
Introduction

Contemporary politics and policy-making in the commonwealth of Pennsylvania are the products of its formal and informal governmental institutions as well as the unique personalities of the men and women who participate in its political arena. As William Penn stated in his preface to the First Frame of Government of Pennsylvania (1682), “Governments, like clocks, go from the motions men give them, and as governments are made and moved by men, so by them are they ruined too. Wherefore governments rather depend upon men than men upon governments.”¹

Penn correctly concluded that people create governments, which require maintenance by the people. Those constructing governmental institutions bring with them their history, cultural heritage, and diverse personal experiences. They hoped that what they fashioned would endure. It is a testament to the skills of Pennsylvania’s founders that their government has endured for over 340 years, leading us to conclude that whatever the current turmoil that swirls within its political system, its foundation remains solid.

Our goal in this book is to present a clear, cohesive, and, we hope, engaging explanation of how Pennsylvania’s government and politics work to an audience of political amateurs and professionals, students, and citizens. Combining the elements noted above—institutions, processes, and personalities—we present the material and attempt to answer interesting questions that our audience may ask. For example, How are laws made? How are our tax dollars spent? What, if anything, makes the Keystone State’s political culture unique? How has its long history contributed to the development of America’s basic constitutional rights and privileges?

To answer these questions, we draw on a variety of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include legislative documents, constitutional texts, court decisions, and government agency records. News articles, historical texts, and previous research on Pennsylvania politics and government comprise the secondary sources. The sources are complemented by personal interviews with former and current elected officials, appointed and career administrative officials, party leaders, lobbyists, directors of research agencies and nongovernmental associations, and prominent political commentators and reporters.

We also employ a theme to bring coherence to our book: institutionalism. In political science, institutionalism, as a theoretical perspective, posits that one must understand institutions if one is to understand governments, because their norms, rules, and structures

profoundly shape a political system's behavior and its ability to function. By applying this perspective to Pennsylvania's institutions, both formal and informal, we hope to demonstrate how significant they are for maintaining democracy. To understand the ins and outs of Pennsylvania's political system, therefore, one must understand its institutions, as they have held the commonwealth together for over three centuries. Though periodically tested by natural disasters, social upheavals, political corruption, and pitched political conflicts, these institutions provided stability, allowing the state to weather each challenge. In response to each crisis, Pennsylvanians modified their institutions, notably by constitutional amendments but also via legislation, so that the state would be better prepared to confront future crises. Recent events, however, have severely tested the Keystone State's institutions. Together, the COVID pandemic and the 2020 presidential election placed extraordinary burdens on the institutions such that they tore at their very fabric: the governor and his administration's authority were repeatedly challenged, the General Assembly battled with the governor and its own deep internal divisions were exposed to the public, the legitimacy of court decisions was questioned and the public's trust in the courts eroded, the parties became more intensely at odds than at any time since the Civil War, and whatever faith the people had in political journalists to report the news objectively appeared to vanish. While we believe that Pennsylvania's institutions will withstand these latest tests, we leave it to our readers to form their own opinions.²

With institutionalism as our theme, each chapter opens with an introduction that gives an overview of the chapter's subject, followed by an explanation of the subject's significance and function within the state's political system. The subject's role and its powers or influence are next considered. Finally, specific policy examples are woven within the discussion of current issues along with the interviews to expose the "why" behind Pennsylvania's policy and electoral choices.

Pennsylvanians and many historians consider the commonwealth to be the birthplace of America's government. Therefore, we begin with a chapter that traces Pennsylvania's historical development from the time of William Penn, through four frames of government, the state's first constitution, the Civil War and Reconstruction, and two World Wars, ending with the 1968 constitutional revisions. Chapter 2 explores Pennsylvania's political culture with an eye toward regional and rural and urban differences. Chapter 3 introduces the reader to elections and how they function, as well as three informal institutions: political parties, interest groups and their lobbyists, and news media. Chapter 4 surveys the state's legislature: the General Assembly. We consider who its members are, how they came to be elected, and the legislature's structure and operation, as well as the consequences of the assembly's actions. Chapter 5 describes the duties and functions of the state's chief executive, while chapter 6 fleshes out the remainder of the executive branch and the state's many administrative offices. Chapter 7 reviews Pennsylvania's unified judicial system: its organization, membership, and place within the political system. Chapter 8 places Pennsylvania within the federal system by discussing the tensions between states' rights and

federal powers. Chapter 9 captures the complexity of Pennsylvania's local government system, including its sixty-seven counties and numerous municipalities. Lastly, chapter 10 presents a case study of the struggles and policy choices that confronted Pennsylvania's political system during the COVID-19 crisis and the 2020 presidential election. These simultaneously occurring events placed inordinate pressure on the state's political institutions that, upon examination, revealed their strengths and weaknesses.

We trust that our efforts to present a full and colorful portrait of the Quaker State will cause the reader to become more attuned to the state's politics and perhaps decide to participate beyond voting. As Penn noted, governments depend upon the people, but simply observing the government is not supporting it. Active involvement is required.

NOTES

1. US History, Pennsylvania, <https://www.ushistory.org/penn/quotes.htm>.
2. For a fuller understanding of institutionalism, see Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*; Peters, *Institutional Theory in Political Science*; Lowndes and Roberts, *Why Institutions Matter*.

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