

U.S. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

THE CONSTITUTION

- A constitution is a set of principles upon which a nation is politically organized
- The U.S. has had two constitutions. The Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union (1777) and the Federal Constitution (1787)
- The Federal Constitution outlined the structure of the U.S. federal government; it gave more power than the Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union, but reserved every power for the states
- It was submitted to the states for their consideration in 1787; it was ratified between 1787 and 1790
- It has been the law of the land since March 4th, 1790

PRINCIPLES

- Federalism is the system where a large national government shares power with smaller state governments
- The division of powers is detailed in the Constitution
- Federal and state governments exercise power over individuals

THE SENATE

- Prior to the adoption of the Constitution in 1787, senators were appointed by state legislatures; since then, they have been elected by the people
- Senators serve a six-year term; terms are staggered so that every two years, one-third of U.S. senators come up for re-election
- There are 100 senators, two from each state; less powerful states are just as powerful as large states
- As in Congress, there are Majority and Minority leaders
- In the event of a tied vote in the Senate, the Vice President (who also serves as President of the Senate) casts the deciding vote to break it

THE LEGISLATURE

- Members of the House of Representatives are elected by the people every two years
- States are awarded House seats according to their population
- There are 435 seats in the House; the party that holds a majority of seats (218) controls the House
- At the beginning of each Congress (January following biennial elections, in even-numbered years), each party elects its House leaders
- The Majority House leader also becomes Speaker of the House, and controls the legislative agenda

PRIMARY

- A primary is held before a general election to nominate party candidates
- In state presidential primaries, rank and file party members vote to send delegates to the party's national convention
- Presidential candidates try to secure support from delegates (convention is second feature of party conventions)
- Some states use caucuses; delegates are chosen at a series of meetings, beginning at precinct and ending at state convention

THE JUDICIARY

- The Supreme Court, traditionally composed of nine justices, is defined in Article III of the Constitution. "The judicial power of the United States shall be vested in One Supreme Court, and in such inferior Courts as the Congress may from time to time ordain and establish."
- All justices are appointed and have no term limits
- Although the Supreme Court was conceived of as a separate power, the President can name a lasting effect on the nation, since appointed justices can remain on the bench indefinitely
- The Senate can refuse a nomination (such as Robert Bork in 1987)
- For the most part, the judiciary remains above a President's influence as long as he recognizes the importance of balance

JUDICIAL REVIEW

"The power vested in the American courts of justice of pronouncing in statute to be unconstitutional forms one of the most powerful weapons that has ever been devised against the tyranny of political assemblies." - Alexis de Tocqueville



- It is the power of the Supreme Court to declare an act of Congress or a Presidential act unconstitutional
- First applied in *Marbury vs. Madison* (1803)
- Used sparingly until the 1960s when it was used against the New Deal; it has been used more commonly since then

CHECKS & BALANCES

- "The powers of government should be so divided and balanced among several bodies of magistracy, so that none could oppress their equal." - Charles de Montesquieu
- The Constitution is a system of checks and balances that prevents one branch of government from obtaining absolute power
- It allows the President to veto legislation from Congress
- It grants the Congress to override a Presidential veto, fill Presidential appointments, and advise to ratify treaties
- It gives the Supreme Court the authority to declare acts of Congress or by the President as unconstitutional

SEPARATION OF POWERS

- "There can be no liberty where the legislative and executive powers are united in the same person, or if the power of judging be not separated from the legislative and executive powers." - Alexis de Montesquieu

BRANCHES OF THE U.S. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Legislative	Congress (House of Representatives and the Senate)
Executive	The President
Judicial	The federal court system

PRINCIPLES The three branches of government are based on the principle of separation of powers. There is also a federal judiciary that implements policies that are enacted by the legislative and executive.

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The National Union Catalogs, 1963- ,1964 **Library of Congress Catalog** Library of Congress,1965 A cumulative list of works represented by Library of Congress printed cards **Outlook** Alfred Emanuel Smith,Francis Walton,1918

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Table of Contents American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary

1. Understanding the eBook American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary
 - The Rise of Digital Reading American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary
 - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary
 - Exploring Different Genres
 - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
 - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
 - Popular eBook Platforms
 - Features to Look for in an American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary
 - User-Friendly Interface
4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary

- Personalized Recommendations
- American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary User Reviews and Ratings
- American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary and Bestseller Lists
- 5. Accessing American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary Free and Paid eBooks
 - American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary Public Domain eBooks
 - American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary eBook Subscription Services
 - American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary Budget-Friendly Options
- 6. Navigating American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary eBook Formats
 - ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
 - American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary Compatibility with Devices
 - American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary Enhanced eBook Features
- 7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
 - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary
 - Highlighting and Note-Taking American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary
 - Interactive Elements American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary
- 8. Staying Engaged with American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary
 - Joining Online Reading Communities
 - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
 - Following Authors and Publishers American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary
- 9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary
 - Benefits of a Digital Library
 - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary
- 10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
 - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
 - Minimizing Distractions
 - Managing Screen Time
- 11. Cultivating a Reading Routine American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary
 - Setting Reading Goals American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary
 - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
- 12. Sourcing Reliable Information of American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary

- Fact-Checking eBook Content of American Federal Government Study Guide Vocabulary
- Distinguishing Credible Sources
- 13. Promoting Lifelong Learning
 - Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development
 - Exploring Educational eBooks
- 14. Embracing eBook Trends
 - Integration of Multimedia Elements
 - Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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