CIVICS DICTIONARY

absolute monarch  human rights
totalitarian        confederation
government         delegate
dictatorship        Parliament
           bicameral
democracy           federalism
direct democracy    compromise
representative      legislature
democracy           ratification
republic            Federalist
law                 Anti-Federalist

To great organization you need a government. The government is the law. You force your government on the people.
What do you think of when you hear the term government? Perhaps you think of the Capitol in Washington, D.C., or your state capital, or your city hall. Perhaps you think of the president, your state governor, or your town mayor. Or maybe you think of laws you must obey or the rules of your school’s student council. If any of these things come to mind, you are on the right track.

Government, though, is not only buildings, leaders, and laws. Government is the entire system of authority, or power, that acts on behalf of a group of people. The American government is a government “of the people, by the people, and for the people.” It has been established to serve the people. It protects our rights and safeguards our freedom. The American government is you—it is all of us.

**Types of Governments**

Every nation in the world has a government. These governments, however, are not all alike. There are many important differences in the way they govern. They differ in the way their leaders are chosen and in the amount of power held by their people. Each nation’s government has been shaped by the beliefs of the people and by their history.

In times past, the governments of many nations were controlled by kings or queens. They often held all the power in their nation’s governments, and they were able to rule by force. Because they held absolute, or total, power, they were called absolute monarchs. Today there are few absolute monarchs left. Most nations that have monarchs greatly limit the monarchs’ power.

In some nations one person or a small group of people holds all the power. The government has total control over the lives of the people. It rules the nation by force. This type of government is a totalitarian government or a dictatorship.

Other nations have a democratic form of government. In a democracy the people of a nation either rule directly or they elect officials who act on their behalf. The word democracy comes from an ancient Greek term meaning “rule of the people.”

There are two forms of democracy. In a direct democracy all voters in a community...
meet in one place to make laws and decide what actions to take. This form works only in small communities.

In a **representative democracy** the people elect representatives to carry on the work of government for them. This system of government is also called a **republic**. It is the form of government found in the United States.

Americans are fortunate to live in a republic. We believe that the people should rule themselves. We have a form of government in which leaders are responsible to the people.

**Do We Need Government?**

Would it be possible for all of us to live as we choose? Could we manage our own affairs without a government? Do we need rules for getting along with one another? To answer these questions, it is important to understand the basic purposes of government.

**Helping People Cooperate**

One of the earliest lessons people learned was that cooperation was useful. It was easier to hunt and kill a large animal for food if the members of the group worked together. The people could also better protect themselves against enemies when they were united. Thus whenever large groups of people have lived together, they have found it necessary and useful to have a government.

Under early forms of government, the strongest person was often made the leader of the people. This person could best help the people defend themselves against their enemies. When food was scarce, the best hunter might be the leader. In other matters, such as whether the people should move to better land, a group of the oldest and wisest leaders might decide. Even the simplest form of government helped to make life safer and easier.

**Providing Services**

Over the years government has grown more and more complex. Yet its basic purposes have remained the same. It not only provides ways for people to live and work together, it also enables a large group of people to get things done. It might be possible for each person in the group to do some of these things alone. It usually would be more difficult and expensive, however, for each person to do so.

For example, what would happen if each family in your community had to educate its own children? Even if parents had time to teach, would they be able to teach all subjects well? By establishing schools, the government makes it possible for all children to receive a good education.

Government also performs other services that would be difficult or impossible for individual citizens to provide for themselves. Government protects the people from enemy nations. It provides police to protect lives and property. Fire departments protect our homes.

Because of government, you can travel over highways that stretch from border to border. A system of money makes it easy for you to buy and sell things and to know the value of these things. Your trash is collected, and health laws are enforced to protect you. You can go to public libraries. The government provides these and many more services.

**Providing Rules**

Large groups of people need rules to help them live together in peace. When there are rules, all people know what they may and may not do. Without rules, any disagreement would probably end with the strongest members of the group settling things their way.

Providing rules of conduct for a group is therefore one of the most important reasons for establishing governments. These rules are known as **laws**. They are written down so that people can know them and obey them. Laws are written by the government to guide, as well as to protect, all of us.

For example, if you own a house on a city or village street, a law may require you to keep your sidewalk in good repair. If you fail to repair cracks, someone may fall and be injured.
Government provides its citizens with hundreds of services, such as free public libraries and the maintenance of community-owned trees.

This law also protects you and your family, because you depend on your neighbors to keep their sidewalks in good condition.

Many of the laws under which we live are contained in constitutions, or written plans of government. Americans have used constitutions to establish national and state governments. A constitution states the purposes of the government. It describes how the government is to be organized. It also contains important laws the government is to uphold.

**Putting Ideals into Practice**

A nation's government helps put into practice the ideals of the people, the things in which they believe. Americans believe that the people should rule themselves. We also believe that each person is important and that no one should be denied his or her rights.

What are these rights? In the Declaration of Independence (discussed later in this chapter), they are described as “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” This means that all Americans have the right to live their lives in liberty, or freedom, and to seek happiness.

To safeguard each citizen’s liberty, the government guarantees certain freedoms, such as freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of religion. These freedoms can never be taken away from any U.S. citizen by the government. Nor can they ever be restricted, except to keep people from using these freedoms to violate the rights of others.

For example, free speech and a free press do not mean freedom to tell lies or write false statements about another person. Each citizen has the right to have his or her reputation protected from efforts to hurt it with untruths.

Americans believe that if any citizen is denied his or her rights, the liberty of all is endangered. The U.S. government has helped its people put these ideals into practice by passing and enforcing laws that guarantee equal rights for all citizens. For example, there are laws requiring that all Americans be given equal opportunities to receive an education, to vote, and to seek jobs.

**SECTION 1 REVIEW**

1. Define or identify the following terms: absolute monarch, totalitarian government, dictatorship, democracy, direct democracy, representative democracy, republic, law, constitution.

2. What factors shape a nation's form of government?

3. What are the basic forms of government found around the world? Who holds the power in these forms of government?
4. How does a direct democracy differ from a representative democracy?

5. What are the basic purposes of government?

6. **Thinking Critically** You are the new leader of the nation Civicus. Write a speech to the people of Civicus in which you explain how the new government will serve the people. Include examples of how you will work to fulfill the four basic purposes of government.

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**The First American Government**

As you know from your study of U.S. history, America was once ruled by Great Britain. Great Britain, however, was far away on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. This great distance allowed American colonists to make many of their own rules and regulations without interference from British leaders.

When the British government under King George III began to enforce its rules and regulations in the colonies, the Americans were angry. They had become used to doing things their own way, and they resented being forced to obey laws they considered unjust. Americans wanted to be free to govern themselves. They fought the Revolutionary War to gain their independence as a nation and to be free.

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**The Declaration of Independence**

When fighting broke out between the American colonies and Great Britain in 1775, the Americans were not yet officially seeking independence. The next year, however, leaders from the 13 colonies met in Philadelphia. At this meeting, called the Second Continental Congress, they named a committee to draw up a Declaration of Independence. Most of the

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The artist John Trumbull painted this version of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The tallest figure in the center is the Declaration's author, Thomas Jefferson.
Declaration was written by Thomas Jefferson. It was approved by members of the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776.

The Declaration explains the reasons the 13 colonies decided to separate from Great Britain and form a free nation. By doing so it upholds the philosophy that the power of government comes from the consent of the governed—the people. If a government ignores the will of the people, the people have a legitimate right to change the government.

Yet the Declaration of Independence is much more than a document to justify independence. It also is a statement of American ideals. It explains to the world, in clear and inspiring language, that the purpose of government is to protect human rights—the basic rights to which all people are entitled as human beings.

**Ideals of American Government**

These basic human rights are clearly stated in the Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

This passage is one of the most famous in American writing. Over the years it has come to mean that all Americans—members of all groups and including both men and women—are equal under the law.

For example, the right of each individual to life, liberty, and happiness must be equal to that of every other individual. No person has the right to consider his or her own life and liberties more important than those of others.

The leaders who signed the Declaration of Independence realized that these ideals would be difficult to achieve. Yet they believed these ideals were worth “our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.”

The Declaration of Independence is one of the greatest documents in the history of the nation. Although it was written more than 200 years ago, it remains a lasting symbol of American freedom. (See pages 525–527.)

**The Articles of Confederation**

The Declaration of Independence did not provide a government for the new nation. Therefore in 1777, while the Revolutionary War was still being fought, the Continental Congress drew up a plan of government—the Articles of Confederation. It was approved by the 13 states and began to operate in 1781.

A confederation is a loose association, rather than a firm union, of states. The Articles of Confederation set up a “firm league of
There was no provision in the Articles for a president or an executive branch to carry out the nation’s laws. Instead, the Articles gave the states the power to enforce the laws passed by Congress. In part, this arrangement stemmed from the people’s suspicion of strong leaders after their experience with King George III of Great Britain. The Articles also did not establish a national court system to interpret the laws and punish lawbreakers.

During the Revolutionary War, the 13 states were willing to work together and make sacrifices to achieve victory. Things were different in the years following the Revolution, however. Many Americans suffered difficult times after the war. Property had been destroyed. Trade with other nations had slowed. American businesses had suffered. Moreover, the war left the nation deeply in debt. The new government tried to handle these problems, but it was too weak to solve them.

Weaknesses of the Confederation

There were many reasons for the weakness of the nation’s government under the Articles of Confederation. Congress had trouble passing laws because a vote of 9 of the 13 states was needed to pass important measures. Without a president or an executive branch, there were no officials to ensure that the laws passed by Congress were carried out. Nor were there national courts to interpret the laws or to judge those who broke them.

In addition, changing the Articles of Confederation to make the national government stronger was difficult. Changes in the Articles required the unanimous vote of all 13 states.

Another weakness of the new government was that Congress lacked the power to collect taxes. Congress could ask the states to contribute money to pay the national government’s expenses, but Congress had no power to force states to make these contributions.

Without money, Congress could not pay the nation’s debts or carry on any government programs that might be needed. Congress also could not provide for the Revolution.

Under national governance, national power would have been divided between the states. Each state would have had an equal voice. Under the Articles, however, many of the states failed to follow the laws of the Confederation.

The Constitution

The Articles established a government for the young nation. Yet the articles failed to give the government the power or the central authority needed to operate effectively.

The Constitution was written by the Articles, yet the Articles failed. The people of the Articles thought of the Articles as a whole. They wanted a stronger central government to act between the states as parts of the Articles.

The Articles faced the problem of having to make decisions over the Articles. The Articles became ineffective. Congress disagreed on national goals, and small states dominated Congress.

Many of the Articles of Confederation created a new plan of government for the young nation.
could not pay the soldiers who had fought in the Revolutionary War.

Under the Articles of Confederation, the national government also lacked other important powers. It could not regulate, or control, trade between the states or with foreign nations. Each state regulated its own trade, causing many disputes among the states and with other nations. In addition, most of the states issued their own money.

The states acted more like small, separate nations than states that were members of a confederation. The states often refused to obey the laws of Congress. As a result, relations between the states and Congress worsened.

The Confederation Fails

The Articles of Confederation succeeded in establishing a new nation—a major achievement. Yet the national government set up by the Articles failed in a number of important ways.

The main trouble with the government set up by the Articles was that the states refused to give the national government enough power to operate effectively. The states feared a strong central government and thus kept most of the real power in their own hands.

The people of each state continued to think of themselves as belonging to their particular state rather than to the nation as a whole. This was natural because the states were separated by great distances and transportation was poor. Also, there was little contact between many of the states. It took years before the states began to think of themselves as parts of a single nation.

The weaknesses of the national government became clear as the young nation began to face new problems. The states quarreled over the location of boundary lines. They became involved in disputes over trade. The national government was powerless to end these disagreements. It seemed to many that the new nation was about to break up into several small nations.

Many leaders began to favor strengthening the national government. As a result, in 1787 Congress asked the states to send representatives to a meeting to consider what could be done to improve the national government.

Under the Articles of Confederation each state issued its own money. The currency shown here is a Massachusetts-Bay dollar.

SECTION 2 REVIEW

1. Define or identify the following terms: human rights, confederation.
2. What was the outcome of the Second Continental Congress?
3. What were the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation?
4. How did the lack of a strong national government create problems?
5. THINKING CRITICALLY You are a farmer living in Virginia in the 1780s. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper describing the problems you have encountered as a result of government under the Articles of Confederation. Suggest what needs to be done to improve your situation.
The Delegates

The 55 delegates who attended the Constitutional Convention included many of those who had been involved in the nation’s struggle for independence. George Washington had led the American army to victory over the British in the Revolutionary War. Respected by all, he was chosen to preside over the Convention. He called on speakers and kept the meetings running smoothly.

At 81 years of age, Benjamin Franklin—diplomat, inventor, writer—was the oldest delegate to the Constitutional Convention. Among the other delegates were James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, James Wilson, Roger Sherman, William Paterson, and Edmund Randolph.

An English Heritage

These leaders knew history well, and they had learned many important lessons from the past.

The Constitutional Convention owed much of its success to the wisdom and work of these two delegates—Benjamin Franklin (left) and George Washington (right).
The delegates wanted the American people to enjoy the rights the English had fought for and won during past centuries. This heritage from England included the rights mentioned in the Magna Carta (the "Great Charter"), which the English people had won from King John in 1215. This important document guaranteed that free people could not be arrested, put in prison, or forced to leave their nation unless they were given a trial by other free people who were their equals. It also guaranteed that the citizens of England were to be judged only according to English law.

The members of the Constitutional Convention also wished the new American nation to have the rights contained in the English Bill of Rights of 1689. One of these rights was the right to petition, or request, the government to improve or to change laws. Another was the right to a fair punishment if a citizen were found guilty of a crime.

The Convention delegates in Philadelphia also studied carefully the example of parliamentary government in England. Parliament is the lawmaking body of the British government. It is bicameral. That is, it consists of two parts, or houses. It is made up of the House of Lords, appointed by the monarch, and the House of Commons, elected by the people. This system enables each house to check and improve the work of the other house.

**Secret Meetings**

The delegates to the Constitutional Convention held their meetings in secret. They were forbidden to discuss any of the business of the Convention with outsiders. This rule was put into effect so that the delegates could speak freely at the Convention.

The Convention had drawn a great deal of public attention. Many delegates feared that if they spoke publicly on a particular issue, they might be subjected to pressure from outsiders. Taking a public stand would also make it more difficult for delegates to change their minds after debate and discussion.

Some delegates favored open public debate and criticized the secrecy rule. Without it, however, agreement on difficult issues might not have been possible.

If the meetings were held in secret, how do we know today what took place during the
Weaknesses of Government
Established by the
Articles of Confederation (1781)

- States given most powers; few powers given to the national government.
- Congress elected by the state legislatures
- Laws difficult to pass (approval of 9 out of 13 states required)
- Congress given no power to collect taxes
- Congress given no power to regulate trade
- Congress given no power to coin money
- Congress given no power to establish armed forces—each state had its own troops
- No president or executive branch
- No system of national courts

Strengths of Government
Established by the
Constitution (1789)

- States keep many powers; important powers given to the national government.
- Congress elected by the people (after the 17th Amendment)
- Laws easier to pass (majority vote required)
- Congress given power to collect taxes
- Congress given power to regulate interstate and foreign trade
- Congress given power to coin money
- Congress given power to establish an army and a navy to defend the nation
- President given power to enforce the laws
- National court system, including a Supreme Court, given power to interpret the laws

### Writing the Constitution

The framers of the Constitution agreed that the national government had to be given greater power. At the same time, most of the framers agreed that the states should keep the powers needed to govern their own affairs. To achieve this balance, the framers established a system of government known as federalism, or a federal system. In a federal system the many powers of government are divided between the national government, which governs the whole nation, and state governments, which govern the people of each state.

The framers worked out the new plan of a federal system at their meetings during the hot summer months of 1787. They discussed many ideas and proposals and settled many differences of opinion by a series of compromises. A compromise is an agreement in which each side gives up part of its demands.

The most serious disagreement arose over the question of representation in the new national legislature, or lawmaking body. The larger states favored a legislature in which representation would be based on the size of a state's population. The smaller states wanted...
each state to have an equal number of representatives in the legislature. For weeks the framers argued over this issue. Finally, both sides agreed to a compromise. Their agreement provided for a law-making body of two houses, called Congress. In one house, the Senate, the states were to have equal representation. In the other house, the House of Representatives, each state was to be represented according to the size of its population. This agreement is known as the Great Compromise.

A Strong New Nation

Many other compromises were reached as the Convention delegates worked on the Constitution. The framers agreed to take away some of the powers of the states and to increase the powers of the new national government. The national government was given the power to tax, to regulate trade among the states and with foreign nations, to raise armed forces, and to coin and print money.

Provision was made for a president to carry out the nation’s laws. A Supreme Court and other national courts would interpret these laws. The charts on page 30 show the major differences between the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution.

By September 1787 the delegates had completed their work. Probably no delegate was satisfied with every part of the document. Benjamin Franklin, for example, did not approve of parts of the Constitution. Yet he believed that the framers had written the best Constitution possible. For this reason, he urged the delegates to sign the document.

Most of the delegates shared Franklin’s belief. Of the 42 framers present that day, 39

As this political cartoon shows, the states formed the base, or pillars, of a strong new nation under the Constitution. North Carolina and Rhode Island were the last two states to ratify the Constitution.

On the erection of the Eleventh Pillar of the great National Dome, we beg leave most sincerely to felicitate our dear Count.

The Federal Edifice.

ELEVEN STARS, in quick succession rise—
ELEVEN COLUMNS strike our wondering eyes,
Soon o’er the subdued, shall swell the beauteous Dome,
COLUMBIA’s boat—and FREEDOM’s hallowed home.
Here shall the ARTS in glorious splendour shine!
And AGRICULTURE give her dores divine!
COMMERCE refined, dispense us more than gold,
And this new world teach WISDOM to the old—
RELIGION here shall fix her bight alone,
Array’d in mildness, like its parent GOD!
JUSTICE and LAW, shall enslave PEACE maintain,
And the “SATURNIAN AGE,” return again.
signed the Constitution. After a farewell dinner, the delegates left for home.

Approving the Constitution

The work of the members of the Constitutional Convention was not over after they left Philadelphia. The Constitution now had to be sent to the states for their ratification, or approval. Before the Constitution could go into effect, it had to be ratified by 9 of the 13 states. Each state set up a special convention of delegates to vote on the Constitution.

People quickly divided into two groups over the issue of adopting the Constitution. Some people strongly supported the new plan of government. Others were opposed to it. The public was swamped with pamphlets, letters to newspapers, and speeches representing both sides of the debate.

Federalists and Anti-Federalists

Supporters of the Constitution were called Federalists. They favored a strong national government. The Federalists argued that the government under the Articles of Confederation was too weak to keep the country united. They feared that unless the Constitution was adopted, the United States would break up into 13 separate nations.

George Washington was inaugurated as the first president of the United States in New York City on April 30, 1789.

People who opposed the new Constitution were called Anti-Federalists. They believed in a strong national government and recent war against Great Britain. Federalists did not agree. They thought the Constitution would make the United States into a country with too much power, and the freedoms of its citizens would be limited.

The Constitution Gradually, those who gained support. Many were upset that the Constitution upset the list of the rights of people. They agreed that such a list people would be added and when the Constitution was ratified.

Most of the states in 1787 and 1788 ratified the United States before New York City was the temporary capital. George Washington arrived to begin their new Senate and House of Representatives. The U.S. Constitution is an important document. Read and study it carefully. You will learn more about our government was established by the Constitution.

SECTION

1. Define or identify a delegate, ratify, federalism, ratification, Federalist

2. What ideas of the Constitutional Convention did you borrow from George Washington?
People who opposed the new Constitution were called Anti-Federalists. They feared that a constitution that established a strong national government defeated the purpose of the recent war against Great Britain. The Anti-Federalists did not believe that the proposed Constitution would protect the power of the states and the freedom of the people.

**The Constitution Is Ratified**

Gradually, those who favored the Constitution gained support. Many citizens, however, were upset that the Constitution did not contain a list of the rights of the people. Finally, it was agreed that such a list, or bill, of rights for the people would be added if the new Constitution were ratified.

Most of the states ratified the Constitution in 1787 and 1788. The new government of the United States began to operate in March 1789. Two states, North Carolina and Rhode Island, did not approve the Constitution until after it went into effect.

New York City was chosen as the nation’s temporary capital. There, on April 30, 1789, George Washington was sworn in as the first president of the United States. Members of the new Senate and House of Representatives arrived to begin their work. The nation’s new government was underway.

The U.S. Constitution is a remarkable and important document. Every American should read and study it carefully. (See pages 529–549.) You will learn more about the government established by the Constitution in Chapter 3.

**SECTION 3 REVIEW**

1. Define or identify the following terms: 
debate, Parliament, bicameral, 
federalism, compromise, legislature, 
ratification, Federalist, Anti-Federalist.

2. What ideas of government did the Constitutional Convention delegates borrow from Great Britain?

3. How did the U.S. Constitution strengthen the American government?

4. What did the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists disagree about and how did they settle their differences?

5. **THINKING CRITICALLY** Draw a “family tree” chart of the United States Constitution that traces the origins of its main ideas, institutions, organization, and compromises. Use lines and arrows to connect the sources (countries, people, events, experiences) to the Constitution’s main ideas.

**CHAPTER 2 SUMMARY**

Government serves many important purposes. Above all, government makes it possible for people to live and work together. Government also provides many services that citizens acting alone could not perform.

Americans believe that the people should rule themselves. Americans also believe that no person should be denied his or her rights. These ideals of the American people are clearly set forth in the Declaration of Independence, one of the greatest documents in the history of the nation.

The Articles of Confederation established the first government of the 13 states. Under this plan, the weak national government could not operate effectively.

In 1787 delegates to the Constitutional Convention wrote a new plan of government for the nation. This plan, the Constitution of the United States, has lasted for more than 200 years. It created a stronger national government and established a lawmaking body of two houses, called Congress. It also provided for a president to carry out the laws and for national courts to interpret the laws. Government under the Constitution began operating in 1789.
Vocabulary Workshop
1. Distinguish between a direct democracy and a representative democracy.
2. What is another term for a written plan of government?
3. In what kind of a system are powers divided between the national government and the state governments?
4. What is the term for a league of states loosely bound together?
5. What important compromises were made at the Constitutional Convention?
6. What two groups clashed over support for the new Constitution?

Reviewing Main Ideas
1. What two factors shape the government of a nation?
2. What are four reasons why people form governments?
3. What were the main purposes of the Declaration of Independence?
4. What were the weaknesses of government under the Articles of Confederation?
5. How did the U.S. Constitution correct the weaknesses of government under the Articles of Confederation?
6. Why did the Constitutional Convention delegates hold their meetings in secret?
7. What were the arguments of the supporters and opponents of the Constitution?

Citizenship in Your Community
Cooperative Project
With your group, ask several members of your community to define the term human rights. Use this information to create a visual display entitled “How the United States Protects Human Rights.” Your display may include pictures from magazines, photographs you take in your community, newspaper articles, and poems.

Building Your Portfolio
The second step of your unit portfolio project (see page 67) is to write a “Declaration of Education” statement. In your Declaration express what you believe are the ideals of American education. Begin your Declaration of Education with the following phrase: “We, the American students, hold these truths to be self-evident…” Your Declaration should then explain how your school upholds each of the educational ideals listed. Place your statement in your individual portfolio for later use.