

politics who gets what when how

politics who gets what when how is a fundamental question that lies at the heart of political science and governance. Understanding how resources, power, and benefits are allocated in society is crucial to analyzing political behavior, policy decisions, and institutional functions. This phrase encapsulates the core dynamics of political negotiation and competition, addressing who the recipients of political rewards are, what they receive, at which point in the political process, and through what mechanisms these allocations occur. This article explores the theoretical foundations and practical applications of the concept, highlighting its relevance in different political systems and contexts. It also examines the roles of institutions, actors, and processes in determining the distribution of goods and services within a society. The discussion will provide insights into how political power shapes outcomes and affects governance, public policy, and social equity.

- Understanding the Concept of Politics: Who Gets What When How
- Theoretical Frameworks Explaining Political Allocation
- Mechanisms of Distribution in Politics
- Actors and Institutions in the Politics of Allocation
- Implications for Policy and Governance

Understanding the Concept of Politics: Who Gets What When How

The phrase "politics who gets what when how" succinctly summarizes the process through which societies determine the allocation of resources, rights, and responsibilities. It emphasizes the competitive and often contentious nature of political decision-making, where various groups and individuals vie for influence and benefits. Politics is not only about power but also about the distribution of tangible and intangible goods, ranging from economic resources to legal privileges and social recognition. The timing ("when") and methods ("how") of allocation are as significant as the beneficiaries ("who") and the items allocated ("what"). Recognizing these dimensions helps clarify the complexities of political interactions and the outcomes they produce.

Origins and Definition

The phrase was popularized by political scientist Harold Lasswell, who defined politics as "who gets what, when, how." This definition frames politics as a process of authoritative allocation of values in society. Here, "what" refers to the values or resources being distributed, "who" to the recipients or stakeholders, "when" to the timing of these allocations, and "how" to the procedures or methods used. This approach highlights politics as a continuous negotiation involving conflict and cooperation among competing interests.

Significance in Political Science

Understanding "who gets what when how" is essential in analyzing power relations and policy outcomes. It allows scholars to dissect political processes and reveal the underlying interests, strategies, and institutional rules that shape distribution. Moreover, it facilitates the study of equity, justice, and efficiency in governance, offering tools to evaluate how well political systems serve their populations.

Theoretical Frameworks Explaining Political Allocation

Several theoretical perspectives in political science address the question of who gets what when how, each providing different explanations for political distribution and decision-making. These frameworks help in understanding the motivations of actors, the role of institutions, and the dynamics of power in shaping outcomes.

Pluralism

Pluralism views politics as a competition among diverse interest groups that struggle to influence policy decisions and resource allocation. According to this theory, no single group dominates; instead, power is dispersed among multiple actors who bargain and compromise. The "who" in this context includes various organized groups, the "what" involves policy benefits, and the "how" entails lobbying, advocacy, and negotiation. Timing ("when") depends on political cycles and opportunities for influence.

Elitism

Elitism argues that a small, cohesive elite controls the significant resources and power in society. This elite determines who gets what, often prioritizing their own interests. The "how" involves institutional control, economic dominance, and political maneuvering, with timing dictated by strategic considerations to maintain influence. This perspective highlights inequalities and the concentration of decision-making power.

Institutionalism

Institutionalism focuses on the rules, procedures, and structures that govern political processes. Institutions shape the "how" by establishing formal mechanisms for allocation and decision-making. They influence who can participate ("who"), what resources are available ("what"), and when decisions are made ("when"). This framework emphasizes the importance of legal frameworks, bureaucratic procedures, and organizational norms in political allocation.

Mechanisms of Distribution in Politics

The question of who gets what when how is answered through various mechanisms that facilitate the allocation of resources and benefits in political systems. These mechanisms operate at multiple levels

and utilize different strategies to achieve distribution.

Legislation and Policy Making

Legislation is a primary mechanism by which governments decide who receives benefits and when. Through laws and regulations, political actors define eligibility criteria, allocate budgets, and set priorities. The "how" involves formal debates, voting procedures, and committee processes. Policy-making also reflects competing interests and power dynamics among stakeholders.

Public Administration and Bureaucracy

Bureaucratic agencies implement policies and manage the distribution of services and resources. They operationalize political decisions through administrative rules and procedures, affecting the timing and manner of allocation. Bureaucracies often play a gatekeeping role, influencing who actually receives benefits on the ground.

Political Negotiation and Bargaining

Negotiation is a core mechanism in politics, where actors engage in dialogue and compromise to determine allocations. This process reflects the "who" by identifying stakeholders, the "what" by debating resources or privileges, the "when" by setting timelines, and the "how" through agreed-upon methods. Negotiation can occur formally within institutions or informally among interest groups.

Electoral Processes

Elections influence who gains political power and thus control over allocation decisions. The timing ("when") is fixed by electoral cycles, and the "how" includes campaigning, voting, and coalition-building. Elected officials often distribute resources strategically to maintain support, making elections a vital mechanism in the politics of distribution.

Actors and Institutions in the Politics of Allocation

The politics of who gets what when how involves a variety of actors and institutions whose roles and interactions determine political outcomes. Understanding these participants is key to comprehending the distribution process.

Political Leaders and Elected Officials

Leaders and officials hold formal authority to make decisions about resource allocation. Their priorities, ideologies, and strategies shape the "who," "what," "when," and "how" of political distribution. They also respond to public opinion, party pressures, and institutional constraints.

Interest Groups and Lobbyists

Interest groups represent collective interests and seek to influence political decisions to secure benefits for their members. Their activities include lobbying, advocacy, and mobilization, affecting the distribution of resources and policy outcomes. They play a significant role in defining "who" benefits and "how" allocations occur.

Bureaucratic Agencies

Bureaucracies implement and enforce policies, managing the practical aspects of allocation. They interpret laws, set administrative rules, and oversee service delivery, thus controlling the timing and manner of distribution.

Judiciary and Legal Institutions

Courts and legal bodies influence political allocation by interpreting laws, resolving disputes, and ensuring compliance with constitutional principles. They can affect who receives benefits and under what conditions, serving as checks on political power.

Voters and Citizens

The electorate influences allocation indirectly through the democratic process. Voters determine who holds political power, shaping policy agendas and priorities. Citizen participation, public opinion, and activism also affect political decisions about distribution.

Implications for Policy and Governance

The question of politics who gets what when how has profound implications for public policy and governance. It affects the legitimacy, effectiveness, and fairness of political systems and influences social cohesion and development.

Equity and Social Justice

Analyzing who benefits from political decisions reveals patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Policies that address inequalities in distribution promote social justice and reduce disparities. Understanding the timing and methods of allocation helps identify barriers to equitable access.

Accountability and Transparency

Clear mechanisms for allocation enhance accountability by making political actors responsible for their decisions. Transparency in who gets what when how reduces corruption and builds public trust in institutions.

Policy Efficiency and Effectiveness

Efficient allocation ensures that resources are used optimally to achieve policy goals. Timing and procedures influence the responsiveness of governance to societal needs, affecting overall effectiveness.

Political Stability and Conflict

Fair and predictable allocation mechanisms can mitigate conflicts arising from competition over resources. Conversely, perceptions of unfairness or exclusion can lead to political instability and social unrest.

List of Key Factors Influencing Political Allocation

- Power distribution among political actors
- Institutional rules and procedures
- Economic resources and constraints
- Public opinion and electoral dynamics
- Interest group pressures and lobbying efforts
- Legal frameworks and judicial decisions
- Administrative capacity and bureaucratic efficiency

Frequently Asked Questions

What does the phrase 'politics is about who gets what, when, and how' mean?

The phrase means that politics involves the distribution of resources, power, and privileges among individuals or groups, determining who receives what benefits, at what time, and through which processes.

How does politics determine who gets what in society?

Politics determines who gets what through decision-making processes within governments and institutions, influenced by laws, policies, negotiations, and power dynamics among competing interests.

Why is timing ('when') important in political decision-making?

Timing is crucial because political opportunities, public opinion, and social conditions change over time, affecting when policies are enacted or resources are allocated to maximize impact or gain support.

How do political systems influence 'how' resources are distributed?

Different political systems (democracy, authoritarianism, etc.) have varying mechanisms—such as elections, appointments, or coercion—that shape how decisions are made and resources allocated.

Who are the key actors involved in determining 'who gets what' in politics?

Key actors include politicians, government officials, interest groups, lobbyists, voters, and sometimes external influences like international organizations or corporations.

What role does power play in deciding 'who gets what' in politics?

Power shapes the ability of individuals or groups to influence decisions and access resources, meaning those with more power often secure more benefits in political outcomes.

How can understanding 'who gets what, when, and how' help citizens engage in politics?

Understanding these aspects helps citizens recognize the processes behind policy decisions, empowering them to advocate effectively, hold leaders accountable, and participate meaningfully in political life.

Additional Resources

1. *Who Gets What — and Why: The New Economics of Matchmaking and Market Design*

This book by Alvin E. Roth explores how markets work and how resources are allocated efficiently without prices. Roth explains the principles behind matching markets such as school admissions, job placements, and organ donations. It offers a fresh perspective on political decision-making and resource distribution by analyzing the underlying mechanisms of allocation.

2. *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* by Harold D. Lasswell

A foundational text in political science, Lasswell's work breaks down politics into the core question of distribution: who gets what, when, and how. It provides an analytical framework for understanding the processes of power, governance, and policy-making. The book remains influential in the study of political behavior and institutional dynamics.

3. *The Logic of Political Survival* by Bruce Bueno de Mesquita et al.

This book investigates how political leaders maintain power by distributing resources strategically to

key supporters. It introduces the concept of the "selectorate," explaining who benefits from policies and why. The authors use game theory and empirical evidence to show how political survival shapes governance and policy outcomes.

4. *Who Governs?: Democracy and Power in an American City* by Robert A. Dahl

Dahl's classic study examines the distribution of political power in New Haven, Connecticut, to determine who really influences policy decisions. The book challenges assumptions about elite control and democratic participation. It offers insights into how power structures impact who benefits from political arrangements.

5. *Power and Resources in World Politics* by Michael Cox

This text explores the global distribution of power and resources and how they influence international relations. Cox discusses the mechanisms through which states and non-state actors secure benefits in the international system. The book connects political theories of power distribution with real-world global dynamics.

6. *The Politics of Distribution: A Framework for Analysis* by Erik Wibbels

Wibbels provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how political institutions affect the distribution of wealth and resources. The book analyzes the interaction between political structures and economic outcomes. It is particularly useful for studying inequality and public policy in developing countries.

7. *Marketscraft: How Governments Make Markets Work* by Eric Posner

Posner examines the role of governments in shaping markets and determining who gets what through regulation and policy. The book argues that effective political management is essential for market success. It sheds light on the political processes underlying economic distribution and market design.

8. *The Politics of Redistribution* by Bo Rothstein

This book investigates how governments decide on redistributive policies that determine who benefits from social welfare programs. Rothstein analyzes the political incentives and social values that guide redistribution. The work enhances understanding of the political dynamics behind economic equality and social justice.

9. *Who Gets What? Theories of Justice and the Politics of Distribution* by Frank Cunningham

Cunningham explores various philosophical and political theories about justice and resource allocation. The book discusses how different conceptions of fairness influence political decisions on distribution. It provides a critical perspective on the ethical foundations of political economy and policy-making.

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politics who gets what when how: Defending Politics Matthew Flinders, 2012-04-25 If the twentieth century witnessed the triumph of democracy then something appears to have gone seriously wrong. Citizens around the world have become distrustful of politicians, sceptical about democratic institutions, and disillusioned about the capacity of democratic politics to resolve pressing social concerns. This shift in global attitudes has been explored in a vast body of writing that examines the existence of 'disaffected democrats' and 'democratic deficits'. Defending Politics meets this contemporary pessimism about the political process head on. In doing so, it aims to cultivate a shift from the bland and fatalistic 'politics of pessimism' that appears to dominate public life towards a more buoyant and engaged 'politics of optimism'. Matthew Flinders makes a highly unfashionable but incredibly important argument of almost primitive simplicity: democratic politics delivers far more than most members of the public appear to acknowledge and understand. If more and more people are disappointed with what modern democratic politics delivers then is it possible that the fault lies with those who demand too much, fail to acknowledge the essence of democratic engagement and ignore the complexities of governing in the twentieth century rather than with democratic politics itself? Is it possible that the public in many advanced liberal democracies have become 'democratically decadent' in the sense that they take what democratic politics delivers for granted? Would politics be interpreted as failing a little less if we all spent a little less time emphasising our individual rights and a little more time reflecting on our responsibilities to society and future generations? Democratic politics remains 'a great and civilizing human activity... something to be valued almost as a pearl beyond price in the history of the human condition', as Bernard Crick stressed in his classic *In Defence of Politics* fifty years ago. But it is also a far more fragile system of governing than many people appear to realize. By returning to and updating Crick's arguments, this book provides an honest account of why democratic politics matters and why we need to reject the arguments of those who would turn their backs on 'mere politics' in favour of more authoritarian, populist or technocratic forms of governing. In rejecting fashionable fears about the 'end of politics' and daring to suggest that the public, the media, pressure groups, academics and politicians are all part of the problem as well as part of the cure, this book provides a fresh, provocative, and above all optimistic view of the achievements and future potential of democratic politics.

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