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This book is about the nature of change in the American political system. President Bill Clinton has often stated his belief that his election was about change, or rather the public's desire for change. But many journalists and academic commentators stress stability: The American system, they say, is particularly designed to thwart major and meaningful change. Moreover, the nature of political, social, and economic change itself has been the source of academic controversy. Emblazoned across the title page of *Principles of Economics*, by the great late-nineteenth-century economist Alfred Marshall, is the Latin phrase *Natura non facit saltum*: Nature does not make leaps. Encapsulating the belief that nature is well-behaved, this aphorism can be traced at least to the biologist Carolus Linnaeus in 1750; but Marshall may have been the first social scientist to popularize it.

In political science, *Natura non facit saltum* comes in various guises. Indeed, many analysts of American government seem compelled to claim that government not only doesn't make leaps, it doesn't make moves. In 1989 *Time* carried a cover story entitled "Is the Government Dead?" It seems that so many politicians were beholden to interest groups, so much money was pouring into image-making in elections, and the institutions of government were enmeshed in so much divided control and deadlock that bold leadership at the national level was impossible. From James Madison's schemes to try to make government less oppressive by making it less active, to James McGregor Burns's classic *Deadlock of Democracy* in the early 1960s, to *Time*'s dead-government claim and Brookings scholars John Chubb and Paul Peterson's book *Can the Government Govern?* (1989), to the present-day claim that government cannot act because the deficit has gotten too big, it has been fashionable to point to the inherent inaction and conservatism of national government in the United States. The most recent entries in the "government can't govern" refrain point to interest groups as the problem—journalist Jonathan Rauch calls it "demosclerosis" (Rauch, 1994).

The pessimism regarding the capacity of U.S. government to make major changes carries over into the more abstract analyses of political scientists. The