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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