Controlling the Behavior of Others

- One of the key differences between realists and idealists is the way they view human nature.
- Idealists would argue that when studying what governments do, we should judge them and their leaders by how much they maximize these positive human qualities and how effectively they provide for their populations.
- Realists tend to believe that human beings care only about maximizing their own self-interests and they would expect no more from their leaders.
- From a realist perspective, much of what groups and governments do tends to serve the interests of their leaders.

Controlling the Behavior of Others

- This section relies heavily on the realist perspective.
- Whenever you are trying to understand a confusing aspect of politics, simply ask:
  - “Who benefits?”
  - “How do they benefit?”
- The answers to these two questions will usually provide a solid first step toward unraveling the political puzzle.
- Often, the best line is: “Show me the power.”
- The questions “Who benefits?” and “How?” are helpful when discussing the strategies governments and leaders use to maintain control over their populations.
- Regardless of the type of government they head, it can be argued that all leaders try to maximize their self-interests.
- This helps explain what totalitarian governments do and also what democracies do.

Leadership Benefits

- People want to become leaders because of the tremendous individual benefits.
- Leaders can be power hungry or they can be interested in extreme personal wealth.
- Leaders may be after different kinds of benefits, but they all pursue personal benefits.
- Even some of the most revered political leaders benefited by gaining notoriety, prestige, and accomplishing their personal, though altruistic or nationalistic, goals through the political process.

Leadership Benefits

- Some scholars argue that personal benefits are the only reason people pursue leadership positions.
- Given the potential for massive benefits, it is understandable why people might be willing to risk their lives to take over a government and why a leader might go to great lengths to prevent this.
- The greater the benefits to be gained from the leadership position, the more willing people are to invest their own resources and to take risks to attain it.

The Panopticon

- The concept of the panopticon as a social mechanism for controlling populations comes from an eighteenth-century prison design crafted by Jeremy Bentham.
- In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault argued that the way the panopticon enables a few guards to control hundreds of prisoners is similar to the way governments control their societies.
- In the panopticon:
  - The cells are all built around a central guard tower.
  - The cells are arranged so that the guards in the tower can see everything in every cell.
  - The guard tower is completely enclosed with mirrored windows so that the prisoners never know when they are being watched.
  - The prisoners know they are not being watched all of the time, but the guards’ severe and public punishments keep them constantly aware that they could be watched at any time.
  - Consequently, the prisoners always behave as if the guards are watching.

*The greatest happiness of the greatest number is the foundation of morals and legislation.* – Jeremy Bentham
The Panopticon

- This panoptic means of controlling behavior is a pervasive aspect of almost every government.
- An example is the way traffic laws are enforced.
- The vast majority of times there are no police to be seen.
- However, there always could be a police officer around any bend in the road.
- Through self-policing, a few hundred policemen can control thousands of drivers.
- Leaders use this same concept to prevent revolt and maintain control of their countries.

Collective Action, Revolution and the Use of Force

- One argument for why people initially created government was to collectively pursue security in an anarchic environment.
- As a result, once formed, government serves as a framework for society to use to pursue other collective goals.
- What happens when people do not want to be a part of the governed society or if they wish to cancel the social contract?
- The details are important for understanding the most fundamental threats to a government: revolution.
- Revolutions are collective actions focused on the goal of tearing down and replacing the current government.
- Those at the top of the existing social hierarchies are driven by self-interest to actively oppose any collective effort to overthrow the system.

Atomization

- When people are isolated they are kept from forming a group that could threaten a leader’s hold on power.
- At the most extreme, you would want to prevent anyone from forming any kind of personal bond.
- Keeping people separate is atomization and the two most important mechanisms leaders use to accomplish this are:
  - peer policing
  - preference falsification

Peer Policing

- Peer policing is having people watch each other.
- While peer policing can sometimes occur spontaneously, for it to work as a mechanism for preventing revolt, leaders must usually put a few structural elements in place.
- Leaders need to encourage citizens to engage in the act of peer policing against potential revolutionaries.
- This might be most easily accomplished by making it a crime to not report someone else’s efforts to form a revolutionary group.
- It will work well if people believe that government agents will test individuals’ willingness to turn others in to the authorities.

Preference Falsification

- Preference falsification is when people hide the way they feel while publicly expressing what those in power want them to communicate.
- Governments use preference falsification as part of the atomization and peer-policing process to keep people separate and to keep groups from forming.
- If people do not express their true feelings about the government, how can potential revolutionaries even know if there are others who share their view?

"Every generation needs a new revolution." – Thomas Jefferson

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." – The United States Constitution
Limits on Forceful Control

- The level of force leaders must use to maintain control is related to the level of dissatisfaction.
- When dissatisfaction is low, less force is necessary.
- When societal discontent outweighs fear, people stop falsifying their preferences and try to overcome the government’s mechanisms for atomization.
- When pushed too far, people will stand up to a bully.

Legitimacy and Government Control

- Instead of relying on force, threats, and punishments, leaders can maintain control by pursuing legitimacy.
- Legitimacy is the voluntary acceptance of their government.
- Legitimacy exists when people have the sense that obeying government is just the right thing to do.
- There are many complex phenomena that affect a government’s legitimacy.
  - There are many ways that governments can achieve or lose legitimacy, e.g., stay in power a long time, get the blessing of a legitimate past leader, or convince people that God sent the leaders to rule.
  - Perhaps the most effective route is to convince people it is in their interest to accept leadership.

Balancing Force and Legitimacy

- How do leaders calculate the correct mix of force and legitimacy?
  - Simply put, the less dissatisfaction, the less force is necessary.
  - The pursuit of legitimacy tends to be a better long-term strategy, while force is very effective in the short-term.
  - Once an immediate danger is removed through force, leaders tend to lose the motivation to pursue legitimacy.
  - It is cheaper to pay off a small group of army officials and the police force than to invest in meeting the needs of the entire society.

Legitimacy and Conflict within Groups

- After World War I, researchers believed that conflict was something horrible, and that conflict should be eradicated.
  - Georg Simmel and later Lewis Coser pointed out problems with this approach.
  - The complete elimination of conflicts could be equally bad because conflict serves constructive functions.
  - When engaged in a conflict with another group, self-identification with the group increases and support for the leadership increases.
  - This can benefit the leader and, perhaps, the group.
  - It makes the group more cohesive, gives the leader more control of the group, and enhances stability.
  - The work of Simmel and Coser helped redirect the study of conflict toward how conflict within a group can also provide beneficial functions for the group and the leader.

Elections and Public Goods

- Popular elections provide the best example of how to use legitimacy as the primary means to avoid revolt.
  - Popularly elected leaders are legitimate leaders, at least when they start out.
  - Electoral democracies deal with the threat of revolt by embracing it.
  - They create political structures that tame and institutionalize the process of revolt.
  - The vote is a non-violent way of meaningfully expressing satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the leader.
  - Democratically elected leaders constantly consider their (or their party’s) chances of reelection.
Safety Valve

- Intra-group conflict (conflict within the group) can serve as a safety valve.
- Stopping people within the group from engaging in conflict builds up pressure.
- Frustration and anger can build until people get to the point where just about anything will set them off.
- Conflicts, even small ones, serve the safety valve function.
- Instead of a big blowup, you get a whole bunch of minor, more manageable conflicts.
  - Essentially what Madison meant when he called for more “factions.”

Conclusion

Questions? Concerns? Angry Rants?