

AP US Gov Notes --- Chapter 1

Introduction

- Politics and government matter
- Americans are apathetic about government
 - Our youth are not likely to be informed about government and rarely participate in politics

Government

- Definition: institutions and processes through which public policies are made for a society
- This definition leads to 2 basic questions
 - How should we govern?
 - What should the government do?
- Governments typically:
 - Maintain a national defense
 - Provide services (public goods)
 - Collect taxes
 - Preserve order
 - Socialize the young (schools)

Politics

- Definition: process by which we select our governmental leaders and what policies they produce
- Politics produces authoritative decisions about public issues
- Lasswell's definition "Who gets what, when, and how."

The Policymaking System

- Definition: the process by which policy comes into being and evolves over time
- People → Linkage Institutions → Policy Agenda → Policymaking Institutions → Policy → People

People

- Interests
- Concerns
- Problems

Linkage Institutions

- Definition: political channels through which people's concerns become political issues on the policy agenda
- Political parties
- Elections

- News and entertainment media
- Interest groups

Policy Agenda

- Definition: issues that attract the serious attention of public officials
- Political issues arise when people disagree about a problem and how to fix it
- Some issues will be considered, and others will not
- A government's policy agenda changes regularly

Policymaking Institutions

- Definition: Policymaking institutions are the branches of governments charges with taking action on political issues
- Legislature (Congress)
- Executive (President)
- Courts (Federal and State)
- Bureaucracies (Federal and State)

Policies Impact People

- Public Policy: a choice that government makes in response to a political issue
- Impacts of policies:
 - Does it solve the problem?
 - Does it create more problems?
- Depending on the answer, policy impacts carry the political system back to its point of origin: the concerns of the people

Democracy

- Definition: system of selecting policymaking and of organizing government so that policy represents and responds to the public's preferences
- Components of Traditional Democratic Theory
 - Equality in voting
 - Effective participation
 - Enlightened understanding
 - Citizen control of the agenda
 - Inclusion
- **Majority Rules:** in a democracy, choosing among alternatives requires that the majorities desire be respected
- **Minority Rights:** guarantees rights to those who do not belong to a majority

Theories of US Democracy

Pluralist Theory

- Theory that politics is mainly a competition between groups, each one pressing for its own preferred policies
- Groups will work together
- Public interest will prevail through bargaining and compromise

Elite and Class Theory

- Theory contending that societies are divided along class lines and that an upper-class elite will rule, regardless of the formal niceties of governmental organization
- Not all groups are equal
- Policies benefit those with the most \$ and power

Hyperpluralism

- Theory contending that groups are so strong that government is weakened
- Groups control policy and prevent the government from acting
- Difficulty in coordinating policy implementation
- Confusing and contradictory policies result from politicians trying to placate every group

Challenges to Democracy

Increased technical expertise

- Experts with their technical knowledge overshadow the knowledge of the general population

Limited participation in government

- Americans care little about politics

Escalating campaign costs

- Political Action Committees (PACs) fund some campaigns
- PACs care only about what they want, so politicians will listen to them lest they be denied reelection \$

Diverse political interests (policy gridlock)

- Too many groups and people want policies for their issues
- May conflict
 - Resulting in a Policy Gridlock – little gets done

American Political Culture and Democracy

- Political Culture: an overall set of values widely shared within a society
- Fundamental values of democracy:

Liberty

- Freedoms of speech and religion

Egalitarianism

- Involves equality of opportunity
- Americans have never been equal
- Everyone has a CHANCE to be rich – not everyone WILL be rich

Individualism

- Belief that people can, and should, get ahead on their own

Laissez-Faire

- Promote free markets and limited government
- In terms of the American government's impact on citizen's everyday lives, it has done less than governments of other nations
 - Other nations' governments are responsible for airline, telephone companies, healthcare, and building homes

Populism

- Political philosophy supporting the rights of average citizens in their struggle against privileged elites