

Name and Date _____

Handout 2: Philosophical Foundations of the U.S. Political System

Part 1: Influences on the Founders and Foundational Ideas

How did different ideas about government influence the Founders in their development of the U.S. political system?

The Founders of the U.S. political system borrowed ideas from many people, societies, and governments to create the U.S. government. Some of these influences on the Founders are shown in the box.

Influences on the Founders

- governments of ancient Greece
- governments of the Roman Republic
- political writings of Enlightenment thinkers
- social and political systems of Native Peoples
- colonial rules created from British law

Foundational ideas from these influences can be found in documents written by the Founders in the period leading up to the American Revolution and during the creation of the U.S. government, including the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.

Directions: As a group, read and discuss the quotations in the chart below. Answer the questions by selecting ideas from the word bank and from the list of influences from page 1. Not all ideas in the bank will be used. Each student should fill out their own handout.

Word Bank of Foundational Ideas			
civic duty	confederacy	direct democracy	natural rights
representative democracy		self-government	separation of powers

Quotation	What foundational idea is present in this quotation? (Select an idea from the word bank.)	From whom did the Founders borrow this foundational idea? (Select an influence from the list on page 1.)
<p><i>“ . . . the representatives of the United States of America, . . . solemnly publish and declare, that these united colonies are . . . free and independent states. . . .”</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">–The Declaration of Independence</p>		
<p><i>“All legislative powers . . . shall be vested¹ in a congress of the United States. . . . The executive power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America. . . . The judicial Power of the United States, shall be vested in one supreme Court. . . .”</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">–U.S. Constitution, Articles I, II, and III</p>		
<p><i>“The House of Representatives shall be composed of members chosen every second year by the people of the several states. . . .”</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">–U.S. Constitution, Article I, Section 2</p>		

¹ vested in—assigned to

Part 2: Foundational Ideas Today

To what extent are the foundational ideas of U.S. government still relevant today?

The Founders drew on many different political ideas about government. Now, more than 200 years after the Founders used these ideas to create a system of government, the ideas still influence life in the United States.

Directions: Read the text about a law passed in 2018 concerning civics education and answer the questions that follow.

2018 Civics Education Law

In November 2018, members of the Senate and House of Representatives in the Massachusetts Legislature passed “An Act to Promote and Enhance Civic Engagement.” The governor signed the bill into law. This law requires schools in Massachusetts to do the following:

“In all public schools, history of the United States of America and social science, including civics, shall be taught as required subjects to promote civic service and a greater knowledge thereof and to prepare students, morally and intellectually, for the duties of citizenship. Instruction within the history and social science academic standards . . . shall include: (i) history of the United States of America; (ii) the Constitution of the United States, including the Bill of Rights; (iii) the Declaration of Independence; (iv) the constitution of the commonwealth; (v) local history and government; (vi) the function and composition of the branches of local, state and federal government; (vii) the roles and responsibilities of a citizen in a democracy; (viii) the development of skills to access, analyze and evaluate written and digital media as it relates to history and civics; (ix) community diversity and historical trends in voter registration and civic participation relative to disenfranchised* voter populations; (x) opportunities to identify and debate issues relative to power, economic status and the common good in democracy; and (xi) a program relating to the flag of the United States of America. . . .”

This law requires Massachusetts middle school students to learn about the U.S. and Massachusetts governments and civic life, and to complete a civics project. The law also requires schools to provide eligible high school students the opportunity to register or pre-register to vote.

*disenfranchised—deprived of a legal right, such as the right to vote

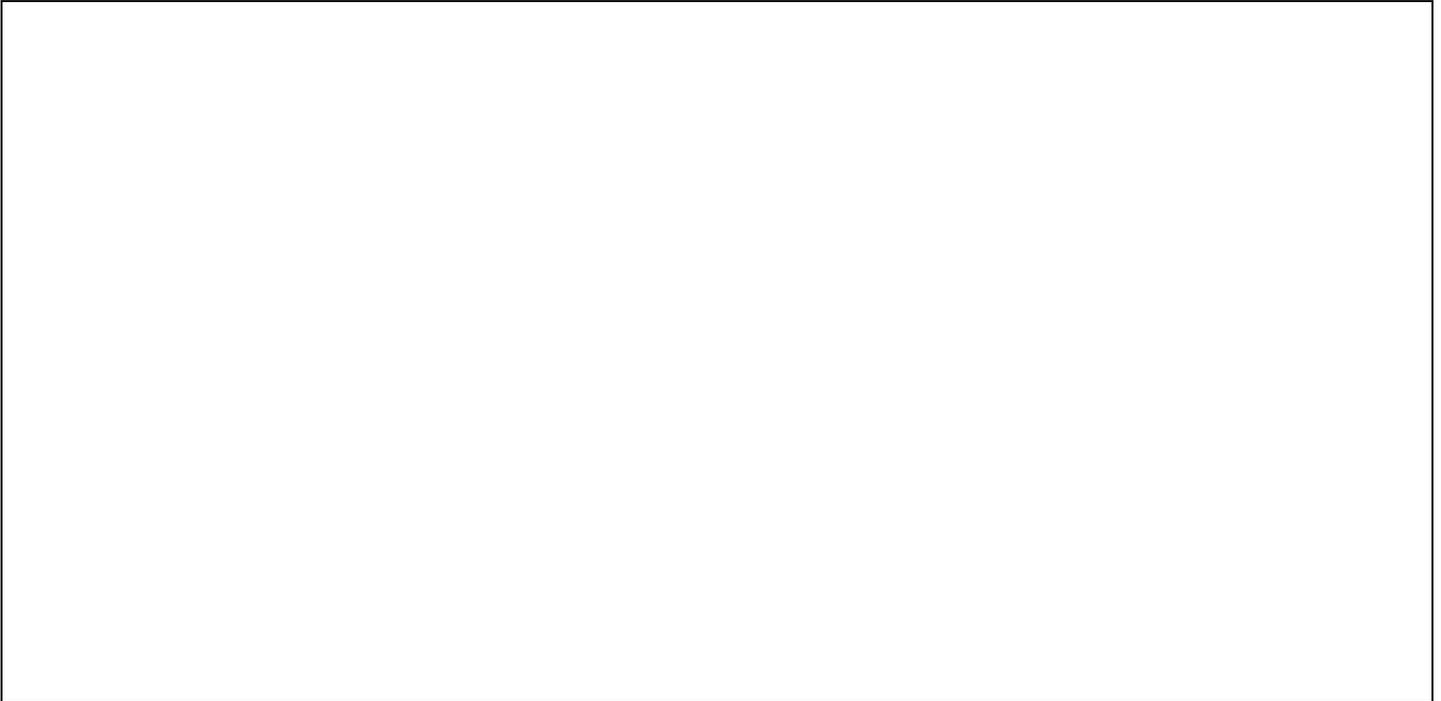
This word bank shows foundational ideas that the Founders used when creating the U.S. government.

Word Bank of Foundational Ideas		
checks and balances	civic duty and participation	common good
direct democracy	natural rights	representative democracy
self-government	separation of powers	voting

1. As a group, select **two** foundational ideas from the word bank that are represented in the “2018 Civics Education Law” text and discuss the answers to the questions in the chart. During the discussion, each student should write their own responses to the questions in the chart.

Identify two foundational ideas from the civics education law.	Describe how each foundational idea is represented in the text about the civics education law.	Describe how the foundational idea was used by a government or society before the creation of the U.S. government.
Foundational Idea 1:		
Foundational Idea 2:		

2. As a group, choose one of the foundational ideas from the word bank and discuss why this is an important idea in the U.S. political system today. After the discussion, write in the space below why you think it is an important idea today. Use your knowledge of the U.S. government to support your answer. Each student should write their own response.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for students to write their responses to the question above. The box is currently blank.