



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on October 5, 2013

Google “Constitute” Pushes New Governments to Embrace Democracy

Little did James Madison know that if the Constitutional Convention could have just been delayed a couple of hundred years, he could have saved himself and his colleagues a lot of time. Instead of waiting weeks for crates of books sent from Paris by Thomas Jefferson, then studying those books to discover the weaknesses that ultimately destroyed the republics of history, Madison could have just Googled it.



In cooperation with [Google Ideas](#), the [Comparative Constitution Project](#) has launched [a site called “Constitute.”](#) The purpose of the new venture is to make available the currently in force constitutions of over 160 countries around the world.

Anyone in the world may access these charters (searching by country name, for example), or users may select various topics and study their presence within the various governing documents.

The purpose of the creation of this database? According to the website:

New constitutions are written every year. The people who write these important documents need to read and analyze texts from other places. Constitute offers access to the world’s constitutions that users can systematically compare them across a broad set of topics — using a modern, clean interface.

As our own Constitution is judged by the caliber of men who crafted it, it would be likewise illuminating to learn the identity of the collaborators in the Constitute project.

Under the title, [“Who is Behind Constitute?”](#) the following information is provided by the consortium:

Constitute was developed by the [Comparative Constitutions Project](#). It was seeded with a grant from [Google Ideas](#) to the University of Texas at Austin, with additional financial support from the [Indigo Trust](#) and [IC2](#). Semantic search components were created by the Miranker Lab at the University of Texas. Engineering and web-design support are provided by [Psyche](#).

The following organizations have made important investments in the Comparative Constitutions Project since 2005: the [National Science Foundation](#) (SES 0648288, IIS 1018554), the [Cline Center for Democracy](#), the [University of Texas](#), the [University of Chicago](#), and the [Constitution Unit at University College London](#).

There are disturbing “democratic” elements evident in most of these contributing organizations.

The Indigo Trust, for example, is a U.K.-based group that funnels millions of dollars of grant money into developing the technological infrastructure of poor countries around the world. The Trust awarded \$48,674 to the Constitute project.

In [a blog post authored by Dr. James Melton](#) and posted on the Indigo Trust website, the purpose of a constitution as described by Melton sounds distinctly democratic and very un-republican. Melton



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writes:

Constitutions are the foundation for government in virtually every society around the world. They simultaneously create, empower, and limit the institutions that govern society. In doing so, they are intimately linked to the provision of public goods. Outcomes, like democracy, economic performance and human rights protection, are all associated with the contents of countries' constitutions. It is little wonder, then, that constitutions are often blamed for poor economic and political outcomes or that such outcomes commonly result in constitutional change. Both domestic and international actors view constitutional change as a means to spur economic, political and social development.

In no way does the US Constitution establish a democratic form of government.

In point of fact, a *republic* is a representative government ruled by law — in the case of the United States, the Constitution of 1787. A *democracy*, on the other hand, is a form of government ruled by the vote of a majority of the people. A republic recognizes that individuals are endowed (by their Creator) with rights, whereas democracies focus on the government's ability to provide for the public good through allocation of resources.

"Democracies," James Madison wrote in [The Federalist, No. 10](#), "have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths."

This could explain the data cited by Melton in his blog post. "The result is a surprisingly large amount of constitutional change each year. On average, 30 constitutions are amended and 5 are completely replaced each year," Melton explains.

In light of the distinction between a democracy and a republic, it is easy to detect the decidedly "democratic" tone of Dr. Melton's description of the *Constitute* project. Especially when he writes that constitutions are "intimately linked to the provision of public goods" and "both domestic and international actors view constitutional change as a means to spur economic, political and social development."

What did Madison think of political scientists, such as Dr. Melton, who advocate for increased democratic influence in government? Again, from *The Federalist*, No. 10:

Theoretic politicians, who have patronized this species of government, have erroneously supposed that by reducing mankind to a perfect equality in their political rights, they would at the same time be perfectly equalized and assimilated in their possessions, their opinions, and their passions.

As individuals, mankind is never truly perfectly equal.

The men who drafted the Constitution of the United States roundly rejected the notion that government should be the means of supporting the public. The government, they believed, was a necessary evil that had the sole purpose of performing very limited, enumerated duties of national import.

In fairness, the Indigo Trust is not alone among the contributors to the *Constitute* project that is devoted to using the database to spread democracy.

Another participant, the Cline Center for Democracy at the University of Illinois, is equally fond of promoting democracy as the collectivist cure for society's ills. [Under the "About" tab on the group's website](#), the devotion to democracy is unmistakable:



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Democracy in the United States and other industrialized nations faces daunting challenges. These problems are rooted in the rapid pace of technological and demographic change. Responding effectively to these challenges is complicated by the forces of globalization as well as by a radical transformation of the political milieu. Many mature democracies now function within a milieu that hampers rather than facilitates the ability of government to respond to contemporary problems decisively, coherently, and in a manner consistent with democratic values.

[Program in Global Democratization](#)

The wave of democratization that spread throughout Latin American and Southern and Eastern Europe in the past 25 years was one of the 20th century's most important developments. It improved the quality of life for tens of millions of people by providing them with new freedoms and liberties, and it laid the groundwork for economic reforms, a higher standard of living, and hope for a brighter future. Recent history, however, shows that this "third wave" of democratization has slowed and that many fledgling democracies failed after only a few years of existence. Thus, hundreds of millions of people in the Middle East, East Asia, and Africa were untouched by democracy's third wave; tens of millions of others live in fragile democracies...

[Program in Democratic Governance and Societal Welfare](#)

Government is a means to pursue, through collective action, a set of ends that are essential to societal welfare. To some people government is a "necessary evil." It prevents anarchy by providing the order essential to fruitful human intercourse. Government is objectionable because it constrains liberty, which is a vital wellspring of happiness. Basic human freedoms are essential in order for individuals to maximize their talents and to realize their desires, which form the bedrock of societal welfare.

There are so many keywords in that mission statement that should give pause to Americans and to all who recognize the rule of law and individual liberty as the keystones of good government. Likewise, these calls for greater global democracy are understood by constitutionalists as the seedbeds of collectivism and the social welfare state that supports it. Both of these latter two concepts are anathema to the American concept of freedom.

Still, despite the errors in political philosophy rampant in the statements of several Constitute collaborators, there may be something of use in the database after all.

In [a statement to Foreign Policy](#), Tom Ginsburg, a professor at the University of Chicago Law School and co-director of the Comparative Constitutions Project, explained the philosophy:

Most people who are drafting constitutions have never done so before and hope to never have to do it again. We seek to empower both potential constitutional drafters and their citizens, so as to better inform the choices they will have to make to establish and preserve lasting national constitutions. With Google's help, we've been able to do just that.

Drafters and decision makers sincere in their efforts to create a lasting and liberty-protecting government would be wise to attempt to replicate the republican form of government established by the Constitution of the United States and to ignore the drive toward short-lived and dangerous democracy promoted by the project's creators.

Graphic at top: Screen-grab from <https://www.constituteproject.org/#/>

Joe A. Wolverton, II, J.D. is a correspondent for The New American and travels frequently nationwide



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speaking on topics of nullification, the NDAA, and the surveillance state. He is the host of The New American Review radio show that is simulcast on YouTube every Monday. Follow him Twitter @TNAJoeWolverton and he can be reached at jwolverton@thenewamerican.com



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