

Unit 1: Foundations of American Democracy

The U.S. Constitution arose out of important historical and philosophical ideas and preferences regarding popular sovereignty and limited government. To address competing states' visions for the allocation of governmental authority, compromises were made during the Constitutional Convention and ratification debates, and these compromises have frequently been the source of debate and negotiation in U.S. politics over the proper balance between federal and state power and between liberty and social order.

A balance between governmental power and individual rights has been a hallmark of American political development.

Explain how democratic ideals are reflected in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

The U.S. government is based on ideas of limited government, including natural rights, popular sovereignty, republicanism, and social contract.

The Declaration of Independence, drafted by Jefferson with help from Adams and Franklin, provides a foundation for popular sovereignty, while the U.S. Constitution drafted at the Philadelphia Convention and led by George Washington, with important contributions from Madison, Hamilton, and members of the "Grand Committee," provides the blueprint for a unique form of political democracy in the U.S.

Define:

natural rights

popular sovereignty

republicanism

social contract

Explain how models of representative democracy are visible in major institutions, policies, or debates in the U.S.

Representative democracies can take several forms along this scale:

Define:

Participatory democracy

Pluralist democracy

Elite democracy

Discuss the five Madisonian Principles of a representative democracy that continue to be reflected in contemporary institutions and political behavior.

Define and provide an example:

Federalism

Popular Sovereignty

Checks and Balances

Separation of Powers

Limited Government

The Constitution emerged from the debate about weaknesses in the Articles of Confederation as a blueprint for limited government.

Explain how Federalist and Anti-Federalist views on central government and democracy are reflected in U.S. foundational documents.

Madison's arguments in Federalist No. 10 focused on the superiority of a large republic in controlling the "mischiefs of faction," delegating authority to elected representatives and dispersing power between the states and national government.

What is a faction?

What is the source of factions?

How are factions controlled?

Anti-Federalist writings, including Brutus No. 1, adhered to popular democratic theory that emphasized the benefits of a small decentralized republic while warning of the dangers to personal liberty from a large, centralized government.

Why were the Anti-Federalists reluctant to sign the new Constitution?

Explain the relationship between key provisions of the Articles of Confederation and the debate over granting the federal government greater power formerly reserved to the states.

In other words, identify the problems in the Articles of Confederation and how they were corrected in the Constitution.

Compromises deemed necessary for adoption and ratification of the Constitution are represented by the:
Great (Connecticut) Compromise

Electoral College

Three-Fifths Compromise

Compromise on the importation of slaves

Informal Amendment Process: Although the United States has been formally changed only 27 times, there have been many changes in the way in which the American government operates. Most of those changes have come about through the informal amendment process and do not involve actually changing the wording of the Constitution. Informal changes in the Constitution may occur in the following ways:

Legislative actions:

Executive actions:

Judicial interpretations/judicial review:

Custom and usage:

The Constitutional Basis of Federalism: Although the term federalism is not found in the Constitution, it is clearly defined in the enumerated, concurrent and reserved powers of the national and state governments.

Interstate relations: Describe the general obligations that each state has to every other state under the Constitution.

Enumerated powers

Implied powers

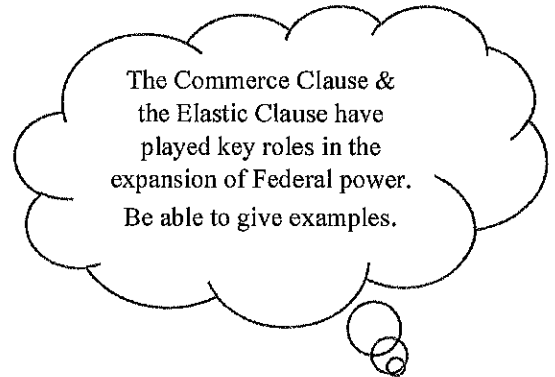
Inherent powers

Reserved powers

Full Faith and Credit Clause

Privileges and Immunities Clause

Extradition



The Constitution creates a complex competitive policy-making process to ensure the people's will is represented and that freedom is preserved.

Explain the ideas represented in Federalist No. 51

Explain the implications of separation of powers and "checks and balances" for the U.S. political system.

Federalism reflects the dynamic distribution of power between the national and state governments.

Explain how societal needs affect the constitutional allocation of power between the national and state governments.

The distribution of power between federal and state governments to meet the needs of society changes, as reflected by grants, incentives, and aid programs, including federal revenue sharing, mandates, categorical grants, and block grants.

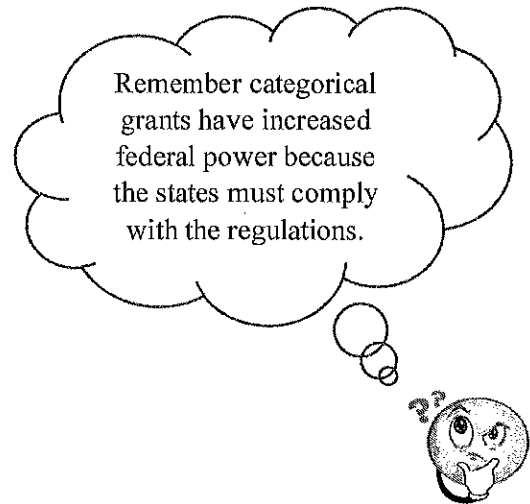
Fiscal Federalism: Define and provide an example for each.

Grants-in-aid

Categorical Grants

Block Grants

Mandates



Explain how the appropriate balance of power between national and state governments has been interpreted differently over time.

Dual Federalism

Cooperative Federalism

The interpretation of the 10th and 14th Amendments, the commerce clause, the necessary and proper clause, and other enumerated and implied powers is at the heart of the debate over the balance of power between the national and state governments.

Commerce clause

The necessary and proper clause

The balance of power between the national and state governments has changed over time based on U.S. Supreme Court interpretation of such cases as:

McCulloch v. Maryland

United States v. Lopez

Heart of Atlanta Motel v. US

Gonzales v. Raich

Explain how the distribution of powers among three federal branches and between national and state governments impacts policy making.

Key Federalism Legislation:

Unfunded Mandates Reform Act

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

National Voter Registration Act (Motor Voter Act)

Clean Air Act

Americans with Disabilities Act

Brady Bill

No Child Left Behind Act