

## Unit 1

# Laws of the Land



*The Adoption of the Constitution, J. B. Stearns*

In this unit, you will learn about the U.S. Constitution, the document that is the basis for the structure of the government of the United States. Chapter 1 focuses on the basic organization of the government and the history behind it. You will hear people of various ages and backgrounds speaking about why they do or do not vote, and you will hear a lecture about the three branches of the U.S. government. In Chapter 2, you will learn about the Bill of Rights, which are the first 10 amendments, or changes, to the Constitution. The interviews in Chapter 2 are about topics in the Constitution that often create disagreement among Americans. The lecture discusses freedom of speech.

## Contents

In Unit 1, you will listen to and speak about the following topics.

Chapter 1 The Foundations of Government	Chapter 2 Constitutional Issues Today
<b>Interview 1</b> Reasons for Voting or Not Voting <b>Interview 2</b> Voter Turnout <b>Lecture</b> The Structure of the U.S. Federal Government	<b>Interview 1</b> Important Constitutional Rights <b>Interview 2</b> A Controversial Right <b>Lecture</b> The First Amendment

## Skills

In Unit 1, you will practice the following skills.

<b>L Listening Skills</b> Listening for different ways of saying <i>yes</i> and <i>no</i> Listening for tone of voice Listening for main ideas Listening for the plan of a lecture Listening for specific information Listening for stressed words Listening for main ideas and details	<b>S Speaking Skills</b> Previewing the topic Examining graphics Retelling what you have heard Sharing your opinion Asking and answering questions Sharing your knowledge Understanding humor about the topic Role-playing Predicting what you will hear
<b>V Vocabulary Skills</b> Reading and thinking about the topic Building background knowledge and vocabulary Examining vocabulary in context Guessing vocabulary from context	<b>N Note Taking Skills</b> Using information the lecturer puts on the board Taking good lecture notes Understanding numbers, dates, and time expressions Using symbols and abbreviations Using a map to organize your notes Conducting a survey

## Learning Outcomes

**Prepare** and **deliver** an oral presentation on an American president

# Chapter 1

## The Foundations of Government



The Great Seal of the United States

### 1 Getting Started

In this section, you will read about the foundations, or beginnings, of the United States government. You will also listen to a conversation about some important symbols that are found on the Great Seal of the United States. The seal is used on passports and other official government documents.

#### 1 Reading and thinking about the topic **V** **S**

Reading and thinking about a topic before you hear about it helps you to review what you already know and to get ready to listen to new information.

**A** Read the following passage.

The United States has had its system of government for more than 200 years. This system is based on a number of important principles.

First, the United States is a *republic*. This means that the head of the government is a president, not a king or queen. Second, the United States is a *democracy*. In other words, representatives chosen by the people have the power to make decisions. Citizens of the United States have the right to vote for their president and other representatives in regular, free elections. *Federalism* is another important principle. It means that there are different levels of government: the federal (national) level, the state level, and the local level.

According to the Constitution, the federal government has three branches: the legislative branch (Congress); the executive branch (the president and vice president); and the judicial branch (the court system). Under a system of *checks and balances*, each branch has separate responsibilities, but the branches work together to govern the country. The men who wrote the Constitution designed the government this way so that no branch would have too much power.

**B** Answer the following questions according to the information in the passage.

1. What are three principles that form the foundation of the U.S. government?
2. What is one important right that U.S. citizens have?
3. What is the purpose of the system of checks and balances?

**C** Read these questions and share your responses with a partner.

1. How is the U.S. government similar to or different from other governments that you know about?
2. In the United States, people vote for their president and representatives. How are leaders chosen in other countries you know about?

## 2 Building background knowledge on the topic

**A** The American flag is one of the most important symbols of the country. Read the statements and guess whether they are *T* (true) or *F* (false). Share your guesses with a partner. Then look at the answer key on the next page.



- \_\_\_ 1. The flag is usually displayed from sunrise to sunset.
- \_\_\_ 2. The flag can only be displayed on national holidays.
- \_\_\_ 3. When it is carried, the flag should be held flat, or horizontal.
- \_\_\_ 4. The flag flies at half-mast (halfway up) when the country has experienced a loss.
- \_\_\_ 5. American citizens are required to salute the flag during ceremonies.
- \_\_\_ 6. The flag should never be allowed to touch the floor.
- \_\_\_ 7. Folding the flag indicates extreme danger.
- \_\_\_ 8. Very old flags should be disposed of by burning them.
- \_\_\_ 9. The flag should be folded in quarters to be put away.
- \_\_\_ 10. The flag is never used on postage stamps.

**B** The answers for “Building background knowledge on the topic” are at the bottom of this page. Look at the answers and then discuss the following questions.

1. Did any of the answers surprise you? Why?
2. What do you think are the reasons for these customs?

### 3 Previewing the topic S L

*Previewing* means looking at pictures or other visual materials, skimming handouts that your teacher gives you, or perhaps reviewing key vocabulary about a topic before listening to people talk about it. Doing these things will prepare you for listening and will improve your ability to understand what you hear.



**A** You will hear a conversation about some symbols that appear on the back of a U.S. one-dollar bill. Look at the numbered symbols in this picture. Find the same symbols in the larger picture on page 3. What are they? Can you guess what each symbol represents?

**B** Now listen to the conversation and write the number of each symbol next to what it represents in the list below.

- \_\_\_ a. The national symbol of the United States
- \_\_\_ b. The 13 original states of the United States
- \_\_\_ c. The fact that America is a country with a strong foundation
- \_\_\_ d. The fact that the United States is one nation made of many states and many people
- \_\_\_ e. The year that the United States became independent from Britain

## 2 Real-Life Voices

In this section, you will hear five people of different ages and backgrounds talk about voting. First you will hear Manuel, Mary, Kelly, and Ralph discuss why they do or do not vote. Then you will hear Robert talking about voter turnout (the percentage of eligible voters who vote in an election).

### BEFORE THE INTERVIEWS

#### 1 Building background knowledge and vocabulary **V** **S**

Learning background information and vocabulary related to a topic can help you understand the topic better when you listen to people talking about it.



**A** The following words and expressions are used to talk about voting. Work in a small group and match the words with their meanings. Check your answers in a dictionary if necessary.

- |                    |       |   |
|--------------------|-------|---|
| 1. candidate       | _____ | <b>a.</b> to compete for votes                                |
| 2. compulsory      | _____ | <b>b.</b> a person who is nominated for an election           |
| 3. election        | _____ | <b>c.</b> required or obligatory                              |
| 4. go to the polls | _____ | <b>d.</b> to go to a voting station                           |
| 5. issue           | _____ | <b>e.</b> an important topic                                  |
| 6. party           | _____ | <b>f.</b> a political group                                   |
| 7. run for office  | _____ | <b>g.</b> the process of choosing a government representative |

**B** Form a group. Read this passage about voting in the United States. Use vocabulary from Step A to fill in the blanks. You may have to change the form of a noun or verb. Then check your answers with the members of your group.

All U.S. citizens have the right to vote in national (1) \_\_\_\_\_ at the age of 18. Voting is also called (2) “\_\_\_\_\_.” In the United States, voting is voluntary, not (3) \_\_\_\_\_. Voters choose the (4) \_\_\_\_\_ they support and vote for that person on Election Day.

Voters may make their decision for different reasons. One reason might be that they support a particular (5) \_\_\_\_\_ (Democratic, Republican, etc.). Another reason might be that they feel strongly about a particular (6) \_\_\_\_\_, such as the economy, crime, or freedom of expression, and they want to express their opinion by electing the candidate who agrees with them.

In most cases, there are only two candidates in a U.S. election: a Democrat and a Republican. Sometimes, a third candidate may (7) \_\_\_\_\_, but third-party candidates almost never win in the United States.

## 2 Examining graphics S V

Graphics are information that is presented visually in graphs, diagrams, charts, and tables. Graphs show different kinds of numerical information about a topic, including facts, trends (changes over time), and comparisons. For example, a graph about voting might show:

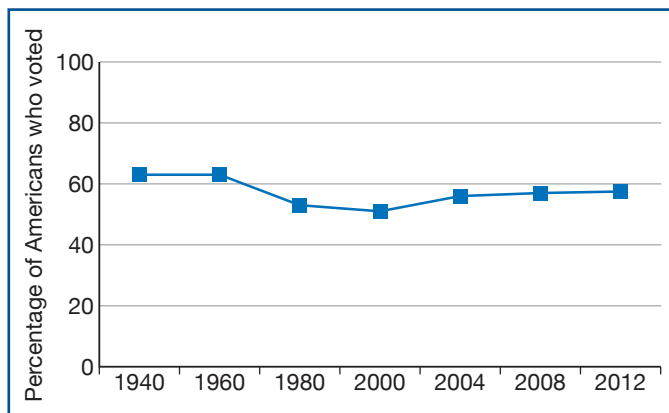
**a fact:** the number of people or percentage of the population that votes

**a trend:** an increase or decrease in the number of people who vote

**a comparison:** the difference in voting practices between one year and another

The graph shows voter turnout between 1940 and 2012. Work with a partner and study the graph. Then discuss the questions that follow.

- Does this graph show some facts, a trend, a comparison, or all of these? Explain your answer.
- In what years was voter turnout the highest?
- What happened between 1960 and 1980?
- Approximately what percentage of people voted in 2008 and 2012?
- Does any information in the graph surprise you? Why or why not?



Source: Federal Election Commission

## INTERVIEW 1 Reasons for Voting or Not Voting

### 1 Examining vocabulary in context

Here are some words and phrases from the interview with Manuel, Mary, Kelly, and Ralph, printed in **bold** and given in the context in which you will hear them. They are followed by definitions.

It's still not **convenient** for a lot of people: *easy to do*

I just **couldn't make it**: *couldn't go somewhere as planned*

You know, voting gives you a **voice**: *an opportunity to express yourself*

When you vote, you get to say . . . who can help more in **dealing with** the country's problems: *trying to solve*

I think voting is a **civic duty**: *a responsibility of a citizen*


I read that in 34 countries, voting is an **obligation**: *something you must do*

Actually, I don't **trust** most politicians: *believe in*

### 2 Listening for different ways of saying yes and no

Speakers don't always answer Yes / No questions with those exact words. Here are some other ways of saying yes and no.

<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<i>Sure.</i>	<i>I would have, but . . .</i>
<i>Definitely.</i>	<i>Well, not usually.</i>
<i>Of course (I do)!</i>	<i>Of course not!</i>
<i>Absolutely.</i>	<i>Not really.</i>
<i>Yeah. (informal)</i>	<i>Nope. / Nah. (informal)</i>


 **A** Listen to the interview. The interviewer asks four people if they vote. Do they answer yes or no? Match the speakers with their reasons.

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| ___ 1. Manuel | <b>a.</b> Yes, because voting gives you a voice.           |
| ___ 2. Mary   | <b>b.</b> No, because there is no holiday on Election Day. |
| ___ 3. Kelly  | <b>c.</b> No, because you can't trust most politicians.    |
| ___ 4. Ralph  | <b>d.</b> Yes, because voting is a civic duty.             |

**B** Work with a partner and compare answers. Then discuss whether you agree or disagree with the reasons the speakers give for voting or not voting.



### 3 Listening for tone of voice **L**

-  Listen again to excerpts from the interview. Circle the response that describes the speaker's tone. Compare answers with a partner.

Excerpt	Speaker	Tone of voice		
1	Manuel	unsure	enthusiastic	angry
2	Mary	afraid	certain	frustrated
3	Kelly	furious	excited	bored
4	Ralph	hopeless	interested	passionate

#### INTERVIEW 2 Voter Turnout

### 1 Examining vocabulary in context **V**

Here are some words and phrases from the interview with Robert, printed in bold and given in the context in which you will hear them. They are followed by definitions.

Voting is becoming **increasingly** important: *more and more*

There are many problems that need to be **addressed**: *thought about, dealt with*

The environment is definitely a **critical** topic: *important*

Global warming is a huge problem, and we can't go on **ignoring** it: *paying no attention to*

Surely we have to make it a **priority** to get people back to work: *our main concern*

The political parties are **sharply** divided: *extremely*

### 2 Listening for main ideas **L S**

Main ideas are the important points that a speaker wants to make. In an interview, you have to listen carefully to the questions as well as the answers in order to understand the main ideas. For example:


**Interviewer:** *What problems are people concerned about?*

**Robert:** *Well, they're worried about things that affect them personally.*

One of Robert's main ideas is: People are worried about things that affect them personally.

**A** The following questions are about the main ideas in the interview with Robert. Read the questions before you listen.

1. Does Robert think that voting is important?
  - a. Yes, he does.
  - b. He's not sure.
  - c. No, he doesn't.
  
2. Why does Robert think more people vote nowadays?
  - a. Politicians are more popular than they used to be.
  - b. Problems today are more serious than they were in the past.
  - c. People are more aware of the issues today.
  
3. What is the most important issue, in Robert's opinion?
  - a. crime
  - b. the environment
  - c. homelessness
  
4. Which other issues does Robert think are important? Check (✓) two issues.
  - a. education
  - b. equality
  - c. the economy
  - d. health care
  - e. taxes
  - f. immigration

 **B** Now listen to the interview. Check (✓) all of Robert's responses to the questions.

**C** Work with a partner and compare answers. Then discuss the following question: Of the issues listed above, which ones are also important to you? Explain your response.

## AFTER THE INTERVIEWS

### 1 Retelling what you have heard

Using your own words to retell what you have heard is an important skill. It helps you check your understanding and review important ideas and vocabulary.

Work in groups of five students. Each member of the group should play the role of one of the speakers from the interviews (Manuel, Mary, Kelly, Ralph, or Robert). Take turns explaining why you do or do not vote. Ask each other questions about their reasons.