

FEDERALIST 78

ALEXANDER HAMILTON

from *The U.S. Constitution: A Reader*, pp. 379-385

Defending the idea of judicial review—the authority of the courts to declare a law unconstitutional—Publius denies that it leads to judicial supremacy. The courts must never substitute “will” for “judgment,” as all branches of government answer to the Constitution.

JUNE 14, 1788

THE JUDICIARY DEPARTMENT

We proceed now to an examination of the judiciary department of the proposed government....

According to the plan of the convention, all judges who may be appointed by the United States are to hold their offices *during good behavior*; which is conformable to the most approved of the State constitutions, and among the rest, to that of this State. Its propriety having been drawn into question by the adversaries of that plan is no light symptom of the rage for objection which disorders their imaginations and judgments. The standard of good behavior for the continuance in office of the judicial magistracy is certainly one of the most valuable of the modern improvements in the practice of government. In a monarchy it is an excellent barrier to the despotism of the prince; in a republic it is a no less excellent barrier to the encroachments and oppressions of the representative body. And it is the best expedient which can be devised in any government to secure a steady, upright, and impartial administration of the laws.

Whoever attentively considers the different departments of power must perceive that, in a government in which they are separated from each other, the judiciary, from the nature of its functions, will always be the least dangerous to the political rights of the Constitution; because it will be least in a capacity to annoy or injure them. The executive not only dispenses the honors but holds the sword of the community. The legislature not only commands the purse but prescribes the rules by which the duties and rights of every citizen are to be regulated. The judiciary, on the contrary, has no influence over either the sword or the purse; no direction either of the strength or of the wealth of the society, and can take no active resolution whatever. It may truly be said to have neither FORCE nor WILL but merely judgment; and must ultimately depend upon the aid of the executive arm even for the efficacy of its judgments.....

Alexander Hamilton, “No. 78: The Judiciary Department,” in Clinton Rossiter, ed., *The Federalist Papers* (New York: Mentor, 1999), 463–71.