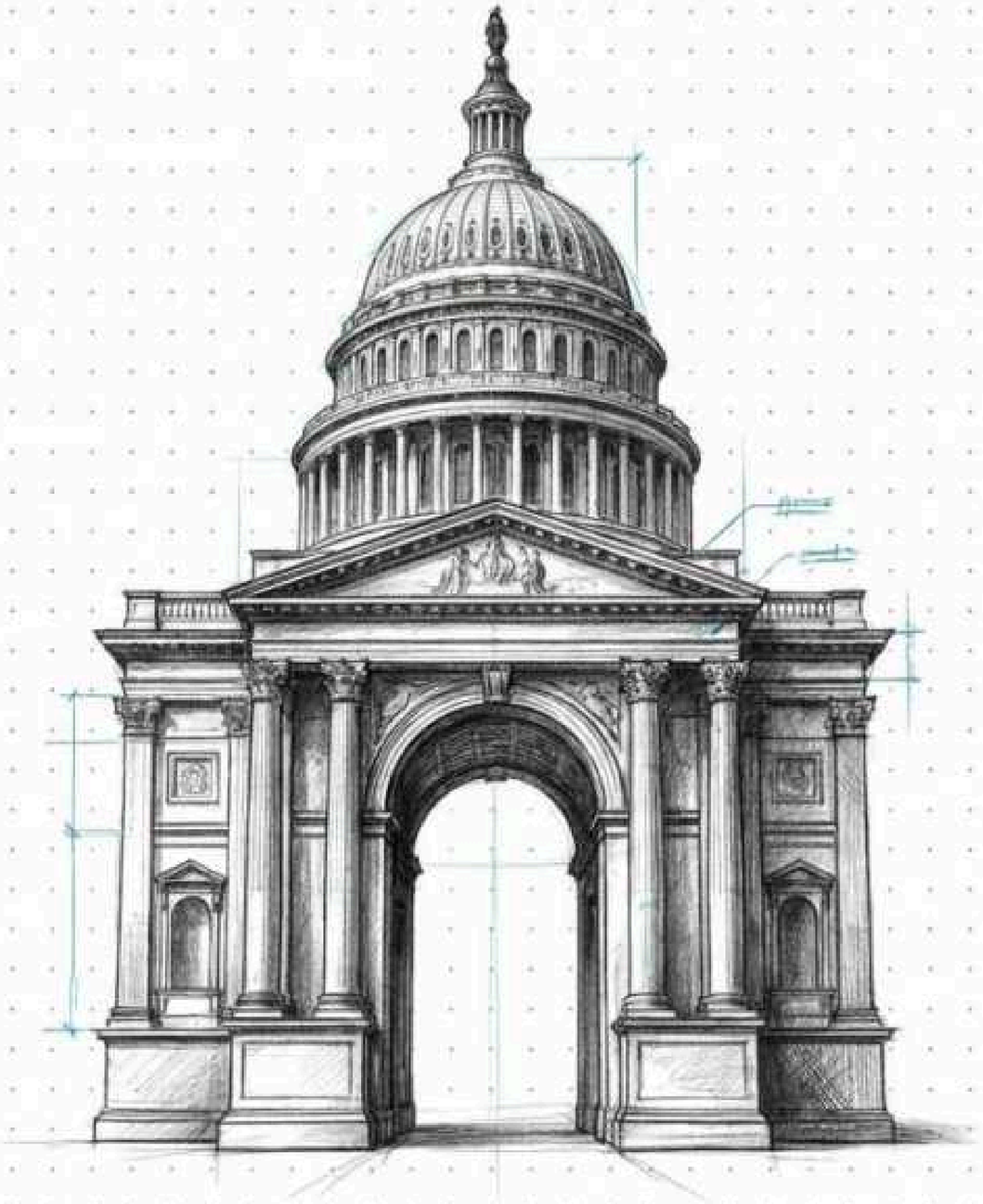
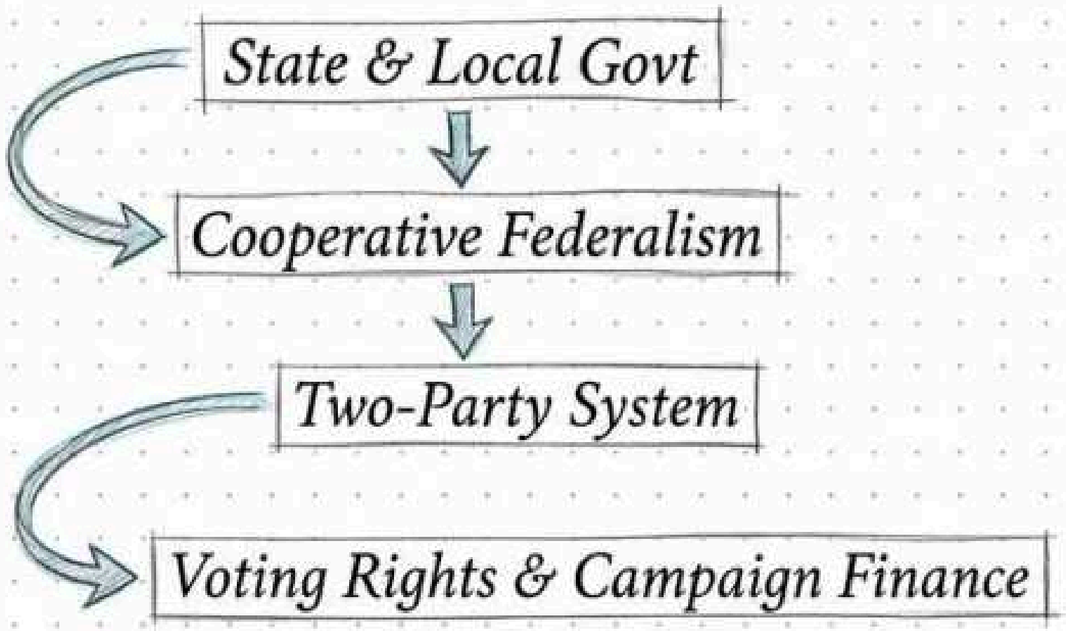
¶ 5.1



Lecture 5: Federalism, Parties, and Elections

Connecting Institutions to the People



Gemini Notebook

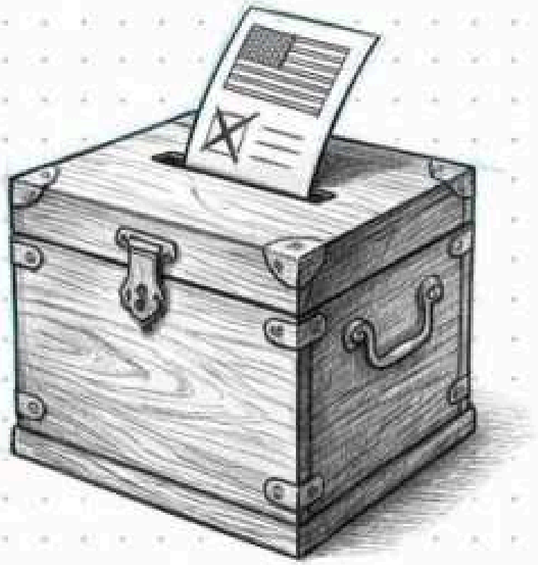
¶ 5.2



State & Local Governments
(Where citizens meet government first)

The Citizen

Parties, Primaries, and General Elections

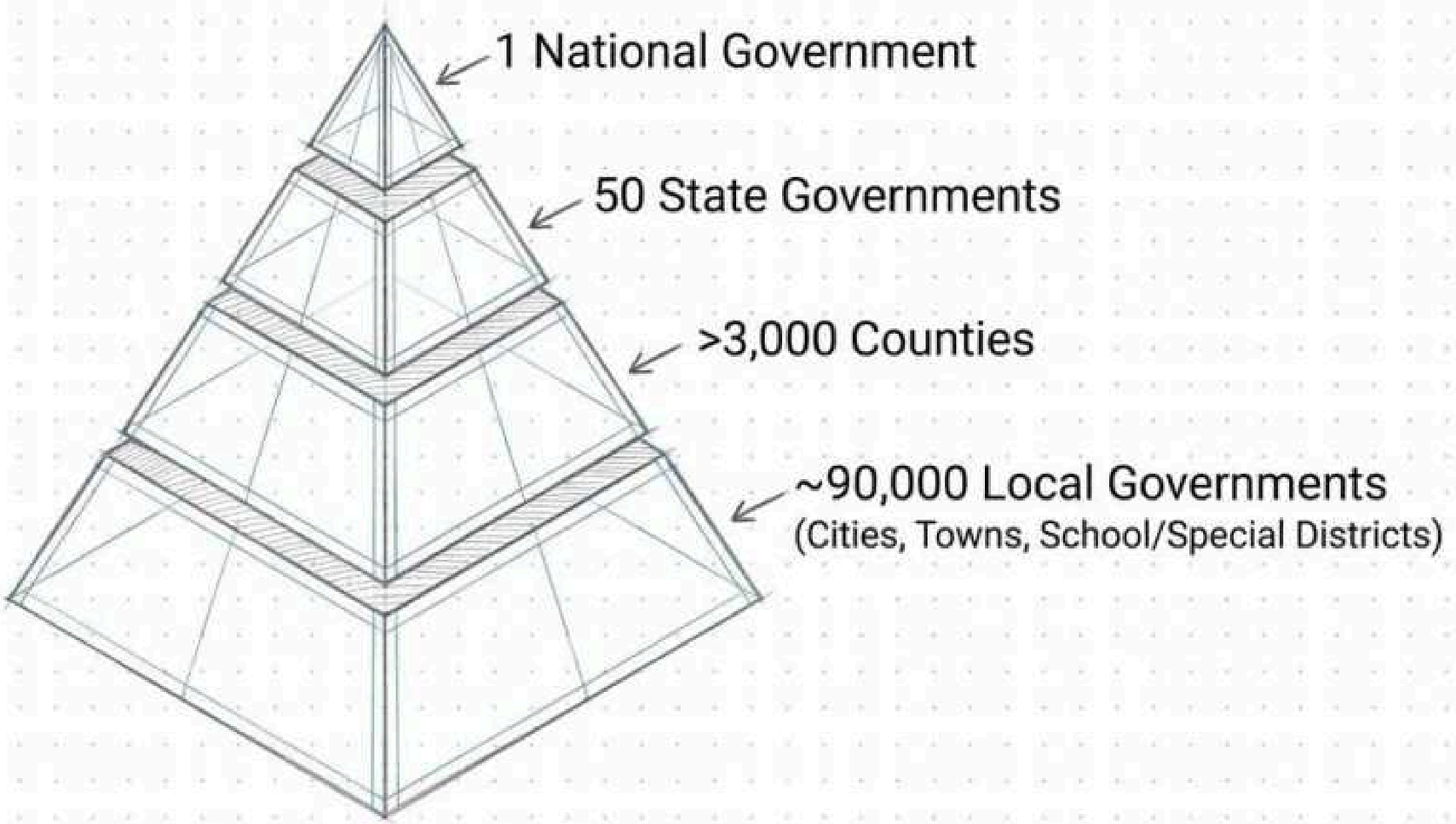




The Right to Vote
& The Role of Money

Gemini Notebook

¶ 5.3

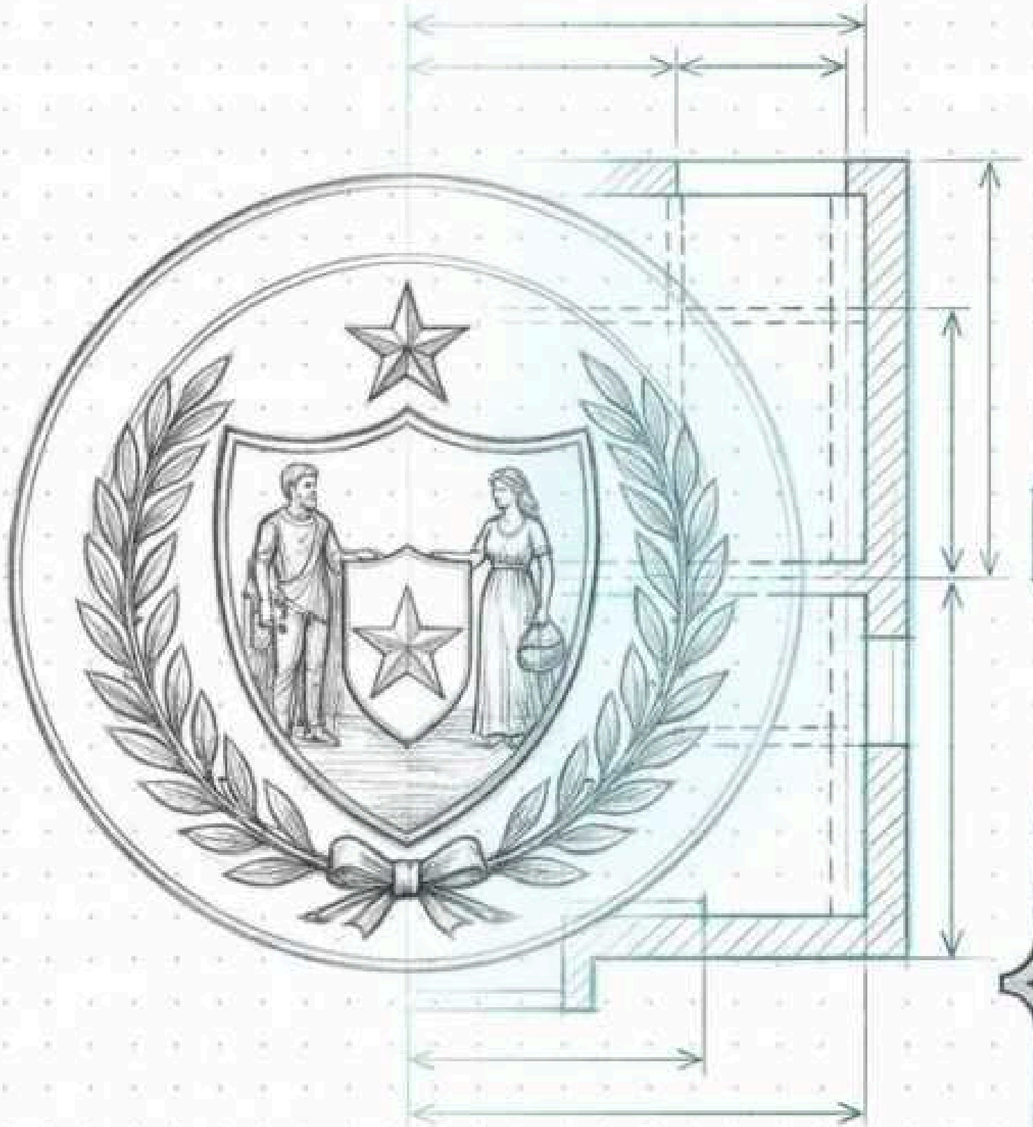


Most citizen interaction happens here—far more often than with Washington.

Gemini Notebook

¶ 5.4

State Structure



Constitution
(Longer & amended more often than national)

- Legislature
- Governor
- Courts

The Police Power

The general power to protect Health, Safety, and Welfare.

Core Duties:

- ☑ Run elections
- ☑ Set criminal law
- ☑ Charter local governments
- ☑ License professions
- ☑ Oversee public schools

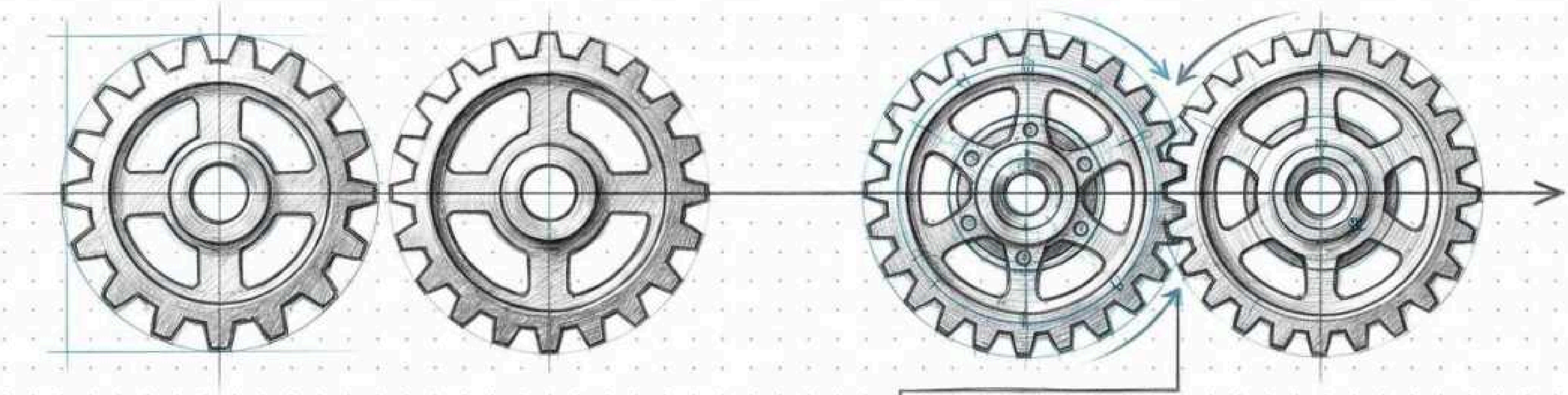
Gemini Notebook

¶ 5.5

Time →

Early Republic — Separate spheres of power.

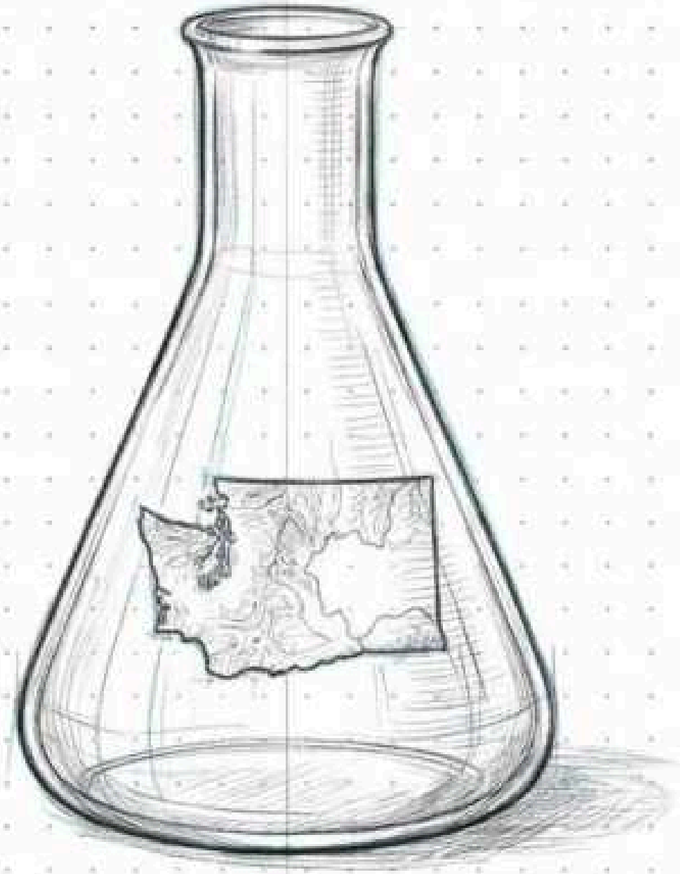
Post-New Deal — Cooperative Federalism.



Washington → Grants-in-Aid (Roads, Schools, Health) → States

*Money often comes with conditions (e.g., Highway funds tied to a minimum drinking age of 21)

Gemini Notebook



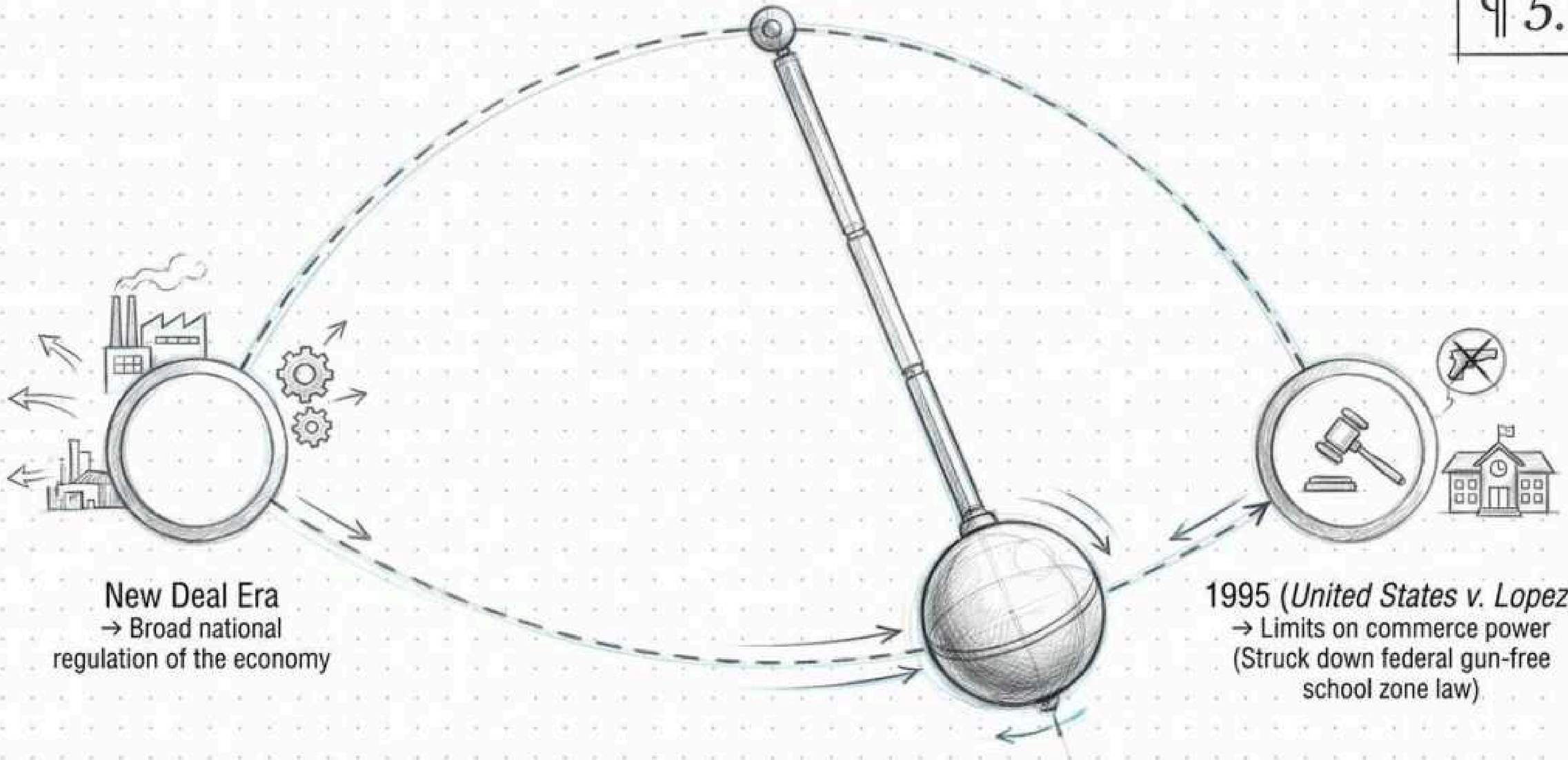
Justice Louis Brandeis's Laboratories of Democracy

Pros (Test & Observe)	Cons (Fractured Rules)
Try new policies without national risk; others can copy or avoid mistakes.	Rights and rules differ sharply by state.

Core Tension: When should national uniformity override local choice?

Gemini Notebook

¶ 5.7



New Deal Era
→ Broad national regulation of the economy

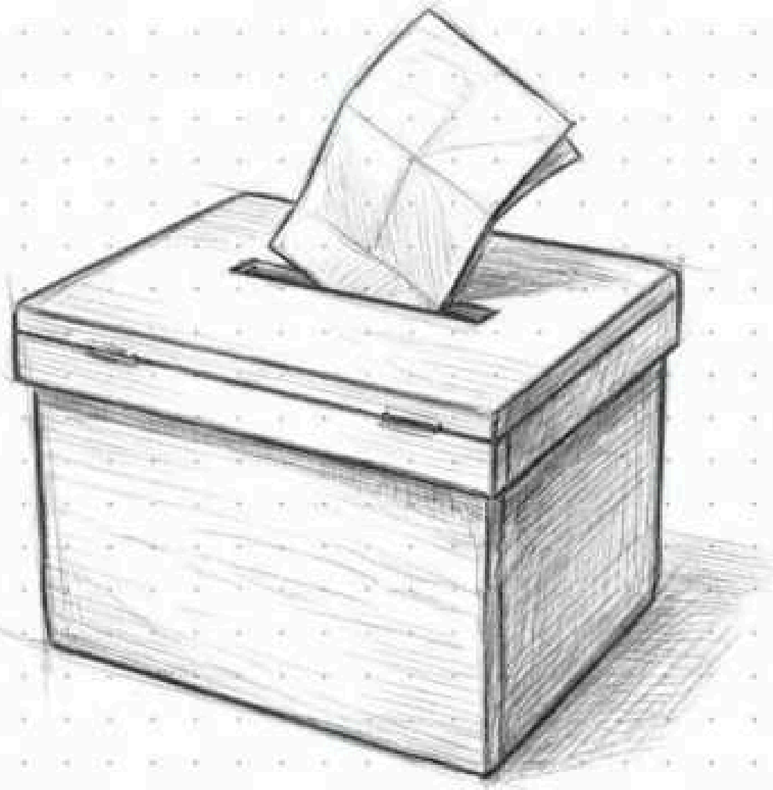
1995 (*United States v. Lopez*)
→ Limits on commerce power (Struck down federal gun-free school zone law)

Federalism is continually argued over, not settled once.

Gemini Notebook

¶ 5.8

The System: Single-Member Districts (Candidate with the most votes wins).



Duverger's Law:

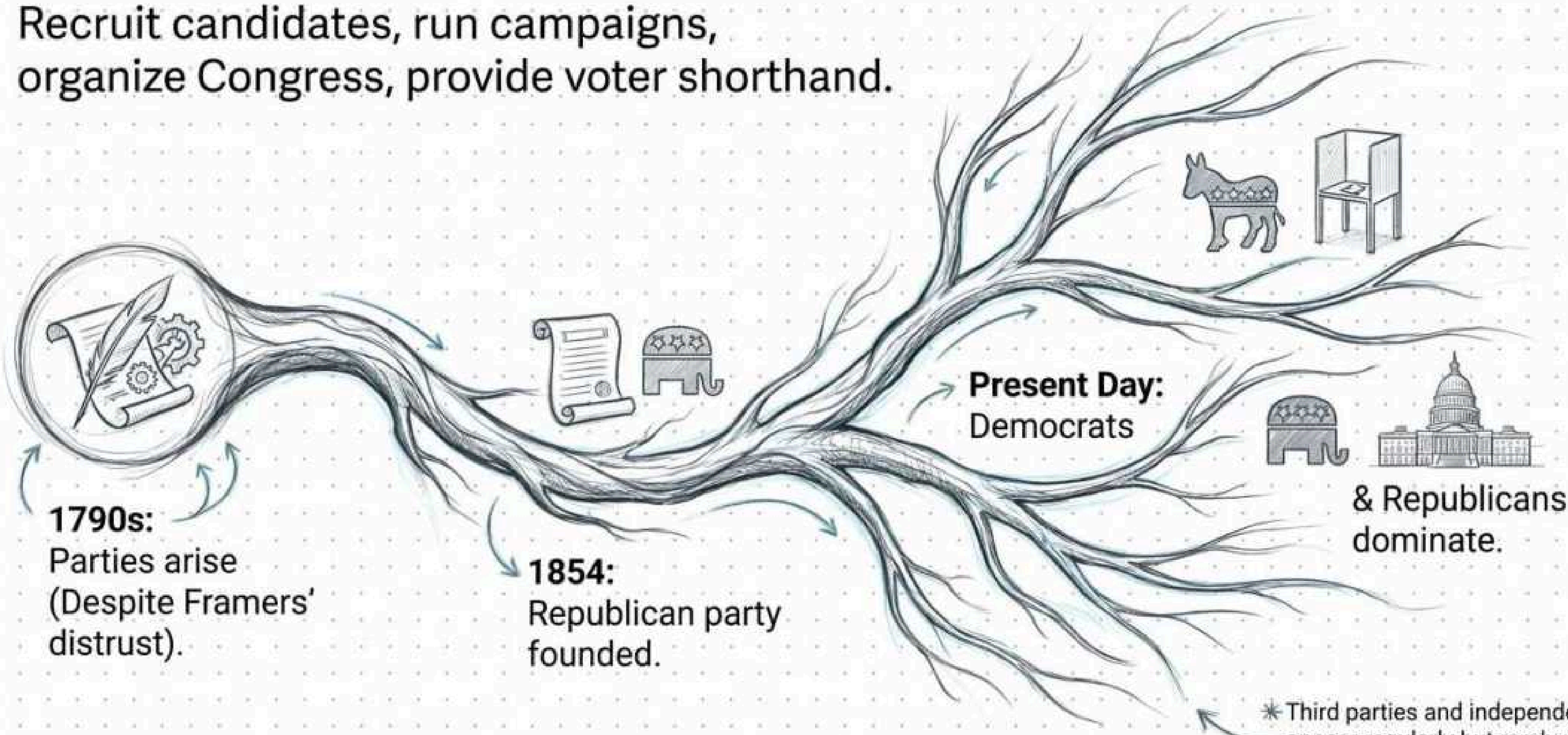
$$f(\text{SMD}) \approx \text{2 Major Parties}$$

Votes for small parties are usually wasted.

[Exceptions: A few places (Maine, Alaska) use ranked-choice voting.]

Gemini Notebook

Core Functions:
Recruit candidates, run campaigns, organize Congress, provide voter shorthand.



1790s:
Parties arise (Despite Framers' distrust).

1854:
Republican party founded.

Present Day:
Democrats & Republicans dominate.

✳ Third parties and independents appear regularly but rarely win national office.

Gemini Notebook

¶ 5.10

Step 1: The Primary

- Closed Primary: Registered party members only.
- Open Primary: Other voters may take part.

Step 2: State-by-State

→ Presidential candidates win delegates.

vote

Step 3: National Convention

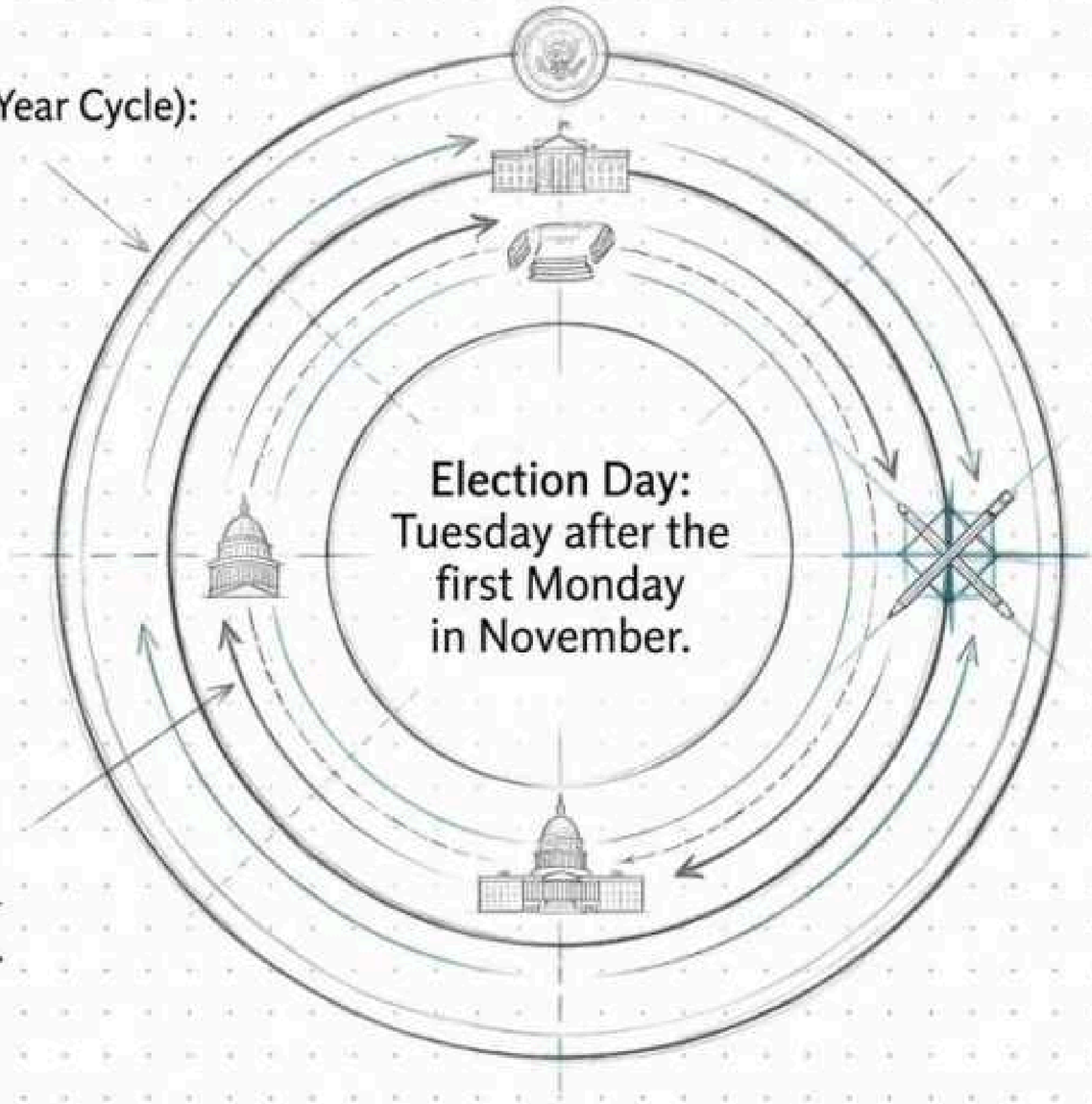
→ Delegates formally choose the nominee.

delegate

delegate

Primaries give voters power, but they heavily reward the most committed partisans.

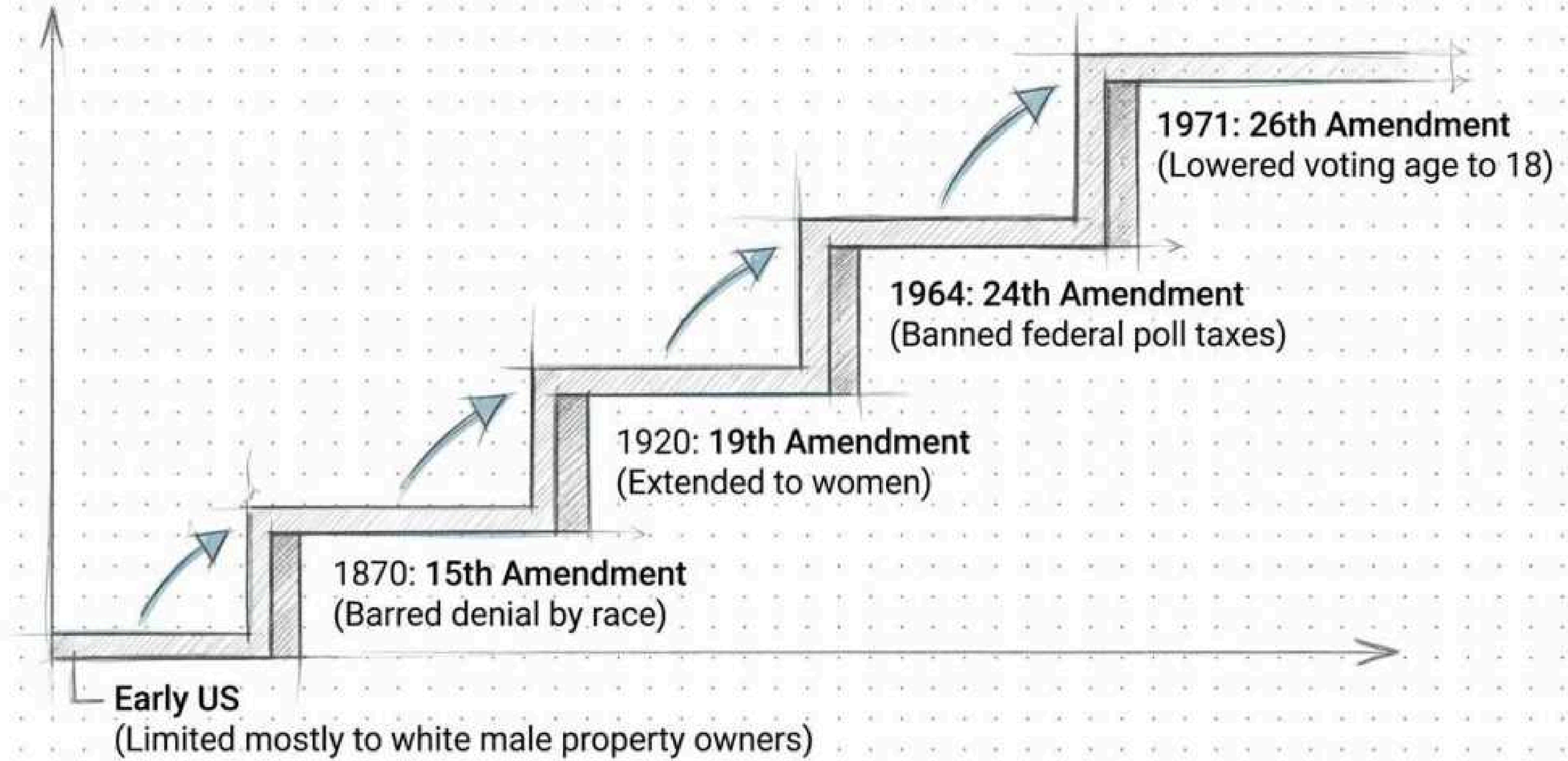
Gemini Notebook



Note: States administer elections—rules on registration, early voting, and mail ballots differ widely.

Gemini Notebook

¶ 5.12



Gemini Notebook

¶ 5.13

The Turning Point (1965): Voting Rights Act (VRA) outlawed these practices and sent federal examiners.

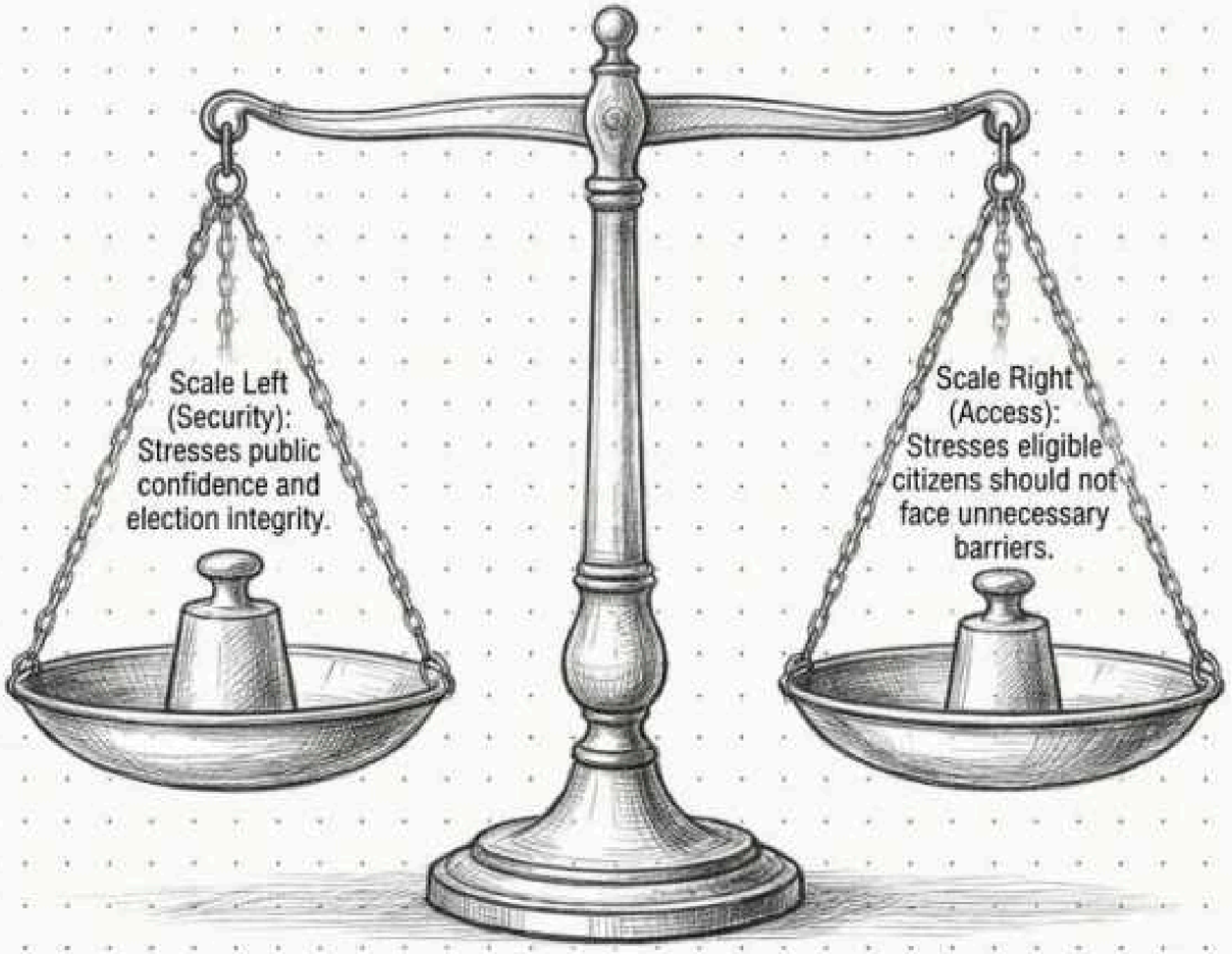
Post-Reconstruction: Literacy tests, poll taxes, and violence used to keep Black citizens from voting.



Modern Shift (2013): Shelby County v. Holder → SCOTUS struck down the formula determining which states need federal approval for voting changes.

Gemini Notebook

The Debate Ground: Voter ID, registration, mail voting, general access.



Both sides claim to protect democratic integrity, resulting in a patchwork of widely differing rules across states.

Gemini Notebook

The Baseline: Campaigns are expensive; federal law limits direct contributions and requires disclosure.

Legal Precedent 1:
Buckley v. Valeo (1976)
→ Spending money to speak = First Amendment protected speech.

Legal Precedent 2:
Citizens United (2010)
→ Corporations and unions may spend without limit on independent political speech.

→ The creation of Super PACs.

Gemini Notebook

Speech vs. Influence

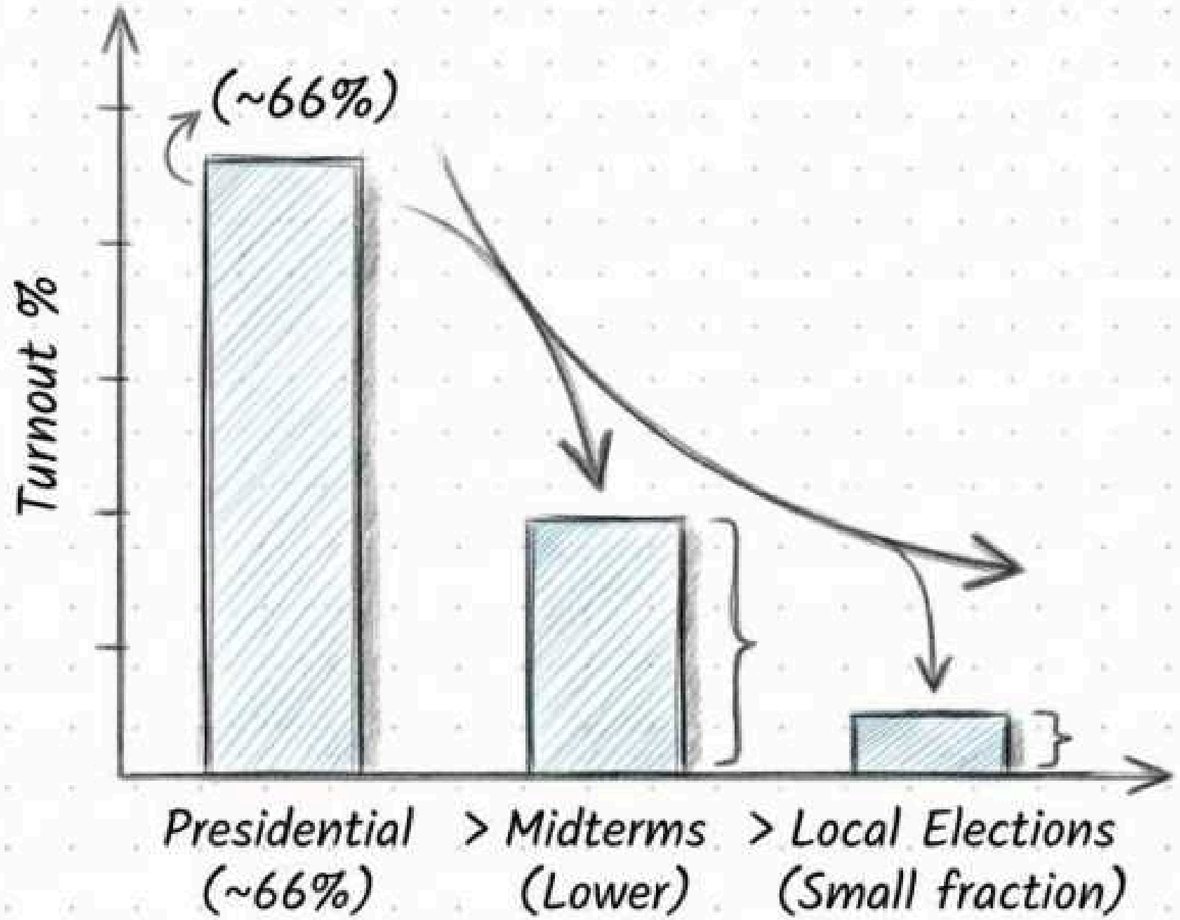
Supporters:	Critics:
Limits on spending = Limits on free speech.	Large donors wield disproportionate influence.

Reform Proposals

- ☑ - Public funding
- ☑ - Lower contribution limits
- ☑ - Stricter disclosure

Campaign finance rules are a major reason elections and lobbying take the shape they do.

Gemini Notebook



Direct Democracy *(Citizens shape government directly in some states)*

Initiatives:
Voters propose laws.

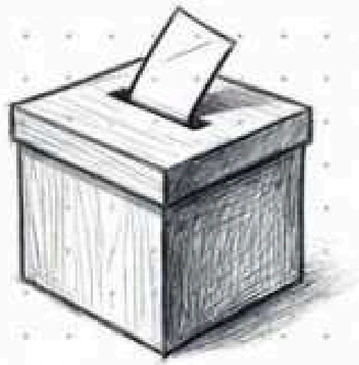
Referendums:
Voters decide on laws.

Gemini Notebook

¶ 5.18



1. **Shared Power:** Power is distributed among national, state, and local governments; states run most elections.



2. **The Party Machinery:** Single-member districts produce two major parties, choosing nominees via primaries and conventions.

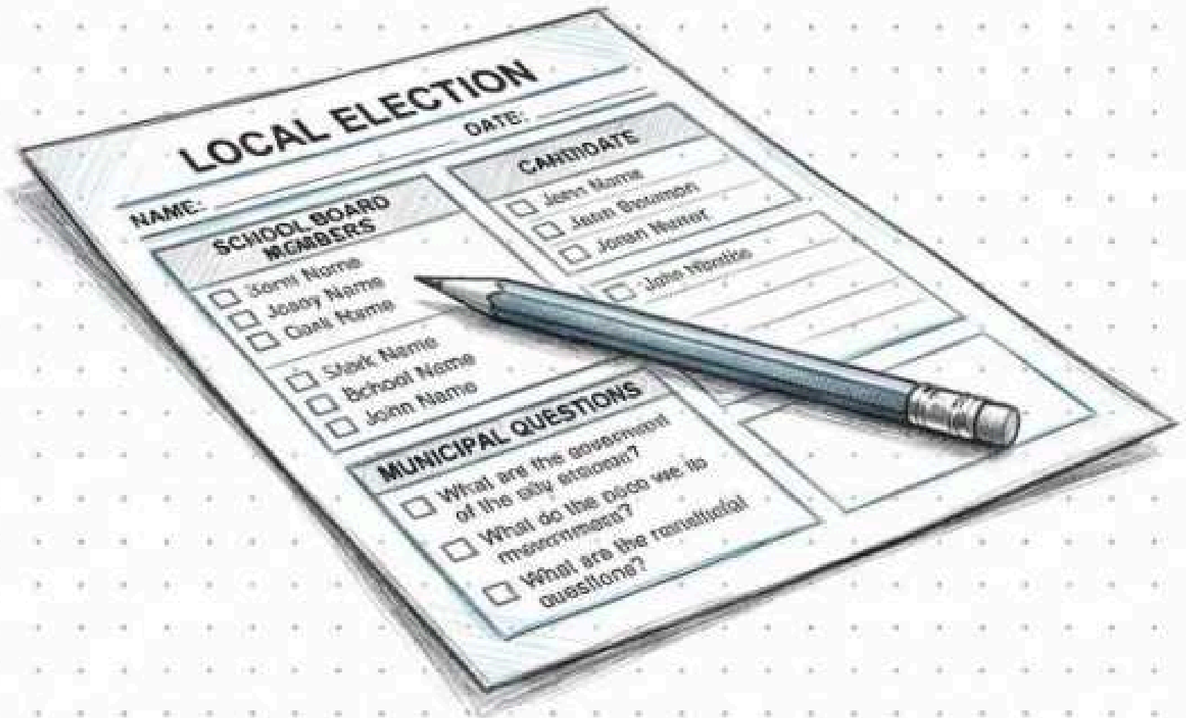


3. **The Contested Vote:** The right to vote expanded historically through amendments, but rules on access and money remain fiercely contested today.

Gemini Notebook

¶ 5.19

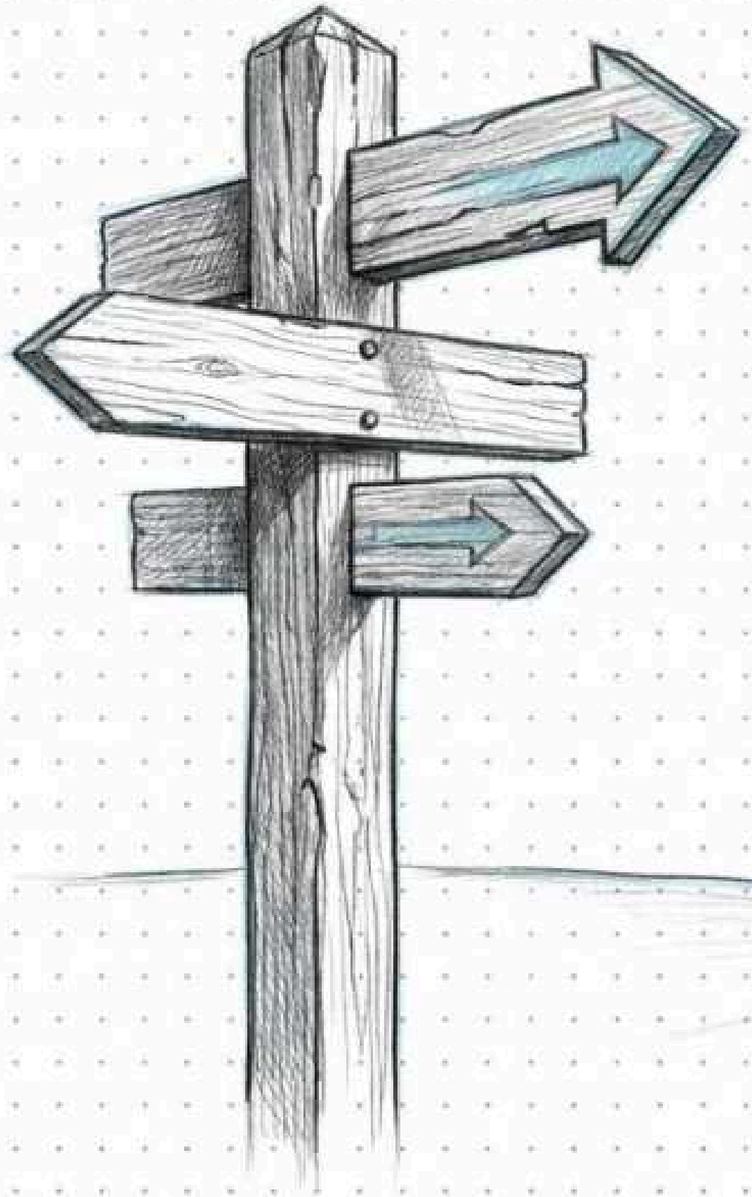
A Question to Take Away: Your state and community make their own rules about voting, school boards, and local taxes. Which of those rules do you know? Which would you change?



Action Prompt: Find out who is on the ballot for your next local election and what that office actually does.

Gemini Notebook

¶ 5.20



Looking Ahead to the Final Lecture:

- Public Opinion
- The Media
- Interest Groups

How policy is made, and how you can actively take part as a citizen.

Gemini Notebook