

1.2

The Internet as a Public Utility

Who should provide Internet services to people: national, state, or local governments; private companies regulated by government agencies; private companies who engage in direct competition provide Internet? Activities here consider whether making the Internet a public utility would provide more access and more resources to more people at fair or no costs.

In ancient Rome, the government provided public services such as roads, schools, waste management, and plumbing that its citizens needed and demanded. National, state, and local governments in the United States do the same today - providing a range of services from highways, electricity, city water, mail delivery, public schools, and more ([50 Ways Government Works for Us](#)).

Many Americans are now debating whether **the Internet** should be freely provided to everyone by the government as a **public utility** rather than a private service.



[Watch on YouTube](#)

A public utility is a "company that supplies 'utilities' - such as natural gas, electricity, and telephone services - to consumers. It may be a private sector or state-owned business. In most cases, it is the only supplier" ("[What is a Public](#)

[Utility? Definition and Meaning](#)," *Market Business News*, para. 4). The government's role is to ensure **equitable access**, **fair prices**, and **efficient services** for all.

Yet, none of these conditions are in place for many Americans when it comes to the Internet. [2019 data from Microsoft](#) indicates that some 162 million Americans lack access to Internet broadband services, especially in rural regions and Native American tribal areas. Additionally, millions of people who have access do not subscribe to broadband services often because it is too expensive given their individual and family budgets.

To begin, here are two articles arguing for and against making the Internet a public utility:

- **Pro:** [It's Time For An Internet-For-All Public Utility](#)
- **Con:** [Why Treating the Internet as a Public Utility is Bad for Consumers](#)

Activity: Evaluate Whether the Government of the Roman Republic Would Have Made the Internet a Public Utility

- If the Internet had been invented at the time of the Roman Republic, do you think the government of the Roman Republic would have made the Internet a public utility? Why or why not?
- Express your ideas by **writing an opinion article** and **designing an editorial cartoon or TikTok dance**. Support your ideas with historical evidence and reasoning.

Additional Resources

- [Topic 6.7: Responsibilities of Federal, State and Local Government](#)
- [Topic 6.9: Tax Supported Facilities and Services](#)
- [Push for Internet to Be a Public Utility](#) - Fox 13 News Utah
- [Multnomah County, other cities eyeing internet as public utility](#) - KPTV FOX 12 Oregon
- [Is Internet Access a Public Utility, Like Water or Gas?](#) - NBC News

Connecting to the Building Democracy for All eBook

[Building Democracy for All: The Structure of Roman Government](#)

Connecting to the Standards

- [Massachusetts Civics & Government Standards](#)
 - *Describe the government of the Roman Republic and the aspects of republican principles that are evident in modern governments* (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Studies) [8.T1.2]
- [ISTE Standards](#)
 - Knowledge Constructor
 - 3d: Students build knowledge by actively exploring real-world issues and problems developing ideas and theories and pursuing answers and solutions.
 - Creative Communicator
 - 6d: Publish or present content that customizes the message and medium for the intended audiences.
- [DLCS Standards](#)
 - Interpersonal and Societal Impact (CAS.c)
 - Research (DTC.c)
- [English Language Arts > History/Social Studies Common Core Standards](#)
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.4
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8
- [English/Language Arts Common Core Standards](#)



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