

## Founded on Foundational Foundations

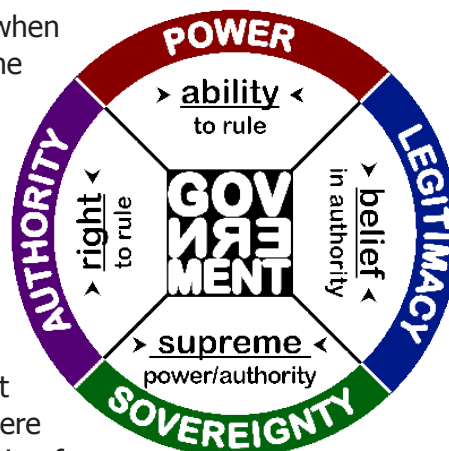
If you've ever been in a building's basement, you've seen the building's foundation. Even if you've never been in a basement, the very top of a building's foundation can often be seen from the outside. Foundations are pretty important. Buildings don't do very well without them. Traditionally, foundations 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 cold, 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 treating him 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*.

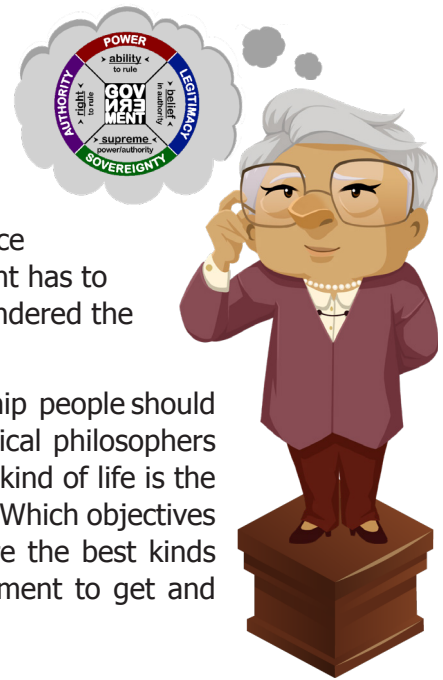
## Pondering PALS for Fun and Profit

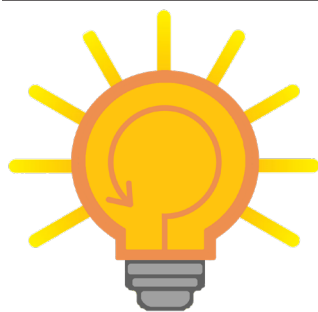
Over the centuries, lots of people have spent time and even dedicated their lives to thinking about the *how* of PALS. Sound boring? Maybe, but you've probably thought about it yourself. If you've ever wondered why we have an Electoral College instead of electing the president by popular vote, or felt 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 get and maintain power, authority, legitimacy, and sovereignty?

## Founding Philosophy

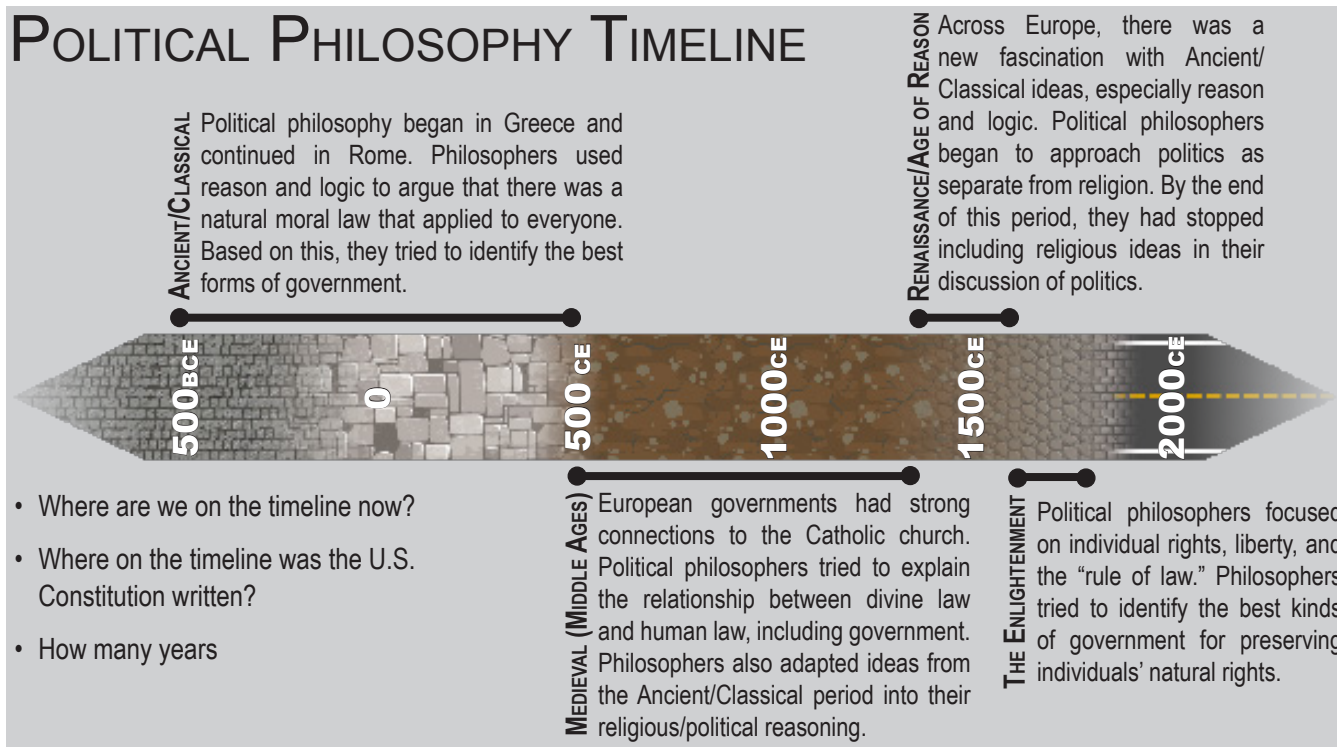
The men who created America's government (and, yes, they were all men) had Western European heritage, so their ideas and education were based in European culture and traditions. While there were societies and governments all across the world, most of those governments got their PALS in ways that America's 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 thought—including political philosophers. 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: \_\_\_\_\_

**A. Power, Authority, & Legitimacy.** Read each statement. Decide if it is an example of power, authority, or legitimacy. Underline the word or words that help you decide.

- \_\_\_\_\_ A 1000-year-old tradition that a member of the royal family has the right to rule.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A sovereign leader determines the country's policies and laws.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A public belief that religious law and a religious deity or deities reign supreme.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Officials elected by the people take on the everyday tasks of governing.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A constitution written by the people giving elected representatives the right to rule.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A system upheld by the people that a leader's right to rule is determined by God.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A dictator maintains obedience through control of information and fear.

**B. PALS and Relations.** This activity is an intellectual exercise to help you think about how power, authority, legitimacy, and sovereignty are related. Look back at the definitions in the reading to help you think about each relationship. Complete the chart.

Could you have...	How?
Power but not legitimacy?	
Authority but not power?	
Power but not authority?	
Sovereignty but not power?	
Legitimacy but not authority?	

# 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?

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

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

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**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	Legitimate?	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	

**E. Political Thought 101.** Political philosophy is the study of ideas about what kind of relationship people should have to their society and government. Read four philosophers' ideas about government, then match each philosopher with the real life quote that illustrates his ideas.



People govern themselves? I think not! We're selfish and confrontational. Strong leadership is needed.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

Government can't happen unless people agree to it. And if the government isn't protecting natural rights, then the people should probably think about a new government.



2. \_\_\_\_\_

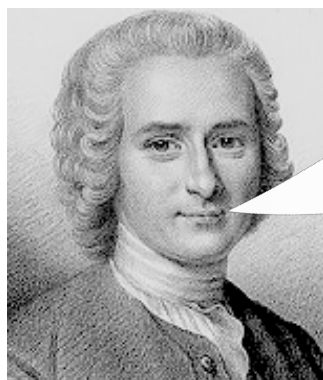
**A.** "The people of England regards itself as free; but it is grossly mistaken; it is free only during the election of members of parliament. As soon as they are elected, slavery overtakes it, and it is nothing." -- Rousseau

**B.** "Political liberty is to be found only in moderate governments [...] But constant experience shows us that every man invested with power is apt to abuse it, and to carry his authority as far as it will go." -- Montesquieu

**C.** "During the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that conditions called war; and such a war, as if of every man, against every man." -- Hobbes

**D.** "All mankind... being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions." -- Locke

Separate, limited power: That's the key. Separate the government into equal parts and give each part the ability to limit the power of the other.



3. \_\_\_\_\_

Government should follow the will of the people. We should participate and put the public need before our own. If we disagree about what's best, well, then majority rules.



4. \_\_\_\_\_