

# 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
- Politics focuses on the process

# 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