Chapter 1

People and Government

•People have asked questions about government for centuries…

•The big one we’ll discuss is What is the state?

–The Greeks were the first serious students of politics and government.

–The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle famously wrote, “man is a political animal.”

–Aristotle carefully analyzed what he observed in society.

–For example, in a democracy Aristotle observed, “He who has the power to take part in the deliberative or judicial administration of any state is said to be a citizen of that state.”

–In the modern world, the word state identifies a political community in a precise territory.

–A state has what is called sovereignty…

–Which means, its government makes and enforces its own laws without approval from any other authority.

–The Greeks passed their beliefs on to the Romans.

–The Romans had a republic…

–meaning government was representative of certain groups, but it was not a democracy.

–The United States is one of 193 sovereign states recognized by the U.N.

–The term nation means a sizeable group of people who believe themselves united by common bonds of race, language, custom or religion.

Essential Features of a State

1. Population-the *nature* of a state’s population affects its stability. States where people share a consensus (or agreement) about basic beliefs and values have the most stable governments.

•Another way population affects a state is through its *distribution*. States that are mostly urban are likely to have different policies than those that are more rural. Also, shifts in population make a difference as well.

•Ex) When a state’s population changes in the U.S., its representatives in the House of Representatives change.

2. Territory-All states have established boundaries. These boundaries may change as a result of war, purchase or negotiation.

3. Sovereignty-this is the key characteristic of a state.

•Political sovereignty means the state has supreme and absolute authority within its boundaries.

•In theory, no state has the right to interfere with the internal affairs of another state.

•In reality, however, states with great economic strength and military capabilities have more power than other states.

4. Government is the institution through which a state maintains social order, provides public services and enforces decisions that are binding on all its residents.

•How did the state come to be? Theories to explain the origins of the state:

1.Evolutionary Theory-idea that the state evolved from the family. Ex) Abraham’s descendants in the Old Testament.

2. Force Theory-idea that a state emerged when everyone in an area was brought under the authority of one person or group. In essence, the state was born of force because people cooperated to survive. 3. Divine Right Theory-idea that certain people are chosen by a god or gods to rule.

•This is the oldest theory dating back to the ancient Egyptians, Chinese and Aztecs.

•The term “divine right” refers particularly to European monarchs in the 1600 and 1700s who claimed their right to rule came from God alone and to oppose them was to oppose God.

4. Social Contract Theory-challenges began to develop against the Divine Right Theory.

•Among the earliest were Thomas Hobbes and John Locke.

•They believed that in every society there existed a “state of nature” when there’s no government.

•To create a government, a social contract was made between a ruler and the ruled.

•Thomas Hobbes:

–Life is nasty, brutish and short

–There’s no decent life without order

–People surrender their freedom to the state and in return they receive order and security

–As long as the government keeps the deal, people can’t break the contract

•John Locke:

–Belief in natural rights-rights to life, liberty and property

–Contract between people and government that promised to preserve those natural rights

–If government breaks contract, people have the right to rebel.

–*Americans cite Locke’s social contract when they revolted against King George III.*

Purposes of Government:

1.To maintain social order-conflict is an inescapable part of life.

•According to the social contract theory, civilized life would be impossible without government.

•Government controls and contains conflict between people by placing limits on what individuals are permitted to do.

2. Providing public services-these are services that no one person could provide.

•Ex) building sewer systems, laying utility lines, paving roads and creating water supply systems.

3. Providing national security-protecting people against attack by other states or from threats such as terrorism. This also includes handling the day-to-day relations with other nations.

4. Making economic decisions-governments usually try to stimulate economic growth and stability by controlling inflation, encouraging trade, and regulating the development of natural resources.

Governments derive their authority from 2 sources:

1.Legitimacy-the willingness of citizens to obey the government.

•In democratic countries, legitimacy is based on the consent of the people as expressed through the vote.

•Ex) Americans know that if their elected officials fail to respond to their interests, they can be voted out of office. Therefore, the people trust their government with power.

2. Force-derives from certain institutions of the state: police, judiciary (courts), and military.

•The government can force people to pay taxes and can punish offenders by imposing fines or imprisonment.

The relationship between a nation’s central government and its smaller government divisions can be described in 2 ways:

1.Unitary system-system of government that gives all key powers to the central government.

2. Federal system-system of government that divides the powers of government between the national and state or provincial government.

•Which type does the U.S. have? (Federal) What type did we originally have, before the Constitution?

•Confederacy or confederation-a loose union of independent states.

•Why did it fail?

•It failed to provide an effective national government because the power was spread too thin. The central government wasn’t powerful enough.

•When the confederacy failed, the Founding Fathers created the constitution-a plan that provides the rules of government.

•A constitution has several major purposes:

1. It sets out ideals that the people bound by the constitution believe in and share

2. It establishes the basic structure of government and defines the government’s powers and duties

3. It provides the supreme law for the country

•The U.S. constitution was drawn up in 1787 and is the oldest written constitution still serving today.

•Great Britain is an example of a country with an unwritten constitution based on hundreds of years of legislative acts, court decisions and customs.

•The term constitutional government refers to a government in which a constitution has authority to place clearly recognized limits on the powers of those who govern…Thus, it is a limited government.

•Constitutions are incomplete for 2 reasons:

1.No written constitution can possibly spell out all the laws, customs and ideas that grow up around the document.

•Ex) There’s no way that in 1787, the Founding Fathers could have included issues like abortion. What’s one way we “fix” this?

•Amending-procedure of changing, or adding to, the constitution.

2. A constitution does not always reflect actual government practice.

•Most constitutions contain a statement that sets forth the goals and purposes that the government will serve. This statement is called the preamble.

•There are many different types of governments that can be defined in many ways. According to Aristotle, all governments belong to one of 3 major groups:

1. Autocracy-system of government in which one person has all the authority and power to rule. Ex) the czars of Russia who ruled until 1918

•Monarchy-form of government in which one person has great power, but a monarch’s power has often been limited in some way by tradition or law.

–Louis XIV of France became an absolute monarch meaning his power was unlimited. In practice, it was the same as autocracy.

•Dictator-also a single ruler but this term emphasizes the fact that this person rules by force and by dictate alone.

•Totalitarianism-a special type of single-ruler government.

–Here the ruler attempts to control the total society.

–Ex) Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin-tried to control civil society (civilian life).

–A political term for totalitarianism is fascism (name comes from Mussolini’s Fascist Party in Italy 1922-43.)

2. Oligarchy-any system of government in which a small group holds power. Oligarchs derive their power from their wealth, social position, military power, or a combination of these.

3. Democracy-a system of government in which rule is by the people, either through representatives or directly.

•A direct democracy is a government in which all citizens cast a vote directly on government issues and laws.

•(This can only take place in small societies where it’s practical for everyone to assemble, discuss and vote.)

–In an indirect or representative democracy, the people elect representatives and give them the responsibility to make laws and conduct government.

–This is the most efficient way to ensure that the rights of individual citizens, who are part of a large group, are represented.

–In a republic, the head of state is not a king or queen, and voters elect *representatives* to run the nation’s government.

–Only a small percentage of the people might be empowered to vote, however, without participation a republic will not work.

–The U.S. has a democracy that is a republic.

•We are a democracy because our citizens participate by voting and serving in government offices. We are a republic because we have representatives that represent us in the government.

•(Not all democracies are republics. Great Britain, for example, is a constitutional monarch.)

Characteristics of a Democracy:

1. Individual liberty-the goal of democracy is that all people be as free as possible to develop their talents.

2. Majority rule with minority rights-democracy requires that government decisions be based on the will of the majority.

–The American concept of democracy includes a concern about tyranny of the majority and so the Constitution aims to protect the rights of minorities as well.

–(Understand that this was not the case in the beginning-SLAVES!)

•Korematsu v. United States(1944)-followed the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the government imprisoned more than 100,000 Japanese-Americans in relocation camps because of fear that they would be disloyal. 70,000 of these were American born citizens. Some people saw this as a violation of individual rights, however, the government’s actions were upheld (supported, agreed with) in this Supreme Court case.

•Ex Parte Endo v. United States(1944)-this is a landmark case. In 1942, a woman named Mitsuye Endo was fired from her job and sent to a government relocation camp. Her lawyer challenged the government and the Court agreed that she should not be held in the camp. The Court agreed that it was a violation of an individual’s Constitutional rights to hold people of Japanese descent in relocation camps.

3. Free Elections-all genuine democracies have free and open elections.

•Several characteristics mark free elections:

–Everyone’s vote carries the same weight (“one person, one vote”)

–All candidates have the right to express their views freely, giving voters access to competing ideas.

–Citizens are free to help candidates or support issues

–The legal requirements for voting, such as age, residence and citizenship, are kept to a minimum. (Race, ethnicity or religion requirements would be discriminatory if they were used to restrict voting. 15th Amendment…)

–Citizens vote by secret ballot without coercion or fear of punishment for their decisions.

4. Competing political parties-A political party is a group of individuals with broad common interests who organize to nominate candidates for office, win elections, conduct government and determine public policy.

•For the most part, the U.S. has had a two-party system.

•However, any number of political parties may compete.

•Parties have 3 functions in a democracy:

1. Rival parties make elections meaningful because they give voters a choice.

2. They focus voters’ attention on the issues by debating them publicly.

3. The minor parties serve as “loyal opposition” meaning they help make the party in power more responsible to the people by criticizing the policies and actions of the party in power.

Essential Elements of a successful Democracy:

1.Citizen participation-democracy requires citizens who are willing to participate in civic life.

2. A favorable economy-a prosperous economy that distributes wealth to many members of society. Having a large middle class signals this kind of economy.

3. Widespread education-democracy is more likely to succeed in countries where most people are educated.

4. A strong civil society-the term *civil society* refers to private, nongovernmental society.

–Examples of American civil society include the American Red Cross, the Humane Society, the NRA, your local church, business groups, etc.

5. A social consensus-democracies are more prosperous when most people accept democratic values such as individual liberty and equality for all.

–They must also generally agree about the purposes and limits of government.