

Why Do We Hate Government?
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Democrats and Republicans have different ideas (in theory) of what government should do. Both believe that, as our founding father James Madison noted, if men were angels, they would need no government. But since they are not, they need government to control the unangelic among us---and government needs to control itself as well. Government is not given a free hand to rule. In our system, we have multiple checks and balances so that no one sector of government can become a dictatorship of unlimited power, with a free press and courts to see to it.

There are similarities in what powers both parties support in government\227but there are differences in how these powers are used. Government should:

\225 Protect the public from criminals and foreign enemies. Democrats want protection from domestic terrorists on the right (abortion doctor murderers and survivalist nuts) whereas Republicans want protection from enemies abroad and anarchists on the left at home. We need both.

\225 Safe Infrastructure. Democrats want protection for streets, roads, bridges, dams, airports, and the environment in general. Republicans want these too\227until government interference stifles common sense. Democrats believe people need protections that private enterprises cannot give; Republicans think that too much such protection kills the golden goose.

Regarding environmental protection, which Democrats believe must be a government responsibility, Republicans note that the world\222s worst environmental despoilers were and are Communists (who didn\222t care); they also note that Democrats fail to see that businesses are often environmentalists themselves and that government alone cannot do the job.

\225 Financial and Business Regulation. Democrats want strict regulation; Republicans prefer that the market take care of itself. After the financial bubble, we obviously need more regulation. The question is how much.

\225 The Social Safety Net. Democrats introduced Social Security, Medicare, and now are trying to increase entitlements that most people want. Republicans believe that too much indulgence infantilizes the public and becomes unaffordable. They believe that the private sector can provide many of these services better than when state-run.

A colleague of mine, Gene Lester, has offered a list of services that most of us expect from our government. The problem for the Republicans would be which of these would they cut, and how popular would these cuts be with voters?

\225 Public Safety: Safe food, buildings, industries, products, medicines and drugs, chemicals, and harmful substances. Infrastructure: Roads, bridges, airports. Defense against terrorism, war and invasion; cyber attack, theft and mischief; weapons research and control; energy security, food security, military, intelligence, local police and fire protection. Justice: courts, prisons, investigations and enforcement, US Marshals, witness protection. Threats and Emergencies: earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, all natural disasters, FEMA.

\225 Societal Concerns: Conservation: aquatic life, forests, natural resources, fresh water, parks and recreation. Education: funding, encouragement, and university research programs. Standards: National Bureau, measurements, licensing, driving rules, packaging, advertising, mining. Agriculture: crop research and advice, erosion and pest control, price supports and subsidies, farm loans, emergency food program, reforestation program, Bureau of land management. Safe and plentiful energy: for transportation on land, sea, and air. Safe environment: for air, water, land, waste disposal and reuse, Corps of Engineers.

\225 Diplomatic Affairs: treaties and agreements, arms control, UN affairs, embassies and consulates, all relations with foreign governments. Treasury: printing and coining money, Government Printing Office, Internal Revenue Service, Secret Service to protect President.

This is just a partial list. But one problem for both parties is that what begins modestly burgeons into monstrous costs. For example, civil servants at all levels used to be content with less salary but better benefits than in the private sector. Now many want both\227to the detriment of struggling municipalities and states. We also

need to look at the huge costs (and mistakes) of maintaining Capital Punishment. Some former supporters (Republicans) are now seeing this.

There should be a sensible (and courteous) debate between and among our representatives. Demonizing government, along with ready access to guns, as we learned in Arizona, not only fouls our own nest, but can also spur on killers.

674 words

Dr. Laina Farhat-Holzman is a historian, lecturer, and writer. You may contact her at Lfarhat102@aol.com or www.globalthink.net