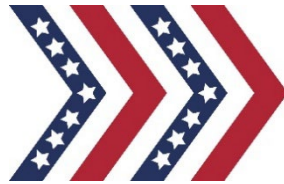


# The Compact from 1620 to Today: Consent of the Governed

The Mayflower Compact (1620) drew from English common law dating back to the Magna Charta of the thirteenth century. It recognized each person's right of *consent of the governed* within a body politic, therefore establishing a community with rights of person and property, the rule of law, and mutual defense (and other benefits) and responsibilities.

Even before political philosophers in Great Britain and elsewhere in Europe envisioned contemporary democratic processes and constitutional republics where there had been autocratic monarchies and nonconsensual rule, taxation, and unequal rights, the Mayflower Compact addressed these needs of a people governing themselves. They informed many desires enunciated in the Declaration of Independence (1776), where the very phrase "*consent of the governed*" is enshrined, and set the stage for the Constitution of the United States of America (1787).



While the Mayflower Compact ensured a "right of conscience," it still excluded many. Yet, the spirit of this foundational document inspired the U.S. Founding Fathers who expanded the franchise to all men, regardless of nationality or religion. Still greater, the same spirit of *consent of the governed* carried forward into U.S. government's layered (subsidiarity) approach to law and the process of amending the Constitution. Over time, amendments have ensured that same *consent of the governed* applies to citizens without regard to property ownership, race, and—at last, a little over a century ago—whether they are men or women. We can be assured that the "*More Perfect Union*" the Constitution seeks will continue to be informed by the value of *consent of the governed* first developed in America by the Mayflower Compact.

