

Directions-Read the following letter from Thomas Jefferson to James Madison and answer the questions that follow.

To James Madison
Paris, Dec. 20, 1787

...The second feature I dislike, and greatly dislike, is the abandonment in every instance of the necessity of rotation in office, and most particularly in the case of the President. Experience concurs with reason in concluding that the first magistrate will always be re-elected if the Constitution permits it. He is then an officer for life. This once observed, it becomes of so much consequence to certain nations to have a friend or a foe at the head of our affairs that they will interfere with money & with arms... If once elected, and at a second or third election out voted by one or two votes, he will pretend false votes, foul play, hold possession of the reins of government, be supported by the States voting for him, especially if they are the central ones lying in a compact body themselves & separating their opponents: and they will be aided by one nation of Europe, while the majority are aided by another. The election of a President of America some years hence will be much more interesting to certain nations of Europe than ever the election of a king of Poland was...

Smaller objections are the Appeal in fact as well as law, and the binding all persons Legislative Executive & Judiciary by oath to maintain that constitution. I do not pretend to decide what would be the best method of procuring the establishment of the manifold good things in this constitution, and of getting rid of the bad...

At all events I hope you will not be discouraged from other trials, if the present one should fail of its full effect. -- I have thus told you freely what I like & dislike: merely as a matter of curiosity, for I know your own judgment has been formed on all these points after having heard everything which could be urged on them. I own I am not a friend to a very energetic government. It is always oppressive...

After all, it is my principle that the will of the majority should always prevail. If they approve the proposed Convention in all it's parts, I shall concur in it cheerfully, in hopes that they will amend it whenever they shall

find it work wrong.

I have tired you by this time with my disquisitions & will therefore only add assurances of the sincerity of those sentiments of esteem & attachment with which I am Dear Sir your affectionate friend & servant.

1. Why does Jefferson think European countries will interfere with American elections if a person can be reelected to the office?
2. According to Jefferson, what might elected officials do in order to keep their office?
3. Jefferson doubts having elected officials take an oath will ensure good government. Do you agree with Jefferson? Explain your answer. What would you include in the Constitution to ensure good government?
4. Why is Jefferson willing to agree to the Constitution despite his concerns?

Letter text:

Thomas Jefferson
Electronic Text Center
University of Virginia Library
<http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=JefLett.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=66&division=div1>

