

Checks and Balances

Week 1: Government and the Executive Branch

What is a [government](#)? Let's take a look at the definition of government. Oh, not in today's dictionary. Let's travel back in history and use Noah Webster's [American Dictionary of the English Language, 1828](#):

Government, n. Direction; regulation. These precepts will serve for the government of our conduct.

1. Control; restraint . . .
2. The exercise of authority; direction, and restraint exercised over the actions of men in communities, societies, or states; the administration of public affairs, according to established constitution, laws, and usages . . .
3. The exercise of authority by a parent . . .
4. The system of polity in a state; that form of fundamental rules and principles by which a nation or state is governed, or by which individual members of a body politic are to regulate their social actions; a constitution, either written or unwritten, by which the rights and duties of citizens and public officers are prescribed and defined . . .

Discussion

Let's discuss some of the great principles found in these definitions.

1. Where does government first start? That's right—in the direction, regulation, control, and restraint in our own life.
2. Where should the precepts for our own self-government come from? Right again—God's Word! Parents have the responsibility to teach and train their children in these precepts (Deut. 6:7) and govern their children well.

“The most perfect maxims and examples for regulating your social conduct and domestic economy, as well as the best rules of morality and religion, are to be found in the Bible . . . The moral principles and precepts found in the scriptures ought to form the basis of all our civil constitutions and laws. These principles and precepts have truth, immutable truth, for their foundation . . . All the evils which men suffer from vice, crime, ambition, injustice, oppression, slavery and war, proceed from their despising or neglecting the precepts contained in the Bible . . . For instruction then in social, religious and civil duties resort to the Scriptures for the best precepts.”

Noah Webster¹

Christian self-government begins internally with our thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, and habits. Our self-government shows externally through our actions and words.

“He knows not how to rule a kingdome, that cannot manage a Province; nor can he wield a Province, that cannot order a City; nor he order a City, that knows not how to Regulate a Village; nor he a Village, that cannot guide a Family, nor can that man Govern well a Family that knows not how to Gouverne himself: neither can any Govern himself unless his reason be Lord, Will and Appetite her Vassals: nor can Reason rule unless her selfe be ruled by God, and (wholy) be obedient to Him.”

Hugo Grotius²

Branches and Levels of Government

Federal Government

The federal government has [three branches](#). These three branches are the executive branch, the legislative branch, and the judicial branch.

The men who founded our nation had the foresight to realize that if one person has all of the control and authority, it could leave the door open for an abuse of power. They wanted to form a system that divided the power evenly between the three branches. They felt that this would provide a system of [checks and balances](#); if one branch acted in a way that the other branches felt was against the Constitution, another branch could push for the decision to be amended.

Let's take a look at each individual branch and discuss its responsibilities.

The Executive Branch

The executive branch is led by the President of the United States. The biggest of the three, this branch signs the laws that are passed in Congress, makes sure that the laws are enforced, is in charge of national defense, and more! Let's take a look at who makes up this branch of the government.

President

Do you know how we decide who our next President will be? We have an [election](#). The President of the United States is determined by the votes of the [Electoral College](#). Sometimes it is hard to understand how the [Electoral College](#) works, but the simplified explanation is this: Each state is given a particular number of electoral votes, depending on the number of representatives the state has in Congress. Some states may have fifty or more electoral votes, while other states might have fewer than ten votes.

When we vote during a Presidential election, our votes are tallied with all of the other votes in our state. After the state determines who won the most votes in that state, its electoral votes are given to the nominee who won the majority of the votes. Once the electoral votes are all added up, we know who will be our President for the next four years. The President is allowed to serve two four-year terms in his lifetime.

There are certain qualifications that a Presidential candidate must have in order to run for office.