Preface

The first edition of *US politics today* was published in 1999, well before the fiercely fought presidential contest of 2000. Inevitably, many of the events that the book charted had happened during the 1980s and early 1990s. The second edition of the book was published in 2004 and took account of the 2000 election as well as the events and developments that followed in the wake of the September 11 attacks. The third edition appeared eight years later in 2012 and took note of Barack Obama's presidential election victory and reviewed the legislation passed during his first term of office.

This edition was written in the wake of Donald Trump's inauguration as the forty-fifth president of the United States. Trump's campaign, for both the Republican nomination and then the presidency itself, was dramatic. It defied the expectations of commentators and tore up much that had been written in the textbooks, including *US politics today*. Studies of the US political process had emphasised the importance of campaign finance, the need for support within the party elites or 'establishments', the making of credible policy commitments, and then the requirement during the months preceding the election that candidates re-orient their campaign away from the base and towards the 'median voter'. Trump broke more or less every rule with seemingly reckless abandon. And yet, of course, he beat 'crooked Hillary' in the Electoral College. The fourth edition of *US politics today* not only incorporates coverage of these developments but also seeks to amend and revise our overall understanding of American political institutions and processes. It thus pays particular attention to Obama's second term and the early stages of the Trump presidency.

The book has a further goal. Alongside the coverage of core topics and themes, it introduces its readers to some of the scholarly debates that are taking place within political science and the theoretical frameworks that are employed. Students, particularly in the run-up to examinations, often search for the 'right' answer. Often, however, there may be a number of 'right' answers insofar as different political scientists take different positions. That should not, of course, be taken to suggest that 'anything goes'. Only some

answers 'go'. To be credible, a line of argument or claim has to be backed by solid and recognised forms of evidence. It should acknowledge its theoretical associations and methodological implications. It has to stand up to scrutiny and its backers must be able to fend off counter-claims and rival arguments. Like other academic disciplines, political science subjects research work and analysis to often intense review processes.

I hope that readers will be able to use these features of the book to take their study of the subject beyond the strict requirements of a particular course specification and develop a sense of the ways in which the study of US politics is changing and developing as it seeks to interpret the rapid and dramatic forms of change that are, as I write, taking place.

I am enormously grateful to Bill Jones, the series editor, and Tony Mason, former commissioning editor at Manchester University Press for their continuing support and encouragement over the years. Could I also thank Helena Geier, who prepared the index with precision and efficiency, and Joe Haining, who copy-edited the manuscript. His meticulous attention to detail and ability to spot the slips and ambiguities that I had missed were invaluable. It goes without saying that the responsibility for errors and omissions is mine alone.

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