**Preface**

This is the third edition of a book that first appeared in 1997 when the world and politics were considerably different. Of course since then we can discern continuities in forms and practices, but apparent certainties, such as the division of the world into two armed camps engaged in a ‘Cold War’, with the major protagonists locked in a nuclear standoff, were already undergoing significant change. By the time of the second edition in 2002, we were talking about the ‘wave’ of democratization that was sweeping post-Soviet space, just as the world experienced the tragedy of 9/11 and what it portended. Since then, day-to-day life in many countries has been affected by the implementation of the ‘global war on terror’, the fallout from financial crisis that began in 2007, and the refugee crisis that has troubled many parts of the world since 2015. These are among the most obvious exemplars of these new times. We have also witnessed what some commentators see as a decline in the credibility and trust-worthiness of political elites and of conventional politics more generally. So, in some respects it might be said that we now live in more turbulent and unpredictable times and, for students of politics, this brings its own challenges.

Just as the world of politics has turned, so has its study. We refer to ways of studying politics throughout the book, but two examples of how approaches and techniques are changing will be useful here, right at the start of our venture. First is the growing significance of research methods that rely on the use of computational social science to investigate a range of phenomena, including political participation. At its broadest this means using everyday sources such as people’s use of social media to track what they do, consume and think. Second is the increasingly widespread application of what is called ‘postcolonial’ methods to address themes and issues in the appearance of racism, imperialism and oppression. Postcolonial methods focus on stories, histories and images from people traditionally excluded from European or, more generally, Western, descriptions of the world.

When we wrote the first two editions, we were concerned that there were few texts usable for our first-year undergraduate programme. Over the years that programme has developed in terms of its real-world address and in terms of our attention to the ways in which politics can be studied. Nevertheless, we believe that the tenets we first set down in 1997 are still highly relevant to the study of politics today. First, we aim to demonstrate why politics matters, and therefore why the subject should be studied. It is our belief that those new to the subject should be encouraged to think about themselves as political actors in a political world. Students come to the study of politics for a variety of reasons, and many treat ‘the political’ as a separate, and peripheral, sphere of human existence. But such a view is sustainable only by adopting a very restricted definition of politics. Our position is that politics is much more than a realm of human activity populated by the usual suspects - legislators, cabinets, parties, activists and *apparatchiks*, and we say more about this in the introductory chapter. More important to stress here is our belief that the successful student of politics (or political science, government, or any other label for the subject) is not someone who has just accumulated a body of facts about various political systems, or who is a connoisseur of the main principles of, for example, Thomas Hobbes’ theory of government. Rather, studying politics involves acquiring concepts, analytical frameworks and ideas that make it easier to understand, interpret and (perhaps) to explain the complexities of political life.

Our strategy as teachers is to introduce the study of politics by asking students to confront their own experience of the political world and by asking them to think seriously about the boundaries of the political. While this may strike some as an approach slanted towards what is still generally, if a little unhelpfully, called political behaviour, it is not intended to endorse what we later discuss as a behavioural view of politics. Our intention is to persuade students to see themselves as part of political life and as actors or participants in it. This is why the earlier chapters in the book are concerned with the individual in politics. Later chapters concentrate upon collective political actors and wider political processes to give a fuller picture of the complexities of government and politics, both within and beyond the territorial state and bounded societies.

It is also worth pointing out that the book is not an explicitly comparative textbook. This does not mean that it is lacking in illustrative material of a comparative nature, or, given the earlier reference to postcolonial methods, that it is Anglocentric. Rather, the book does not adopt any systematic framework of comparison, least of all one that trades on the detailed comparison of a few political systems. Of course we are all aware of the advantages of comparison and of the extent to which much good social science is by definition comparative. But we want to avoid focusing on Britain, the USA and France, or on any other selection of countries, because the main purpose of the text is the study of politics. To complement our general approach we offer a broad range of illustrative case study and comparative materials throughout the text.

In the first and second editions of the book, we were anxious to make connections between personal experience and wider structures and processes that impinge on individual consciousness and action. This remains a key aim of the book. In addition, we have revised and strengthened our focus on international and global matters to take note of new sources of turbulence in world politics. To say that the world is more, or even less globalized than previously, is contentious. But, as the first two editions showed, any textbook on politics must treat seriously these arenas in which politics and political discourse take place. We have also made some changes to the content and organisation of the book, which allow important subjects such as democratisation and authoritarianism, and the role of digital media in politics, to be examined more fully.

Finally, we wanted to continue a style of writing and presentation that students would find user-friendly but not patronising. The use of ‘think points’ and exercises throughout the text is not an attempt to spoon-feed the reader. They should be taken as opportunities to think more deeply about the material introduced in the text and may be used either by the individual reader or by the seminar group. As far as possible, we have tried to highlight the most important terms found in the text. These are highlighted and defined the first time they appear and are consolidated in a glossary at the end of the book.

In this edition the composition and production of the book owe much to the commitment shown by Routledge and in particular by Andrew Taylor and Sophie Iddamalgoda. Their advice has been invaluable in seeing the project to fruition and we are very grateful for their forbearance at points throughout the process. Thanks are also due to a raft of referees whose comments on draft chapters were thoughtful and constructive. The speed of their collective response was a great help to us. Finally, in this edition, we say goodbye to Gary Browning and Ben Rosamond, both integral to the conception and delivery of the first two volumes. In their place we welcome Victoria Browne and Rico Isaacs who, apart from their scholarly expertise, have exemplified a collegial approach to writing a multi-authored volume.

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