

Section Preview

OBJECTIVES

1. Define government and the basic powers every government holds.
2. Describe the four defining characteristics of the state.
3. Identify four theories that attempt to explain the origin of the state.
4. Understand the purpose of government in the United States and other countries.

WHY IT MATTERS

Government is essential to the existence of human beings in a civilized society. What any particular government is like and what that government does have an extraordinary impact on the lives of all people who live within its reach.

POLITICAL DICTIONARY

- ★ government
- ★ public policy
- ★ legislative power
- ★ executive power
- ★ judicial power
- ★ constitution
- ★ dictatorship
- ★ democracy
- ★ state
- ★ sovereign

Today, the United States is at war. That war—the war against terrorism—is a new and a different kind of war, against a new and a different kind of enemy. The conflict began with sudden and shocking violence on September 11, 2001, when terrorists hijacked four airliners. They crashed two of them into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City and another into the Pentagon. The heroic actions of the passengers on the fourth plane forced it to crash in western Pennsylvania, short of its intended target, which was probably in Washington, D.C. The government, acting with the full support of the American people, began to respond to that monstrous assault immediately. President Bush vowed that the nation will “answer these attacks and rid the world of [the] evil” of terrorism. Congress quickly authorized the President to use “all necessary and appropriate force” against those who brought on this war.

Government in this country is now focused on the fight against terrorism, both at home and abroad. Still, government has many other and important tasks to perform. It must provide for education, guard the public’s health, and protect the environment. It must also pave the streets, punish criminals, protect civil rights, care for the elderly, and do much, much more.

What Is Government?

Government is the institution through which a society makes and enforces its public policies. Government is made up of those people who exercise its powers, those who have authority and control over people.

The **public policies** of a government are, in short, all of those things a government decides to do. Public policies cover matters ranging from taxation, defense, education, crime, and health care to transportation, the environment, civil rights, and working conditions. The list of public policy issues is nearly endless.

Governments must have power in order to make and carry out public policies. Power is the ability to command or prevent action, the ability to achieve a desired end.

Every government has and exercises three basic kinds of power: (1) **legislative power**—the power to make law and to frame public policies; (2) **executive power**—the power to execute, enforce, and administer law; and (3) **judicial power**—the power to interpret laws, to determine their meaning, and to settle disputes that arise within the society. These powers of government are often outlined in a country’s constitution. A **constitution** is the body of fundamental laws

setting out the principles, structures, and processes of a government.

The ultimate responsibility for the exercise of these powers may be held by a single person or by a small group, as in a **dictatorship**. In this form of government, those who rule cannot be held responsible to the will of the people. When the responsibility for the exercise of these powers rests with a majority of the people, that form of government is known as a **democracy**. In a democracy, supreme authority rests with the people.

Government is among the oldest of all human inventions. Its origins are lost in the mists of time. But, clearly, government first appeared when human beings realized that they could not survive without some way to regulate both their own and their neighbors' behavior.

The earliest known evidences of government date from ancient Egypt. More than 2,300 years ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle observed that "man is by nature a political animal."¹ As he wrote those words, Aristotle was only recording a fact that, even then, had been obvious for thousands of years.

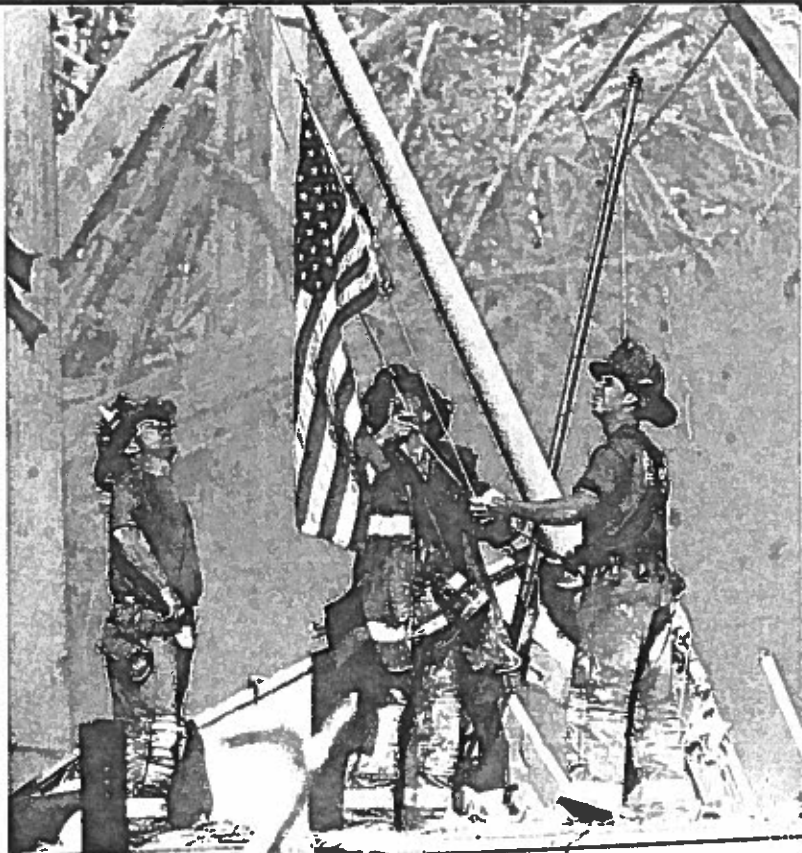
What did Aristotle mean by "political"? That is to say, what is "politics"? Although people often equate the two, politics and government are very different things. Politics is a process, while government is an institution.

More specifically, politics is the process by which a society decides how power and resources will be distributed within that society. Politics enables a society to decide who will reap the benefits, and who will pay the costs, of its public policies.

The word *politics* is sometimes used in a way that suggests that it is somehow immoral or something to be avoided. But, again, politics is a *process*, the means by which government is conducted. It is neither "good" nor "bad," but it is necessary. Indeed, it is impossible to conceive of government without politics.

The State

Over the course of human history, the state has emerged as the dominant political unit in the world. The **state** can be defined as a body of people, living in a defined territory, organized politically (that is, with a government), and with the power to make and enforce law without the consent of any higher authority.



▲ **Patriotism in a Time of Crisis** Americans showed their pride in their country and support for their government in the wake of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

There are more than 190 states in the world today. They vary greatly in size, military power, natural resources, and economic importance. Still, each of them possesses all four characteristics of a state: population, territory, sovereignty, and government.

Note that the state is a legal entity. In popular usage, a state is often called a "nation" or a "country." In a strict sense, however, the word *nation* is an ethnic term, referring to races or other large groups of people. The word *country* is a geographic term, referring to a particular place, region, or area of land.

Population

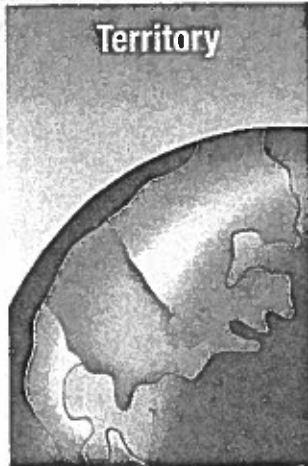
Clearly, a state must have people—a population. The size of that population, however, has nothing directly to do with the existence of a state. One of the world's smallest states, in population terms, is San Marino. Bounded on all sides by Italy, it has only some 27,000

¹In most of the world's written political record, the words *man* and *men* have been widely used to refer to all of humankind. This text follows that form when presenting excerpts from historical writings or documents and in references to them.

The Four Characteristics of the State



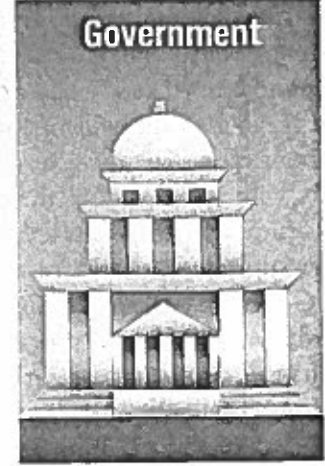
Population



Territory



Sovereignty



Government

Interpreting Charts To be considered a state, a group of people must have a defined body of land and an independent, sovereign government. *Does your school qualify as a state? If not, which requirements does it lack?*

people. The People's Republic of China is the world's most populous state with more than 1.3 billion people—just about one fifth of the world's population. The more than 285 million who live in the United States make it the world's third most populous, after China and India.

The people who make up a state may or may not be *homogeneous*. The adjective *homogeneous* describes members of a group who share customs, a common language, and ethnic background. Today, the population of the United States includes people from a wide variety of backgrounds. Still, most Americans think of themselves as exactly that: Americans.

Territory

Just as a state cannot exist without people, so it must have land—territory, with known and recognized boundaries. The states in today's world vary as widely in terms of territory as they do in population. Here, too, San Marino ranks as one of the world's smallest states. It covers less than 24 square miles—smaller than thousands of cities and towns in the United States.²

Russia, the world's largest state, stretches across some 6.6 million square miles. The total area of the United States is 3,787,425 square miles.

Sovereignty

Every state is **sovereign**—it has supreme and absolute power within its own territory and can decide its own foreign and domestic policies. It is neither subordinate nor responsible to any other authority.

Thus, as a sovereign state, the United States can determine its form of government. Like any other state in the world, it can frame its economic system and shape its own foreign policies. Sovereignty is the one characteristic that distinguishes the state from all other, lesser political units.

The States within the United States are not sovereign and so are not states in the international, legal sense. Each State is subordinate to the Constitution of the United States.³

Government

Every state is politically organized. That is, every state has a government. Recall, a government is the institution through which society makes and

²The United States also recognizes the State of Vatican City, with a permanent population of some 850 persons and a roughly triangular area of only 109 acres. The Vatican is wholly surrounded by the City of Rome. American recognition of the Vatican, which had been withdrawn in 1867, was renewed in 1984.

³In this book, state printed with a small "s" denotes a state in the family of nations, such as the United States, Great Britain, and Mexico. State printed with a capital "S" refers to a State in the American union.

enforces its public policies. A government is the agency through which the state exerts its will and works to accomplish its goals. Government includes the machinery and the personnel by which the state is ruled.

Government is necessary to avoid what the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) called “the war of every man against every man.” Without government, said Hobbes, there would be “continual fear and danger of violent death and life [would be] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” The world has seen a number of examples over recent years of what happens when a government disappears: In Lebanon, Bosnia, Somalia, and many other places, life became “nasty, brutish, and short.”

Origins of the State

For centuries, historians, philosophers, and others have pondered the question of the origin of the state. What factor or set of circumstances first brought it into being?

Over time, many different answers have been offered, but history provides no conclusive evidence to support any of them. However, four theories have emerged as the most widely accepted explanations for the origin of the state.

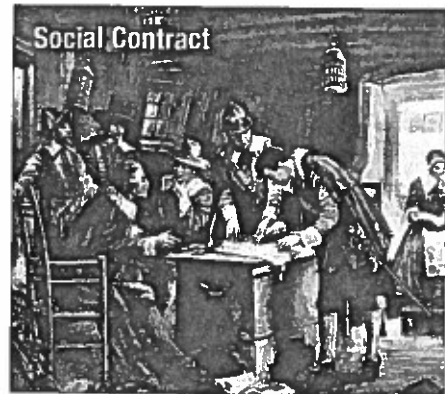
The Force Theory Many scholars have long believed that the state was born of force. They

hold that one person or a small group claimed control over an area and forced all within it to submit to that person’s or group’s rule. When that rule was established, all the basic elements of the state—population, territory, sovereignty, and government—were present.

The Evolutionary Theory Others claim that the state developed naturally out of the early family. They hold that the primitive family, of which one person was the head and thus the “government,” was the first stage in political development. Over countless years the original family became a network of related families, a clan. In time the clan became a tribe. When the tribe first turned to agriculture and gave up its nomadic ways, when it first tied itself to the land, the state was born.

The Divine Right Theory The theory of divine right was widely accepted in much of the Western world from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries. It held that God created the state and that God had given those of royal birth a “divine right” to rule. The people were bound to obey their ruler as they would God; opposition to “the divine right of kings” was both treason and mortal sin.

During the seventeenth century, philosophers began to question this theory. Much of the thought upon which present-day democratic government rests began as a challenge to the theory of divine right.



◀ Different explanations have been offered for the origin of the state. Pharaoh Akhenaton of Egypt (middle) believed that power flowed from Aton, the god of the sun disk. **Critical Thinking Can** more than one of these theories accurately explain the origin of the state? Explain why or why not.

The notion of divine right was not unique to European history. The rulers of many ancient civilizations, including the Chinese, Egyptian, Aztec, and Mayan civilizations, were held to be gods or to have been chosen by the gods. The Japanese emperor, the *mikado*, governed by divine right until 1945.

The Social Contract Theory In terms of the American political system, the most significant of the theories of the origin of the state is that of the “social contract.” Philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, James Harrington (1611–1677), and John Locke (1632–1704) in England and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) in France developed this theory in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Hobbes wrote that in earliest history humans lived in unbridled freedom, in a “state of nature,” in which no government existed and no person was subject to any superior power. That which people could take by force belonged to them. However, all people were similarly free in this state of nature. No authority existed to protect one person from the aggressive actions of another. Thus, individuals were only as safe as their own physical strength and intelligence could make them.

Human beings overcame their unpleasant condition, says the social contract theory, by agreeing with one another to create a state. By contract, people within a given area agreed to give up to the state as much power as was needed to promote the safety and well-being of all. In the contract (that is, through a constitution), the members of the state created a government to exercise the powers they had voluntarily given to the state.

In short, the social contract theory argues that the state arose out of a voluntary act of free people. It holds that the state exists only to serve the will of the people, that they are the sole source of political power, and that they are free to give or to withhold that power as they choose. The theory may seem far-fetched today. The great concepts that this theory promoted, however—popular sovereignty, limited government, and individual rights—were immensely important to the shaping of the American governmental system.

The Declaration of Independence (see pages 40–43) justified its revolution through the social contract theory, arguing that King George III and his ministers had violated the contract. Thomas Jefferson called the document “pure Locke.”

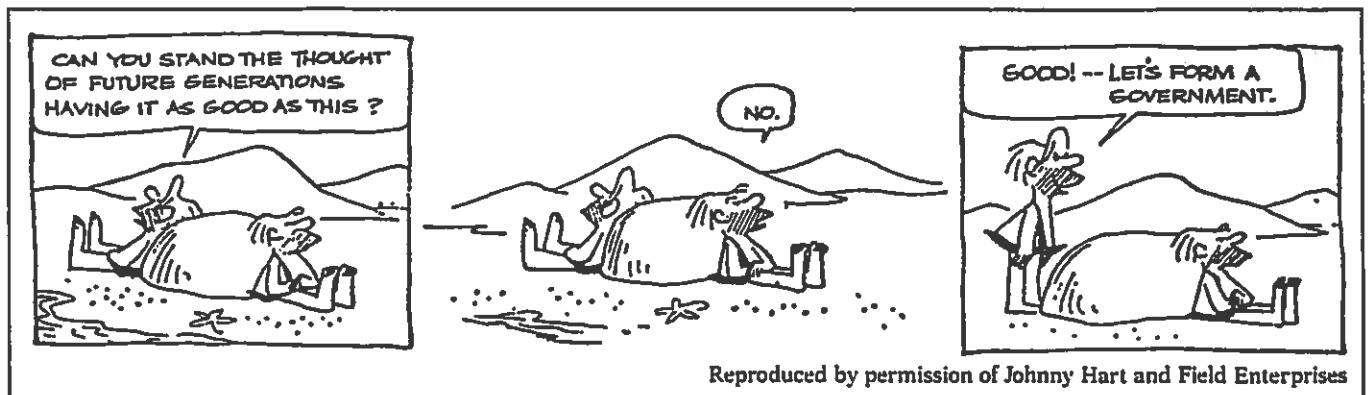
The Purpose of Government

What does government do? You can find a very meaningful answer to that question in the Constitution of the United States. The American system of government was created to serve the purposes set out there.

FROM THE
Constitution

“We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

—Preamble to the Constitution



Reproduced by permission of Johnny Hart and Field Enterprises

Interpreting Political Cartoons American government was influenced strongly by the social contract theory. *How does this cartoon poke fun at that theory?*

Voices on Government

Form a More Perfect Union

The United States, which had just won its independence from Great Britain, faced an altogether uncertain future in the postwar 1780s. In 1781, the Articles of Confederation, the nation's first constitution, created "a firm league of friendship" among the 13 States. That league soon proved to be neither firm nor friendly. The government that the Articles established was powerless to overcome the intense rivalries and jealousies among the States that marked the time.

The Constitution of today was written in 1787. The original States adopted it in order to link them, and the American people, more closely together. That Constitution was built in the belief that in union there is strength.

Establish Justice

To provide justice, said Thomas Jefferson, is "the most sacred of the duties of government." No purpose, no goal of public policy, can be of greater importance in a democracy.

But what, precisely, is justice? The term is difficult to define, for justice is a concept—an idea, an invention of the human mind. Like other concepts such as truth, liberty, and fairness, justice means what people make it mean.

As the concept of justice has developed over time in American thought and practice, it has come to mean this: The law, in both its content and its administration, must be reasonable, fair, and impartial. Those standards of justice have not always been met in this country. We have not attained our professed goal of "equal justice for all." However, this, too, must be said: The history of this country can be told largely in terms of our continuing attempts to reach that goal.

"Injustice anywhere," said Martin Luther King, Jr., "is a threat to justice everywhere." You will encounter this idea again and again in this book.

Insure Domestic Tranquility

Order is essential to the well-being of any society, and keeping the peace at home has always been a prime function of government. Most people can only imagine what it would be like to live in a state of anarchy—without government, law, or order. In fact, people do live that way in some parts of the world today. For

Barbara Jordan was the first African American woman ever elected to the Texas legislature. She went on to represent her State in the U.S. House of Representatives (1973–1979). Famous for her eloquent speeches, Barbara Jordan often seemed to serve as the conscience of the government. In her keynote speech at the 1976 Democratic National Convention, she noted:



"A nation is formed by the willingness of each of us to share in the responsibility for upholding the common good.

A government is invigorated when each of us is willing to participate in shaping the future of this nation. . . .

Let each person do his or her part. If one citizen is unwilling to participate, all of us are going to suffer. For the American idea, though it is shared by all of us, is realized in each one of us."

Evaluating the Quotation

How do Jordan's expectations for Americans relate to the basic ideas that underlie our democracy?

years now, Somalia, which is located on the eastern tip of Africa, has not had a functioning government; rival warlords control different parts of the country.

In *The Federalist* No. 51, James Madison observed: "If men were angels, no government would be necessary." Madison, who was perhaps the most thoughtful of the Framers of the Constitution, knew that most human beings fall far short of this standard.

Provide for the Common Defense

Defending the nation against foreign enemies has always been one of government's major responsibilities. You can see its importance in the fact that defense is mentioned far more often in the Constitution than any of the other functions of the government. The nation's defense and its foreign policies are but two sides of the same coin: the security of the United States.

The United States has become the world's most powerful nation, but the world remains a dangerous place. The United States must maintain its vigilance and its armed strength. Just a glance at today's newspaper or at one of this evening's television news programs will furnish abundant proof of that fact.

Promote the General Welfare

Few people realize the extent to which government acts as the servant of its citizens, yet you can see examples everywhere. Public schools are one illustration of government's work to promote the general welfare. So, too, are government's efforts to protect the quality of the air you breathe, the water you drink, and the food you eat. The list of tasks government performs for your benefit goes on and on.

Some governmental functions that are common in other countries—operating steel mills, airlines, and coal mines, for example—are not carried out by government in this country. In general, the services that government provides in the United States are those that benefit all or most people. These are the services that are not very likely to be provided by the voluntary acts of private individuals or groups.

Secure the Blessings of Liberty

This nation was founded by those who loved liberty and prized it above all earthly possessions. They believed with Thomas Jefferson that "the God who gave us life gave us liberty

at the same time." They subscribed to Benjamin Franklin's maxim: "They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."

The American dedication to freedom for the individual recognizes that liberty cannot be absolute. It is, instead, a relative matter. No one can be free to do whatever he or she pleases, for that behavior would interfere with the freedoms of others. As Clarence Darrow, the great defense lawyer, once said: "You can only be free if I am free."

Both the Federal Constitution and the State constitutions set out many guarantees of rights and liberties for the individual in this country. That does not mean that those guarantees are so firmly established that they exist forever, however. To preserve and protect them, each generation must learn and understand them anew, and be willing to stand up for them when necessary.

For many people, the inspiration to protect our rights and liberties arises from deep feelings of patriotism. Patriotism is the love of one's country; the passion which aims to serve one's country, either in defending it from invasion, or by protecting its rights and maintaining its laws and institutions in vigor and purity. Patriotism is the characteristic of a good citizen, the noblest passion that animates a man or woman in the character of a citizen. As a citizen, you, too, must agree with Jefferson: "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

Section 1 Assessment

Key Terms and Main Ideas

1. What is the difference between a government and a state?
2. Who holds power in a dictatorship?
3. What is the purpose of a constitution?
4. Give an example of a use of judicial power.

Critical Thinking

5. **Making Comparisons** The United States is sovereign, but the city or town in which you live is not. Do you think that your community should be sovereign? Why or why not?
6. **Recognizing Cause and Effect** Explain this comment: Much of the thought upon which present-day democratic

government rests began as a challenge to the theory of the divine right of kings.

7. **Drawing Conclusions** Explain how the language of the Preamble reflects the idea of the social contract.

Take It to the Net

8. Read about Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau and create a chart that compares and contrasts these three philosophers on three different topics. Be sure to explain their similarities and differences. Use the links provided in the Social Studies area at the following Web site for help in completing this activity. www.phschool.com

Section Preview

OBJECTIVES

1. **Classify** governments according to three sets of characteristics.
2. **Define** systems of government based on who can participate.
3. **Identify** different ways that power can be distributed, geographically, within a state.
4. **Describe** a government by how power is distributed between the executive branch and legislative branch.

WHY IT MATTERS

Governments come in many different forms—democratic or dictatorial, unitary or federal or confederate, presidential or parliamentary. But, whatever its form, government has an impact on nearly every moment and nearly every aspect of your life.

POLITICAL
DICTIONARY

- ★ autocracy
- ★ oligarchy
- ★ unitary government
- ★ federal government
- ★ division of powers
- ★ confederation
- ★ presidential government
- ★ parliamentary government

Does the form a government takes, the way in which it is structured, have any importance? Political scientists, historians, and other social commentators have long argued that question. The English poet Alexander Pope weighed in with this couplet in 1733:

PRIMARY
Sources

*“For Forms of Government
let fools contest; Whate’er is
best adminster’d is best. . . .”*

—*Essay on Man*

Was Pope right? Does it matter what form a government takes? Pope thought not, but you can form your own opinion as you read this section.

Classifying Governments

No two governments are, or ever have been, exactly alike, for governments are the products of human needs and experiences. All governments can be classified according to one or more of their basic features, however. Over time, political scientists have developed many bases upon which to classify (and so to describe, compare, and analyze) governments.

Three of those classifications are especially important and useful. These are classifications according to (1) who can participate in the governing process, (2) the geographic distribution of governmental power within the state, and (3) the relationship between the legislative

(lawmaking) and the executive (law-executing) branches of the government.⁴

Who Can Participate

To many people, the most meaningful of these classifications is the one that depends on the number of persons who can take part in the governing process. Here there are two basic forms to consider: democracies and dictatorships.

Democracy

In a democracy, supreme political authority rests with the people. The people hold the sovereign power, and government is conducted only by and with the consent of the people.⁵

Abraham Lincoln gave immortality to this definition of democracy in his Gettysburg Address in 1863: “government of the people, by the people, for the people.” Nowhere is there a better, more concise statement of the American understanding of democracy.

A democracy can be either direct or indirect in form. A direct democracy, also called a pure democracy, exists where the will of the people

⁴Note that these classifications are not mutually exclusive. A government can be defined using two or three of these classifications.

⁵The word *democracy* is derived from the Greek words *dēmos* meaning “the people” and *kratia* meaning “rule” or “authority.” The Greek word *dēmokratia* means “rule by the people.”

s translated into public policy (law) directly by the people themselves, in mass meetings. This can work only in very small communities, where it is possible for the citizenry to meet in a central place, and where the problems of government are few and relatively simple.

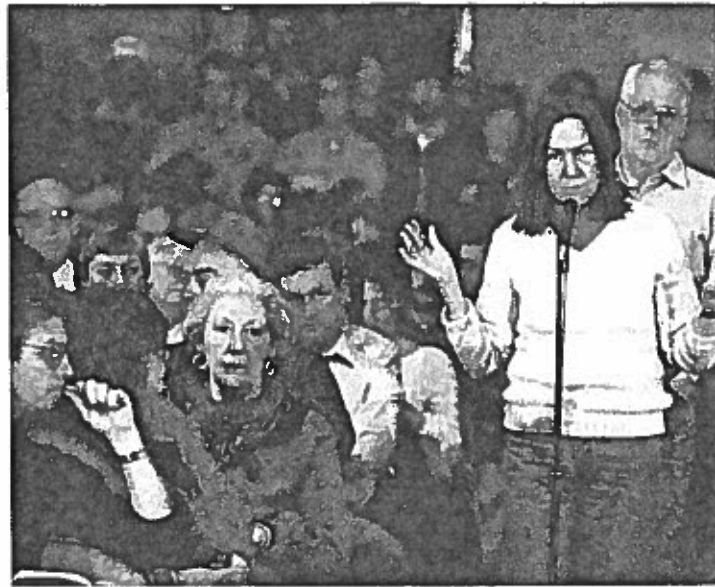
Direct democracy does not exist at the national level anywhere in the world today. However, the New England town meeting, which you will read about in Chapter 25, and the *Landsgemeinde* in a few of the smaller Swiss cantons are excellent examples of direct democracy in action.⁶

Americans are more familiar with the indirect form of democracy—that is, with representative democracy. In a representative democracy, a small group of persons, chosen by the people to act as their representatives, expresses the popular will. These agents of the people are responsible for carrying out the day-to-day conduct of government—the making and executing of laws and so on. They are held accountable to the people for that conduct, especially at periodic elections.

At these elections, the people have an opportunity to express their approval or disapproval of their representatives by casting ballots for or against them. To put it another way, representative democracy is government by popular consent—government with the consent of the governed.

Some people insist that the United States is more properly called a republic rather than a democracy. They hold that in a republic the sovereign power is held by those eligible to vote, while the political power is exercised by representatives chosen by and held responsible to those citizens. For them, democracy can be defined only in terms of direct democracy.

Many Americans use the terms *democracy*, *republic*, *representative democracy*, and *republican* form of government interchangeably, although they are not the same things. Whatever the terms used, remember that in a democracy the people are sovereign. They are the only source for any and all of government's power. In other words, the people rule.



▲ **Direct Democracy Today** At this town meeting in New Hampshire, every citizen in the town enjoys the right to speak out and vote on issues. **Critical Thinking** Why are town meetings impractical in large cities?

Dictatorship

A dictatorship exists where those who rule cannot be held responsible to the will of the people. The government is not accountable for its policies, nor for how they are carried out. Dictatorship is probably the oldest, and it is certainly the most common, form of government known to history.⁷

Dictatorships are sometimes identified as either autocracies or oligarchies. An **autocracy** is a government in which a single person holds unlimited political power. An **oligarchy** is a government in which the power to rule is held by a small, usually self-appointed elite.

All dictatorships are authoritarian—those in power hold absolute and unchallengeable authority over the people. Modern dictatorships have tended to be totalitarian, as well. That is, they exercise complete power over nearly every aspect of human affairs. Their power embraces all matters of human concern.

The leading examples of dictatorship in the modern era have been those in Fascist Italy (from 1922 to 1943), in Nazi Germany (from 1933 to 1945), in the Soviet Union (from 1917

⁷The word *dictatorship* comes from the Latin *dictare*, meaning to dictate, issue orders, give authoritative commands. *Dictator* was the ancient Roman republic's title for the leader who was given extraordinary powers in times of crisis. Julius Caesar (100–44 B.C.) was the last of the Roman dictators.

⁶The *Landsgemeinde*, like the original New England town meeting, is an assembly open to all local citizens qualified to vote. In a more limited sense, lawmaking by initiative petition is also an example of direct democracy; see Chapter 24.

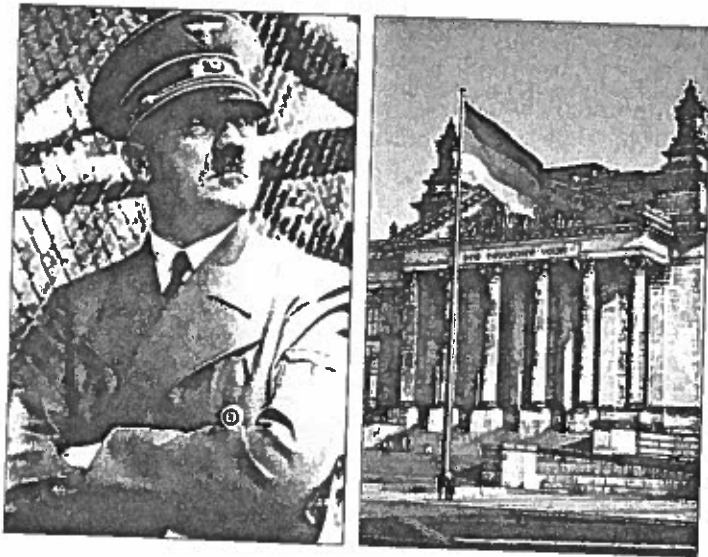
until the late 1980s), and one that still exists in the People's Republic of China (where the present regime came to power in 1949).

Although they do exist, one-person dictatorships are not at all common today. A few close approaches to such a regime can now be found in Libya, which has been dominated by Muammar al-Qaddafi since 1969, and in some other Arab and African states.

Most present-day dictatorships are not nearly so absolutely controlled by a single person or by a small group as may appear to be the case. Outward appearances may hide the fact that several groups—the army, religious leaders, industrialists, and others—compete for power in the political system.

Dictatorships often present the outward appearance of control by the people. The people often vote in popular elections; but the vote is closely controlled, and ballots usually contain the candidates of but one political party. An elected legislative body often exists, but only to rubber-stamp the policies of the dictatorship.

Typically, dictatorial regimes are militaristic in character. They usually gain power by force. The military holds many of the major posts in the government. After crushing all effective opposition at home, these regimes may turn to foreign aggression to enhance the country's military power and prestige.



▲ *Dictatorship and Democracy in Germany* Today, the Federal Republic of Germany is a vigorous democracy. It was born out of the defeat of Adolf Hitler's Nazi dictatorship in World War II.

Geographic Distribution of Power

In every system of government the power to govern is located in one or more places, geographically. From this standpoint, three basic forms of government exist: unitary, federal, and confederate governments.

Unitary Government

A **unitary government** is often described as a centralized government. All powers held by the government belong to a single, central agency. The central (national) government creates local units of government for its own convenience. Those local governments have only those powers that the central government chooses to give them.

Most governments in the world are unitary in form. Great Britain is a classic illustration. A single central organization, the Parliament, holds all of the government's power. Local governments exist solely to relieve Parliament of burdens it could perform only with difficulty and inconvenience. Though unlikely, Parliament could do away with these and other agencies of local government at any time.

Be careful not to confuse the unitary form of government with a dictatorship. In the unitary form, all of the powers held by the government are concentrated in the central government. That government might not have *all* power, however. In Great Britain, for example, the powers held by the government are limited. British government is unitary and, at the same time, democratic.

Federal Government

A **federal government** is one in which the powers of government are divided between a central government and several local governments. An authority superior to both the central and local governments makes this **division of powers** on a geographic basis; and that division cannot be changed by either the local or national level acting alone. Both levels of government act directly on the people through their own sets of laws, officials, and agencies.

In the United States, for example, the National Government has certain powers and the 50 States have others. This division of powers is set out in the Constitution of the United States. The Constitution stands above both levels of government; and it cannot be changed unless the people,

ting through both the National Government and the States, agree to at change.

Australia, Canada, Mexico, Switzerland, Germany, India, and some 20 other states also have federal forms of government today. In the United States, the phrase “the federal Government” is often used to identify the National Government, the government headquartered in Washington, D.C. Note, however, that each of the 50 State governments in this country is unitary, not federal, in form.

Confederate Government

A **confederation** is an alliance of independent states. A central organization, the confederate government, only handles those matters that member states sign to it. Typically, confederate governments hold limited powers in such fields as defense and foreign commerce.

Most often, they have not had the power to make laws that apply directly to individuals, at least not without some further action by the member states. A confederate structure makes possible for the several states to operate in matters of common concern and to retain their separate identities.









Confederations are very rare in today’s world. The European Union (EU) is the closest approach to a confederation today. Through its institutions, the EU has established free trade among its 15 members, launched a common currency, and is moving toward the close coordination of its members’ foreign and defense policies. In our own history, the United States under the Articles of Confederation (1781 to 1789) and the Confederate States of America (1861 to 1865) are also examples of this form of government.

Relationship Between Legislative and Executive Branches

Political scientists also classify governments based on the relationship between their legislative and executive agencies. This view yields

Comparative Government

Forms of Government

Country	Where is the power?		What is the relationship between the legislative and executive branches?		Who can participate?	
	Unitary	Federal	Parliamentary	Presidential	Democracy	Dictatorship
 Botswana	✓		✓		✓	
 Brazil		✓		✓	✓	
 Costa Rica	✓		✓		✓	
 Cuba	✓		✓			✓
 France	✓			✓	✓	
 India		✓	✓		✓	
 Syria	✓			✓		✓
 United States		✓		✓	✓	



Interpreting Tables Some combinations of governmental forms, such as parliamentary democracy and unitary dictatorship, are more common than others. *Why is a state unlikely to be both a confederation and a dictatorship?*

two basic forms of government: presidential and parliamentary.

Presidential Government

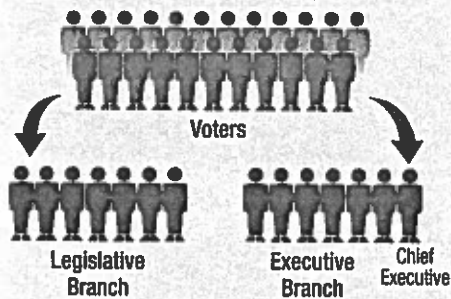
In a **presidential government**, the executive and legislative branches of the government are separate, independent of one another, and coequal. The chief executive (president) is chosen independently of the legislature, holds office for a fixed term, and has broad powers not subject to the direct control of the legislative branch.

The two branches regularly have several powers with which each can block actions by the other branch. Usually, as in the United States, a written constitution provides for the separation of powers between the branches.

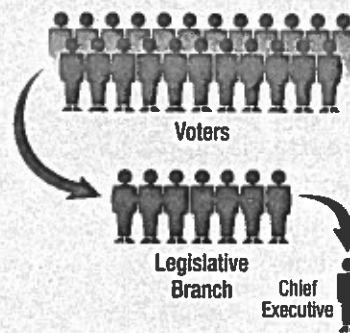
The United States is the world’s leading example of presidential government. In fact, the United States invented the form. Most of the other presidential systems in the world are also found in the Western Hemisphere.

Presidential and Parliamentary Governments

The Presidential Relationship Voters elect the Legislature and the Chief Executive who is part of the Executive Branch. The legislature and executive are independent and coequal.



The Parliamentary Relationship Voters elect the Legislature. The Chief Executive is drawn from the Legislature.



Interpreting Diagrams Compare presidential and parliamentary forms of government. *In which form of government is the chief executive both elected from and part of the legislature?*

Parliamentary Government

In **parliamentary government**, the executive is made up of the prime minister or premier, and that official's cabinet. The prime minister and cabinet themselves are members of the legislative branch, the parliament. The prime minister is the leader of the majority party or of a likeminded group of parties in parliament and is chosen by that body. With parliament's approval, the prime minister selects the members of the cabinet from among the members of parliament. The executive is thus chosen by the legislature, is a part of it, and is subject to its direct control.

The prime minister and the cabinet (often called "the government") remain in office only as long as their policies and administration have the confidence of a majority in parliament. If the parliament defeats the prime minister and cabinet on an important matter, the government may receive a "vote of no confidence," and the prime minister and his cabinet must resign from office. Then a new government must be formed. Either

parliament chooses a new prime minister or, as often happens, all the seats of parliament go before the voters in a general election.

A parliamentary government avoids one of the major problems of the presidential form: prolonged conflict and sometimes deadlock between the executive and legislative branches. On the other hand, it should be noted that the checks and balances of presidential government are not a part of the parliamentary system. Nevertheless, the British, Canadian, Japanese, and a majority of all of the other governments in today's world have a parliamentary government.

Section 2 Assessment

Key Terms and Main Ideas

1. What defines a **unitary government**?
2. How is power distributed in a **federal government**?
3. Who holds power in an **oligarchy**?
4. What specific trait gives the United States a **presidential system of government**?

Critical Thinking

5. **Making Decisions** Reread the Preamble to the Constitution on page 8. In your opinion, which combination of governmental forms would be best able to establish justice? Which combination would be best able to provide for the common defense? Explain your answers.

6. **Drawing Conclusions** Many people have suggested using the Internet to create a direct democracy in the United States where every citizen could vote. List one benefit and one drawback of this proposal.



Take It to the Net

7. Create your own chart comparing governments according to several categories. Create at least five categories, including type of leader, economy, and governing body. Use the links provided in the Social Studies area at the following Web site for help in completing this activity.
www.phschool.com

Section Preview

OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the foundations of democracy.
2. Analyze the connections between democracy and the free enterprise system.
3. Identify the role of the Internet in a democracy.

WHY IT MATTERS

Democracy insists on the fundamental importance of each and every individual. The free enterprise system is a natural counterpart to democracy—for it, too, is built on the concept of individualism.

POLITICAL DICTIONARY

- ★ compromise
- ★ free enterprise system
- ★ law of supply and demand
- ★ mixed economy

What do you make of James Bryce's assessment of democracy? "No government demands so much from the citizen as Democracy, and none gives so much back." What does democratic government demand from you? What does it give you in return?

Foundations

Democracy is not inevitable. It does not exist in the United States simply because Americans regard it as the best of all possible political systems. Rather, democracy exists in this country because the American people believe in its basic

concepts. It will continue to exist only for as long as we, the people, continue to subscribe to and practice those concepts.

Winston Churchill (1874–1965) once argued for democracy this way: "No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

The American concept of democracy rests on these basic notions:

- (1) A recognition of the fundamental worth and dignity of every person;
- (2) A respect for the equality of all persons;
- (3) A faith in majority rule and an insistence upon minority rights;
- (4) An acceptance of the necessity of compromise; and
- (5) An insistence upon the widest possible degree of individual freedom.

Of course, these ideas can be worded in other ways. No matter what the wording, however, they form the very minimum that anyone who professes to believe in democracy must agree to.

Worth of the Individual

Democracy is firmly based upon a belief in the fundamental importance of the individual. Each individual, no matter what his or her station in life, is a separate and distinct being.

This concept of the dignity and worth of the individual is of overriding importance in democratic thought. At various times, of course, the welfare of one or a few individuals



▲ At Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, Abraham Lincoln declared that the United States was "conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." *Critical Thinking* Which of the five foundations of democracy are best described by this quote?

is subordinated to the interests of the many in a democracy. People can be forced to do certain things whether they want to or not. Examples range from paying taxes to registering for the draft to stopping at a stop sign.

When a democratic society forces people to pay a tax or obey traffic signals, it is serving the interests of the many. However, it is *not* simply serving the interests of a mass of people who happen to outnumber the few. Rather, it is serving the many who, as individuals, together make up that society.

Equality of All Persons

Hand-in-hand with the belief in the worth of the individual, democracy stresses the equality of all individuals. It holds, with Jefferson, that "all men are created equal."

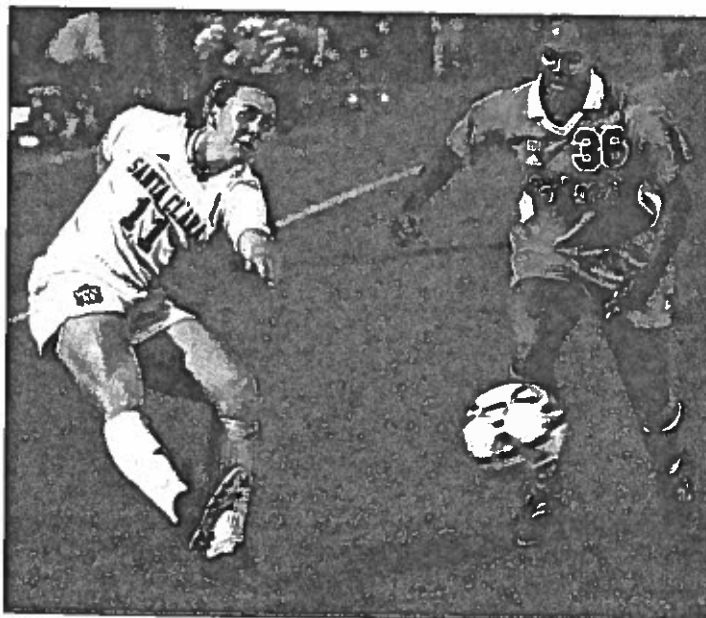
Certainly, democracy does *not* insist on an equality of condition for all persons. Thus, it does not claim that all are born with the same mental or physical abilities. Nor does it argue that all persons have a right to an equal share of worldly goods.

Rather, the democratic concept of equality insists that all are entitled to (1) equality of opportunity and (2) equality before the law. That is, the democratic concept of equality holds that no person should be held back for any such arbitrary reasons as those based on race, color, religion, or gender. The concept holds that each person must be free to develop himself or herself as fully as he or she can (or cares to), and that each person should be treated as the equal of all other persons by the law.

We have come a great distance toward the goal of equality for all in this country. It is clear, however, that the journey is far from over.

Majority Rule, Minority Rights

In a democracy, the will of the people and not the dictate of the ruling few determines public policy. But what is the popular will, and how is it determined? Some device must exist by which these crucial questions can be answered. The only satisfactory device democracy knows is that of majority rule. Democracy argues that a majority of the people will be right more often than they will be wrong, and that the majority will also be right more often than will any one person or small group.



▲ *Equality of Opportunity* Under Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972, women must have the same athletic opportunities as men in schools and colleges.

Democracy can be described as an experiment or a trial-and-error process designed to find satisfactory ways to order human relations. Democracy does *not* say that the majority will always arrive at the best decisions on public matters. In fact, the democratic process does not intend to come up with "right" or "best" answers. Rather, the democratic process searches for *satisfactory* solutions to public problems.

Of course, democracy insists that the majority's decisions will usually be more, rather than less, satisfactory. Democracy does admit the possibility of mistakes; it acknowledges the possibility that "wrong" or less satisfactory answers will sometimes be found. Democracy also recognizes that seldom is any solution to a public problem so satisfactory that it cannot be improved upon, and that circumstances can change over time. So, the process of experimentation, of seeking answers to public questions, is never-ending.

Certainly, a democracy cannot work without the principle of majority rule. Unchecked, however, a majority could destroy its opposition and, in the process, destroy democracy as well. Thus, democracy insists upon majority rule restrained by minority rights. The majority must always recognize the right of any minority to become, by fair and lawful means, the majority. The majority must always be willing to listen to a minority's argument, to hear its objections, to bear its criticisms, and to welcome its suggestions.

Necessity of Compromise

In a democracy, public decision making must be largely a matter of give-and-take among the various competing interests. It is a matter of **compromise** in order to find the position most acceptable to the largest number. Compromise is the process of blending and adjusting competing views and interests.

Compromise is an essential part of the democratic concept for two major reasons. First, remember that democracy puts the individual first and, at the same time, insists that each individual is the equal of all others. In a democratic society made up of many individuals and groups with many different opinions and interests, how can the people make public decisions except by compromise?

Second, few public questions have only two sides. Most can be answered in several ways. Take the apparently simple question of how a city should pay for the paving of a public street. Should it charge those who own property along the street? Or should the costs be paid from the city's general treasury? Or should the city and the adjacent property owners share the costs? What about those who will use the street but do not live in the city? Should they have to pay a toll?

Remember, compromise is a process, a way of achieving majority agreement. It is never an end in itself. Not all compromises are good, and not all are necessary.



Interpreting Political Cartoons If the two chefs represent lawmakers in a democracy, what might the stew represent?

Individual Freedom

It should be clear by this point that democracy can thrive only in an atmosphere of individual freedom. However, democracy does not insist on *complete* freedom for the individual. Absolute freedom can exist only in a state of anarchy—the total absence of government. Anarchy can only lead, inevitably and quickly, to rule by the strong and ruthless.

Democracy does insist, however, that the individual must be as free to do as he or she pleases as far as the freedom of all will allow. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes once had to say about the relative nature of each individual's rights: "The right to swing my fist ends where the other man's nose begins."

Drawing the line between the rights of the individual and those of another is far from simple. Still, the drawing of that line is a continually important function of democratic government. As John F. Kennedy put it: "The rights of every man are diminished when the rights of another man are threatened."

Striking the proper balance between individual freedom for the individual and the rights of society as a whole is similarly difficult—and Abraham Lincoln once stated the democratic problem in these words:

**PRIMARY
Sources**

"Must a government of necessity be too strong for the liberties of its own people, or too weak to maintain its own existence?"

—*Response to a Serenade*, November 10, 1862

Human beings desire both liberty and authority. Democratic government must work constantly to strike the proper balance between the two. The authority of government must be adequate to the needs of society. At the same time, that authority must never be allowed to become so great that it restricts the individual beyond necessity.

Democracy and the Free Enterprise System

The American commitment to freedom for the individual is deep-rooted, and it is as evident in the nation's economic system as it is in its political system. The American economic system is often called the **free enterprise system**.