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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

George C. Edwards, Martin P. Wattenberg, Robert L. Lineberry. *Government in America: People, Politics, and Policy.* New York: Longman, 1997. xxxi + 648 pp. $59.70, (cloth), ISBN 978-0-673-52500-0.

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Robert Lineberry's *Government in America* is a coherent introduction to American Government, successfully engaging students in the substantive issues of American government while socializing them to the methods and approaches of professional political analysis. The text also provides supplementary materials useful for in-class debate or as stepping-stones for a fuller exploration of the topics raised in each chapter. My students respond well to the text, remarking that it alternately informs and infuriates them throughout the semester. Now in its seventh edition, Lineberry's work is a classic introductory text, maintaining much of the utility and student-friendly qualities that convinced me to stay in political science when I encountered the 2nd edition in 1984. It remains a quality text that freshmen and sophomore students appreciate, although some recent changes make it less user-friendly than previous editions.

Student Engagement: Students find *Government in America* to be readily accessible in terms of organization, appearance and writing style. Their initial favorable reaction is due in part to the cover of the text, which now sports a full-color portrait of the Grand Canyon in the Spring. The text itself is appropriately backpack sized, so students have little trouble bringing it to class. Addison-Wesley has also changed to a lighter paper stock from previous editions, so the text is lighter and somewhat shorter than previous editions. The authors have kept their target audience in mind by using clear language and simple sentence structure that Freshmen and Sophomores have little difficulty understanding. Finally, with its extensive footnotes and Further Readings sections, students seem to find this text very useful after the Intro course. This continued utility was what originally attracted me to the text, and I am pleased that it maintains this utility.

Substance: *Government in America* presents American government and politics in a straightforwardly topical manner, as is standard in introductory texts. Its approach to these topics is mainstream, with alternative interpretations appearing in supplements or "Features". The book is divided into four sections, reflecting the authors' emphasis on "People, Politics and Policy." The first section, "Constitutional Foundations" (Chapters One through Five) presents a brief history of the Constitution (with an interesting discussion and rejection of Beard's economic hypothesis), a discussion of Federalism, and two chapters on civil liberties and civil rights. "People and Politics" (Chapters Six through Eleven) discusses individual, group and party level politics in the United States. The chapters on interest groups and political parties are very well-presented, as is the discussion of campaigns and campaign finance. Chapter Ten also contains a discussion of the electoral college, always a fruitful arena for debate. Unfortunately, it devotes only a page and a half to the functioning of the college, and only a few paragraphs to the debate over its utility in American elections. I generally supplement this section with a few articles critical of the college, and a few articles supporting the college.

"The Policymakers" (Chapters Twelve through Sixteen) presents the formal structures of national government. This section has improved consistently from the 2nd edition of the text to the current (seventh) edition. The discussion in each section is clear, comprehensive, and very informative. Students find these chapters slow reading, however, as there is a great deal of information to process. The final section, "Policies" (Chapters Seventeen through Twenty-One) discusses several key arenas in American politics, including economic, social welfare, environmental and foreign policies. These chapters are quite thorough, and offer students many resources to explore specific topics in some detail. Chapter Twenty-One, State and Local Politics, is too brief, and should address modern debates over federal and state autonomy.

The text is very thorough, which unfortunately means that for a one-semester or one-quarter course, teachers must make some choices about what to cover and what to skim. I generally cover the first and third

sections thoroughly, while condensing the information in the second section. I usually cover only one or two of the "Policy" chapters, usually by class vote. Since the text includes good notes and supplementary bibliographies, students who have an interest in another topic have the tools to explore it independently.

Methodology: Lineberry's text is a good example of how political scientists think about political phenomena. From the topical nature of the text, to the way Lineberry, Edwards and Wattenberg construct the policy chapters, to the use of four "Features", students learn to approach government conceptually, rather than historically or episodically. the four "Features" socialize students to key aspects of political methodology, including survey research, comparative analysis, history and the norm of objectivity. The first of these Features, "You are the Policymakers," presents students with a current debate in government, summarizes both sides of the debate, and asks students to decide what they would do. This feature teaches students that there are several ways to interpret a political conflict and underscores the need for objectivity in policy analysis. I have used this Feature to generate exam questions and short writing assignments, specifying which students are to take which position.

"The People Speak," the second of the Features, presents public opinion data related to the different chapters. This Feature provides professors with several opportunities to discuss the power and limitations of government by poll. They give instructors opportunities to point out the difference between opinion about a topic, and objective reality.

"America in Perspective," the third Feature, is a new and often controversial addition to the text. These sections compare American political practice to other nations'. Most often, students respond to this section with the comment, "That's fine for X nation, but we're Americans. We don't do those things." This response presents a professor with a comparative bent many opportunities for discussion.

Finally, "Since Kennedy" discusses historical changes in American political practice. I share Lineberry's conviction that good political science is grounded in good history, and these insets help students understand that the policy world they are accustomed to seeing is the result of many events.

The text presents students with many key models of politics to understand voting, parties, and congressional behavior. Students learn to conceptualize politics, rather than simply define and discuss different bills and activities. The "Policies" section is designed around Lowian policy theory, giving professors a natural opening to discuss formal policy theory.

Supplementary Materials: *Government in America*'s Teacher's packet includes printed overheads, a test booklet, lecture outlines, and suggested assignments. The text has several appendices for students and professors alike. The test booklet is not very useful, but the overheads are colorful and complementary to the text. They do not simply repeat the text's graphics, but add information professors may find useful. The course outlines are interesting and contain interesting anecdotes. The appendices contain such standards as the Constitution, a list of presidents, a glossary and an index. The glossary definitions occasionally reveal an editorial bias (note the differences in terms used to define Liberalism and Conservatism), which permit a brief discussion on conscious and unconscious bias. Since the text mentions the Articles of Confederation several times, they should appear as an appendix as well.

Overall, *Government in America* is an engaging text by known scholars presenting American politics in an informative and flexible format. However, the new edition is far less student-friendly than previous editions. For example, although the text is shorter than previous editions (648 pp, versus 734 for the 4th edition and 683 for the 2nd), Lineberry et. al. have significantly narrowed the text margins, chosen a smaller type-font, and switched to the standard two-column format for their text. Pages which once appeared easy to read and relatively short are now crowded with text, boldfaced type, and bullets all demanding attention and sometimes overwhelming students. The flow of the text is often broken with graphics, pictures, and special features, presenting an intimidating appearance. Students commonly complain at the start of class that "we'll never finish this book in one semester."

A second weakness (this is a completely personal bias) is the change from footnotes to endnotes. As a student, I was always pleased to be able to look at the bottom of a page to see what the author thought was so important. My students today share this preference. Finally, the text as it now appears is a tribute to what can be done through the use of computer page layouts and graphical interfaces. But that technical sophistication comes at the expense of introducing students to three fine authors whose contributions to the study of American politics made me stay in the field.

The seventh edition of Lineberry's *Government in America* retains many of the features that attracted me to the study of American politics over a decade ago. It is an attractive book, well-written, and designed to be

more than a class text, but a reference book to be consulted over the years. It has, sadly, fallen to the recent mania of stylish graphics and computer-generated layouts. This weakness makes the text less user-friendly and more intimidating to students who are tasting for the first time the essence of American politics. This intimidation is doubly disappointing, because the trio who present this edition are among the elite of our field. Students will find their style and insights engaging (if not occasionally infuriating), and their ability to deal with complex material satisfying. But overall, I preferred the simpler style and wider margins of earlier editions. Fireworks celebrate historic moments, but they don't make them. The text is a fine introduction for students considering a career in political science, one I will continue to use, but the container has lost something in this edition.

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