

The Constitution

SECTION 1

THE SIX BASIC PRINCIPLES

TEXT SUMMARY

The Constitution originally consisted of a **Preamble**, or introduction, and seven sections called **articles**. The Framers developed the Preamble and articles around the six broad ideas, or principles, described below.

Popular sovereignty is the idea that the people are the source of all power held by the government.

Limited government means that the government possesses only the powers the people give it—it must obey the Constitution. This principle is also known as **constitutionalism**.

Government officials are subject to the **rule of law**—they must always obey the law and are never above it.

Separation of powers establishes three separate parts, or branches, that

share the government's power. These branches are the executive, the legislative, and the judicial.

The Constitution uses a system of **checks and balances** to ensure that none of the three branches can become too powerful. Each branch has ways to limit the power of the other two. An example of this principle is the power of the President to **veto**, or reject, any act of Congress. Congress may then override a veto with a two-thirds vote in each house.

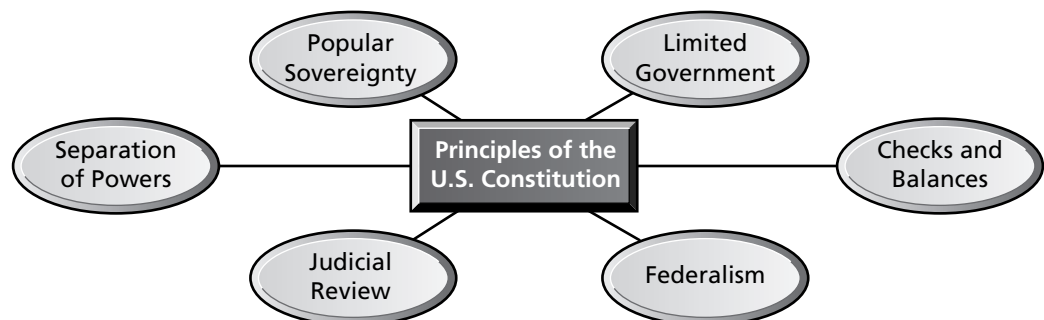
Judicial review is the power of the courts to decide what the Constitution means. The courts also have the power to declare a government action to be against the Constitution, or **unconstitutional**.

Lastly, the Framers used the principle of **federalism** to divide power between the central government and the States.

THE BIG IDEA

The Constitution is based on six broad principles: popular sovereignty, limited government, separation of powers, checks and balances, judicial review, and federalism.

GRAPHIC SUMMARY: Six Constitutional Principles



The Constitution and the government of the United States are based on these six ideas.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Explain the principle of federalism.
2. **Diagram Skills** Which principle divides the government into three branches?