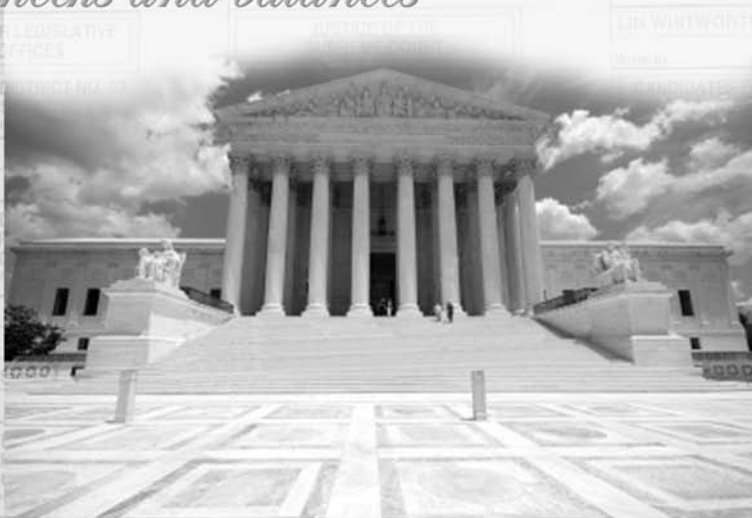


GOVERNMENT SERIES – BOOK 1

*American Government*  
**HOW IT WORKS**

*cooperation*      *Constitution*  
*Bill of Rights*  
*legislative branch*  
*Congress*  
*checks and balances*



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***Rules help people work together.***

## CHAPTER I

# Government and the Law

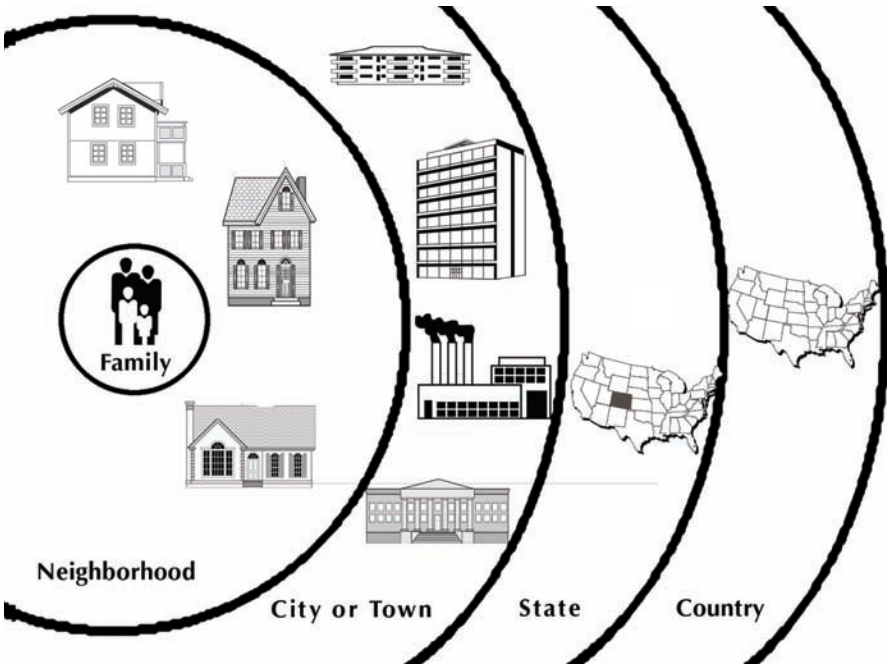
People cannot always take care of all of their own needs. This is why people are members of groups. In a group, people can work together to take care of their needs. Yet, in every group, people are different. They have different ideas and different needs.

In order to have peace, people make rules. The rules often apply to members of a group, such as a family or a country. Rules tell what people can do. Rules also tell what people cannot do. When everyone in the group obeys the rules, the people can have peace.

People are members of many different groups. People have

families, live in neighborhoods, and go to schools. They join clubs, faith groups, and workers' unions. Some groups are small, and others may be very large.

A small group is usually part of larger groups. A family is part of a neighborhood, with its schools, shops and other groups. Neighborhoods are parts of towns or cities. Towns and cities belong to larger groups like states, and these groups belong to countries. Countries may also belong to larger groups. All of these groups try to take care of the needs of their members. They all need rules.



***People are members of many different groups.***

A family is a small group. A family may be made up of only two people, or many people. Either way, people need rules in order to live and work together. Families usually do not write down their rules. Members of a family talk about their rules. Then everyone in the family can know about these rules and get along.

In large groups, people may have many kinds of differences. The people may be of different races and religions. They may even speak different languages. The members of these groups also have to get along with each other. They need rules, too. The members have to know about these rules. In large groups, it is usually better to write down the rules. Then everyone can know them.

## **What is a government?**

In large groups, it is hard to get all the people together to make the rules. It is easier to have one person represent other people in the group. A **representative** helps make the rules for the whole group. Representatives form part of the government for the group.

Every country has some kind of government. One kind of government is a **democracy**. In a democracy, the people choose the members of their government. When people make choices about their government, this is called voting.

A government makes rules for all the people in the country. These rules are called laws. Most governments write down their laws. The government of a democracy also protects the **rights** of the people. One of these rights is to speak against the actions of their government. This is called a protest.

The government of the United States is a democracy. People in the United States vote for many members of their government. These members are called representatives. In the United States, representatives help make the laws for the people.

Almost anyone in the United States can become a representative. Representatives work in the government. People in the United States choose their representatives by voting. Representatives can be mayors of small towns or big cities. They can make laws for their state or for the whole country. When the votes are counted, the winner is the person with the most votes.



***People can speak against the government by marching in the streets.***

Then that person becomes a representative. The representative works for a number of years. Then there is another vote. Sometimes, the voters choose someone new to represent them.

## **Laws**

The United States has laws about the needs of the people. The laws tell the government what to do. Different parts of the government have different jobs. People choose representatives to write laws about those jobs. The representatives are one part of government. Other parts carry out the laws.

For example, people may need a road from one town to another town. Some people in the town may talk to a representative in the government. The representatives may make a law about this new road. Then the government builds the new road.

Some laws say the government will do certain things for the people. For example, one law says that only the central government can print money for the United States. As a result, a part of the central government prints the money. Other laws might say the government must help poor people pay for a place to live. This tells a part of the government to take this action.

Other laws in the United States say what people cannot do. To break a law is to commit a crime. Representatives help decide how the government will punish people who break laws. For example, it is against the law to steal. If people steal things, the government can punish them. One part of the government finds the lawbreakers. Another part of the government punishes them.





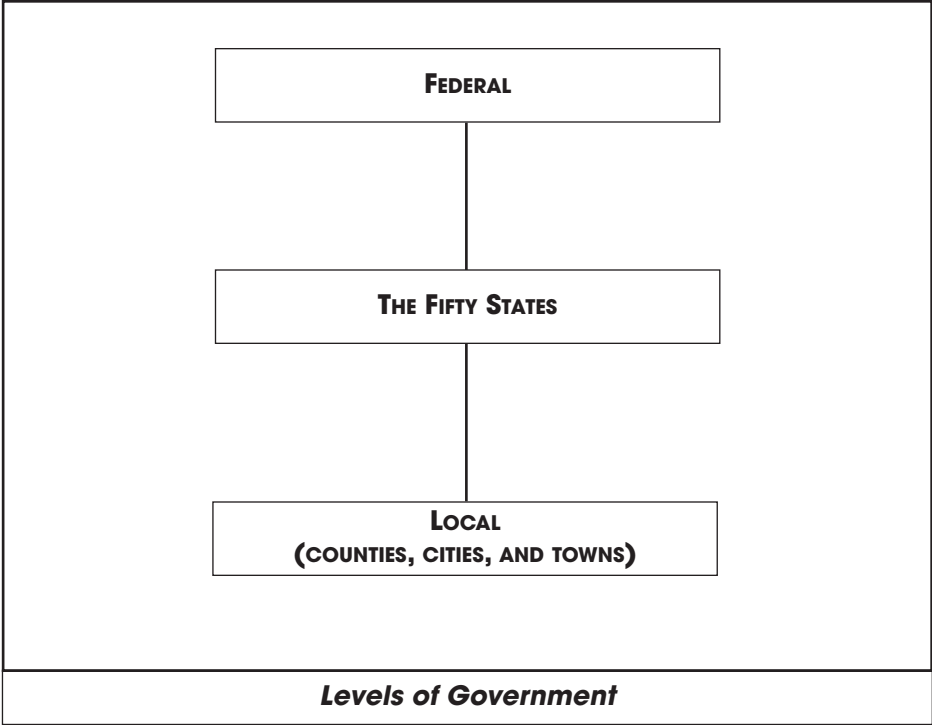
*In 1789, representatives signed the Constitution*

## CHAPTER 2

# Levels of Government in the United States

In 1789, the United States formed a new government. Since that time, the United States has had the same **Constitution**. The Constitution tells how the government of the United States works. The government of the United States is the central government for the country. This level of government is called the **federal government**. It makes laws for all the people in the United States.

Each state also has its own constitution and its own **state government**. Each state constitution tells how that state government works. Each state government makes laws for people in its state.



In every state, there are counties, cities and towns. Each county, city or town has its own government. Each of these governments is a **local government**. Local governments make the laws for their areas in the state.

The United States has three levels of government. These levels of government are the federal, state, and local governments. Each level of government makes different laws. Each level of government takes care of people in different ways.

Laws tell what each level of government must do for the people. These laws tell about the services of each level of government. Other laws tell what the people must do and what they cannot do. People in the United States must obey the laws of all three levels of government.



***President George H.W. Bush talked to other leaders in the federal government about going to war against Iraq in 1990.***

## **The federal government**

The federal government works for all of the people of the United States. It is the highest level of government in the United States. It has the most power. It often makes rules for state and local governments to follow.

The Constitution says that the federal government can make laws for all the people in the United States. Federal laws may be about money, companies, taxes, wars, health, and **pollution**. Parts of the federal government carry out these laws.

Many federal laws are about services of the federal government for the people. Some federal laws are about services for all of the people in the United States. Other federal laws tell how the federal government will help certain people at certain times. Then there are federal laws about crimes. The

federal government can punish people who break federal laws.

The federal government also must deal with the governments of other countries. Sometimes, the federal government may decide that the United States should help the government of another country. At other times, the federal government may decide that the United States will fight against another country.

## **The state governments**

The Constitution of the United States says that the federal government can only make certain kinds of laws. It also says that a state government can only make certain kinds of laws. A state government cannot make any laws against a federal law. A state government also cannot make any laws against the Constitution.

In the United States, there are 50 states. Each state has a government that makes laws for people in its state. State laws may say what the state government will do for the people in the state. State laws may also tell what people in the state must do for the state. Other state laws are about crimes. The state government can punish anyone who breaks a state law.

States make laws about many different services. State laws may be about roads, drivers, parks, workers, companies, marriage, hospitals, and schools in the state. Different parts of the state government carry out these laws. For example, a state law may say that hospitals have to hire more doctors. A part of the state government would help make this happen.

Each state government makes laws about state services. People in different states may have the same needs. Because of this, many state governments have the same kinds of services. People in different states may have different needs. So state laws about some services are different in each state. State laws about crime also may be different in each state.



***Some local governments run trains and buses like this one in Chicago.***

## **The local governments**

A local government makes the laws for a small area in a state. An area may be a town, a city, or a county. Each area in a state has a local government.

The government of a large city takes care of the needs of many people. It can give many services to the people in the city.

A city government may have many representatives for people living in the city.

Small areas may have smaller governments. These governments will not have as many representatives as big city governments do. Other local governments are called special service districts. Some of these districts give people clean water and take away dirty water. Others run buses and trains, or keep the parks clean.

People in an area vote for representatives in their town, city,

county, or special service district. The representatives in these local governments make local laws. These laws cannot go against any state or federal laws. Some local laws are about schools, garbage, street repair, police, and taxes.

Governments in different areas may have the same services for the people in their area. Also, each local government may give the service in a different way. People in each area can only get the services of their local government.

For example, the local government in one area will pick up the garbage from people's homes in that area. In another area, the government may have a garbage dump instead. People living in that area have to bring their garbage to the dump. The local government in this area takes care of the dump. Both local governments are giving a service to the people. These local governments are taking care of the needs of people in their area, but doing it in different ways.

### **How the three levels of government work together**

All three levels of government provide services to the people. Sometimes, they all provide the same type of service. They can work together, or separately. The laws of the different levels of government tell them how to do this.

Two levels of government often work together. For example, the federal government may decide that a part of the country needs a new interstate highway. An interstate highway is a service for people in different states. The federal government has to work with the governments of those states. Together, they have to decide where they will build this new interstate highway. They also decide how they will pay for it.

The interstate highway is built after the president signs a law. The law identifies which states the highway will go through. The federal law also makes the federal government give money to those states. The governments of those states use this federal

money to build and take care of their parts of the new highway. Often, state governments also have to use some of their own money. They spend this money on building and taking care of their part of the interstate highway.



***These signs show the way to interstate highway 17, federal highway 89A, and state highway 179.***

Each state government may build other highways within its state. These highways may go through many local areas in the state. The state government has to work with the local government in each area. Together, they decide where they will build the state highway. They also decide how they will pay for it. The state government and the local governments each pay a certain amount of money for the state highway. Then these governments build and take care of it.

A local government may also decide that people in its area need a new road. This new road may connect one local area to another. Then, the two local governments decide where they will



***Workers from the local government take care of their part of the road.***

build this new road. They also decide how they will pay for it. Each local government uses its own money to build its part of the new road. Each local government takes care of its part of the road.

Sometimes, a local government builds other roads. These roads are only in their local area. Because of this, the local government pays all the costs for these roads.

The three levels of government may work together on the same service. Sometimes, they do not have any problems working together. Often, they disagree about services. The laws say how they can end the conflict.

The three levels of government have different amounts of power. The federal government is the most powerful. A state government has more power than a local government. State and local governments cannot make any law against a federal law. A local government cannot make a law against a state law



or a federal law.

For example, a state government may think that an interstate highway should not go through its state. The federal government has more power than the state government. This means that when the federal government decides on the plan for the interstate highway, both levels of government must follow that plan.

Each state government builds its own state highways. Usually state highways meet the highways of other states at the state borders. The state governments may not agree about where their highways should meet. A part of the federal government decides on the plan for these state highways. Both state governments have to follow this plan.

A local government may think that a certain state highway should not go through its area. It may have to follow the state government's plan anyway. This is because the state government has more power than the local government. The state government will make a plan for both the local government and the state government to follow.

Local governments may have different plans about local roads. Part of the state government makes a plan for local roads. Local governments have to follow the state's plan.