

Government questions

Consider the policies which underpin these topics.

Consider the legal processes by which to bring about change on these topics.

1. Is the Confederate Flag a symbol of heritage or a symbol of hate?
2. Should Native American nicknames/mascots be banned from high school, college, and professional sports teams?
3. Should Supreme Court members be elected by the people instead of appointed by the President [with Senate approval]?
4. Should the Federal Government be allowed to regulate Major League Baseball [and other professional leagues] by enacting uniform penalties for steroid use?
5. Should the practice of physician-assisted suicide be allowed?
6. Is file-sharing a crime and should those who share files and those who create file-sharing software be criminally prosecuted? What of dvd/blu-ray?

7. It is currently a law that you can be forbidden Federally subsidized students loans for college [such as Stafford and Perkins loans] if you have a prior conviction for drug use, drug possession, or drug dealing. Do you think that this should remain a law?
8. Many states have hate crime legislation. Under such laws, crimes motivated solely because of someones race, sex, religion, or sexual orientation are given stiffer and mandatory penalties. How do you feel about those types of laws?
9. Should the Federal, State, and Local governments rebuild the New Orleans area and encourage people to return in large numbers? (post-Hurricane Katrina)
10. Is it good policy for schools to ban the sale of soft drinks, candy, and other questionably nutritious snacks in order to promote better eating habits?
11. How do you feel about the rise of gated, police-monitored communities? Should they be allowed or should construction of those types of communities be stopped?

12. What are your opinions regarding beach-front property and private beaches? Should all beaches be public to allow access to the ocean, or do you believe that some beaches can be bought for private use? How might eminent domain laws apply?
13. As a means to preventing terrorist activity, do you have a problem with the Federal government having access to your e-mail account, library records, and other personal information?
14. Should it be legal to give the death penalty to someone who commits a crime as a minor [under 18 years old]?
15. A *much* higher percentage of Australians (88 percent) vote in elections than Americans (about 50%). Many believe that this is due to the fact that Australians who do not vote must pay a fine, typically \$20-\$50. Should the United States enact similar measures? What (this or something else?) should be done to encourage voting?
16. Some have proposed that the Federal government should set an age restriction [21 years old] on when a person can apply for a credit card. Do you believe that this legislation should be passed?

17. Should taxpayers finance the building of a light-rail system to lesson traffic in our major cities?
18. Are todays video games too violent? To what extent – if at all – is this a source of other problems?
19. Should the United States adopt English as its official language?
20. Do you believe that the government should do more to limit immigration [legal and/or illegal] from Mexico, or should we just open the border?
21. Should the Electoral College be outlawed and replaced with a system where the Presidential candidate with the most votes is elected?
22. Are professional athletes overpaid, or is this simply a situation where highly skilled and scarce athletes are paid according to supply and demand?
23. Should the United States attempt to spread the principles of democracy throughout the World, or should we let the other countries of the World decide for themselves?
24. Should drug companies be forced to limit the price of potentially life-saving drugs so the average person can afford them?

25. Are television and/or print advertisements exploitative in nature? Do they take advantage of consumers?
26. Should makers of unhealthy foods targeting children be forced to change packaging that attracts young people?
27. Should there be a Constitutional amendment that allows naturalized citizens to be president or vice president?
28. Some shopping malls across the United States are not allowing people under age 18 to enter on Friday and Saturday nights without parental supervision. What are your opinions regarding that policy?
29. As a means to combating obesity, should the United States enact a tax on fast food and other unhealthy foods?
30. As a way to curb drunk driving, should all cars have breathalyzer machines installed? (Some legislators in New York have proposed this requirement.)
31. Should public companies (those whose stock is publicly traded) have to disclose the pay and total compensation of their CEOs and other high-ranking officials?

32. In your opinion, should September 11th be made a national holiday or national day of mourning?
33. What is your opinion regarding merit pay for teachers? When students do well on standardized tests, should the teachers of those students receive merit-based raises?
34. Should standardized tests [SAT, ACT] continue to be used as a measurement of student achievement and an important part of the college admission process?

The Importance of a Written Constitution

- Is the U.S. Constitution a living document that adapts to the times or does it mean today exactly what it meant when it was written? Explain and give examples.
- If the Constitution needs to be changed, how should that be done – through court decisions, or by amendments? Which is the preferred/best process, and under what circumstances?
- The U.S. Constitution is the oldest national Constitution still in use. Since 1787, many other nations have written constitutions, only to see them fail. What are some of the strengths of the U.S. Constitution that has allowed it to survive the test of time? (*Related: Would you consider the Civil War as evidence of the Constitution's success or failure?*)
- The U.S. Constitution is considered a milestone in the protection of individual rights. However, it was by no means perfect when it was written. What was lacking in the Constitution when it was written in 1787? Does it lack anything now? If so, what changes do you think are needed?

Separation of Powers

- Why is it important to not concentrate too much power in one branch of government? Give examples of what might happen if there were too much power in the Executive Branch, the Legislative Branch, or the Judicial Branch. Give examples of when it might be necessary for one branch to exercise more power than another branch.
- In a parliamentary system, like England's, the executive and legislative powers are often closely interconnected. In a presidential system, like the United States', these powers are separated. What are some of the pros and cons of each system?
- Some have suggested that having a closer working relationship between the branches of government would end "gridlock" and lead to a more efficient government. Others have argued that the separation of powers was specifically created to "slow down" the pace of government to ensure cool deliberation and not emotional reactions. What is your opinion?
- Does the separation of powers result in reasonable deliberation, or excessive delay?

Federalism

- The framers of the Constitution wanted to create a government that was neither too strong nor too weak. Reflecting upon modern-day government, to what extent do you think that the framers succeeded? Explain and give examples.
- The United States is a very different nation today than it was when the Constitution was written in 1787. In an age when technology allows us to be in constant contact, why is it still necessary for people in the U.S. to have state government and a national government?
- Is federalism still relevant? Explain and give examples.
- Although the Constitution created a federal government of limited powers, the Supreme Court has ruled that the government has certain "implicit" (implied) powers that are necessary for it to function properly. Do you agree with such an interpretation of the Constitution?
- Looking at Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution (the explicit powers of the federal government), what, if any, are some "implicit" powers that you think the federal government needs in order to be effective?
- What "implicit" powers should the national government have to wage the War on Terrorism?

- Are there areas which you believe the federal government should be more powerful?
- Should health care be a national or state responsibility?
- Should education be a national or state responsibility?
- Should border security be in the hands of the state or the federal government?

Individual Rights

- It has been more than 200 years since the American Revolution was fought in response to the British government's infringing upon individual rights. Even today, Americans are very protective of their rights. Why do you think that this is so?
- Some have argued that the rights protected in the First Amendment to the Constitution are the most important because they are listed first. What right contained in the Bill of Rights is most important to you? Please explain why.
- What do you see as the proper role of the Courts in protecting individual rights?
- When, if ever, should there be restraints on the role of the Courts in regard to individual rights?
- Should the Courts protect individual rights even if that means risking public safety to interfere with the military's efforts to combat terrorism?
- What is the proper balance between individual liberties and public safety?



Cartoon by Steve Sack of the Star Tribune, Minneapolis, Minnesota

