

APGoPo Unit 4

STRUCTURE OF OUR GOVERNMENT

In a democratic society, **political parties**, **elections**, **interest groups**, and the **mass media** are key linkage institutions between the preferences of citizens and the government's policy agenda. When people confront government officials with problems they expect them to solve, they are trying to influence the government's policy agenda. A government's policy agenda changes frequently: if public officials want to get elected, they must pay attention to the problems that concern the voters.

People, of course, do not always agree on what government should do. Indeed, one group's concerns and interests are often at odds with those of another group. A political issue is the result of people disagreeing about a problem or about the public policy needed to fix it.

Four policymaking institutions - **Congress**, the **presidency**, the **bureaucracy**, and the **courts** - stand at the core of the political system. They make policies concerning some of the issues on the policy agenda. Translating people's desires into public policy is crucial to the workings of democracy. Public policy is a choice that government makes in response to some issue on its agenda. Public policy includes all of the decisions and nondecisions of government: policymakers can establish a policy by doing something or by doing nothing, as can be seen in the government's original response of inaction to the AIDS crisis.

