



MY COMMUNITY, MY STATE

The United States Government: A Constitutional Republic

The government of the United States is a **constitutional republic**. This form of government is based on a written constitution. This document determines the power and functions of the government. Adult citizens vote for people to represent them in the government. The officials make decisions according to the laws of the land. The Constitution is the law of the land for the United States. The people agree to abide by the decisions of their representatives. This agreement is called **consent of the governed**. At every level, people's consent is what gives the government power to act. The idea that the American people give the U.S. government its powers comes from the Declaration of Independence.



ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does the national government work?

Structure of National Government

The Constitution Guides the United States Government

In the United States, how the government should act is written in documents. How the communities should act are also written in documents. These documents are called laws. The U.S. Constitution is the supreme law of our country. Its purpose is to describe the duties of the government and the rights of the people being governed. It defines the basic responsibilities and structure of the government.

The United States Constitution shows how the government must work. The Constitution says there must be three branches of government. These three branches are called the executive,

judicial, and legislative branches. The branches share power. This way, each branch has limits, and no branch has too much power. This is called the **separation of powers**. The separation of powers creates a system of checks and balances in the government.

In the United States, we have a federal government that leads our whole country. The federal government shares its power with state governments. The federal government and the U.S. Constitution serve as a model for state governments and constitutions throughout our country. Florida has a state constitution that guides the state.

The federal government has the power to:



print money



declare war



build the military



make post offices and stamps



make treaties (agreements with foreign countries)



make and enforce laws for doing business between the states and foreign nations



make laws to enforce the Constitution

Three Branches of Government

Each branch of the government was designed to address specific issues and concerns. Each branch has its own structure, processes, and leaders.

Executive Branch

The **executive branch** enforces our country's laws. It is also in charge of the military. The head of the executive branch is the president of the United States. The president is chosen by voters. The president and vice president are elected together for four years. They may serve up to two terms for a total of eight years. The president creates a group of advisors called a cabinet. Cabinet members are often experts in their fields. They help run the executive branch by leading departments. For example, the Department of Defense is in charge of the military. The president has veto power. A **veto** means saying "no" to a bill. A bill is a plan for a law.



White House

Legislative Branch

The **legislative branch** makes laws and sets taxes. Congress is the legislative branch of our national government. It is divided into two parts: the Senate and the House of Representatives. Two senators are elected from each state. A state's number of representatives depends on how many people live there. Larger states send more representatives. Smaller states send fewer. Today, there are 100 senators in the Senate and 435 representatives in the House. All of them were elected by the people of their states.



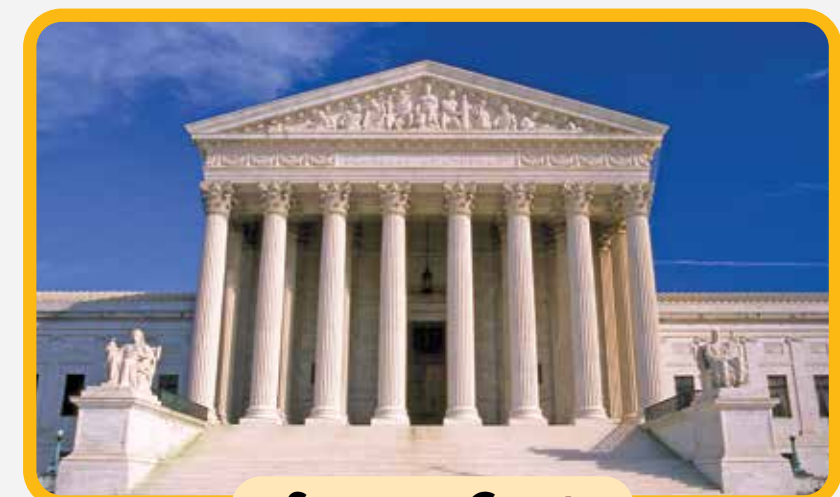
U.S. Capitol

The legislative branch also approves how tax money is spent. They vote on which programs and projects the government can spend money on.

Judicial Branch

The **judicial branch** interprets the laws, or decides what laws mean. It also determines whether laws follow the Constitution.

The judicial branch is made up of judges and courts. The Supreme Court is the highest court in the land. The Supreme Court is made up of leaders called justices. They are chosen by the president and approved by senators. They work in the Supreme Court building in Washington, D.C.



Supreme Court

Name _____

Voting, Elections, and Appointments

The Constitution is not just a list of rights and laws for everyone in our country. It also tells us how our leaders should be chosen. At the national level, citizens vote to elect the president. They also elect representatives to serve in the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Citizens interested in serving in the government participate in a campaign process. Each candidate shares what they believe about different issues. Citizens study each candidate carefully and vote for the one who best represents their viewpoints. The candidate with the most votes wins! To vote, citizens need to be 18 years old or older. Citizens can vote for leaders of their community, state, or country.

An **appointed official** is chosen by our leaders. The leaders have to agree on public appointments. For example, the president can nominate a member to the cabinet but Congress has to approve the appointment. People who have an appointed office serve for a set period of time.

