

# Summary: United States Government

## The United States Constitution

The Constitution of the United States is a written document that is the basic law of our country. It describes how the national government, the states, and local government share power. The purpose of the government is to protect the rights of citizens.

The Constitution divided the national government into three branches. Congress, the legislative branch, makes the laws. Congress includes the Senate and House of Representatives. Voters from each state elect two senators. The number of representatives in the House a state has depends on the population. California has 53 representatives, more than any other state.

The President leads the executive branch, which also includes many departments. This branch executes the nation's laws. Judges and courts make up the judicial branch, which decides what the laws mean. The highest court is the Supreme Court, which decides whether laws obey the Constitution.

Each branch has limits on its powers. There is a system of checks and balances that allows each branch to check on the others.

## Rights and Duties

The United States is a democracy. This means that power belongs to the people. Our country is also a republic. This means we elect representatives to make the laws. Rights of citizens are protected by the Constitution. These include the right to vote and freedom of speech, protected under the Bill of Rights.

American citizens also have responsibilities. Citizens must obey the law. Adults pay taxes and serve on juries. Many citizens join the armed forces to protect the nation. If laws are unjust, they should work to change them. Voting is both a right and a duty for citizens over 18. Citizens agree to be governed by the person who wins the most votes, even if they voted for someone else.



### Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

**legislative branch** *noun*, branch of government that makes laws

**executive branch** *noun*, branch of government that executes the laws

**judicial branch** *noun*, branch of government that decides what laws mean

**democracy** *noun*, form of government in which power belongs to the people



### After You Read

**REVIEW** In what way is the power of the government divided?

Highlight the sentences that explain what each branch of government does.

**REVIEW** In a democracy, what power belongs to the people? Underline sentences that describe the power of the people.