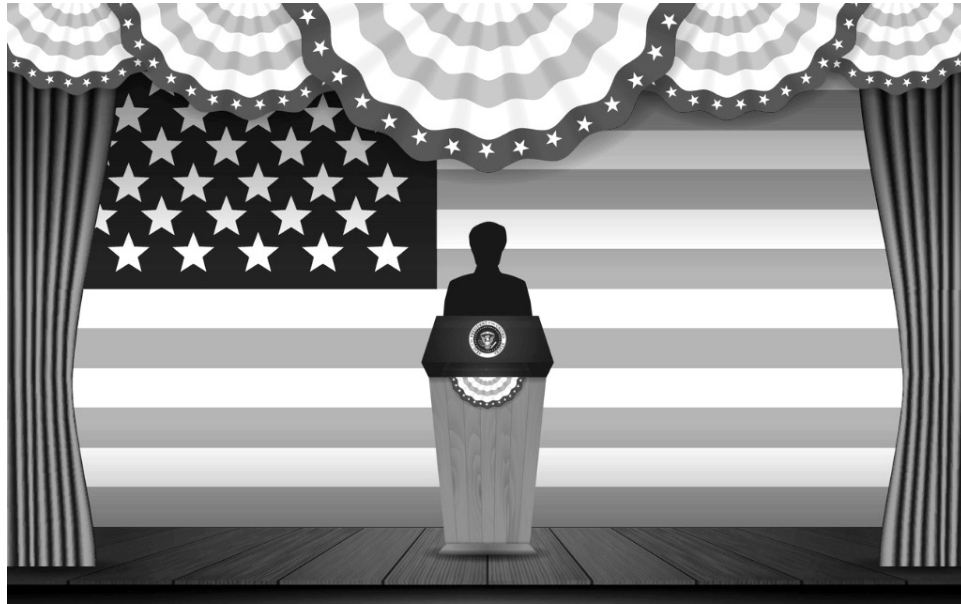
ABSTRACT

This book provides a practical overview of the mechanics and philosophical underpinnings of the United States political system, which has been quite successful for over two centuries. It is a handbook or guide for American citizens to generate more informed decisions and for people from other lands to understand this system that impacts the entire world.

Questions and answers discuss the United States' founding documents, the mechanics of the American election system, and the differences between local, state, and federal governments. Explorations include how money and political contributions, through lobbyists, individual donations, and PACs, impact the United States and its political decisions.

CHAPTER 1

The Preface



In 2019, Peter Tarlow and Steve Vincent decided to write a book explaining in layperson's terms how the United States of America's elections work. That book was written by Americans, for Americans. The book's goal was to become a valuable tool for American voters and soon-to-be voters. That 2019 book is the inspiration for this current book.

Tarlow and Vincent did not set out to author a detailed academic book, but this book aims to provide basic information to help Americans become knowledgeable citizens.

Although this book speaks directly to an American audience, it also aims to provide insights into the American political system for those who observe it from afar and often need clarification on the workings of the American political and election system.

This book is presented in a classical “question and answer” style for ease of understanding. The questions asked in this book— and the answers provided—will help you decide what you consider essential for the country, and they will give you the tools that you can use to be involved in the direction of our nation's future. We have tried to focus on the fundamental questions and answers that every citizen needs. We encourage you to foster further questions.

Anyone who follows the news knows that people can be extremely passionate about politics. This book attempts to stay at arm's length from these heated debates. Instead, it provides basic factual information for anyone wanting to understand the American political process. We use examples from the past to give clarity to issues. Our intention is not to invoke emotion.

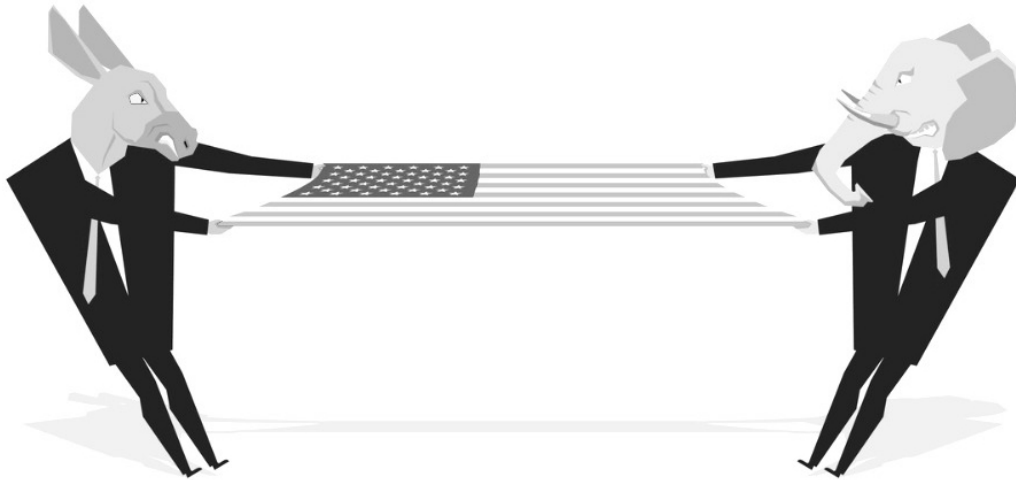
You will find an appendix at the end of the book through which you can enhance your knowledge.

The United States' system of government is Built upon the concept of what works and what does not work in governance. It is complicated, cumbersome, imperfect, and under constant scrutiny and modification. But it has been effective in producing one of history's great countries.

We hope this book will inspire in you a voracious appetite to better understand and become involved in the grand experiment called American Democracy.

CHAPTER 2

Maintaining Personal Relations in an Age of Political Discord



Keywords: Political discord, Political intimidation.

Once upon a time, people in polite company did not discuss money, politics, and religion. People with good manners did not discuss these subjects during family get-togethers or when socializing, networking, or celebrating. Today, only a few people follow this unwritten social rule. Not only do we discuss money, politics, and religion, but these topics have almost turned into contact sports.

Most people still firmly believe that when playing a sport, the players must follow the rules. There is a winner and a loser, and at the end of the match, everyone comes together, shakes hands, and tries to learn from their mistakes. Unfortunately, we now live in an age where the “game” of politics never ends, and the losing side does not recognize that the other team has won. Furthermore, too many people judge other people by their political views. We have become opposing rivals instead of just having opposing ideas.

HOW DO I MAINTAIN A RELATIONSHIP WITH PEOPLE WITH WHOM I DISAGREE?

So, how do we keep our relationships with those we love? If possible, avoid the conversation or refuse to answer. At least two people are required to fight, but if you do not engage, there is no argument.

Avoidance, however, will not always work. When it fails, hold your ground and consider some of the following suggestions. Remember, that in an age of hypersensitivity and overreaction, there are no magic solutions.

- Smile! No matter how the other person tries to provoke you, smile and use a loving tone.
- Listen and be respectful to someone you disagree with and insist that the other person do the same.
- Speak in a low, calm voice.
- Know when to hear and when to ignore snide remarks.
- Remind the provoker that people have the right to disagree.
- Emphasize that we all want what is best for our country; we have different roads to achieve the same goals.
- Smile! Smile! Then smile some more.
- End with something like, “Even though we disagree, I love you” or “You are my friend.”

HOW DO I SURVIVE WHEN EVERYONE IS SO SURE THEIR OPINION IS THE ONLY CORRECT OPINION?

The news is full of people mocking, screaming, and insulting one another all because they are sure that only their own opinions are correct, and give the impression that anyone who has a different view should be sent to re-education camps or done away with. Sometimes, we wonder whether some people’s sole purpose is to post ridiculousness on social media to make their family and future “former friends” hate them. These people’s minds are made up, and no quantity of facts can change their opinion. Hopefully, these extreme people do not represent most Americans. In this case, the easiest solution is to avoid these people.

The best way to survive is to refuse to be drawn into yelling matches or purely emotional arguments. Instead, educate yourself about the actions governments take and the policies they enact to make this a better country. Most of us hope that our country will benefit all its citizens. However, not all governmental actions are good. Governments are composed of human beings. At all levels of government, there are times when people make mistakes, or their actions or decisions are later

judged to be shameful.

We are aware that all governments have, at times, failed their citizens. Governments are composed of people who sometimes lie, do things that harm rather than help, carry out actions for their benefit, or make simple unintentional errors. Some politicians lie. Some politicians seek office for their benefit rather than for the good of the people they represent. There are others that history has shown were wrong. These lies are like the wolf dressed in sheep's clothing. These selfish and self-serving politicians benefit the few to the detriment of the many.

HOW DO I KEEP FROM BEING INTIMIDATED?

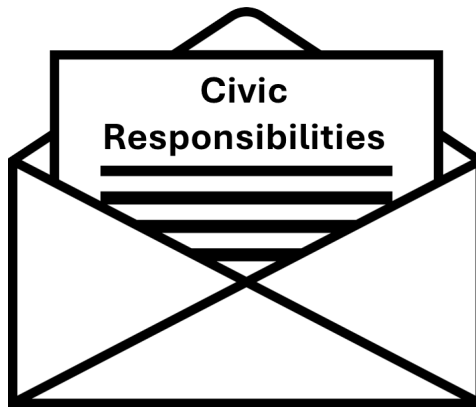
Be strong in your beliefs, be steadfast, and be polite. Never be belligerent. Giving in to bullies only encourages them to continue to bully you or others. If you have a valuable relationship with an intimidator, then try to avoid the topic. If that does not work, then be polite but stand your ground.

SHOULD I GO TO PROTESTS OR RALLIES? HOW EFFECTIVE ARE THEY?

It depends on how strongly you feel about a topic. Gatherings are important in that they express a group's position, and there is strength in numbers.

Some political rallies have been highly effective. The fight to end segregation was highly successful. Often, the success of a protest depends on interworking the protest with media coverage and how often the protest occurs. Ideally, protests with a righteous cause will be the most successful. Single protest rallies rarely do much; continual and well-orchestrated protests can do a lot. In the past, political rallies were thought to have little impact, but President Trump has turned this notion on its head and successfully used rallies to go around the media and speak directly to the citizens, thus inspiring his followers.

Rights and Responsibilities



Keywords: Civil rights, Civic duties, Human rights.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS, CIVIL RIGHTS, AND CIVIC DUTIES?

Human rights are generally viewed as fundamental rights that transcend national boundaries. In 1948, in response to the Holocaust perpetrated by German Nazis, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* as a foundation of international law. These principles are based on, and expanded from, *Les droits de l'homme et du citoyen* (translated into English as *the Declaration of the Rights of Man* by the Yale Law School Avalon Project) during the French Revolution. The document was promulgated on August 26, 1789. These rights were meant to guarantee the right to life and protection from torture.

The term “Civil Rights”, as differentiated from human rights, refers to the rights that one has by being a citizen of a specific nation, in this case, being a citizen of the United States.

Below, you will find some of the rights that all United States citizens have and which the government is obliged to respect.

- Freedom to express yourself.
- Freedom to worship as you wish.
- Right to a prompt, fair trial by jury.
- Right to vote in elections for public officials.
- Right to apply for federal employment requiring U.S. citizenship.
- Right to run for elected office.
- Freedom to pursue “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

(U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Citizenship Rights and Responsibilities. (2020, July 5))

The unalienable right of freedom to pursue “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” is found in the Declaration of Independence. This unalienable right is a statement of principle but not the law. The legal rights are in the Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution.

WHAT ARE CIVIC DUTIES?

Civic duties are different from civil rights, as explained above. We use the term *duty*—or better stated, “civic duty”—to describe the responsibilities of individuals to their society at large. The United States assumes that individuals have specific responsibilities that go beyond a person’s personal preference.

Below, you will find several of the responsibilities that all citizens should exercise and respect. Some of these responsibilities are legally required of every citizen, but all are important to ensure that United States of America remains a free and prosperous nation.

- Support and defend the Constitution.
- Stay informed of issues affecting your community.
- Participate in the democratic process.
- Respect and obey federal, state, and local laws.
- Respect the rights, beliefs, and opinions of others.
- Participate in your local community.
- Pay taxes honestly and on time to federal, state, and local authorities.
- Serve on a jury when called upon.
- Defend the country if the need should arise.

(U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Citizenship Rights and Responsibilities. (2020, July 5))

CHAPTER 4**Competing Political and Economic Philosophies**

Keywords: Capitalism, Communism, Conservatives, Fascism, Liberals, Socialism.

ECONOMIC SYSTEMS AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHIES

Traditionally, there are four major political and economic theories: capitalism, fascism, socialism, and communism. No nation has a pure form of any of these systems. Instead, countries have some form of these concepts, with the distinction being in the quantity and quality mixture each nation employs. Below is a pure definition of each theory and a short critique.

WHAT IS CAPITALISM?

Capitalism is based on the idea that human beings are motivated by needs and that progress comes about through competition. Capitalism embraces the concept of

private property and that profit motivates business, trade, and even life. In the United States, capitalism is the dominant system. Please note, however, that our progressive tax system is an *anti-capitalist* structure. It argues that the more one earns, the more one pays. This system is very different from that of some capitalist countries, such as Chile, that use a “flat tax” system. The U.S. social security system and Medicare are two examples of non-capitalism. Hundreds of countries practice some form of capitalism in the world today.

WHAT IS FASCISM?

It operates a robust central government under the authority of a dictator. It may or may not have a capitalist economic system, but strict government controls exist. We might call this “government-mandated capitalism”. All individuals are subservient to the state, and violence, intimidation, and racism are used to control the population. Fascists and Communists are often bitter enemies in word and action, but both philosophies emphasize central and total control of their people. Nazi Germany and Italy in the 1930s and ‘40s are examples of failed Fascist states.

WHAT IS SOCIALISM?

Socialism emphasizes property and trade being in the hands of the government. It promotes high taxes that are then redistributed as equal benefits for all. Many Scandinavian nations experimented with some form of socialism. These nations had extremely high tax rates, about 60%, but at least on paper, they provided social services such as free health care and education to all of their citizens.

So far, pure socialism has only worked with limited success for small nations or communities, such as communes and kibbutzim. These were rich in natural resources and had a homogeneous population. An example of a partial socialist state is Norway, a nation of under ten million people with great petroleum wealth. On the other hand, Norway’s two neighbors, Denmark and Sweden, do not have these natural resources and have reverted to some form of capitalism.

WHAT IS COMMUNISM?

Communism is a mixture of political class warfare mixed with socialist ideas. Its goal is a class revolution, leading to a society where the working class owns and operates the means of production and output. So far, no pure communist society has ever been successful in the long term. The Soviet Union, China, and Cuba have attempted to create classless societies, but all have failed.

POLITICAL AND MORAL PHILOSOPHIES

Every political candidate and everyone discussing politics seems to wrap everything in a simple package and stick it on a label. These labels are so bent and twisted that you may not recognize the candidate's label once you look at the definition. When you understand the label's description, you may come to like or dislike that label.

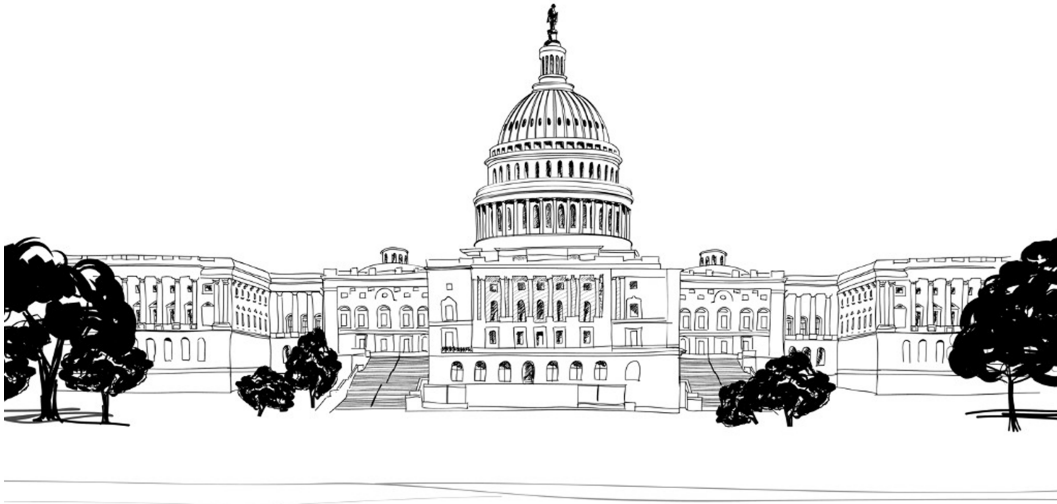
The opposing labels are expressed linearly, with one faction on the right and its antithesis on the left. In reality, a circle seems best to represent the practices of today's factions. Communists and Fascists both use government to control the masses. In contrast, white supremacists, right-wing conservatives, and ANTIFA, left-wing liberals, use protest and violence to try and impose their will. They are side by side in the reality circle.

WHAT DO CONSERVATIVES BELIEVE?

Conservatives respect American traditions, support Judeo-Christian values, also known as traditional American values, are anti-communist and socialist, and defend Western culture. Liberty within these core values is essential. They oppose high taxes and government and labor union encroachment on entrepreneurs or public employee agencies. They support a small, deregulated government, reduced government spending, and lowered national debt, and are opposed to tax increases. Economic liberalism and fair trade are fundamental traits. The Jeffersonian maxim that the government closest to the people governs the best is an anchor for conservatives. America First is a phrase many conservatives embrace, as is Make America Great Again (MAGA).

WHAT DO LIBERALS (PROGRESSIVES) BELIEVE?

Liberalism, by definition, is a political philosophy based on liberty, consent of the governed, and equality before the law. Liberals' beliefs range from the far left to the far right. Traditionally, they supported free markets, free trade, capitalism, democracy, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of religion. Some Modern liberals are also known as progressives. These left-leaning people embrace concepts such as environmentalism and "social justice". They are primarily secular or pseudo-secular, although some progressives morph conventional science to the level of a type of faith or religion. They focus on reducing income inequality, reforming Wall Street, eliminating private property ownership, universal health care, perceived police brutality, gender fluid acceptance, climate change, internationalism, and altering societal norms on acceptable speech. Another focus is to shift responsibility to ethnic privilege causation. Ironically, many of these people tend to be part of the very rich.

CHAPTER 5**The Ins-and-Outs of American Democracy**

Keywords: Democracy, Electoral college, Federal republic.

WHAT IS A DEMOCRACY?

Democracy is a form of government in which citizens choose their government's policies or elect all or some of their leaders to represent their wishes. The term comes from the Greek word *demos*, meaning people, and *Kratos*, meaning power. In the United States, we understand the term to mean that we strive to provide freedom and equality for all citizens, and we have rules to ensure that all legally qualified people have an equal vote, regardless of their wealth or family background.

In a democracy and within the confines of the law, the majority decides the direction and action of their community or country.

We can divide democracy into two groups and several sub-groups. A direct democracy is where every citizen is directly involved in decision-making. Direct democracies are impractical for almost all nations as it would be impossible for all citizens to vote on every issue.

Most democratic countries solve this problem by implementing a second type of democracy called a representative democracy. We can divide representative democracies into several sub-groups. A representative democracy means that qualified citizens vote for someone to represent them. The elected representatives must look after their constituents' best interests. In an ideal world, these representatives will immerse themselves in the pros and cons of issues and then vote for what they believe will produce the best outcome for the majority of the people who elected them.

If their constituents believe their representative is ineffective or acting contrary to their wishes, they can vote them out of office during the next election. In many locales, citizens also have the right to a recall vote, that is, to remove the representative from office before the next election.

In some centralized democracies, the government gets its power and authority from the people, but few or even no autonomous government entities exist within individual divisions of the country. All government power and control occurs through the central government.

A federal republic is a federation, or a united group of states or provinces, governed by elected representatives and an elected leader. In the United States, in these subdivisions, states oversee education and infrastructure, and the federal government handles defense and monetary policies.

WHAT IS THE UNITED STATES: A DEMOCRACY, A FEDERAL REPUBLIC, OR A CONSTITUTIONAL REPUBLIC?

As noted in the previous questions, direct democracy is unworkable except in small villages. Due to the United States' history and large size, we are a type of representative democracy, defined as a federal republic.

The United States is economically, demographically, ethnically, and politically diverse. The areas and groups have unique economic strengths, weaknesses, thoughts, and needs. A central government cannot make every law benefit all the nation's citizens. As a remedy, our founders provided layers of government. They assumed that governments closest to their citizens—that is, local governments—best understand the needs of their citizens. State governments facilitate cooperation and interactions between local governments. The central

government, the United States federal government, oversees the interaction between states and represents the entire nation to foreign governments.

The United States is a type of federal republic, a constitutional republic, where each state within the United States has power and authority granted by the U.S. Constitution that the central government cannot modify. The state's authority and power cover areas different from the control and management of the central government.

The United States Constitution has been an excellent framework for a successful society; here are some of the reasons why it works well:

- Most Americans have a sense of fundamental fairness.
- Most Americans respect the U.S. Constitution even when decisions do not work to their particular benefit.
- There is a general set of ethical principles that most people support as a moral compass, a general sense of right and wrong. Our structure is one of the most successful and, to a greater or lesser degree, the most followed form of government in the history of the world.
- Most Americans respect the fact that the Constitution is the ultimate political authority.

WHY DO WE HAVE STATES INSTEAD OF OTHER GOVERNMENTAL ENTITIES?

The history of European settlements in North America has significantly impacted the formation of a government structure that has made us one of the most prosperous countries in history. If you look at our beginnings, European countries came to North America and established settlements that grew into colonies. The Dutch, English, French, and Spanish all established settlements.

The colonies adopted the thoughts and ideas of their parent countries. The European countries fought and traded colonies for about one hundred and fifty years. Eventually, Great Britain acquired the thirteen colonies that became the birthplace of the United States. During the War for Independence from Great Britain, the colonies acted together against their common enemy. After the war, each former colony wanted to operate independently. Based on the French concept of “*état*” *versus* “*province*”, they translated the term *état* as “state” to mean an “independent” entity rather than a subdivision set up by a national government. This term reflects that the states formed the federal government rather than the federal government creating subsections called provinces.

WHAT ARE THE ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION?

After winning independence from England in 1783, the United States tried to govern itself using the “Articles of Confederation”. This document gave the states the majority of the power. The Articles of Confederation proved to be unworkable. For this reason, the founding fathers decided to write a formal national constitution that gave the federal government much greater power.

WHAT IS THE U.S. CONSTITUTION?

The preamble, or introduction, to the U.S. Constitution needs no introduction. It tells us why the Constitution was written and describes the values our country seeks to uphold. The preamble reads as follows:

“WE, the PEOPLE of the UNITED STATES, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America” (We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union..., n.d.).

The U.S. Constitution might be compared to the rules of a game. It is the basis for all laws in the United States, and any law that goes against the principles expressed in the Constitution ceases to be legitimate.

“The members of the Constitutional Convention signed the United States Constitution on September 17, 1787, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The Constitutional Convention convened in response to dissatisfaction with the Articles of Confederation and the need for a strong centralized government. After four months of secret debate and many compromises, the proposed Constitution was submitted to the states for approval. Although the vote was close in some states, the Constitution was eventually ratified, and the new Federal government came into existence in 1789. The Constitution established the U.S. government as it exists today” (Ken Drexler, 2019).

Fashion trends come and go. We have had tight blue jeans, baggie jeans, and tight jeans again. Amazingly, some people believe the Constitution's importance is like fashions in clothing, ever-evolving. Some of these people believe the Constitution is useless or outdated and, therefore, want to change those parts that do not fit their desires. Many others will argue that our Constitution is the backbone of the laws and values that have made the U.S. a great country. The latter believe that to throw parts of it away for “political fashion” would destroy the nation and its people.

TO WHOM DID THE CONSTITUTION ASSIGN POWER?

The Constitution formed a three-part system of government in which no one branch was to have more power than the other two branches. This three-part system of government is based on what is called separation of powers. The three constitutionally mandated centers of power are:

1. The Legislative Branch comprises the House of Representatives and the Senate. This branch is responsible for making laws.
 2. The Executive Branch, headed by the President, is tasked with enforcing the laws and setting foreign policy.
 3. The Judicial Branch settles disputes using the United States Constitution as its secular “Bible”.
-

WHY DO WE HAVE A VICE PRESIDENT?

As noted, the President is the head of the executive branch. The founding fathers also realized that all presidents are mortal and can die during their term of office or, for some other reason, cannot assume the duties of their office. In that case, the Vice President takes over from the President. The vice president's official duties are:

- To preside over the Senate and to break a tie vote
 - To assume the presidency if the President is incapable of carrying out their responsibilities
 - To perform other duties as assigned by the President
-

WHAT IS CONGRESS?

The word congress has two common meanings. The official meaning of Congress refers to both the Senate (upper House composed of two senators from each state and elected for a six-year term) and the lower House (House of Representatives consisting of 435 members who are elected for two-year terms of office and proportioned according to the population ranking of each state). In common parlance, however, the House of Representatives is often called “Congress” or simply “the House”. Context is needed to clarify the terms.

HOW DOES AN IDEA BECOME THE LAW?

The path from an idea to a law of the land is long and treacherous, and most ideas never become a law. The American system is designed to be slow and deliberate to eliminate quick or emotional changes to our government that could result in unforeseen consequences, unfairly punish people or groups, or enact unconstitutional laws.

CHAPTER 7

The Media and U.S. Elections



Keywords: Fake news, Feelings, Media, News outlet, Opinions, PBS/Public Broadcasting Service.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA?

The media exists in many different forms. In the modern world, print and radio are the oldest modes, followed by cinema, television, and now the Internet and social media. We can easily divide the media into news reporting, opinion, and entertainment. Most Americans recognize that most media outlets slant their work, despite claiming to be unbiased, and rarely are objective in their reporting.

We rely on the media to:

- Inform and educate.
- Investigate and inform us of questionable activities.
- Be a platform for opinions.
- Be a platform to publicize activities and ideas.
- Entertain.

ARE THE MEDIA PROTECTED UNDER THE FIRST AMENDMENT?

The answer to this question depends on how one defines “media”. The U.S. Constitution protects a free press (see Amendment 1), and most legal scholars have expanded this right to include the electronic press. At this time, some argue that this expansion might be an overreach. Two arguments against applying this protection to the media are as follows.

The media may be as much entertainment as informative.

A few oligarchs control social media platforms by giving themselves the right to censorship. They see themselves as more intelligent than the average person. For this reason, they have declared it their right to decide what may or may not be presented or read.

Most legal scholars argue that it is necessary to err on the side of free expression. Nevertheless, individuals hurt by the media are now suing media giants and often winning large settlements. How these lawsuits impact the media and its accuracy or lack of truthfulness is unfolding political reality.

WHAT ARE THE NEWS OUTLETS IN THE UNITED STATES?

In the United States, the three classical networks, ABC, CBS, and NBC, host various news and entertainment programs on television and internet programming.

CNN, FOX News, and MSNBC are major news and political opinion networks on television and the Internet. Other notable outlets in this genre are Newsmax and OAN.

There is also publicly funded PBS, which is “supposedly” unbiased on television and the Internet.

A multitude of syndicated radio and internet talk show programs are broadcast.

The Associated Press, the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post, and USA Today are major print media outlets. Most communities have some form of a printed and or online press. Many of these local papers receive their news from the primary media sources listed above.

Increasingly, many people rely on social media and the Internet. The Internet allows U.S. citizens to access news from around the world and in the language of their choice.

DO NEWS OUTLETS HAVE POLITICAL LEANINGS?

Yes. A small number of people or organizations in the history of the world have remained unbiased when offered the chance to gain power and wealth from supporting an individual or organization. A well-used truism from the 1976 movie *All the President's Men* is “Follow the money”. Unbiased, objective reporting of the news based on facts, not opinion, or giving fair treatment to both sides of an issue is considered neutral reporting. Most news outlets claim to be neutral, but they are not. The vast majority of news media tends to be center to center-left. U.S. media outlets are not required to state their political biases.

WHAT ARE THE POLITICAL LEANINGS OF EACH MAJOR U.S. NEWS OUTLET?

Left-leaning means more slanted toward Progressivism, and right-leaning means slanted more toward Conservatism.

ABC	Left
NBC	Left to very left
CBS	Left
Newsmax	Right
NPR	Very left
OAN	Right
Fox	Right to center
New York Times	Very left
USA Today	Left
Washington Post	Very left
Washington Times	Right

WHAT IS A FACT-CHECKER?

Hypothetically, a fact checker is a neutral person who seeks to ensure that politicians state the facts correctly—and speak the truth—during speeches, press conferences, and political debates. The same responsibility applies to print and Internet postings.

HOW DOES ONE BECOME A FACT-CHECKER?

These people often work for a media outlet. There are questions about the accuracy of fact-checkers, and there are now fact-checkers checking the fact-checkers.

CHAPTER 8

The American Political Party System



Keywords: Candidate, Democrats, Identity Politics, Political parties, Republicans.

WHAT ARE POLITICAL PARTIES?

Political parties are individuals who band together around a common idea or candidate. Some countries have one ruling party; typically, they are countries with an authoritarian government. In contrast, some countries with parliamentary-based governments have a multitude of parties.

HOW MANY PARTIES DO WE HAVE IN THE U.S.?

Currently, the United States has two major political parties and several smaller parties. Both major parties have sub-sections called “wings”. Primary elections usually determine control of the two major parties. There is no limit to the number of parties that can run in elections, although many states have specific requirements to be able to appear on an election ballot.

WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES, AND WHAT ARE THEIR FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS?

The Democratic Party, formed in the 1830s, dominated the southern states, opposed the expansion of federal power, and was considered the ordinary person's party.

Formed in 1854, Republicans, during the 1860s, dominated the northern states, supporting a strong central government over states' rights, and passed laws that made African Americans equal under the law.

In 1936, the Democratic Party switched philosophies. Democrat Franklin Roosevelt won reelection with his New Deal and created welfare, pension, and work programs in an attempt to end the Great Depression.

In 1965, a move toward a stronger federal government was enhanced by Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs, significantly increasing the power in Washington, D.C. At that time, the southern states gradually changed to the GOP (the Republican Party) because the Republicans took up the philosophy of limited government. Basically, the parties have switched sides. Before the twenty-first century, there was the common belief that the Democrats represented the interests of the less well-to-do and minorities. In the twenty-first century, the parties switched, with the Republicans representing the less affluent and the Democrats becoming the party of the rich.

HOW IMPORTANT IS A U.S. PARTY PLATFORM?

Party platforms give a general idea as to the direction of a particular party. They are meant to be broad general statements. There are no consequences in the United States for not implementing a position stated in a party platform, and candidates, once elected, legally are not required to follow the platform's dictates.

HOW DOES ONE JOIN A POLITICAL PARTY?

Joining a political party depends on state laws. In many states, one declares a political affiliation upon registering to vote. In other states, choosing to vote in a party's primary election automatically makes one a member of that party. Check with your county clerk about how one joins a political party in your state. Many people choose not to join a political party and are called "independents".

DO I HAVE TO SUPPORT A POLITICAL PARTY TO WHICH I HAVE JOINED?

You can join a political party by donating to it, registering to be a member, or calling the party headquarters. If you are a legal voter, the party will gladly enroll you. Voting in a primary election obligates you to do nothing except when there is a runoff election after a primary election. You cannot vote for party A in the main primary election and then vote in party B's runoff election.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF BELONGING TO A PARTICULAR PARTY?

If you want to be involved in candidate selection or policy, actively being involved in a particular party makes sense. Being a member of a party can be both expensive and time-consuming, so it is a matter of how active you want to be and how much money and time you wish to commit.

HOW DO I LEARN ABOUT WHAT A POLITICAL PARTY SUPPORTS?

Political parties publish platforms at their national conventions. It is important to understand that no U.S. politician must follow their party platform. These are philosophical positions that can easily change. It is a good idea to research individual candidates. In most elections, the candidate's headquarters will be more than happy to answer questions on specific topics.

CAN I CHANGE MY POLITICAL REGISTRATION?

Yes. In most states, this involves merely telling someone during a primary election that you want to vote in the other party's primary election.

WHAT QUESTIONS DO I WANT TO ASK A CANDIDATE OR LEARN FROM HIS PLATFORM?

No candidate will match 100% of a voter's opinions. The best thing to do is prioritize issues and then ask those questions that are your top priority.

WILL I FIND A CANDIDATE WHO AGREES WITH ME ON EVERY POLITICAL POSITION?

No. Most people cannot find a spouse who agrees with them on every issue! Life is a series of compromises, so pick the candidate whose position on your priorities best matches yours.

CHAPTER 9

Political and Economic Influences: Lobbyists and Monetary Donations



Keywords: Bundler, Down ballot, Lobbyist, Political donations.

WHAT IS A LOBBYIST?

Political lobbyists work to influence actions, government decisions, and policies. They must be registered, but they do not necessarily receive a salary. Often, they represent specific industries and “lobby” in favor or against legislation that might help or hurt the industry or cause they are supporting.

WHAT IS A BUNDLER AND A PAC, AND WHEN DOES IT BECOME DARK MONEY?

Bundler is another word for *fundraiser*. They collect contributions for a political candidate or party. PAC stands for Political Action Committee. Like fundraisers, they work for specific ideals, political policies, and legislative positions or causes. They collect money to promote a policy or stop it from happening. They are not necessarily aligned with a political party. They can and often contribute to more than one candidate or party vying for the same elected office.

ARE POLITICAL DONATIONS PUBLIC?

Political donations are public, but when money is given to influence political outcomes through politically active organizations where the donors are kept private, these donated funds are referred to as “Dark Money”. These organizations can be politically active nonprofits such as 501(c)(4)s that choose not to reveal their funding sources or opaque nonprofits and shell companies where the bulk of their funding cannot be traced back to the original donor.

IS CONTRIBUTING TO A POLITICAL PARTY LEGAL, AND HOW IS IT DONE?

Yes! However, there are specific laws on how much you can donate to a particular party or candidate. To know the laws in your state, contact its board of elections. To contribute to a party, you can answer a solicitation, contact a political party or candidate, or donate to a PAC or Bundler.

WHERE SHOULD I SEND MY CHECK? DO I NEED TO HAVE A LARGE FORTUNE?

You must decide whom to support and how much you wish to donate. You can also contribute to a political party; most political candidates have a special fund with a treasurer in charge of that fund. There is no minimum donation. Every citizen has the right and privilege to donate to their chosen candidate.

SHOULD I DONATE TO A LARGE ORGANIZATION OR GO STRAIGHT TO THE CANDIDATE I SUPPORT?

In most cases, you will have more influence if you give it to a specific candidate. Money sent to a party rather than a candidate will be used as the party sees fit to support candidates who have strategic value for that party.

CAN I GIVE DONATIONS TO MORE THAN ONE CANDIDATE?

Yes, but there are restrictions. For the years 2023-2024, the federal election law states:

It is complicated. Be sure to research the details if you are planning gifts that are approaching the above limits. A helpful website for locating all the details is <https://www.fec.gov/help-candidates-and-committees/candidate-taking-receipts/contribution-limits/>

State and local election districts might have their own legal limits. It is best to consult with your city and state office of elections to determine what the boundaries, if any, are for your locale.

You can donate to multiple candidates if your donation is, at most, \$3,300 per candidate.

CAN I GIVE TO A PRESIDENTIAL RACE, DOWN-BALLOT, OR ACROSS THE BOARD?

You can contribute to as many candidates as you desire if you stay within federal and local laws.

SHOULD I SEND MONEY TO INDIVIDUALS OUTSIDE MY DISTRICT TO SUPPORT CANDIDATES WHO HAVE A CHANCE TO UNSEAT INCUMBENTS WITH WHOM I DISAGREE?

It is legal to financially support a candidate who resides outside your voter jurisdiction. You are free to contribute to anyone you please financially. This action is permitted, which might be a wise strategy on a federal or state level.

HOW MUCH MONEY AM I ALLOWED TO GIVE?

For federal elections, see the chart **Can I give donations to more than one candidate?** above. For state and local elections, consult with your city and state office of elections to determine what the limits, if any, are for your locale.

CAN I DESIGNATE THAT MONEY GO TO A SPECIFIC CANDIDATE?

Yes, you can donate to a specific candidate.

CAN I VOLUNTEER MY TIME, AND WHOM DO I CONTACT TO VOLUNTEER TO HELP?

It is perfectly legal to volunteer your time.

There is no specific answer to how and where to volunteer your time. To determine what is best for you, consider:

- Your personal skill set;
- Your financial situation;
- How dedicated you are to a specific cause or candidate and
- Where can you have the most significant impact?

How U.S. Elections Work



Keywords: County, Fraud, States, Voter eligibility.

WHY DO WE NEED ELECTIONS?

It is in our genes to join groups following a leader or several leaders. The first leaders could defeat their rivals, were better hunters, had more charisma, or all of the above.

The matriarch, the oldest and wisest female elephant, almost always leads herds or parades of elephants. An alpha male dog leads packs of wolves. Herds of buffalo do everything their leader directs without question. When human hunters kill the leader, the rest of the group stands around immobilized and baffled. The result is that hunters can easily slaughter the whole herd.

Somewhere along the way, the leadership of a group became something that the leader handed down to their offspring. In many cases, the leader had so much power that others could not stop them from handing leadership power to one of his kin. It happened that a lot of relatives who became leaders were less capable than the previous leader. Consequently, people became dissatisfied or craved power for themselves, so they replaced—or killed, more often than not—the weak leader with someone else. When there was a change in leadership, people often chose a side, after which a war ensued, and lives and property were destroyed.

No one knows when people decided there must be a better way to choose a leader than destroying everyone and everything. We know that the ancient Greeks introduced a system of political changes called *dēmokratiā*, which means “rule by the people”. It seems the Athenian Greeks chose their leaders by dropping a pebble into an urn marked with the name of their favorite candidate. Despite the tremendous political progress made by the Greeks, few other nations of the time followed their example.

Throughout history, most leaders earned their titles either by heredity or violence rather than by some form of a popular vote. In the 18th century, the United States reintroduced the concept of elections when the U.S. Constitution was adopted, specifying that the members of the House of Representatives were elected directly by the people.

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AMERICAN ELECTION SYSTEM?

The American people created the U.S. elections system to determine many answers to questions that reach into the essence of our being and touch on such important issues as life and death. Elections can significantly impact a nation's future and countless generations to come.

The United States held its first Presidential election in 1788–1789. George Washington won the election and became the nation's first president. Most American political scientists argue that regularly scheduled elections are the best way to choose a leader for several reasons:

- In a fair election, the candidates who champion the ideas most people support become the leaders.
- Leaders are encouraged to fulfill the will of the people.
- There is an orderly change in leadership.
- Fair, regularly scheduled elections mean no one person is a dictator for life, and this system helps keep the leader from passing the leadership along to their friends or family.

- Elections allow citizens to participate in the election process and have their thoughts and ideas heard.
-

HOW OFTEN DO WE HAVE ELECTIONS?

In the United States, we have several levels of government. We have the Federal government that influences all states and United States territories. Each state or territory also has its own government. There are county governments, municipal districts, and city and town governments. We even have school districts and homeowner associations. The answer to how often we have elections is any time and all the time.

For reasons of simplicity, we will focus primarily on the United States national elections.

In 1789, the first presidential election occurred following the newly adopted Constitution. Only ten of the original thirteen colonies sent electors to select the first President of the United States. North Carolina and Rhode Island did not vote because, at the time, they had not ratified the Constitution, and New York chose not to send anyone. The electors chose George Washington as the first President of the United States.

WHEN ARE NATIONAL ELECTIONS HELD?

A federal law passed in 1845 established the second Tuesday after the first Monday in November as Federal Election Day. The date considered that the electors were to meet in December to cast their vote for President, and since most of the people were employed in agriculture, the election would not interfere with their jobs. Starting with the election of 1848, every four years, on the second Tuesday after the first Monday in November, we vote to elect the President (McNamara, 2019).

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PRIMARY ELECTION AND A GENERAL ELECTION?

Primary elections choose the candidate to represent a party in the general election. General elections choose the person who will serve in that specific position (office).

WHO CAN VOTE IN A PRIMARY ELECTION?

This answer depends on your state's laws. For the most part, it is any person who declares themselves to be part of that political party.

CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSION

This book's goals are threefold. Its first goal is to educate. We hope that by reading it, you have a better idea of the details, the “ins and outs” of the American political system, and the workings of the American government. This book is a helpful guide for U.S. citizens desiring a better understanding of our governmental system. For non-Americans, the book will enlighten those who seek to understand the essence of the United States' political system.

The book's second goal is to help American citizens make wise choices when they vote. As such, this book encourages its readers to do their own research and to determine which candidates they support based not on emotions but facts. As part of one's research, we encourage our readers to have a non-emotional discussion with friends and family and share what they have learned. Really listen to their thoughts and opinions. Ask questions about the reasons behind your family and friends' ideas rather than always advocating for your own. There is an old saying that we have two ears and one mouth because we should listen twice as much as we speak. Do not be afraid to listen. Listening allows us to hear the other side and prevents emotions from overtaking reality. We are not electing a friend but leaders who can develop and implement policies that will serve us all now and in the future.

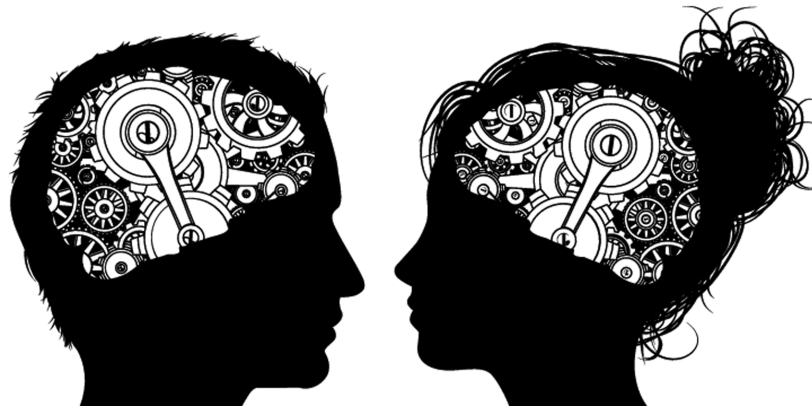
ACTIONS VS WORDS

The book's third goal is to help readers discern the differences between words and actions. Morality is not about what our politicians say but what they do. In times of great emotional and political turmoil, such as the current cycle, we must remember that our words and actions have consequences. When we seek to harm others with whom we disagree, we have chosen not only to disrespect one of the foundations of our country's Judeo/Christian ethic but also to destroy civil discourse and society.

Remember that politics is not a contact sport! The idea should be to pick the best people no matter which “team” the candidate is on! This book hopes that upon reading it, you, the voters, will agree that good leaders are essential. We should focus less on the personality of who wins an election, and instead, our concern should be about who can best serve the American people. Ultimately, our country will be better served if we devalue the quality of a leader's rhetoric and value the ideas a leader proposes more. The Biblical text teaches us that Moses successfully led the Israelites through the desert for over forty years. He was not an orator, but despite his lack of talent as a speaker, few would doubt that Moses was a great leader.

CHAPTER 12

The Practical Side for American Citizens



How you participate in the American system is a personal decision allowed by freedom in the United States. One narrow area is how do you, the American voter, decide for whom to vote. What ideals and ideas do you value enough to support? What ordinances or amendments do you favor? Before you vote, a little inventory of your beliefs, views, and requirements helps you cast an intelligent vote. What do you need, want, and expect from your elected officials?

To help you decide your priorities, we offer these exercises. There are no right or wrong answers. Think deeply about these questions and then vote your conscience. Remember, no one has a monopoly on truth. After studying the issues, each person must do what is right in their eyes.

First, take some time to think about these broad political-philosophical issues and then apply your thoughts to the specific subjects mentioned immediately after them. This book does not intend to tell you, the reader, whom to vote for or what propositions to support. The book's purpose is to inspire readers to contemplate the issues and candidates of the upcoming elections. Decide what is best for you, the reader, and for our country. How you vote will determine our immediate future and possibly the course of our national destiny for years to come.

Then, go back into American history and try to understand the nation's founders' ideas and goals. Many scholars and historians believe that our nation's founders felt local governments best served the needs of the citizens. Our founders wrote the Federalist Papers to explain the truths, principles, and logic of the proposed U.S. Constitution. The Papers indicate that our founders feared large bureaucracies and wanted the least political possible distance between the governed and those governing. For this reason, they stated that all powers not explicitly assigned to the federal government were to belong to the states. Do you agree with our founders? Do local governments best understand citizens' rights and needs?

At the beginning of the third decade of the twenty-first century, the world suffered from its greatest pandemic and the political consequences of COVID-19. From the American perspective, the COVID-19 crisis highlighted issues with the Bill of Rights (first ten amendments). It forced all of us to ask questions such as: At what point can the government withdraw our rights to freedom of assembly, freedom of worship, and freedom to work? Looking back, we must decide whether we answered these questions correctly or failed. How we analyze the COVID-19 years will have much to teach us about handling future crises.

To help you determine what decisions you can make, we offer a series of exercises and mental experiments. There are no correct answers. Instead, we encourage you to think about your answers and then determine what you, as an informed voter, think about the future of our country.

MENTAL EXPERIMENTS

Albert Einstein conducted mental experiments in his head as he walked the streets of Princeton, New Jersey.

None of us are Albert Einstein, but we can conduct a mental experiment no matter who we are. Please take a few moments to think about these questions, and then take a walk and try to answer them as you walk.

1. Assuming you are a delegate to a national presidential convention, what would you include in your party's platform? What would you want to exclude?
2. How do you make decisions? What outside influences do you have? Ask yourself, are you guided by nothing more than your whims, a religious text, what you read in the media, or some other inner or outer source?
3. Assume you are the President of the U.S. or the governor of your state and must conduct a news conference with many hostile media reporters:

How would you handle the news conference? What tone would you use with people who ask only “gotcha” questions?

4. Assume that you are the President of the United States and told that there is an illness abroad that might come to the United States but is not contagious: what would you say to the media?

5. Now assume that the Center for Disease Control gave inaccurate information: What would you do? What actions would you take?

6. Design a healthcare system. What would you include? How would you pay for it? What unexpected consequences might your system produce?

7. Imagine that you are running for a national political office. What would your platform be regarding domestic and foreign policy? What would be your top five priorities? How would you pay for your ideas?

True or false, or I do not know

Answer the following true-false statements to help determine what you believe or not believe regarding American politics.

8. A strong central government works best for the U.S.

9. The U.S. has been a successful country due to federalism and limited government.

10. I believe the U.S. media and journalists accurately report the news.

11. The U.S. Constitution permits most people to live a free and successful life.

12. The U.S. should copy European countries and their healthcare system.

13. Excessively taxing major corporations will force them to move outside the U.S.

14. It is a mistake not to produce essential products such as food, energy, or medicines at home.

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Peter E. Tarlow and Stephen H. Vincent
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Peter E. Tarlow

Peter E. Tarlow is a world-renowned speaker and expert specializing in the impact of crime and terrorism on the tourism industry, event and tourism risk management, and tourism and economic development. He was the rabbi at Texas A&M University for over thirty years, and he currently is a member of the faculty of Texas A&M Medical College and a chaplain for the College Station, (Texas) police force and for the U.S. Federal Prison Camp in Bryan, Texas. He has worked with numerous U.S. government agencies, including the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Customs, the FBI, the U.S. Park Service, the Department of Justice, and the Speakers Bureau of the U.S. Department of State. He has published multiple books and academic articles.



Stephen H. Vincent

Stephen H. Vincent is a successful businessman whose first career spanned thirty-four years in the electric utility industry. In his second career, his efforts have been redirected to providing state-of-the-art electric systems to improve the health and education for the neediest people in the world. His altruistic organization, Power From the SON, has provided electricity to hospitals, schools, and orphanages in Liberia, Kenya, and Honduras. He is the author of a book and a chairperson of The Salvation Army Advisory Board of Bryan\College Station, a board member of Higher Education Servicing Corporation, and BUILD Texas A&M University.