

GOVT2306: Texas Government

Lecture 2: What is Government? What is Politics?

Instructor: Tom Hanna, Summer 2025

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Agenda and Announcements

Agenda

- Today:
 - What is government? What is politics? Where does federalism fit?
 - Discussion: Experiences with Texas government
 - Questions
- Next class (Monday):
 - Texas Background: History, Geography, People, and Culture
 - State vs. Federal: dividing the responsibilities
- Tuesday:
 - US vs Texas Constitution
 - Texas culture activity/discussion

Assignments Due

- Journals July 14
 - Prologue: Texas Political Roots
 - Chapter 1: Texas Political Culture and Diversity
- Journals July 15:

- Chapter 2: Texas in the Federal System
- Chapter 3: The Texas Constitution in Perspective
- Study Guide Module 1
 - Due July 15*
 - Quiz July 15 in class

Texas Government: Introduction to Government and Federalism

introduction to Government

Introduction to Government: Short discussion

Before stepping on the campus today, what was the last time that politics made a direct difference in your life?

- not just a feeling

What is government / politics?

- Expensive or involves large amounts of money
- Distant
- Involves politicians or campaigns
- involves voting or decision making
- Involves rights
- National borders
- Controversial

What is politics: State and local (mostly)



Figure 1: Houston Public Works

What is politics: Federal, state and local



Figure 2: Metro rail

What is politics: Federal, state and local



Figure 3: HCC Central Campus

What is politics?

- Not distant
- immediate,right here
- touches everything
- direct impacts are constant
- involves all of us
- It can be expensive, but it's not always about money

Politics is powerful

- Immense power to achieve good ends

Politics is powerful

- Immense power to achieve good ends
- Immense power to do incredible harm

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Politics is powerful

Why does politics have such power to cause harm?

Introduction to Government

To really understand government and politics we first need to know what those things are.

What is government?

What is government?

- Government is what it does
- Government is something else more fundamental

What does government do?

Collective action: organizing individuals to achieve a common goal

Is government the only group that engages in collective action?

Is government the only group that engages in collective action?

Is government the only group that engages in collective action?

- Family
- Churches
- Charities
- Businesses!
- Community organizations

What makes government different?

What makes government different from other organizations?

What makes government different?



Figure 4: Severe Penalties

What makes government different?

- police force
- prison system
- military
- enforcement backed by violent, armed force

Formal definition of government

Government is the organization that has the **exclusive right to use organized coercive force** in a given territory that is commonly perceived as **legitimate**.

Formal definition of government

- organized
- coercive
- violent
- legitimate

What is politics?

Politics is the process of making collective decisions in the context of government. Making collective decisions about why, how, and when to use coercive force.

Why limit government?

Why limit government?

Because government is violent force!

How do we limit government in the US system?

- By defining its powers

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- By defining its powers
- By setting limits to its powers
- By guaranteeing rights to individuals ...

But how do those paper guarantees stand up to the reality of violent force?

How do we limit government in the US system?

By dividing the power among competing groups with different agendas

Dividing power

- Separation of powers
- Checks and balances

Federal level

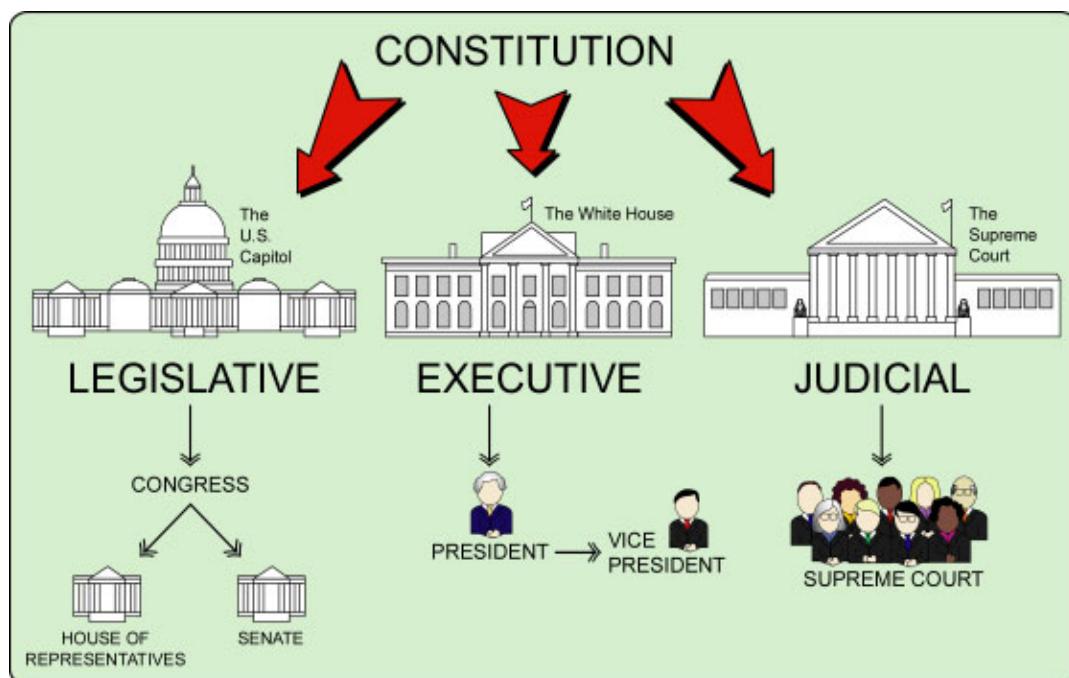


Figure 5: Separation of Powers

Federal level

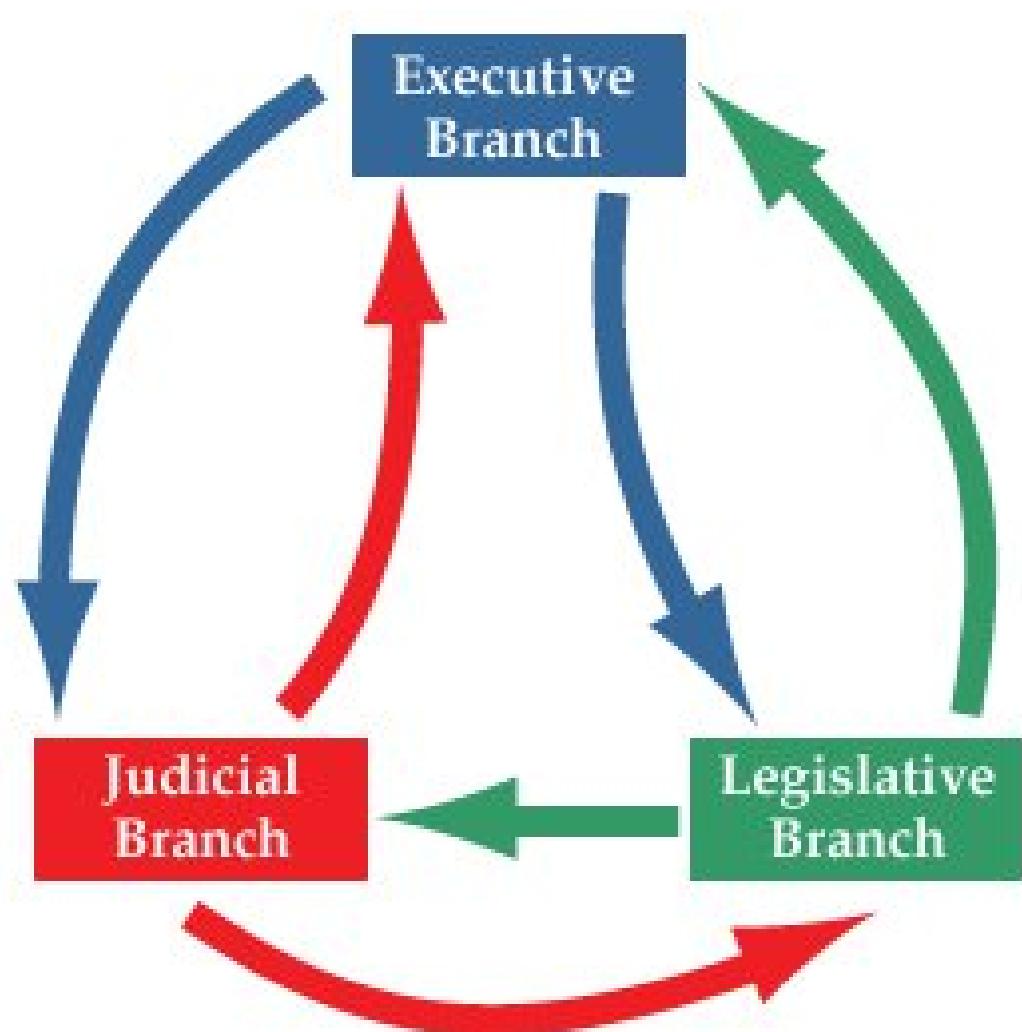


Figure 6: Checks and Balances

State level

We do the same thing at the state level, but with different names

- President - Executive (more than the Governor)
- Congress - Legislature
- Courts - Courts

What is perhaps the biggest separation of powers in the US system?

What is perhaps the biggest separation of powers in the US system?

- Federal vs 50 states
- Under the US Constitution, the federal government is limited to only those powers that are explicitly granted to it.
- All other powers are reserved to the states or the people.

Supremacy

- The US Constitution is the supreme law of the land
- The federal government is supreme in areas given to it by the US Constitution
- Under the state constitutions, the states are supreme in anything not prohibited *by US Constitution*

Supremacy

- Under the state constitutions, the states are supreme in anything not prohibited *by US Constitution*
- Note: this does not say, “prohibited by Congress” or “prohibited by the President” or even “prohibited by the Supreme Court

State vs Federal Powers

Federal Government		State Government
Enumerated Powers <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coin money• Regulate interstate and foreign commerce• Conduct foreign affairs• Establish rules of naturalization• Punish counterfeiting• Establish copyright/patent laws• Regulate postal system• Establish courts inferior to Supreme Court• Declare war• Raise and support armies• Make all laws "necessary and proper" to carry out responsibilities Powers Denied <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tax state exports• Change state boundaries• Violate the Bill of Rights	Concurrent Powers <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Levy and collect taxes• Borrow money• Make and enforce laws• Establish courts• Charter banks and corporations• Take property for public purpose with just compensation (eminent domain)	Reserved Powers <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regulate intrastate commerce• Conduct elections• Provide for public health, safety, welfare, and morals• Establish local governments• Maintain militia (National Guard)• Ratify amendments to the Constitution Powers Denied <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tax imports and exports• Coin money• Enter into treaties• Impair obligation of contracts• Abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens or deny due process and equal protection of the laws

Figure 7: State vs Federal Powers

State vs Federal Powers

One of the least talked about and most important state powers for preventing federal tyranny is the power to...

State vs Federal Powers

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Conduct elections

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