Intro to Politics:

Government & You
The Necessity of Gov’t

• "If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place, oblige it to control itself."

By James Madison
What types of governments exist?

- **Autocracy** = monarchy or dictatorship
- **Oligarchy (junta)** = a group of landowners, military rulers, wealthy elite, warlords, etc.
- **Democracy (or a republic)** = participation by the people in the government (social contract exists)
All governments do certain things!

- Governments maintain national defense
- Governments provide public services called, “public goods”
- Governments preserve order
- Governments socialize the young
- Governments collect taxes
What is politics?

- Famous political scientist, Harold Lasswell put it this way:
  “who gets what, when, how.”
- Conflicts over the character, membership, and policies of any organization to which people belong.
- Politics is a struggle for control (power)
- System of determining power, status, and wealth in a society
Who will be allowed to participate?

American System:

• Individuals – thru voter participation (any citizen 18 years old or older)
• Organized groups – political parties, unions, corporations, interest groups, etc.

This is not the case everywhere!
America’s Republican Democracy

• When asked what the founders had created at the Constitutional Convention (1787), Ben Franklin responded, “A republic if you can keep it.”

• In a republic, we elect “policymakers” to establish a priorities list

• This list of priorities = policy agenda

• Example: 1994 ~ Contract with America
Policy Making Institutions

American System = 3 components

• Congress
• President
• Courts

Policymakers must keep all 3 in mind!

Public policy = decision (or indecision) by any of the three

Political issue = when people cannot agree
Linkage Institutions

Groups that connect or transmit the public’s ideas with the policymakers in Government:

• Political parties
• Elections
• Interest groups (Single Issue ~ PAC’s)
• Media
Is our system working?

According to Traditional Democratic Theory, an “ideal” democratic system should possess the following:

- Equality in voting
- Effective participation
- Enlightened understanding
- Citizen control of the agenda
- Inclusion
What best describes the current status of our system?

- Pluralist theory = competing interest groups that organize efforts to influence the agenda
- Elite theory = society divided along class lines; the upper-class elite pulls the strings of the gov’t
- Hyperpluralism = many competing groups are so strong that government has been brought to a stand still (policy gridlock)
Summary

• Many types of systems
• Republican Democracy
• Do we measure up to our ideal?
• How is our system supposed to work versus how is it currently working