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Schattschneider Book Review

Schattschneider’s theory involves conflict and how we use it to our advantage. Chapter 1 describes what is meant by conflict and its spread. The two main parts of conflict are the active people in it and the audience. The audience are the ones who decide what happens regarding the conflict. Schattschneider states that, “This is the basic pattern of all politics”[[1]](#footnote-1). The scope of conflict changes the balance of the forces involved. The change in nature of any conflict could involve others, so the original people have no control. Schattschneider goes on to state, “the balance of the forces recruited will almost certainly not remain constant”[[2]](#footnote-2). The stronger side could win because people do not want to lose or the weaker side could become stronger. These changes can alter the nature of politics. An important factor in all this is the socialization of conflict. The public help decide private affairs and are not specifically interested in expanding the scope of conflict. All we need to know to figure out the scope of conflict is how competitive and visible it is, and how effective the government can be. We interpret political conflicts and their scope how we want them to happen.

Chapter 2 is about the scope and bias of the pressure system. Public interests are those we have in common with a community, while special interests are limited in all ways. We have made our decisions on the opinion we have on a conflict because we have discussed it in public. Schattschneider goes on to state that, “In the nature of things a political conflict among special interests is never restricted to the group most immediately interested”[[3]](#footnote-3). The pressure system refers to the organized special interest groups. Business is a large part of the pressure system and is upper-class. A critique, though, is economic determinism which is “to identify the origins of conflict and to assume the conclusion”[[4]](#footnote-4). Private conflicts are thrown to the public, so that the first people involved cannot win. This socialization of conflict is necessary to all politics. By looking at how businesses work, we see that “In this way special-interest politics can be converted into party policy”[[5]](#footnote-5). The Republican Party plays a major role by helping business out.

Chapter 3 discusses the question of whose ideas are we following in the system. To test this, we have to look at public opinion polls to see how significant special interests are in an election. By looking at these numbers, we can see that political mobilization is not perfect from groups like the AFL-CIO. These special interest groups might even have a negative effect because they are detested by some. All of this shows us that, “it is nearly impossible to translate pressure politics into party politics”[[6]](#footnote-6). It is hard to fit the pressure system into our two-party system. These are two different types of politics. We just have to remember that, “In the end, the theories of power and political organization get themselves related to what people want to accomplish”[[7]](#footnote-7).

Chapter 4 is about how we divide ourselves in conflict. Everyone chooses what conflict they think is most important, so few are well-known. This brings power to these specific conflicts. Schattschneider states that, “organization is the mobilization of bias”[[8]](#footnote-8), so this is why we have polarization. Also, substituting conflicts makes it so one is relevant while the other is not. With so many conflicts, they either morph together or become a minority because of tensions. Parties agree with each other for opposite reasons. Power has many uses, so it is not always useful.

Chapter’s 5 & 6 look at examples of how politics have changed and the factor of nonvoters. We looked at the effect of the elections of 1896 and 1892 on American politics. Sectionalism was an example of one-party politics having power, which made party organization harder. Also, we looked at the election of 1932 and the change in American agenda compared to 1912. We saw how our two-party system is competitive. Then, we were shown how people not voting seems to be voluntary. Also, examples of suffrage, the ballot, and our use of majority rule are discussed. The people that decide the game get to put the people they want in it[[9]](#footnote-9). Politics and social life correspond for nonvoters. We are unaware of this most of the time, but it is important. Lastly, modern politics has to deal with a different kind of politics that includes public policy.

Chapter’s 7 & 8 look at how change happens and people’s involvement in it. Unresolvable conflicts help keep the system balanced. The example looked at is between government and business. Businesspeople think they have total power, not just some power over government. This relationship shows us tensions between two different powers for dominance. Through examples, we see how democracy is a power system to rival economic power[[10]](#footnote-10). Then, we see how the role of the people in a political system is determined by conflict. Also, we look at the classical and modern definitions of democracy, and how to understand them. Public opinion is looked at to try to understand everything. We see how “nobody knows enough to run the government”[[11]](#footnote-11). Everyone has some power with this competition. Democracy is competitive in a way that can involve the people in decisions because it is essential. I recommend this book to anyone who wants a greater understanding of the political system in America.

The article, “The secret war on the left between unions and people with disabilities” shows me how a conflict is being played out like Schattschneider showed with the labor conflict. Pennsylvania is going to close the Polk State Center, an institution for developmental disabilities, in the next three years[[12]](#footnote-12). The Center employs about 700 people and this announcement caught the attention of others especially when there was media about the employees not wanting to leave. It turns out that labor and disability rights activists do not get along because the union’s interests hurt those who are disabled. There are unions like AFSCME that fight the closure of these places like the Polk Center that have harmed the disabled[[13]](#footnote-13). These unions and groups for institutionalization are really the minority. They are not looking at how more people are starting to use home and community-based care because they think that labor is being undermined. The reality is that these people are happy. What they need to do is help home-care workers get “higher direct-support worker pay” because this will help lessen the conflict[[14]](#footnote-14). Two different spheres are fighting about who has the power like Schattschneider wrote about.

Another article titled, “The new Ford Mustang is electric. But battery-powered cars raise complicated questions for workers” also illustrates labor conflict how Schattschneider wrote of it. This new electric car means that less workers are needed for its assembly, so it hurts these people. The ones who are still working in this industry are those who work on cars with internal combustion engines, with even that being said to decrease[[15]](#footnote-15). These technology companies coming in to where the unions were do not help in the same way. They hire and pay less, but it is still a job. Eventually these places will have to hire people who are skilled, and labor unions will have a harder time. This is another aspect of the labor conflict today[[16]](#footnote-16).

A third article titled, “How Can Americans Compete with Mexicans Making a Tenth of What They Do?” also looks at the labor conflict. There was a G.M. strike that was resolved but the focus is on how most of the labor has gone to Mexico through part of NAFTA. Congress wants Mexico to form labor unions and collectively bargain like American unions do. They target the auto workers because that is where many people have gone which makes Americans have less jobs and wages[[17]](#footnote-17). The Mexicans work for less, but have been promised reforms, though only on paper. Those fighting this are corrupt unions who are only trying to help employers. We need to see good competitiveness and success for Congress to get onboard with helping Mexico out just like we see in the states[[18]](#footnote-18).

The last article titled, “The Supreme Court May Let Trump End DACA. Here’s What the Public Thinks About It” shows how public opinion works in Schattschneider’s theory. DACA has lots of popular support, despite the possibility of the Supreme Court stopping it. That would make them out of step with public opinion though if they stop the program. The majority of Americans like immigration now more than ever, so people want DACA to stay[[19]](#footnote-19). With the partisan issue, we see that Republicans want something to be done more than Democrats. If DACA ends, it could be an opportunity for Republicans to bring it back with a reform they want, so both sides are happy[[20]](#footnote-20). This public opinion is trying to steer the government toward the solution they think is right like Schattschneider mentioned happens sometimes.

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1. E.E. Schattschneider, *The Semi-sovereign People: A Realist’s View of Democracy in America* (Boston: Wadsworth, 1975), 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Schattschneider, *Semi-sovereign People*, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Schattschneider, *Semi-sovereign People*, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid, 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid, 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid, 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid, 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid, 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid, 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid, 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Sara Luterman, “The secret war on the left between unions and people with disabilities,” *Washington Post*, November 14, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/11/14/secret-war-left-between-unions-people-with-disabilities/#comments-wrapper>. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Luterman, “The secret war.” [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Luterman, “The secret war.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Eli Rosenberg & Faiz Siddiqui, “The new Ford Mustang is electric. But battery-powered cars raise complicated questions for workers,” *Washington Post*, November 19, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2019/11/19/new-ford-mustang-is-electric-battery-powered-cars-raise-complicated-questions-workers/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
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18. Levin & Shaiken, “How Can Americans.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Giovanni Russonello, “The Supreme Court May Let Trump End DACA. Here’s What the Public Thinks About It,” *New York Times*, November 15, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/15/us/politics/daca-supreme-court-polls.html?searchResultPosition=2>. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Russonello, “The Supreme Court.” [↑](#footnote-ref-20)