Rules for States

How state constitutions work within a national framework

USG.C.3.1.C "Explain why states have written constitutions and explain the relationship of state constitutions to the national constitution, including the guarantee "to every State in the Union a Republican form of Government" (Article IV, Section 4)."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two reasons states put their basic rules in writing, circle one example of a national limit on state constitutions, and put a 1 beside the sentence that explains the guarantee of republican government.

Two Constitutions, One School Debate

1. Imagine a state legislature debating whether to reduce funding for public schools. Before voting, lawmakers check their state constitution, not just a budget report. States put their basic rules in writing so the public can find them and officials can be held to them. A state constitution establishes branches of government, assigns powers, and explains how leaders are chosen. It can also direct state responsibilities, such as providing public education, and protect individual rights. Written rules make it harder for officials to change the system on a whim. Changing a constitution usually takes a more demanding process than passing an ordinary law.

2. The national Constitution sets the framework for the entire country and is the supreme law of the land. State constitutions organize state governments within that framework. They cannot override the national Constitution or valid federal laws. For example, a state cannot use its constitution to deny people the equal protection of the laws required by the Fourteenth Amendment. But a state constitution may protect a right more broadly than the national Constitution does. The national Constitution does not expressly require states to provide public schools; many state constitutions do. In a school funding debate, state rules may therefore matter directly.

3. Article IV, Section 4 says the United States shall guarantee "to every State in this Union a Republican Form of Government". Here, republican does not mean membership in a political party. It means government through representatives, rather than a ruler who inherits power. This national guarantee helps explain why state governments must fit a shared constitutional framework even though each state writes its own governing document. Voters choose state lawmakers, who must follow both constitutions. If lawmakers pass a school funding law, state courts can consider whether it meets the state constitution's education requirements. The guarantee itself does not set a school budget.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why might written state constitutional rules matter when lawmakers debate school funding?

2. Why might a state constitution affect school funding even though the national Constitution does not expressly require public schools?

3. Could a state constitution deny people the equal protection required by the Fourteenth Amendment? Explain the relationship between the two constitutions.

4. What does the national guarantee of a republican form of government require of state government, and does it decide a school budget?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A state convention proposes replacing elections for state lawmakers with seats inherited by their children. In 4 to 5 sentences, advise the delegates whether this fits the national guarantee, explain why putting rules in a state constitution matters, and describe one choice the state can still make within the national framework.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · USG.C.3.1.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two reasons states put their basic rules in writing, circle one example of a national limit on state constitutions, and put a 1 beside the sentence that explains the guarantee of republican government. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why might written state constitutional rules matter when lawmakers debate school funding?	**The public can find the rules and hold lawmakers to them, including any state constitutional requirement to provide public education.**
2	Why might a state constitution affect school funding even though the national Constitution does not expressly require public schools?	**Many state constitutions require public education, so state lawmakers must consider those requirements when making funding laws.**
3	Could a state constitution deny people the equal protection required by the Fourteenth Amendment? Explain the relationship between the two constitutions.	**No. A state constitution cannot override the national Constitution, which requires equal protection of the laws.**
4	What does the national guarantee of a republican form of government require of state government, and does it decide a school budget?	**It requires government through representatives rather than an inherited ruler. It does not set a school budget.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Delegates should reject inherited seats because government through representatives, not inherited power, fits the national guarantee of a republican form of government. Writing the rules in a state constitution lets the public find them and hold officials to them. The state could still decide how to organize its branches of government. Those choices must stay within the national constitutional framework.

Accept explanations that connect written rules to public accountability or limits on officials and correctly place state constitutions under the national Constitution. For Part 3, students may name another valid state choice, such as providing public education or protecting a right more broadly.