

Name _____



State Governments

By Phyllis Naegeli

The U.S. Constitution formed a strong central government for our country. In order to preserve the rights of the states and keep America a united nation, a system of federalism was used. Federalism shares government power between national and state governments, allowing for diversity and unity at the same time. Diversity is encouraged by giving states the power to make laws for their citizens as long as the laws do not conflict with the U.S. Constitution. States have the power to conduct elections, issue licenses, and regulate trade within their borders. Unity is encouraged by allowing states to share the power to collect taxes, build roads, and establish courts. Other powers of the federal and state governments are strictly prohibited. States may not form treaties with other countries. They cannot print money or tax import or export trade. States must protect the rights of their citizens through due process - ensuring that citizens are treated fairly under the law. The federal government cannot change state boundaries, use tax money without proper legislation, or tax trade between states.

State governments are run in a similar fashion to our federal government. However, states are generally more democratic than the government in Washington, D.C. Generally, the high-ranking officials in a state are elected by popular vote. This includes the governor, executive branch officials (such as secretary of state and lieutenant governor), judges, and legislators. In states where the governor is given the power to appoint high-ranking officials, the power of the governor is increased.

The democratic process in states also includes the lawmaking process. State citizens are often given the opportunity to participate in the lawmaking process through initiatives, referendums, and recalls. Initiatives and referendums are used to allow citizens to vote on laws rather than having them go through the legislature. An initiative begins with a petition regarding a certain issue. If enough citizens sign the petition, the issue is either placed on the ballot (direct initiative), or sent to the legislature for consideration (indirect initiative). If approved in either case, the initiative becomes a law. A referendum places an issue that has been considered in the legislature on the ballot for citizens to vote on it. Forty-nine states (Alabama is the exception)

require that a referendum be used on any changes to a state's constitution. Recalls are special elections held to remove a government official from office. Recalls begin with a petition that must be signed by a certain percentage of citizens from the state. If enough signatures are collected, a special election is held for citizens to remove the official from office.

One of the most debated issues during the Constitutional Convention of 1787 was state rights. In colonial America, delegates from each of the states worked hard to be sure that a strong central government would unite the states while protecting the rights of the states. The care and planning created a relationship between the federal government and the states that has kept us free from oppression for over two hundred years.

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Questions

1. States may make laws for its citizens as long as they do not conflict with _____.

- _____ 2. Which of the following is a power shared by state governments and the federal government?
 - A. the ability to collect taxes
 - B. taxing exports
 - C. printing money
 - D. changing state borders
- _____ 3. Which of the following powers is the federal government prohibited from doing?
 - A. printing money
 - B. collecting taxes
 - C. building roads
 - D. changing state borders

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4. Define federalism.

- _____ 5. Many high-ranking state government officials are appointed rather than elected.
- A. true
 - B. false
- _____ 6. State governments are more democratic than our federal government.
- A. false
 - B. true
- _____ 7. Which of the following types of lawmaking usually begin with a petition signed by citizens?
- A. referendums
 - B. initiatives
- _____ 8. Forty-nine states use _____ on any changes to a state's constitution.
- A. an initiative
 - B. a referendum
 - C. a general election
 - D. a recall election