

Student Handout 2: Connecting Principles to Constitutional Mechanisms

Constitutional Mechanism	Definition or Description	Where is it found?	Which foundational principles does this mechanism promote and/or protect?
A Written Constitution with Delegated Powers	<p>A document called the U.S. Constitution creates the system of government.</p> <p>The Constitution specifies which powers the people are giving the government (delegated powers).</p>	<p>The written document itself – the Constitution.</p> <p>The federal government has only the powers the people delegate to it (delegated or enumerated powers).</p> <p>For example, the Constitution lists specific powers that the people have given the legislative branch.</p>	
Federalism	<p>A system of government in which the state or regional governments share power with a central/national government.</p>	<p>The federal government has only the powers the people delegate to it (delegated or enumerated powers) in Articles I-IV.</p> <p>For example, the Constitution lists specific powers that the people have given the legislative branch.</p> <p>The 10th Amendment states that the rest of the powers belong to the states and the people.</p>	
Representative Government/ Republicanism	<p>A way for citizens have a voice in their government by electing people to represent their interests and concerns.</p>	<p>People elect members of the legislative branch. Senators are elected for 6-year terms, Representatives for 2-year terms as described in Article I. The president is also elected (although technically it is through the Electoral College) in Article II.</p>	
Separation of Powers	<p>A mechanism, device, or constitutional structure that divides powers and responsibilities of government among the legislative, executive, and judicial branches.</p>	<p>Articles I-III of the Constitution separates powers among three branches. The legislative branch has the power to pass laws; the executive branch has the power to execute the laws; and the judicial branch has the power to settle disputes.</p>	

Constitutional Mechanism	Definition/Description	Examples from the Constitution (Where is it found)	Foundational Principles it promotes or protects
Checks and Balances	A mechanism, device, or constitutional structure that empowers each branch of government (legislative, executive, and judicial) to amend or veto acts of another branch.	<p>Under Articles I-III of the Constitution, the President appoints federal judges and the Senate confirms the appointments. Once confirmed, federal judges serve for life.</p> <p>Under Articles I-III, the president can veto an act of Congress and the Supreme Court can declare a law unconstitutional.</p>	
The Amendment Process	A procedure that allows the Constitution to be changed.	<p>Article V of the U.S. Constitution provides for the amendment process. There are two ways this can happen:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Congress needs a 2/3 majority to adopt and then 3/4th of the states need to ratify or approve. 2. States propose an amendment at a convention that 2/3 of the state legislatures call. Then, 3/4th of the state legislatures need to ratify or approve it. 	
Bill of Rights	A mechanism that protect personal, political, and economic freedoms from unjustified government interference	<p>Bill of Rights</p> <p>Enumerated Powers in the Constitution</p> <p>10th Amendment which leaves those powers not granted to the federal government to the states or the people.</p>	