

Words to Know

Look for these tricky words in **bold** type throughout the issue.

developing country (*n*): a nation in which people live on far less money and with fewer resources than those in industrialized nations (*p. 7*)

diplomatic (*adj*): having to do with negotiations between nations (*p. 15*)

exports (*n*): goods shipped to other countries to be sold (*p. 11*)

imports (*n*): goods brought into a country to be purchased (*p. 11*)

indigenous (*in-DIH-juh-nus*) (*adj*): native to a particular region, environment, or people (*p. 18*)

infrastructure (*n*): the physical structures and public works of a city or country, including transit systems and roads (*p. 16*)

media literacy (*n*): the ability to identify news and other forms of communication and understand the messages they are sending (*p. 13*)

NATO (*n*): North Atlantic Treaty Organization, an alliance of the U.S. and European nations formed after World War II as a defense against the Soviet Union (*p. 15*)

sanction (*n*): a measure used to punish a nation, often by restricting its trade (*p. 17*)

undocumented (*adj*): lacking official papers for legal residence (*p. 16*)

4 SEPTEMBER 4, 2017

CIVICS Government/Politics

**5-MINUTE
GUIDE TO**

The U.

The Constitution created our government. More than 200 years later, here's how it affects you.

ON SEPTEMBER 17, 1787, our nation's Founders created a document that continues to shape Americans' lives today. That day, delegates to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, signed the United States Constitution.

The Constitution is the supreme law of the land. It set up our federal (national) government, as well as the government's relationship with the states and citizens. Amendments—which were added later—spell out important changes, including guarantees of Americans' rights. Read on for a quick overview of the Constitution and how it works.

CREATING OUR GOVERNMENT

1 American colonists won independence from Great Britain in the Revolutionary War (1775-1783). After the war, the 13 original states established a country whose **federal government had limited power**.



2 Leaders called for a conference to form a stronger government. On May 25, 1787, delegates from most states met in Philadelphia for what would become known as the **Constitutional Convention**.

3 The delegates debated for nearly four months. Finally, 39 of the 55 delegates signed a **newly written Constitution**.



116

Total number of days it took to create the Constitution

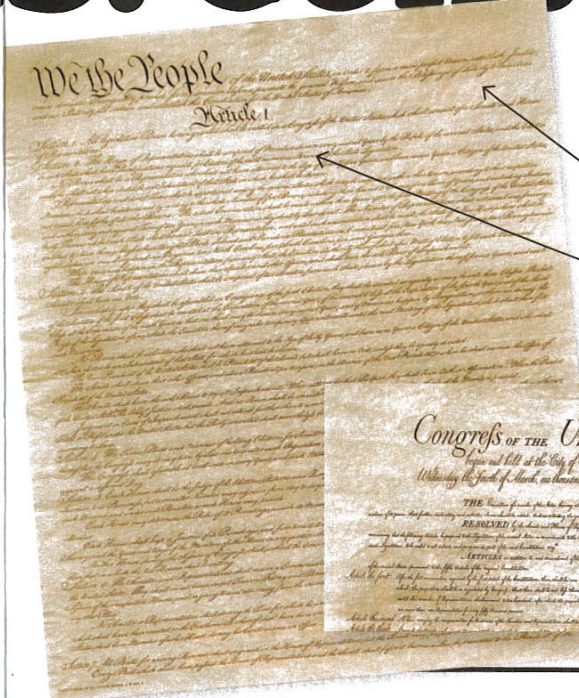
2

Number of Founders (John Adams and Thomas Jefferson) who didn't sign because they were in Europe

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U.S. Constitution



HOW TO READ IT

The Constitution has three main sections. Here's a breakdown of the fine print.

PREAMBLE This introduction describes the purpose of the document and the government.

ARTICLES Seven articles establish how the government is structured and how the Constitution can be changed.

AMENDMENTS

The Constitution has a total of 27 amendments. The first 10, added in 1791, are known as the Bill of Rights.



SEPARATION OF POWERS

The U.S. Constitution outlines a system of "checks and balances" to make sure that no one branch of the federal government has too much power.



LEGISLATIVE

Congress, which has two chambers: the Senate and the House of Representatives

Main job: Writes the nation's laws

Checks: The Senate must confirm the president's nominees for federal court and Cabinet positions.



EXECUTIVE

The president, vice president, and Cabinet

Main job: Enforces the nation's laws

Checks: The president can sign (approve) or veto (reject) laws passed by Congress and appoints federal judges, including Supreme Court justices.



JUDICIAL

The federal court system: the U.S. Supreme Court and more than 100 federal courts

Main job: Evaluates the nation's laws

Checks: The courts can overturn laws and executive orders they find unconstitutional.

Who Signed It?

Fifty-five delegates attended the Constitutional Convention. Meet three of them.



George Washington

The first to sign the Constitution, he became the nation's first president less than two years later, in 1789.



James Madison

He played such a key role that he's called the Father of the Constitution. He was later the fourth U.S. president.



Alexander Hamilton

He's famous now because of *Hamilton*, the hit Broadway musical about his life. In the 1780s, his essays won support for the Constitution.

CORE QUESTION Why might our nation's Founders have created a process for changing the Constitution?

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