American Federal Government

James E. Hanley

1. A Brief Introduction to Politics

Chapter Roadmap

In this chapter you will learn three definitions of politics, which one is preferred by the author and why, the general classification of political problems, why politics is not just a human activity, and how the general classes of political problems shaped the founding of the United States.

1.1 Defining Politics

While this book is about the American government, that government is just one example of government in general, and government itself is just one arena in which we engage in politics. So to set the stage for discussion of the American government we need to have a working definition and understanding of the nature of politics. In this chapter we will do so, and in the next chapter we will define government.

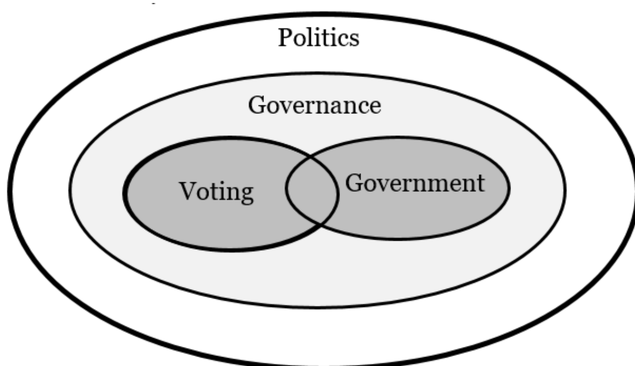

Figure 1: Politics, Governance, Government, and Voting

We begin here with three of the most influential and well-known definitions of politics. While this book will emphasize one of them, all

three are given here to give readers the power to judge for themselves which they think is best, and throughout the book you can look for the applicability of your preferred definition. The one emphasized here is not "the right one," and the others "the wrong ones." Rather, each has its own particular emphasis, and the one emphasized most strongly here is done so simply because it is broad enough to incorporate each of the other two within it.

1. Politics is "the authoritative allocation of values for the society" (David Easton).[1]
2. "[T]he essence of politics lies in power...of relationships of superordination, or dominance and submission, of the governors and the governed" (V.O. Key).[2]
3. "The study of politics is the study of influence and the influential [or]who gets what, when, and, how" (Harold Lasswell)."[3]

First, let's consider Easton's model. By "allocation of values," David Easton meant anything people value, both material and immaterial. Not only money and material resources are values, but ideology and culture, and for Easton the key to politics was who had the authority to determine what those would be and who would share in them within a particular society. His definition was associated with his emphasis on politics as a system in which demands for values were inputs into the system and decisions and actions were the output at the other end (see figure 2 for a simple depiction of his model). *Authority* is key to Easton's definition; private actions that result in value distributions are not political, only

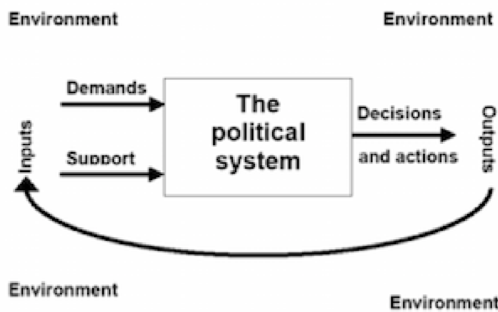

Figure 2: Easton's Political Systems Model

actions taken by public authorities, which pushes his definition into the realm of government action: if not limited to government action, then restricted to actions that are government-like. This is an important

limitation on his definition, as actions taken in the absence of authority can also have the effect of being authoritative,[4] that is ultimate and final in their effects. Also, in the next chapter we will define government, and see how it is properly more restricted as a concept than is the concept of politics.

In contrast, V. O. Key's definition is not restricted to authoritative actions, and consequently it incorporates Easton's definition. Some people dominate others without public authority to do so. Some do so quite illegitimately, through brutal threats of unjustified violence, such as organized crime groups. Others dominate simply through a natural leadership quality, charisma, defined by German political theorist Max Weber, as "the extraordinary and personal gift of grace" that enables someone to demand "the absolutely personal devotion" of "soulless" followers who "obey him blindly."[5] But of course these governors can be public officials with due public authority over the governed, so this definition of politics is broader than the first one, it covers the territory Easton's definition covers and more.

Lasswell's definition is even broader, less limited, and so incorporates both Easton's and Key's definitions within it (see figure 2). Like Key's definition it does not limit the definition of politics to the actions of public authorities, but unlike that one it does not limit politics to relationships of dominance and submission. "Who gets what" covers Easton's concept of distributing values, but "how" covers all the various ways in which those values (again, material or immaterial) get distributed. Some of those ways involve dominance, whether abusive or gentle, but some of those ways can be more collaborative, mutual agreements between parties with equal power. An added value of this definition is that it includes within its scope the idea that the *choice* of whether to pursue a particular allocation of values through public authority or to do so privately is itself a political choice.

Politics, by this definition, is all around us, and we all engage in it. When you and a roommate coordinate to resolve problems, or perhaps directly conflict about them, you are practicing politics. When you and a sibling are arguing over the rules of a game you are involved in a political activity. When employees try to impress the boss and outperform their colleagues so they can get the corner office, they're playing office politics. When members of a church vote on who will be members of the church

board, and delegate certain responsibilities and authority to them, they are engaging in politics. We are, by nature, political animals.

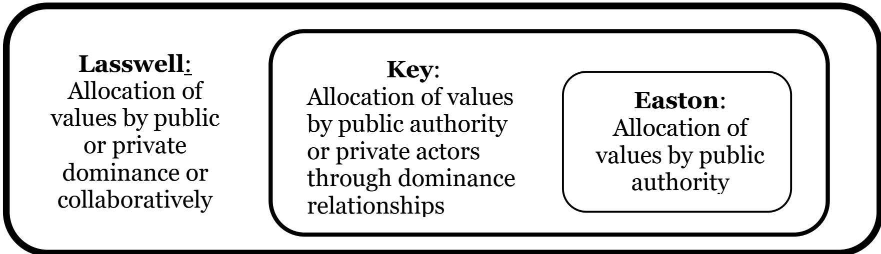

Figure 3: Definitions of Politics

Our choice of definition, then, shapes how broadly we understand the concept of politics. Because public authority is just one means of distributing values, one of the methods people who want values distributed a particular way can choose to pursue their preferred outcome, it is useful to understand it as merely one means of politics, rather than limit politics. As American political scientist Paul Wapner wrote,

> Since the dawn of social life, humans beings have worked to shape and direct collective affairs independent of formal government…. [P]olitics takes place in the home, office, and marketplace, as well as in the halls of Congress and parliaments. Politics, in this sense, is much more subtle to notice than the conduct of governments, but … no less significant for political affairs.[6]

In short, political science is not simply the study of government, but the study of humans' interactions with each other as we create the outcomes that shape our shared society through the pursuit of what we value. This can also help us understand two more casual definitions of politics, that it is "the art of the possible," and "the art of compromise," since getting everything you want is often not possible, and the pursuit of values happens in the context of competition and collaboration with other individuals.

1.2 A General Classification of Political Problems

Identifying politics as broader than just public or "official" authority, and involving both competitive means (such as domination) and collaborative means demonstrates the two broad classes of political problems: competition and collaboration. Competition is perhaps most obvious. Politicians compete for elections, legislators compete to pass public policies, interest groups compete for influence, children compete for parental attention, and so on. But even within those competitions there is room for collaboration. Politicians within the same party collaborate to pass their legislation, interest groups sometimes join forces to bring attention to an issue, and even children – if clever – may find a collaborative effort gains them both more attention from their parents. Politics consists not just of those two types of problems, and the tactical choices one makes in pursuing either competition or collaboration, but the strategic choice between them. We will discuss competition first, then collaboration. After that we will apply these problems to the actions of non-human species, to show that politics is not solely a human activity. Then we will conclude the chapter by bringing our focus back to American government by showing how these classes of political problems were present, and how they shaped events, during the American founding.

Conflict

Conflict occurs when two or more people or groups have incompatible wants. They could each desire the same thing (two children who want the same toy; two countries that want the same territory; two wolves both want to eat from the same carcass) or they could desire different things that can't both be achieved at the same time (one roommate wants to keep the room warm and the other likes it cool; multiple states that each want to have their presidential primary election before the other states do; a Congress that wants to increase defense spending while the President wants to decrease it).

Conflict can involve dominance and submission, as suggested by Key's definition of politics, but nicer ways of resolving conflict are possible. The roommate who likes it warm could wait for the cold-loving roommate to open the window again and then throw him out of it, or he could suggest they play rock-paper-scissors, or agree to a schedule of alternating open-window and closed-window days. There have even been elections

decided by a coin toss, after voters cast an equal number of votes for the top two candidates, a more fair and more peaceful way of determining the winner than resorting to murder, which is another way electoral conflicts are sometimes resolved. As Nobel prize winning political scientist Elinor Ostrom said, "Conflict isn't necessarily bad; it's just how we articular our differences." It is the means by which we resolve conflict that may be bad, not the mere existence of conflicting interests.

Collaboration

Collaboration as a class of political problems contains two related but distinct types of problems: coordination problems and collective action problems.

Coordination Problems

Coordination problems occur when we want something that we can't achieve on our own, so we have to get help from others to achieve it. This could involve searching for others who share our goal, which will be easy in some cases, but difficult in others. Or it could involve persuading others that they ought to share the same goal, which, again, will be easy in some cases, but in others impossible.

Imagine a person living on a dirt road, who wants to have the road paved. It could be too expensive to do on her own, so she wants others to help pay for it. First she has to find out if any of her neighbors also want the road to be paved. They may have been thinking about it, too, but never said anything, or they may never have thought about but are persuaded that it's a good idea. She doesn't have to persuade everyone, just enough to get the job done.

Most likely, she will not be able to persuade all her neighbors, at least if there are very many of them. Often people simply don't want the same thing. Some of her neighbors may prefer a dirt road because they think that a paved road will cost more to maintain or might draw more through-traffic through their neighborhood. But also just having a large number of people who have a stake in the project (*stakeholders*) can make the job of coordinating more difficult even if they all want about the same thing (figure 3). As a general rule, the larger the number of people, the greater the difficulties in coordination, a point made by Scottish philosopher David Hume almost three hundred years ago;

> Two neighbours may agree to drain a meadow, which they possess in common; because 'tis easy for them to know each other's mind; and each must perceive, that the immediate consequence of his failing in his part, is, the abandoning the whole project. But 'tis very difficult, and indeed impossible, that a thousand persons shou'd agree in any such action; it being difficult for them to concert so complicated a design, and still more difficult for them to execute it;[7]

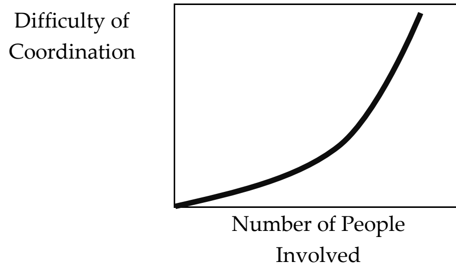

Figure 4: Difficulty of Coordination

Collective Action Problems

Collective action problems often arise after a coordination problem is solved, and they exist because people like to get things for free, or more precisely (because nothing is truly free) they like to have others pay for what they get. It's not enough just to get everyone to agree that paving the road, or draining the meadow, or building a public swimming pool are things they want—we also have to get enough people to actually contribute the money or effort it takes to accomplish our goal.

Two conditions create collective action problems. 1) There is a *collective benefit*, one that everyone in the group will share if it is achieved; and 2) it doesn't take everyone's effort to achieve that benefit. The second condition means we can achieve the benefit even if not everybody contributes (as long as enough of them contribute), while the first condition means that even those free loaders—or as political scientists call them, *free riders*, will still enjoy the benefit. But collective action problems are not problems just because some people get the benefit without paying for it. The real problem is that if we have too many people trying to free ride on each

other's' efforts then we don't have enough people contributing—the desire to get something at everyone else's expense doesn't work if too many people are trying to do it.

Some people find free riding morally outrageous, but even so it is a very rational behavior. This rationality works in two ways, 1) when enough other people are contributing so that the benefit is achieved, and 2) when too few people contributes. For the first, each of us is better off getting something at no cost to ourselves than when we have to pay for it (whether that payment is measured in dollars or in sweat). For example, the economist Alex Tabarrok told the story of a guy knocking on his door and offering to repaint the faded street address on the curb.

> Over the weekend a crew came round my neighborhood offering to paint house numbers on the curb. Large bold curb numbers, they pointed out, make it easier for emergency service workers to find houses in the dark. Good argument. The price was good too. Then I noticed my neighbors were having their numbers painted. So of course, I declined.[8]

If enough other people painted their numbers on the curb, people could find his house whether or not his house number was visible. His contribution, he saw, was not necessary to achieve the collective gain of house numbering.

From the second direction, if too few people are contributing, my contribution probably won't help achieve the benefit anyway, and I'll have paid a price for no gain. The World War II novel, *Catch-22*, provides a classic example of this. The main character, an American pilot, doesn't want to risk his life by flying any more missions, and when his commander asks, "What if everyone thought that way?" he replies, "Then I'd certainly be a damn fool to feel any other way, wouldn't I?"[9]

Collective action problems are endemic in collaborative efforts among humans. Any student who has been forced to participate in a group project where every member of the group receives the same grade is intuitively familiar with the problem. Leaders of student organizations will also recognize their frustrations at getting enough members to participate as an example of a collective action problem. Efforts to reduce global carbon emissions are a bigger example—even if every country agreed on the necessity, each would prefer that the others make the effort. The frequency of these problems led Elinor Ostrom to suggest that "the

theory of collective action is *the* central subject of political science."[10] Not surprisingly, then, the theory of collective action is one of the central issues in understanding American government and politics, as we will see throughout this text.

Mixed Conflict and Cooperation

Although we can distinguish between conflict and collective action, many political situations involve a mixture of the two. Sometimes we work together on a course of action even when we disagree on just what goals we're seeking with that action. Legislators might work together on legislation, working hard to create a bill that will get enough votes to become law, but along the way they may be in conflict not only about specific details of the bill but also about exactly what they want the law to achieve. As well, sometimes we can collaborate for the purpose of being more effective in conflict, like the U.S, Britain and other allies in World War II collaborating against Germany and Italy. And coordination can be a means of resolving conflict, as when roommates negotiate a set of mutually agreeable rules to help them avoid fighting over issues. So it is important to realize that while conflict and collaboration are alternative means to one's goals, they are not mutually exclusive and political activities often involve a complex mixture of competitive and collaborative efforts.

1.3 Politics in the Animal Kingdom.

Politics is much older than government. Homo sapiens came into being between 100,000 and 200,000 years ago, but formal governments appear to have arisen only in the last ten thousand years. Before the development of agriculture, hunter-gathers lived in social groups of around 30-150 people,[11] making it inevitable that they had to engage in defining who could be members of their group and what rules members had to follow. It also means conflict was inevitable, whether within groups or between groups. Skeletons older than the earliest governments have been found with arrowheads lodged in them, the ultimate demonstration of dominance. But political scientists aren't biologists, so we don't look at other species often enough. We should.

Both Key's and Lasswell's definitions of politics allow us to look beyond human behavior, because other animals also pursue values, such as food, shelter and sex, and many species exhibit dominance behavior. Even Easton's definition may be used in this if we see the dominant individuals in a specific group of animals (such as an alpha male wolf) constituting an official public authority in the context of that species' social life. These authors may not have foreseen that use, and were they still alive might not like it, but our definitions have a way of eluding our grasp and ultimately identify and reveal more than we had expected.

Political scientists usually only study humans, so we're not well-positioned to say whether other species do the same things we see among humans. But we can look to the work of biologists and see what they have to say. A particularly surprising example is described by Thomas D. Seeley in *Honeybee Democracy*, in which he compares honeybee's collective decision-making about where to make their swarm's new home to direct democracy.

> "[I]ndividuals within a [bee] community who choose to participate in its decision making do so personally rather than through representation. The collective decision making of a bee swarm therefore resembles a New England town meeting in which the registered voters who are interested in local affairs meet in face-to-face . . . to debate issues of home rule and to vote on them, rendering binding decisions for their community. . . .
>
> . . . [I]n both the insectan and human forms of this collective decision making, each decision about a future course of action reflects the contributions, freely given and equally weighted, or several hundred individuals. In other words, the control of the group's actions is distributed among many of its members rather than concentrated in a few local leaders.[12]

Of course there are differences in how honeybees and humans approach politics. The most significant (and noted by Seeley) is that honeybees all have a common interest, whereas humans have competing interests (even our conceptions of what is in the common interest are in conflict!) So for the remainder of this section we will consider a species much more closely related to humans, sharing over 98% of our DNA as

inheritance from a common ancestor between six and seven million years ago: chimpanzees.

<u>Chimpanzee Conflict</u>

Primatologist Frans De Waal tells an epic story of a battle for dominance and submission between three adult chimpanzees in his book *Chimpanzee Politics.* The main characters are Yeroen (the dominant male and the oldest), Nikkie (younger and stronger than Yeroen), and Luit (also younger, and the strongest). Luit decided to challenge Yeroen's dominance. In the popular conception of chimpanzees, this should have been just a *mano a mano* contest, where Luit's superior strength would make him victorious. But like humans, chimpanzees are not that simple. The other adult chimpanzees, all females, liked Yeroen and joined him when he was attacked, presenting Luit with a united front that was much stronger than he was, and defeating his initial bid for dominance. (Notice in that example the mixture of conflict and collaboration.) Luit responded by shifting his direct attacks to the females, punishing them when they would sit with Yeroen or groom him. Sometimes he would run by and slap them hard, and other times he would punish them afterwards when they were alone. Sometimes he only needed to stand nearby and put on a threatening display to persuade them to get up and walk away from Yeroen. This classic divide-and-conquer strategy worked—the next time Luit attacked Yeroen, the females were afraid to support the older male, and Luit easily dominated him.

That is an interesting story, but it takes another twist because of the third contender for power, the other young male Nikkie. Nikkie was not as strong as Luit, so he couldn't attack him one-one-one. And the adult females disliked Nikkie, so he could not get support from them. But Nikkie and Yeroen together could overpower Luit. When Yeroen was defeated by Luit he fell from first male to third (being weaker than either of the other two), and by supporting Nikkie, he could move back up to second. And because Nikkie required his support to remain dominant, Yeroen could demand tolerant treatment from Nikkie by threatening to throw his support to Luit instead. No longer able to be king, Yeroen became the king-maker.

De Waal explained the chimps' behavior in explicitly political terms.

> Ever since Thucydides wrote about the Peloponnesian War...it has been known that nations tend to seek allies against nations perceived as a common threat.[13]

Chimpanzee Collaboration

But politics is not just about conflict, and it not just about the dominance and submission emphasized by V. O. Key. It is also about "the process through which individuals and groups reach agreement on a course of common, or collective, action," as suggested by Kernell, or the collaborative method of Lasswell's "how" one gets what one wants. De Waal gives an example that demonstrates collaborative effort and foresight among chimpanzees.

> The males use long branches to climb up into the live trees which are protected by electric fencing... the male carries the branch down to the ground and sets it up as a 'ladder,' usually in close cooperation with the other males and sometimes the females. The ape in the tree breaks off far more than he needs, and this falls down among the waiting group. Sometimes the process of sharing is selective. Once when Dandy held the branch steady so that Nikkie could climb into the tree he later received half the leaves Nikkie had collected. This appeared to be a direct payment for the services rendered.[14]

Additionally, even for the top male dominance is not just about dominance. De Waal notes that dominant chimps played a crucial role in resolving conflicts among other members of the group—the best were impartial.[15] In another case he recounts a time when zookeepers gave the chimpanzees a bundle of tasty leaves. The dominant chimp (Yeroen at that time) rushed to claim the treat, but rather than keeping it for himself he distributed the leaves so that everyone in the group, even the young, had a share. This minimized the conflict between the other group members and helped him earn their continued support.[16]

Were all these interactions really "politics"? De Waal certainly thought so. In the 25th anniversary edition of his book he wrote,

> "[i]f we follow Harold Lasswell's famous definition of politics as a social process determining 'who gets what, when, and how,' there can be little doubt that chimpanzees engage in it."[17]

Our human sense of superiority has often led us to distinguish ourselves from the animal kingdom. We once believed that animals did not use tools, but have discovered tool use among other mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, and even insects (the Wikipedia page on tool use by animals is fascinating). Many of those tools are just stones used for cracking open foods, so it was thought that perhaps humans were distinguished by the *making* of tools. But rudimentary tool making, such as modifying twigs by stripping off leaves or bending them into particular shapes, has been observed in multiple primate species, in elephants, and in birds such as crows, rooks, some finches, and Australian keas. Language was also thought to be a distinguishing characteristic of humans, but psychologist Sue Savage-Rumbaugh demonstrated language communication in bonobos (a primate closely related to chimps and humans), both in the laboratory and in the wild.[18] Is it really surprising, then, that other animals might exhibit political behavior as well?

1.4 Conflict and Collaboration in the American Revolution

Talking about politics among animals is fun, but this is a book on American government, so we will conclude this chapter by applying the general types of political problems to the origins of the American political system. This last section will demonstrate the roles of conflict, coordination problems, and collective action problems in in the American Revolution and founding, from the start of conflict with Great Britain through to the establishment of the U.S. Constitution. Conflict between the colonies and Britain began after the French and Indian War (1754-1763), which led unhappy colonists to coordinate a unified response, which led to the conflict of war and collective action problems among the colonies. Success in the war led to further conflict and collective action problems between the colonies-become-states, which led James Madison and Alexander Hamilton to work to coordinate the states to revise the structure of their union, which led to further conflict over adoption of the

new Constitution. And in all of this we can see all three definitions of politics, but most clearly Lasswell's.

Conflict: From Happy Colonists to Angry Revolutionaries

Not all of Britain's American colonies revolted, and those that did had been happy subjects for many years, so we have to ask what changed, and why did it change for those particular colonies and not others? The oldest colony was Virginia, established in 1607, and the youngest rebellious one was Georgia, established four decades before the Revolution. All the others ranged from about 90 to 150 years old. But Britain also had colonies in the Caribbean that did not rebel (and are still part of the British Commonwealth today) as well as Canadian colonies, including Quebec, which was won in the French and Indian War (called the Seven Years War in Europe, just one of many Franco-British wars over the centuries). The revolutionaries invited these other colonies to join their revolt, but they declined, so what was different for them?

A variety of issues ultimately pushed the colonists to the point of revolution, but the initial factor seems to have been the outcome of the French and Indian (Seven Years) War. Britain not only won Quebec from the French, but the territory below the Great Lakes and between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River, which was mostly due west of those thirteen colonies and offered abundant farmland. The colonists expected the victory to lead to opportunity to claim that land and make a living, but Britain chose to restrict the colonists from it and leave it to the Indians who occupied it. This explains why the Caribbean and Canadian colonies did not experience the same growing discontent, as they had never had the urge for that territory. In addition, the British treasury had been bled dry by war, so they required the colonists to help pay for the soldiers stationed there to protect them from further attack. The colonists had not been directly taxed in this way before, and the variety of taxes – on sugar, tea, paper, and so on – angered them. Conflict finally broke out into violence in the Boston Massacre in 1770 and the Boston Tea Party in 1773.

Collaboration: Coordinating Joint Action among the Colonies

As you might guess from the fact that the Massacre and the Tea Party both took place in Boston, Massachusetts was the flashpoint of opposition, but they did not want to act alone. So in 1772 Massachusetts opposition leaders organized "committees of correspondence," writing letters to prominent people in the other colonies expressing their concerns and asking if those concerns were shared by others. These communications led to the First Continental Congress. This was not a legislature (the word congress originally just meant a formal meeting), but just a gathering of men from the various unhappy colonies to discuss how to respond. At this point almost nobody was ready to openly rebel, but they wrote a letter to the King expressing their loyalty as British subjects, blaming Parliament for oppressing them, and asking the King to give them relief. Although this petition had no effect, we can see that the colonists at this point were not seeking independence, but a return to the old relationship with Britain and access to the land west of the Appalachians, but the means they chose did not achieve their goal.

Conflict and Collective Action Problems during The Revolutionary War

The petition had no effect, and the mood of the opposition gradually shifted towards rebellion. (About 15-20% of the colonists remained loyal to Britain, and some of them emigrated to Canada or England after the war.) A second Continental Congress gathered in May 1775, but by then the first battles (Lexington and Concord) had already been fought, on April 19. But because of doubts about their authority (again, they were not a legislature or government, just a meeting) and because some delegates had instructions from their colonial governments forbidding them from voting for independence, it took more than a year to coordinate agreement to that final step, with the Congress voting to sever ties with Great Britain on July 2, 1776, and two days later voting approval of the text of the Declaration of Independence, and declaring themselves thirteen new independent countries (the original meaning of the word "state").

Violent conflict with Britain had become full war, but wars are costly, and now the new states struggled with the collective action problem of contributions to the war effort. They were seeking a common benefit – independence in fact, not just in word – but it might not take the full effort of each to achieve, and predictably there was plenty of shirking in the

provision of men, materials, and money. The Congress, as noted above, was not a true government, so it had no power to levy taxes to fund the war effort, but could only ask – or beg – for the states to contribute what was needed. Alexander Hamilton, as an officer under General George Washington, experienced this first hand. And while he had never heard of a collective action problem, he identified it clearly in his letter.

> The present mode of supplying the army – by state purchases . . . is too precarious a dependence, because the states will never be sufficiently impressed with our necessities. Each will make its own ease a primary object, the supply of the army a secondary one.

Washington himself nearly despaired during their winter camp at Valley Force:

> Our sick naked – our well naked – Our unfortunate men in captivity naked!

Collective Action, Conflict, Coordination, and More Conflict after the Revolutionary War

The intervention of the French with financial and material support tipped the balance and won the war, but Hamilton had claimed that the political system as it then existed (under the Articles of Confederation) was "neither fit for war, nor peace," and events proved him right. The Confederation Congress had, despite its lack of authority to do so, borrowed money, particular from the French, to fight the war, but without the power to tax they could only plead with the states to help pay off the war debt, a burden the states preferred to shirk. Hamilton was again in the midst of the problem, having been appointed Receiver of Continental Taxes for the State of New York, and being able to do little more than publish pleas in local newspapers.

> THE SUBSCRIBER has received nothing on account of the quota of this State for the present year.

In addition to these collective action problems, the states were in conflict with each other. Each state coined its own money, hindering the efficiency of trade between them. Virginia and Maryland were in conflict over navigation on the Potomac River, which forms the boundary between

the two states, and which was crucial to both for the shipment of goods. Further north, Connecticut and Virginia were so incensed over fees to ship goods through New York harbor that they were considering a joint military attack on the New York. And in Massachusetts Revolutionary War Captain Daniel Shays led a rebellion against the state courts for foreclosing on farmers' mortgages when they could not pay them.

Many people supported that political system, but Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and George Washington were among those who thought it was necessary to replace the Articles of Confederation with a strong central government. Their first task was a coordination problem: getting others to agree something should be done. Their first attempt at a convention to discuss potential changes failed, with only five of the thirteen states sending delegates. Their second attempt, the federal convention in Philadelphia in 1787 was more successful: twelve states sent delegates and the Constitution was drafted. But the conflicts during the convention were deep, and resulted in numerous compromises, including the Great Compromise over representation in Congress, the 3/5 clause that counted 60% of enslaved people towards a state's House representation even though those people could not vote, and the electoral college. And after the convention had completed its work the conflict simply shifted to the public at large, as people in each state debated whether they should ratify this fundamental change in the nature of the union or reject it to preserve their own state's sovereignty. It ultimately passed, but North Carolina ratified and joined only after the new government was in effect, and Rhode Island chose to not ratify and remain independent, joining only two years later under pressure from the other states.

This is only a brief sketch of the formation of the United States, however the goal here is not to write a historical account but to emphasize how that history embodies the three general classes of political problems. Of course, political problems did not end with ratification of the Constitution. The greatest internal conflict came in the 1860s with the Civil War, and other conflicts, from elections to policy disagreements to the struggle for power between Congress and the President continue today. Collective action problems – including most environmental problems – are and will always be present. And simply coordinating a national policy on any issue where the states still have authority to choose their own policy in inherently a difficult challenge.

What to Take Away from this Chapter
(or to be honest, what might you get tested on)

1. Know Easton's, Key's, and Lasswell's definitions of politics.
2. Is politics just about voting, elections, and government?
3. Is politics only a human activity?
4. What makes coordination difficult?
5. What two conditions make for a collective action problem?
6. What is a free rider?
7. What did Elinor Ostrom say is "the central subject of political science?"
8. What collective action problems occurred during the American Revolution?
9. What collective action problems occurred *after* the American Revolution, and what change did they lead to?

Questions to Discuss and Ponder

1. Which definition of politics do you think is the best, and why? What is less satisfying to you about the others?
2. What kind of collective action situations have you been involved in? Did you free ride? Did others free ride? Did you manage to resolve them so the benefit was achieved? If so, how?
3. What are some contemporary political issues that are conflict problems?
4. What are some contemporary political issues that are collective action problems?

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