

Founded on Foundational Foundations

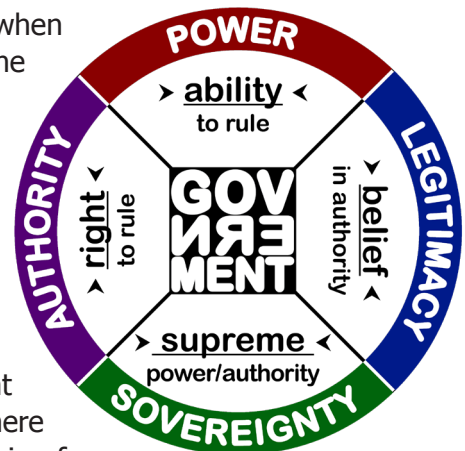
If you've ever been in a building's basement, you've seen the building's foundation. Even if you've never been in a basement, the very top of a building's foundation can often be seen from the outside. Foundations are pretty important. Buildings don't do very well without them. Traditionally, foundations have been made out of blocks or stones—pieces that fit together to create a strong, solid base for the building to sit on.

You can think of the "foundations" of government as the pieces that fit together to create a base that a government sits on. Except these pieces aren't stones. They're ideas. Some of these ideas are broad concepts that are foundational to any government, while others are unique to a specific government or a certain way of thinking about government.

Meet Your PALS

All governments have characteristics that you can analyze. Four of the most basic characteristics you can look at in any government are power, authority, legitimacy, and sovereignty:

- **Power** is the ability to get people to behave in certain ways even when people don't want to behave in those ways. Think of power as the *ability* to rule.
- **Authority** is the *right* to rule.
- **Legitimacy** is a society's *belief* that their ruler or government has the right to rule.
- **Sovereignty** is the supreme and ultimate power or authority within a territory. The buck stops with whoever has sovereignty.



Are there different ways to get power? Authority? Are there different ways to get people to believe in their government's authority? There sure are, and not all of them are nice. But the most basic analysis of a government's PALS is about the *what*, not the *how*. A government either has these characteristics or it doesn't. Did the government get its PALS by torturing the people into submission? Or did the people get to fill out a ballot while sipping a skinny latté? PALS can exist either way. PALS are the functional blocks at the very bottom of the foundation.

The How Matters

In November 2017, a North Korean soldier was shot several times by his fellow soldiers while making a desperate dash across the border to South Korea. The soldier lived, but what really fascinated the world was what doctors found in his intestines: Parasitic worms. Huge ones—the kind that even surprised the doctors. The North Korean government has serious PALS, which it maintains by doing things like shoot people who try to leave the country. How else could it control citizens who are so poorly cared for that even someone in the military has parasites big enough to shock people in modern nations?

How a government gets and maintains its power, authority, legitimacy, and sovereignty can make a big difference in the lives of its people. Living under the rule of a leader who would rather kill people than let them leave could be very different from living under the rule of a government that gets its PALS from a constitution written by the people. That's why, most of the time, people don't analyze the *what* of PALS—they analyze the *how*.

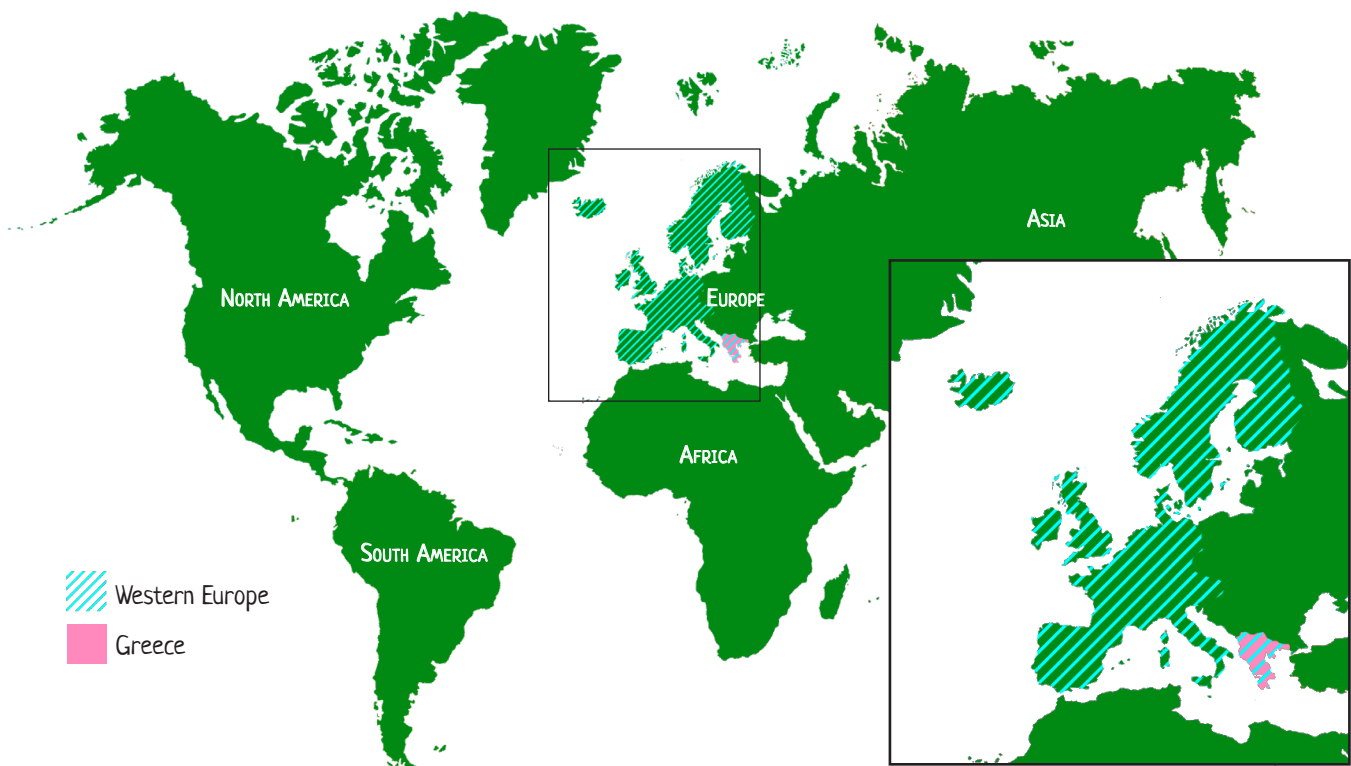
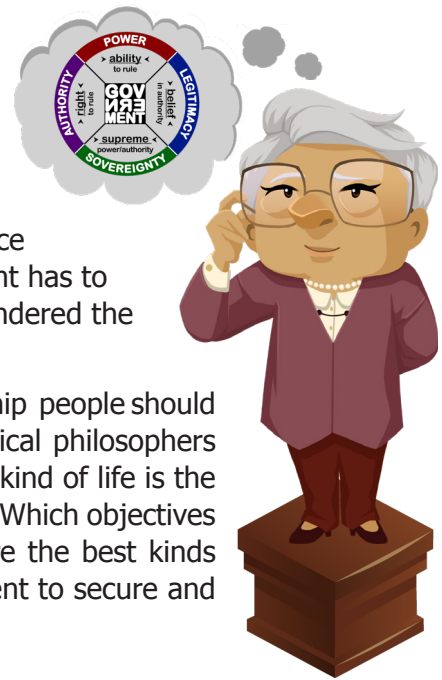
Pondering PALS for Fun and Profit

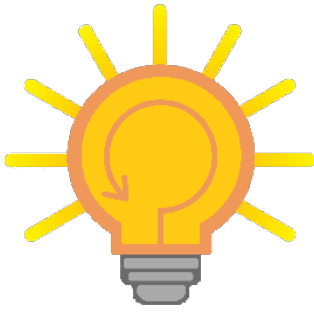
Over the centuries, lots of people have spent time and even dedicated their lives to thinking about the *how* of PALS. Sound boring? Maybe, but you've probably thought about it yourself. If you've ever wondered why we have an Electoral College instead of electing the president by popular vote, or felt like the rich and powerful have too much influence in government, or been frustrated by the amount of power government has to limit what people do and how they do it, then guess what? You've pondered the *how* of PALS, too.

Political philosophy is the study of ideas about what kind of relationship people should have to their society and government. To answer this question, political philosophers explore all kinds of ideas about how society should operate and what kind of life is the best life for people living among other people: What's fair? What isn't? Which objectives are worthwhile for people and governments? Which aren't? What are the best kinds of government? And, of course, what are the best ways for government to secure and maintain power, authority, legitimacy, and sovereignty?

Founding Philosophy

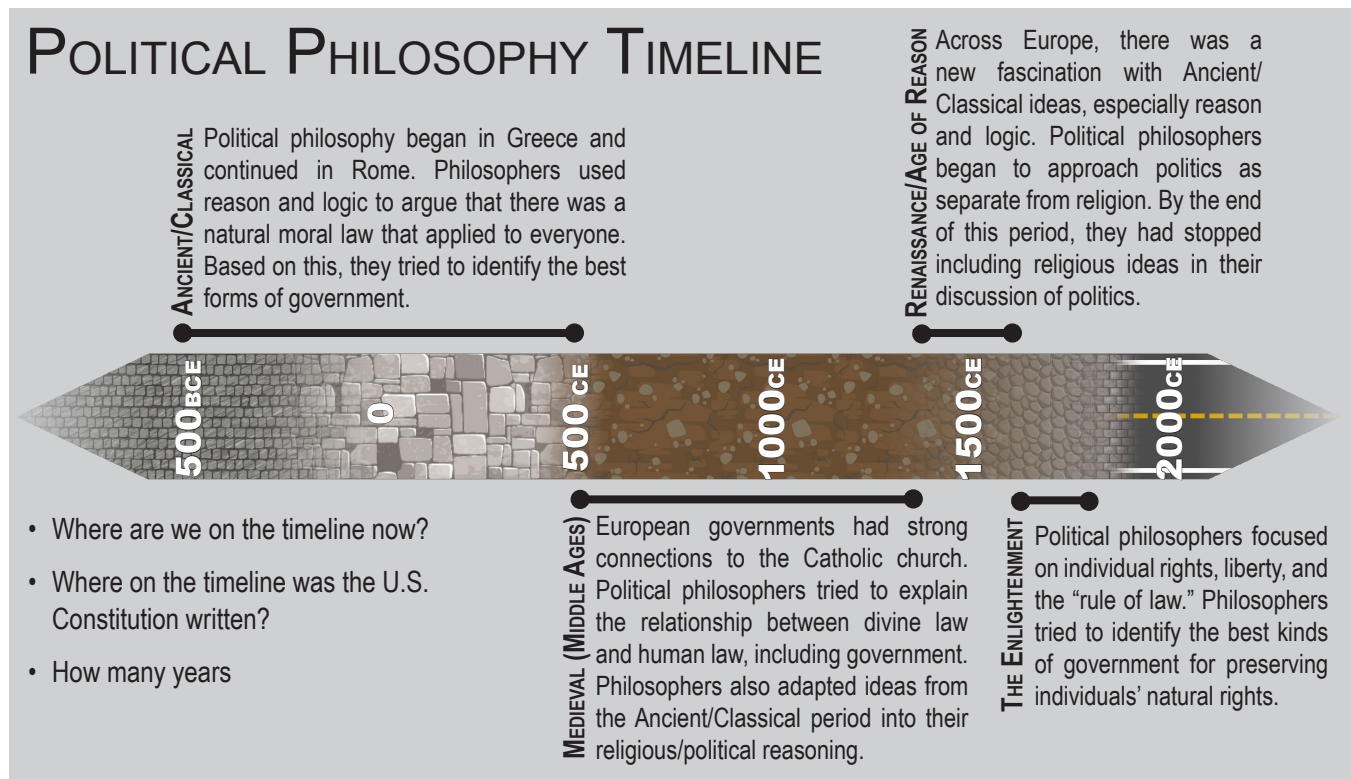
The men who created America's government (and, yes, they were all men) had Western European heritage, so their ideas and education were based in European culture and traditions. While there were societies and governments all across the world, most of those governments got their PALS in ways that America's Founders didn't want to copy. For example, China's history is thousands of years old, but it had always been ruled by an emperor. People in China who were thinking about politics and government were thinking about them in a different way than people in Europe because their starting point was rooted in a different culture and tradition. For America's Founding Fathers, the ideas about individual rights and liberties that were being discussed by political philosophers in Western Europe were exactly what they had in mind.





Ideas for the Ages

The earliest European political philosophers lived about 2,500 years ago in Greece. A lot of the “blocks” in the U.S. government’s foundation are ideas that came from these first philosophers. As Western Europe and the societies that lived in it changed, so did the way people—including political philosophers—thought. There are several eras of political philosophy that scholars identify:



Why were so many people thinking about the fundamentals of government? Because as hard as this may be to imagine (sarcasm alert), people have always been dissatisfied with their governments. Thousands of years ago, societies had the same kinds of problems we have today: imbalance of power between rich and poor, inequality of different groups in society, selfish motives of those in power, and many more issues that would sound pretty familiar to us. These challenges have always existed, and there have always been people interested in finding a better way than whatever system they were living under.

On top of that, most governments in human history have been **monarchies** ruled by one person who held all the power. It’s easy for one person with too much power to get carried away, so people throughout the ages have been very concerned with what to do about leaders who abuse their power. How can a government get its power, authority, legitimacy, and sovereignty in a way that ensures the people will be treated fairly?

In the rest of this unit, you’ll learn about different ways political philosophers have tried to answer this question—and which ideas made it into America’s own foundation.

Foundation Basics

Name: _____

C. A PALS-uation. Each question requires that you invent a situation. Use what you know about power, authority, legitimacy, and sovereignty to help you. Write your answers in complete sentences.

1. What might a citizen say in the presence of a *sovereign* ruler? Why?

2. What would an *illegitimate* government look like?

3. How might an aspiring leader challenge another leader's *authority*?

D. Legitimacy Test. A government's legitimacy is based on the general belief of people that their government has the right to rule. Based on this definition, decide if the situations below jeopardize the government's legitimacy. Then explain your answer.

Government	Legitimacy in Jeopardy?	Explanation
Three top military generals overthrow the country's government. The generals are very popular with the citizens, who cheer by the thousands in streets across the country.	Yes No Maybe	
A king's power to rule his country passes from father to son. The current king's cousin poisons the king, has the king's son kidnapped, and proclaims himself the new king.	Yes No Maybe	
The mayor of a large city is suspected of committing several crimes related to misuse of her power as mayor. The majority of city residents have lost all faith in her and support a recall election to throw her out of office.	Yes No Maybe	