

Reinventing an American Republic

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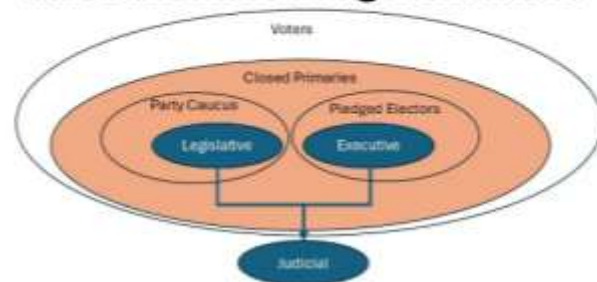
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In these times of high societal tension one may feel that our world is spinning out of control and that as individuals we have no power to achieve civility in society and effective, moderate government. That power is ours if we choose to take it. As individuals we can't change the national government – although we should continue to try, but we can take charge of local affairs. We can take control of those issues that are most important and most relevant to ourselves. We can shield ourselves from the turmoil that exists on a national level. The goal is concentric governance – layers of government centered on the individual. The path is devolution – the assumption of authority by the smallest government unit with capability to achieve local goals. Concentric governance and devolution are fully consistent with our present constitution.

Background The government created by the constitution in 1789, although often referred to as a democracy, is actually Constitutional Federal Republic. A republic because power rests with the citizens, who exercise that power through elected representatives rather than directly. A Federal system because power is divided between a national (federal) government and smaller, regional governments (states). After more than 200 years the constitution continues to serve us well. Much has changed in the past 200 years, however, and there are ways that we can adapt our existing constitution to best deal with those changes.

One big change is the dominance of political parties. Political parties are not found in our original constitution nor are they mentioned specifically in any of the subsequent 27 Amendments. Nonetheless political parties now dominate the original three branches of government so that our system of government now IS the two-party system. In order to run for state or national government offices one must almost always work through one of the two major parties. Citizens vote for president between the two candidates selected by the two political parties. In order to be effective legislators must caucus with one of the two political parties. At the national level judges are confirmed in the Senate by votes on party lines. Gerrymandered electoral districts

Bi-partisan control over the three branches of government



and big money in politics are tools of political parties.

When political success depends on defeating the opposing party rather than solving shared problems, polarization becomes a structural outcome. Conflict is rewarded; compromise is penalized. Issues that vary widely by place are increasingly debated and decided in a single national ideological arena. Political parties thrive on controversy. A problem solved is a problem that cannot be used to demonize the other party. No matter how inept or corrupt is one party, people will vote for their party if they perceive that their party is better than the alternative. The two-party system of government does not serve the people. People know this. In spite of the power of political parties about one half of citizens declare themselves as Independents.

In addition, political parties are national organizations that govern from the nation's capital and impose their will on people in the rest of the country. As authority has become increasingly centralized, the distance between decision-making and lived experience has grown. National government now plays a dominant role in areas such as education, housing, land use, public safety, and health—issues that are inherently local and context-dependent. Even cultural issues such as gender identification and reproductive freedom are dictated from above. States and communities are often left responsible for outcomes they did not meaningfully control.

This misalignment weakens accountability. Citizens struggle to influence decisions made far away. Local knowledge is overridden by uniform national rules. Political conflict intensifies without producing resolution. The result is frustration, distrust, and a sense that governance is something imposed rather than shared.

A second big change is the population growth of our country. In 1789 there were thirteen colonies – soon to become states, and approximately four million people. In 2026 we have fifty states and 349 million people. One measure of this population growth on voting power per person is that in 1790 there were on average 33,000 voters per Representative to the US House of Representatives, in 2020 the number is 760,000. Thus the impact of a single vote has been reduced by a factor of 23. In round numbers early Americans had 20 times more influence on their government than do citizens today. Numbers for Senators are 154,000 in 1789 vs 3.49 million today. In the electoral college the numbers are 30,000 in 1789 vs 652,000 today. 'Our country has outgrown the human scale.

American government is widely experienced as distant, polarized, and unresponsive—regardless of which political party holds power. Elections feel consequential yet unsatisfying, and many citizens sense that important decisions affecting their daily lives

are being made by people who are far away and are not affected by the consequences of those decisions.

The question is not whether our current system is failing, but whether we are willing to reorganize authority so that self-government once again operates at human scale.

Concentric Governance: A framework for restoring accountability, reducing societal polarization, and aligning government with human scale

Concentric Governance is a way of organizing political authority so that decisions are made as close as possible to the people affected by them, while still enabling cooperation on problems that genuinely require broader coordination. Concentric Governance is not a political party, an ideology, or a fixed blueprint. It is a structural principle—one that helps understand why our current system struggles, and how reforms such as Independent Electors fit into a larger, coherent vision of republican self-government. Concentric governance is not about weakening national unity or abandoning shared values. It is about reserving national authority for national problems, and restoring local authority where uniformity is neither necessary nor helpful.

The basic principle is federalist in nature in that governments of various scales, structures and responsibilities work together to achieve overall efficiency and harmony. Whereas our current two-party system funnels most political conflict into a single national arena, concentric governance distributes responsibility across nested layers—each with a clear role and each accountable to the people or entities that it serves. This approach aligns authority with knowledge, responsibility with impact, and governance with human scale.

The following description is conceptual rather than prescriptive. Its purpose is to illustrate how authority can be distributed, not to dictate exact institutional forms. Individual governments at all levels would largely have control over their internal affairs with the limits that basic rights would be protected and that matters requiring cooperation with outside or coordinating governments in order to achieve features beyond the control of individual governments.

To understand how authority can be redistributed without chaos, it helps to think in terms of nested layers of responsibility. In concentric governance each ring consists of governments that, although not exactly the same size, are of similar scale and



function. Thus, for example, it would be expected that each community government would be defined by some combination of geography and common interests – and most certainly not gerrymandered to achieve partisan ends. The primary role of governments within each ring would be to provide support and good governance for their constituents, i.e., to the individuals or governments within the inner ring. At the same time the governments within a ring would be the constituents to the government in the next outer ring. Thus individuals would be the constituents of community governments and community governments would be the constituents of county or municipal governments, county or municipal governments would be the constituents of state governments, and state governments would be the constituents of the national government.

Individual

Individuals retain autonomy over their beliefs, expression, personal relationships, and lawful private conduct. Government exists to protect these freedoms, e.g. through a bill of rights, not to define them.

Local Community

Local governments exercise primary authority over education, public safety, housing, land use, and community well-being—areas where local knowledge and accountability matter most.

Municipal and County Government

Municipal and county governments coordinate among communities, manage infrastructure, and provide services that benefit from economies of scale, such as transportation systems, utilities, public health, and community colleges.

State Government

States harmonize regional activity, oversee statewide systems such as insurance, finance, transportation, and professional regulation, and represent their citizens in relations with the national government.

National Government

The national government addresses matters requiring uniformity or collective action among states, including national defense, monetary policy, interstate commerce, immigration, and foreign relations.

Global Cooperation

International institutions facilitate cooperation on challenges that transcend national borders, such as climate change, pandemics, large-scale disasters, war prevention, and humanitarian crises.

Devolution: Concentric governance describes where authority belongs . Devolution describes how authority becomes vested there.

Devolution is the process by which decision-making power is deliberately shifted downward—from national to state, from state to local—so that responsibility and accountability are restored at human scale. It strengthens self-government by placing authority where knowledge and consequences are closest.

How Concentric Governance Takes Shape in Practice

In the US constitution Federal power over the states is limited by the Tenth Amendment. State power over local governments is largely unlimited. Court decisions, including those of the US Supreme Court, often adhere to Dillon’s Rule¹ which states that municipal corporations are "creatures of the state" and possess only powers expressly granted, implicitly authorized, or essential to their purpose. This is top-down government and has been used, for example, by “red state” legislatures to impose their will on “blue municipalities”. Dillon’s Rule is not part of the US constitution and can be overturned by state constitutions. Absent an amendment to a state constitution, any authority assumed by local governments can be taken away by the state government.

A practical and immediately available form of devolution, however, is for local governments to exclude political parties from formal roles within government itself. This does not restrict free association or political speech. Political parties may endorse candidates, advocate policies, and organize supporters. What changes is that government no longer grants parties privileged institutional status.

At the local level, exclusion of political parties from formal roles can include:

- Nonpartisan ballots and elections
- No party labels on official ballots or documents
- No party-based leadership roles or caucuses

¹ Dillon’s Rule is a principle of statutory construction regarding local government power that originates from the legal opinions and writings of Judge John F. Dillon in the late 19th century. The most common citations for the rule are to his judicial opinion in *City of Clinton v. Cedar Rapids and Missouri River Railroad* (1868) and his subsequent treatise *Commentaries on the Law of Municipal Corporations* (1872/1873).

- Equal ballot-access standards for all candidates
- Issue-based coalitions rather than partisan alignment

Many municipalities already operate this way, particularly for city councils, school boards, and local commissions. Where adopted, party-neutral governance tends to:

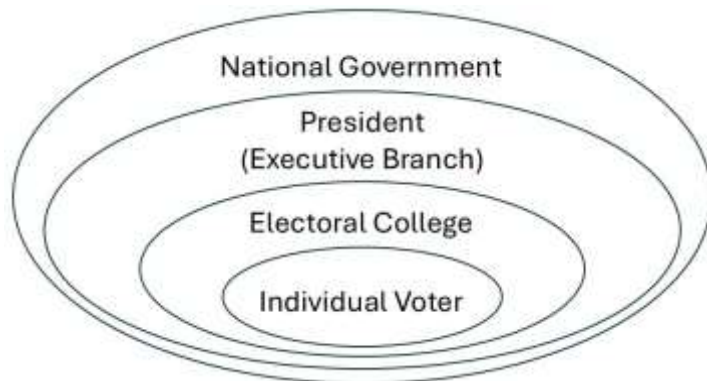
- Encourage problem-solving over ideology
- Reduce imported national conflicts
- Strengthen accountability to residents rather than party organizations

As communities demonstrate that party-neutral governance works, states can expand home-rule authority and authorize similar structures at broader levels. In this way, devolution allows concentric governance to emerge organically—layer by layer—without coercion.

Independent Electors as a State-Level Application

The Independent Electors approach fits naturally within concentric governance.

Article II of the U.S. Constitution grants states the authority to determine how presidential electors are chosen. Over time, political parties have effectively absorbed this function by requiring elector pledges and controlling candidate selection.



Electing Independent Electors—

individuals free to exercise judgment on behalf of voters—restores authority to citizens and states while reducing the dominance of national party structures. It is a state-led, constitutional reform that addresses polarization at the highest level of the system without imposing a single national solution.

Independent Electors are not the entirety of concentric governance, but they are a clear, achievable example of how authority can be realigned through lawful devolution.

How Concentric Governance Reduces Polarization

When authority is concentrated at the top, every issue becomes a national ideological battle. When authority is distributed, disagreement can coexist with self-rule.

Concentric governance:

- Allows communities to reflect their own values
- Encourages diversity and experimentation
- Contains failures locally rather than system-wide
- Preserves unity without demanding uniformity

In this way, diversity becomes a strength rather than a threat.

Moving Forward

Concentric governance is not a single reform or a finished design. It is a way of thinking clearly about where power belongs and how self-government can function in a large, diverse society.

By devolving authority where possible, excluding political parties from formal government roles, and reserving higher levels of governance for problems of scale, Americans can make their government more effective, reduce polarization while preserving cooperation and unity.

Independent Electors represent one practical path forward. There are others. What matters first is defining the goal—and then allowing governance to evolve toward it.

- www.independentelectors.com