In drafting the Constitution, most of the Founding Fathers believed that the safeguards written into it would protect the rights of Americans. But when the Constitution was sent to the states in 1787 for ratification, a great roar of disapproval went up. In Virginia, Patrick Henry protested vigorously against the lack of a specific statement of rights. Other Americans from different states demanded that a Bill of Rights be added to the Constitution. A number of states ratified the Constitution only conditionally. That is, they would approve the Constitution only if it were changed to include these rights.

Two years after the new American government went into effect, the *Bill of Rights* was added as the first ten amendments to the Constitution. Congress discussed nearly 200 proposals for amendments before it presented these ten to the states for approval. The states ratified these amendments, and they became part of the Constitution in 1791.

**THE BILL OF RIGHTS**

The first ten amendments to the Constitution, or the Bill of Rights, set forth the priceless rights or freedoms that all Americans may enjoy. A brief summary of these great freedoms is given here.

**FREEDOM OF RELIGION**

The first right, or freedom, guaranteed in the Bill of Rights is freedom of religion. This right is guaranteed in the **First Amendment**. *Freedom of*religion guarantees to all Americans the right to practice any religion they choose, or to practice no religion at all.

Congress is forbidden to establish any religion as our nation's official religion. Congress cannot favor any one religion over others or tax citizens in order to support any one religion.

**FREEDOM OF SPEECH**

The right to express your ideas and opinions when you speak is called freedom of speech. Freedom of speech also means the right to listen to the thoughts and opinions of others. This freedom guarantees that Americans are free to express their thoughts and ideas about anything. They may talk freely to their friends and neighbours or speak in public to a group of people. Of course, no one may use his freedom of speech to injure others. If a person knowingly says things that are false about another, he may be sued in court by the person or persons who believe they have been harmed by what he said.

Americans are free to express opinions about their government or anything else. They are free to criticize the actions of the government and of government officials. In a dictatorship, where the nation's government has all the powers, the people have no right to speak like this. They do not dare to criticize the actions of the government. If they do, they may be imprisoned. But all Americans enjoy the freedom of speech, which is guaranteed in the First Amendment.

**FREEDOM OF THE PRESS**

The freedom to express your ideas and opinions in writing is known as *freedom of*the *press.*This freedom is closely related to freedom of speech and is also guaranteed by the **First Amendment.**

Freedom of the press gives all Americans the right to express their ideas and thoughts freely in writing. This writing may be in newspapers, books, magazines, or any other printed or written form. Americans are also free to read what others write. They may read any newspaper, book or magazine they want. Because they are free to read a variety of facts and opinions, Americans can become better-informed citizens.

**FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY**

Another priceless freedom guaranteed by the **First Amendment** is *freedom of assembly*, or freedom to hold meetings. Americans are free to meet together to discuss problems and to plan their actions. Of course, such meetings must be carried on in a peaceful way.

**FREEDOM OF PETITION**

The *freedom of*petition is the right to ask your government to do something or to refrain from doing something. The **First Amendment contains** this guarantee, also. The freedom of petition gives you the right to write to your Congressman and request him to work for the passage of laws you favor. You are free to ask him to change laws that you do not like. The right of petition also helps government officials to know what Americans think and what actions they want the government to take.

**THE RIGHT TO BEAR ARMS**

**The Second Amendment** to the Constitution guarantees Americans the *right*to bear *arms.*In the early years of our nation, Americans needed weapons in order to serve in the militia, or volunteer armies, that were established to defend our states. The militia provided protection during emergencies, too. Many Americans also believed that without weapons they would be powerless if the government tried to overstep its powers and rule by force.

**"NO-QUARTERING" RIGHT**

**The Third Amendment** states, "No soldier shall, in times of peace, be quartered in any house. . . ." Under British rule, the colonists sometimes had to feed and house British soldiers against their will. As a result, Americans wanted this practice forbidden under the Bill of Rights.

**THE RIGHT TO EQUAL JUSTICE**

The Bill of Rights contains many rights that are guaranteed to persons accused of a crime. **Amendments Five, Six, Seven, and Eight** are all concerned with these rights. Our nation places great importance on these rights in order to guarantee equal justice for all Americans.

1. A person must be indicted, or formally accused of a crime, by a group of citizens called a "grand jury" before he can be brought into court for trial. (5)
2. A person accused of a crime is guaranteed the right to know what law he is accused of breaking. (5)
3. A person accused of a crime has a right to a prompt public trial by a jury of his fellow citizens. (7)
4. An accused person cannot be put into prison and kept there for weeks or months while awaiting a trial. He has the right to leave jail, in most cases, if he can raise a certain sum of money, or bail, as a pledge that he will appear at his trial. (8)
5. An accused person has a right to a lawyer to represent him in court. (6)
6. All the testimony and evidence against an accused person must be presented publicly in court. (7)
7. The accused person has the right to call any witnesses to appear if their testimony will help him. (7)
8. The accused person cannot be forced to testify or give evidence against himself. (7)
9. If the accused person is found guilty, he cannot be given cruel or unusual punishment. (8)
10. If the accused person is found not guilty of a serious crime, he cannot be tried a second time for this same crime. (5)

**THE RIGHT TO OWN PRIVATE PROPERTY**

The **Fifth Amendment** guarantees Americans the right to own private property. No person may take away anything that we own. Nor can the government seize our land, money, or other forms of property without cause, or without paying for it. The right to own private property is one of America's basic freedoms. Our free economic system is based upon this right.

**THE RIGHT TO ENJOY MANY OTHER FREEDOMS**

To make doubly sure that Americans should enjoy every right and freedom possible, **Amendment Nine** was added to the Constitution. This amendment states that the list of rights contained in the Bill of Rights is not complete. There are many other rights that all Americans have and will continue to have even though they are not mentioned in the Bill of Rights. Among them are the following.

1. Freedom to live or travel anywhere in our nation
2. Freedom to work at any job for which we can qualify
3. Freedom to marry and raise a family
4. Freedom to receive a free education in good public schools
5. Freedom to join a political party, a union, and other legal groups

As a final guarantee of our rights, **the Tenth Amendment** set aside many powers of government for the states. This Amendment says that all powers not given to the federal government by the Constitution, nor forbidden to the states, are set aside for the states, or for the people. This provision leaves with the states the power to act in many ways to guarantee the rights of their citizens.

**SUMMARY**

Government is the authority or power that people establish to help them run their affairs.

Governments serve many important purposes, but the most important one is that government makes it possible for people to live and work together. Government provides us with rules of conduct we can follow. Government makes it possible for people to live by known laws, and helps provide many services that citizens acting alone could not perform themselves.

Our nation's government is based on the American Constitution. This Constitution, together with its Bill of Rights and other amendments, provides us with a workable plan of government. The Constitution also guarantees to all Americans many priceless rights and freedoms.

Our nation's government is based upon the approval, or consent, of the people who are governed. It is a federal system in which certain powers are given to the national

government and other powers are left to the states and to the people. Certain powers are shared by both federal and state governments. In both federal and state governments, powers are separated and balanced among three branches of government.

## List of human rights

Not everyone agrees on what the basic human rights are. Here is a list of some of the most recognized ones:

* Right to privacy
* Right to live, exist
* Right to have a family
* To own property
* Free Speech
* Safety from [violence](http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violence)
* [Equality](http://simple.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sexual_equality&action=edit&redlink=1) of both [males](http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Male) and [females](http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Female); [women's rights](http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_rights)
* Fair [trial](http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trial)
* To be innocent until proven guilty
* To be a citizen of a [country](http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Country)
* To be recognized as a person
* The right to express his or her [sexual orientation](http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexual_orientation)
* To vote
* To seek [asylum](http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_asylum) if a country treats you badly
* To think freely
* To believe and practice the [religion](http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion) a person wants
* To [peacefully](http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace) [protest](http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protest) (speak against) a government or group
* Health care ([medical](http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medicine) care)
* [Education](http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education)
* To communicate through a [language](http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language)
* Not be forced into [marriage](http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marriage)
* The right to love
* The right to work

The right to express oneself