Introduction to the American Political Process

The Role of Government: Institutions and Politics

Central Questions
- What is the purpose of government?
- What should we ask government to do?
- How should we evaluate government?

What should government do?
- Different governments have different standards
- At different times in American history, we have had different answers
  - New Deal
  - Civil Rights

The Duties of Government
- Government needs means of coercion and means of collecting revenue
- But we expect more
  - Public goods
  - Property rights
  - Assure democracy
  - Protect individual liberties
  - Resolve disputes
  - Define and guarantee justice and fairness
  - Controversies and tradeoffs

Politics and The Control of Government
- Politics: The battle over the right to make decisions concerning the scope and rule of government.
  - “the struggle over who gets what, when, and how”
- This course deals with Government and Politics

Strategizing About Campaign 2000
One candidate wins the popular vote, the other wins the electoral vote. What happens?

**Winner of Electoral Vote:** “Then we win. You play by the rules in force at the time.”
**Vs.**

**Losers of Electoral Vote:** “The one thing we don’t do is roll over. We fight.”

**Strategy:** In league with the campaign - which is preparing talking points about the Electoral College’s essential unfairness - a massive talk-radio operation is encouraged.
The American System

- The Backdrop of the Constitution: Articles of Confederation
  - The Confederation (1781-1787)
  - Power with States
  - In sum: A big mess
- Constitutional Convention
  - Compromise

Structure of Government

- Federal System
- Presidential/Congressional system
- SOP/Checks and Balances
- Republicanism
- Textual Government
- Cabinet
- Independent Judiciary
- Bill of Rights

Structure of Government (cont.)

- Flawed by design
- Interaction of Government and Politics