4.3

Civic, Political, and Private Life

Standard 4.3: Civic, Political, and Private Life

Distinguish among civic, political, and private life. (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Studies) **[8.T4.3]**

FOCUS QUESTION: What are the Differences and Interconnections Among Civic, Political, and Private lives?

In America's democratic society, people engage in three different types of social life: Civic, Political, and Private.

- **Civic life** is the "public life of the citizen concerned with the affairs of the community and nation as contrasted with private or personal life, which is devoted to the pursuit of private and personal interests" (Center for Civic Education, 2014, para. 2). How people act in relation to their town, city, or community is

known as a person's "**civic duty.**"

- **Political life** is where individuals seek to influence and/or direct local, state, or national policies through interaction with the government. Political life "enables people to accomplish goals they could not realize as individuals" ([Center for Civic Education, 2014, para. 4](#)). One engages in political life by voting and actively participating in politics through individual and group actions and by becoming informed about key issues and pending decisions by government leaders.

- **Private life** is the area of individual behavior and action that is removed from political and civic life, but in theory protected by both. Private life includes the concept of **privacy** which refers to the right of an individual to live one's life without interference from or control by people or governments. Individuals' right of privacy is highly contested in United States politics. It is at the center of the *[Roe v. Wade](#)* abortion decision and a woman's right to choice as a matter of personal control. Privacy concerns are also raised by the ways companies conducting online activities collect personal information about adults and children, often without one knowing about it (see [Right to Privacy: Constitutional Rights & Privacy Laws](#)).

What are the dimensions of civic, political, and private lives in the United States today? The modules for this standard explore this question by first examining whether the government can restrict personal freedoms (private life) in a public health emergency such as the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Other modules examine women's political participation (political life) around the world and whether the United States should adopt Universal Basic Income (civic life) as a national policy.

Modules for this Standard Include:

1. INVESTIGATE: People's Lives and Government Responses to COVID-19

"**Anti-Coronavirus Sign**", 2020
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The U.S. response to the **2020 COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic** revealed the interconnections and tensions that exist between civic, public, and private life in this country's democratic society. The coronavirus outbreak began in the United States in late January 2020

- the first confirmed case was January 21st; the [first reported death was in early February](#). The disease spread quickly. A national emergency was declared on March 13. By the beginning of April, there were COVID-19 cases in all 50 states with hotspots centered in Washington state and New York City.

Governments at the national, state, and local level responded, although **each had different powers to enact and enforce coronavirus policies**. In an effort to limit the spread of the disease, the federal government issued recommendations for social distancing, wearing of masks, and closing of federal offices. Some state governments went further, closing public schools, colleges and non-essential businesses; shutting down parks, lakes and common spaces; and issuing stay-at-home orders for entire communities. Other states chose not to close businesses, restrict travel or issue stay-at-home orders. In every instance, local governments and their police departments were then expected to enforce COVID-19 rules, but lacked the resources to do so without high levels of public cooperation.

Unlike the United States, other nations in the world imposed much greater restrictions on people's freedoms in response to COVID-19. China locked down some 60 million people, many in isolation centers. India subsequently locked down 1.3 billion people, the largest quarantine in world history. In those nations, the national government used the pandemic to order draconian restrictions on people's private lives.

What are the government's powers to intervene in people's lives in a national emergency? The question impacts people's civic, political, and private lives. The federal government does have public health powers and could issue a national federal quarantine order as was done during the "Spanish Flu" pandemic of 1918-1919 ([Legal Authorities for Isolation and Quarantine](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020).

However, long-standing constitutional law gives the states and their governors greater legal authority to act in public health emergencies ([The Police Power of the States to Control a Pandemic, Explained](#)). The ruling precedent, set by the Supreme Court in [*Gibbons v. Ogden* (1824)](#) is that the **police power belongs to the states**. Quarantine laws, Chief Justice John Marshall said, "form a portion of that immense mass of legislation which embraces everything within the territory of a State not surrendered to the General Government" (as cited in [Bomboy, 2020, para. 7](#)).

Individual citizens also have rights in such situations. Under the 14th Amendment, public health laws cannot be "arbitrary, oppressive and unreasonable" ([Constitutional Powers and Issues During a Quarantine](#), 2020, para. 11). According to the Human Rights Watch (2020), restrictions on people's rights during an emergency must be "[lawful, necessary and proportionate](#)" ([para. 14](#)).

The COVID-19 pandemic blended civic, political, and private lives in unique ways. Government action is effective only if there are rules and people see it as their duty to obey them. People must believe it is everyone's civic responsibility to ensure health and safety for all. At the same time, people have a right, within reason, to make their own choices about their personal lives and private conduct. Politically, people will be more likely to accept restrictions of personal freedoms if they believe they will not lose their jobs or homes and they will have access to needed health care, unemployment funding and essential services during a pandemic. Learn more: [Why There Is No National Lockdown](#).

Finding ways to bring individuals' civic, political, and private interests together is complicated by everyone's presumed right of privacy (see [Patient Right to Privacy Called into Question During COVID-19 Pandemic](#)). Although the right to privacy is not mentioned in the Constitution, the Supreme Court has interpreted several of the amendments to establish this right ([Does the Constitution Protect the

[Right of Privacy?](#)). Students in schools, however, do not have the same wide-ranging privacy rights as do adults in homes and communities ([Students: Your Right to Privacy](#)).

Does the increasing use of social media blur the line between people's private life and political life when encountering an event as unprecedented as COVID-19? How do you know? In what ways? As a nation, we are still debating how to effectively balance private and civic interests in a time of a pandemic, a process that has many political dimensions.

Media Literacy Connections: COVID-19 Information Evaluation

There has been an array of fake and false claims in the media about the severity and duration of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has led to very different responses by people throughout the country to government-based COVID-19 policies and recommendations (e.g., mask requirements, lockdown, social distancing).

Have you been able to distinguish fake news about COVID-19 from the truthful and reliable information and guidance? How do you think other students and community members did with evaluating news about COVID-19? The following activities are designed to explore these questions.

- **[Activity 1: Counter False News About COVID-19](#)**
- **[Activity 2: Evaluate Twitter Posts About COVID-19 in Regards to Civic, Political, and Private Life](#)**

Suggested Learning Activities

- **Create an Infographic**
    - What are examples of issues that influence the civic, political, and private lives of students?

- **Research and State Your View**
    - Should individuals' rights be restricted during a national emergency to protect the broader public?
    - What restrictions should a government be allowed to impose on individuals and businesses during a national public health emergency, like a pandemic, or a natural disaster, like a hurricane or earthquake?

Online Resources for Civic, Political, and Private Life and the Right of Privacy

- [How Can Citizens Participate?](#) Center for Civic Education
- [Recalling the Supreme Court's Historic Statement on Contraception and Privacy](#), National Constitution Center
- [*Griswold v. Connecticut* (1972**)**](#) Supreme Court case held that a state's ban on contraceptives violated the right to privacy of married couples. The case included the concept people have a "zone of privacy."
- [Where Did the Right to Privacy Come From?](#) ThoughtCo. (May 31, 2018)

2. UNCOVER: Women's Political Participation Around the World

New Zealand was the first country to grant women the right to vote in 1893. Today, Vatican City is the only country where women cannot vote (Saudi Arabia began allowing women to vote in 2015).

Even with the right to vote, women's entry into positions of political leadership has been slow internationally. At the beginning of 2019, women were more than half of the lawmakers only in Rwanda (61.3%), Cuba (52.2%) and Bolivia (51.3%). According to the World Economic Forum, the United States ranked 75th on a "Women in Parliament" list with just 23.5% of female members of Congress ([Thornton, 2019](#)).

Consult [Women's Power Index](#), an interactive map from the Council on Foreign Relations that identifies where women have power around the world and explore the interactive [arcGIS StoryMap: Women in National Parliaments](#).

You can access a country-by-country breakdown of women's

participation in electoral politics at this [Gender Quotas Database](#).
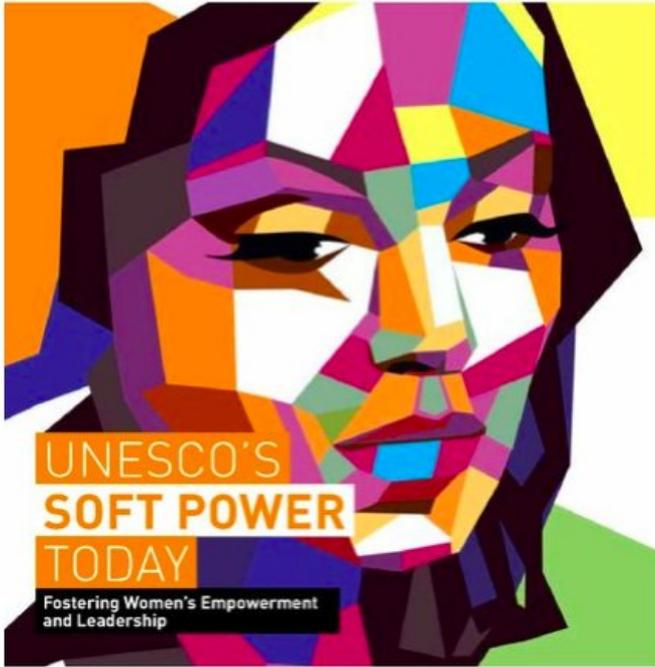
Internationally, 59 countries have elected a woman leader, beginning in 1960 with **Sirimavo Bandaranaike** who was chosen Prime Minister in Ceylon/Sri Lanka ([All the Countries (59) That Had a Woman Leader Before the U.S.](#)). Angela Merkel (Germany), Sahle-Work Zewde (Zimbabwe), Jacinda Ardern (New Zealand), Katrin Jakobsdottir (Iceland), and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (Liberia) were among the women leading countries in 2019 ([Female Heads of State and Government in 2019](#)).

In 2016 in Iceland, women held 30 of 63 seats in Parliament making it the most gender equal political system in the world without a quota system ([The Tiny Nation of Iceland is Crushing the U.S. in Electing Female Politicians).](#)

For a video of interest, check out [Women Leaders of the Yukon First Nations](#) (TEDWomen, 2020) that discusses the long history of women leaders among tribal peoples in northwestern Canada. Visit also the website of the [Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council](#).

Gender Quotas and Gender Parity

There are 80 countries in the world that have **quotas for women's electoral participation** in government (*The Washington Post*, March 29, 2019). The word "quota" refers to "numerical targets that stipulate the number or percentage of women that must be included in a candidate list or the number of seats to be allocated to women in a legislature" ([Women in National Governments Around the Globe](#), February 8, 2021, p. 4). Most quotas are set at 30% women, but they range from 20% to 40%.

Quotas function differently in different countries. In some places, quotas reserve seats for women in national legislatures. In other places, quotas reserve places for women on election ballots or ask political parties to voluntarily nominate women candidates for elected office.

There are examples where quotas have expanded women's political participation. India has reserved one-third of seats in the local governments for women since 1993; legislation is pending to extend that rule to all state legislatures and the lower house of the national parliament. A 1999 constitutional amendment in France mandated political parties "endorse an equal number of men and women candidates in municipal, legislative and European elections" ([French Women in Politics](#), Lambert, 2001, para. 13). For more than two

decades, Belgium has required political parties put equal numbers of women and men on election ballots. In 2014, Mexico began requiring gender parity among candidates for its national legislature.

Would you support gender quotas for local, state, or national elections in the United States? Would you favor voluntary quotas for political parties or gender parity mandated by law?

You can access a country-by-country breakdown of women's participation in electoral politics at [Gender Quotas Database](#).

Impacts of Women's Political Leadership

"Do women leaders perform differently than men in similar positions?"

This research subject has taken on new immediacy in a time of a global pandemic and heightened international tensions. Exploring why women-led nations did better addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, a *New York Times* reporter suggested female leaders (like Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand and Angela Merkel of Germany) were more willing to consult a broader range of information sources than male leaders when deciding to implement virus testing, contract tracing, and social isolation measures ([Taub, 2020](#)). In the United States, however, that same report found both female and male Republican governors were slower to implement virus control shut-down measures than their Democrat peers, suggesting political party affiliation was a stronger influence than gender-based dispositions.

For additional information, go to [ENGAGE: Can a Women Be Elected President or Vice-President in the United States?](#)

Media Literacy Connections: Women Political Leaders in the Media

Media coverage of women in political roles can vary greatly. Some

women are in the news all the time; others are hardly ever mentioned. Those who appear regularly are often presented differently depending on the political lean of different media outlets. [Social scientists have shown](#) that the media cover women and men political leaders differently. Stories about women in politics more often mention their appearance, clothing, family, and instances of combative behavior, all in line with traditional gender stereotypes. Such gender bias hinders women and helps male leaders politically.

In these activities, you will examine how women political leaders are represented in the media, both in the United States and in different countries around the world.

- **[Activity 1: Examine the Representation of Women Political Leaders in the Media](#)**
- **[Activity 2: Evaluate the Media Portrayal of Women Leaders in Different Countries and Careers](#)**

Watch on YouTube https://edtechbooks.org/-vbx

Suggested Learning Activities

- **State Your View**
  - First, explore the [arcGIS StoryMap: Women in National Parliaments](#).
  - Why is the proportion of women leaders around the world so small?
  - Given the small number of women leaders, what are the barriers to expanding women's political participation around the world? How can these barriers be overcome?
    - [How Do We Get More Women in Politics?](#) World Economic Forum

- **Construct a Timeline for Women's Suffrage**
  - [History of Women's Suffrage Timeline](#) shows when women around the world were granted suffrage and given the right to stand for election
  - [Visual timeline](#) showing when women were granted suffrage around the world.

Online Resources on Women's Political Participation Around the World

- [Percentage of Women in National Parliaments](#)
- [OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) Interactive Data](#) on women's political participation around the world (2015)
- [Angela Merkel](#), Chancellor of Germany, sometimes referred to as the "Leader of the Free World". She was named [Time's Person of the Year](#) in 2015.
- [Women Rising: Political Leadership in Africa](#), YouTube Video
- [Interview with Bharati Silwal-Giri,](#) member of Nepali Congress Party and expert on gender, YouTube Video
- [Text of speech by Michelle Bachelet](#), UN Women Executive

Director, on women's political participation worldwide

3. ENGAGE: Should the U.S. Adopt Universal Basic Income (UBI) or Guaranteed Employment as National Policies?

Universal basic income (UBI) refers to regular cash payments (with minimal or no requirements for receiving the money) made to a given population in order to increase people's income ([International Monetary Fund](#)). [Debating Universal Basic Income](#) from the Wharton Public Policy Initiative offers more information about this policy.

Guaranteed employment happens when the government becomes the employer for anyone who cannot otherwise find work. The idea is the economy will be better off when there is full employment when all workers are spending the money they earn purchasing goods and services from businesses and other providers ([The Federal Job Guarantee: A Policy to Achieve Full Employment](#), Center on Budget

and Policy Futures, 2018). Guaranteed employment was a centerpiece of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's [Economic Bill of Rights](#) that set forth a "right to employment" as well as the 1963 [March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom](#)led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Direct Government Payments to People During the Pandemic

The economic dislocations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed the **direct government payments to individuals and families** as well as the possibilities of universal basic income and guaranteed employment into the wider political dialog. By mid-April 2020, with more than 22 million people out of work, members of Congress including then Senator Kamala Harris and Representatives Maxine Waters, Ro Khanna, and Tim Ryan, among others, were calling for ongoing direct payments to unemployed workers. In his April 2020 Easter Sunday Address, Pope Francis called for governments to consider a **universal basic wage**. During summer 2020, one in five workers (more than 30 million individuals) were collecting unemployment benefits.

Beginning in April 2020, the federal government has provided 3 rounds of stimulus checks (direct payments to eligible individuals and couples) to provide emergency aid to those impacted by the pandemic, the most recent coming from the $1.9 trillion **American Rescue Plan** passed in March 2021. Under that plan, eligible individuals will receive a $1400 check, couples $2800, and there is an additional $1400 for each dependent child. The American Rescue Plan is huge initiative that will be spending $43,000 every second between March 2021 and when it expires at the end of 2022.

Included in the American Rescue Plan is the **Child Tax Credit** (CTC) that provides direct payments of at least $250 per child every month up to $3600 a year between July and December 2021. While these payments are more of a tax cut rather than a form of Universal Basic

Income, they will impact some 39 million households (about 90 percent of all families with children in this country). You can learn more from the [Advanced Child Tax Credit Payments](#) from Internal Revenue Service. The Child Tax Credit was originally created as part of the 1997 Taxpayer Relief Act.

Versions of Universal Basic Income

Universal Basic Income gained renewed publicity during the early stages of the 2020 Presidential campaign when Democratic candidate and entrepreneur Andrew Yang proposed giving $1000 a month to every American over the age of 18. Yang, as well as both Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and Tesla CEO Elon Musk, among others, believe UBI will help address the growing problem of workers being displaced from their jobs by automation.

Other politicians regard UBI as a way to help the large numbers of Americans who are living at or near the poverty level and must work multiple jobs just to get by. The Census Bureau has reported that about 13 million workers in the U.S. have more than one job (Beckhusen, 2019).

There are UBI programs in existence right now. Alaska gives every resident a yearly check from the state's oil revenue called the [Permanent Fund Dividend](#). In 2018, all residents received $1,600. Since February 2019, the city of Stockton, California paid 125 low-income residents $500 a month through its SEED (Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration) program (["Will 'Basic Income' Become the California Norm?"](#)). The mayor of the city declared that "unconditional cash provides people the agency to make the right decisions for themselves and their families" ([Tubbs, 2020, para. 8](#)).

Beginning in November 2020, Chelsea Massachusetts, a majority Latino city across the Mystic River from Boston, will begin giving 2,074 families between $200 and $400 a month to use as those family

members decide. The program, **Chelsea Eats**, which has funding from the Shah Family Foundation ($1 million), the city of Chelsea ($2.5 million), United Way of Massachusetts ($250,000) and Massachusetts General Hospital ($200,000) is scheduled to last for four to six months.

Guaranteed Jobs

As an alternative to UBI programs, 2020 Presidential candidate Bernie Sanders has proposed a **guaranteed government jobs** program. Under his proposal, state and local governments would pay people to engage in public works projects related to areas of community need, such as construction of affordable housing, repair and replacement of aging infrastructure, and so on. Workers would be paid $15 an hour and receive paid family and medical leave. Since 2005, in India, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Act has provided 100 days of guaranteed employment every year for adult members of rural households who cannot find a job.

Persistant and Pervasive Income Inequality

Income inequality remains a persistent social problem because the rich are so much richer than everyone else. "Income disparities are so pronounced that America's top 10 percent now average more than nine times as much income as the bottom 90 percent, according to data analyzed by UC Berkeley economist Emmanuel Saez," (as cited in Inequality.org, n.d., para. 3), while the top 1% average over 39 times more income than the bottom 90%. Providing people with a guaranteed income could make a huge difference for those struggling to survive on a monthly basis.

## Suggested Learning Activities

- **State Your View**
    - How much money does someone need for happiness and well-being?
        - [Researchers have proposed $75,000 a year.](#) Do you agree or disagree and why?

- **Envision a More Equitable Society**
    - Universal Basic Income and Guaranteed Government Jobs are proposed as ways to create a more equitable society where everyone has an economic and social foundation for personally productive and meaningful lives.
    - What steps would you take to create a more equitable society for all?

Online Resources for Universal Basic Income and Guaranteed Employment

- Pro:
    - [Why Everyone is Talking About Free Cash Handouts--An Explainer on Universal Basic Income](#), CNBC.com (June 27, 2019)
    - [5 Characteristics of Basic Income,](#) Basic Income Earth Network
- Con:
    - [Who Really Stands to Win from Universal Basic Income?](#) The New Yorker (July 2, 2018)
    - [Universal Basic Income Has Been Tried Before. It Didn't Work.](#) The Heritage Foundation (October 9, 2018)

Standard 4.3 Conclusion

Civic life is where people exercise their responsibilities by being active members of their community and nation. **Political life** is where people actively participate in government at the local, state, and national level as voters, engaged community members who protest and lobby for change, and as candidates for and holders of political offices. **Private life** is where individuals conduct their own affairs in their own ways. **INVESTIGATE** looked at how the government's responses to the COVID-19 pandemic impacted people's personal lives and freedoms. From the perspective of political life, **UNCOVER** examined women's political participation around the world. **ENGAGE** asked if the United States should adopt Universal Basic Income (UBI) or Guaranteed Employment as national economic, social and civic policies.
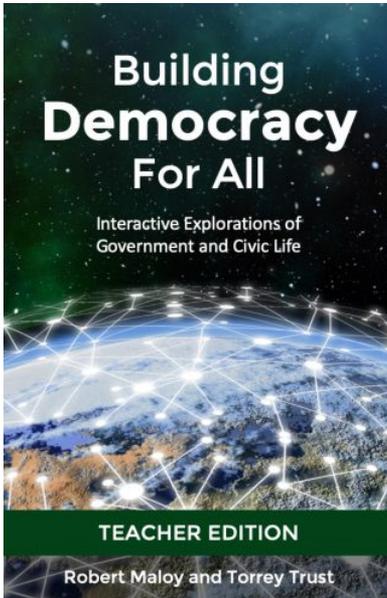
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