

The Constitution and Congress

The nation's founders believed Congress to be the fundamental institution of the federal government, since it is the body that most closely represents the people. The framers of the United States Constitution began by creating Congress. Then they established the other two branches of government—the executive branch and the judicial branches.

The Constitution gives each branch distinct powers, but it makes sure that the three are in competition. Each branch has its own ways to check and balance the powers of the other two. The separation and balance of powers has contributed to the government's enduring vitality, providing order and stability while allowing flexibility for adaptation and change.



The U.S. House of Representatives and Senate

Congress is the foundation of the U.S. constitutional government. Here, the people speak through their representatives and senators. Article I—the longest article of the Constitution—describes congressional powers that are divided between two institutions: the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Responsibilities of the House of Representatives

- ★ Initiates all laws concerning the raising of money by the federal government
- ★ Elects the president if no candidate receives a majority of the electoral vote count
- ★ Investigates and impeaches federal officials suspected of "high crimes and misdemeanors"

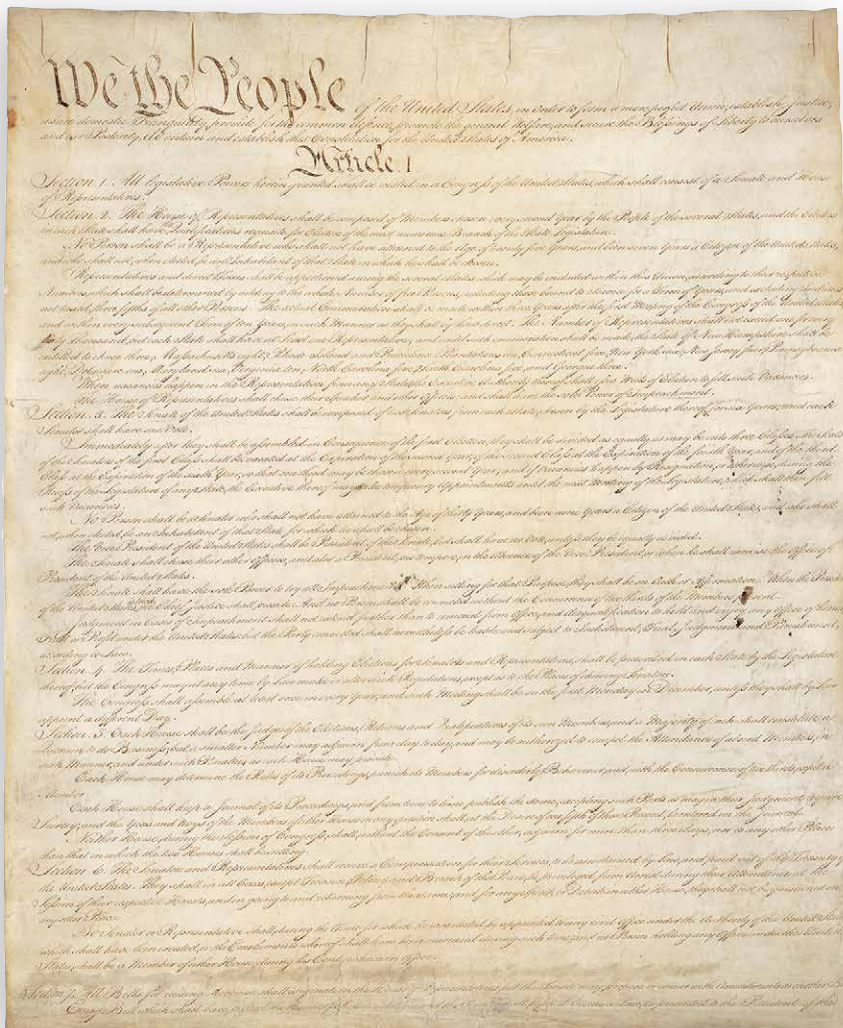
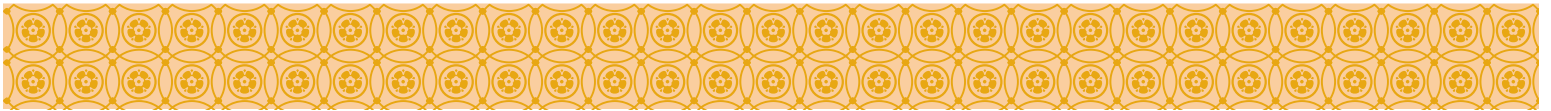
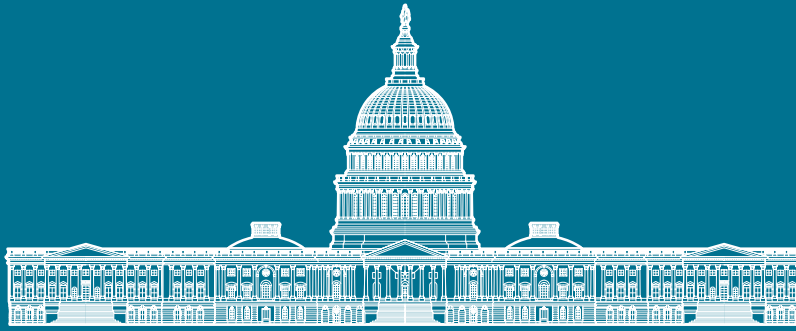
Combined Responsibilities

- ★ Makes all laws
- ★ Levies taxes
- ★ Declares war

Responsibilities of the Senate

- ★ Approves all treaties
- ★ Confirms presidential nominations
- ★ Elects the vice president if no candidate receives a majority of the electoral vote count
- ★ Conducts trials of federal officials impeached by the House

Article I: The Legislative Branch

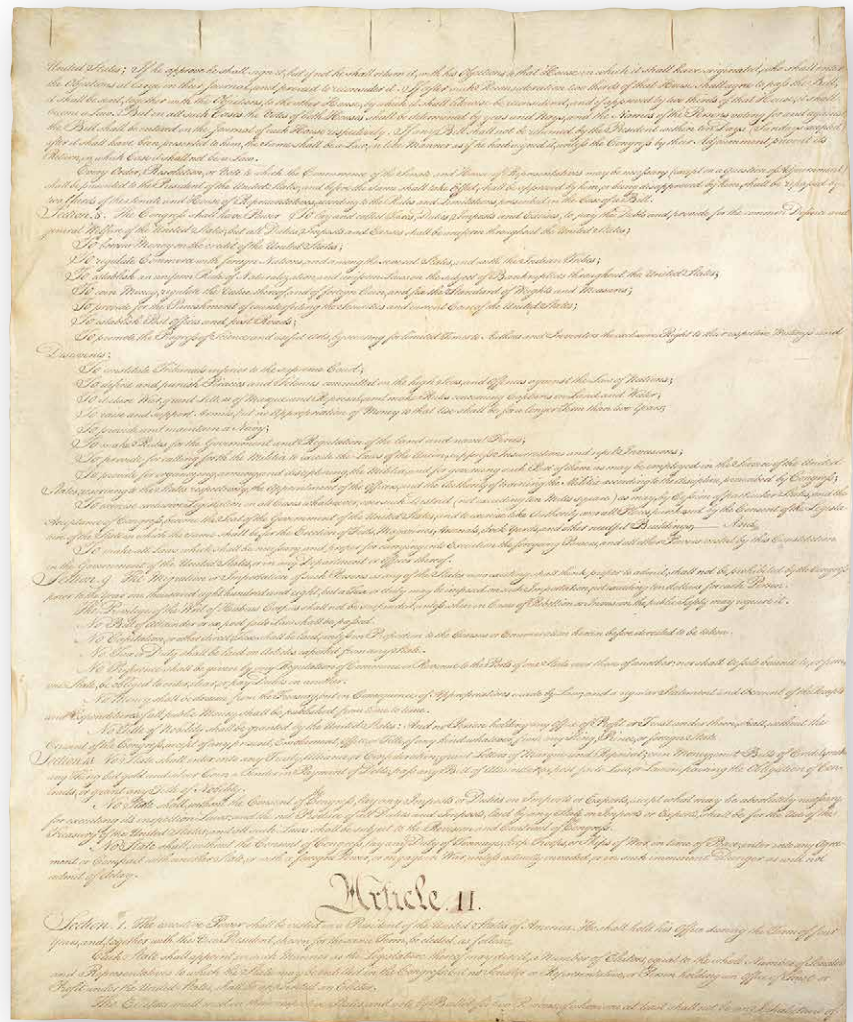


- ★ Makes all laws
- ★ Raises and provides public money and oversees its proper expenditure
- ★ Provides oversight and conducts investigations
- ★ Declares war
- ★ Approves treaties negotiated by the Executive Branch
- ★ Approves presidential appointments
- ★ Impeaches and tries federal officers

Article II: The Executive Branch



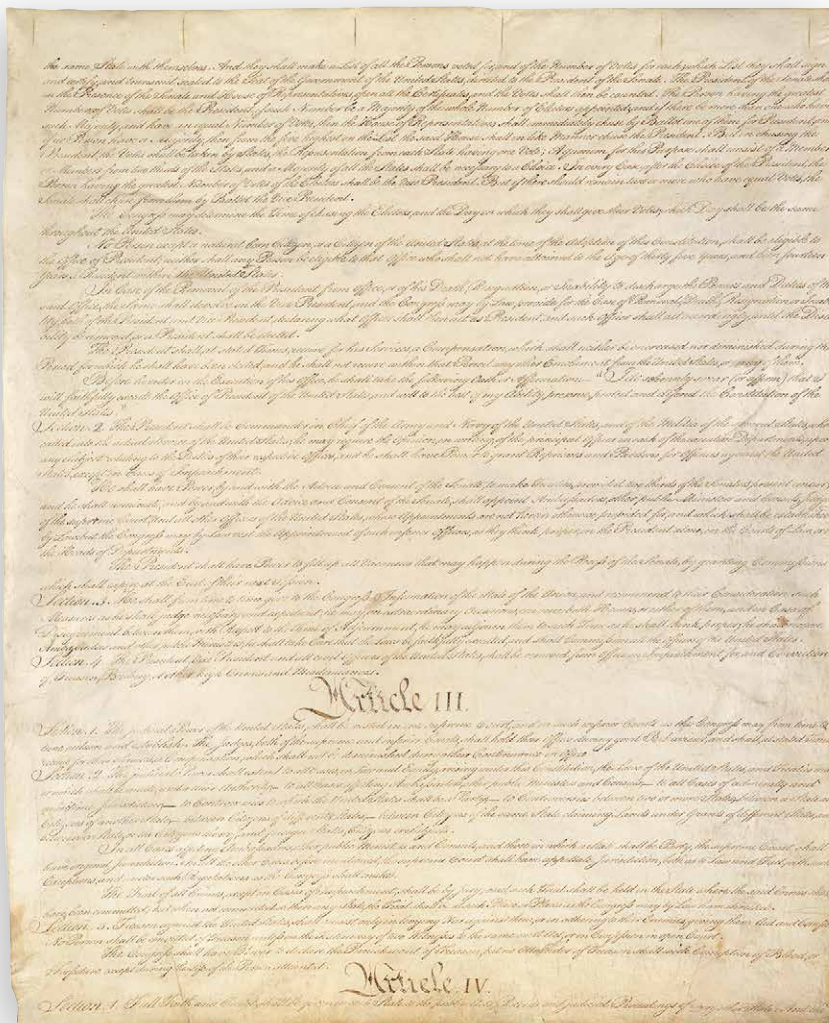
- ★ Enforces all laws
- ★ Nominates federal officers, judges, and ambassadors for Senate approval
- ★ Represents the country abroad as head of state
- ★ Commander-in-Chief of the United States military
- ★ Informs Congress of the State of the Union



Article III: The Judicial Branch



- ★ Interprets laws and resolves disputes
- ★ Tries cases affecting states and foreign representatives
- ★ Reviews lower-court decisions and procedures



Articles IV, V, VI, VII

★ Article IV: Relations among the States

Each state will recognize and honor the laws of the other states

★ Article V: The Amendment Process

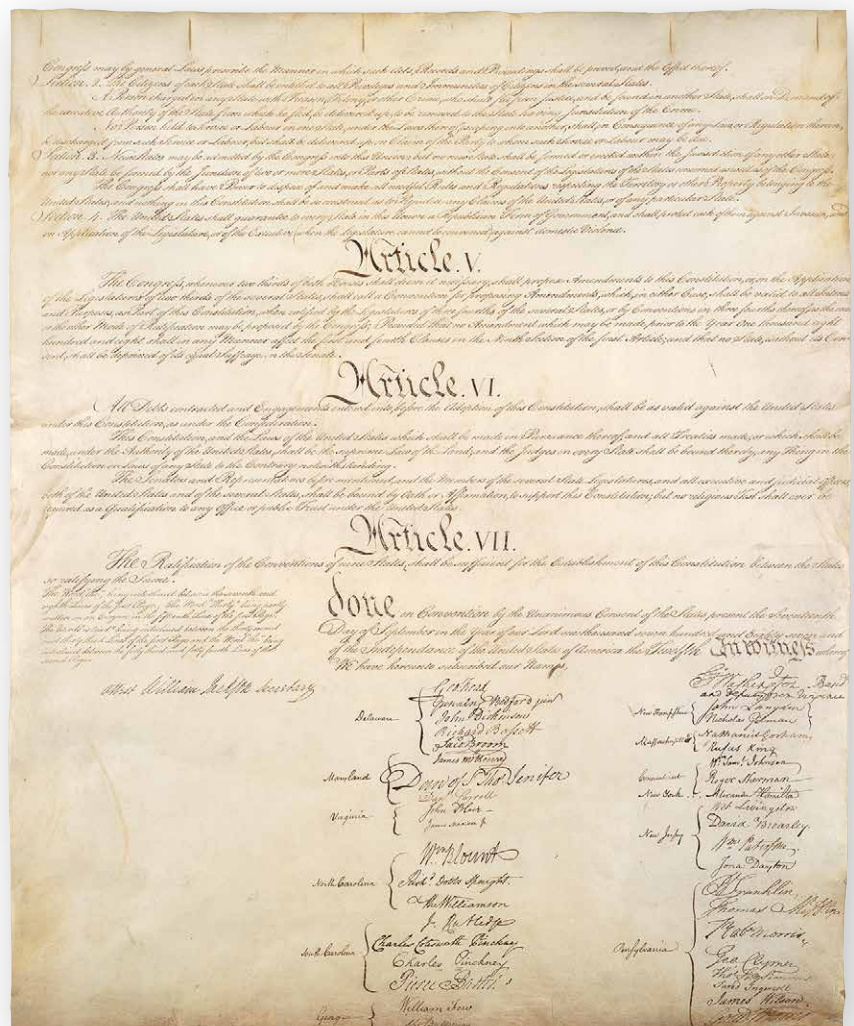
Provides instructions to change the Constitution

★ Article VI: Supremacy

The Constitution is the supreme law of the land

★ Article VII: Ratification

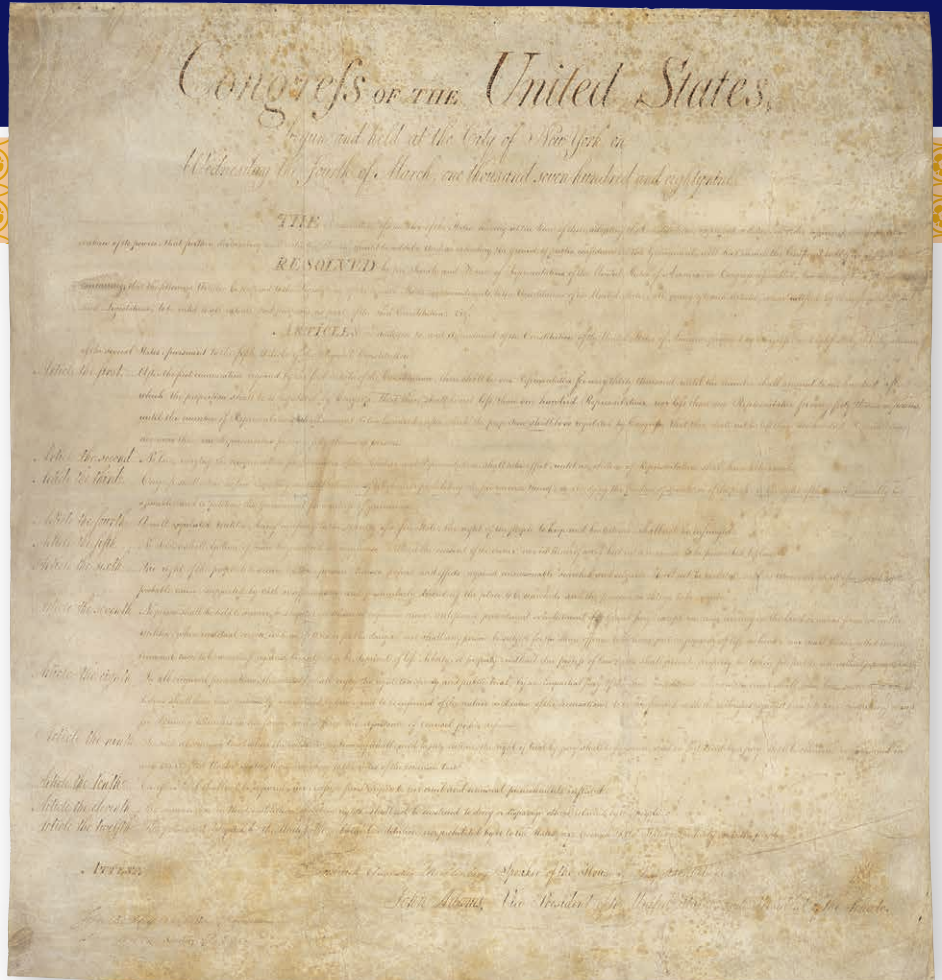
Explains how to ratify the Constitution to replace the Articles of Confederation



The Bill of Rights

The Constitution includes provisions for passing amendments. While the process is difficult, it reflects the framers' vision of a document that could adapt to new circumstances. The Constitution has been amended 27 times in our nation's history.

Perhaps the best-known amendments to the Constitution are the first 10 amendments collectively known as the Bill of Rights. These amendments safeguard some of the most fundamental rights of Americans. The rights protected range from freedoms of religion and speech to the rights of the accused during a trial.



★ First Amendment

Freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom to peaceably assemble, freedom to petition the government

★ Second Amendment

Right to keep and bear arms

★ Third Amendment

Restrictions on quartering of soldiers

★ Fourth Amendment

No unreasonable search or seizure

★ Fifth Amendment

Due process and criminal procedures

★ Sixth Amendment

Speedy trial by jury, witness, and counsel

★ Seventh Amendment

Jury trial in civil cases

★ Eighth Amendment

No excessive fines, no cruel and unusual punishment

★ Ninth Amendment

Unenumerated rights kept by the people

★ Tenth Amendment

Rights Reserved to the states or the people

Constitutional Amendments

Following the ratification of the Bill of Rights in 1791, the U.S. Constitution has been amended an additional 17 times. Some of these amendments changed government structure, while others expanded federal protections of civil and political rights.

★ **Eleventh Amendment–1795**

Prohibited a state from being sued in federal court by citizens of another state or of any foreign state.

★ **Twelfth Amendment–1804**

Changed the presidential selection process to provide for the separate election of the president and vice president.

★ **Thirteenth Amendment–1865**

Abolished slavery. Up to that point, the status of slavery was a state responsibility.

★ **Fourteenth Amendment–1868**

Recognized the citizenship of all individuals born or naturalized in the United States, including formerly enslaved people. It prohibited states from depriving any person of “life, liberty or property” without due process of law or denying any person equal protection under the law.

★ **Fifteenth Amendment–1870**

Prohibited states from denying the right to vote to any male citizen because of “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

★ **Sixteenth Amendment–1913**

Allowed for a Federal income tax.

★ **Seventeenth Amendment–1913**

Replaced the election of senators by state legislatures with direct election by popular vote in each state.

★ **Eighteenth Amendment–1919**

Outlawed the production and sale of alcoholic beverages.

★ **Nineteenth Amendment–1920**

Prohibited the United States or any state from denying citizens the right to vote based on sex. The amendment did not prevent other discriminatory voting restrictions, and women of color would continue to fight for their right to vote in the decades that followed.

★ **Twentieth Amendment–1933**

Shortened the time between elections and the start of new congressional and presidential terms.

★ **Twenty-First Amendment–1933**

Repealed the unpopular Eighteenth Amendment. This is the only time that an amendment has been repealed.

★ **Twenty-Second Amendment–1951**

Limited presidents to two terms in office. After President Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected president four times, Congress sought to restrict his successors to two terms, a tradition set by the first president, George Washington.

★ **Twenty-Third Amendment–1961**

Granted residents of Washington, D.C. the right to participate in presidential elections.

★ **Twenty-Fourth Amendment–1964**

Prohibited poll taxes as a requirement for voting. Poll taxes were fees used to deter citizens, particularly African Americans, from voting.

★ **Twenty-Fifth Amendment–1967**

Established procedures for filling a vacancy in the office of the vice president and how to proceed if the president is unable to fulfill their duties.

★ **Twenty-Sixth Amendment–1971**

Lowered the voting age from 21 to 18.

★ **Twenty-Seventh Amendment–1992**

Mandated that any changes in congressional salaries take effect after the next election.