

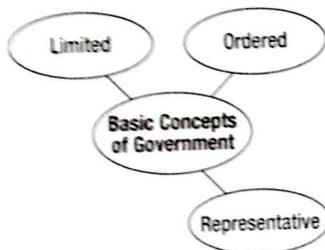
SECTION 1

Our Political Beginnings



Guiding Question

What ideas and traditions influenced government in the English colonies? Use a concept web like the one below to take notes on the ideas that shaped American colonists' concepts of government.



Political Dictionary

- limited government
- representative government
- Magna Carta
- due process
- Petition of Right
- English Bill of Rights
- charter
- bicameral
- proprietary
- unicameral

Objectives

1. Identify the three concepts of government that influenced the American colonies.
2. Explain the significance of three landmark English documents.
3. Describe the three types of colonies that the English established in the American colonies.

Image Above: King John signs the Magna Carta, limiting his own power.

The American system of government did not suddenly spring into being with the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776. Nor was it created by the Framers of the Constitution in 1787.

The beginnings of what was to become the United States can be found in the mid-sixteenth century when explorers, traders, and settlers first made their way to North America. The French, Dutch, Spanish, Swedes, and others came to explore and settle what would become this nation—and to dominate the Native Americans who were here for centuries before the arrival of the first Europeans. It was the English, however, who came in the largest numbers. And it was the English who soon controlled the 13 colonies that stretched for some 1,300 miles along the Atlantic seaboard.

Basic Concepts of Government

The earliest English settlers brought with them knowledge of a political system—of established laws, customs, practices, and institutions—that had been developing in England for centuries.

Some aspects of that governing system had come to England from other times and places. Thus, the concept of the rule of law that influenced English political ideas has roots in the early civilizations of Africa and Asia.¹ More directly, the ancient Romans occupied much of England from A.D. 43 to 410. They left behind a legacy of law, religion, and custom. From that rich political history, the English colonists brought to North America three basic notions that were to loom large in the shaping of government in the United States.

Ordered Government The English colonists saw the need for an orderly regulation of their relationships with one another—that is, a need for government. They created local governments, based on those they had known in England.

¹ For example, King Hammurabi of Babylonia developed a system of laws known as Hammurabi's Code around 1750 B.C. Its 282 legal rules covered real estate, trade, and business transactions, as well as criminal law. The code distinguished between major and minor offenses, established the state as the authority to enforce the law, and tried to guarantee social justice. Because of the Babylonians' close contact with the Hebrews, many of their laws became part of Hebrew law and thus later a part of the Old Testament of the Bible—for example, "An eye for an eye." The English were quite familiar with and devoutly attracted to this Biblical concept of the rule of law.

Many of the offices and units of government they established are with us yet today: the offices of sheriff and justice of the peace, the grand jury, counties, and several others.

Limited Government The colonists also brought with them the idea that government is restricted in what it may do, and every individual has certain rights that government cannot take away. This concept is called **limited government**, and it was deeply rooted in English belief and practice by the time the first English ships set sail for America. It had been planted in England centuries earlier, and had been developing there for nearly 400 years before Jamestown was settled in 1607.

Representative Government The early English settlers also carried another important concept across the Atlantic: **representative government**. This idea that government should serve the will of the people had also been developing in England for several centuries. With it had come a growing insistence that the people should have a voice in deciding what government should and should not do. As with the concept of limited government, the idea of “government of, by, and for the people” flourished in America.

Landmark English Documents

These basic notions of ordered government, limited government, and representative government can be traced to several **landmark** documents in English history.

The Magna Carta A group of determined barons forced King John to sign the **Magna Carta**—the Great Charter—at Runnymede in 1215. Weary of John’s military campaigns and heavy taxes, the barons who prompted the Magna Carta were seeking protection against heavy-handed and **arbitrary** acts by the king.

The Magna Carta included guarantees of such fundamental rights as trial by jury and **due process** of law (protection against the arbitrary taking of life, liberty, or property). Those protections against the absolute power of the king were originally intended for the

privileged classes only. Over time, however, they became the rights of all English people and were incorporated into other documents. The Magna Carta established the critical idea that the monarchy’s power was not absolute.

The Petition of Right The Magna Carta was respected by some monarchs and ignored by others for 400 years. Over that period, England’s Parliament slowly grew in influence. In 1628, when Charles I asked Parliament for more money in taxes, Parliament refused until he agreed to sign the **Petition of Right**.

The Petition of Right limited the king’s power in several ways. Most importantly, it demanded that the king no longer imprison or otherwise punish any person but by the lawful judgment of his peers or by the law of the land. The document also insisted that the king may not impose martial law, or military rule, in times of peace, or require homeowners to shelter the king’s troops without their consent. The Petition declared that no man should be

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compelled to make or yield any gift, loan, benevolence, tax, or such like charge, without common consent by act of parliament.

—Petition of Right

The Petition challenged the idea of the divine right of kings, declaring that even a monarch must obey the law of the land.

The English Bill of Rights In 1689, after years of revolt and turmoil, Parliament offered the crown to William and Mary of Orange. The events surrounding their ascent to the throne are known as the Glorious Revolution. To prevent abuse of power by William and Mary and all future monarchs, Parliament, in 1689, drew up a list of provisions to which William and Mary had to agree.

This document, the **English Bill of Rights**, prohibited a standing army in peacetime, except with the consent of Parliament,

✓ **Checkpoint**
What is represent government?



Commemorative coin from the reign of Charles I

landmark
adj. historical, pivotal, highly significant

arbitrary
adj. not restrained or limited in the exercise of power

Audio Tour

Listen to a guided audio tour of the rights in these documents at PearsonSuccessNet.com

Foundations of American Rights

The rights established in these landmark documents were revolutionary in their day and influenced government in many countries. *How might the right to petition, first granted in the English Bill of Rights, prevent abuse of power by a monarch?*



The English Bill of Rights is presented to William and Mary.

	1215 Magna Carta	1689 English Bill of Rights	1776 Virginia Bill of Rights	1791 Bill of Rights
Trial by jury	•	•	•	•
Due process	•	•	•	•
Private property	•	•	•	•
No cruel punishment	•	•	•	•
No excessive bail or fines	•	•	•	•
Right to bear arms	•	•	•	•
Right to petition	•	•	•	•
No unreasonable searches or seizures	•	•	•	•
Freedom of speech	•	•	•	•
Freedom of the press	•	•	•	•
Freedom of religion	•	•	•	•

Checkpoint
What were the limitations set by the English Bill of Rights?

venture
n. an undertaking involving risk

levy
v. to impose, to collect by legal authority

and required that all parliamentary elections be free. In addition, the document declared

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that the pretended power of suspending the laws, or the execution of laws, by regal authority, without consent of Parliament is illegal . . .

that levying money for or to the use of the Crown . . . without grant of Parliament . . . is illegal . . .

that it is the right of the subjects to petition the king . . . and that prosecutions for such petitioning are illegal . . .

—English Bill of Rights

The English Bill of Rights also included such guarantees as the right to a fair trial, as well as freedom from excessive bail and from cruel and unusual punishment.

Our nation has built upon, changed, and added to those ideas and institutions that settlers brought here from England. Still, much in American government and politics today bears the stamp of those early English ideas. Surely, this is not so strange when you recall that the colonial period of American history lasted for some 170 years and that the United States has existed as an independent nation for only a slightly longer period.

The Thirteen Colonies

England's colonies in North America have been described as "13 schools of government." The colonies were the settings in which Americans first began to learn the difficult art of government.²

The 13 colonies were established, separately, over a span of some 125 years. During that long period, outlying trading posts and isolated farm settlements developed into organized communities. The first colony, Virginia, was founded with the first permanent English settlement in North America at Jamestown in 1607.³ Georgia was the last to be formed, with the settlement of Savannah in 1733.

Each of the colonies was born out of a particular set of circumstances. Virginia was originally organized as a commercial venture. Its first colonists were employees of the Virginia Company of London (also called the London Company), a private trading corporation. Massachusetts was first settled by

² The English and other Europeans brought their own notions of government, but that is not to say that they introduced the idea of government to the Americas. Several Native American societies had developed systems of government. Some Native American political organizations were very complex. For example, five Native American tribes in what is now New York State—the Seneca, Cayuga, Oneida, Onondaga, and Mohawk—formed a confederation known as the Iroquois League. The League was originally created to end conflicts among the tribes. It proved so successful as a form of government that it lasted for some 200 years.

³ St. Augustine, Florida, is the oldest continuously populated European settlement in what is now the United States. St. Augustine was founded by Pedro Menéndez de Avilés in 1565 to establish Spanish authority in the region.

people who came to North America in search of greater personal and religious freedom. King George granted Georgia to 21 trustees, who governed the colony.

But the differences among the colonies are of little importance. Of much greater significance is the fact that all of them were shaped by their English origins. The many similarities among all 13 colonies far outweighed their differences.

Each colony was established on the basis of a **charter**, a written grant of authority from the king. This grant gave colonists or companies a grant of land and some governing rights, while the Crown retained a certain amount of power over a colony. Over time, these instruments of government led to the development of three different types of colonies: royal, proprietary, and charter.

Royal Colonies The royal colonies were subject to the direct control of the Crown. On the eve of the American Revolution in 1775, there were eight: New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.

The Virginia colony did not enjoy the quick success its sponsors had promised. In addition, the colony's government was evolving into one of popular rule. The king disapproved of the local government's methods, as well as their attempt to grow tobacco. So, in 1624, the king revoked the London Company's charter, and Virginia became the first of the royal colonies. Later, as the charters of other colonies were canceled or withdrawn for a variety of reasons, they became royal colonies.

A pattern of government gradually emerged for each of the royal colonies. The king named a governor to serve as the colony's chief executive. A council, also named by the king, served as an advisory body to the royal governor. Later, the governor's council became both the upper house of the colonial legislature and the colony's

highest court. The lower house of a **bicameral** (two-house) legislature was elected by those property owners qualified to vote.⁴ It owed much of its influence to the fact that it shared with the governor and his council the power of the purse—the power to tax and spend. The governor, advised by the council, appointed judges for the colony's courts.

The laws passed by the legislature had to be approved by the governor and the Crown. Royal governors often ruled with a stern hand, following instructions from London. Much of the resentment that finally flared into revolution was fanned by their actions.

The Proprietary Colonies By 1775, there were three **proprietary** colonies: Maryland,

The Thirteen Colonies, 1775



The Virginia legislature held its first meeting in Jamestown on July 30, 1619, and was the first representative body to meet in the North American English colonies. It was made up of burgesses—that is, representatives—elected from each settlement (each borough) in the colony. Virginia called the lower house of its colonial legislature the House of Burgesses; South Carolina, the House of Commons; Massachusetts, the House of Representatives.

➔ **Analyzing Maps** Despite the differing government systems within the colonies, they were all influenced by their English roots. **How many royal colonies were left at this time? How were royal colonies and charter colonies different?**

✓ Checkpoint
What is the difference between a proprietary colony and a charter colony?

haven
n. a place of safety

Pennsylvania, and Delaware. These colonies were organized by a proprietor, a person to whom the king had made a grant of land. By charter, that land could be settled and governed much as the proprietor chose. In 1632, the king granted Maryland to Lord Baltimore, which was intended as a **haven** for Catholics. In 1681, Pennsylvania was granted to William Penn. In 1682, Penn also acquired Delaware.⁵

The governments of these three colonies were much like those in the royal colonies. The governor, however, was appointed by the proprietor. In Maryland and Delaware, the legislatures were bicameral. In Pennsylvania, the legislature was a **unicameral** body. It consisted of only one house. The Frame of Government, a constitution that William Penn drew up for that colony in 1682, was, for its time, exceedingly democratic. As in the royal colonies, appeals of decisions in the proprietary colonies could be carried to the king in London.

The Charter Colonies The Massachusetts Bay Colony was established as the first charter colony in 1629. Its charter was later

⁵ New York, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia also began as proprietary colonies. Each later became a royal colony.

revoked, and Massachusetts became a royal colony in 1691.

Connecticut and Rhode Island were charter colonies founded by religious dissidents from Massachusetts. Connecticut was founded in 1633, and granted a charter in 1662. Rhode Island was founded in 1636, and granted a charter in 1663. Both colonies were largely self-governing.

The governors of Connecticut and Rhode Island were elected each year by the white, male property owners in each colony. Although the king's approval was required before the governor could take office, it was not often asked. Laws made by their bicameral legislatures were not subject to the governor's veto, nor was the Crown's approval needed. Judges in the charter colonies were appointed by the legislature, but appeals could be taken from the colonial courts to the king.

The Connecticut and Rhode Island charters were so liberal for their time that, after independence, they were kept with only minor changes as State constitutions until 1818 and 1843, respectively. In fact, many historians say that if Britain had allowed the other colonies the same freedoms and self-government found in the charter colonies, the Revolution might never have occurred.

SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT

Essential Questions Journal

To continue to build a response to the chapter Essential Question, go to your Essential Questions Journal.

1. **Guiding Question** Use your completed flowchart to answer this question: What ideas and traditions influenced government in the English colonies?

Key Terms and Comprehension

2. Define the concept of **representative government**.
3. Explain why the barons forced King John to sign the **Magna Carta**.
4. (a) What is a **bicameral** legislature?
(b) How was the lower house of the legislature chosen in the royal colonies?

Critical Thinking

5. **Make Comparisons** What principles do the Magna Carta, the Petition of Right, and the English Bill of Rights have in common?
6. **Predict Consequences** The English Crown gave Connecticut and Rhode Island many freedoms not enjoyed by other colonies. Do you agree with the historians who say that the Revolution may have never happened if all colonies enjoyed the same freedoms? Why or why not?

Quick Write

Narrative Writing: Choose a Colony
Choose one of the 13 colonies and write questions about its founding, its original government, and how it changed throughout the Revolutionary period. You will later research answers for these questions and write a narrative nonfiction piece. For example, if you choose Connecticut, you might ask: What was Connecticut's reaction to the English government's treatment of the colonies?