

SS.7.C.3.11

Diagram the levels, functions and powers of the courts at the state and federal levels.

Also Assesses

SS.7.C.2.6 - Simulate the trial process and the role of juries in the administration of justice.

SS.7.C.3.11 Benchmark Clarification 1: Students will distinguish between the levels, functions, and powers of courts at the state and federal levels.

There are multiple levels, functions and powers of the courts at the state and federal levels of the government.

The State Court System

Most legal matters that arise within a state fall under the state court system. **Jurisdiction** (the authority to hear a case) within state and federal courts is determined by the individual constitutions. The U.S. Constitution determines jurisdiction for federal courts and the Florida Constitution determines jurisdiction for state courts. Most states have a three-leveled system similar to the federal court system, but in Florida there is a four-leveled court system.

The lowest courts in Florida are the **county courts**, the second level contains the **circuit courts**, the next level of courts in Florida that deal with appeals are the **Florida District Court of Appeals**, and the highest court is the **Florida Supreme Court**. Below is a brief description and review of each level of the Florida courts.

County Courts

County courts handle misdemeanors or less serious crimes. These courts handle minor cases such as traffic violations, disturbing the peace, or civil cases involving sums of money less than \$1,000. Municipal (city) courts are found in large cities and are divided into traffic, juvenile, and small claims courts. Small claims courts decide civil cases involving minor amounts of money. In small claims court there are two sides: (1) Plaintiffs (people filing lawsuits) and (2) Defendants (people being sued) who speak for themselves with no lawyers present.

Circuit Courts

More serious crimes (felonies) and civil cases involving large amounts of money (more than \$1000) are heard at the second level. Circuit courts, sometimes referred to as general trial courts, hear cases where defendants are accused of felonies such as murder, armed robbery, drug trafficking, and other major crimes. Trials in these courts may be held before a **jury**. It is the **judge's** responsibility to make sure that the trial is handled fairly and lawfully.

District Court of Appeals

The third leveled court in Florida is the District Court of Appeals. This is an **appellate court** and it reviews decisions made by trial courts. No trials are heard in appellate courts and there are no juries present. Instead, panel of judges decides cases by a majority vote.

Florida Supreme Court

The Florida Supreme Court is the highest court in the state. It is the responsibility of this court to review the decisions of appellate courts and to supervise all Florida courts. It is also the Florida Supreme Court's responsibility to interpret the Florida Constitution. The Florida

SS.7.C.3.10

Identify sources and types (civil, criminal, constitutional, military) of law.

SS.7.C.3.10 Benchmark Clarification 3: Students will compare civil, criminal, constitutional, military, and/or juvenile law as types of law.

There are different types of law in the United States. The first type is **civil law**, a law concerned with private relations between members of a community rather than criminal, military, or religious affairs. Civil law deals with issues that are not related to crime. For example, Article I, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution secures the right for authors and inventors to claim their writings and discoveries as their own exclusive work for a limited time. During that period of time, if another person copies and claims the author or inventor's work as their own, they may be sued.

As a type of law, **constitutional law** defines the powers between states, deals with the relationship between the government and states, and between government and citizens. **Criminal law** deals with crimes and the punishments associated with those crimes. Persons who break state **statutes** will be tried by the state, if it is a federal offense persons may go to a federal prison if convicted. Civil and criminal law have the most effect on citizens. **Juvenile law** deals with the actions and wellbeing of persons who are not yet adults. Juvenile law mainly deals with criminal law for people under the age of 18 because they do not have the same obligations, responsibilities, or powers as adult citizens. **Military law** consists of laws that have been developed to meet the needs of the military. Congress created a set of criminal laws called the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) that apply to all military members. This code includes military trial and punishment with several parallels to constitutional law.

civil law - law concerned with private affairs between members of a community rather than criminal, military, or religious affairs

constitutional law - the interpretation and implementation of the U.S. Constitution

criminal law - law that deals with crimes and the punishments associated with those crimes

juvenile law - law that deals with the actions and well-being of persons who are under the age of 18

military law - laws that have been developed to meet the needs of the military

statute - a law enacted at the state level



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SS.7.C.3.12

Analyze the significance and outcomes of landmark Supreme Court cases including, but not limited to, *Marbury v. Madison*, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, *Brown v. Board of Education*, *Gideon v. Wainwright*, *Miranda v. Arizona*, *In re Gault*, *Tinker v. Des Moines*, *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier*, *United States v. Nixon*, and *Bush v. Gore*.

SS.7.C.3.12 Benchmark Clarification 1: Students will use primary sources to assess the significance of these U.S. Supreme Court cases.

There have been several **landmark** U.S. Supreme Court **judicial opinions** that have significantly impacted American society and government. These cases include unique or important decisions based on certain events, facts and discoveries.

The landmark Supreme Court cases reviewed here are related to the protection of American civil liberties

Landmark Supreme Court Cases (related to civil liberties)		Primary Sources
Case	Significant Details	Passages from the Court Opinion Linked to the Significance of the Case
<i>Gideon v. Wainwright</i> (1963)	Clarence Gideon was arrested and charged in a Florida court for breaking and entering. He was unable to afford a lawyer and the court refused to appoint a lawyer to him. Gideon was forced to defend himself in court and the jury found him guilty. In his appeal to the Supreme Court, Gideon claimed the lower court violated his rights under the 6 th Amendment, which protects the rights of the accused and the equal protection clause of the 14 th Amendment that says that states must apply the law equally and cannot discriminate against citizens or groups of citizens.	“Lawyers in criminal courts are necessities, not luxuries.”
<i>Miranda v. Arizona</i> (1966)	The state of Arizona arrested Ernesto Miranda for kidnapping and the state court found him guilty. He was questioned about the charges when he was arrested without being advised of his right to speak with an attorney or any of his other legal rights. Miranda appealed his conviction of these charges to the Supreme Court claiming the police violated his rights under the portion of the 5th Amendment that protects the rights of the accused against self-incrimination .	“The prosecution may not use statements, ...from questioning initiated by law enforcement officers after a person has been taken into custody or otherwise deprived of his freedom of action in any significant way, unless it demonstrates the use of procedural safeguards effective to secure the Fifth Amendment's privilege against self-incrimination.”
<i>Tinker v. Des Moines</i> (1968)	John Tinker, his sister Mary Beth Tinker, and other students decided to wear black armbands to school in protest of the Vietnam War. The school adopted a policy prohibiting armbands. When the students arrived to school, they refused to remove their armbands and were suspended. The Tinkers claimed the school	“In wearing armbands, the petitioners were quiet and passive. They were not disruptive, and did not impinge upon the rights of others. In these circumstances, their conduct was within the protection of the Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment and the Due Process Clause



Landmark Supreme Court Cases (related to civil liberties)		Primary Sources
Case	Significant Details	Passages from the Court Opinion Linked to the Significance of the Case
	officials violated their 1 st Amendment right to freedom of speech.	of the Fourteenth.”
<i>United States v. Nixon</i> (1974)	In 1972, the offices of the Democratic National Committee in Washington D.C. were broken into. During the criminal investigation, a federal judge ordered President Nixon to turn over audio tapes of conversations recorded by Nixon about the break-in. Nixon refused to produce the tapes for the court by claiming that executive privilege (the belief that conversations between the President and his aides are protected from being revealed to anyone) allowed him to withhold the conversation tapes from the other government branches and protect the secrecy of the conversations. The United States government prosecuted (carry a legal action against a person to prove guilt or innocence) President Nixon and requested that the case and evidence against President Nixon be heard by the U.S. Supreme Court.	“Neither the doctrine of separation of powers nor the generalized need for confidentiality of high-level communications, without more, can sustain an absolute, unqualified Presidential privilege of immunity from judicial process under all circumstances.”
<i>Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier</i> (1987)	Students of Hazelwood East High School wrote and edited the school-sponsored newspaper. The school principal removed two articles from the issue and claimed they were inappropriate. Cathy Kuhlmeier and two other students brought the case to court because they believed the principal violated their 1 st Amendment rights of freedom of the press.	“First Amendment rights of students in the public schools are not automatically coextensive with the rights of adults in other settings, and must be applied in light of the special characteristics of the school environment. A school need not tolerate student speech that is inconsistent with its basic educational mission, even though the government could not censor similar speech outside the school.”
<i>Bush v. Gore</i> (2000)	During the 2000 presidential election, Al Gore and George W. Bush were close in their number of Electoral College votes and the Florida Supreme Court required that the votes in question be recounted by hand. These votes determined which candidate won Florida’s Electoral College votes and would ultimately win the presidential election. Bush requested to stop the recount and claimed it violated the equal protection clause of the 14 th Amendment that says that states must apply the law equally and cannot discriminate against citizens or groups of citizens. In this case, the inequality was linked to the fact that only certain ballots were to be recounted (those that did not give a clear idea of the voter’s choice) and not all votes.	“Because it is evident that any recount ...would be unconstitutional under the Equal Protection Clause, the Florida Supreme Court’s judgment ordering manual recounts is reversed. The Clause’s requirements apply to the manner in which the voting franchise is exercised. Having once granted the right to vote on equal terms, Florida may not, by later arbitrary and disparate treatment, value one person’s vote over that of another.”



SS.7.C.3.12

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SS.7.C.3.12 Benchmark Clarification 1: Students will use primary sources to assess the significance of these U.S. Supreme Court cases.

There have been several **landmark** Supreme Court cases that have significantly impacted American society and government and the Court has acted as an arbiter (someone with the power to settle disputes) in these instances. These cases include unique or important decisions based on certain events, facts and discoveries. We call these decisions **judicial opinions**.

The landmark Supreme Court cases reviewed here are related to the protection of Americans' **civil rights**.

Landmark Supreme Court Cases (related to civil rights)		Primary Sources
Case	Significant Details	Passages from the Court Opinion Linked to the Significance of the Case
<i>Marbury v. Madison</i> (1803)	In his last days of office, President John Adams appointed several federal judges and justices of the peace including John Marshall, Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court and William Marbury as Justice of the Peace for Washington D.C. Not all of the appointments were finalized before the end of the Adams presidency. President Thomas Jefferson informed his Secretary of State, James Madison, not to deliver the remaining appointments because they were no longer valid. Marbury (an Adams appointee) referred to an act of Congress that he believed would require that Madison make certain that Marbury would get to hold his government position. This case went to the Supreme Court to determine how these presidential actions should be handled.	<p>“To enable the Court to issue a mandamus to compel the delivery of the commission of a public office by the Secretary of State, it must be shown that it is an exercise of appellate jurisdiction, or that it be necessary to enable them to exercise appellate jurisdiction.</p> <p>It is the essential criterion of appellate jurisdiction that it revises and corrects the proceedings in a cause already instituted, and does not create the cause.</p> <p>The authority given to the Supreme Court by the act establishing the judicial system of the United States to issue writs of mandamus to public officers appears not to be warranted by the Constitution.</p> <p>It is ...the duty of the Judicial Department to say what the law is. Those who apply the rule to particular cases must, of necessity, ...interpret the rule. If two laws conflict with each other, the Court must decide on the operation of each.”</p>
<i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> (1896)	Under Louisiana law, whites and blacks were required to ride in separate railway cars. Although Homer Plessy was seven-eighths (7/8) white and one-eighth (1/8) African-American, he was required to ride in the “colored” car. Plessy was arrested for refusing to leave the “whites-only” railway car. He took his case to state court because he believed that this segregation	<p>”Legislation is powerless to eradicate racial instincts or to abolish distinctions based upon physical differences, and the attempt to do so can only result in accentuating the difficulties of the present situation. If the civil and political rights of both races be equal, one cannot be inferior to the other civilly or politically. If one race be inferior to the other</p>



Landmark Supreme Court Cases (related to civil rights)		Primary Sources
Case	Significant Details	Passages from the Court Opinion Linked to the Significance of the Case
	(separation based on the law) violated the 14 th Amendment equal protection clause , which says that states must apply the law equally and cannot discriminate against citizens or groups of citizens. The Louisiana judge, John Ferguson, ruled that Louisiana can enact segregations laws within the state. As a result, Plessy appealed this case to the United States Supreme Court.	socially, the Constitution of the United States cannot put them upon the same plane.”
<i>Brown v. Board (1954)</i>	African-American students were not allowed to attend the same public schools as white students because state laws permitted racial segregation (separation based on the law). Several parents of African-American children, including Oliver Brown, sued the Topeka, Kansas School Board claiming racial segregation (separation of people based on race) is unequal and violates the equal protection clause of the 14 th Amendment which says that states must apply the law equally and cannot discriminate against citizens or groups of citizens. The lower courts ruled in favor of the school system; Brown appealed this case to the United States Supreme Court.	“We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.”
<i>In re Gault (1966)</i>	At age 15, Gerald Gault was arrested for making an indecent phone call. Gault was denied the right of due process (established legal procedures) because he was a juvenile (someone under the age of 18). Gault was tried in juvenile court and sentenced to six years to the State Industrial School. Gault appealed this case to the United States Supreme Court.	”Appellants urge that the Arizona statute is unconstitutional under the Due Process Clause because, as construed by its Supreme Court, “there is no right of appeal from a juvenile court order.””



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SS.7.C.3.12 Benchmark Clarification 3: Students will recognize and/or apply constitutional principles and/or rights in relation to the relevant U.S. Supreme Court decisions.

Landmark Supreme Court Cases (related to civil liberties)	
Case	Constitutional Rights/Principles
<i>Gideon v. Wainwright</i> (1963)	This case dealt with rights of the accused which is protected by the 4 th , 5 th and 6 th Amendments: 4 th Amendment – no unreasonable searches and seizures 5 th Amendment – protection from double jeopardy, the right to due process, protection from self-incrimination 6 th Amendment – the right to an attorney, the right to a speedy and public trial, the right to be informed of criminal charges, the right to be confronted by witnesses accusing the person of committing a crime
<i>Miranda v. Arizona</i> (1966)	This case dealt with rights of the accused which is protected by the 4 th , 5 th and 6 th Amendments. 5 th Amendment - provision of due process and protection from self-incrimination .
<i>Tinker v. Des Moines</i> (1968)	This case dealt with the 1 st Amendment as applied in schools and to students. 1 st Amendment – freedom of speech, freedom of expression (symbolic speech)
<i>United States v. Nixon</i> (1974)	This judicial opinion in this case confirmed the concept of legal equality, which is that everyone is equal in the eyes of the law.
<i>Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier</i> (1987)	This case dealt with the 1 st Amendment as applied in schools and to students. 1 st Amendment – freedom of speech, freedom of expression, freedom of the press
<i>Bush v. Gore</i> (2000)	The judicial opinion on this case set a precedent related to U.S. Supreme Court and state (Florida) Supreme Court dealings with state elections.
<i>District of Columbia (DC) v. Heller</i> (2007)	This case dealt with the right to bear arms which is protected by the 2 nd Amendment.



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Landmark Supreme Court Cases (related to civil rights)	
Case	Constitutional Rights/Principles
<i>Marbury v. Madison</i> (1803)	This landmark case helped define the checks and balances system and established the Supreme Court's power of judicial review (the Supreme Court has the final say on what the Constitution means).
<i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> (1896)	This decision upheld the concept of separate but equal meaning that separate facilities for blacks and whites satisfied the Fourteenth (14 th) Amendment as long as they are "equal". 14 th Amendment (Equal Protection Clause) says that states must apply the law equally and cannot discriminate against citizens or groups of citizens.
<i>Brown v. Board</i> (1954)	The Supreme Court overruled <i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> . The Court decided that racial segregation (separation based on race) in public education is unconstitutional, according to the equal protection clause of the 14 th Amendment. 14 th Amendment (Equal Protection Clause) says that states must apply the law equally and cannot discriminate against citizens or groups of citizens.
<i>In re Gault</i> (1966)	This judicial opinion on this case confirmed that the proceedings of Mr. Gault's case in Juvenile Court were unconstitutional. The Court decided that criminal cases for juveniles must obey the equal protection clause of the 14 th Amendment. Minors have the same rights as adults. 14 th Amendment (Equal Protection Clause) says that states must apply the law equally and cannot discriminate against citizens or groups of citizens.

Brown v. Board of Education - U.S. Supreme Court case that determined that "separate but equal" segregation was not equal in public education

checks and balances - a principle of the federal government, according to the U.S. Constitution, that allows each branch of government to limit the power of the other branches

equal protection clause - the section of the Fourteenth Amendment that says that states must apply the law equally and cannot discriminate against citizens or groups of citizens

In re Gault - U.S. Supreme Court case that determined that juvenile court must comply with the Fourteenth Amendment

judicial opinion - judgment by a court

judicial review - the power of the U.S. courts to examine the laws or actions of the legislative and executive branches of the government and to determine whether such actions are consistent with the U.S. Constitution

juvenile - a person under the age of 18 years old.

Marbury v. Madison - U.S. Supreme Court case that established judicial review

Plessy v. Ferguson - U.S. Supreme Court case that determined that "separate but equal" segregation was not discrimination

separate but equal - the concept that having separate facilities for African-Americans and white people was not illegal as long as the facilities were equal, from the U.S. Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson*



SS.7.C.3.4

Identify the relationship and division of power between the federal and state governments.

SS.7.C.3.4 Benchmark Clarification 1: Students will define the system of federalism.

Federalism is a system of government where power is shared between the central government and the states. Under the Articles of Confederation, a **confederal system** of government existed – which means that there was no central government. This system proved to be weak and ineffective and a new constitution was written.

The United States Constitution was created around the principle of federalism – the idea that power is shared between the national, state and local governments. Federalism corrected the problems under the Articles of Confederation, all while maintaining a balance between central and state powers.

According to the Constitution, powers are set aside specifically for the national government (**enumerated** power, also known as **delegated** powers), for state governments only (**reserved** powers) or for both (**concurrent** powers).

concurrent powers - powers shared by the national, state, and/or local government

confederal system - a system of government where power is located with the independent states and there is little power in the central government

enumerated or delegated powers - the powers specifically named and assigned to the federal government or prohibited to be exercised by the states under the U.S. Constitution

federalism - a system of government in which power is divided and shared between national, state, and local government

reserved powers - powers that are not granted to the federal government that belong to (are reserved to) the states and the people



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SS.7.C.3.4

Identify the relationship and division of power between the federal and state governments.

SS.7.C.3.4 Benchmark Clarification 3: Students will compare concurrent powers, enumerated powers, reserved powers, and delegated powers as they relate to state and federal government.

Types of Powers	Definitions
Concurrent Powers	Concurrent powers are powers that are shared by the national and state governments. Examples of shared powers are: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The power to levy taxes (tax the people).2. The ability to borrow money.
Enumerated Powers	Enumerated (delegated) powers are powers that are specifically listed in the Constitution for the national government. Examples of powers granted to the national government are: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The power to raise and support an army and navy.2. The power to coin money.3. The power to declare war.
Reserved Powers	Reserved powers are powers that are given to the states by the Tenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution which states that any power not specifically granted to the national government is reserved to the states. Examples of powers that belong to the states: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The power to run elections.2. The power to establish schools.
Delegated Powers	Delegated (Enumerated) powers are powers that are specifically listed in the Constitution for the national government. Additional examples of power granted to the national government are: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The power to regulate trade and commerce.2. The power to establish rules for naturalization.3. The power to declare war.



SS.7.C.3.8

Analyze the structure, function and processes of the legislative, executive and judicial branches.

Also Assesses

SS.7.C.3.9 - Illustrate the lawmaking process at the local, state, and federal levels.

SS.7.C.3.8 Benchmark Clarification 4: Students will compare and contrast the lawmaking process at the local, state, and federal levels.

Lawmaking at the Local Level

It is the job of local governments to make communities better places to live. To accomplish this job, local lawmaking bodies have the power to pass ordinances. **Ordinances** are regulations that govern a local community. Ordinances may not conflict with state laws, called **statutes** or federal laws, called **acts**. Local law enforcement groups (like the police force or Sherriff's deputies) are in charge of enforcing both ordinances and state statutes.

Lawmaking at the State Level

At the state level, the process of how a bill becomes a law can be difficult. Each **bill** begins as an idea. An idea for a law can come from **state legislators**, the **governor**, or even ordinary **citizens**.

An idea once proposed in the state legislature is called a bill. Bills can be proposed in either the **state house of representatives** or the **state senate**. The house or senate **committee** that the bill is assigned to will research more information related to the bill. There are several different types of committees each with their own set of responsibilities. Every state legislator serves on one or more committees.

After the committee completes its research and discusses the bill, the committee decides if the bill should move forward. If the committee agrees to move the bill forward, the bill moves to the full house of **Congress** where the bill was first introduced for debate and vote. If that legislative chamber votes to keep the bill (for example, the state house of representatives) it then moves to the other legislative chamber (for example, the state senate) for more debate and discussion. Finally, the other legislative chamber will vote on the bill. If members of that chamber vote to keep the bill, the governor will then be asked to sign the bill into law.

State legislatures have various committees similar to the federal Congress. The committees study bills, hold hearings, and revise bills if necessary. Both state houses (the House of Representatives and the Senate) must approve a bill and the governor must sign it before it becomes law.

Lawmaking at the Federal Level

At the federal level, the process of how a bill becomes a law can be difficult. Each bill begins as an idea. An idea for a law can come from **U.S. Representatives**, **Senators**, the **president**, or even ordinary citizens.



SS.7.C.3.13

Compare the constitutions of the United States and Florida.

SS.7.C.3.13 Benchmark Clarification 2: Students will recognize the basic outline of the U.S. and Florida constitutions (both have articles, amendments, and preambles).

After the U.S. Constitution was ratified (approved by the states), the states wrote or amended their own state constitutions. Article IV, Section 4 of the U.S. Constitution states: “The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government”. Because the U.S. Constitution served as a guideline, many state constitutions look very similar to the national constitution, including the Florida Constitution. The U.S. and Florida constitutions both have a preamble (an introduction that states the purpose and goals of government), articles (sections that describe the powers and functions of the government) and amendments (changes that have been made to the constitution over time). While the basic outline of the U.S. Constitution and the Florida Constitution are the same, the contents of these documents are very different.

Below is a brief comparison of the major similarities and differences of the two documents:

United States Constitution	Florida Constitution
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Begins with “We the People” – shows that the federal government gets its power from the citizens• Shorter than the Florida Constitution• Seven articles• 1 (large) page• Contains a Bill of Rights (enumerated list of rights for the people)• 27 amendments• Written as a “living document” to be interpreted over time.• Contains a “Supremacy Clause” stating the Constitution is the highest law of the land.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Begins with “We the People” – shows that the state government gets its power from the citizens• Longer than the U.S. Constitution• 12 articles• 80 pages• Contains the Florida Declaration of Rights (enumerated list of the rights for the people that includes many of the same rights as those found in the U.S. Bill of Rights)• Written as a “living document” to be interpreted and changed. There are many amendments to the Florida Constitution that are very specific. The Florida Constitution is a living document that changes with the times.• Addresses public education, motor vehicles, and elections• Deals with day-to-day issues that impact state residents

amendment - change to the U.S. Constitution

Bill of Rights - the first ten amendments of the U.S. Constitution

Florida Declaration of Rights - the part of the Florida Constitution that lists the basic rights guaranteed to all citizens who live in the state

supremacy clause - the clause that states that the U.S. Constitution is the supreme law of the land, and that national laws are supreme over state laws found in Article VI



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SS.7.C.3.13

Compare the constitutions of the United States and Florida.

SS.7.C.3.13 Benchmark Clarification 4: Students will recognize the U.S. Constitution as the supreme law of the land.

According to Article VI (Six) of the U.S. Constitution, the U.S. Constitution is the final authority for our government. This Article contains the **supremacy clause**, which says that the U.S. Constitution is the “supreme law of the land”. That is, there is no law that can go above the U.S. Constitution or the U.S. government. If a local or state law conflicts with a national law, that law is struck down and the national law is the law that remains in place.

supremacy clause - the clause that states that the U.S. Constitution is the supreme law of the land, and that national laws are supreme over state laws, found in Article VI



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SS.7.C.2.8

Identify America's current political parties, and illustrate their ideas about government.

SS.7.C.2.8 Benchmark Clarification 1: Students will compare current political parties' ideas about government.

A **political party** is a group of citizens or voters with similar views on public issues who work to put their ideas into government action and who work together to elect a candidate. One of the jobs of political parties is to nominate candidates to run for office. That is, to select them to represent their particular political party in an election. Parties choose a **candidate** who agrees with their beliefs and try to persuade voters to support their candidate running for office. Competing political parties give voters a choice among candidates and ideas. To know where a party stands on the major issues, the voters can look at the party's platform. A **platform** is a series of statements expressing the party's principles, beliefs, and positions on issues. Each individual part of a platform is called a plank. The platform communicates to voters what the political party plans to do if it wins. (Examples: Platform Issue = Healthcare; Plank = Agreeing/Disagreeing with universal healthcare)

The United States has had a long tradition of a **two party system**. This means that two major political parties have controlled elections and have the most participation by voters. The two major political parties today are the Democrats and the Republicans.

Political Party	Year Founded (Created)	Core Beliefs
Democratic	1828	The federal government should take a more active role in people's lives, especially those in need. Democrats are not opposed to raising taxes to pay for social programs.
Republican	1854	The federal government should take a limited role in people's lives. Republicans favor lowering taxes and less government spending

Because these two major parties have the most support from the public, it has made it nearly impossible for **third parties** to win elections. Third parties are political parties that often form on the basis of one or a few issues. These issues might be related to a foreign or domestic concern and, because the concern is so particular, it is difficult to gain popular support. Third party candidates have never won a presidential election and rarely win election to other offices. Below are some examples of current third parties that exist in the United States.

Political Party	Year Founded (Created)	Core Beliefs
Communist Party	1919	The federal government should control all production and supply of goods and the workers should control their own lives and destinies.
Libertarian Party	1971	The only purpose of the federal government is to protect freedom; this party believes in individual freedom.