Ch 1: introducing government in america

Politics, Democracy

Ch 1: Introducing Government in America * Many young ppl apathetic about politics, less involved than elderly * Need to be involved for political tolerance, identify what policies they benefit from * Politics compete with TV and the internet Government * Government: institutions + processes through which public policies are made for a society (Congress, president, the courts, federal administrative agencies) * 500, 000 elected officials in US * How should we govern? * What should the gov. do? * Maintain a national defense * Provide public services * Schools, hospitals, * Public goods: goods everyone must share (clean air and water, highways) * Preserve order * Socialize the young * Instill national value among the young (Pledge of Allegiance) * Collect taxes * Determine how much we should spend on edu. or defense through politics Politics * Politics: process by which we select our gov. leaders and what policies these leaders pursue, produces authoritative decisions about public issues (who gets what, when, how) * Who: voters, parties * What: benefits and burdens (medical care, taxes) * How: voting, lobbying * Political participation: all activities used by citizens to influence the selection of political leaders or the policies they pursue. (voting, protests) * Low voter turnout has an effect on who holds power * Single-issue groups: groups that have a narrow interest, dislike compromise, draw membership from ppl new to politics (ex: focus only on abortion) Policymaking System * Policymaking System: process by which policy comes into being and evolves over time. ppl's interests, problems, and concerns create political issues for gov. policymakers. These issues shape policy, which impacts ppl, generating more interests, problems, and concerns. People Shape Policy * People start with a problem * Linkage institution: political channels through which ppl's

concerns become political issues on the policy agenda (parties, elections, media, interest groups) * Policy agenda: issues that attract the serious attention of public officials and other ppl actually involved in politics at any given point in time * Political issue: an issue that arises when ppl disagree about a problem and how to fix it * Never a shortage, but the gov. will not act unless it is high on policy agenda * Policy making institutions: branches of gov. charged with taking action on political issues. The US Constitution est. Congress, president, courts. Political scientists consider bureaucracy a fourth. * Policymakers scan the issues on the policy agenda, select those they consider important, and make policies to address them * Few policies are made by a single policy making institution * President urges clean air policies, Congress passes the legislation, bureaucracies implement it, can be challenged in the courts Policies Impact People * Public policy: choice that gov. makes in response to a political issue. A course of action taken with regard to some problem. * Policy Impacts: effects a policy has on ppl and problems. Impacts are analyzed to see how well a policy has met its goal and at what cost. Democracy * Global move towards democracy * Democracy: a system of selecting policymakers and of organizing the government so that policy represents and responds to the public preferences * Writers of con. believed ppl should not participate in gov., now we do * Gov of the ppl, by the ppl, for the ppl? Traditional Democratic Theory * Equality in voting: "one person, one vote" must be representative * Effective participation: citizens must have equal opportunities to express preferences * Enlightened understanding: free press and speech * Citizen control of the agenda * Inclusion * Gov. must include and extend rights to all those subject to its

laws * Majority rule: a fundamental principle of traditional democratic theory. In a democracy, choosing among alternatives means the majority's desire must be respected. * Minority rights: a principle of traditional democratic theory that guarantees rights to those who do not belong to majorities and allows that they might join majorities through persuasion and reasoned argument. * Representation: a basic principle of traditional democratic theory that describes the relationship b/t the few leaders and many followers 3 Contemporary Theories of American Democracy 1. Pluralist Theory: a theory of gov. and politics emphasizing that politics is mainly a competition among groups, each one pressing for its own preferred policies * Ex: National Rifle Association, National Organization for Women * No one group dominates * Public interest will eventually in the making of public policy through a complex process of bargaining and compromise * Rather than speaking of majority rule we should speak of groups of minorities working together * Alex de Tocqueville: Interest groups are a positive development * Robert Putnam: problems stem from a decline in group participation i. Ppl participating alone, not in groups 1. Elite and Class Theory: a theory of gov. and politics contending that societies are divided along class lines and that an upper-class elite will rule, regardless of the formal niceties of governmental organization * Poor get food stamps but businesses get large tax deductions * 1% of population holds a third of the nation's wealth ii. They are the policymakers; finance campaigns, corporate giants 2. Hyperpluralism: a theory of gov. and politics contending that groups are so strong that gov. is weakened, an exaggerated form of pluralism * Groups that lose in Congress take it to the courts * Like other theories, public

interest is translated into messy if any public policy Challenges to Democracy * Increased Technical Expertise * Democratic theory does not require citizens to be experts on everything * Difficult for citizens to make well-informed decisions * Limited Participation in Government * Americans know little about leader and their policy decisions * Escalating Campaign Costs * A House seat needs half a million dollars * PACs fund campaigns, members listen to PACs for money for reelection * Diverse Political Interests * Policy gridlock: condition that occurs when no coalition if is strong enough to form a majority and est. policy, nothing gets done American Political Culture and Democracy * Political culture: an overall set of values widely shared within a society * What holds diverse Americans together * Lipset says they are: * Liberty * " Live free or die" * Freedom of speech and religion , unalienable rights * Egalitarianism * Involves equality of opportunity and respect in the absence of a monarchy and aristocracy, political equality * Individualism * Belief that ppl can and should get ahead on their own (without help from gov) * Laissez-faire * Free market and limited gov. * US devotes a smaller % of its resources to gov. * Populism * Political philosophy supporting the rights of average citizens in their struggle against privileged elites * Siding with ordinary ppl against big interests is so valued that politicians claim this A Culture War? * Different political cultures , political division is a major problem * Encourages our enemies, disheartens our allies * Others disagree, public has grown more central on issues Preview Questions About Democracy * Elected officials must be responsive to public opinion * Bureaucracy and the courts were not elected, but they can't avoid making public policy, are they violating democratic principles for policy

decisions? * Is the scope of gov. responsibilities too vast, right, or not comprehensive enough? The Scope of Government in America * Those that support gov involvement in matters such as healthcare argue that intervention is the only way to achieve goals, others disagree How Active is American Government? * Gov. spends 29% of our gross GDP * Gross domestic product: sum total of the value of all the g+s produced in a nation * Spends 3 trillion annually, own 1/3 of land in US * When taxes do not grow as fast as spending, a budget deficit results * National debt: over $9 trillion Preview Questions about the Scope of the Government