

CHAPTER 2

The design of today's democracy

Democracy is the idea that people should have control over their government. This is the opposite of government having control of the people. In societies where there is one absolute ruler – a king, or a dictator – all power is held by one person. In a democracy, all power is held by the people.

In a democracy, people control government by voting. When our country was founded, the idea that all people should be able to vote was considered quite radical. The people who wrote the constitution thought they were going pretty far just by giving the right to vote to all white men who owned land. This was a huge change for a people who had been ruled by a king who lived far across the ocean.

Over the years, the right to vote has been expanded to include people who don't own land, African-Americans, women, Native Americans, and immigrants of all races who choose to become citizens. Today, it seems obvious to us that everyone is equal, and that everyone should have the right to vote. But we need to remember that this was not always so, and that the right to vote is something that many generations of Americans struggled hard to create for us.



Portrait of
George Washington
by Rembrandt Peale,
in the Governor's Mansion
Olympia, WA

photo by Diane Walste, courtesy Governor's Mansion Foundation

Lord Acton, a British historian, wrote in 1887 that “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

The basic principles of our system of government are spelled out in our nation's constitution, which was adopted when our country was founded over 200 years ago. The constitution sets the basic rules for how government should work. A series of amendments to the constitution called the **Bill of Rights** defines the rights of citizens.

Our constitution is the foundation of our democracy. It represents a very careful balance between **individual liberty** and the **common good**. Our constitution protects our freedom to pursue our own dreams and choose our own beliefs, but, at the same time, it calls on citizens and elected leaders to put the common good – the welfare of everyone – ahead of our own interests.

Separation of powers

Human beings are far from perfect, and we often have a hard time resisting the temptation to abuse power. We also need stability in our government so that people

“...we here resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain — that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom — and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S
GETTYSBURG ADDRESS, 1863

Different kinds of government

We have three basic levels of government: national, state, and local.



Our national government deals with issues that affect our whole nation. This includes managing our relationships with other countries, protecting the U. S. from attack, making national laws, and providing programs and services for all Americans.



Our 50 state governments – and the governments of territories governed by the U. S., like Puerto Rico, Guam and American Samoa – deal with issues that affect the people of their state or territory.



Our local governments make laws and provide services to people within counties, cities and towns.

Tribal governments are also an important part of the United States. In every state, including Washington, tribes govern the native people who live on the reservations created when their ancestors signed treaties with the federal government.



art courtesy of Northwest
Indian Fisheries Commission

State and local governments are based on the same democratic ideas as our national government. Tribal governments are usually based partly on the national model described in our constitution, and partly on the traditional ways tribes governed themselves before settlers came.

and businesses can plan for the future. That's why American democracy *spreads power around* rather than giving a lot of power to one elected leader.

American democracy has three branches of government – ***the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch***. By balancing power among three branches of government, we assure that power is shared, and that no one person or branch of government has absolute authority.

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- ***At the federal or national level, the legislative branch makes laws,*** and decides how to spend the federal taxes that all of us pay. The legislative branch consists of the Senate and the House of Representatives. (Together, the House and Senate are called the ***Congress***.) The people of each state elect two Senators, no matter how big or small the state is. But the number of representatives each state elects to the House of Representatives depends on how many people live there. (For example, Washington currently has ten representatives; California has 52.)

- ***The president, who is the head of the executive branch,*** can approve or reject (veto) the laws Congress makes. If the President vetoes a law, the Congress can cancel (*override*) the veto by passing the law again, but this time two-thirds of them (not just a ***simple majority*** of half plus one) have to vote for it.

The president is also the boss for most national government agencies, and is the Commander in Chief of the military.

- ***The most important part of the judicial branch is the Supreme Court.*** There are nine Justices on the Supreme Court. They are appointed for life by the President, but the Senate has to vote to approve of the President's appointments. Because Supreme Court Justices are appointed for life, they don't have to worry about losing their jobs if they make decisions that someone doesn't like. Their primary duty is to make sure that the laws passed by Congress, states,

and local governments respect the basic principles laid out in our nation's constitution. If the Supreme Court decides a law is unconstitutional, it can throw the law out. The Supreme Court can also rule on cases about whether police and other government agencies – including the president – respect the constitutional rights of citizens.

This system of government is not designed to be efficient and fast; it is designed to be careful and slow. A new law has to be debated and voted on by the legislative branch, approved by the executive branch, and, if anyone challenges it, upheld by our judicial branch.

There is often tension and conflict between the three branches of government. Presidents sometimes get angry when the Senate doesn't approve their appointments to the Supreme Court. Congress doesn't like it when a President vetoes a law they've passed. But because everyone agrees with the basic rules set out in the constitution, these conflicts don't get out of hand.

This basic idea – the idea of *separation of powers* into the three branches of government – is reflected in the way state and local governments are organized, too. But state and local governments vary in the way they do this. Nebraska, for instance, has only one legislative body instead of two. And in our state, we elect the members of our state Supreme Court rather than letting the Governor (the head of our executive branch) appoint them.



Mt. Rushmore features four presidents carved into a mountainside. Can you name all four?

Many local governments combine some of the functions of the legislative and executive branches because they are just too small to maintain three separate branches. But the basic principle of spreading power around is a universal feature of American governance. It is often called a system of *checks and balances*.

The rule of law

A cornerstone of American government is the idea of having a “government of laws rather than a government of men.” This means that our government is guided by the law, not by what one person – or one group of people – wants to do. Our laws are intended to apply to everyone equally. No one is supposed to get special treatment, no matter how rich or powerful they may be. And the power of all government officials is limited to what the law says they can do.

The importance of democratic institutions

Our democracy depends on people’s respect for the basic institutions of government. Even if we don’t like the person who is holding an office, we have to respect the fact that he or she was elected by the majority of voters and has a right to do the job. If we don’t like the decisions that person makes, we can vote them out of office when their term is up. In the meantime, we often have to live with elected officials we just don’t agree with.

For instance, we may think the current president or governor is terrible, or that the decisions of Congress, the state legislature, the Tribal Council, or the County Commission are all wrong—but we can still respect that we need those institutions.

Democracy takes patience. We can’t throw someone out of office the minute we get mad at them. Unless they’ve committed a terrible crime, we just have to wait until the next election. This can be a hard reality for many people to live with, but it might be the most important idea you learn about democracy.

Having three branches of government share power prevents any single elected leader from becoming a tyrant. But this system of checks and balances only works if citizens understand and respect it.

If a leader comes along who convinces people that he alone can solve all our problems, and we don't need the other two branches of government, we could end up with a dictator.

This has happened in other countries, and the results have been terrible: people jailed for their political beliefs, freedom lost, and people left with no way to get rid of a tyrant.

That's why it's so important for citizens to do all we can to protect our democracy. We can do that by making careful choices when we vote, by making sure we get truthful information about what's going on in our government, and by speaking up if we think someone is abusing their power.



photo courtesy Jeanie Lindsay, Northwest News Network

On the first day of a legislative session following an election, legislators are sworn in to serve the citizens they represent. In the gallery at the top left, their family, friends and other citizens watch.

Majority rule, minority rights

When our nation was founded, the people who wrote our constitution worked hard to balance two ideas. The first – majority rule – is the idea that the ultimate power in a democracy is vested in the people. When we elect leaders, the majority of the people – that is, 50% plus one or more – determines who wins.

The second idea relates to “the rule of law.” The idea is that the majority shouldn’t be able to violate the rights of a minority. Like the idea of the separation of powers,

this idea recognizes that people are imperfect. Sometimes the majority of people are prejudiced against a certain group of people – people of a different race or religion, or people who have different political beliefs, for instance. Our political system is designed to protect minorities by providing all citizens with the same rights, and by giving the Supreme Court the power to strike down any law, no matter how popular, if it violates the rights of even one person. These ideas are reflected in the U.S. Constitution’s Bill of Rights.

Federalism

The word *federalism* describes the division of responsibility between state governments and our national government. When our country was founded, it was made up of 13 colonies that had been created by England. As our national constitution was being written, there were lots of arguments about how much power they would have when they became states, and how much power the national government would have. In the end, the general idea was that the federal government would make rules about things that crossed state lines, and states would be responsible for everything else. So, for instance, states are responsible for education, but the national government is responsible for defending our nation from attack.

Not all of the arguments about state versus national government power were really settled when the constitution was written. In the history of the U.S., the relative power of state and federal governments has continued to change. During the civil rights movement of the 1960s for instance, southern states argued that they had “states’ rights” to discriminate against African-Americans. After a long series of debates and court cases, it was decided that they did not.

Political parties

A political party is an organization that shares a set of values and beliefs. Voters often choose who they will vote for based on the political party that person belongs to.

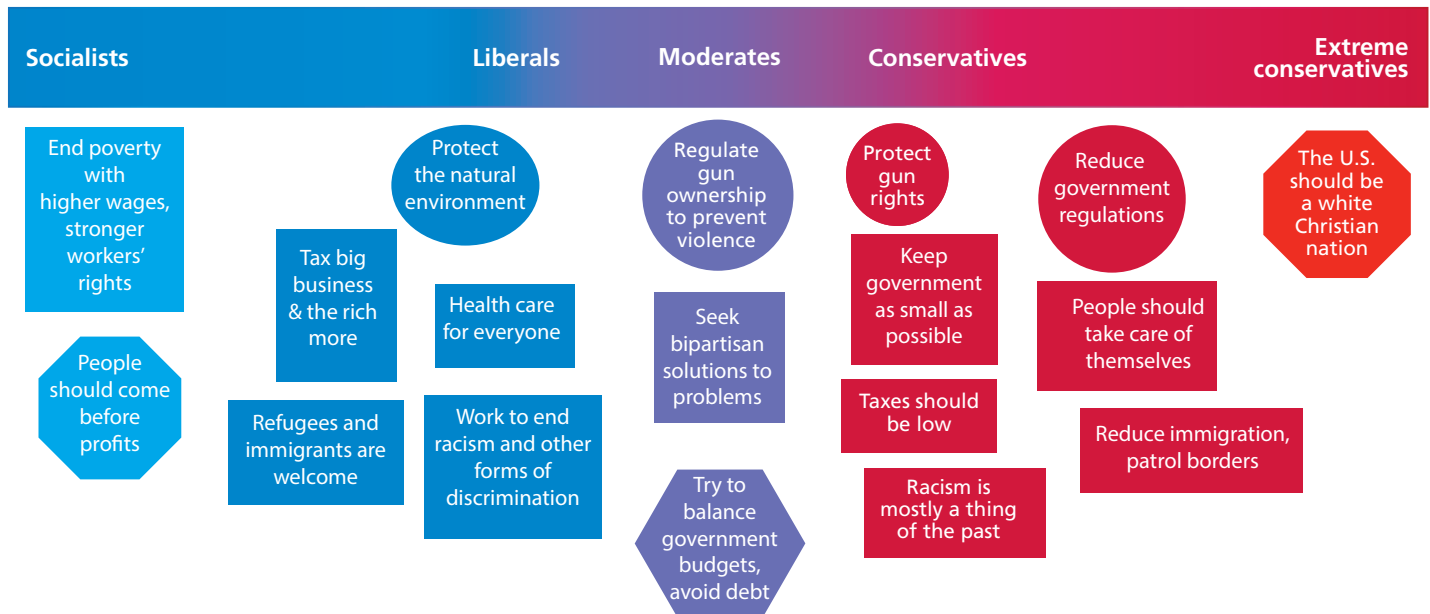
Right now, our country has two main political parties: Republican and Democratic. There are also several smaller political parties, and it’s always possible that one of those

smaller parties may grow larger and more important. In the history of our country, the names and ideas of political parties have shifted with the times.

In today's world, people usually think of political ideas as if they were on a line. (This is called the political spectrum.) On the left end of the line are socialists. They think wealth should be shared and that, where possible, businesses should be owned and run by the people who work in them. They are strong champions of workers' rights and want generous government benefits to prevent poverty and to provide health care, education, and other services to all.

A bit closer to the center, but still on the left, are liberals – those who think rich people and big businesses should pay a larger share in taxes to provide government benefits, such as education and health care, and to help people who are poor. Liberals believe that government can be a force for good in many ways, such as creating regulations to reduce pollution and protect the environment, and funding for the arts and public broadcasting.

The political spectrum in the United States



On the far right end of the line are extreme conservatives, who want as little government as possible. The most extreme believe that the United States was intended to be a white Christian nation and that we should discourage other races and religions. They also usually believe that men should be in charge of their families and that wives should obey their husbands.

More toward the center are conservatives who believe that all people should be responsible for their own well-being. They think government should be smaller than it is now, that taxes should be very low, and that businesses should be free from most regulation.

A lot of people are somewhere near the middle of the line, in what people call the mainstream. Mainstream Republicans are just to the right of center; mainstream Democrats are just to the left of it.

You could also place people along the line from left to right based on what they believe about many other issues. To the right of the center, for instance, people are likely to believe that everyone has a right to own as many guns as they want; on the left people are likely to believe that we should create laws to limit gun ownership in order to reduce violence. People to the left of center are usually in favor of allowing more immigrants and refugees, regardless of where they come from; people to the right of center want to limit, or even stop, immigration or, at the far right, to exclude people of other faiths or races.

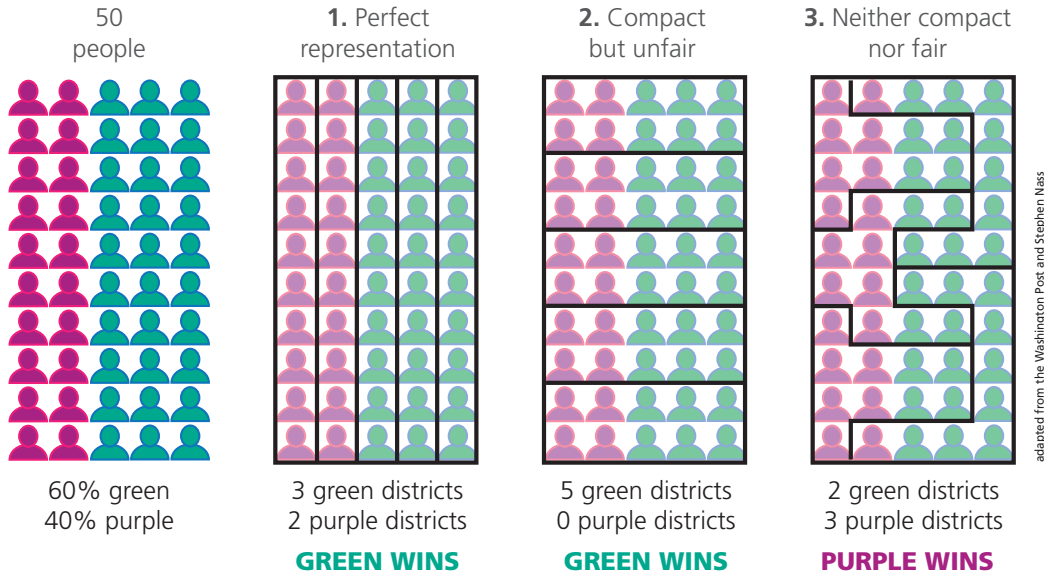
However, many people are liberal on some issues and conservative on others.

Universal suffrage – the right of everyone to vote – is the foundation of democracy, but in a complex society like ours, people cannot vote on everything. We have to choose people to do the work of governing for us. That’s why we elect people to represent us. This is called *representative democracy*. (When people vote on everything, it’s called *direct democracy*.)

Even now, when women and men and people of all races have a right to vote, there are conflicts about whether we have really achieved complete fairness in voting.

Gerrymandering

Three different ways to divide 50 people into five districts



There are three reasons for this:

- **Gerrymandering** is the practice of drawing voting district boundaries in ways that favor one group of voters and discount the votes of another group. It is unconstitutional to draw district lines that reduce the voting power of communities of color. But in many states, whichever political party holds the majority in the state legislature draws the boundaries. They can draw district lines that dilute the impact of another political party. (See the graphic above that shows how this works.)

Our state's district boundaries are drawn by a five-member commission that includes two people from each political party, who together elect a nonvoting fifth person to be their chair. The legislature votes to approve or reject the commission's plan, but they can't amend it.

We all need both national and local news sources we can trust to be accurate, truthful, and thorough...it's important to gather news from diverse sources and to find out who owns the news media you read or watch.

California has an even fairer process—an independent citizen commission that doesn't represent either party draws district lines.

- **Campaign financing rules can reduce the power of ordinary people**

because business groups, unions, and wealthy individuals can give huge sums of money to help their favorite candidates get elected. They can also raise money to pay people to gather signatures to get an initiative on the ballot, and then pour more money into ad campaigns to get people to vote for it. (There's more about this on pages 36 and 77.)

- **Voter registration laws** are supposed to make sure only citizens who live in a certain district can vote in that district's election. But laws in some states require paperwork that ends up excluding people who don't have—or who can't afford to pay for—documents (like birth certificates or a special card with their photo on it) that prove they are who they say they are. Tactics like this that make it hard for all citizens to vote are called “voter suppression.”

Laws about all these issues vary from one state to another. All three of these problems occasionally end up in court—sometimes the U.S. Supreme Court.

The Art of the Possible

In a democracy where people have many different opinions and points of view, no one group is likely to get all it wants. People have to work out their differences and find solutions to problems that everyone can live with, even if no one is entirely happy with the compromise.

That's why people often say that “politics is the art of the possible . . . the art of the next best.” (A 19th-century German leader, Otto von Bismarck, was the first to say this.)

Even if one political party has the majority in Congress, they still have to think about what might happen in the next election. If they lose the majority, will the other party try to repeal what they just passed? This can and does happen. So if elected leaders want to make progress that lasts, compromise is necessary.

When elected leaders fail to compromise, things get very messy. In rare cases, when they fail to pass a budget, the government might shut down (except for essential services)

until they solve their dispute. At the state level, it can mean that the legislature goes into overtime—sometimes for several weeks.

In the end, finding an agreement that a majority will vote for just has to happen, no matter how messy it gets or how long it takes.

The Media

While there are only three branches of government (legislative, executive, and judicial), our news media is sometimes referred to as the “fourth estate,” or fourth branch. (The “fourth estate” is an old English term for the news media.)

The news media are a bridge between government and citizens, because the news media provide most of the information that shapes our opinions about proposed laws, elected leaders, and issues.

That’s why it’s so important to know as much about our news sources as possible. We all need both national and local news sources we can trust to be accurate, truthful, and thorough.

Many news media have their own points of view. Some are liberal, others are conservative, and some are quite extreme in their beliefs. Those beliefs guide what stories they cover and how they cover them.

Not everything you read or see online or on TV is true. That’s why it’s important to gather news from diverse sources and to find out who owns the news media you read or watch, whether it’s online, on TV or radio, or in print.

Social media like Facebook and Twitter can be especially hard to trust, because it’s often really hard to figure out the original source of the information you see there.





Who came when, and where did they come from?

When the railroad finally reached Washington in 1887, it cut the time to travel across the country from four to six months to six days. Washington's population exploded once the railroads connected us to the rest of the country. Most of the people who came were European immigrants who had already lived for some time in the East and Midwest, but people also came directly from other countries.

White settlers came to Washington beginning in the 1840s. Most came from the American Midwest or the Northeast. Their migration to Oregon and Washington started as a trickle, but grew larger with every passing year – especially after 1846, when the federal government encouraged people to settle here.



Image courtesy Tacoma Public Library

African-Americans were among the earliest settlers, but the number of African-Americans was very small until the 1880s when railroads reached Washington. The population grew a lot during World War II, when many came to work at Boeing, Hanford, and in other wartime jobs. In 1880, there were 180 African-Americans in Washington; in 1890, there were just over 1,000; in 1940, there were 7,000. In 1950, after World War II, there were 30,000.



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Chinese workers were recruited to help build the railroads during the 1870s. But in the 1880s, white workers who needed jobs blamed the Chinese workers for high unemployment, and there were anti-Chinese riots and killings. Many Chinese left or were driven out of the state.



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Scandinavians (people from Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland) began to immigrate to Washington in the 1880s, and their numbers increased rapidly for the next twenty five years. Most came to the Puget Sound region, but there were also clusters of various nationalities in Spokane and in other cities and farming areas. In 1910, the population of Kitsap County was 25% Scandinavian immigrants. Some Scandinavians settled in the Puget Sound area because it reminded them of home and they could find jobs in the woods.

Before 1846, when the Oregon Territory officially became part of the United States, the only immigrants were fur traders and trappers, a few missionaries, and people who worked for the trading companies that bought and sold furs. Nearly all were single men. Some were French-speaking Canadians; a few were from Hawaii; others were British or American. A few married native women and lived with local tribes, but most left eventually.

National immigration policy didn't exist until 1882. That was the first time the federal government passed a law to control who could come to this country – and the law was the Chinese Exclusion Act, which forbade any more Chinese laborers from coming to the U. S. In the 1920s, more immigration laws were passed to limit the immigration of Eastern and Southern Europeans and to exclude people from Asia and the Pacific Islands. Immigration policy was based on race for a long time, and it favored Northern Europeans. This didn't change until the Immigration Reform and Nationality Act of 1965, which allowed people to immigrate if they have family members already here, or if they have skills needed by U. S. employers.

Mexicans were actually among the very earliest immigrants to Washington. When Spanish explorers came here in the 1770s, the crews on their ships were mostly Mexican. One Mexican crew member collected and catalogued over 200 species of plants, animals and birds. Another was a renowned artist who drew pictures of the Olympic Peninsula. And for many years before the railroads came to Washington, skilled

Mexicans provided transportation services of “mule trains” to miners, fur traders, settlers and merchants. During World War II, Mexicans and other Latinos began to come to Washington in larger numbers, mostly as farm workers. Many settled in the Yakima Valley, but they soon spread to other agricultural areas, such as the Skagit Valley. Today, Latinos (including Mexicans, people from other Latin American countries, and Latinos from Texas, California and other states) are the fastest-growing and largest minority in Washington.



photo courtesy of the Lopez family

catalog # 2010.0.81

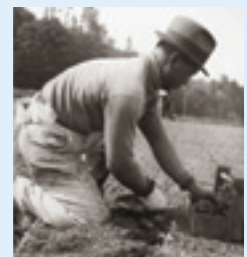


Italians, Greeks, Croatians, Basques, Irish, Germans, Dutch, and people from many other European countries settled in Washington singly or in groups in the late 1800s and early 1900s. We can still see their legacies, in small towns that celebrate their immigrants' history. For instance the town of Lynden is known for its Dutch roots, and Leavenworth is famous for its German-themed celebration of Christmas. In Eastern Washington, Odessa and Endicott are known for their Russian/German heritage.

catalog # 1957.64.81093



Japanese, Koreans, and other Asian and Pacific Island nationalities arrived in Washington during times when federal immigration policy allowed it, but there were long periods during which the U. S. government excluded them. Japanese, Chinese, Filipino and Korean immigrants were recruited to come here for jobs when their labor was needed to build railroads, work in mines, canneries, farms or logging camps, but Asian and Pacific Island immigrants were not allowed to become citizens or to own land until after World War II. After the Vietnam war, many refugees and immigrants from Southeast Asia came to Washington.



catalog # 1991.37.25

Immigration

*Sometimes people say that the U.S. is a **nation of immigrants**, since all of us except Indians are descendants of immigrants.*

People who come to the U.S. from other countries are called immigrants. Sometimes people say that the U.S. is a **nation of immigrants**, since all of us except Indians are descendants of **immigrants**. Today, about 12.9% of the people in the U.S. were born in another country.

Some immigrants come to this country because they are fleeing from war in their home country. Some come because they might be jailed or even killed for their political or religious beliefs or their race. These people are called **refugees**, because they are seeking **refuge** – a safe place. But most immigrants come to join family members who are already here, or because they want better jobs and more opportunities for their children. Sometimes immigrants come because there is a shortage of people for certain jobs or professions – nurses, for instance, or computer professionals, or farm workers.

The federal government sets the number of immigrants that can come to the U.S. every year. Often when people in other countries apply to come here, they have to wait many years before they get permission from the federal government. Many never get permission. If they come to the U.S. without getting permission first, or if they stay longer than they have permission to, they are considered **illegal immigrants** or **undocumented immigrants**. There are probably several million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. today. (No one knows the exact number.)

Most undocumented immigrants come to this country because they are poor and they need jobs. And lots of American employers hire them, even though it is against the law to do so. There is a constant conflict about this. Some people think all undocumented immigrants should be rounded up and sent back to their home countries. Other people think that some or all the undocumented immigrants in the country should be given

Women immigrating from Japan



photo courtesy Seattle Betsuin Archives

amnesty – meaning they should be given permission to stay, and be made *legal* immigrants, because employers need them, and because they make an important contribution to the American economy by working and paying taxes.

Only legal immigrants can apply to become American citizens. To become a citizen, an immigrant has to live in this country for at least five years. Then they have to fill out an application form, pay a fee, be interviewed by a U.S. official, and pass a test to show that they have learned to read, write and speak English; that they know some U.S. history; and that they understand how American government works.

All children born in the U.S. are citizens by birth. If adults come to this country illegally and then have children while they are here, the children are U.S. citizens because they were born in this country. If their parents are here illegally, or if the parents commit a crime, they can be **deported** (sent back to the country they came from). But what happens to the children? Legally, they have a right to stay here – but to exercise that right, they might have to be separated from their own mom and dad.

Immigration also gets complicated when it comes to deciding what government services people get. Illegal immigrants pay taxes, but they don't get the same benefits as other taxpayers. They can't get human services, government-paid health insurance, or help if they get hurt and can't work. (Even legal immigrants can't get most welfare benefits.)



photo by Jal Schnor, courtesy of the Ethnic Heritage Council

The 20th Annual
Naturalization Ceremony
on July 4th, 2004 at
the Seattle Center, where
many people became
U. S. citizens



The passport
of a Swedish family, 1923

VOTING

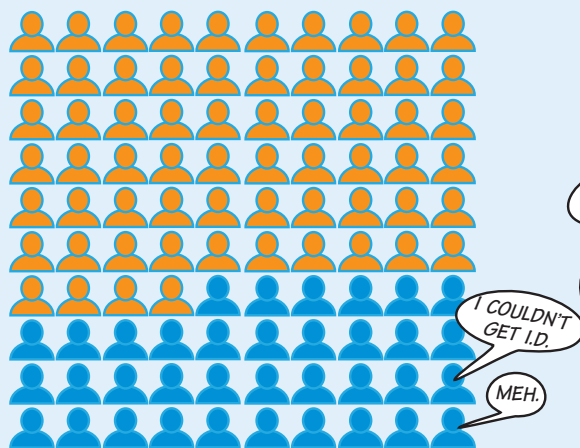
Women, married people, and older people are more likely to vote.


In Washington, 77% of people eligible to vote were registered in 2016, and 79% of all of those registered to vote actually did vote. So in our state, 61% of people eligible to vote did. Washington was ranked 16th in the country in voting rates.

Some reasons given by registered non-voters for not voting in the 2016 election include too busy (14%), not interested (15%), illness or disability (12%), did not like candidates or campaign issues (25%), forgot (3%). Yikes!

Voters in the 2016 national election


100 voting age people



 64% eligible are registered.

100 voting age people



 Of those registered, 61% voted—only about 39 of 100 eligible voting age people. They decided the election for everyone.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, data tables on voting and registration, November 2016; US Election Atlas, 2016; Washington State Office of Financial Management; 247wallst.com.

People argue about this a lot. If a woman is a poor illegal immigrant, and she’s going to have a baby, should the government pay for her medical care? Some people say no, because she broke the law by coming here illegally. Other people say yes, because the baby will be a U.S. citizen, and we want that child to be born healthy.

People have similar arguments about whether kids who are illegal immigrants should be able to go to school. Some people say that U.S. citizens shouldn’t have to pay to educate kids who are here illegally. But the U.S. Supreme Court has said that

the kids shouldn't be punished for something their parents did. They say that educating all kids is the best and only way to make sure that they can get jobs and pay taxes when they grow up. (Washington's state constitution says we should educate all children "residing" in our state, not just those who are citizens.)

Becoming a citizen is important because only citizens are allowed to vote, and only citizens have the absolute right to stay in this country, no matter what. Even legal immigrants who have lived here for many years can be deported if they have not become citizens. Some young people have been deported for drug charges or stealing, even though they lived legally in the U.S. since they were babies.

The role of citizens

Elections

The most basic way people in a democracy exercise political power is by voting in elections. We elect the people who represent us – the members of city or tribal councils, county commissioners, state governors and legislators, and the President and the Congress of the United States. And if we don't like what they do, we can vote them out of office.

We also vote on specific issues. For instance, in Washington, local communities vote on how much we are willing to pay in taxes to support public schools. Sometimes we vote on special issues, like whether we want to pay extra taxes to build sports stadiums. And we vote on amendments to our state constitution.

Initiatives and referenda

In the early 20th century, people wanted to make sure that citizens kept control over our government. So even though our state government has the same checks and balances as our national government, Washington voters amended the state constitution to build in an extra check – the power of citizens to bypass the legislature, write a proposed law and have the people vote on it. This is called an *initiative*.





People with disabilities and their allies lobby in Olympia for recognition, and for programs that help them lead full and meaningful lives.

To pass an initiative, a citizen or group of citizens must get a large number of people to sign petitions asking for a proposed law to be put on the ballot. If enough people sign, the proposed law can go to the legislature, or directly to the ballot. (The number of people who have to sign an initiative is 8% of the number who voted in the last election for governor.)

If an initiative goes to the legislature, the legislature can pass it, and it becomes law. The legislature can also write an alternative measure, and put both the original initiative and their proposed alternative on the ballot of the next election. If the

legislature doesn't do anything, the initiative still goes to the voters at the next election. If a majority of people vote for it, it becomes law. (Even if an initiative passes, the State Supreme Court can throw it out if it violates the state constitution. And if it violates the U.S. Constitution, the U.S. Supreme Court can throw it out.)

People in Washington also vote on referenda. A *referendum* is a law passed by the state legislature, but *referred* to the voters. Sometimes the legislature itself refers a measure to the ballot to see if the majority of voters agrees that it should become law. But sometimes a citizen or group of citizens doesn't like a law passed by the legislature. If they can get enough people to sign a petition, they can get the law put on the ballot. (The number of people who have to sign the petition is 4% of the number of people who voted in the last election for governor.) Then if the majority of people vote against it, the new law is thrown out.

Running for office

Another important way citizens participate in government is by running for public office. Most people who decide to do this start by running for a local office, such as being a school board member, or a city council member. When they are more experienced, and more people know them and support them, they run for higher offices. But this is not always true; sometimes a person who has never been involved in government decides to run for governor or the U.S. Congress.

People who run for office need money to finance their campaigns. They have to buy campaign signs, publish brochures to let people know what they stand for, and sometimes buy advertising in newspapers or on radio or TV. If they are running for a statewide office, they also need money to travel around the state to campaign. Candidates for public office usually ask the people who support them to donate money for their campaigns, although sometimes rich people finance their own campaigns.

(There's more information about running for office in Chapter 5.)

photo courtesy Institute for Community Leadership



These students are participating in a program of the Institute for Community Leadership that teaches them the skills they need to become confident, effective leaders and advocates.

Advocacy:

promoting a point of view or belief, or working to help a certain group of people (For instance, someone who tries to get laws passed to help people with disabilities would be advocating for them. The person who does this would be an advocate.)

The role of money in election campaigns is very controversial. In a democracy, we want everyone to have an equal chance to be heard. And we don't want individuals, unions or corporations that have a lot of money to have more than their share of influence in an election. We don't want our elected officials to feel that they have to vote the way their campaign contributors want them to. So we have rules about who can give, and how much they can give. And every few years, we pass more rules. But hardly anyone believes that we have found the perfect solution to this problem.

The most important safeguard we have come up with is the principle of *transparency*, or openness. This means that everyone should be able to find out who gave money to a political campaign, and how much. We have very strict laws that require every candidate and every campaign organization to report their contributions. A special government agency, the Public Disclosure Commission, makes this information available to the public and to reporters. (There's more information about this on page 77.)

Still, campaign financing will always be a subject we debate, both in elections for public office, and in campaigns to pass initiatives and other ballot measures.

Jury Duty

Citizens also serve on juries. A jury is a group of people – usually 12 – who sit in judgment when someone is brought to court and accused of a crime. A judge conducts the trial, but members of the jury have to decide whether the accused person is guilty or innocent. (In civil cases, where one person or business is suing another person or business, juries usually have only six members.)

This is called “jury duty” because it is a duty that comes with being an American citizen.

Advocacy

American democracy is founded on great ideas and principles. We still struggle to live up to them, but over many generations, we keep making progress.

In fact, our whole history is a struggle to live up to the ideals of liberty, equality, and opportunity for all. Many generations of citizens have pushed and prodded and sacrificed to get us this far.

Over many years, it was ordinary citizens who led the struggle to end slavery, to expand voting rights, and to make discrimination because of race, religion, or national origin illegal. It was citizens who fought to win decent wages, safe working conditions, and weekends off for all of us. And it was citizens who won passage of laws to make government meetings open to the public.



photo courtesy of the Office of the Secretary of State

When Kim Wyman lived in Germany with her husband, who was serving in the military, she didn't receive her ballot in the mail until the election was already over. She was so frustrated by this that she eventually became the Thurston County Elections

One person's opinion makes a difference

Manager, so she could make sure this didn't happen to other people. After working in that job for several years, she became the Thurston County Auditor—an elected position. In 2012, she was elected Washington's Secretary of State.

The Secretary of State has several roles: overseeing the state library and historical documents, registering corporations and charities, and verifying

that initiatives and referendums have the required number of signatures to be on our ballots. But her most important role is supervising state and local elections to ensure that they are fair and accurate, and that every qualified voter is able to vote. Her office also produces the statewide voters' pamphlet, which has information on all the statewide candidates and issues for each election.

The Secretary of State must make sure our election system is secure from computer hackers, that only eligible voters are registered, and that both information about an election and voting are accessible to people with disabilities.

You can also be sure that Kim Wyman makes delivering ballots on time to Washington voters who are overseas a top priority.

Too young to vote? Don't let that stop you.

The younger you are, the bigger a stake you have in the future. So it's no wonder that kids wage some of the best citizen campaigns.

For instance, eight kids between the ages of 12 and 16 are suing Washington's governor and Department of Ecology for not doing enough to protect them from climate change. They are working with a nonprofit organization called Our Children's Trust, which provides them with a lawyer. Our Children's Trust is also working with other groups of kids who are suing the federal government and several other states.

All of the lawsuits argue that state and federal governments have not done enough to limit greenhouse gas emissions that cause the climate to heat up.

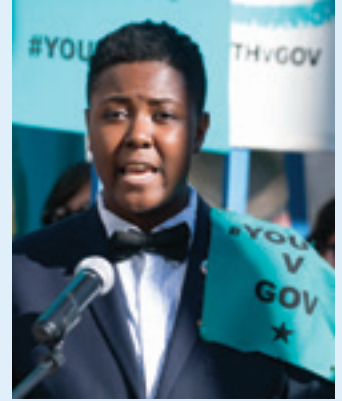
In the Washington state case, the Department of Ecology issued a report that says, "The effects of climate change on water supplies, public health, coastal and storm damage, wildfires, and other impacts will be costly unless additional actions are taken to reduce greenhouse gases." Yet in spite of this clear warning of trouble ahead, the report didn't recommend any additional action.

"This case is important because it transformed from a small case against a single Washington state agency into a large case against the entire

Washington state government," said Aji Piper, 16, in a press release Our Children's Trust issued.

According to Julia Olson, who founded Our Children's Trust, climate change is "the crisis that most threatens our children. Significantly, our coequal third branch of government is stepping in to protect the constitutional rights of young people before it is too late to act."

Athena Fain, another youth involved in the case, has also branched out to become president of Plant for the Planet Seattle, a group that promotes tree planting and public education about the science of climate change. "Science doesn't lie to us. Science tells us the truth," she says.



all photos on this page courtesy Robin Loznak

There is more to do to make our society and our democracy better. But it's important to remember that we didn't get this far because people sat around and complained; we got this far because people spoke up and worked together.

They did this because they understood that in a democracy, no matter how imperfect it is, people have the power to make change. It isn't easy, and it often takes a long time.

But progress is always possible as long as we have the right to say what we think, to band together to push for change, and to support or oppose candidates for public office.

As people have been saying for many generations, freedom isn't free. Every generation has to earn it and preserve it by being active, responsible citizens.



photos at left by Don Willott, courtesy Forterra

photo by Brian Kilpatrick, courtesy Forterra

About 4,000 acres of forest, wetlands, and 1.5 miles of shoreline were slated for logging and then development, which would have harmed water quality and wiped out habitat for wildlife. Thousands of families, community groups, Indian tribes, and businesses worked together with a non-profit called Forterra to raise millions of dollars to buy and preserve this “green jewel” near Port Gamble, in Kitsap County.