

## □ **What is government?**

□ Government: the system for implementing decisions made through the political process; all countries have governments with two main purposes: to provide order and to promote the general welfare

## □ Forms of Government

□ Aristotle distinguished 3 pure types of governments: monarchy (rule by one), aristocracy (rule by the few), and polity (rule by the many)

□ Polity: constitutional republican governments, based on how they allocate power b/w the three branches - presidential systems, follow a separation of powers among branches, parliamentary systems elect chief exec. From the legislature

□ Federal system, unitary system and confederation

□ Federal: power is shared among local, state and national levels of govt.

□ Unitary: all power is held at the national level

□ Confederation: states retain their sovereignty and autonomy but form a loose association at the national level (Article's of Confederation)

## □ **Why do we have government?**

□ To provide order

□ Without govt. there would be chaos

□ Founders of constitution wrote in preamble that two central roles of govt. are to "provide for the common defense" and "insure domestic tranquility" [basically govt. is necessary to provide security]

□ Founders also wanted to "establish justice, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity"

□ Madison saw factions as being opposed to the common good and feared tyranny by a faction imposing its will on the rest of the nation.

□ Separation of powers divides the govt. into 3 branches (executive, legislative, and judiciary) and assigns distinct duties to each branch

□ Checks and balances gives each branch some power over the other two

□ Federalism divides power by allotting different responsibilities to local, state and national govt.

□ To promote the general welfare

□ Stated in preamble

- Collective action problems: situations in which members of a group benefit by working together to produce an outcome, but the individual is better off refusing to cooperate and reaping benefits from those who do the work (hinder promotion of general welfare)
- Positive externalities: benefits created by public good that are shared by the primary consumer of the good and by society more generally
- Free rider problem: incentive to benefit from others' work w/out making a contribution, which leads individuals in a collective action situation to refuse to work together
- **What is politics?**
- Politics: the process that determines what government does
- Politics is conflictual:
- Making govt. policy involves issues on which people will disagree, making compromise difficult
- Although compromise will be difficult, it is often necessary to produce an outcome that can be enacted
- Political processes matter
- Elections determine who represents citizens in govt.
- Rules and procedures determine who has power in Congress and other branches of govt.
- Politics is everywhere
- Decisions about what govt. should do and who should be in charge are integral to society and influence the everyday lives of Americans
- Peoples' political behavior is similar to their behavior in everyday life
- **Sources of conflict in American life**
- Economic interests:
- The U.S. ranks 91 out of 194 countries in terms of income equality
- But the U.S. remains committed to the free market and economic individualism
- Free market: economic system based on competition among businesses w/out govt. interference
- Economic individualism: autonomy of individuals to manage their own financial decisions w/out govt. interference
- Democratic politicians and activists favor redistributive tax policies: using taxation to attempt to create greater social equality (higher taxation of the rich to provide programs for the poor)

- They're also more inclined to regulate industry to protect the environment and worker and product safety
- Republicans favor low taxes and less spending on social policies
- They're more supportive of the free market and less inclined to interfere with business, although many Republicans favor regulation of individual behavior, such as abortion and gay marriage
- Cultural values:
  - Culture wars: political conflict in the U.S. b/w "red-state" Americans, who tend to have strong religious beliefs, and "blue-state" Americans, who tend to be more secular
  - Many Americans disagree on cultural and moral issues, including "family values"
  - Racial, gender and ethnic differences:
    - Melting pot: the idea that different racial and ethnic groups that come to America, should assimilate into American culture, leaving their native languages, customs and traditions behind
    - As long as racial discrimination is present in our society, race will continue to matter in politics
  - Ideology:
    - Ideology: a cohesive set of ideas and beliefs used to organize and evaluate the political world
    - Conservative vs. liberal
      - Conservative: defined by support for low taxes, free market, and more limited govt. (associated w/ Republicans)
      - Liberal: defined by support for stronger govt. programs, more market regulation and social tolerance (associated w/ democrats)
      - Libertarians: those who prefer very limited govt. and therefore tend to be conservative on issues such as welfare policy, environmental policy, and public support for education, but liberal on issues of personal liberty and social tolerance
      - Also, personal ideologies are not always consistent, someone could be a fiscal conservative but a social liberal
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