

My Definition of Government

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To some economists, governments exist for the re-distribution of wealth. That may be true, or at least was before we formed our “government of, for, and by the people” but to me it exists simply to protect and to serve its citizens. The idea came to me while going through a museum where an old police car was on display. They used to put those words on the doors of police cars, but unfortunately, they do not any more. I think if they did, and we saw those words every day, we might think differently about our government.

To Protect

Essentially, we all need security. Security comes in different forms and some people may prioritize the different forms of security differently. Our founding fathers mentioned things in the Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution, and Bill of Rights that elude to the different forms of security. Even back then, there was a deep understanding of the peoples’ needs?

The three main forms of security are financial, physical, and emotional. I will explain what I mean by these terms. There are many sub-forms of security that fit under each of these. I may not be able to list them all, and you may think of others, but you will get the idea as we go along.

Physical security is probably the easiest one to explain, so I will start there. We all need to be physically secure and many things supply that security. We have a military

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that protects us against foreign invaders, and various law enforcement agencies that protect us from criminals. Besides those protecting us from other people and entities, we also need protection from natural disasters and the elements. Our fire fighters, the Coast Guard, and Emergency Medical Services are good examples of that kind of protection.

Many people would stop there, but I include:

- Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)
- Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
- US Department of Agriculture (USDA)
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)
- Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC)

I include them in the same category because they protect us physically from tainted drugs, food, and other consumer products as well as protect us against transportation accidents. I might also include the National Weather Service (NWS) because they help protect us from severe weather conditions by warning about them.

Financial Security is a bit more difficult to explain. We are a society based on monetary transactions. If we have enough money, we can feel secure, but we do not always have enough to make us feel that way. Our government provides some security in this area by making sure we have a safety cushion when we run into financial trouble. The government provides financial assistance when necessary in the form of Medicaid, food stamps and other welfare programs. What about when a disaster happens? That is when the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) is there with grants and loans. What about when we want to attend college or buy a house? The government

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is there too by backing low interest loans or with grants. The government also provides assistance when we get older or are disabled, with Medicare and Social Security. They even help us save money by allowing for tax deference with 401K's, 403B's and IRA's, and by protecting our savings and investments with the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) and the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). If you want to start or expand your small business, they help with the Small Business Administration (SBA). Have an idea for a new invention or have created something you want to get credit or royalties for, remember the U.S. Patent Office is there to help. There are countless other agencies, but you get the idea.

Emotional security is much more difficult to define. Some people might call it piece of mind, but essentially to me it incorporates all of the things that the government protects us with such as laws and rights written into the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights. We have the right to free speech, freedom of assembly and religious beliefs, and the right to an attorney (when we can't afford one), and the right to remain silent. When we feel that the government is not working correctly, we have the right to vote. In addition, of course, we have the right to bear arms. All of these rights contribute to our piece of mind. We expect these rights to be upheld, and when they are not, our security is threatened or diminished. All of these rights are free to us in that we do not have to pay to be citizens, but they are not free to maintain. Those free attorneys have to be paid somehow. Someone needs to pay the court officials to uphold your rights. Someone also has to pay for the law enforcement officers that protect you when someone else threatens your rights.

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In fact, every one of these security-providing entities requires money to exist. First, there are the legislators that write and pass the laws that set up the policies for the organizations to follow to provide those protections. Then there are the governmental entities that provide those protections. No matter how much you hate government, there is no way that you have not benefited from at least some of the security measures provided by it.

We all need protection from some other person or group that whether on purpose or not has or will attempt to harm you in some way because they are looking out for their own interests and not yours. We all look out for number one, and sometimes for others as well. The government is there to look out for all of us, when no one else will.

And Serve

Whether we like to admit it or not, we all enjoy the benefits of at least some of the government's services too. If you have ever driven on a public road, crossed a public bridge, attended public school, entered a public building, or borrowed a book from the public library, you have benefited. Besides all of the protections listed in the previous section, you count on the fact that those protections are there just in case you need them. If you listen to the radio or watch television over the public airways, you are benefiting from governmental regulations on those industries. You may hate the fact that the government has regulations, but without them, you would not be where you are today. Without regulations, anyone could set up shop as a doctor, lawyer, psychologist, or financial advisor. How would you know whom to trust with your health or your money? Who would provide you with money to use in exchange for goods and services without

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the government? Would you rather barter for that car, house, food, utilities, gasoline, and other supplies you need to live? I don't know about you but my homeowners association doesn't allow me to raise chickens (to barter with).

While it is often maligned, the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) is an incredible pseudo-government agency. People often complain about slow service and especially about the USPS when the price of a stamp goes up by a penny or two. How many actually stop to think how much value you are getting for those 42 cents? Many people say that FedEx or UPS do a better job, yet they do not stop to consider that those private organizations are out to make a profit. They forget that the USPS stops at everyone's mailbox six days a week, whether they have something to be delivered or not. That is the communications lifeline for millions of Americans. The private companies do not come close to delivering the billions of letters and packages that the USPS does, and certainly not for the low prices, we pay for the service. I used to own and operate a pack and ship retail store, where customers came to me to pack and ship their letters and packages around the world via FedEx, UPS, DHL, or the USPS. Usually they wanted their item shipped the cheapest way, but refused to go a half mile down the street in either direction to one of the two post offices (each in different cities). Yet, when given the choice of shipper, they would choose for me to send it via the USPS even with my additional markup over and above the postal rates. Some people wanted the convenience of a tracking number that the private companies give them, not noticing that the USPS offered a similar service for less. Lately, the USPS is considering reducing their service to fewer days per week, saying that costs are too high to keep up their 6 days of service. I say, stop the penny-at-a-time postage hikes and make it an even 50 cents. The added money

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can go towards things that could help them be more efficient with what they have.

Shouldn't every post office have solar panels on the roof? Shouldn't every postal vehicle be a plug-in hybrid? There is not one person who will read this document that can claim they don't utilize the services of the U.S. Postal Service. It is still one of the best values around.

There are so many services offered by the government, it is overwhelming. Books have been written to tell people about all of the services offered and "free money" available to people. Each and every one of those services was created because some one or group requested it and the government was the best place to provide it. Sometimes it is because the government has gathered information that belongs to all of us or because it would be too cost prohibitive for individuals to set up the same service for themselves. If you want to start a business or import products from another country, there are government agencies with information and assistance to help you get started or be able to better compete in the world market. I like to think of it as the government is the biggest buyers club around and we are all members, able to take advantage of the economy of scale. We cannot all build and maintain our own roads, police and fire departments, schools, libraries, and so on. Instead, we decided to do it as a group and provide it to the public for little-to-no cost in comparison.

Conclusion

Every single law on the books was written because some one or group of people did something to harm some one else, or because some one or group requested it to prevent something bad from happening to some one. If you look at the history of every

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single law, you will find that is true. The law may be indirectly because of such an event, such as a law in the tax codes helping to pay for protections or services, but they all have a reason. The reasons may have been eliminated and the laws may have reasons to be repealed, but they had a purpose when they were first written.

As we have seen recently, some laws are not very effective because they have been watered down by the process of compromise and negotiation, but every clause in those laws was written by someone to make sure some one or group of people wanted addition protections, safeguards, or limitations included. If we were all perfectly good to everyone else as the good book says, we would not have to worry about needing protection from others. If we were all wealthy or nothing had a cost and were readily available, we would not need the government's services either. The problem is that we do not live in a perfect world and nothing is truly and completely free, so we need government to help us in our pursuit of happiness.