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### UNIT SYNOPSIS

The U.S. Constitution arose out of significant historical and philosophical ideas and preferences regarding popular sovereignty and limited government. As a result, compromises were made during the Constitutional Convention and ratification debates. These compromises have frequently been the source of conflict in U.S. politics over the proper balance between individual freedom, social order, and equality of opportunity. The first semblance of a national government created after independence was a state-centered, decentralized system that reflected a fear of a powerful central government. Yet, the lack of powers held by the weak national Congress, coupled with each state’s independent and often conflicting actions, raised concerns with such key actors as James Madison and Alexander Hamilton as to whether the Articles of Confederation were able to protect the new nation. The weaknesses led to a call for change and a decision to host a convention to revise the Articles. The Convention itself was a triumph of negotiation, collaboration, and compromise, extending beyond the delegates’ original mandate. It created a new constitution that granted more centralized authority while dispersing powers among three branches in the national government and reserving powers and authority to the states to govern within their borders. The group that favored the new federal Constitution, the Federalists, argued that the constitutional separation of powers and checks and balances would protect people from governmental tyranny and unify the nation. The Federalists also argued that although the Constitution lacked a specific listing of rights, it protected civil liberties in general by limiting the national government to enumerated powers. By contrast, the Anti-Federalists argued against the new federal system, claiming that the new Constitution would erode the sovereignty of the states, the prominence of local self-government, and their inherited liberties, as it lacked a specific listing of rights needed to protect the people from the national government. After James Madison’s eventual concurrence, the Federalists promised the Anti-Federalists that they would support the addition of a bill of rights once the Constitution was ratified. The Constitution was approved in 1788, although the last state, Rhode Island, did not confirm it until 1790. The Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution, was ratified in 1791. More than 200 years later, the compromises that were necessary for the Constitution’s ratification, and in some instances led to ambiguity, continue to fuel debate and sometimes even conflict over how best to protect liberty, equality, order, and private property.

College Board, AP® U.S. Government and Politics Course and Exam Description, 2018 All 2024-25 AP U.S. Government and Politics resources are linked here; the materials for Unit 1 are here.

## ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS AND CONTENT STANDARDS

Below are the standards **taught** and **assessed** in this unit.

### Topic, Enduring Understanding, Learning Objectives (*Students will be able to...*)

#### 1.1 Ideals of Democracy

- **LO 1.1.A:** *Explain how democratic ideals are reflected in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.*

#### 1.2 Types of Democracy

- **LO 1.2.A:** *Explain how models of representative democracy are visible in major institutions, policies, events, or debates in the U.S.*

#### 1.3 Government Power and Individual Rights

- **LO 1.3.A:** *Explain Federalist and Anti-Federalist views on central government and democracy.*

#### 1.4 Challenges of the Articles of Confederation

- **LO 1.4.A:** *Explain the relationship between key provisions of the Articles of Confederation, and the debate over granting the federal government greater power formerly reserved to the states.*

#### 1.5 Ratification of the U.S. Constitution

- **LO 1.5.A:** *Explain the impact of political negotiation and compromises at the Constitutional Convention on the development of the constitutional system.*

#### 1.6 Principles of American Government

- **LO 1.6.A:** *Explain the constitutional principles of separation of powers and checks and balances.*
- **LO 1.6.B:** *Explain the effects of separation of powers and checks and balances for the U.S. political system.*

#### 1.7 Relationship between the States and Federal Government

- **LO 1.7.A:** *Explain how the constitutional allocation of power between the national and state governments affects society.*

#### 1.8 Constitutional Interpretations of Federalism

- **LO-1.8.A:** *Explain how the balance of power between national and state governments has changed over time based on interpretations of the Supreme Court of the United States.*

#### 1.9 Federalism in Action

- **LO 1.9.A:** *Explain how the distribution of powers between national and state governments impacts policymaking.*