

## UNIT 1: FOUNDATIONS OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

*More than 200 years after the U.S. Constitution was ratified, the compromises that were necessary for ratification—which in some instances led to ambiguity—continue to fuel debate and discussion over how best to protect liberty, equality, order, and private property. This first unit sets the foundation for the course by examining how the framers of the Constitution set up a structure of government intended to stand the test of time. Compromises were made during the Constitutional Convention and ratification debates, and these compromises focused on the proper balance between individual freedom, social order, and equality of opportunity. In subsequent units, students will apply their understanding of the Constitution to the institutions of government and people's daily lives.*

**Big Idea:**

- Why are there debates about the balance of power between the federal and state governments?
- Is the Bill of Rights necessary? Why or why not?
- How does the Constitution affect you and the choices you make?

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

### TOPIC 1.1 Ideals of Democracy

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

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

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- 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.

### TOPIC 1.2 Types of Democracy

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

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

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- Representative democracies can take several forms along this scale:
  - Participatory democracy, which emphasizes broad participation in politics and civil society
  - Pluralist democracy, which recognizes group-based activism by nongovernmental interests striving for impact on political decision making
  - Elite democracy, which emphasizes limited participation in politics and civil society
- Different aspects of the U.S. Constitution as well as the debate between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists in *Federalist No. 10* and *Brutus No. 1* reflect the tension between the broad participatory model and the more filtered participation of the pluralist and elite models.
- The three models of representative democracy continue to be reflected in contemporary institutions and political behavior.

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

**TOPIC 1.3 Government Power and Individual Rights**

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

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

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- 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.
- 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.

**TOPIC 1.4 Challenges of the Articles of Confederation**

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

- 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.

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- Specific incidents and legal challenges that highlighted key weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation are represented by the:
  - Lack of centralized military power to address Shays' Rebellion
  - Lack of tax-law enforcement power

**TOPIC 1.5 Ratification of the Constitution**

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

- Explain the ongoing impact of political negotiation and compromise at the Constitutional Convention on the development of the constitutional system.

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- Compromises deemed necessary for adoption and ratification of the Constitution are represented by:
  - Great (Connecticut) Compromise
  - Electoral College
  - Three-fifths Compromise
  - Compromise on the importation of slaves
- Debates about self-government during the drafting of the Constitution necessitated the drafting of an amendment process in Article V that entailed either a two-thirds vote in both houses or a proposal from two-thirds of the state legislatures, with final ratification determined by three-fourths of the states.
- The compromises necessary to secure ratification of the Constitution left some matters unresolved that continue to generate discussion and debate today.
- The debate over the role of the central government, the powers of the state governments, and the rights of individuals remains at the heart of present-day constitutional issues about democracy and governmental power, as represented by:
  - Debates about government surveillance resulting from the federal government's response to the 9/11 attacks
  - The debate about the role of the federal government in public school education

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

**TOPIC 1.6 Principles of American Government**

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

- Explain the constitutional principles of separation of powers and "checks and balances."

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- The powers allocated to Congress, the president, and the courts demonstrate the separation of powers and checks and balances features of the U.S. Constitution.
- *Federalist No. 51* explains how constitutional provisions of separation of powers and checks and balances control abuses by majorities.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

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

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- Multiple access points for stakeholders and institutions to influence public policy flows from the separation of powers and checks and balances.
- Impeachment, removal, and other legal actions taken against public officials deemed to have abused their power reflect the purpose of checks and balances.

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

**TOPIC 1.7 Relationship Between the States and Federal Government**

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

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

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- The exclusive and concurrent powers of the national and state governments help explain the negotiations over the balance of power between the two levels.
- 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.

**TOPIC 1.8 Constitutional Interpretations of Federalism**

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

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

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- The interpretation of the 10th and 14th Amendments, the commerce clause, the necessary and proper clause, and other enumerated and implied powers are at the heart of the debate over the balance of power between the national and state governments.
- 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* (1819), which declared that Congress has implied powers necessary to implement its enumerated powers and established supremacy of the U.S. Constitution and federal laws over states laws
  - *United States v. Lopez* (1995), which ruled that Congress may not use the commerce clause to make possession of a gun in a school zone a federal crime, introducing a new phase of federalism that recognized the importance of state sovereignty and local control

**TOPIC 1.9 Federalism in Action**

**LEARNING OBJECTIVE**

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

**ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE**

- Multiple access points for stakeholders and institutions to influence public policy flows from the separation of powers and checks and balances.
- National policymaking is constrained by the sharing of power between and among the three branches and the state governments.