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OUR FEDERAL CONSTITUTION - A STUDENT'S GUIDE TO THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION

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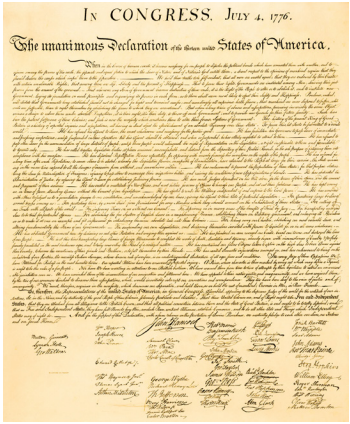

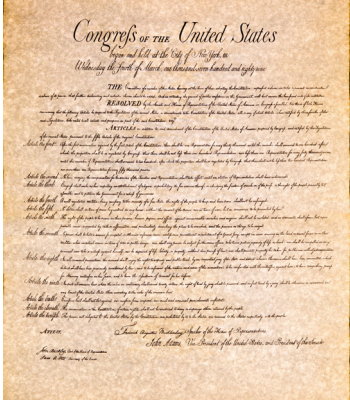
The *Rotunda for the Charters of Freedom* is the permanent home of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and the Bill of Rights, located in the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C. These historic documents are displayed in a cathedral-like, dimly lit rotunda, which is open to the public. A visit can be both a moving and educational experience, deepening your appreciation for the principles that continue to guide American society.

The nation's Founding Fathers drafted these documents during dramatic, fast-moving events. They form the foundation of the United States and confirm that people are born with certain natural rights, including "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," that does not come from presidents, kings, or charters. This nation's founding documents secure these and other rights of the American people.

Preserving the Documents

On December 13, 1952, the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence were sealed in helium-filled cases, placed in wooden crates, and transported by an armored car to the National Archives Exhibition Hall in Washington, D.C. In 2001, the documents were placed in upgraded, state-of-the-art encasements with the latest preservation technology, replacing the original 1950s encasements.

While the original, signed Declaration is housed in the Charters of Freedom, 26 other copies are known to exist and are referred to as the *Dunlap BroadSides*. Over 200 copies were initially produced by John Dunlap, a printer in Philadelphia, on the night of July 4, 1776, to spread the news of American Independence. This urgent document was sent to colonial leaders, local governments, military officers, and newspapers.

Document Question	Declaration of Independence	U.S. Constitution	Bill of Rights
For the exact wording of each document, read the original transcripts or refer to your pocket guide.			
What year was it ratified?	1776	1787	1791
Where was it written?	Philadelphia	Philadelphia	New York City
Why was it written?	To formally announce and justify the American colonies' decision to break away from British rule, outlining principles of individual rights and self-governance.	To replace the ineffective Articles of Confederation with a structured, balanced system of government that could govern effectively, unify the states, and protect freedoms.	To protect citizens' freedoms, address government power concerns, fulfill promises made during ratification, and set a precedent for future amendments.
Who wrote it?	Thomas Jefferson	James Madison	James Madison
How many words in the document?	1,458 words (1 page) including signatures	4,543 words (4 pages) including signatures	760 words (1 page)
What is stated in the Preamble of the document?	"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."	"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."	"The Conventions of a number of the States, having at the time of their adopting the Constitution, expressed a desire, in order to prevent misconstruction or abuse of its powers, that further declaratory and restrictive clauses should be added...."

Six other principles of the U.S. Constitution guide our government's structure and function besides protecting individual rights. These principles reflect the framers' intentions to create a government that balances power and promotes the common good. In upcoming units, we will cover these principles in more detail.

1. Checks and Balances

Summary: This principle ensures that no single branch of government can dominate. Each of the three branches has the ability to check the others.

Examples in the Constitution: Presidential veto power in Article 1, Section 7.

2. Separation of Powers

Summary: To prevent any one branch from becoming too powerful, the Constitution divides the federal government into three branches.

Examples in the Constitution: Articles 1, 2, and 3 outlines the responsibilities of the three branches.

3. Popular Sovereignty

Summary: The authority for government originates from the people and they rule through their representatives. Direct democracy actions like *referendums* and *initiatives* embody popular sovereignty. This also includes the concept of *republicanism* where people elect representatives to govern of their behalf.

Examples in the Constitution: The preamble (We the People..) and the Ninth Amendment.

4. Federalism

Summary: The sharing of power between the federal, state, and local governments. In many ways, this is a natural division of functions. Local governments handle local affairs; national affairs by the federal government.

While each of the 50 states has its own constitution, all provisions for state constitutions must comply with the U.S. Constitution.

Examples in the Constitution: The 10th Amendment.

5. Judicial Review

Summary: The judiciary has the power to review laws and government actions to determine if they violate the Constitution.

Examples in the Constitution: While judicial review is not within the text of the Constitution itself, this principle was established in the case of *Marbury v. Madison* (1803).

6. Limited Government

Summary: The government can only exercise the powers granted to it by the Constitution. Everyone, including government officials, is subject to the law.

Examples in the Constitution: The *enumerated powers*, as listed in Article I, Section 8, give specific powers granted to Congress, such as the power to tax, regulate commerce, and declare war. Congress can only exercise powers explicitly listed in the Constitution; all other powers are reserved for the states or the people.

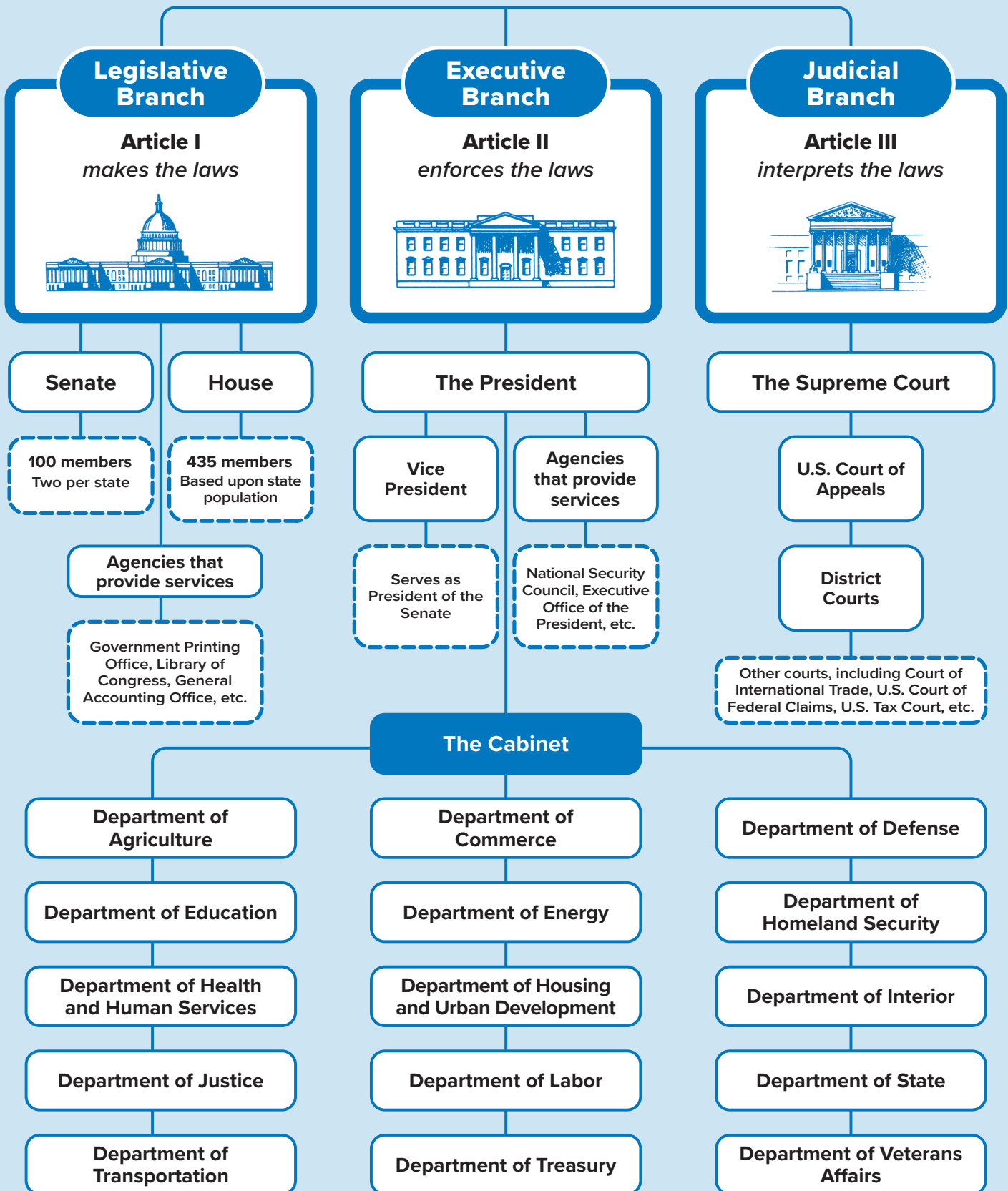
QUESTIONS

WHICH PRINCIPLE? Identify the principle that best describes the following statements. Put the number of the principle(s) listed in the corresponding title box in the space provided (more than one principle may apply).

- ___ 1. Only the federal government can print money.
- ___ 2. Congress passes a law that the president then vetoes.
- ___ 3. The government gets its power from the people.
- ___ 4. The president must follow the law.
- ___ 5. The Senate confirms a presidential nomination.
- ___ 6. A referendum to build a new school is passed by the voters of your city.
- ___ 7. The Supreme Court declares a law unconstitutional.
- ___ 8. Congress can impeach a president if they believe powers were abused.
- ___ 9. A representative holds a town hall meeting on banning plastic bags to get voters' opinions.



The Constitution sets up three branches.



Presidential Election 2024

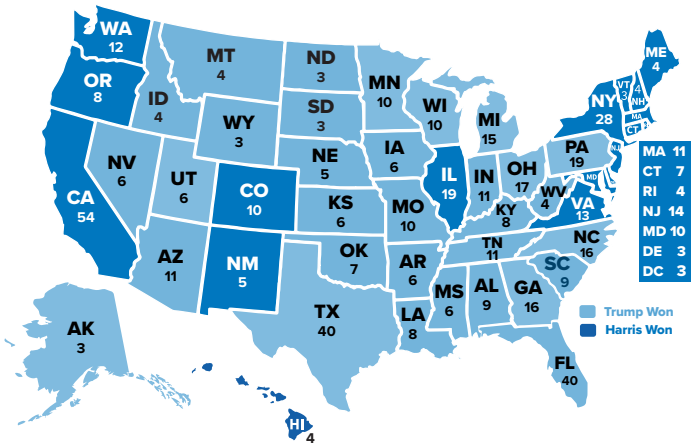
The voters elected Donald Trump as the 47th president of the United States. Trump’s victory over Kamala Harris in the 2024 presidential election marks a historic comeback for the former president, who left office in 2021 after losing the 2020 election to Joe Biden.



Donald Trump

Trump’s message on the economy and immigration ultimately resonated with enough Americans. Trump swept to a decisive victory by winning several crucial battleground states. Trump’s 2024 win marks the third straight presidential election in which voters have thrown out the incumbent party. On January 20, 2025, the 45th president of the United States will become the 47th at an inauguration at the US Capitol. Trump will not be eligible for reelection in 2028 because of the 22nd Amendment.

Candidate	Popular Vote	States Won	Electoral Votes
Trump	76,842,134	31	312
Harris	74,341,050	19 + DC	226



119th Congress (2025-2027)

Republicans have achieved the "government trifecta"—keeping control of the House, winning the Senate, and winning the presidency. It will be the first time Republicans have fully controlled Congress and the White House since 2018. Now that both chambers of Congress are under Republican control until at least 2026, they can reshape key aspects of U.S. policy and push forward with their full legislative agenda.

100 Total Senate Seats - 51 Needed for Control	
Republican 53	Democratic 47

• **Senate Control:** Republicans gained control of the Senate, propelled by wins in West Virginia and Ohio. Democrats previously held a narrow majority in the Senate. Republicans will have a 53-47 edge, and the tie-breaking vote of Vice President JD Vance in the event of a 50-50 stalemate on any legislative proposal.

435 Total House Seats - 218 Needed for Control

Republican 220	Democratic 215
• House Control: Republicans will hold onto control of the House with 220 seats, more than the 218 seats necessary for a majority. The last called race in the 2024 House election was from California, and it took almost one month to tabulate the final results, as every mail-in ballot must be inspected and verified. Republicans maintained control thanks to wins in key battleground races, where they defended vulnerable seats and expanded their reach in Democratic-held districts.	

The Constitution and Elections

The Constitution is filled with hidden techniques and ideas. An example is the election chart prescribed by the Constitution. It uses different ways to choose some officers, various lengths of term, and other age requirements. While the president is elected like the Senate and House members, the Electoral College, not the people, actually elects the president. While the Senate and House are both elected by the people, senators are elected by the vote of all people in the state. Representatives are elected by people from one area of the state. Federal judges are not to be elected by the people at all. These are just some examples.

How do we elect government officials?

	CONGRESS		PRESIDENT	SUPREME COURT
	HOUSE	SENATE		
<i>How Chosen</i>	Elected	Elected	Elected	Appointed by President
<i>Term of Office</i>	2 Years	6 Years	4 Years	Life or Retirement
<i>Age Req.</i>	25 Years old	30 Years old	35 Years old	None

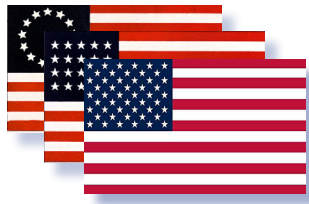
This chart shows that the Constitution affects elected officials' selection, the terms they serve, and the minimum age requirements.

QUESTIONS

TRUE OR FALSE? Write a **T** or **F** in the space provided.

- ___ 1. The 17 U.S. Representatives from Illinois will be up for reelection in 2026.
- ___ 2. All 100 U.S. Senators are up for reelection in 2026.
- ___ 3. Each state receives ten electoral votes.
- ___ 4. The Constitution states that all government officials must be elected.
- ___ 5. Donald Trump won both the electoral and popular votes in 2024.
- ___ 6. All election races must be declared within three days after the Election Day.
- ___ 7. You can still become president even if you do not win the most electoral votes.
- ___ 8. Trump will be able to run for reelection in 2028.

On June 14, 1777, less than a year after the Declaration of Independence was signed, the Continental Congress adopted the *Stars and Stripes* as the flag of the United States. Original plans to provide a new star and a new stripe for each new state proved impractical, and it was decided that only a new star would be added with each new state. Today, our flag retains 13 stripes in honor of the 13 original colonies and 50 stars, one for each of the 50 states.



We look upon our flag as a symbol of union, freedom, and justice. Historically, the red of the flag stands for courage, the white for liberty, the blue for loyalty. The number of stars shows our nation's growth, and the flag is not only an emblem but a history of our country, as well.

It should be important to all Americans to fly the flag from their homes on national holidays and other patriotic occasions. When we pledge allegiance to our flag, it is not a pledge to any person or political party, but the United States Constitution and its ideals.

When the flag passes in a parade or during the ceremony of raising or lowering the flag, all persons present should face the flag, stand at attention and salute, and men should remove their hats.

The Pledge of Allegiance

Thirty-one words that affirm the values and freedom the American flag represents are recited while facing the flag as a pledge of Americans' loyalty to their country.

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Flag Code Rules

All Americans should treat the country's flag with respect and follow established conduct in the use and display. Some of the main points of the flag code are shown here. Consult a copy of the complete code, found in your library or on the internet, when you have other questions about the flag.

- The flag should be flown only from sunrise to sunset.
- The flag should be hoisted briskly and lowered ceremoniously.
- When displayed against the wall, the union should be on top and to the flag's right, your left.
- The flag may be used to cover a casket, but should not be lowered into the ground.
- In a procession, the flag should always be in the front.
- When shown with flags of states or other groups, the flag should be in the center and highest.

- When shown with flags of other nations, the American flag should not be flown higher than others.
- The flag should never be used as a cover.
- The flag should be displayed daily and especially on national holidays.
- The exact likeness of the flag should never be used for advertising.
- Nothing should be attached to the flag.
- The flag should never be allowed to touch the ground or floor, not be used as a carrying device, nor brush against any objects, nor be used as a drapery of any sort.
- Worn flags should be burned and not thrown in the trash.
- On a speaker's platform, the flag should be displayed at the right if it is on a staff or on the wall behind the speaker if it is flat.
- Flags flown from fixed staffs are placed at half staff to indicate mourning. The flag so used should be first raised to the peak and then lowered to half-staff; it is again raised to the peak before lowering.

Contrary to popular belief, the flag code is not a law with penalties. It is a guide for American citizens on the best etiquette for displaying and honoring the American flag. The Supreme Court has ruled that even those who desecrate the flag by burning or mutilating the flag are merely exercising their rights of free speech and cannot be prosecuted. However, most Americans heed the flag code and treat it very seriously.

From our independence in 1776 until today, many Americans have fought for and died to preserve the ideals of democracy represented by the flag.

Who Designed the Flag?

Did Betsy Ross design the flag? Probably not. Historians have been unable to find solid evidence that Betsy was involved in either making or designing the flag. Best guess as to who did? Probably Francis Hopkinson, a naval flag designer, who billed Congress for that service in 1781.

QUESTIONS

1. What do the stars of the flag stand for? _____
2. What do the stripes of the flag stand for? _____
3. What does the red of the flag stand for? _____
4. What does the blue of the flag stand for? _____

TRUE OR FALSE? Write a **T** or **F** in the space provided.

- ___ 1. Worn flags should be burned, not put in the trash.
- ___ 2. The flag should be used to advertise only if the products advertised are in good taste.
- ___ 3. The flag should be in the rear of a procession and centered.
- ___ 4. The flag should be flown only on holidays.
- ___ 5. The flag can be displayed on public buildings.

- ___ 54. Our original Constitution outlawed slavery.
- ___ 55. The Bill of Rights are the first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution.
- ___ 56. The British held the Boston Tea Party to make friends with the colonists.
- ___ 57. A U.S. senator may be re-elected only once, serving a maximum of two terms.
- ___ 58. The House of Representatives has nothing to do with the impeachment of a president.
- ___ 59. Under certain conditions, the House of Representatives selects the president.
- ___ 60. A three-fourths vote is required for Congress to pass a bill over the president's veto.
- ___ 61. After 10 days, a bill passed by Congress automatically becomes a law if the president doesn't act and Congress is still in session.
- ___ 62. Supervising the coining and printing of money is the job of the Treasury Department.
- ___ 63. An ex post facto law is a law that makes something illegal after the act has been committed.
- ___ 64. Only federal officers may have titles of nobility.
- ___ 65. Congress may not tax goods being exported from a state, even if the goods are going to a foreign country.
- ___ 66. States must treat the citizens of other states the same way it treats its own citizens.
- ___ 67. States can make treaties with foreign countries.
- ___ 68. Both federal and state governments can establish courts.
- ___ 69. The president can call both houses of Congress into special session
- ___ 70. The Articles of Confederation was really our first constitution.
- ___ 71. Federalism is the sharing of power by the federal government and state governments.
- ___ 72. There are 12 Cabinet positions.
- ___ 73. The U.S. Supreme Court justices are appointed by Congress.
- ___ 74. The judicial branch has no checks on the other branches.
- ___ 75. The U.S. flag should be in the rear of a parade or procession.
- ___ 76. The 26th Amendment allows 18-year-olds to vote in federal and state elections.
- ___ 77. There are 15 justices on the Supreme Court.
- ___ 78. The Declaration of Independence came before the signing of the Constitution.
- ___ 79. United States senators receive a higher salary than U.S. representatives.
- ___ 80. Cabinet members are elected rather than appointed.

This is the end of your Federal Unit self-test. Please take the following steps:

1. Correct your test by using the answers below.
2. Any mistakes you have made should be reviewed, corrected, and studied.
3. You should take the test over, paying particular attention to any previous incorrect answers.

Your number of correct answers: _____

Your number of incorrect answers: _____

Total = 80

Answers: 1. b 2. a 3. c 4. b 5. c 6. a 7. b 8. b 9. a 10. c 11. d 12. b 13. c
 14. d 15. c 16. b 17. b 18. a 19. c 20. a 21. b 22. c 23. b 24. a 25. b 26. c 27. a
 28. c 29. b 30. a 31. b 32. a 33. c 34. a 35. d 36. c 37. b 38. e 39. a 40. f 41. T
 42. T 43. T 44. T 45. F 46. T 47. F 48. F 49. T 50. T 51. F 52. T 53. F 54. F 55. T
 56. F 57. F 58. F 59. T 60. F 61. T 62. T 63. T 64. F 65. T 66. T 67. F 68. T 69. T
 70. T 71. T 72. F 73. F 74. F 75. F 76. T 77. F 78. T 79. F 80. F



Compare and Contrast the United States Constitution and Your State Constitution

The United States Constitution details are given; fill in the blanks related to the your State Constitution. This will better understand the similarities and differences between both constitutions.



Topic or Detail	United States	Your State
Bill of Rights	First 10 Amendments	In Article # _____
Number of Branches	Three 1. legislative, 2. executive, 3. judicial	Three 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____
Scope of Branches	<i>Enforce, Make, or Interpret</i> laws of the United States	Enforce, Make, or Interpret laws of _____
Chief Executive Officer	President	_____
Minimum age for Chief Executive	35 years old	_____ years old
Term for Chief Executive Officer	4 years (two-term maximum)	_____ years (no term limits)
First successor to the office	Vice President	_____
Name of Lawmaking Body	Congress	_____
House & Senate Key Officers	House = Speaker Senate = Vice President	House = _____ Senate = _____
Number of members in Legislative Body	House = 435, Senate = 100	House = _____, Senate = _____
Terms for Members of Legislative Body	House = 2 years, Senate = 6 years	House = _____, Senate = _____
Minimum age for Legislative Members	House = 25 years old, Senate = 30 years old	House = _____ years old Senate = _____ years old
Veto override	2/3 of both houses	_____ of both houses
Justices or Judges Terms	Term of office = for life	Term of Office = _____ years
Number of Supreme Court Justices	9 justices	_____ justices
Number of Words in the Constitution	4,543 words	_____ words