

American Government/Civics—The Complete Idiot's Guide to U.S. Government & Politics

p. 10 of PG / p. 9 of SG

This chapter has several references to “popular sovereignty,” which it defines as “[g]overnment by the consent of the governed” (15)...

This text assumes that “Informal Methods of Constitutional Change” are necessary and proper, “a result of the flexibility of the Constitution to adapt itself over time to events and concerns of the citizens” (26)...

p. 19 of IG / p. 17 of SG

To Discuss After You Read

Notes: “The conflict between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists in the early years is mirrored today by the debate among strict and liberal constructionists” (119)...

p. 24 of PG / p. 21 of SG

To Discuss After You Read

Notes: The book suggests Lincoln was a great president because his name is remembered, that he was a strong enough leader to take the power of the presidency. “Lincoln was the only president to stand up to Congress and the partisan system that had developed. He used his executive powers . . . He did all of this without the approval of Congress” (160)...

p. 24 of PG / p. 21 of SG (omit)

The next paragraph says that “the system has changed” (160). Obviously it has. But did it change Constitutionally? Or did it just evolve to meet the needs of the present day?

p. 24 of PG / p. 21 of SG

“A president may serve for more than eight years if he succeeds another president” (161). . . .

p. 28 of PG / p. 24 of SG

To Discuss After You Read

Note: Did you notice that the judicial branch also has the difference of opinion between the strict-constructionists and the activist approach? The debate goes on. And I appreciated this comment: “Today, many politically conservative judges favor judicial activism in order to reverse many court rulings of the last half century” (190).

p. 28 of PG / p. 24 of SG (omit)

Notes: “The current Supreme Court appears to maintain a ‘liberal’ majority voting bloc on issues of liberties but a ‘conservative’ majority voting bloc on issues relating to federal supremacy” (195). As I understand it, this means that the Court would be willing to push the envelope on individual rights (abortion rights, for example: not in the Constitution, but now legal). However, in cases where federal supremacy is in question, it seems the Court is happy to allow a balance between states and general government, closer to what the founders conceived. They limit the general government.

p. 36 of PG / p. 30 of SG

To Discuss After You Read

Notes: “Civil liberties are distinct from civil rights, which are inherent freedoms upheld, not granted, by the government” (203) . . . “Individuals have certain rights that are guaranteed by the Constitution that the government cannot take away” (204)...

p. 36 of PG / p. 31 of SG

“Essentially, people are free to do what they like as long as they do not impose on other people’s rights” (204)...

The Ninth Amendment somehow stretched to include “a woman’s right to have an abortion without government interference” (205)...

Did you notice any problems with the definition of creationism (207)? I don’t know that anyone today would argue that all life has “not undergone any change or evolution” (207)...

p. 37 of PG / p. 31 of SG

Interesting to read about the Supreme Court’s decision to allow prayer in government, but not in government schools. The argument for tradition seems especially weak: I think prayer in schools was present from the beginning. To say that “lawmakers are not subject to religious indoctrination or peer pressure” (209)...

p. 37 of PG / p. 31 of SG

Notes: I find it creepy that, for a time, flag saluting was mandatory “because it promotes patriotism” (211)...

p. 37 of PG / p. 32 of SG

“Civil disobedience refers to behavior that is peaceful but is in violation of the law for the purpose of making a political statement” (214)...

p. 37 of PG / p. 32 of SG

Interesting that “the right to privacy, which is not explicitly named or guaranteed in the Constitution” (216)...

Minor typo on p. 217: the president who vetoed the bill was Andrew Johnson, not Andrew Jackson (Jackson was earlier in the century).

p. 54 of PG / p. 45 of SG

I had not heard of “inherent” powers before reading this text: “These are powers that the federal government derives from the fact that the United States is a sovereign nation” (32)...

pp. 67–68 of PG / p. 56 of SG

“Today, equality of opportunity is seen as essential by liberals, and they believe the government must take an active role to see this realized” (72)...

p. 68 of PG / p. 57 of SG

“In general, conservatives believe that the market should provide social services rather than government. Human needs should be rendered by families, places of worship, and charitable organizations” (72)...

p. 95 of PG / p. 79 of SG

“Individual invasion of individual rights is not the subject matter of the [Fourteenth] Amendment” (228)...

p. 95 of PG / p. 80 of SG

“Most [immigrants] have faced discrimination in one form or another” (234)...

“[A] substantial number of Hispanics living in the United States are undocumented and, therefore, unable to participate in the political process” (235)...

pp. 105–106 of PG / pp. 89–90 of SG

To Discuss After You Read

Notes: “Foreign governments hold a large percentage of our national debt” (284)...

“[T]he Federal Reserve has the power to act on its own without the approval of Congress or the president” (285)...

p. 128 of PG / p. 109 of SG

To Discuss After You Read

65. “Americans take for granted that the federal government is involved in almost all aspects of life... Yet this was not always the case” (269). Based on our studies so far this year, did you know that? ➔ yes

p. 128 of PG / p. 109 of SG

“The scope of legitimate government action is always increasing because people believe that the government ought to be doing what it is doing and should continue to do so” (270)...

p. 129 of PG / p. 110 of SG

Notes: “[M]ost people generally want the most benefits for the least cost” (271)...

p. 129 of PG / p. 110 of SG

The book mentions four methods to address the Social Security debt crisis (p. 277). A few comments on each.

p. 130 of PG / p. 110 of SG

“Practically speaking, however, once government has instituted new spending programs in order to stimulate the economy, it becomes difficult to abolish the program or spending line” (278)...

p. 135 of PG / p. 115 of SG

“Today, over three million people work for the federal government” (183)...

p. 146 of PG / p. 124 of SG

I like this observation: “Candidates for president are essentially entering two elections” (96)...

p. 179 of PG / p. 152 of SG

“Together, the small farmer and these large agricultural corporations lobby the government to promote agricultural policies and subsidies” (248)...

* * *

29. “People join interest groups to get incentives [hand-outs], or something of value that they cannot get on their own” (249)...

p. 183 of PG / p. 156 of SG

37. The media serves as “gatekeeper, scorekeeper, and watchdog” (260)...

p. 184 of PG / p. 157 of SG

“[T]he media’s most influential role might be at the local level. Since there are fewer sources reporting on local news, those organizations have greater influence over what the public hears, sees, and reads” (264).

With the rise of the internet and “free” news, the print papers have seen dramatic declines. What is lost when the papers go? ■