

# OUR AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

---

## DEMOCRACY AND ITS AMERICAN INTERPRETATION

### 1. What is the purpose of the U.S. Government?

The purpose is expressed in the preamble to the Constitution: "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

### 2. What form of government do we have in the United States?

The United States, under its Constitution, is a Federal, democratic republic, an indivisible union of 50 sovereign States. With the exception of town meetings, a form of pure democracy, we have at the local, state, and national levels a government which is "democratic" because the people govern themselves; "representative" because the people choose elected delegates by free and secret ballot; and "republican" because government derives its power from the will of the people.

### 3. What is the role of the citizen in our Government?

The citizen may take an active or passive role in the governmental process. The United States today is even more of a participatory democracy than was envisioned by the founders when they established a government "of the people, by the people, and for the people," as President Abraham Lincoln later described it. Along with the constitutional responsibilities which accompany citizenship, such as providing revenues to the Government, the citizen is afforded a wide range of rights and opportunities to influence the making of public policy by the Government.

At the most basic level, the right to vote gives the citizen a chance to help select those who will ultimately be responsible for determining public policy. Beyond the casting of the ballot, a citizen may actively assist in nominating and electing preferred public officials through volunteer activities and campaign donations. The participation of citizens in the electoral process contributes greatly to the sense of legitimacy of the Government.

Citizen involvement in the Government need not be manifested only during election campaigns. Legislators are accustomed to hearing from constituents expressing opinions about issues of the day, and procedures exist which mandate that executive agencies allow time for public comment before proposed regulations become final. Individuals may also join with others who hold similar views

to make the most of their influence with Government on particular issues; this is how interest groups or political action committees are established and the lobbying process begins.

**4. What contributions has our country made to the institution of government?**

Some of the U.S. contributions to the institution of government are as follows: a written constitution, an independent judiciary to interpret the Constitution, and a division of powers between the Federal and State Governments.