

MEANING AND SCOPE OF GOVERNMENT

THE THREE MAIN MEANINGS OF GOVERNMENT

1. GOVERNMENT AS AN INSTITUTION OF A STATE.

Government refers to the set of institutions and structures legally set up by the state to manage its affairs. It is the machinery through which the will of the state is formulated, expressed and attained. The institutions of government responsible for carrying out the political task of a state include the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. The legislature makes laws to regulate the conduct of people in the state, the executive implements laws and policies of the state and the judiciary is responsible for the interpretation of laws.

Government as an institution is responsible for the provision of social services. It does this through the various ministries, corporations, local governments and other agencies. It is also responsible for the creation of employment opportunities. This is carried out by the executive through the ministry of labour and employment and the various extra- ministerial agencies. Again, through established institutions such as ministry of foreign affairs and other agencies, government maintains cordial relationship with other countries. Besides that, the executive through the police and other security agencies ensures that law and order is maintained in the state.

2. GOVERNMENT AS AN ACADEMIC FIELD OF STUDY

Government is also an academic field of study. It is a social science subject that is taught in schools and colleges as well as higher institutions. In tertiary institutions, it is popularly referred to as Political Science. Government as an academic field of study involves the study of political institutions and theories which deal with acquisition and use of political power. Other courses studied under government include the study of International Relations, Political Economy, Conflict Resolution, Local Government, Political Thought, Public Administration, and Comparative Politics.

3. GOVERNMENT AS A PROCESS OR AN ART OF GOVERNING

Government as an art of governing is the process of carrying out the day-to-day administration of the affairs of a state. The art or process of governing includes the day-to-day activities carried out by the three organs of government namely the legislature, the executive and the judiciary to achieve the aims of government. It encompasses (includes or involves) making, enforcing and interpreting laws.

SUMMARY OF THE MEANINGS OF GOVERNMENT

- i. Government can be defined as a body of persons or agency through which laws are made, interpreted and enforced in a state.
- ii. Government refers to the study of political institutions and theories which deal with acquisition and use of political power.
- iii. Government is the art or process of carrying out the day-to-day administration of the affairs of a state.

REASONS FOR THE STUDY OF GOVERNMENT/WHY GOVERNMENT IS IMPORTANT AS AN ACADEMIC FIELD OF STUDY.

- i. **It helps the citizens to know their duties and obligations in a state:** The study of government helps the citizens to know their duties and obligations in a state. For instance, through the study of government, citizens are made to know why they should pay tax, why it is necessary for them to protect public properties; defend the country and be law abiding.
- ii. **It promotes Political participation/Interest in the governance of our country:** The study of government promotes political participation. Thus, it stimulates and arouses the interest of the people in the activities of the government and prepares them to take active part in the political process of their country. Its study enables the individuals to take active part in the political affairs of their country such as voting during elections, belonging to a political party, contesting in elections to hold public office and constructively criticizing the unpopular policies of the government.
- iii. **It helps us to know the successes and failures of our past leaders:** The study of government in schools and colleges enables those who study it to know the successes and failures of our past leaders. For example, a lot of us were not born during Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's regime, but through the study of government, we can easily outline almost all the achievements and failures of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah.
- iv. **Helps citizens to know their fundamental human rights and freedoms defend them when violated:** The study of government helps citizens to know their fundamental human rights and freedoms and redress when those rights are infringed upon or violated. Examples of these rights and freedoms include the right to privacy, the right to life, movement and freedom of speech.
- v. **Helps the individuals to understand the various systems of government:** The study of government helps the individuals to understand the systems of government such as Presidential and parliamentary systems government and recommend the best type for their country. This is possible through a comparative study of the various systems of government.

- vi. **Inculcates the consciousness of nationalism and patriotism in the people:** The study of government enables individuals to develop consciousness of nationalism and patriotism. Thus, it enables the individuals to love their country, and to defend its sovereignty
- vii. **Promotes understanding of the economic and social systems:** The study of government helps the citizens to know and understand the type of economic and social systems in their country.
- viii. **Equips people interested in politics with knowledge:** The study government equips people interested in politics with knowledge to become professional politicians. Such people embark on effective and goal-oriented campaigns devoid of insults and personality attacks.
- ix. **It widens citizens political horizon:** The study of government widens citizens' political horizon. This makes them understand and appreciate the system of government practised in their country.
- x. **Makes the citizens understand the importance of joining international organizations:** The study of government makes the citizens understand why the government of their country belongs to some international organisation such as Commonwealth of Nations, ECOWAS, UNO, and AU.
- xi. **It provides career opportunities for those who study it:** The study government offers individuals who study it the opportunity to get jobs in the state. Its study makes people secure jobs such as Government tutors or lecturers of political Science, politicians, lawyers, etc.
- xii. **Helps the individuals to understand the processes of managing the state:** The study of government enables the individual to understand the processes by which the affairs of the state are managed. Thus, people get better insight on how the state is run through the study of government
- xiii. **It helps us to know what is happening in and outside our country:** The study of government helps us to know what is going on in our country and around the world.

FEATURES OR CHARACTERISTICS OF GOVERNMENT

- i. **Supremacy of government laws:** The laws made by government are superior to and above all other laws made by individuals, associations and clubs.
- ii. **Non-permanency:** Governments come and go but a state remains unchanged. No government in this world rules permanently. A government may rule for quite a reasonable period of time but one day its authority would be replaced by another government. For example, in Ghana, J.J Rawlings government made way for Kufour's government after the 2000 presidential election and Kufour's government also made way for Atta Mill's

government after the 2008 presidential election. This attests to the fact that no government is permanent.

- iii. **Monopoly over the use of force:** A government has monopoly over the legitimate use of force which enables it to compel people to obey its laws. The government exercises this through established institutions such as courts, police, military and other law enforcement agencies.
- iv. **Laws of the government bind everyone:** A rule made by an association, club or a religion binds only its members but the laws of the government binds everyone found in its territory be it a citizen or an alien.
- v. **Its authority encompasses everyone living in its territory:** One's subjection to authority of an association, club or a religion is not compulsory but voluntary. However, one's subjection to the authority of government is compulsory or involuntary. Whether one likes it or not, so far as he lives in the territory of a state, be it a citizen or an alien, is subject to the authority and control of the government of the country.

FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNMENT/WHY GOVERNMENT IS IMPORTANT AS AN ART (PROCESS) OF GOVERNING / INSTITUTION OF A STATE

- i. **Maintenance of law and order:** The basic function of every government is to maintain peace, law and order in a state. A government establishes institutions such as the police force, other security agencies and the Judiciary for the maintenance of peace, law and order.
- ii. **Maintaining friendly external relations with other states:** A government is responsible for maintaining good rapport (friendly relation) with other states so that in times of needs it can rely on them. The executive through the appropriate ministries like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other agencies ensures that a good friendly external relation with other states is maintained.
- iii. **Enactment of laws:** A government is expected to make laws for regulating the conduct of people in the country. Without laws, citizens may do whatever they like which could result in anarchy, chaos or disorder in the state. The laws of the government are enacted by the legislature.
- iv. **Provision of social amenities (social services):** It is the duty of a government to provide social amenities or services for its citizens. Examples of social amenities a government is expected to provide include building hospitals, schools and providing recreational facilities.
- v. **Creation of job opportunities:** A government is responsible for creating job opportunities in the country. The government does this by establishing firms or by encouraging and regulating private enterprises to establish firm in order to reduce the unemployment rate in

the country.

- vi. **Defence of the country against external aggression:** It is the duty of government to defend the country against any external aggression (attack). This is the primary duty of the Armed forces namely, the Navy, the Army and the Air Force.
- vii. **Protection of Citizens:** A government is responsible for protecting the citizen of his country against any attack. Internally, the government protects the citizens through the police and court of laws. Externally, the citizens are protected against attack through the armed forces namely the Army, Navy and the Air Force.
- viii. **Promotion of economic activities in the country:** Another duty of government is to promote the economic and social development of the country. The government does this by setting up public corporations to provide the goods and services needed by the people at moderate prices. Another means is by encouraging private entrepreneurs to produce goods and services needed by the people. To promote good economic development, it is also the duty of the government to provide the necessary physical infrastructure such as good roads and electricity.
- ix. **Regulating economic activities:** A government through ministerial and financial institutions like the Central Bank regulates economic activities in the state.
- x. **Administering justice:** The government ensures that justice prevails in the country. The government does this through the judiciary.
- xi. **Formulation and implementation of policies:** Government formulates and implements policies in the country. This is carried out by the executive.

INSTITUTIONS THAT PERFORM THE FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNMENT

- **Maintenance of law and order:** This is carried out by the executive through the police, other security agencies and the judiciary.
- **Maintaining friendly external relations with other states:** This is carried out by the executives through the appropriate ministries like the ministry of foreign affairs and other agencies.
- **Enactment/making of laws:** This is carried out by the legislature/parliament.
- **Provision of social amenities (social services):** This is carried out by the executive through the various ministries, corporations, local government etc.
- **Creation of job opportunities:** This is carried out by the executive through the various extra-ministerial agencies.
- **Defending the country against external aggression:** The executive protects and defends the state through the Armed Forces namely, the Army, Navy and Air Force.

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- **Promotion of economic activities:** This is carried out by the executive through appropriate ministries.
- **Regulating economic activities:** This is carried out by the executive through ministerial and financial institutions like the Central Bank.
- **Administering justice:** This is carried out by the Judiciary.
- **Formulation and implementation of policies:** This is carried out by the executive/cabinet.

ACTIVITY

- Put students into groups to discuss the functions of government and make presentations.
- Invite resource persons from the various institutions that perform the functions of government to highlight more on their roles.

TRIAL QUESTIONS

- Q1). Explain what is meant by government as an academic field of study
- Q2.a) Define government as an academic field of study
- b) Describe any three branches of government as an academic field of study.
- Q3.a) Outline three functions of government
- b) Identify the institutions that perform these functions (WASSSCE, 2006;
- Q4.a) What is government?
- b) Give any five reasons for the study of government (WASSSCE 2007,
- Q5). In what six ways is government important as an institution of the state? (WASSSCE, NOV/DEC 2009; Q1)
- Q6). Explain government as an institution of a state (WASSSCE NOV/ DEC2010; Q1)
- Q7). Identify any five features of government.
- Q8.a) Define government as an institution of a state
- b) Highlight any five functions of government (WASSSCE NOV/DEC 2011, Q1).
- Q9. State five reasons for the study of government (WASSSCE MAY/ JUNE 2014, Q1)