

# Chapter 1

The Study of American Government

# Essential Question

Everything we talk about in the next two chapters revolves around this questions. Keep the question below in mind as you view the slides.

- What is the best type of republic?

# What is Political Power?

The Declaration of Independence says government's power comes from the people.



But what gives our elected officials the authority (the right) to use power?

After all, President Obama makes decision every day that affect us. What gives him the legitimate authority to exercise power?



# What is Political Power?

- In America, the U.S. Constitution is the source of legitimate authority.

Here me  
people, I'm  
too legit to  
quit



# What is Political Power?

Uneducated,  
poor people are  
freakin' crazy!

- Today, we would say that political power must also be democratic in some way in order to be legitimate. This was not always the case.



Alexander Hamilton was worried that the U.S. government would be too democratic.

# What is Democracy?

- Democracy basically means majority rule.
  - This is called direct, or participatory, democracy
- Another type of democracy is called Representative democracy (also called a republic).
  - A republic allows individuals to gain political power through competitive elections.

Greece has swag.



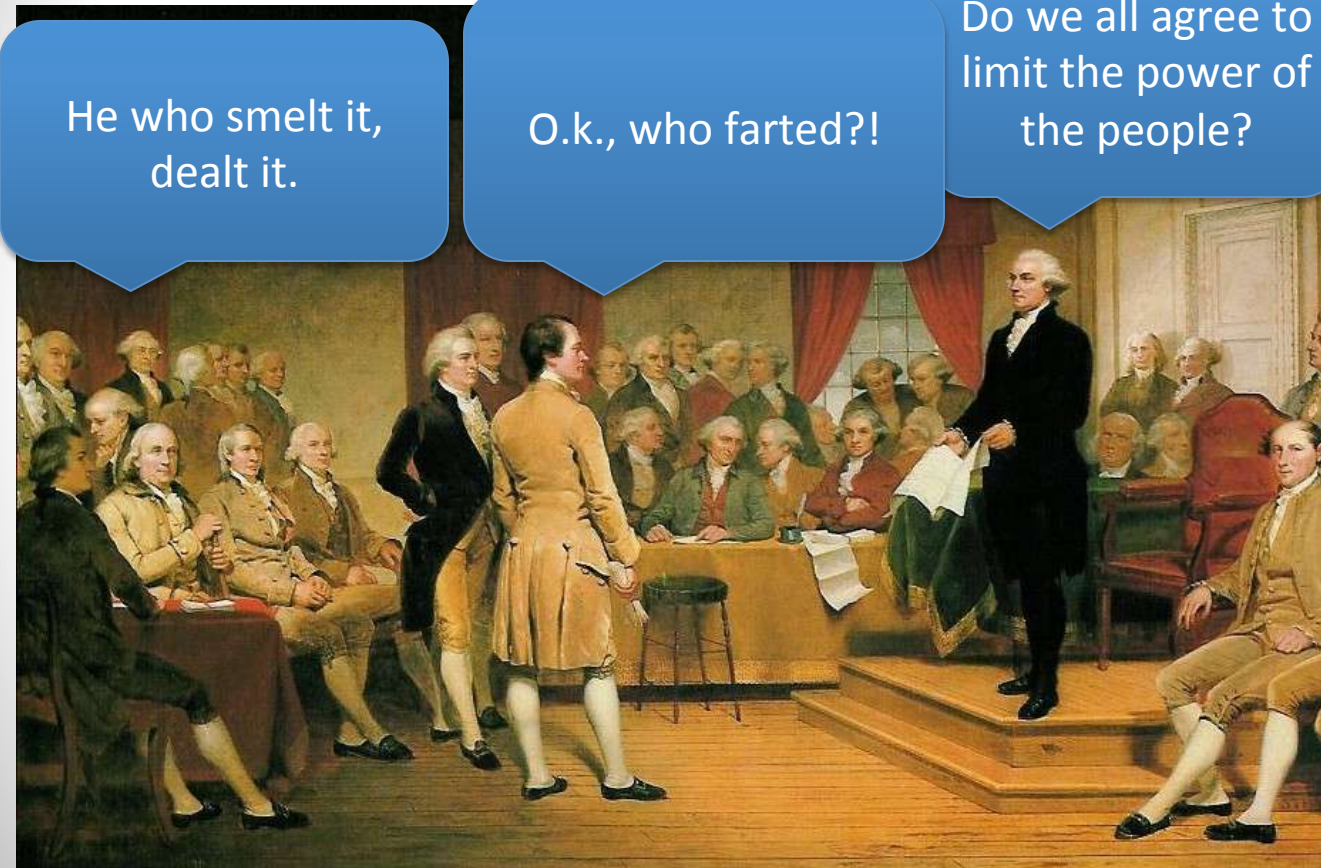
# Is Representative Democracy Best?

He who smelt it,  
dealt it.

O.k., who farted?!

Do we all agree to  
limit the power of  
the people?

- Representative democracy is the republican form of government our Framers were referring to.
- Notice, the word “democracy” is not mentioned even once in the U.S. Constitution because of fears over direct democracy.



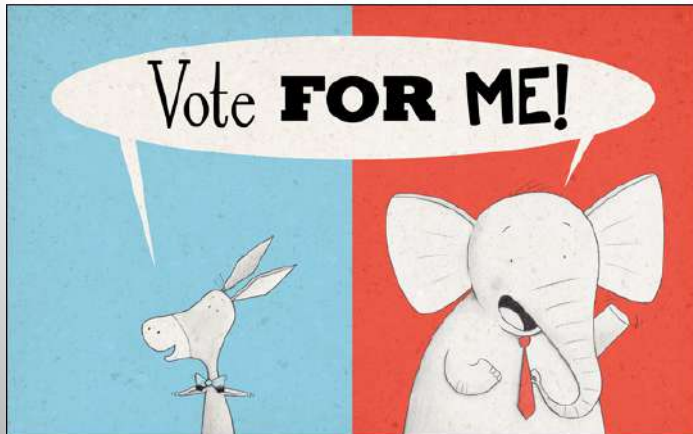
# Is Representative Democracy Best?

- Representative democracy must have:



Competition among  
leaders

Free communication

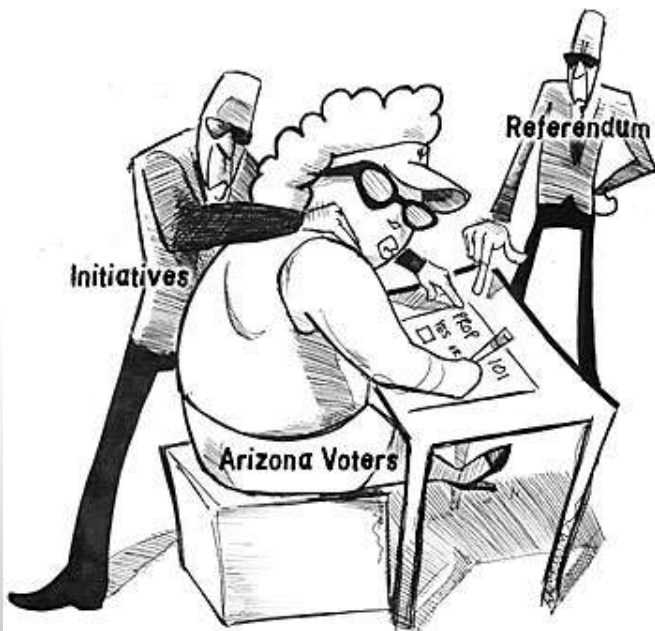


Meaningful choice &  
freedom to run for office



# Is Representative Democracy Best?

- Direct democracy is not dead!
- Direct democracy can include citizen participation and community control
- In America, this includes neighborhood associations and referendums.



# Is Representative Democracy Best?

- The Framers of our government intended government to mediate, not mirror, popular views.
- This is because the “will of the people” can be cruel or unwise at times.



# Is Representative Democracy Best?

Rise up people - I know what we should do!



- The Founders assumed that representative democracy would prevent sweeping changes in policy and often proceed slowly.
- Direct democracy can make changes quickly but the people could be manipulated by those who play on peoples' fears and prejudices. (the government could do good things quickly but also bad things quickly).

# Is Representative Democracy Best?

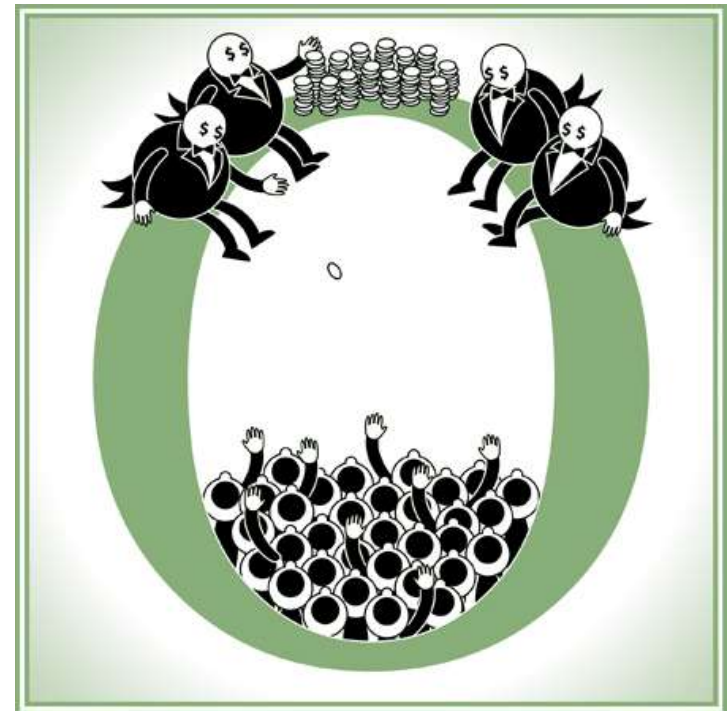
- Maybe in 1787 representative democracy was best, but what about today?
- With the internet, cell phones, well educated people, and more time on our hands, could direct democracy be better today?



I can make decisions for myself, duh.

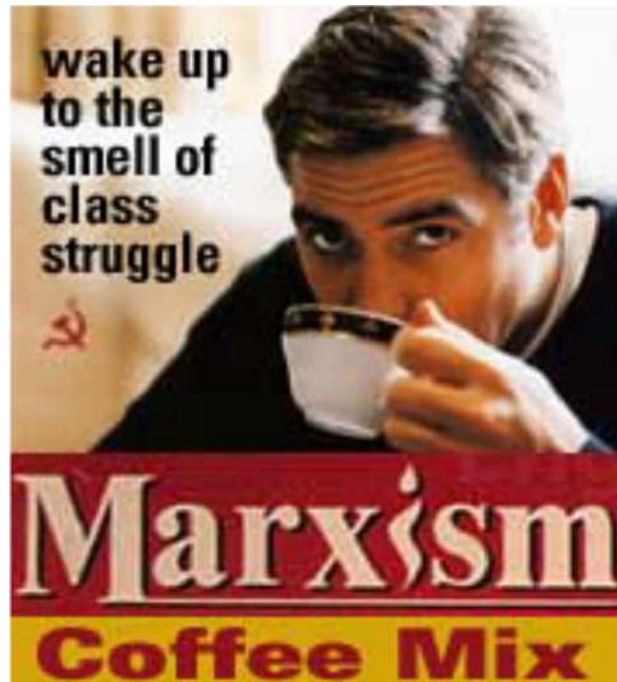
# How is Political Power Distributed?

- Power elite view
  - American democracy is controlled by a few top leaders, such as the military generals, big business leaders, and a few elected officials.
- An oligarchy features rule by the rich



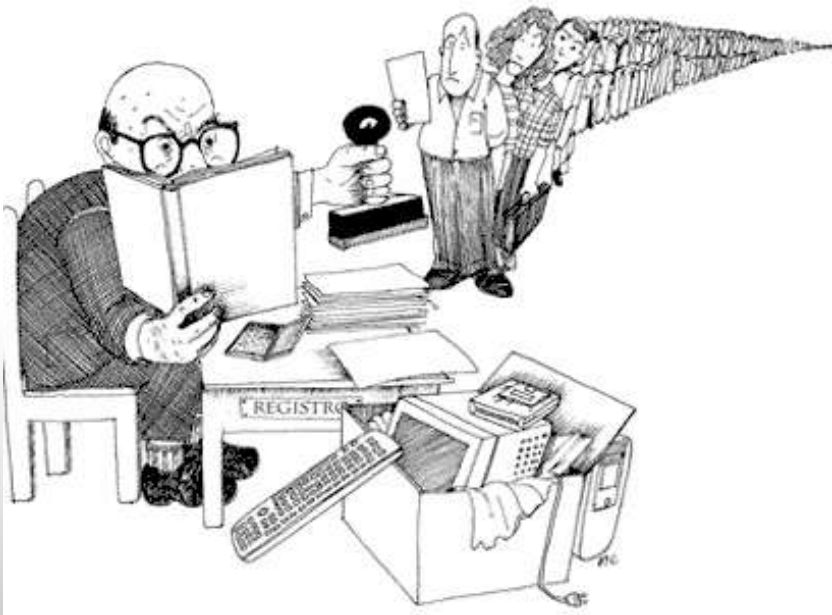
# How is Political Power Distributed?

- Marxist view
  - Government is controlled by the owners of most of the capital in America, such as the owners of Wal-Mart, Microsoft, Apple, etc.



# How is Political Power Distributed?

- Bureaucratic view
  - Power is mainly in the hands of unelected government workers, such as the IRS.



# How is Political Power Distributed?

- The pluralist view of power focuses on a large number of organized interests.





# Questions to Consider

- Which political power distribution view makes most sense to you? Why?
- What is government supposed to do?
- Who decides what government is supposed to do?
- How do changes in politics happen?