

# **GOVT2305: Federal Government**

## **Lecture 2: What is government? What is politics?**

Instructor: Tom Hanna, Spring 2025

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### **Agenda and Announcements**

#### **Agenda**

- Today
  - What is Government? What is politics?
  - Discussion: Experiences with Government
  - Questions
- Next class (Monday):
  - Basic ethics
  - Discussion of personal ethics
- Tuesday:
  - Constitutional Safeguards
  - Ethics and limits on government discussion (why do we need Constitutional safeguards)

#### **Assignments Due**

- Journals July 14
  - Chapter 1: Political Thinking and Political Culture: Becoming a Responsible Citizen
  - Chapter 2: Constitutional Democracy: Promoting Liberty and Self-Government
- Journals July 15:

- Chapter 3: Federalism: Forging a Nation
- Chapter 4: Civil Liberties: Protecting Individual Rights
- Study Guide Module 1
  - Due July 15
  - Quiz July 15 in class

## **Introduction to Government**

### **Introduction to Government**

To really understand government and politics we first need to know what those things are.

#### **Introduction Government: Questions to consider**

What is government or “The State”?

#### **A word on words**

- Government can mean multiple things
  - The specific group of people in charge of...
  - The enduring institution or organization we government
- State has at least three meanings
  - International: State = independent country
  - United States: State = one of the 50 states
  - Political Science: State = government
- Politics
  - The process of making collective decisions in the context of the state or government

#### **What is government?**

How can we define government?

- What government does?

## **What is government?**

How can we define government?

- What government does?
  - Then what is politics?
- What makes government unique?
  - What does this make politics?

## **What government does?**

Before stepping on the campus today, what was the last time that politics made a difference in your life?

## **What is politics?**

- Expensive or involves large amounts of money
- Distant
- Involves politicians or campaigns
- involves voting or decision making
- Involves rights
- National borders
- Controversial

## **What is politics: State and local (mostly)**



Figure 1: Houston Public Works

## **What is politics: Federal, state and local**



Figure 2: Metro rail

## **What is politics: Federal, state and local**



Figure 3: HCC Central Campus

## **What is politics?**

- Not distant
- immediate,right here
- touches everything
- direct impacts are constant
- involves all of us
- It can be expensive, but it's not always about money

## **Politics is powerful**

- Immense power to achieve good ends

## **Politics is powerful**

- Immense power to achieve good ends
- Immense power to do incredible harm

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- Immense power to achieve good ends
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## **Politics is powerful**

Why does politics have such power to cause harm?

## **What does government do?**

These are all examples of *collective action*, organized action by a group of people to achieve a common goal.

## **What makes government different?**

What makes government or The State different from other organizations? Is collective action unique to government?

## **Other organizations - Group 1**

- Family
  - What does it have in common?
  - What is different?

## **Other organizations**

- Family
- Church
  - What does it (government) have in common?
  - What is different?

## **Other organizations**

- Family
- Church
- Community organizations (voluntary)
  - What does it have in common?
  - What is different?

## **Other organizations**

- Family
- Church
- Community organizations (voluntary)
- Charities
  - What does it have in common?
  - What is different?

## **Other organizations**

- Family
- Church
- Community organizations (voluntary)
- Charities
- Businesses - The Market
  - What does it have in common?
  - What is different?

## **Other organizations - Group 2**

- Organized crime
  - What does it have in common?
  - What is different?

## **Other organizations**

- Organized crime
- vigilantes
  - What does it have in common?
  - What is different?

## **Other organizations**

- Organized crime
- vigilantes
- terrorists
  - What does it have in common?
  - What is different?

## **Other organizations**

- For the Group 1 organizations, how can they enforce their rules?

For the Group 2 organizations, who are they responsible to and how do we view their use of force?

## **What is “the state”?**

**The organized, coercive use of violent force commonly accepted as legitimate**

- organized
- Coercive use
- violent force (armed force)
- Legitimacy

## **Introduction Government: Questions to consider**

What is politics?

### **What is politics?**

- Politics is the process of making collective decisions in the context of...

### **What is politics?**

- Politics is the process of making collective decisions in the context of...

The State or government.

### **The difference between politics and everything else**

These organizations all engage in collective action and collective decision making, but lack one thing the state has:

- Family
- Church
- Community organizations (voluntary)
- Charities
- Businesses - The Market

### **The difference between politics and everything else**

These organizations all engage in collective action, but lack one thing the state has:

- Family
- Church
- Community organizations (voluntary)
- Charities
- Businesses - The Market

### **Coercive use of violent force**

## **Studying other organizations**

Family, church, the market, etc. are all about making collective decisions in:

### **The Voluntary Sphere**

## **Politics is about**

Making collective decisions in:

### **The Coercive Sphere**

## **Politics is powerful**

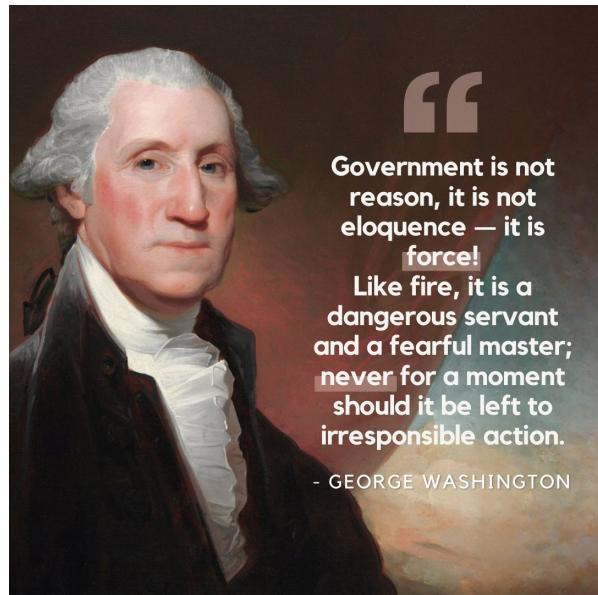


Figure 4: George Washington

## **Politics is powerful**

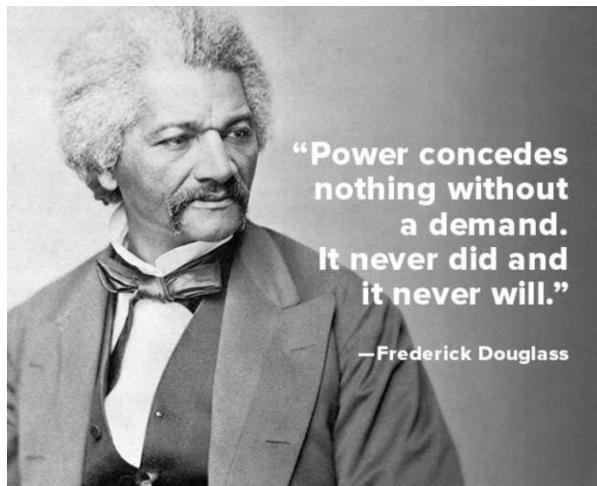


Figure 5: Frederick Douglass

## **Canvas and e-Book Overview**

### **Questions**

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