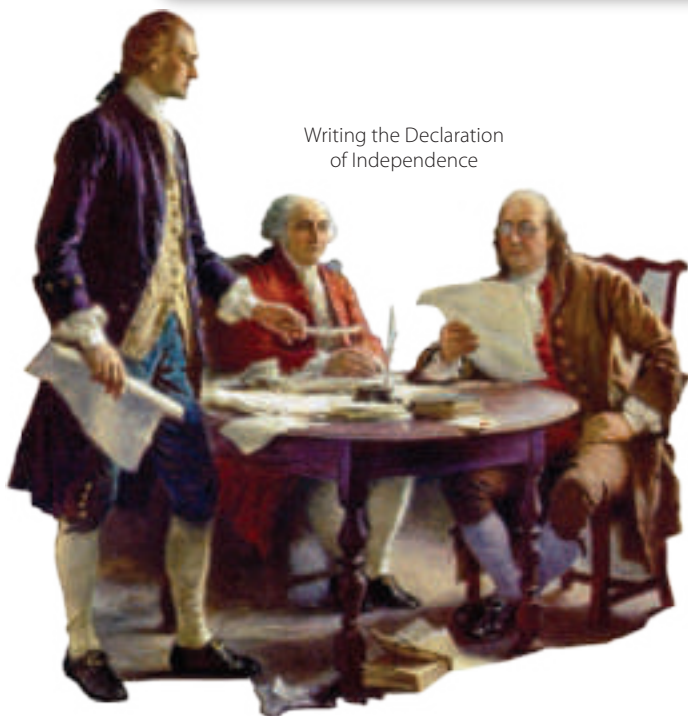




Understanding Civics

Reader

Writing the Declaration of Independence



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Understanding Civics

Reader



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Understanding Civics

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Chapter 1

What Is Government?

A Need for Government Imagine you are a farmer in ancient Sumer (present-day southern Iraq), more than six thousand years ago. A new irrigation system has been developed to bring water to farmlands in the area. Your land is upstream. It no longer receives all the water it needs, and no one is controlling how the rivers flow through the system. Who could help you solve this problem?

The Big Question

Why do societies have governments?

During ancient times, the ability to farm meant that more and more people lived together, sharing resources. As civilizations like Sumer developed, people needed law and order in their lives. They created governments to provide that order. Ancient Sumerians set up an organized government in which officials were assigned to control irrigation systems and distribute water across farmlands.

Governments have grown and changed quite a bit since ancient times. The first governments were led by one person or a small group. Most modern governments still have one person who leads the government, such as a president. However, that person has many other people advising them.



Many members of the U.S. government work in the U.S. Capitol Building.

Modern governments also usually have a **legislature**, which is a body of government that makes the laws. They also have a system of courts that hear matters related to the laws.

Types of Government

Governments have many responsibilities and many more people to manage tasks than they did in ancient times. Not only do governments create and **enforce** rules, but they also defend the country, run the **economy**, and make sure **citizens** are safe. These jobs are carried out in different ways, depending on which form of government a country uses.

A **democracy** is a form of government in which the people make the decisions about how the government runs. In a direct democracy, citizens vote directly on issues the community faces. Every person has a say—these governments are truly run by the citizens. The ancient city-state of Athens is believed to have been the first direct democracy.

In an indirect democracy, also known as a **representative democracy**, the people vote for leaders who make the decisions

Vocabulary

legislature, n. the part of the government responsible for making laws

enforce, v. to make sure people do what is required of them

economy, n. the way a country manages its money and resources to produce, buy, and sell goods and services

citizen, n. a person who belongs to a country and has protections under that country's laws

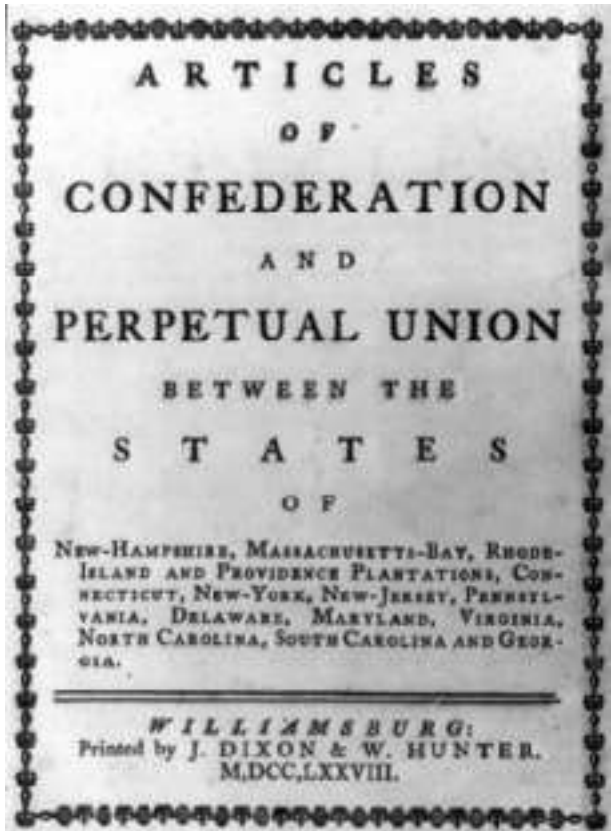
democracy, n. a form of government in which people choose their leaders; a country with this form of government

representative democracy, n. a form of government in which people vote for leaders to make governing decisions on their behalf

about government. The leaders make laws on the citizens' behalf. The U.S. government is an example of an indirect democracy.

A representative democracy is also known as a republic. Republics are often governed by a **constitution**, a set of rules that defines the powers of the government. If this sounds familiar, that is because the United States is a constitutional republic.

Another form of government is a **confederation**. This is a loose association of independent governments. The first government of the United States was a confederation. Some early Native American nations also had confederations. Their goal was to resolve conflicts among nations. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy and Muscogee (Creek) Nation are two examples. Some scholars believe that knowledge of these governments may have influenced the Founders when they designed the U.S. government.



The Articles of Confederation were the first set of government rules of the new United States.

Vocabulary

constitution, n.
a set of rules that defines the powers of government in a country

confederation, n.
a group of states joined together by a formal agreement

Monarchies are one of the oldest forms of government. In a monarchy, a king or queen rules, sometimes with absolute, or total, power. There are few absolute monarchies in the world today. Most monarchs now share power with another branch of government, such as a legislature. The United Kingdom, for example, was once an absolute monarchy but is now a constitutional monarchy. This means that the monarch is a ceremonial leader, while Parliament, the legislature, is given lawmaking and legal power. A **prime minister** serves as the true head of government.

In a **dictatorship**, one person or a small group holds absolute power. Often, that power was taken by force. There are no constitutional limits on power, and the people have no say in the government. Adolf Hitler's rule over Germany before and during World War II is an example of a dictatorship.

Similarly, an **oligarchy** is a form of government controlled by a few people or families who typically have a great deal of wealth and power. The small group has unlimited power, which can be used in unjust and oppressive ways. Russia is both a historical and modern-day example of an oligarchy. Iran is a **theocracy**. In this form of government, a religious institution holds absolute power. Often, government officials in a

Vocabulary

monarchy, n. a government led by a king or queen

prime minister, n. the head of the government in some countries

dictatorship, n. a government in which all power is held by an individual or small group

oligarchy, n. a government in which all power is held by a small group of wealthy or powerful people

theocracy, n. a form of government in which those in power are also religious leaders or are closely tied to a religion



Religious leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was the supreme leader of Iran from 1989 until his death in 2026.

theocracy are members of the religious leadership. Laws are based on religious law.

Purposes of Government

Have you ever thought about how things get done in a country, such as the building of roads and schools? Who decides what will be built? Who pays for roads and schools? The example of the irrigation system in ancient Sumer demonstrates some of the purposes of government: to provide law and order and to protect people from conflict. Without government, people would likely disagree with each other over rights and property. Government sets rules and guidelines to reduce disagreements. Sometimes

these rules aren't enough to stop disagreements from happening, so governments have ways to resolve them.

One key way that government keeps order is by creating laws. In the United States, laws are passed by elected representatives and exist at all three levels of government—federal (national), state, and local. Federal laws apply to all people in the United States. For example, the federal government makes laws about such issues as **immigration**. State and local laws apply to the people who live in a specific state or town. State laws address issues like property ownership or injuries in the workplace. Local laws may address issues such as how schools function and policing the community.

Vocabulary

immigration, n. the act of moving to another country to live

In a democracy, another purpose of government is to protect citizens' rights and freedoms. In democratic countries like the



States work with the federal government on major highway construction.

United States, these rights are protected by constitutions and through laws made by every level of government.

Although levels of government are structured in similar ways, they have different responsibilities. The federal government passes laws to address issues that affect all people in the United States. For example, a government department inspects food to make sure it won't make people sick. The federal government also works with state and local governments by providing money to build roads and cover healthcare. The federal government gets its funding by collecting taxes. **Taxes** are money that people pay to the government so it can fund programs and services.

Vocabulary

taxes, n. money collected from citizens by the government

The state government is responsible for carrying out federal laws at the state level. State governments oversee healthcare programs, and most states collect a state income tax. State and local courts hear cases related to the state's laws and constitution. State and local governments work together to operate schools and maintain educational standards set by the state. Citizens elect representatives for their local government, just as they do at the state and national levels. Local governments oversee public services, such as police and fire services, schools, and parks.

In the preamble to the U.S. Constitution, the Framers listed ensuring "domestic tranquility" as one purpose of the U.S. government. This means that the government must keep the peace and ensure its citizens are safe from harm. Laws help keep people safe. Law enforcement such as the police ensures laws are

followed. The courts hear cases related to people breaking the law and may set punishments if people are found guilty.

Another purpose of government is to provide services to its citizens. **Domestic policy** is a set of decisions that the government makes regarding people and issues within the country. Major domestic policy issues in the United States include healthcare and education.

Foreign policy relates to decisions the government makes about its relationships with other countries. The United States has many allies, or friends, around the globe. World leaders work together to solve problems. There are also countries that pose threats. One

Vocabulary

domestic policy, n. decisions and laws that a government makes to impact the lives of its country's citizens

foreign policy, n. decisions and laws that are related to a government's relationships with other countries



The U.S. Army distributes humanitarian aid in Port au Prince, Haiti, after an earthquake in 2010.

goal of foreign policy is to decrease threats from other countries. This is done in part by working with peacekeeping organizations. One example of a peacekeeping organization is the United Nations. The United States also helps other countries by providing aid when countries are in need. **Diplomatic** and **humanitarian** efforts around the world help ensure the safety of people in other countries as well as in the United States.

Vocabulary

diplomatic, adj. related to the managing of relations between the governments of different countries

humanitarian, adj. related to efforts to make other people's lives better

Early Governments That Influenced Americans

The United States is a republic governed by a constitution. Some of the most important ideas and principles that guided the Founders and shaped American democracy have roots in other times, places, and peoples.

The ancient Greeks were the first people to have a democratic government. In ancient Athens, for example, citizens voted in an **assembly** on the issues at hand. However, the Athenian government wasn't all that democratic by today's standards. Only wealthy Greek men were considered citizens and could take an active role in government. Women and enslaved people were not citizens and could not vote. Still, the idea of citizen participation in lawmaking was the root of later, more democratic governments like the United States'.

Vocabulary

assembly, n. a group of representatives who gather to make laws

The ancient Romans established a republic in 509 BCE. Unlike Athenian citizens, citizens of Rome elected representatives to make the laws. Both men and women were citizens, but women could not vote. Lower-class citizens and enslaved people also couldn't vote. Over time, people from the lower classes gained more rights of citizenship and a greater voice in government.

The first English monarchy began in 827 CE. Early monarchs had absolute power, but over time people began to demand limits on that power. In 1215 CE, the king signed a document called the Magna Carta, which established the **rule of law**. This meant that the monarch and any other lawmakers had to follow the law. The rule of law limits the power of government. Limited government was another groundbreaking idea in government.

Vocabulary

rule of law, n. the principle that no one is above the law, not even the highest lawmakers



Romans established a republic—a government in which elected leaders represented the people.

When English settlers came to North America, they met many Native peoples and learned about how their nations were organized. One people they met were the Cherokee. The Cherokee had lived on the land that is now the southeastern United States since before recorded history. They first came into contact with Europeans in 1540 CE. Treaties made with the British in the early 1700s recognized the Cherokee Nation as **sovereign**. The Cherokee tribal government later created a constitution based on the structure of the U.S. Constitution.

Vocabulary

sovereign, adj.
having supreme power and authority over a nation and its people

English settlers also learned about the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, a league of five (later six) Indigenous nations. The league was said to have been founded by leaders Dekanawida and Aionwatha as a way to avoid conflict and war. They traveled between nations to find a solution and designed the Great Law of Peace, which guided relations in the confederacy. The confederacy had a common council of tribal leaders, and each tribe had a vote in decisions. Laws had to be approved by two lawmaking bodies. The powers of governing were divided between the central government and those of each of the tribes.

This system influenced Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and other Founders as they crafted the U.S. government. The goals of peace, unity, and structure that were valued by the members of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy are reflected in American political institutions. For example, the two-house structure of the United States Congress is similar to the structure of the Grand Council of the confederacy.

Chapter 2

Creating the American Government

A New Start For Europeans in the 1600s, North America represented hope and a chance for a new start and new opportunities. Colonists from England, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, and other nations crossed the Atlantic in ships bound for an unfamiliar land. Some hoped to make a fortune. Others were fleeing conditions in their homelands. Still others—enslaved Africans—were forcibly brought to the Americas. By 1750, there were thirteen English colonies on the East Coast of what would become the United States. The population was nearing two million.

The Big Question

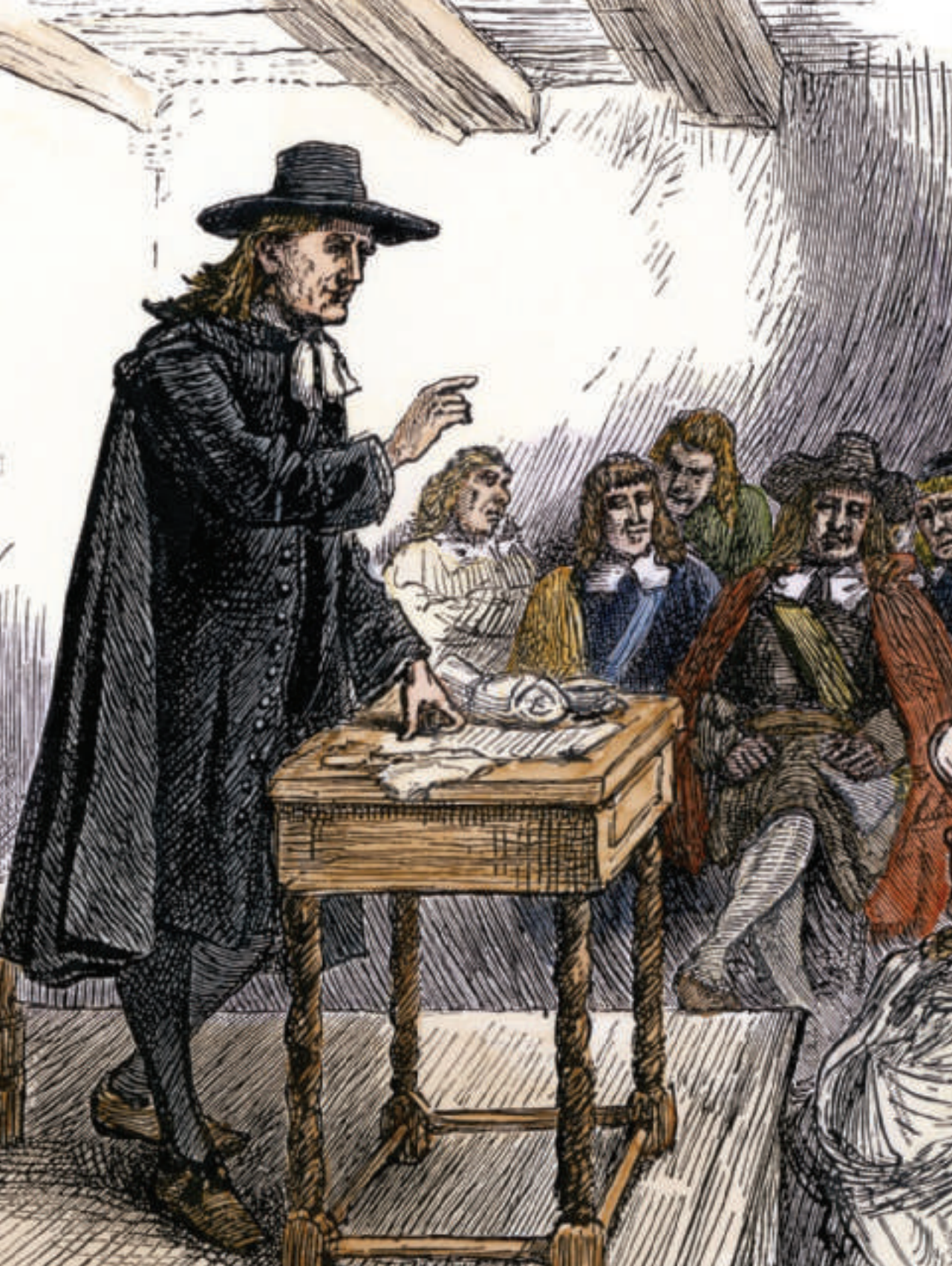
How does the American government embody a social contract?

Vocabulary

charter, n. a document given by a ruler to a group of people that allows them to elect their own government officials

Settlements spread from the Atlantic Ocean to the Appalachian Mountains.

Each English colony was established by a **charter**. This was a written agreement between the king of England and the colonists about how the colony would be run.



Governor John Archdale addressing the assembly of Carolina in 1696

The Search for Religious Freedom

Many English colonists came to America for religious freedom. Puritan spiritual leader Anne Hutchinson came to Massachusetts from England in 1634 for this reason. Once in America, Hutchinson began to question the strict rules of the Puritan religion. She held weekly meetings in her home. She shared her ideas about religion. Leaders of the Puritan Church saw this as a challenge to their authority. Hutchinson was tried and found guilty of **sedition**. After being banished from Massachusetts, she and her family helped found the colony of Rhode Island.

A colonial assembly was set up in each colony as well. The assembly provided the colonists the opportunity for limited self-government. The first assembly was the Virginia House of Burgesses, established in 1619. Men who owned property elected the members of these lawmaking bodies, but the king appointed the governor of each colony. It was the governor's job to carry out the king's wishes in the colonies.

As time went on, the governors often conflicted with the colonial assemblies.

In New England, colonists established the practice of holding **town meetings**.

Town meetings were a form of direct democracy at the local level. Colonists gathered to discuss various issues that affected the community. Then they voted on the issues. The earliest town meetings date to the early 1600s.

The colonists often found themselves in a difficult position. They had a certain degree of **autonomy** in their communities. But they

Vocabulary

sedition, n. the crime of saying or doing something that encourages people to disobey their government

town meeting, n. a gathering of town residents to discuss community issues and vote

autonomy, n. the state of existing and acting separately from others

were still ultimately bound to the reigning monarch across the Atlantic Ocean. They valued their assemblies and the ability to make decisions about the issues that affected them. The colonists also took note of the governments of the Native Americans. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy was a framework that appealed to colonists. It featured self-rule through a unified representative government.

English Traditions of Government

There were aspects of English government that the colonists admired, too. For example, the government could not take

away a house or ship from an English citizen. Additionally, if the government wanted to search a home, it first had to make a case before a judge to get permission for the search. The English also enjoyed the freedom to petition the government for changes. The English government protected the right to a trial by **jury**, too.

Eventually, the limited autonomy that the colonists enjoyed came to end. Great Britain was at war with France

Vocabulary

jury, n. a group of people who listen to information presented during a trial in a court and make decisions about whether someone is guilty or innocent



King George III

from 1756 to 1763. To some extent, it ignored the colonies during this time. The war left Britain saddled with debt. Needing to raise money, King George III began to tighten his grip on the colonies.

Conflict with the Crown

By 1774, Parliament had passed several laws placing taxes on goods the colonists purchased, such as sugar and paper goods, to pay the war debt. Britain also began to strictly enforce trade laws related to its colonies. Parliament took the position that the war was fought in part to protect the colonies from the French. It was therefore only right that the colonists help pay the debt. Most colonists did not agree. They felt that Britain had fought the war to expand its empire. Also, colonists did not have the right to vote for members of Parliament. They believed that a government three thousand miles away did not have the right to tax them. "No taxation without representation" became the colonists' rallying cry.

The colonists also took great issue with Parliament's Quartering Act. Under this act, if the British colonial barracks were full, colonists had to take British soldiers into their inns, stables, or even their homes.

Protests regarding British policies only caused the Crown to tighten control. After the Boston Tea Party protest in Massachusetts, the king restricted the colony's power of self-rule. The colonists lost patience with King George III. They wanted the freedom to make their own laws. They were angry about paying high taxes to a government in which they had no real representation.

Leaders from the colonies came together in Philadelphia for the First Continental Congress in 1774. All the colonies except for Georgia were represented. **Delegates** talked about the British laws that they believed were unjust. The leaders agreed that the British government did not treat the colonists as equals. The delegates wanted the colonies to have more control over their government. They sent a petition to King George III stating their complaints. The king ignored the petition.

The British increased their troop presence in the colonies as tensions grew. Events of the American Revolution were set in motion one night in 1775. British troops began marching toward Concord, Massachusetts, to seize colonists' weapons. Paul Revere and William Dawes traveled from home to home all night, warning colonists that the British were coming. The British were eventually met by local **militia** in both Lexington and Concord. Shots were fired, and the American Revolution began. By the next year, the colonists were ready to officially declare their independence from Britain.

Vocabulary

delegate, n. a representative

militia, n. a group of armed citizens prepared for military service at any time

The Declaration of Independence

In June 1776, the Second Continental Congress established a committee to write a document officially declaring independence. Thomas Jefferson was chosen to write the document.

Jefferson knew a lot about the ideas of the Enlightenment. Among these ideas was the belief that humans had certain

natural rights just by being human.

These rights couldn't be taken away by government. He stated in the Declaration of Independence that people have "**unalienable** Rights, [and] that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Jefferson also wrote that "all men are created equal." Government rule shouldn't be limited to just those people whose power came from birth, such as a king or queen, or from wealth. He referenced the Enlightenment idea of the **social contract** when he wrote that "Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." What this means is that people agree to form a government and give that government the power to rule. Citizens agree to give up some of their individual rights for the good of the whole community. In turn, the government they've created protects their rights and freedoms.

Finally, Jefferson referenced the ideas of Enlightenment

Vocabulary

natural rights, n. rights that all people are born with and that cannot be taken away by the government

unalienable, adj. unable to be taken away

social contract, n. an agreement by members of a society to establish and be ruled by a government



Writing the Declaration of Independence

thinker John Locke when he wrote that “whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government.” This means that if a government violates its people’s rights, the people have the power and right to create a new government. Jefferson explained that people can change their government if it becomes **tyrannical**. He included a list of twenty-seven grievances, or complaints, against King George III. He used these as proof that the Americans had the right to **rebel**.

Vocabulary

tyrannical, adj.
using power over people in a way that is cruel and unfair

rebel, v. to oppose or fight against

While the idea that “all men are created equal” appealed to American colonists, it was in conflict with the fact that many Americans were enslavers, including Jefferson. Enslaved people were denied the inalienable rights for which Americans were soon going to fight. In his original draft of the Declaration, Jefferson had crafted a short passage in which he condemned the practice of keeping people enslaved. That passage was cut during the final edits to the Declaration. The Founders felt that it was not the right time to deal with enslavement because it would cause conflict among the new states.

Keeping Jefferson’s passage out of the Declaration allowed for the struggle over basic human and civil rights to continue for many decades. Jefferson also didn’t address the equality of women. Over time, many Americans used the words of the Declaration to fight for equality for all.

Independence was formally declared on July 2, 1776. On July 4, Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence, making the colonies independent states.

The Nation's First Government

Once they had declared independence, the delegates needed to establish a government for their new country. After much debate, the Second Continental Congress adopted the Articles of Confederation, the first written plan of government of the United States, in 1777. The Articles created a confederation of states in which each state would have the power to govern itself. The confederation government would work for the common good of all the states.

The Articles of Confederation protected state power, but it made the national government very weak. The national government was unable to enforce its laws. The only real powers it had were to declare war, make peace, and borrow money. Under the Articles, the states operated as if they were each their own country. They began making agreements with foreign governments and had their own militaries. Each state printed its own **currency**. This prevented the establishment of a stable national economy. The national government also could not tax the states. All it could do was ask the states to contribute their share of funds to help the government run.

Often, the states ignored these requests. As a result, the new nation struggled to pay its debts from the Revolutionary War.

Vocabulary

currency, n. a system of money

Under the Articles of Confederation, the central government of the United States lacked the power it needed to keep the country unified. The government needed the ability to enact laws that would

be binding across all states. It needed to regulate commerce on a national level, collect taxes, and raise an army to defend the country in case of attack. The country also needed a national currency.

The shortcomings of the Articles of Confederation came into focus when Shays's Rebellion occurred in 1786 in western Massachusetts. The rebellion began when farmers suffering from heavy debt lost their farms and violence broke out. The weak national government was unable to put down the rebellion, so the governor of Massachusetts gathered three thousand volunteers to defeat the rebels. Americans had worried about creating too strong a central government after living under a tyrannical king. Now, they realized that too weak a central government would not work either.



Shays's Rebellion illustrated the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation.

The United States Constitution

To fix these problems, congressional delegates went back to the drawing board. The Constitutional Convention met from May until September 1787 in the Pennsylvania State House in Philadelphia. The meeting had been called to **revise** the Articles. Instead, the delegates scrapped the Articles and wrote an entirely new document. **Ratification** of the new plan for government was a long process, but it was finally completed in 1788. March 9, 1789, was chosen as the day that the United States Constitution would go into effect.

Vocabulary

revise, v. to change

ratification, n. a formal approval process

The United States, under the new Constitution, was now a constitutional republic in which the people held the power. In fact, the first words of the Constitution are “We the People.” These three words declare that the people of the United States give the government its power. Because not all the people can hold direct power, they vote for representatives. The people allow the representatives to make choices for them, and the government can only legitimately keep its power if it has the consent of those it governs.

The Constitution provides a framework for the national government. It limits the power of the national government so that it cannot become too powerful. The powers of the government are divided among three branches. The legislative branch is Congress, and it makes the country’s laws. The executive branch, led by the president, enforces those laws. The judicial branch is the court system, which applies the laws and decides

if the laws follow the Constitution. Each branch has its own responsibilities, but all three work together. The Constitution creates a system of checks and balances in which the powers of one branch can check those of another branch. This ensures that the powers of each branch are limited.

Native Americans and the Constitution

The Framers of the Constitution didn't have other, similar world governments to look to as a model. They applied some English customs of government and Enlightenment ideas. They also were inspired by some Native American nations' governments. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy had a significant influence on the Constitution, in particular the ways in which it distributed power among the members of the confederacy while also maintaining a strong union.



The Haudenosaunee Confederacy influenced the ideas in the U.S. Constitution.

In spite of this, the Constitution did not grant the same rights to Native Americans that it did to other Americans. Instead, Native nations were considered sovereign. Over time, this sovereignty would be violated repeatedly by the U.S. government.

Structure of the Constitution

The Constitution can be divided into different sections. The first section, the preamble, begins with the famous words “We the People.” The preamble states the purpose of the Constitution. Next are seven articles that describe the structures and functions of the government, including

- Article I, which outlines the powers and structures of the legislative branch;
- Article II, which establishes the executive branch and names the president as its head
- Article III, which establishes the U.S. Supreme Court and gives Congress the power to create other courts; and
- Article IV, which defines the relationship among the states, and between the states and the national (federal) government.

Article V outlines the process for passing **amendments** to the Constitution. The process is not easy. This ensures that changes are not constantly being made. A proposed amendment needs a two-thirds majority vote in both houses of Congress. Alternatively, two-thirds of the states can petition Congress for a new constitutional convention

Vocabulary

amendment, n. an addition or change to the words or meaning of a law or document

to be called to consider amendments. Then the amendment must be ratified by three-fourths of the states.

The Bill of Rights is the first ten amendments, or additions, to the Constitution. The Constitution might never have been ratified if these changes had not been promised because some states worried that the Constitution did not sufficiently protect rights. The Bill of Rights protects Americans' freedoms as well as the powers of the states. Their addition gave citizens more confidence in the new government. Since the Bill of Rights was added in 1791, there have been only seventeen additional amendments. For example, the Thirteenth Amendment outlawed enslavement, and the Nineteenth Amendment gave women the right to vote.

Government Under the Constitution

The strength of the Constitution comes from the fact that the Framers did not plan every small detail. They left some things open to the **interpretation** of the courts and the elected officials who make laws. If "we the people" do not agree with the decisions being made, they can elect new representatives.

Vocabulary

interpretation,

n. the way someone explains or understands something

Another important principle of the Constitution is limited government. Limits are created through the systems of separation of powers and checks and balances. The Constitution also outlines what the federal government cannot do. For example, it cannot limit a person's freedoms without a legal reason to do so. Americans have other fundamental rights that are protected from

government interference, too. These include freedom of speech and freedom of assembly.

Another important guiding principle in the Constitution is **federalism**. This is the system of dividing government powers between the state and federal governments. The Framers learned how useless a weak central government was under the Articles of Confederation. Under the Constitution, the federal government is tasked with all the responsibilities it is best suited to carry out. For example, only the federal government can print and coin money. However, the Constitution also leaves many powers to the states. The states have the power to make their own election laws, for example.

Vocabulary

federalism, n. the system of dividing government powers between the state and federal governments



The American flag is a symbol of the United States and its ideals.

The Constitution also establishes the principle of the rule of law. This makes everyone bound by and accountable to the same laws. In principle, every person and institution, no matter how powerful, is subject to the same consequences for breaking the law. The courts play an important role in maintaining the rule of law. Equality before the law is a fundamental part of American government.

These guiding principles of the Constitution—consent of the governed, separation of powers, limited government, federalism, and the rule of law—are some of the reasons why the U.S. Constitution has lasted more than two hundred years. This document is unique in the world for the way that it secures and protects the rights of U.S. citizens.

Chapter 3

The Federal System

The Division of Power Think about how your school is structured. You most likely have a principal and a vice principal. These two people collaborate to set the tone and standards for the school. They make sure the school runs smoothly. Then there are all the teachers. They are in the classrooms teaching students day to day. If you lost all your pencils, would you ask your principal for help? Probably not. You'd go to your teacher. Who would be in charge of putting a new lunch program in place for the entire school? This would likely be your principal's responsibility, not your teacher's.

The Big Question

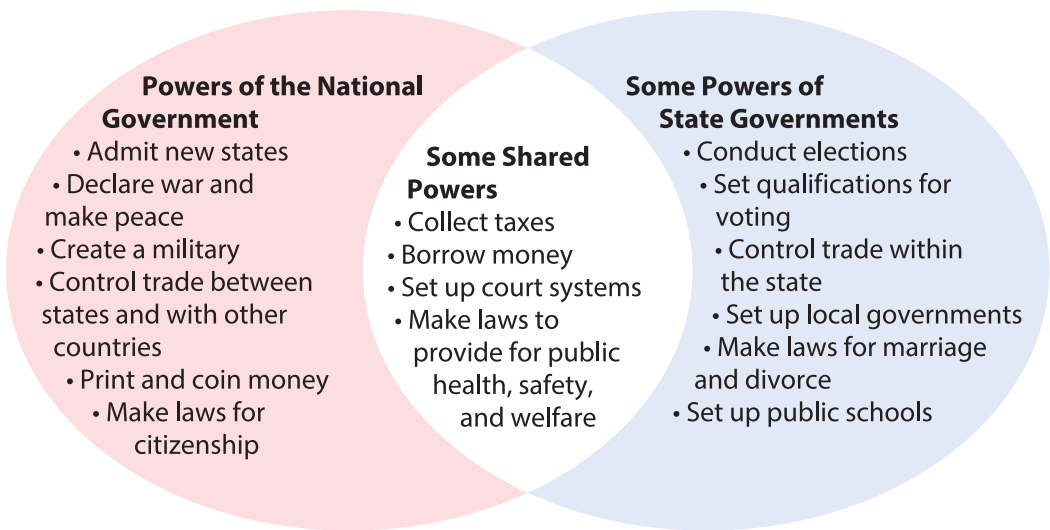
How does the United States distribute decision-making powers at the local, state, and national levels?

Just as in a school, each branch and level of government in the United States has different duties and responsibilities. For example, if someone needed their street repaved, they would contact city hall. They would not call the U.S. House of Representatives. The Constitution establishes the principle of federalism. Federalism divides powers between the national government and state governments. Local governments also have powers that they receive from their state governments.



The California state legislature meets in this state capitol building in Sacramento, California.

Federalism



As you can see from the diagram, the federal government takes care of the issues that affect the country at a high level. It makes decisions that no one state or even a group of states could carry out on their own. These include declaring war, creating national armed forces, and establishing rules for U.S. citizenship.

The Tenth Amendment to the Constitution says that powers not granted to the United States are **reserved** to the states, or to the people. This allows states to be in charge of the issues that most affect the daily lives of their citizens. Marriage licenses, driver's licenses, public school organization, and rules for elections are all handled by state governments.

Vocabulary

reserved, v. kept for use only by a particular person or group

State Government

All state governments have a constitution that establishes their basic principles and structure. Some have been in place since

the founding of the state. Others have been replaced over time. Vermont's constitution was adopted in 1793. It is the nation's shortest state constitution, at just over eight thousand words. The longest state constitution is that of Alabama, at almost four hundred thousand words. Alabama has also had six constitutions since its founding. Each state constitution is different because it reflects the needs of the specific state. But all state constitutions must be aligned with the U.S. Constitution. They cannot violate any of the Constitution's principles.

A governor serves as the head of a state's executive branch, much like the president is the head of the federal executive branch. Governors are responsible for **implementing** the laws that their state legislature enacts. Like the president, governors can bring about new programs and policies through **executive orders**. And governors have advisors and agency heads to help them make decisions, as the president does.

Vocabulary

implement, v. to put into effect

executive order, n. a rule created by an executive head of government, such as a president, that has the force of law

State legislatures are the lawmaking bodies of state governments. All states but Nebraska have two-house legislatures similar to the U.S. Congress. California, for example, has two houses. California's Senate has forty members, and its Assembly has eighty members. The Nebraska legislature has only one house. It is called the Unicameral and has forty-nine senators.

All legislatures follow a similar process to pass laws that help the people of their state. For example, California has many agricultural

workers who work outside in the heat. So the California legislature passed a law that says that these workers must get one liter of water per hour. Not every state has this type of law.

After a legislator proposes a bill, it is drafted and sent to committee for discussion. Once it is passed by the committee, legislators vote on the bill in the house where the bill began. If the bill passes that house, it is sent to the other house for consideration. If the bill passes the second house, any differences between the houses are resolved. Then the bill goes to the governor to be signed.

States also have a state court system. These courts hear cases related to state law. Some state courts are at the county level.



This map shows the 254 counties in Texas.

A county is a division of state government. For example, Texas has 254 counties. Each county has its own court. Some have additional special county courts.

Just as the federal government's power is limited, so is that of the state government. Article I of the Constitution says that individual states are forbidden from forming alliances with other countries, for instance. States also cannot declare war, coin money, or impose **duties** on imports and exports. In addition, state laws cannot conflict with federal laws.

Vocabulary

duties, n. taxes on goods that are being brought into a country

municipal, adj. related to a city or town

Local Government

Local governments get their powers from the state. Many state constitutions outline the process of creating local governments and detail their responsibilities. Local governments are structured differently in different states. States typically have governments at both the county level and the **municipal** level. Municipal governments are those in charge of cities, towns, and villages. Some states also have special districts at the local level. Included among these are school districts. They make decisions that affect all the schools in a certain area.

Depending on the form of local government, positions might be elected or appointed. In either case, the people who run the local governments work closely with state legislators to best meet their community's needs.

Local governments are usually in charge of police and fire departments, municipal courts, emergency medical services, public transportation services, and public works. They handle the day-to-day needs of residents, such as trash collection, stoplight installation and maintenance, and the repair of local roadways.

Most states grant their local governments a good deal of independence when it comes to dealing with local issues.

The states' responsibilities are well outlined in their constitutions. Thus, there is not much confusion about what a local government is and isn't allowed to do. Just like a state law can't conflict with a federal law, local laws must not conflict with state laws.

It is considered a **civic** responsibility of citizens to vote in not only federal and state elections but also local elections. This way, every voice is heard. Some local elections may have a greater impact on a citizen's everyday life than those at the state and federal level. This is especially true when a specific issue is at stake, such as how to pay for improving local schools.



Firefighters respond to a call in New York City.

Vocabulary

civic, adj. relating to the duties of the people who live in a community

Voting isn't the only way to participate in government, though. Another way to participate is to write to or even visit your local elected officials. The people who hold these positions want to make their communities better and are often happy to hear directly from their **constituents**. Running for local office and working for local government are other ways to be active in one's community, as is volunteering for community service.

Vocabulary
constituent, n. a person who lives and votes in an area



Voting is an American right and responsibility.

Chapter 4

The Shaping of America's National Identity

The Making of a Nation Imagine that it's June 1947. You've just spent almost a week on an ocean liner from Italy. Your ship sails into New York Harbor, and you see the Statue of Liberty. Your journey to America is finally complete. You've read about this moment in letters from friends and family who have already moved to the United States. Now you're here, too! You're excited and looking forward to the future, but you're also a bit scared. But why? What is special about this place? Why have you and your family made this long trip? And why are you nervous?

The Big Question

What does it mean to be "a people"?

Vocabulary

vibrant, adj. showing great life and energy

When Europeans arrived in North America in the 1500s, there was already a **vibrant** mix of Native cultures spread across the land.



Immigrants arriving in New York

They had different languages, economies, governments, and **traditions**. People from Europe, Africa, Asia, and other parts of the world then brought their own traditions and **heritage**. At various points in U.S. history, not all immigrants have been welcomed with open arms by the U.S. government and some Americans. Over time, however, the United States developed an **identity** that is a mix of the history and culture of the many groups who have contributed to its story.

As immigrants from all parts of the world have come to the United States, they have added to the country's **diversity**. This diversity has become part of the nation's identity. Even a newcomer to the United States joins in its history and is impacted by its shared principles and ideals. For example, the United States is one of the countries in which people can freely speak their mind. They are innocent until proven guilty. Their rights are protected, even if they are in the **minority**.

Whether an immigrant arrived in America in 1750, 1947, or yesterday, the country still offers the promise of new opportunities. Is the U.S. government perfect? Do its systems always get it right? No. For example, immigration laws have restricted who could come to America at various points in time.

Vocabulary

tradition, n. a way of thinking or doing something that has been used by the people in a particular group or family for a long time

heritage, n. something that is inherited by one person or group from an older person or group

identity, n. all of the things for which something is known

diversity, n. the state of having people of different races, cultures, religions, etc. in one group

minority, n. a group that is the smaller part of a larger group

These laws were based in part on people's country of origin. An 1882 law banned workers and other immigrants from China. A 1924 law extended this restriction to include other countries in Asia. It also limited immigrants from eastern and southern Europe. Over time, these laws were changed. The country became more diverse. This was especially true after changes to immigration laws in the 1950s and 1960s.

America remains a **beacon** of hope for others around the world. Hundreds of thousands of people try to become citizens of the United States each year. They do this because citizenship offers many benefits. Citizens can vote and run for office. They also can more easily get citizenship for other members of their family.

Vocabulary

beacon, n.
something that guides or gives hope to others

naturalization, n.
the process of becoming a citizen if born outside the United States

Just as laws provide order and safety, laws also address citizenship. People born in the United States are automatically citizens. People born in other countries who move to the United States can become citizens by going through the process of **naturalization**. A federal Naturalization Act was first passed in 1790. This act allowed only white people who had lived in the United States for two years, and their children under age twenty-one, to become naturalized citizens. It excluded citizenship for people of color. Later, the time of residence was increased to five years. In 1870, citizenship was extended to people of African descent. Few changes were made to the naturalization laws after this time.

Today, certain requirements still must be met to become a citizen, including being at least eighteen years old, demonstrating a

knowledge of U.S. history and government, and taking an oath of allegiance to the country. Immigrants still have to live in the United States for five years before they can be naturalized.



Naturalization ceremony in Seattle, Washington

The United States Takes Shape

As the nation grew and changed, it developed a sense of shared bonds. The stories and words of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution shaped many of these bonds, as they reflect American ideals of freedom, liberty, and democracy. Symbols like the U.S. flag and traditions like the Pledge of Allegiance have come to represent those ideals.

There are places that represent those ideals, too. The Statue of Liberty in New York City, which many early immigrants saw upon their arrival, is one. The Capitol Building and the White House in Washington, D.C., are others.

Other traditions include national songs such as “America the Beautiful,” which talks about the natural beauty of the country, and “The Star-Spangled Banner,” which became the national anthem in 1931. It was written by Francis Scott Key as he watched American soldiers raise the American flag over Fort McHenry in Maryland during the War of 1812.



Statue of Liberty at night

The last two lines of the

final verse are “O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave; O’er the land of the free and the home of the brave.” The song is sung and played at most public ceremonies and sporting events.

“The American’s **Creed**” was written in 1916 by William Tyler Page. Page worked for the government all his life, beginning in 1881. His creed is a short declaration of all the things that he believed made the United States special. Shortly before World War I began, a publication held a writing competition. The goal was to encourage **patriotism**. There were thousands of

Vocabulary

creed, n. a statement of basic beliefs

patriotism, n. love of one’s country

The American's Creed

I believe in the United States of America as a government of the people, by the people, for the people; whose just powers are derived from the consent of the governed, a democracy in a republic, a sovereign Nation of many sovereign States; a perfect union, one and inseparable; established upon those principles of freedom, equality, justice, and humanity for which American patriots sacrificed their lives and fortunes.

I therefore believe it is my duty to my country to love it, to support its Constitution, to obey its laws, to respect its flag, and to defend it against all enemies.

entries. Page's creed won because it was so simple but **encompassed** so much. The creed calls on Americans to safeguard the liberty of individual Americans, respect the rule of law, and preserve and support the Constitution.

The creed conveys America's identity by focusing on freedom, liberty, and justice. These are the ideals that have drawn so many immigrants here. They also continue to inspire those who already call the United States home.

Vocabulary

encompass, v. to include as a part of something



"The American's Creed" focuses on the people as the power behind the U.S. government.

Glossary

A

- amendment, n.** an addition or change to the words or meaning of a law or document (28)
- assembly, n.** a group of representatives who gather to make laws (13)
- autonomy, n.** the state of existing and acting separately from others (18)
-

B

- beacon, n.** something that guides or gives hope to others (43)
-

C

- charter, n.** a document given by a ruler to a group of people that allows them to elect their own government officials (16)
- citizen, n.** a person who belongs to a country and has protections under that country's laws (6)
- civic, adj.** relating to the duties of the people who live in a community (38)
- confederation, n.** a group of states joined together by a formal agreement (7)
- constituent, n.** a person who lives and votes in an area (39)
- constitution, n.** a set of rules that defines the powers of government in a country (7)
- creed, n.** a statement of basic beliefs (45)
- currency, n.** a system of money (24)
-

D

- delegate, n.** a representative (21)
- democracy, n.** a form of government in which people choose their leaders; a country with this form of government (6)
- dictatorship, n.** a government in which all power is held by an individual or small group (8)
- diplomatic, adj.** related to the managing of relations between the governments of different countries (13)
-

diversity, n. the state of having people of different races, cultures, religions, etc. in one group (42)

domestic policy, n. decisions and laws that a government makes to impact the lives of its country's citizens (12)

duties, n. taxes on goods that are being brought into a country (37)

E

economy, n. the way a country manages its money and resources to produce, buy, and sell goods and services (6)

encompass, v. to include as a part of something (46)

enforce, v. to make sure people do what is required of them (6)

executive order, n. a rule created by an executive head of government, such as a president, that has the force of law (35)

F

federalism, n. the system of dividing government powers between the state and federal governments (30)

foreign policy, n. decisions and laws that are related to a government's relationships with other countries (12)

H

heritage, n. something that is inherited by one person or group from an older person or group (42)

humanitarian, adj. related to efforts to make other people's lives better (13)

I

identity, n. all of the things for which something is known (42)

immigration, n. the act of moving to another country to live (10)

implement, v. to put into effect (35)

interpretation, n. the way someone explains or understands something (29)

J

jury, n. a group of people who listen to information presented during a trial in a court and make decisions about whether someone is guilty or innocent (19)

L

legislature, n. the part of the government responsible for making laws (6)

M

militia, n. a group of armed citizens prepared for military service at any time (21)

minority, n. a group that is the smaller part of a larger group (42)

monarchy, n. a government led by a king or queen (8)

municipal, adj. related to a city or town (37)

N

naturalization, n. the process of becoming a citizen if born outside the United States (43)

natural rights, n. rights that all people are born with and that cannot be taken away by the government (22)

O

oligarchy, n. a government in which all power is held by a small group of wealthy or powerful people (8)

P

patriotism, n. love of one's country (45)

prime minister, n. the head of the government in some countries (8)

R

ratification, n. a formal approval process (26)

rebel, v. to oppose or fight against (23)

representative democracy, n. a form of government in which people vote for leaders to make governing decisions on their behalf (6)

reserved, v. kept for use only by a particular person or group (34)

revise, v. to change (26)

rule of law, n. the principle that no one is above the law, not even the highest lawmakers (14)

S

sedition, n. the crime of saying or doing something that encourages people to disobey their government (18)

social contract, n. an agreement by members of a society to establish and be ruled by a government (22)

sovereign, adj. having supreme power and authority over a nation and its people (15)

T

taxes, n. money collected from citizens by the government (11)

theocracy, n. a form of government in which those in power are also religious leaders or are closely tied to a religion (8)

town meeting, n. a gathering of town residents to discuss community issues and vote (18)

tradition, n. a way of thinking or doing something that has been used by the people in a particular group or family for a long time (42)

tyrannical, adj. using power over people in a way that is cruel and unfair (23)

U

unalienable, adj. unable to be taken away (22)

V

vibrant, adj. showing great life and energy (40)



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