

STAND UP FOR DEMOCRACY

"Together We Can Change Everything"

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Curious how democracy actually works—or how to make it work better?

Dive into these resources and become the informed citizen your community needs.

Join the League of Women Voters of Lane County in a program to engage our community in the U.S. Constitution and civics.

These key civics topics provide the foundation for how our government is meant to run on the federal and state levels.

KNOW THE LAW. KNOW YOUR RIGHTS. GET INVOLVED.

The Bill of Rights First Amendment	Separation of Powers, Checks & Balances, Consent of the Governed
Second—Fourth Amendments	Emoluments, Hatch Act
Fifth—Seventh Amendments	Civil Rights Act, Voting Rights Act
Eighth—Tenth Amendments	Posse Comitatus, War Powers, Insurrection Act
Fourteenth Amendment	Rule of Law, Shadow Docket
Nineteenth, Twenty-Second, & Twent-Sixth Amendments	Naturalization Process Civics Test
Amending the Constitution, Electoral College	Oregon Government Elections & Voting in Oregon

The Bill of Rights

The first ten amendments to the Constitution make up the Bill of Rights. James Madison, one of our nation's founders, wrote these amendments to set limits on the powers of government through the Constitution and to protect individual liberties. The Bill of Rights was added when it became concerning to some that the Constitution lacked limits on government power. Originally, seventeen amendments were proposed, but ten were ratified by Congress on December 15, 1791.

Learn more: [First 10 Amendments | Preamble to Bill of Rights](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

Each amendment supports our participation in our society and strengthens democracy by knowing how to best use our rights. Understanding the Bill of Rights brings clarity to the importance of these amendments and provides a gauge by which to view current events.

- **First Amendment: Freedom of Speech**

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."—U.S. Constitution

The purpose of the First Amendment is to protect fundamental individual liberties from government interference, fostering an open exchange of ideas essential for democracy acting as a cornerstone for American self-governance. No one can overturn the First Amendment without passing a new amendment. Any new, proposed amendment must be passed by two-thirds of both houses of Congress, then ratified by three-fourths of the states.

- **Religious Freedom** guarantees that people have the right to practice any religion or observe no religion and that the government cannot establish a state religion. Religious freedom has been protected in the courts since our nation's founding. Many of the early European settlers in what would become the United States were fleeing persecution for their religious beliefs, and laws compelling them to join government-favored churches.

Learn more: [Freedom of Religion](#)

- **Freedom of Speech and of the Press** are guaranteed to all persons in the First Amendment. This includes the right to express opinions in public, including views that are critical of the government, without fear of being arrested, jailed, or deprived of our rights under the Constitution. Certain types of speech, such as incitement of violence, are not protected.

Learn more: [Freedom of Speech](#), [Freedom of the press](#)

- **Right of Petition and Peaceful Assembly** guarantees the right of the people to gather or associate with a group of people for social, economic, political, or religious purposes. It also protects the right to peaceably protest against the government. The right to petition can mean signing a petition or even filing a lawsuit against the government.

Learn more: [Interpretation: Right to Assemble and Petition | Constitution Center](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

Those who live under threat of religious persecution cannot live a free life. These five freedoms are rights guaranteed by our U.S. Constitution and fundamental to our republic. All of these rights are essential for a free and just government.



- **Second Amendment: Right to Bear Arms**

“A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” —U.S. Constitution.

The Second Amendment has a diversity of interpretations, primarily due to its wording. Some argue that the amendment refers to a group of people, “the Militia,” who must be allowed to bear arms should the security of their free state be in jeopardy. It further indicates that the Militia must be organized and well regulated. Others argue that the amendment refers to an individual’s right to bear arms. It wasn’t until the U.S. Supreme Court weighed in on the Second Amendment in 2008 that some clarity was provided. Their landmark ruling in *District of Columbia v. Heller* provided that, “The Second Amendment protects an individual’s right to possess a firearm unconnected with service in a militia, and to use that arm for traditionally lawful purposes, such as self-defense within the home.”

Since then, both the U.S. Supreme Court and state courts have heard many Second Amendment cases. Because those rulings vary significantly, confusion and controversy surrounds laws regarding the legality of the possession of certain types of guns, including some handguns and assault weapons; background checks; and the open or concealed carrying of weapons.

Read more: [Classroom Resources about Second Amendment | Constitution Center](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

As of 2024, almost one-third of U.S. adults say they personally own a gun. At the same time, in response to concerns such as rising gun death rates and mass shootings, the U.S. surgeon general took the unprecedented step of declaring gun violence a public health crisis. Nearly 39,000 people died of gun-related injuries in the United States in 2025.

Learn more about Americans’ views of gun ownership, gun policy, and regulation:
[Key facts about Americans and guns | Pew Research Center](#)

- **Third Amendment: Quartering of Troops**

“No soldier shall, in time of peace, be quartered in any house, without the consent of the Owner, nor in times of war, but in a manner prescribed by law.” —U.S. Constitution

The requirements of an owner’s express permission and the passage of appropriate laws for wartime housing originated from colonists’ grievances against British soldiers forced to quarter in colonists’ homes and was a key factor in the Revolutionary War. Then and now, most Americans see housing of troops in private homes as an imposition and a challenge to their right to privacy and the right to freedom to carry on with their lives unhindered.

Learn More: [Interpretation: The Third Amendment | Constitution Center](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

We have standing armed forces with healthy budgets for housing troops. Legal scholars contend the Third Amendment remains relevant: It exemplifies the right to personal privacy and to the sanctity of the home. It is the only part in the Constitution that discusses the relationship between civilians and the military. It stands for the idea that in this country people are protected from the government intruding into their homes and their private spaces.

- **Fourth Amendment: Search & Seizures, Probable Cause**

"The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized." —U.S. Constitution

The Fourth Amendment protects people from arbitrary and illegal government intrusion. It protects a person's privacy interests, safeguards against unlawful arrests, and limits the power of law enforcement agencies. Law enforcement officers cannot search a person's home without a search warrant supported with probable cause to believe that evidence of a crime will be found there. The Supreme Court has made it clear that a search warrant must be signed by a "judicial officer" or a "magistrate." Their signature on the warrant conveys that they have reviewed the evidence and have ruled there is just cause to allow law enforcement to search a home. And yet, the Fourth Amendment is not absolute. Searches and seizures can be conducted without a warrant if there is an immediate threat to public safety. In these cases, the government must still establish "reasonable suspicion," and the actions taken must be in proportion to that assessment.

Learn more: [What Does the Fourth Amendment Mean?](#), [Do Constitutional Rights Apply to Everyone?](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

Limited government is essential to ensuring that individuals have rights and personal freedoms over their money, property, and person. This amendment protects against arbitrary arrests and is the basis of the law regarding search warrants, stop-and-frisk, safety inspections, wiretaps, use of license plate reader and facial recognition devices, and other forms of surveillance. It is central to many other criminal law topics and to privacy law.



- **Fifth Amendment: Rights of the Accused**

"No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation." —U.S. Constitution

The Fifth Amendment sets out several specific rights, including:

- **Grand Jury**—Grand jurors hear a formal "presentation" of the federal criminal charges against the accused and determine whether there is enough evidence to require a person to stand trial for committing a crime. These jurors do not decide if someone is guilty or not guilty. Grand juries are made up of 16-23 ordinary citizens who are selected at random and receive a summons to serve.
- **Double Jeopardy**—This right protects individuals against a second prosecution of the same charges after an acquittal or a conviction and against multiple punishments for the same offense.
- **Self-incrimination**—Persons accused of committing a crime cannot be forced to testify against themselves. In the U.S. Judicial system, a person is presumed innocent, and it is the responsibility of the state (or federal) government to prove guilt.
- **Due Process**—The government must follow established laws and procedural safeguards before depriving someone of their life, liberty, and property.
- **Eminent Domain**—The government is empowered to take private property as long as the property is for public use and adequate compensation is provided.

Learn more: [Fifth Amendment](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

Without the Fifth Amendment, our government could deprive a person of their life, freedom, or property without proper legal procedures to determine if such action is warranted. Additionally, the government could require individuals accused of a crime to testify against themselves. A recent example is the government's arrest and deportation of residents without due process or proof that there is enough evidence against them to warrant detention.

• Sixth Amendment: Rights of Criminal Prosecutions

"In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the Assistance of Counsel for his defense." —U.S. Constitution

The Sixth Amendment guarantees rights that uphold the integrity of the criminal justice system, emphasizing fairness, transparency, and accountability. It applies to anyone residing in the United States. It is the basis for [Miranda Rights](#), read to everyone who is arrested.

Components include:

- **The Right to a Speedy and Public Proceeding**—Protects defendants from prolonged detention and secretive judicial processes; ensures timely resolution and prevents unnecessary delays.
- **The Right to an Impartial Jury**—Ensures defendants are judged by an unbiased group of peers, preventing personal biases from influencing the trial's outcome.
- **The Right to Be Informed of Charges**—Guarantees defendants the right to be informed of the charges against them, allowing for adequate preparation of a defense; prevents vague or overly broad accusations and ensures clarity.
- **The Right to Legal Counsel**—Provides access to attorneys to develop and present a defense.
- **The Right to Confront Witnesses**—Allows defendants to challenge evidence against them through cross-examination.
- **The Right to Compulsory Process**—Allows defendants to secure witnesses who can provide testimony or evidence beneficial to their defense.

Learn More: [Interpretation: The Sixth Amendment | Constitution Center](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

Understanding one's rights under the Sixth Amendment is essential from the point of being detained for questioning and through the process of arrest and a determination of guilt. This amendment protects all individuals in the United States and is the basis for the requirement that individuals be read their rights before an arrest.

Seventh Amendment: Civil Trial Rights

"In suits at common law, where the value in controversy shall exceed twenty dollars, the right of trial by jury shall be preserved, and no fact tried by a jury, shall be otherwise re-examined in any Court of the United States, than according to the rules of the common law."* —U.S. Constitution

The Seventh Amendment establishes rules to govern civil trials, granting the right to a trial by jury in a civil case between two parties. A "civil case" is one in which disputes involving companies, organizations, or private citizens are heard. Those bringing the civil court case can choose to have a jury trial or opt for a judge to rule. In civil court cases, a plaintiff typically seeks monetary compensation or a court order to resolve a grievance against a defendant. Examples include contract disputes, personal injury claims, or property disputes. The jury's role is to determine responsibility for alleged harm and, if found, the amount of damages.

Learn more: [Interpretation: The Seventh Amendment | Constitution Center](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

The Seventh Amendment ensures an individual the right to a jury trial under clear conditions and ensures that judges abide by jury rulings in most cases.



- **Eighth Amendment: Cruel & Unusual Punishment**

"Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted."
—U.S. Constitution

This straightforward and specific text has been used as the basis for countless legal rulings and challenges in U.S. courts and has helped to shape our criminal justice system in a variety of ways.

- **Adjusting bail and fines**—The amendment limits the use of excessive bail and prevents financially burdensome exactions of fines. This has helped protect the poorest individuals from being denied access to the justice system entirely. High cash bail has sometimes resulted in some poorer Americans having to remain in jail for long periods while awaiting trial because they cannot afford bail.

- **Prohibiting torture**—One of the most important contributions of this amendment has been the prohibition of torture and "cruel and unusual" punishment. This provision has been used to prevent the use of torture, including waterboarding and electric shocks, against detainees in military, federal, and police custody.

- **Protecting against cruel conditions of imprisonment**—Over the years, the amendment has been used to challenge overcrowding, inadequate access to health care, and lack of nutrition in prisons.

- **Punishments fit the crime**—The amendment has enhanced the quality of a fair trial in various ways, especially in the sentencing of convicts by ensuring they are only punished according to the severity of the crime they committed..

Read More: [An Overview of the 8th Amendment - Simplified & Explained - LAWS.com](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

The Eighth Amendment serves as a limitation on federal and state governments to impose unduly harsh penalties on criminal defendants before and after a conviction. This limitation applies equally to the price for obtaining pretrial release, bail, and the punishment imposed upon conviction. This Amendment continues to be used as a guiding principle in determining which punishments are "cruel or unusual," especially in discussions and debates around the conditions of detention and the use of the death penalty.

- **Ninth Amendment: Protection of Unenumerated Rights**

"The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people." —U.S. Constitution

Enumeration is defined as the act of mentioning a number of things, one by one. The Ninth Amendment provides that just because a right has not yet been mentioned or numbered in the Constitution or Bill of Rights, it does not mean the right doesn't exist. The Constitution is a living document that is expected to be amended when the need arises. It does not contain an exhaustive list of all rights and liberties that individuals in the United States have.

Learn more: [Overview of the Ninth Amendment - LAWS.com](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

The Ninth Amendment, often referred to as the "silent amendment," holds sweeping implications for individual liberties. It reminds us that the listing of certain rights in the Constitution does not negate the existence of other rights retained by the people. The amendment itself is brief, yet its impact on American society has been profound.

- **Tenth Amendment: States Rights**

The Tenth Amendment is the last of the original amendments known as the Bill of Rights.

It states, “*The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.*” —U.S. Constitution

The Tenth Amendment serves to clarify the limits of federal power. The “powers” mentioned in this Amendment fall into three categories:

- **Enumerated powers**—Those delegated to the federal government by the Constitution such as the ability to declare war, print paper money and mint coinage, regulate foreign trade and that carried out between the states, run a postal service, grant patents.
- **Reserved powers**—Those delegated to the states such as calling and holding elections, determining and oversight of responsibilities and authority within a police agency, issuing various licenses, such as hunting, marriage, and driving.
- **Shared powers**—Those powers where there is a mutual interest and benefit for both state and federal government such as taxation. Where federal and state laws are similar, the federal law will generally take precedence over the state law.

Read more: [Interpretation: The Tenth Amendment | Constitution Center](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

The Tenth Amendment emphasizes that the fundamental character of the national government remains one of limited and enumerated powers, so that the first question involving an exercise of federal power is not whether it violates someone’s rights, but whether it exceeds the national government’s enumerated powers. Recent cases before the Supreme Court involve action by the federal government that in some way regulates or commands state governments, such as by telling states what policies they must adopt, forcing state or local executive officials to implement federal laws, or conditioning the states’ acceptance of federal money on compliance with certain conditions.



- **Fourteenth Amendment: Citizenship, Due Process, Equal Protection,**

The Fourteenth Amendment was a landmark addition to the Constitution, one of the Reconstruction Amendments passed during the five years immediately following the Civil War. The amendments were intended to restructure the United States from a country that was, in Abraham Lincoln’s words, “half slave and half free” to one in which the constitutionally guaranteed “blessings of liberty” would be extended to the entire populace, including the former slaves and their descendants. While the Thirteenth Amendment ended slavery, and the Fifteenth granted Black men the right to vote, the Fourteenth Amendment addresses citizenship rights and equal protection of the laws as a direct response to issues related to the treatment of freedmen following the war. The amendment was bitterly contested, particularly by Southern states, which were forced to ratify it in order to return their delegations to Congress. Since its passage, the Fourteenth Amendment has had far-reaching impacts on American law, guiding many Supreme Court decisions.

The Fourteenth Amendment contains five sections. [Click here](#) for the full text

• **Section One:** “*All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.*”—U.S. Constitution

The Citizenship Clause declared that everyone born on U.S. soil is a citizen of the United States. The provision overturned *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857) and ended a decades-long debate about whether free Black people were U.S. citizens.

“No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.” —U.S. Constitution

The Privileges or Immunities Clause serves as the legal backbone for rights such as the ability to travel freely between states, to enter public lands, to own property and prohibits states from discriminating against citizens of other states. This clause is essential for maintaining fairness and equality among all citizens, regardless of the state they reside in. By prohibiting states from enacting laws that violate these rights, the clause plays a crucial role in strengthening democracy in the United States. Both Article IV and the Fourteenth Amendment work together to form a more unified national community where citizens can enjoy their rights without prejudice.

The Due Process Clause sets out citizens’ rights to a fair trial and sentencing if they are accused of criminal acts. It requires that when the federal government acts in a way that denies a citizen of a life, liberty, or property interest, the person must be given notice, the opportunity to be heard, and a decision by a neutral decision-maker. It serves to support and expand on the Fifth Amendment.

The Equal Protection Clause states that all persons within the territory of the United States are entitled to its protection, including corporations, aliens, and presumptive citizens seeking readmission to the United States. The government must apply its laws fairly and cannot treat people differently without a valid reason.

- **Section Two** is straightforward yet potent. It awards congressional representation among the states according to their respective populations, counting the number of persons in each state and addresses the impact of voting rights on representation. It also details how states are encouraged to protect the rights of their new citizens in that if a state denies the right to vote to any male citizen who is 21 years old, the state’s representation in Congress will be reduced. This provision was a response to the various methods some states used in an attempt to disenfranchise Black voters during Reconstruction.
- **Section Three** forbids anyone who participates in “insurrection or rebellion” against the United States from holding federal office.
- **Section Four** addresses federal debt and rescinded debts accrued by the Confederacy.
- **Section Five** authorizes Congress to enforce the Fourteenth Amendment “by appropriate legislation.”

Learn more: [14th-amendment-key-clauses-and-sections/](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

This amendment was passed during a pivotal moment when the country had experienced its first and only domestic war since its founding. The United States faced daunting challenges in integrating formerly enslaved individuals into society. The nation needed a way to ensure that all people, regardless of race, had access to equal rights and protections. The Fourteenth Amendment sought to address these issues by establishing citizenship guaranteeing equal protection under the law and strengthening the Fifth Amendment right to due process.

- **Nineteenth, Twenty-second, & Twenty-sixth Amendments**

“The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.” —U.S. Constitution

The Nineteenth Amendment, ratified in 1920, guarantees the right of women to vote. In 1878 a constitutional amendment was introduced in Congress that would enshrine women’s suffrage for all elections. It would be reintroduced in every Congress thereafter. In 1890, Wyoming became the first state whose constitution guaranteed women the right to vote. By January 1918, momentum was clearly behind the suffragists: fifteen states had extended equal voting rights to women, and the amendment was formally supported by both parties and by President Woodrow Wilson. In 1919 it passed both chambers with the requisite two-thirds majority: 304–89 in the House and 56–25 in the Senate.

The final step was ratification by two-thirds of the states. On August 18, 1920, Tennessee—by one vote—became the Thirty-sixth state to ratify the amendment, thereby ensuring its adoption.

Learn more: [Nineteenth Amendment | History, Suffrage, & Facts | Britannica](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

This amendment completes the nearly forty-five year journey of achieving full suffrage for all U.S. citizens whatever their race, sex, national origin, or station in life.

Section I of the Twenty-second Amendment states:

“No person shall be elected to the office of the President more than twice, and no person who has held the office of President, or acted as President, for more than two years of a term to which some other person was elected President shall be elected to the office of the President more than once. But this Article shall not apply to any person holding the office of President when this Article was proposed by the Congress, and shall not prevent any person who may be holding the office of President, or acting as President, during the term within which this Article becomes operative from holding the office of President or acting as President during the remainder of such term.
—U.S. Constitution

The Twenty-second amendment prohibits anyone who has been elected president twice from being elected to the office again.

Learn more: [Twenty-second Amendment | US Presidential Term Limits | Britannica](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

George Washington opted to retire after two terms, setting a precedent observed by the country’s next thirty presidents, until Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected to four terms. The Constitution did not specify presidential term limits until this amendment was ratified in 1951. After the death of President Roosevelt in the third month of his fourth term, Congress took quick action, approving a proposed constitutional amendment setting a limit of two four-year terms for future presidents.

The Twenty-sixth Amendment:

Ratified in 1971, the Twenty-sixth Amendment extended voting rights to citizens aged eighteen years or older.

It states: *The right of citizens of the United States, who are eighteen years of age or older, to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of age.*

—U.S. Constitution

Read more: [Twenty-sixth Amendment | Definition, Significance, & Facts | Britannica](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

Traditionally, the voting age in most states was twenty-one, and attempts to establish a national standardized voting age were met with opposition from the states. In 1970 President Nixon signed an extension of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which lowered the age of eligibility to vote in all federal and state elections to eighteen. Two states, Oregon and Texas, filed suit, claiming that the law violated the Tenth Amendment reserve powers of the states to set their own voting-age requirements, and in *Oregon v. Mitchell* (1970), the U.S. Supreme Court upheld this claim. In response to this setback and spurred by student activism during the Vietnam War—when 18-year-olds could be drafted to fight in the war but could not vote in federal elections in most states—this amendment was introduced in Congress. It won congressional backing on March 23, 1971, and was ratified by the states on July 1, 1971—marking the shortest interval between Congressional approval and ratification of an amendment in U.S. history.



Amending the Constitution

How Is the Constitution Amended?

It is purposefully difficult to change the U.S. Constitution. Any amendment must be proposed and passed by a two-thirds vote in both the House of Representatives and the Senate—and then ratified by three-fourths of the states. Alternatively, if two-thirds of the state legislatures ask Congress to call for a Constitutional Convention, then the proposed amendment must be brought to a vote and ratified by three-fourths of the states. All of the current twenty-seven amendments were added by Congress.

Learn more: National Conference of State Legislatures— [Brief Amending the US Constitution](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

Modifying any provision of the Constitution cannot be accomplished by an executive order.

Electoral College v. The National Popular Vote Interstate Compact

The Electoral College as part of the executive branch of the federal government was established in 1788 by Article II of the U.S. Constitution. It has been revised three times by constitutional amendments. As part of the Constitution, the Electoral College can only be abolished by an amendment. Article II of the Constitution does not mandate any particular legislative scheme for selecting electors; instead, it vests state legislatures with the exclusive power to choose how to allocate their states' electors.

Using this power, eighteen states and the District of Columbia have signed on to the **National Popular Vote Interstate Compact (NPVIC)**, agreeing to award all of their electoral votes to whichever presidential ticket wins the nationwide popular vote, regardless of which ticket won more votes in their individual state/district. Together, these states have 222 electoral votes, which is 41 percent of the Electoral College and 82 percent of the 270 votes needed to give the compact legal force. The compact will take effect when enacted by states possessing an additional 48 electoral votes. The NPVIC plan does not abolish the Electoral College, but instead works with it to accomplish a national popular vote by eliminating the state-by-state winner-take-all systems. Oregon is part of this compact.

Learn more: [National Popular Vote Interstate Compact](#),

WHY THIS MATTERS

- Voters go to the polls on the Tuesday following the first Monday in November, but the ballots that they cast do not directly elect the President. Instead, the will of the voters is reflected in the actions of state electors. These electors are selected by political parties at the state level and in many cases are bound by law to vote in a way that is consistent with the results of the popular vote.
- There can be a discrepancy between the popular votes and the electoral votes. In five presidential elections there was a split between the Electoral College and the national popular vote.
- The League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS) believes that the direct-popular-vote method for electing the President and Vice President is essential to representative government. In 1970, a League study of the presidential electoral process culminated in a position supporting direct election of the President by popular vote as essential to representative government. The League testified and lobbied for legislation to amend the U.S. Constitution to replace the Electoral College with direct election of the President. The measure, which passed the House and nearly passed the Senate in 1971, has been revived in each Congress without success. After a two-year study, at their 2010 Convention, the LWVUS voted to support the NPVIC as another method of selecting the President, specifically stating “We support the use of the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact as one acceptable way to achieve the goal of the direct popular vote for election of the president until the abolition of the Electoral College is accomplished.”

Learn more: [Electoral College | Britannica](#), [What is the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact? | League of Women Voters](#)



Separation of Powers & Checks and Balances

What is the Separation of Powers?

The Separation of Powers refers to the division of government responsibilities into distinct branches to limit any one branch from exercising the core functions of another. The intent is to prevent the concentration of power and provide for **checks and balances**.

The legislative branch is responsible for writing and enacting the laws of the state and appropriating the money necessary to operate the government.

The executive branch is responsible for implementing and administering the public policy enacted and funded by the legislative branch.

The judicial branch is responsible for interpreting the Constitution and laws and applying their interpretations to controversies brought before it.

Read more: [Resource Separation of Powers: An Overview](#)

What are Checks and Balances?

Our system of checks and balances ensures no single branch (legislative, executive, or judicial) becomes too powerful. Each branch has the authority to limit the powers of the others, thus promoting cooperation and preventing abuse of power. In this way, the framers of the Constitution sought to preserve a democratic form of government.

How the Three Branches Keep Each Other in Check

Each branch of government has unique powers and the ability to limit the others, ensuring a dynamic balance of authority.

Legislative Branch (Congress)

Role and Structure: Congress is responsible for making laws and consists of two chambers, the House of Representatives and the Senate. The House reflects the population size of each state, while the Senate ensures equal representation for all states.

- **Powers:** Congress controls taxation, government spending, war declarations, and federal regulations.
- **Checks on Other Branches:**
 - **Oversight:** Conducts hearings and investigations to monitor the executive branch.
 - **Impeachment:** Has the authority to impeach the President or other officials.
 - **Veto Override:** Can override a presidential veto with a two-thirds majority.

Executive Branch (President, Cabinet, and Administration)

Role and Structure: The President leads the executive branch, enforcing laws and overseeing federal agencies.

- **Powers:** Commands the military, negotiates treaties, and issues executive orders.
- **Checks on Other Branches:**
 - **Veto Power:** Can reject legislation passed by Congress.
 - **Appointment Power:** Nominates judges and key officials, subject to Senate approval.
 - **Executive Orders:** Directs government operations but is subject to judicial review.

Judicial Branch (Supreme Court and Federal Courts)

Role and Structure: The judicial branch interprets laws and ensures their alignment with the Constitution.

Powers: Has the authority of judicial review, allowing courts to determine the constitutionality of laws and executive actions.

Checks on Other Branches:

- **Judicial Review:** Can invalidate laws or executive actions that violate the Constitution.

Examples:

The executive branch negotiates peace treaties, and the Senate ratifies them.
Congress can pass a law, and the President must sign the bill or veto it.
The judicial branch can declare a law or a presidential action unconstitutional.
The President appoints federal judges, who must be confirmed by the Senate.
Congress can impeach members of both the executive and judicial branches.

Read more: [Checks and Balances - Definition, Examples & Constitution | HISTORY](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

If the balance of power shifts too much toward any one of the three branches, it threatens to tear apart the fabric of our democracy. For example, if a President has signed an executive order (EOs), this can change the balance of power between the three federal branches. While EOs do not require congressional approval, under our Constitution, the executive branch cannot create new laws, appropriate funds, prevent distribution of funds already appropriated by Congress, or change the Constitution. The Constitution gives Congress and the federal courts power to rein in executive overreach, but those branches must exercise those checks to maintain the balance of powers.

Consent of the Governed

"Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

Declaration of Independence — Thomas Jefferson

Consent of the governed, as framed in the Declaration of Independence, means that a government's legitimacy and moral right to use state power is justified and lawful only when there is consent given from the people or society over which that political power is brought to bear.

Read more: [The Consent of the Governed: A Central Principle of the American Revolution](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

Our government's authority comes from the people. This fundamental principle in a democratic republic is **exercised by voting**.



Emoluments

An **emolument** is a payment, gift, salary, or benefit received either as compensation for services or as the result of holding a government office or position of power.

The Emoluments Clause (Article I, Section 9, Clause 8 of the U.S. Constitution) states:

"No Title of Nobility shall be granted by the United States: And no Person holding any Office of Profit or Trust under them, shall, without the Consent of the Congress, accept of any present, Emolument, Office, or Title, of any kind whatever, from any King, Prince, or foreign State."

In today's language: In the context of the Constitution, it refers to any profit or material gain to a government official, including the President, Cabinet and Supreme Court Justices, in return for a favor without approval by Congress. This includes gifts from state and foreign governments. Foreign interference in the American political system was among the gravest dangers feared by the founders of our nation and the framers of our Constitution. The United States was a new government, one that was vulnerable to manipulation by the great and wealthy world powers.

Learn more: [The Foreign Emoluments Clause—Article I](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

The Constitution was created to guide the behavior of U.S. government officials, elected and otherwise, to focus their loyalty on the interests of the entire country. Whether a gift is from a foreign country or state, it carries both the potential for and expectation of influencing decisions in favor of the gift giver. The emoluments clause is no relic of a bygone era, but rather an expression of insight into the nature of the human condition and the preconditions of self-governance.

Read more: [Emoluments Clause & Presidential Business • U.S. Constitution](#)

The Hatch Act

Passed in 1939 and amended in 2012, the **Hatch Act** is a federal law that, according to the U.S. Office of Special Counsel, restricts the political activity of all federal executive branch employees, District of Columbia government employees, employees of the U.S. Postal Service, and some state and local employees who work in connection with programs financed by federal loans or grants. Whether full-time or part-time, all employees are covered by the act even while on leave, even without pay, or furlough.

The Hatch Act forbids the intimidation or bribery of voters and restricts political campaign activities by federal employees. It prohibits using any public funds designated for relief or public works for electoral purposes. It forbids officials paid with federal funds from using promises of jobs, promotion, financial assistance, contracts, or any other benefit to coerce campaign contributions or political support. It does not apply to the President or Vice President of the United States.

Read more: [Hatch Act Overview | U.S. Office of Special Counsel](#) Detailed: [Hatch Act - Wikipedia](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

The public expects government employees to provide accurate information and to serve the people rather than one political party. Without this oversight, there would be no assurance that federal programs, "are administered in a nonpartisan fashion, to protect federal employees from political coercion in the workplace, and to ensure that federal employees are advanced based on merit and not based on political affiliation."



Civil Rights Act of 1964 & Voting Rights Act of 1965

The **Civil Rights Act of 1964** ending segregation in public places and banning employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, is considered one of the crowning legislative achievements of the civil rights movement. First proposed by President John F. Kennedy, it survived strong opposition from southern members of Congress and was signed into law by Kennedy's successor, Lyndon B. Johnson. In subsequent years, Congress expanded the act and passed additional civil rights legislation such as the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

**WHY THIS MATTERS

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 bars discrimination based on race, color, and national origin in programs receiving federal funds, while Title VII prohibits employment discrimination based on race, religion, national origin, and gender by employers and labor unions and created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission with the power to file lawsuits on behalf of aggrieved workers. Additionally, the act forbade use of federal funds for any discriminatory program and authorized the Department of Education to assist school desegregation.

The December 11, 2019 executive order on combating antisemitism states: "While Title VI does not cover discrimination based on religion, individuals who face discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin do not lose protection under Title VI for also being a member of a group that shares common religious practices." Executive Order 14281, issued in April 2025, states, "The Attorney General shall initiate appropriate action to repeal or amend the implementing regulations for Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 for all agencies to the extent they contemplate disparate-impact liability." On December 10, 2025, the Department of Justice issued a rule stating that proof of intent is now the sole basis for discrimination claims; the rule ends the use of statistical disparities and of evaluating policies or procedures that seem neutral but disproportionately harm a protected group.

Voting Rights Act of 1965

The **Voting Rights Act of 1965**, signed into law on August 6, 1965, by President Lyndon B. Johnson, outlawed the discriminatory voting practices adopted in many southern states after the Civil War. Blacks in the South faced tremendous obstacles to voting, including poll taxes, literacy tests, and other bureaucratic restrictions to deny them the right to vote. They also risked harassment, intimidation, economic reprisals, and physical violence when they tried to register or vote. As a result, Black voter registration was limited, along with political power.

Learn more—including full text: [Voting Rights Act \(1965\) | National Archives](#), [Voting Rights Fact Sheet](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

The Voting Rights Act had an immediate impact. By the end of 1965, a quarter of a million new Black voters had been registered, one-third by federal examiners. By the end of 1966, only 4 out of 13 southern states had fewer than 50 percent of Blacks registered to vote. The act was readopted and strengthened in 1970, 1975, and 1982, and was the most significant statutory change in the relationship between the federal and state governments in the area of voting since Reconstruction. Between 1965 and 1969, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of Section 5 and affirmed the broad range of voting practices for which preclearance was required. However, in 2013, the Court struck down that key provision in *Shelby v. Holder* involving federal oversight of voting rules in nine states. On April 29, 2026, the Supreme Court's 6-3 ruling in *Louisiana v. Callais* fundamentally changed how Section 2 of the act works in redistricting cases. This specifically prohibited any voting practice or law that discriminates based on race, including the drawing of congressional district maps that dilute minority voting power.



Posse Comitatus Act, War Powers Resolution, Insurrection Act

The Posse Comitatus Act generally prevents the President from using the military as a domestic police force. The Posse Comitatus Act bars federal troops from participating in civilian law enforcement except when expressly authorized by law. This 1878 law embodies an American tradition that sees military interference in civilian affairs as a threat to both democracy and personal liberty.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Recent events have revealed dangerous gaps in the law's coverage that Congress must address. The broader principle that the military should not be allowed to interfere in the affairs of civilian government is a core American value. It finds expression in the Constitution's division of power over the military between Congress and the President and in the guarantees of the Third, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Amendments. Today, the Posse Comitatus Act operates as an extension of these constitutional safeguards. Moreover, there are statutory exceptions to the law that allow the President to use the military to suppress genuine rebellions and to enforce federal civil rights laws.

[The Posse Comitatus Act, Explained | Brennan Center for Justice](#)

The **War Powers Resolution** of 1973, is a pivotal piece of federal legislation designed to reassert Congress's authority in decisions concerning military engagements. Passed in the wake of escalating concerns over the U.S.

involvement in the Vietnam War and perceived executive overreach in wartime decisions, the resolution aimed to check the President's power to commit U.S. forces to armed conflict without congressional consent.

Learn more: [What is the War Powers Resolution? – History and Major Facts](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

The main provisions of the War Powers Resolution are as follows:

- **Notification Requirement:** The President must notify Congress within 48 hours of committing U.S. armed forces to hostilities or to situations where hostilities are imminent. This notification must include the reasons for the deployment, the constitutional or legislative authority under which the President is acting, and the estimated duration of the military engagement.

- **Time Limits on Military Engagement:** Without congressional authorization, the President must withdraw U.S. forces from hostilities within 60 days unless Congress declares war, provides specific statutory authorization for the military action, or extends the deadline. An additional 30 days is allowed for the safe withdrawal of troops, if necessary.

Congressional Action: Congress has the power to direct the removal of U.S. forces from hostilities by passing a concurrent resolution. This provision allows Congress to terminate military engagements that lack congressional authorization or a declaration of war.

Congressional Approval: Congress's constitutional authority is to declare war and states that U.S. military forces can only be deployed in hostilities with a declaration of war or specific statutory authorization or in response to an attack on the United States, its territories, or its armed forces.

Constitutional and Legal Controversy: One of the central issues is whether the resolution infringes on the President's powers as Commander in Chief, as outlined in Article II, Section 2 of the Constitution. Presidents have often argued that the resolution limits their ability to respond swiftly and effectively to military threats and have questioned the constitutionality of its provisions.

The Insurrection Act of 1807, signed by President Thomas Jefferson, allows the President to deploy federal troops domestically without a governor's consent if law and order cannot be maintained. It has historically been used to enforce civil rights, suppress rebellions, and respond to large-scale riots.

While discussed in recent years, it has not been invoked since 1992, during the Los Angeles riots.

The President may invoke the Insurrection Act in several scenarios:

- At a state's request, if a governor or legislature asks for help against an insurrection
- When rebellion or disorder makes it impossible to enforce federal law
- To protect constitutional rights, if domestic violence or unlawful conspiracies deprive people of rights and the state fails to act.

Before exercising these powers, the President must issue a formal proclamation ordering insurgents to disperse.

Learn more: [The Insurrection Act Explained](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

The act does not define the allowed circumstances in detail. It serves as a statutory exception to the Posse Comitatus Act, which normally prohibits the military from acting in civilian law enforcement. The law's vague language—unchanged for over 150 years—means a president could theoretically deploy troops in situations that critics argue fall short of true Insurrection, but it's not a blank check.



The Rule of Law is a set of principles, or ideals, for ensuring an orderly and just society. The United States, along with many countries throughout the world, strives to uphold the rule of law in which everyone is treated equally under the law, everyone is held accountable to the same laws, clear and fair processes are in place for enforcing laws, the judiciary provides independent oversight, and human rights are guaranteed for all.

Read more: [Rule of Law-American Bar Association](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

No one is above the law: The creation of laws, their enforcement, and the relationships among legal rules are themselves legally regulated, so that no one—including the most highly placed official—is above the law. This legal constraint means that the government is subject to existing laws as much as its citizens are, no “legal” person shall enjoy privileges that are not extended to all, and no person shall be immune from legal sanctions. Also, application and judgment by various governing officials are to be impartial and consistent across equivalent cases, made without taking into consideration the class, status, or relative power among disputants.

Learn more: [Rule of law | Definition, Implications, Significance, & Facts | Britannica](#)

Shadow Docket

Originally, the shadow docket referred to the Supreme Court’s rules on procedural matters, such as scheduling, and consideration of requests for emergency measures like stays. Its role is changing.

Supreme Court cases take one of two tracks: the merits docket or the shadow docket.

Merits Docket: Each term the Court decides up to 70 cases on the merits docket. Before issuing a ruling in each case, the Court considers many briefs and hears oral arguments. One justice, writing for the majority, then issues comments from other justices. This process supports both informed decision making and transparency. “Almost every major Supreme Court case, including *Brown v. Board of Education*, *Roe v. Wade*, and *Citizens United v. FEC*, was decided on the merits docket.”

Shadow Docket: Cases on the shadow docket often do not receive either extensive briefing or an oral argument. As a result, the decisions are presented with little or no explanation and are frequently unclear on which justices are in the majority or minority.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The use of the shadow docket has changed in recent years. During the 1970s, when a case emerged on the shadow docket, the individual justice assigned to that circuit took oral argument and issued a signed order explaining this reasoning, usually alone. The Court’s handling of sensitive disputes changed dramatically with the presidency of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. His three appointments to the bench of Sandra Day O’Connor, Antonin Scalia and Anthony Kennedy, and particularly, the elevation of William Rehnquist to Chief Justice shifted the balance to the conservative.

Two significant changes followed. First, the Court ceased to formally adjourn during the summer allowing the justices to begin working collectively using the shadow docket, and stop holding hearings. Second, and more recently, the justices have begun to issue far more significant rulings through the shadow docket, which has reduced the thoroughness and reasoning of the decision-making process.

Law professor Stephen Vladeck noted in testimony before Congress in 2021, “Owing to their unpredictable timing, their lack of transparency, and their usual inscrutability, these rulings come both literally and figuratively in the shadows.”

Source: [The Supreme Court “Shadow Docket” Explained | Brennan Center for Justice](#)



Naturalization Process

Administered by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), an agency of the United States Department of Homeland Security since 2002, naturalization is the legal process through which a noncitizen voluntarily becomes a U.S. citizen after meeting specific eligibility requirements. These typically include a period of lawful permanent residence, good moral character, and successful completion of English and civics tests. The applicant must also be in one of these categories:

- Lawful permanent resident (Green Card holder) of five years
- Spouse of a U.S. citizen and lawful permanent resident for three years
- U.S. military service member (active duty or veteran)
- Child of a U.S. citizen

WHY THIS MATTERS

USCIS data shows that 2025 immigration policy changes and scrutiny have affected people's desire to make the final leap to become an American citizen. Naturalization has faced a series of policy and practice changes that may bring significantly longer wait times, higher denial rates, and increased risk for some applicants. With approximately nine million eligible-to-naturalize lawful permanent residents (LPRs) in the United States, understanding these developments is critical to ensure future access to U.S. citizenship.

In early 2025, USCIS cut millions of dollars for naturalization services for the Citizenship and Integration Grant Program, which provided funding for naturalization legal services and test preparation classes to over 30 NAC partners and many other nonprofits. Applicants from other countries have also experienced interview and oath ceremony postponements and cancellations, often without explanation.

Learn more: [The New Americans Campaign](#)

Civics Test

The U.S. citizenship civics test is part of the naturalization interview every applicant takes. The 2025–2026 version of the test draws from a pool of 128 official questions covering U.S. history, government, geography, and rights and responsibilities. During the interview, a USCIS officer will ask up to 20 of those questions out loud, with at least 12 correct answers to pass. All questions come from the publicly available official USCIS 2026 civics test list.

WHY THIS MATTERS

A civics test is required for U.S. naturalization to ensure applicants understand U.S. history, government principles, and civic responsibilities before becoming citizens. It assesses knowledge of topics like the Constitution, Bill of Rights, and branches of government.

Learn more: [What is the civics test, and how do you prepare for it? | Law Offices of Hugo Pina](#)



Oregon Government

Oregon's government is composed of three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial. Each branch operates independently to ensure a system of checks and balances, similar to the federal government. There is also a system of commissions wherein citizens are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate.

Learn more: [Government : State of Oregon](#) and [What the Vote](#)—See who represents Oregon in Congress and what its state legislature is voting on, or dig into district-level demographics.

Data sourced from Congress.gov, GovInfo, U.S. Census Bureau, and FEC.

State government:

• Legislative Branch—Makes the laws

Oregonians elect 30 Senate and 60 House members to enact new laws and revise existing ones relating to the health, education, and general welfare of Oregonians and to make decisions that keep the state in good economic and environmental condition.

• Executive Branch—Enforces the laws

Oregonians elect five representatives responsible for carrying out Oregon's laws, administering those laws through departments, boards, and commissions that create regulations comprising the Oregon Administrative Rules (OAR). These are the [Governor](#), [Secretary of State](#), [State Treasurer](#), [Attorney General](#) and [BOLI-the Bureau of Labor & Industries](#).

• Judicial Branch—Interprets the laws

Oregonians, as well as judicial representatives, elect/appoint members who deliberate on civil, criminal, and constitutional issues. Judges also review the actions of executive and legislative branches for compliance with the state Constitution.

Oregon Supreme Court: The Supreme Court is the highest court in the Oregon judicial branch. The court has seven elected justices. They choose one of their own to serve a six-year term as Chief Justice. Only the U.S. Supreme Court may reverse or modify a decision of the Oregon Supreme Court.

Learn more: [Oregon Supreme Court](#)

Oregon Constitution: This was adopted by the people on November 9, 1857. It outlines the state's framework for governance, including the powers, structure, and limitations of the state government, individual and civil rights, and other matters. The current state constitution has 18 articles and has been amended 260 times. The Oregon Constitution can be amended with a legislative, [citizen-initiated](#), or convention-referred constitutional amendment, all of which require voter approval.

Learn more: [Oregon Constitution](#)

County governments:

Oregon's 36 counties operate as both subdivisions of state government and as independent political entities delivering direct public services such as counting ballots. The statutory structure of county government in Oregon, the composition and authority of county boards of commissioners, the range of services counties are mandated or authorized to provide, and the boundaries that distinguish county jurisdiction from municipal and special district authority can be found [here](#).

Commissions: Oregon also has a system of commissions, wherein private citizens are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the state senate. [Members of Oregon boards and commissions are essential participants in statewide decision making, offering these dedicated individuals the opportunity to participate in developing a wide variety of important governmental policies.](#)

Important issues include consumer protection, economic development, education, conservation, and health care—all of which are vital to the ongoing success of the State of Oregon. All residents are welcome and encouraged to serve. The Governor ensures that the diverse viewpoints of the state's residents are represented on all boards and commissions. Membership provides an opportunity to share viewpoints, visions, and hopes for Oregon.

Read more about serving on a commission: [Governor of Oregon : Boards & Commissions](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS

Understanding the purpose, responsibility, and relationship between each branch of the state, county, and local governments expands and informs civic knowledge and facilitates engagement.

Voting and Elections in Oregon

Voting

The policies governing voter participation are enacted and enforced primarily at the state level. Oregon's election division oversees and administers state elections ensuring that voting is secure, accessible, and reflects the will of the people. These policies, which include voter identification requirements, early voting provisions, and online voter registration systems, direct the conditions under which people cast their ballots. County elections officials are responsible for voter registration and mailing ballots.

Information about voting policies in Oregon:

- [Election policy](#), including deadlines and eligibility requirements.
- [In-person voting details](#), including identification requirements, poll times, and early voting provisions.
- [Absentee/mail-in voting](#) deadlines and rules.
- Details about [voting rules for people convicted of a felony](#).
- Contact information for [election agencies](#).

[Click here](#) for more information about election administration in Oregon, including voter list maintenance policies, provisional ballot rules, post-election auditing practices, and additional election policy context.

Vote By Mail

Oregon established vote-by-mail as the standard mechanism for voting with 1998 Oregon Ballot Measure 60, a citizen initiative. The measure made Oregon the first state in the United States to conduct all its elections exclusively by mail. In 2026, seven states and Washington D.C. use vote-by-mail solely. Political scientists say Oregon's vote by mail system contributes to its highest-in-the-nation rate of voter turnout, an average 61.5 percent of eligible voters.

All registered voters in Oregon receive their ballots via postal delivery and can vote from their homes. A state voters' pamphlet is mailed to every household about three weeks before each statewide election. It includes information about each measure and candidate in the upcoming election. In 2010, Oregon became the fourth state in the country, along with Arizona, Washington, and Kansas, to allow online voter registration. Party affiliation, ballot progress monitoring, and voter registration currently can also be done online. In a 2020 study, Oregon was ranked as the easiest state for citizens to vote in.

“Motor-voter” registration

In 2015, the Oregon legislature passed a bill to adopt an automatic voter registration procedure using information from the State DMV. At the time, the state had roughly 2.2 million registered voters out of an estimated 3 million eligible voters, and the bill potentially registered half of the 800,000 unregistered, eligible voters. Eligible individuals found through the system have 21 days to opt out or register with a political party; otherwise they are automatically registered to vote as nonaffiliated with any party.

In 2026, 44 percent of registered voters are either registered as nonaffiliated or with a minor party.

Learn more about voting in Oregon: [Oregon Secretary of State Elections Division](#)

Elections

Oregon uses a voluntarily closed primary system for its major political parties. This is a *choice* made each election cycle by the Democrat and Republican parties. In addition to the two major parties, there are eight minor political parties in Oregon. Voters can choose to be a member of a party or to remain nonaffiliated. Nonaffiliated voters can still vote in nonpartisan contests, like mayor, judge, and city council races, but cannot vote in partisan primaries.

Learn more: [Glossary of election policy terms - Ballotpedia](#)

Key Features of a Closed Primary System

- **Party Registration:** Voters must be registered with a major political party in order to vote in that party's primary.

- **Exclusion of Nonaffiliated voters:** These voters cannot vote in major party primaries unless the party opts to open its primary. Primary ballots mailed to nonaffiliated voters and those registered with minor parties differ from those mailed to voters registered with one of the major parties.
- **Decision Timeline:** Major parties must announce whether they will hold an open or closed primary at least 90 days before the election.
- **Option:** To receive a ballot for a major party's primary election, changes must be made to the voter's party selection no later than the Voter Registration and Party Change Deadline, 21 days before Primary Election Day.

Fusion Voting in Elections

In July 2009, then-governor Ted Kulongowski signed SB 326, the bill that legalized aggregated fusion voting in Oregon. Fusion voting allows more than one political party to nominate the same candidate. Under this process, if a candidate receives multiple nominations, the candidate will either appear on the general election ballot once with all affiliations listed..

- Proponents argue that fusion voting increases the influence of minor parties by enabling voters to voice their support for minor party platforms while also giving candidates a greater chance of winning the election through multiple endorsements.
- As of May 2023, five states allow for some form of fusion voting: Connecticut, Mississippi, New York, Oregon, and Vermont. Fusion voting is banned in Minnesota, New Jersey, and South Carolina.

Read more about fusion voting in Oregon: [Fusion Voting in Oregon](#), [Fusion voting](#),

WHY THIS MATTERS

Knowledge of the method, rules, and choices available to citizens helps voters make good, informed decisions.

