Objectives

1. Identify the ancient foundations of the state in Athens, in Rome, and in the feudal system.
2. Analyze the rise of sovereign states.
3. Explain how governments can achieve legitimacy.
4. Understand why European nations turned to colonialism.
Key Terms

• **patricians**: the wealthy social class in the Roman Republic

• **plebeians**: the common folk in the Roman Republic

• **feudalism**: a loosely organized system in which powerful lords divided their lands among other lesser lords

• **sovereignty**: the utmost authority in decision making and in maintaining order
Key Terms, cont.

• **legitimacy**: the people’s belief that a government has the right to make public policy

• **divine right of kings**: a form of legitimacy based on the idea that monarchs receive their authority from God

• **colonialism**: the control by one nation over lands abroad

• **mercantilism**: an economic and political theory that emphasizes money as the chief way to increase the absolute power of the monarchy and the nation
On what early political ideas and traditions was modern government founded?

- Early examples of representative government included the Athenian democracy and the Roman Republic.

- These representative governments were replaced first by feudalism and later by the rise of powerful monarchies with strong centralized states, national identities, and a need for legitimacy.
Athens: The First Democracy

• The concept of democracy—rule by the people—was born in the independent Greek city-states, especially Athens.

  – Athenian laws were made by the majority vote of an Assembly of male citizens at least 18 years of age.

  – The Assembly’s agenda was set by a Council of 500 randomly chosen citizens.
Some Athenian judges were randomly chosen to do day-to-day work for one-month terms.

Others staffed courts and served one-year terms.
The Roman Republic

- Rome replaced its monarchy with a republic that lasted some 400 years before becoming an empire.

- Roman society was divided between a wealthy patrician class and the common plebeians.

- The 300-member Senate was elected by the citizens, with both patrician and plebeian Senators.
  - Women, slaves, and the foreign-born could not vote or hold office.
The republic was headed by two consuls elected by the Senate.

- The consuls commanded the army, conducted foreign affairs, presided over the Senate, and enforced its decrees.
Feudalism arose during the Middle Ages, which lasted from the fall of Rome to the 16th century.

In the feudal system, lords with land and power agreed to protect their vassals in exchange for loyalty, military service, and a share of the crops the vassals produced.

- Each lord might have lords above them and vassals might be lords in their own right over lesser vassals.
Feudalism, cont.

- Serfs were peasants bound to their land and their lord.

- The Roman Catholic Church combined with the feudal system to give some order to Europe.
  - Most Europeans became Catholics.
  - By the late Middle Ages, the pope and his bishops had enough land and power to compete with feudal lords for influence over the people.
The Black Plague of the 1340s killed a third of western Europe’s population and weakened feudalism.

The drop in population increased the demand for labor, leading to better wages and work conditions for peasants.

Trade and money became more valuable than land, encouraging the growth of new towns that were centers of trade—especially with Central Europe and Asia—and new political freedoms.
The Rise of Monarchies

• By the 1400s, monarchs were gaining power in nations such as England, Spain, and France.
  – Rulers centralized power by setting up national governments with strong legal systems, taxes, and armies.
  – Monarchs hired loyal civil servants to help manage state affairs from a national rather than a regional perspective.
  – These steps fostered the growth of national identities among the peoples of Europe.
The Rise of Monarchies, cont.

- Monarchs, now representing the centralized state, were seen as having sovereignty—absolute authority—over all subjects.

- They could make laws for the entire nation and its people, including nobles.
Roots of the Sovereign State

**Ancient Athens**
The Athenians introduced direct democracy. Citizens debated public questions and decided them by majority vote.

**Roman Republic**
The Roman Republic gave decision-making power to an elite Senate and consuls who could check each other and, in theory, represented the people. The laws of Rome were written for all to see.

**Fuedalism**
In the Feudal Era, Europe’s first parliaments emerged and began to limit to the powers of kings. England provided for trial by a jury of one’s peers.

**17th century**
Sovereignty emerged in the 17th century, with states with fixed borders, a national identity, and a centralized government with fixed authority.
• Checkpoint: Why is legitimacy important?

– All governments need their people to accept the government’s right to make public policy.

– Legitimacy can be gained through personal popularity or by tradition, such as the belief that God grants authority to monarchs.

– Legitimacy can also be gained when the government binds itself to the rule of law, such as in the United States.
By the 1500s, European monarchies were embracing mercantilism.

- Domestic industry was developed and protected in order to gain a favorable balance of trade, which would enrich the state.

- Explorers sought overseas lands where monarchs founded colonies. This attracted settlers and shipped needed raw materials (including gold and silver) back home.

- European colonization led to new developments in government, such as the eventual founding of the United States.
• Now that you have learned about the early political ideas and traditions upon which modern government was founded, go back and answer the Chapter Essential Question.
  – How should you measure different governments?