Introduction: Crash Course U.S. Government and Politics

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===== Introduction=====

Hi, I'm Craig. I'm not John Green, but I do have patches on my elbows so I seem smart, and this is Crash Course Government and Politics. A new show, hooray!

Why are fireworks legal or illegal? We might find out. Will we find out, Stan?

Anyway, I have a question for you. Have you ever wondered where you tax dollars go? Or why people complain about it so much? Or who pays for the highway that runs past your house? Or why you use the textbooks you use in science class? Or why you need a license to drive, or to hunt, or to fish, or to become a barber? I've always wanted to cut my own hair, back when I had it.

Have you ever wondered why you have to be 21 years old to drink alcohol, but only 18 to vote, or gamble? Sometimes voting is a gamble. Actually, always. Do you get confused when you hear people on the news talk about Wall Street regulations, or ObamaCare, or the national debt? Do you wonder why there are so few cell phone carriers and cable companies?

How about why it's okay for student groups to lead prayers in schools, but not for the principal to do so? Have you ever wondered if there are any limits on when, where, and how the police can search your home, or your car, or your locker, or you, or your friend, or your grandma, or your grandma's friend? And do you know why you can stand outside of a government office with a sign and a bullhorn complaining about military action that you think is unfair, and the police can't stop you, but you can be fired from your job for doing the exact same thing?

Have you ever been sued or fined? Ever wondered what the difference is between being sued or being fined? Have you ever wondered why our government does the things it does, and doesn't do other things? Have you ever wondered what it would be like if we had no government at all? That would be an anarchy. Can we play the Sex Pistols, Stan? That's probably illegal. Why is is illegal?

And probably most important, have you ever thought about how you can change the things that seem unjust or unfair, or that you just don't like?

Okay, so that was more than one question, and obviously there isn't a single answer to all of those questions, except that, in a way, there is. The study of government and politics! And that's what we are going to talk about today, and this whole series - Crash Course Government and Politics! Aptly titled.

(Intro)

=====Why Study Government? (1:57)=====
So let's start by doing what human beings do when confronted with complicated questions they can't answer: we'll answer a simpler one. In this case, what are government and politics, and why do I need to learn about them?

Government is a set of rules and institutions people set up so that they can function together as a unified society. Sometimes we can call this a state, or a nation, or a country, or Guam. And I'll use these terms somewhat interchangeably - except for Guam, that might be a little confusing.

So, we study government in order to become better citizens. Studying government enables up to participate in an informed way. Anyone can participate, but doing so intelligently, that takes a little effort. And that's why we need to learn about how our government works.

Politics is a little different. **Politics** is a term we use to describe how power is distributed in a government. And in the US, it basically describes the decisions about who holds office, and how individuals and groups make those decisions.

Following politics is a lot like following sports, in that there is a winner and a loser. And people spend a lot of time predicting who will win, and analyzing why the winner won and the loser lost. The outcome of an election might affect your life more than the outcome of a sports game, though. Unless you're gambling. Which might be illegal.

Government is really important. Everyone born in America is automatically a citizen, and many people choose to become citizens every year so that they can have a say in the government.

The USA is a **republic**, which mean that we elect representatives to govern us, and a **democracy**, which means that citizens are allowed to participate.

This ability to participate is something we take for granted, but we shouldn't. History tells us that citizen participation is the exception rather than the rule - but we're not going to look at history; who has time? That's what history courses are for, with that other guy!

So one way that people can participate in government is through voting. And many people will tell you that that's pretty much the only way that we can participate in government or politics. But *they're wrong*! And I love pointing out when people are wrong.

Let's go to the Thought Bubble.

=====Thought Bubble: Ways to Participate (3:29)=====

Sure, when you mark a ballot, you are participating in the political process, but there are so many other things you can do to be an active citizen.

You can contact your representatives and tell them what you think about a political issue. People used to do this by writing letters or sending telegrams, but now they tend to call or send email, although there is nothing like a good, old fashioned angry letter.

People can work for campaigns, or raise money, or give money. They can display yard signs, or bumper stickers; they can canvas likely voters, try to convince them to vote, or even drive them to the polls on Election Day. You participate in politics when you answer a public opinion poll, or then you write a letter to the editor, or comment on an online article.

You participate in politics when you blog, or tumble, or make a YouTube video, or tweet, I guess even YouTube comments count. First!

Ever been to a march, or a rally, or held a sign, or worn a t-shirt with a slogan on it, or discussed an upcoming election at the dinner table and tried to convince your parents who to vote for? You've participated in the **political process**. And if you've actually run for office, you've participated, even if you didn't win, and if you did win, congratulations! Now get back to work; you should already know this.

But probably the most important thing that you can do to participate in government and politics is both the easiest and most challenging - become more educated. Anyone can be a citizen, but to be a good citizen requires an understanding of how the government works, and how we can participate. It requires knowledge and effort, and

we have to do it, because otherwise we end up being led rather than being leaders.

We learn about politics because knowledge is our best defense against unscrupulous people who use our ignorance to get us to do the things that they want, rather than what we think should be done.

Thanks, Thought Bubble.

=====In This Course (4:49)=====

That was my first Thought Bubble narration. HOORAY! You guys are fun. This is fun.

So that's where we come in. Over the course of this series, we will be looking in depth at American government and politics. We'll be talking about things like the structure and function of the branches of government, the division of power between the national government and the state governments, what political parties are, what they do, and how they are different from interest groups.

We'll examine the role the media plays in government and politics, how the legal system and the courts work, and how they protect civil rights and civil liberties. We'll look at political ideologies, what it means to say you're a liberal or a conservative, or a libertarian, or a socialist, or an anarchist. Okay, we probably won't talk about anarchy, because that's sort of the rejection of government. Again, sex pistols?

Can't, it's a copyright issue. I'll take care of it. Anarchy, whoo! (punches eagle) I've been known to do that from time to time.

We'll try to understand the forces that are shaping American government and politics today, and we'll work towards becoming more involved in developing our knowledge, so that we can make out government more responsive, and our politics more inclusive.

By the end of this series, and actually before the end, you will actually understand how our government works, and how you can make it work better for you, and your community. Not only will you be able to answer most of the questions I started this episode with, but you will become, if you pay attention and think for yourself, a more engaged and active citizen, and you might have a beard! If you don't shave.

Next week, we'll talk about Congress, how it works, and what it does, when it does anything.

Thanks for watching; I'll see you next week. And that's my first Crash Course episode. Are we out of poppers, Stan? Wait, I'll just throw them. Whoooo! Woo! bang, whoooo! bang, bang, whoooo!

=====Credits (6:18)=====

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Crash Course was made by all these nice people. Thanks for watching. Can we call it Craig Course, Stan? No? Crash Course Craig? Mm-mm, can't.