

Basic Principles Reflected in the United States Constitution

Basic Principles	Description	Location in the Constitution	Clarification
Limited Government	Powers of government are restricted by the Constitution.	Articles I, II, III	In a limited government everyone, including all authority figures, must obey the laws. Constitutions, statements of rights, or other laws define the limits of those in power so they cannot take advantage of their elected, appointed, or inherited positions.
Republicanism	Voters hold the sovereign power and elect representatives to exercise power for them.	Preamble and Article I	Republicanism is a philosophy of limited government with elected representatives serving at the will of the people. People have the right to vote for representatives to make the laws.
Checks and Balances	Each of the three branches of government exercises some control over the others, sharing power among them.	Articles I, II, III	Checks and balances is a system that does not allow any one branch of government to have too much power. Example: The President can veto legislation passed by Congress, but Congress can override that veto. The Senate confirms major appointments made by the President, and the courts may declare acts passed by Congress as unconstitutional.
Federalism	Power is divided between the national and state governments, limiting central power.	10th Amendment	Federalism is the distribution of power between a federal government and the states within a union.
Separation of Powers	Each branch of government has its own responsibilities and limitations.	Articles I, II, III	The branches include a legislative branch known as "Congress" made up of a House of Representatives and a Senate; their powers are outlined in Article I. The executive branch is led by the President and includes the Cabinet of advisors and agencies that carry out the laws and ensure their just application; their powers are outlined in Article II. The judicial branch includes the highest court the "Supreme Court" and all courts of the United States which interpret and apply the laws, ensuring they are just; their powers are outlined in Article III.
Popular Sovereignty	Authority for government flows from the people and they rule through their representatives.	Amendment IX and Preamble	Popular sovereignty is the concept that political power rests with the people who can create, alter, and abolish government. People express themselves through voting and free participation in government.
Individual Rights	Unalienable rights guaranteed to all citizens.	Preamble and Bill of Rights	The individual rights protected in the Bill of Rights include economic rights related to property, political rights related to freedom of speech and press, and personal rights related to bearing arms and maintaining private residences.