

Federalism

Federalism is when there are two governments within one territory, and where each government has different powers and responsibilities. The American Founding Fathers created a federal government that recognizes the importance and strength of the state governments. They did not want a federal government that was too strong, because it might become tyrannical. The Tenth Amendment makes it clear that the state governments retain all powers that are not explicitly given to the federal government.

Checks and Balances

Checks and balances means that the American Founding Fathers created a government with three branches, where each branch had powers to control and check the other branches from becoming tyrannical. The executive branch may veto a bill that the legislative branch passes. Congress may impeach and remove the president and judges. The Supreme Court's judicial power can declare a law or presidential decree unconstitutional.

Separation of Powers

The American Founding Fathers created a government that separated power into three branches. The founders believed that if a leader or group of leaders became too powerful, he would become a tyrant, dictating to citizens what they should do and limiting the rights of all. In the American government, the legislative branch makes law, the executive branch executes the law, and the judicial branch interprets the law.

Limited Government

A government that is limited means that the government does not have complete power. The American Founding Fathers created a limited government so that Americans would have liberty. In a limited government, citizens retain individual rights and states have states' rights. The Constitution clearly creates a federal government that is limited in power so that states and citizens have maximum freedom.

Legislative Branch

The legislative branch is Congress. Article I of the Constitution details the powers and limits of the legislative branch. Congress has the power to make law, declare war, establish a post office, regulate interstate commerce, and levy taxes. The American Founding Fathers created Congress so that it had the greatest powers of the U.S. government, but it also divided Congress into two branches (the Senate and the House of Representatives) to disperse this power and to make sure that both the people and the states were represented.

Senate

The Senate is one of the two houses of Congress and represents the states. Each state has two senators, and each senator serves a six-year term. Because there are fewer senators than

representatives and they serve for six years, the Senate is considered the upper house. The Senate has the power to ratify (confirm) treaties and try impeachments. If the House of Representatives impeaches the president, the Senate has a trial and decides if the president should be removed.

House of Representatives

The House of Representatives is one of the two houses of Congress and represents the people. The more populated states have more representatives. Representatives serve two-year terms. The House of Representatives authorizes all government spending, impeaches the president, and initiates all tax bills. There are currently 435 voting representatives in this house.

U.S. Capitol

Congressmen meet in the U.S. Capitol building. It sits atop Capitol Hill in the middle of Washington, D.C. The U.S. Capitol is built in Neoclassical style. The American Founding Fathers designed the building to look similar to buildings of ancient Greece and Rome. Greek democracy and the Roman Republic gave Americans a governmental model to follow. The U.S. Capitol is symmetrical and has a dome.

White House

The White House, at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, D.C., is both the office of the U.S. President and the home for his family. The house was completed in 1801, but President John Adams moved into the unfinished building in 1800. During the War of 1812, the British set the house on fire. The president executes the law and seeks advice from his cabinet, a group of advisors. The executive branch has many departments that carry out the law.

Commander-In-Chief

The Commander-In-Chief is the title for the U.S. President, meaning that he is in charge of the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard. Article II of the Constitution explains the powers of the president in detail. The Nuclear Football is a nickname given to the briefcase that accompanies the president all the time. The briefcase contains necessary codes and protocol to launch a nuclear attack when the president is away from his command post.

Electoral College

Not a school, the Electoral College is a process to elect the U.S. President. The American Founding Fathers created the Electoral College as a compromise between having the people or the states elect the president. Each state selects electors who in turn vote for the president and vice president. Each state receives an electoral vote equal to the total number of senators and representatives that the state has in the U.S. Congress. The electors choose the president by majority vote. Currently, a candidate needs 270 electoral votes to become president.

Grant Pardons

The president has the ability to grant pardons. A pardon allows a convict to be released from jail or to forego punishment received for breaking the law. In many cases, a pardon removes the record of wrongdoing. The president has this power because, in some cases, individuals are wrongly convicted. There have been other cases where a president thought that it was wise to be merciful and grant a pardon, even though the person was guilty.

Supreme Court

The Supreme Court is the highest court in the United States of America. The nine justices of the court decide cases by simple majority. This means they may decide cases by voting 5-4. Article III of the Constitution details all the information regarding the powers of the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court forms the leadership of the judicial branch.

Judicial Review

Judicial Review is the power of the Supreme Court to decide if a law or executive action is constitutional or unconstitutional. In the decision of the court case *Marbury v. Madison* (1803), Chief Justice John Marshall wrote that the Supreme Court has the power to interpret a law and declare whether or not it is constitutional. Judicial review is a great power and has been used to make slavery and segregation law of the land, as well as to desegregate schools and other facilities.

Equal Justice Under Law

Equal justice under law is a concept of law that traces back to ancient Greece. It means that each person requires equal treatment by the law, regardless of the power of the person's family, the color of his skin, his religion, his personal connections, or any other circumstance. Equal justice under law means that justice is blind, that a person should be judged by members of government in a fair manner. The phrase is found on the pedestal of the Supreme Court building, and is part of the 14th Amendment.

Supreme Court Justice

A Supreme Court Justice is one of nine members who serve for life after appointment to the Supreme Court. Most typically a lawyer, Supreme Court justices are at the head of the judicial branch, one of the three branches of the U.S. government. The leader of the Supreme Court is the Chief Justice. Justices are chosen by the President and approved by the Senate. There have been over 100 Supreme Court justices since 1789, when the Supreme Court was established.

Benjamin Franklin

Benjamin Franklin was one of America's Founding Fathers, a diplomat, inventor, author, printer, scientist, and a beloved leader in the American Revolution. Because he is quite possibly the first to recommend that the 13 British colonies unite and form the United States of America, he has

been aptly called the “First American.” Franklin was on the committee that drafted the Declaration of Independence, and served as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention. He invented many things, including a new kind of stove and the lightning rod.

George Washington

George Washington is aptly called the “Father of the Country” because of his role in the American Revolution, in creating the Constitution, and in leading the new nation as its first president. After securing victory over the British and gaining independence for the United States of America, Washington was chosen to lead the Constitutional Convention as its president. He was deservedly the most admired man at our country’s founding and one of its most honorable.

James Madison

James Madison is hailed as the “Father of the Constitution” because he was a principal author of the document, and he was a leader in convincing the states to adopt it. Madison, a Virginian, was also the fourth president of the United States, and led the country in the War of 1812 against Great Britain. Often referred to as the Second American Revolution, the War of 1812 resulted in the British never again questioning the independence of the United States.

John Adams

John Adams was the first vice president and the second president of the United States. Adams wanted independence from Great Britain, and assisted Jefferson in writing the Declaration of Independence. He also wanted America to establish a strong national government. During his presidency, he supported the Alien and Sedition Acts, which gave the president great power to imprison foreigners and any who criticized the government. Adams and his wife Abigail wrote each other many letters, which we still have today.

First Amendment

The Bill of Rights consists of the first ten amendments added to the Constitution. They guarantee that the federal government will never take away individual and states’ rights. The First Amendment guarantees the right to freedom of speech, press (media), and religion, to assemble to discuss political and all other issues, and to petition the government for change.

Second Amendment

The Second Amendment guarantees that the federal government will make no law against Americans owning guns. To bear arms means to have guns. The Founding Fathers saw that tyrannical governments take away the guns of its citizens, and they wanted Americans to be able to defend themselves.

Tenth Amendment

The Tenth Amendment guarantees that the federal government will not take away states' and individual rights. It guarantees states their sovereignty. This means that a state is in control of affairs that are within the states' powers. Since 1791, when the Constitution was ratified, the federal government has grown in power and has in fact taken away many of the powers that used to be reserved for the states.

Anti-Federalists

The Anti-Federalists were American Founding Fathers, such as Patrick Henry (shown on the card) and George Mason, who did not want a strong, central government. They thought that liberty would be best protected if power was decentralized, where the states maintained their sovereignty. The Anti-Federalists wanted the Bill of Rights added to the Constitution, because they were afraid the federal government would threaten individual and states' rights.

19th Amendment

The 19th Amendment, adopted in 1920, guarantees women the right to vote in the United States of America. The Women's Suffrage Movement had existed for decades, and it was the work of Susan B. Anthony and others who pushed for women's right to vote. Suffrage means the right to vote.

16th Amendment

In 1913, Americans passed the 16th Amendment, which allowed Congress to tax income (wages people earn for their work). The American Founding Fathers wanted the federal government to raise money mainly through tariffs. However, during the Civil War, Lincoln implemented a temporary income tax to fund the war. Then, in the early 1900s, Democrats and Progressives successfully led the argument for the 16th Amendment.

13th Amendment

The 13th Amendment outlawed slavery. During and immediately after the Civil War in 1864 and 1865, Abraham Lincoln and Republicans successfully fought for and achieved passage of the 13th Amendment to free slaves. Because the southern states had seceded, Southern Democrats did not have a vote in Congress and could not reject the 13th Amendment.

22nd Amendment

The 22nd Amendment, passed in 1951, limits the U.S. President to winning the presidential election no more than twice. A full term is four years. During the 1930s and 1940s, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt won four presidential elections. Because he died in office, he was not able to serve most of his last term, but was still president for over 12 years. Americans wanted to make sure that no future president could hold power for that long. The 22nd Amendment is a limit to an individual's power as president.

Signing of the Constitution

In 1789, at Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, delegates to the Constitutional Convention signed the Constitution of the United States of America. Two years later, in 1791, it became the law of the land. The Constitutional Convention was a meeting of delegates who created the new U.S. government. Delegates from highly populated states made compromises with those from sparsely populated states. Delegates from southern, slave-owning states made compromises with those from northern states.

The Great Compromise

Delegates at the Constitutional Convention made an important agreement called The Great Compromise. Delegates from highly populated states wanted representation in Congress to be decided by population. Delegates from lesser-populated states wanted representation in Congress to be decided by state, with each state getting one vote. Roger Sherman suggested a two-house legislature, with a Senate where each state had one vote (later changed to two), and a House of Representatives where the higher-populated states had more representatives. For a bill to become a law, it would have to be passed by both houses of Congress.

Three-Fifths Compromise

Delegates at the Constitutional Convention made an important agreement called the Three-Fifths Compromise. To determine how many representatives in Congress, southern delegates wanted to count slaves, but northern delegates did not. The delegates decided to count slaves as $\frac{3}{5}$ of a person. This meant that 100 slaves would be counted as 60 people when determining representation. Without this compromise, Jefferson would have lost the 1800 election to Adams.

Articles of Confederation

Before the adoption of the Constitution, the Articles of Confederation was the governing document of the United States of America. Under the Articles, Congress passed the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, and the Northwest Territories were organized. The Articles had a government with one branch, Congress, and 9 out of 13 states had to agree to pass a law. Congress could not tax, and it could not mandate an army. Farmers in Massachusetts violently protested against state and local tax collection in Shay's Rebellion, and this was one of the reasons American leaders wanted a stronger government.

Checks Against the Legislative Branch

The American Founding Fathers created the Constitution so that one person or one group of people would not become too strong. The Founding Fathers thought that when men have too much power, they tend to take others' rights. Each branch has checks, or powers, over the other branches. Against the legislative branch, the president can veto bills, the judicial branch can declare laws unconstitutional, and the president proposes laws.

Checks Against the Executive Branch

The American Founding Fathers created the Constitution so that one person or one group of people would not become too strong. The Founding Fathers thought that when men have too much power, they tend to take others' rights. Each branch has checks, or powers, over the other branches. Against the executive branch, Congress can impeach and remove the president, the judicial branch can declare executive orders unconstitutional, and Congress can approve or disapprove presidential appointments.

Checks Against the Judicial Branch

The American Founding Fathers created the Constitution so that one person or one group of people would not become too strong. The Founding Fathers thought that when men have too much power, they tend to take others' rights. Each branch has checks, or powers, over the other branches. Against the judicial branch, Congress can impeach and remove judges and justices, the president can appoint judges and justices, and Congress approves them.

Checks and Balances

Checks and Balances is a principle of the Constitution that limits the power of government and nearly guarantees that one branch will not have tyranny over the others. The American Founding Fathers created the Constitution so that one person or one group of people would not become too strong. The Founding Fathers thought that when men have too much power, they tend to take others' rights. Each branch has checks, or powers, over the other branches.

Legislative Branch Powers

Separation of Powers is a principle of the Constitution that limits the power of government. The American Founding Fathers separated the powers of government into three different branches. The idea behind this is to limit the power of men, so that one person or one group would never become too strong. The legislative branch, called Congress, has many powers, and among these are the powers to make law and declare war.

Executive Branch Powers

Separation of Powers is a principle of the Constitution that limits the power of government. The American Founding Fathers separated the powers of government into three different branches. The idea behind this is to limit the power of men, so that one person or one group would never become too strong. The executive branch, led by the president, has many powers, and among these are the powers to execute the law, veto bills, and lead the military as Commander-in-Chief.

Judicial Branch Powers

Separation of Powers is a principle of the Constitution that limits the power of government. The American Founding Fathers separated the powers of government into three different branches. The idea behind this is to limit the power of men, so that one person or one group would never

become too strong. The judicial branch, led by the Supreme Court, interprets the law. It has the power of judicial review. This means the court can declare a law unconstitutional. The Supreme Court also can declare an executive action unconstitutional.

Separation of Powers

Separation of Powers is a principle of the Constitution that limits the power of government to prevent abuse. The American Founding Fathers separated the powers of government into three different branches. The idea behind this is to limit the power of men, so that one person or one group would never become too strong. One branch makes the law, one branch carries out the law, and one branch interprets the law.

We the People

“We the people” are the first three words of the United States Constitution, in the Preamble. These three words signify that it is the people who formed the government. This means that the people freely give the government power. Politicians in America are the employees of the American people.

Common Defense

The Preamble of the Constitution states that the people are forming a government that will provide for the common defense. This means the government will defend Americans from enemies.

Insure Domestic Tranquility

The Preamble of the Constitution states that the people are forming a government to insure domestic tranquility. This means it is the job of the government to keep the peace, provide for law and order, and protect people from threats inside the country.

Establish Justice

The Preamble of the Constitution states that the people are forming a government to establish justice. Synonyms for justice are fairness, goodness, and evenhandedness. The people expect the government to do what is right.

Supreme Court Cases

Marbury v. Madison

In 1803, the Supreme Court decided perhaps the most important case in the history of the United States of America. In the decision, Chief Justice John Marshall declared that the Supreme Court had the power to decide if a law was constitutional or unconstitutional. This power is called judicial review.

Plessy v. Ferguson

In 1896, the Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that the policy of racial segregation was legal. This meant that a state could force segregation in all public areas. Black Americans could be forced to go to black schools or drink from “black only” drinking fountains, but the facilities were supposed to be “separate but equal.” What actually happened was that public facilities for “whites only” were far superior to the public facilities for blacks. This decision was later overturned in 1954 by *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Dred Scott Decision

In 1857, the Supreme Court ruled that a slave remained a slave everywhere in the United States, regardless of whether he lived in the South or the North. This meant that all of the states that had outlawed slavery now had to recognize slavery. This new fact caused many Northerners to push for the end of slavery in all of the United States of America, and was a cause of the Civil War.

Brown v. Board of Education

In 1954, the Supreme Court overturned a previous Supreme Court decision, and forced the desegregation of schools. In 1896, the Supreme Court had ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that segregation was legal, as long as it was “separate but equal.” The *Brown v. Board of Education* court case reversed this earlier decision and ended legal segregation.