**Unit 1: Foundations of Government and Political Theory**

**Ch 1: Introduction to Government.**

**1 Why Do Governments Exist?**

At its core, **government** exists to provide order, protect individual rights, and promote the common good. Governments perform an array of functions: from defending the nation and enforcing laws to maintaining infrastructure like roads and bridges, regulating the economy, and delivering public services like education and healthcare. While people may disagree about how much government is needed or which functions are most important, few would say we should abandon organized government altogether.

Famous Political thinkers have long debated the purpose of government. John Locke argued that government’s role is to protect “life, liberty, and property.” Others, like Thomas Hobbes, emphasized the need for government to prevent anarchy and provide order.

In the United States, the Preamble to the Constitution outlines six purposes of government: to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty.

**Key Terms and Definitions**

| **Term** | **Definition** |
| --- | --- |
| **Government** | The institution through which a society makes and enforces public policies. |
| **Public Policy** | All the things a government decides to do, such as taxation, defense, and education. |
| **Order** | The maintenance of peace and security through law enforcement and conflict resolution. |
| **Liberty** | The state of being free within society from oppressive restrictions. |
| **Social Contract**  **Politics** | The theory that individuals give up some freedom to a government in exchange for protection and order.  The system of rules and procedures a government uses to distribute resources |

**Active Learning Exercise #1: Government or Not?**

**Orienting Question:**

*What does government actually do, and do we even need it?*

**Objective:**

Students will evaluate the functions of government and debate which are most necessary to society.

**Instructions:**

1. **Start with a Brainstorm (5-10 minutes):**
   * Ask students to list as many government functions as they can think of. Prompt them with areas like defense, law enforcement, roads, education, mail, food safety, etc.
2. **Group Activity: “Build-a-Government” (20 minutes):**
   * Divide students into small groups.
   * Give each group a limited budget (e.g., 100 “government points”).
   * Present a menu of government services and their “costs” (see sample below).
   * Groups must decide how to spend their points to create a functioning government for a fictional country.

**Sample Government Menu (simplified for clarity):**

* + National Defense – 30 points
  + Police and Fire Protection – 20 points
  + Public Education – 20 points
  + Healthcare System – 25 points
  + Transportation Infrastructure – 15 points
  + Environmental Regulation – 10 points
  + Welfare Programs – 15 points
  + Government Transparency & Anti-Corruption Agency – 10 points
  + Tax Collection Agency – 10 points

1. **Debrief Discussion (10 minutes):**
   * Have each group present their government and justify their choices.
   * Discuss:
     + Which functions did every group choose?
     + Which services were often cut?
     + How did values influence your priorities (e.g., safety, liberty, equality)?
     + What are the consequences of underfunding certain areas?
2. **Individual Reflection Assignment (Optional):**
   * Prompt: *“In your view, what are the three most important functions of government and why? Are there any you think government should not be involved in?”*
   * Write a 1–2 paragraph response.

**Review Questions**

1. What are three basic purposes of government?
2. How does the Preamble to the Constitution describe the goals of government?
3. Why might different people disagree about what functions the government should perform?
4. What is the "social contract," and how does it relate to the purpose of government?
5. Why is legitimacy important for a functioning government?