



# **Citizens' Handbook**

**EMPOWERING  
VOTERS.  
DEFENDING  
DEMOCRACY.**

A thick, horizontal, purple brush-stroke-like line that tapers at both ends, positioned below the main text.



Scan the QR code for an online version of LWVIN Citizens' Handbook.



Copyright © 2024 by League of Women Voters' of Indiana.  
All rights reserved.  
Printed May 2024.



The League of Women Voters is a **nonpartisan, grassroots organization** working to **protect and expand voting rights** and ensure everyone is represented in our democracy. We empower voters and defend democracy through **advocacy, education, and litigation**, at the local, state, and national levels.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:**

League of Women Voters of Indiana (LWVIN)  
1500 N Delaware Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46202  
United States of America

[LWVIN.ORG](http://LWVIN.ORG)

**FIND US ON:**



The **LWVIN Citizens' Handbook** was prepared pursuant to a League of Women Voters Education Fund (LWVEF) *Making Democracy Work* grant, received by the League of Women Voters of Indiana and completed in year 2024.

**AUTHORS:**

Dr. Darren Wheeler is a Professor of Political Science at Ball State University where he has been teaching since 2009. Stacy Wheeler has done work with the Bowen Center for Public Affairs at Ball State University and the Indiana Secretary of State's Voting System Technical Oversight Program (VSTOP). They reside in Muncie, Indiana, with their daughter who they hope will read this handbook and use the information in it to make a difference in the future.



### **Citizens' Handbook**

**Goal:** To promote a more informed, engaged, and empowered citizenry, which can help to strengthen democracy and promote greater equity and justice in society in general, and among underprivileged communities in particular.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> "Making Democracy Work Grant Application" League of Women Voters of Indiana.

## Table of Contents

|   |         |
|---|---------|
| Make Your Voice Heard                                   | page 6  |
| Know the Basics   | page 6  |
| Participating in Politics at the National Level         | page 8  |
| The United State Constitution                           | page 8  |
| National Legislative Branch                             | page 11 |
| National Executive Branch                               | page 13 |
| Presidential Selection                                  | page 14 |
| Lawmaking & Implementing the Law                        | page 15 |
| Other Presidential Powers                               | page 16 |
| National Judicial Branch                                | page 17 |
| Participating in Politics at the State Level in Indiana | page 18 |
| Direct Democracy  | page 19 |
| The Indiana State Legislature                           | page 20 |
| The Indiana State Executive Branch                      | page 21 |
| The Indiana State Judiciary                             | page 22 |
| Participating in Local Indiana Government               | page 25 |
| County Government                                       | page 26 |
| Township Government                                     | page 26 |
| City Government   | page 26 |
| Town Government   | page 27 |
| Voting & Voting Rights                                  | page 27 |
| Who Is Eligible to Vote?                                | page 30 |
| How Do You Register to Vote?                            | page 31 |
| Where Do You Go to Vote?                                | page 32 |
| What Is the Voting Process?                             | page 33 |
| Absentee Voting by Mail                                 | page 33 |
| In-Person Absentee Voting (Early Voting)                | page 34 |
| In-Person Voting  | page 34 |
| Challenges and Provisional Ballots                      | page 35 |
| Ten Ways to Participate in Politics & Make an Impact    | page 36 |



# Citizens' Handbook

---

## Make your voice heard. Your voice matters.

Government and politics can sometimes seem confusing when there are a variety of political institutions, policies, and people involved. However, everyone has the capacity to understand the basic structure of our political system. Participating in politics is not difficult. **The key is knowing who to talk to, what to say, how to say it, and how to get involved.** This handbook provides an outline of the structure of the U.S. political system and explains how **you** can participate in various ways across all levels of government.

---

## Know the basics. Be informed.

The United States is a **representative democracy**. There are parts of the U.S. political system where people make decisions on public policy directly (e.g., voting on a local tax referendum). In other instances, elected officials do it on our behalf (e.g., members of Congress voting on the national budget). ***Either way, your informed political participation is extraordinarily important!***

The United States political system is a **federal** one. There are multiple levels of government —**national, state, and local**—exercising power over people. The national government has authority over issues such as coining money, making treaties with other countries, and declaring war. State governments are generally responsible for things such as conducting elections, while local governments are primarily responsible for activities such as zoning regulations or the maintenance of local parks. Some powers, such as the power to tax, are shared powers exercised by multiple levels of government. **People who want to participate in a democracy need to know which level of government is responsible for a particular policy area or decision.** You do not write the President of the United States if you have issues with the local school. Similarly, you do not write to your local mayor with questions about social security.



Academics sometimes characterize the U.S. political system as **pluralist**. **What this means is that there are many access points for you and other individuals to participate in the political process.** You can join a political party or an interest group and attempt to influence an elected official's vote on an issue. Even after a vote on a bill, it is not over. An executive branch agency may have to develop rules which have the effect of law to implement a bill, and interest groups and individuals like yourself can attempt to inject themselves into the policy process. Finally, individuals and groups can file lawsuits in court to challenge laws. **Opportunities to participate are virtually endless and can occur at all levels of government!**

There is one important thing to note at the outset about political participation. **Anyone can participate in politics. There are no age or citizenship restrictions on participation, with one important exception: voting.**

States have residency, age, and citizenship requirements for one to be an eligible voter. In the state of Indiana, for example, Article II of the Indiana Constitution limits voting in elections to "citizen[s] of the United States."

Anyone can make a difference by becoming informed, following legislation they care about, and advocating for policies they would like to see enacted.

## Participating in Politics at the National Level

---

The national level of government is likely the one most familiar to people. **Congress, the Supreme Court, and the office of the President of the United States are all well-known institutions.** Policies at this level are made for the entire United States. Examples include issues like national defense or immigration policy. The U.S. Constitution structures these institutions and creates processes for bills to become laws. Knowing these structures and processes is vital for people such as you who want to influence policy at the federal level.

### The United States Constitution

A good starting place for an examination of government and politics in the United States is the [United States Constitution](#). **The U.S. Constitution is the supreme law of the land.** It provides the structural framework for our political system. The U.S. Constitution created a national government that consists of three branches: the **legislative branch**, the **executive branch**, and the **judicial branch**. The legislature is responsible for writing laws, the executive branch implements the laws, and the judiciary reviews laws to ensure that laws do not violate the U.S. Constitution. In addition to structuring government, the U.S. Constitution also assigns powers and defines the roles of important political institutions and processes such as the duties assigned to Congress and the impeachment process.

When the constitutional convention was convened in 1787, the original purpose of the delegates was to revise the Articles of Confederation, the existing governing document for the states. What they did was revise it right out of existence. In its place they presented the U.S. Constitution for state conventions to ratify.

#### DID YOU KNOW?


At just over **7,000 words**, the U.S. Constitution is one of the shorter constitutions in the world.

While it may seem strange to consider today, there was significant opposition to the U.S. Constitution in many state governments at that time. Many opponents finally agreed to support the new constitution, but only if it contained amendments designed to limit national government power and protect individual rights. Ten amendments, called the **Bill of Rights**, were added to the U.S. Constitution to satisfy these critics. They contain many familiar freedoms such as the right to a jury trial, the right to bear arms, and the right to be free from cruel and unusual punishments. Freedoms contained in the First Amendment—**free speech, free press, and the right to petition government**—are at the heart of political participation in our country.



**The U.S. Constitution contains twenty-seven total amendments**, many of which deal with voting and the selection of government officials. **Voting is generally a state matter.** States get to determine eligibility of voters and the time, place, and manner of elections. While suffrage (the right to vote) at the time the Constitution was written was almost wholly limited to white, property-owning males, it has since been considerably expanded. The [Fifteenth](#), [Nineteenth](#), and the [Twenty-sixth Amendments](#) **expanded voting rights to people of color, women, and eighteen-year-olds respectively.** The [Seventeenth Amendment](#) provides that citizens can directly select their United States Senators.

---



While states still can regulate voting and elections, **they cannot restrict a person’s right to vote based on race or gender, nor can they deny the right to vote for those eighteen or older on the basis of age.**

---

The [Fifth](#) and [Fourteenth](#) Amendments to the U.S. Constitution guarantee **Due Process**. This means that no person can be deprived of life, liberty, or property without Due Process (i.e., a process that is fair). Most people probably think about this in the criminal justice context. Due Process requires that criminal defendants be guaranteed protections found in the Bill of Rights (e.g., the right to counsel, a speedy trial). But the word “liberty” in the Due Process clause has also been interpreted by courts to include intimate personal rights such as the right to marry.

The Fourteenth Amendment also requires that every state provide **Equal Protection** under the law. Originally intended to protect newly freed African Americans from racially discriminatory state laws in the wake of the Civil War, it **has since been expanded to prevent arbitrary government discrimination on the basis of race, gender, and sexual orientation.** These two clauses, the Due Process Clause and the Equal Protection Clause, are at the heart of many of the important freedoms that we enjoy in the United States. How they apply to particular policy issues and questions are matters that are constantly interpreted and reinterpreted by the judiciary.

**What role do the people play in amending the U.S. Constitution?** The public cannot directly amend the U.S. Constitution. However, individuals can play an indirect role. Article V of the U.S. Constitution spells out the two ways to amend the U.S. Constitution. The first method involves approval by two-thirds of both houses of Congress followed by the ratification of the proposed amendment by three-fourths of the states. **You can let your representatives at the national level know whether you support or oppose a proposed amendment.**

The U.S. Constitution also could be amended by holding a new **constitutional convention**. Unfortunately, the Constitution does not describe what rules would govern such a convention. A second constitutional convention could theoretically change anything in the U.S. Constitution! Any changes would need to be approved by three-quarters of the states.

Hundreds of constitutional amendments (e.g., banning flag burning, abolishing the income tax, and abolishing birthright citizenship) are introduced in each session of Congress, but very rarely do these proposed amendments progress very far because the level of support needed for success is quite high. Most constitutional amendments have either made structural changes to the constitution or expanded important rights. Most policy issues (e.g., education, transportation) are addressed in federal and/or state legislation, or in state constitutions rather than the U.S. Constitution through the amendment process.

## The Equal Rights Amendment

“Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”

---

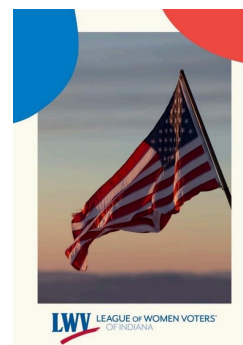
Originally introduced in Congress in 1923, the Equal Rights Amendment reads: “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex”. The Equal Rights Amendment finally passed both houses of Congress in 1972 and was sent to the states for ratification. Opponents argued that the amendment was unnecessary, given that there were already laws that outlawed discrimination on the basis of sex in many areas. Some question whether ratification of the amendment would be legal even if the requisite number of states ratified it given the decades-long time period between congressional passage and any subsequent state ratification. Proponents argue that discrimination on the basis of sex still exists in the United States and that this amendment is needed to truly provide equal protection under the law and prevent sex-based discrimination.

As of 2023, thirty-eight states have ratified the amendment, enough to make it an addition to the Constitution. However, several of these states only ratified the amendment *after* the deadline for doing so had elapsed. Moreover, several states that had ratified the amendment subsequently voted to *rescind* their ratification. The Equal Rights Amendment is *not* currently a part of the U.S. Constitution. [Advocates](#) for the amendment continue to work for its passage.

### DID YOU KNOW?

---

Jeannette Rankin was the **first woman** elected to Congress when she served in the House of Representatives in 1916.



# National Legislative Branch

The legislative branch of government is easily the most accessible to you and the American public when it comes to politics and participation. There are numerous ways to follow legislative activities and communicate with the people's elected representatives.

The legislative branch of government at the national level is known as **Congress**, and it is responsible for writing laws. Congress consists of two chambers, the [United States House of Representatives](#) and the [United States Senate](#). The creation of Congress was a result of compromises between northern and southern states, and large and small states. When the U.S. Constitution was being drafted, debates raged about how to count southern slaves for the purposes of taxation and representation. There were also disagreements between large and small states about how to provide "fair" representation in the legislature. Large states wanted representation based on population. Small states wanted each state to get equal representation.

Representation in the U.S. House of Representatives is based on population, so a populous state such as California has over fifty members in the U.S. House of Representatives, while a sparsely populated one such as Wyoming has only one. However, each state has two United States Senators regardless of population. This means both Wyoming and California have equal representation in the United States Senate despite the enormous difference in population.

All bills at the national level must pass both the U.S. House of Representatives and the United States Senate with the exact same wording to become law so the two chambers must work together—and with the President of the United States—to [pass legislation](#). This can become difficult when one political party holds a majority in Congress and the President is a member of the other political party. When gridlock such as this occurs, very little happens at the national level.



## Who represents you?

[In the U.S. House of Representatives?](#)

[In the U.S. Senate? Go online to find out.](#)

**There are 435 members of the U.S. House of Representatives and 100 United States Senators.** The state of Indiana has nine total members in the U.S. House of Representatives. Each United States Senator represents all of the people in a state, and there are two U.S. Senators for each state.

Each member of the U.S. House of Representatives represents a geographical district within a state based on population. Each district has roughly the same number of people within the district. However, this means the geographic boundaries and shape of a district can vary

considerably. For example, there are several districts within the populous area of New York City while the entire state of Montana is a single district.

**Generally speaking, state legislatures have the responsibility for drawing congressional and state legislative districts.**

Sometimes this process can be controversial. State legislators frequently engage in a process called gerrymandering.

**Gerrymandering** is a process where one political party draws legislative districts in such a way as to maximize their number of seats in both Congress and state legislative bodies.

While legislative districts must have roughly the same number of people, they can be shaped in creative ways when gerrymandered. Gerrymandering is used to create “safe” seats for a political party, and it has the effect of decreasing, or even virtually eliminating, electoral competition because the partisan division of voters makes it almost impossible for the opposing political party to win.

As a result of gerrymandering, only a few dozen of the 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives are routinely competitive. The remainder are regularly won by the same party every election. **The courts have ruled that gerrymandering for partisan political purposes is constitutional, but gerrymandering along racial lines is not.**

**The distorting effects of gerrymandering has led several states to use non-partisan commissions to draw legislative districts,** significantly reducing the impact of partisan politics and resulting in fairer, more competitive districts. In Indiana, the state legislature is responsible for drawing legislative districts, subject to the veto of the governor. If the state legislature cannot pass legislative maps, then a five-member commission is responsible for doing so. The commission consists of the majority leader from the Indiana State Senate and the Indiana House of Representatives, the chair of the redistricting committee from each house, and a state legislator nominated by the governor.



**Watch congressional committees in action! [Go online to watch.](#)**

Located in Washington, D.C., both the U.S. House of Representatives and the United States Senate reside in the [Capitol Building](#). **The U.S. Congress has an extensive online presence.** [There is an online database](#) that contains all congressional legislation including the text of specific bills, who sponsors them, votes, and committee reports. It is also possible to sign up for [online alerts](#) so you know when action has been taken on a particular bill.

Most of the legislative work in Congress is done in various committees that make national policy in particular areas (e.g., agriculture, transportation, foreign affairs). Many committee hearings can be [streamed online](#) or are televised. Congressional committees also have [their own web pages](#) with hearing videos, membership information, reports, and other pertinent

information. [CSPAN](#) and [CSPAN2](#) offer full coverage of U.S. House of Representatives and the United States Senate proceedings respectively. These television channels provide other programming including committee hearings and other political programs.

Schedule permitting, members of Congress can meet with visitors who live in their district in their Washington D.C. office. These elected officials also have a handful of offices in their home state districts. Staffers in their offices perform a number of services for people in their districts who may be having issues with federal agencies. These members of Congress are *your* elected officials. These elected officials and their staff can help you navigate the federal bureaucracy and assist *you* with your problems (e.g., a Veterans' Affairs claim, a social security check, or an issue with your passport).

Finally, each member of Congress has their own web site that details their committee assignments, their legislative agenda, and contact information (both in Washington, D.C. and in their home state field offices).

There are a number of resources where you can learn more about government and culture in the United States. [The Library of Congress](#) was founded in 1800 and it is the largest library in the world with over a hundred million items in hundreds of different languages on all types of subjects including law, politics, and culture. [The National Archives](#) is the entity that keeps records of all business conducted by the federal government. You can find presidential papers, genealogy records, historical photographs and much more. The [Congressional Research Service](#) prepares a variety of reports for members of Congress on specific bills and larger issues ranging from agriculture policy to counterterrorism efforts. These are available to the public at no cost and are an effective way to obtain background information on a particular issue or bill.

## National Executive Branch

When the Framers drafted the U.S. Constitution, they spent a great deal of time considering the executive branch of government. They knew they did not want a King, but they wanted a chief executive with enough power to effectively carry out the responsibilities of the national government. The result is the office of the **Presidency**.

While the constitutional powers of the presidency are largely unchanged since the U.S. Constitution was written, the office has grown considerably in terms of overall power and scope since World War II, particularly in military and foreign affairs.

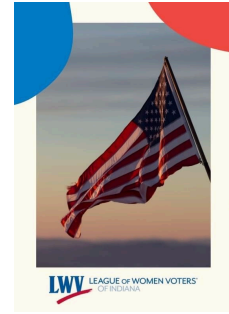
The **President of the United States** is head of the executive branch of the national government. The **Vice President of the United States** assists the President and serves two functions. The Vice President is President of the United States Senate and gets to cast a vote on matters if there is a tie. While the Vice President rarely attends Senate proceedings, they have on occasion cast tie-breaking votes on important legislation. The second duty of the Vice President is to assume the role of President of the United States if the President dies, resigns, becomes incapacitated, or is removed from office. If this occurs, the Vice President assumes the full powers of the presidency.

## DID YOU KNOW?

---

Kamala Harris became the **first female** and **first African American** to serve as **Vice President of the United States** starting in 2021.

---



The President lives and works in [The White House](#), which is located in Washington, D.C. The White House is open to the public for [tours](#). While one does not, generally speaking, *meaningfully* participate in national politics by [writing, emailing, or calling the President](#), it is possible to do so. The United States is simply just too large for this to be a sure, effective means of influencing a high-ranking public official. Still, if you want to contact the President, go right ahead!

## Presidential Selection

The President and Vice-President are selected by the [Electoral College](#), a political institution unique to the United States. The Electoral College was another compromise negotiated by the Framers of the U.S. Constitution. They rejected the idea that voters would be sufficiently knowledgeable to make an informed choice for President. The Framers did not want Congress to select the President either as this might make Congress too powerful. Historically, state legislatures selected the state's electors, but more recently the people of each state vote directly for their electors.



When the **people of each state cast a vote for president, they are actually voting for electors** who are pledged to support a particular presidential candidate. These electors in each state, in turn, cast votes for their pledged presidential candidates.

---

**Voters do not directly elect the president**, which leads some to complain that their vote does not really count. Since electors almost always support their candidate, the practical effect is the same. Most states allocate their Electoral College votes in winner-take-all fashion, which means even if a candidate wins 51% of the popular vote in a state, they will be awarded *all* that state's electoral votes. This can have the effect of providing the impression that the winning presidential candidate received far more support than they did.

But the U.S. Constitution does not mandate a winner-take-all format, and a handful of states award their Electoral College votes on a proportional basis to more accurately reflect the political division in their states. Some critics, including the League of Women Voters, advocate doing away with the Electoral College entirely and allowing voters to directly elect the President and Vice President. However, it would take a constitutional amendment to eliminate the Electoral College, something which is very difficult to achieve.

A President can also be impeached and removed from office for "...Treason, Bribery, or other high crimes and Misdemeanors." The U.S. House of Representatives must pass articles of impeachment (a list of accusations) and the United States Senate determines whether the allegations are proved and warrant the removal of the President from office. Three presidents have been impeached, but no President has ever been removed from office through this process. President Richard Nixon is the only President to ever resign from office, a result of the Watergate scandal.

## Lawmaking & Implementing the Law

**The President must work with Congress to pass legislation.** Congress writes bills and then sends them to the President. If the President signs a bill, it becomes law. If the President vetoes a bill, it is sent back to Congress. If two-thirds of Congress agrees, it can override the President's veto and the bill becomes law anyway. If there is not sufficient support in Congress to override the President's veto, the bill dies.

**The primary job of the executive branch is to implement laws.** There are many [federal agencies](#) who perform these tasks. These agencies and departments are often staffed by political appointees at the top ranks and civil service professionals at lower ranks who have expertise in specific policy areas. Some have familiar names such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, while others such as the Merit Systems Protection Board are less well known.

Sometimes it can be difficult to know which agency or department you need to contact about a particular problem. In instances such as this, it is sometimes helpful to contact your member of Congress and seek assistance from their staff. They are quite knowledgeable about the federal government, and they can help you determine what federal agency you need to talk to, what you need to say, and how it should be said.



**Passionate about an issue? Tell Congress.**

[In the U.S. House of Representatives?](#)

[In the U.S. Senate?](#)

[Go online to find out.](#)

**Lawmaking is not complete just because a bill is passed by Congress and signed by the President.** Because members of Congress are not experts in all policy areas, the legislation they write is necessarily broad. Employees in federal agencies—policy experts—are often the ones who “fill in the details.” One mechanism for this is called [rulemaking](#).

For instance, when Congress passed the Safe Drinking Water Act in 1974, it did not write the standards for what was considered “safe” in the statute itself. Instead, Congress tasked experts at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to create a rule setting the standards for safe drinking water based on scientific evidence.

When an agency engages in rulemaking it publishes its intent to do so in the [Federal Register](#). **In the process of proposing, amending, and finalizing rules, the public has the opportunity to comment.** This is a direct way that you can communicate your policy preferences to executive agencies as they announce the detailed guidelines that bring congressional legislation to life.

All proposed rules, changes in rules, and final rules are published in the [Federal Register](#), sometimes referred to as “The Daily Journal of the United States Government.” Notices of agency meetings, hearings, and Presidential documents (e.g., executive orders, proclamations) can also be found here.

## Other Presidential Powers

The President of the United States also has the power to **pardon individuals** for offenses committed against the United States (except in cases of impeachment). Additionally, the President has the responsibility to deliver to Congress a report on the [State of the Union](#). While this was originally done through written messages, today’s Presidents perform this task each year with a televised speech to Congress. These State of the Union speeches list the President’s accomplishments and outline the President’s agenda for the coming year.

The President has the **power to appoint**, with the “Advice and Consent” of the Senate, **hundreds of government officials and federal judges**. While some of these officials, such as the United States Secretary of State, only serve during the President’s administration, federal judges essentially serve life terms. These judges often continue to make important decisions long after the President who appointed them has departed from office.

While the U.S. Constitution divides **war and foreign affairs powers** between the President and Congress, the reality is that the President has become the dominant actor in these areas. The President can **negotiate treaties**, but these treaties must be approved by two-thirds of the United States Senate. However, the President is largely in control of foreign affairs on a day-to-day basis.

The U.S. Constitution gives Congress the power to declare war, but the President has used their power as **Commander-in-Chief** to involve the United States in dozens of military conflicts. As a result, it is important for you as a voter to become informed about presidential candidates’ positions, not just on domestic policies, but in foreign affairs as well.



There are a variety of places where you can find records and data on the presidency and past presidents. [The American Presidency Project](#) is one of the best sources of presidential documents on the Internet (presidential speeches, executive orders, letters, news conferences, statistics, election data, etc.). Many retired presidents have [presidential libraries](#) that contain records and memorabilia from their time in the White House. These libraries are a good source of historical documents and data.



**Want to learn more about a President?**

**[Go online to learn more about the Presidency.](#)**

## National Judicial Branch

The Framers were somewhat divided about the judiciary during the constitutional convention. Some wanted only a supreme court while others wanted a larger court system. In the end, they compromised. The U.S. Constitution creates one Supreme Court, while Congress was given the power to create additional courts, which has resulted in a large [federal judiciary](#).

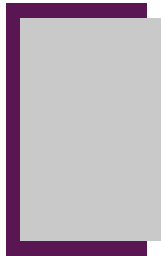
**While it may seem like federal courts can hear cases on any issue, they are generally limited to cases that involve interpreting the U.S. Constitution, federal law, and treaties to which the United States is a party.** While state courts are usually the ultimate judge of state constitutions and state statutes, federal courts may hear cases where state constitutions and statutes are alleged to violate the U.S. Constitution or they conflict with federal laws.

**Federal District Courts** are the trial courts in the federal system. They hear evidence and deliver verdicts in both criminal and civil matters. If you lose at this level you may appeal to the **Circuit Courts of Appeal**. Most federal cases end at this level. If you lose your appeal at this appellate level, you may appeal to the **U.S. Supreme Court**. However, success is unlikely since the Supreme Court has almost complete discretion to decide what cases it will hear, and it issues only about seventy-five full written opinions each yearly term.

Of the three branches of the national government, **the judiciary is easily the most insulated from direct public involvement.** Federal judges are not elected and cannot be removed by voters even if they issue unpopular or controversial opinions. Even though the federal courts are insulated from the public, they have historically issued opinions that do not stray too far from public opinion.

The Supreme Court has almost complete freedom to decide which cases it wants to hear and offers no explanation why certain cases are selected and others are not. [Oral arguments are open to the public](#), but audio and video recording are prohibited. Federal courts have been largely resistant to calls for televising or audio streaming of proceedings, arguing that they might unduly impact them.

After oral arguments, Supreme Court justices meet in secret to discuss cases and assign opinions. Opinions are also written in secret and not released to the public until they are complete. They are then announced. Justices do not explain their opinions or justify their reasoning. This can sometimes make deciphering judicial opinions difficult for the public.



If you want to influence the selection of a federal judge, contact your U.S. Senators and encourage them to either support or oppose a nominee.

**How does one participate when it comes to the judiciary? You and the voting public have no direct role to play in the selection of federal judges**, something criticized by many government observers given the fact that the Supreme Court hears dozens of cases on some of the most important issues of today such as abortion and the death penalty. The President of the United States nominates candidates for the federal judiciary at all levels. Each nominee must be approved by a simple majority vote of the United States Senate. If confirmed, federal judges serve as long as they exhibit “good behavior” (essentially a life term). Federal judges can be removed from office by the impeachment process just like the President of the United States and other executive branch officers, but this does not happen frequently.

You can **join an interest group** that lobbies United States Senators or **files amicus curiae (“friend of the court”) briefs**, which are documents that encourage judges to decide cases in a particular way.

Even if public participation regarding the federal judiciary is limited, it is still important to keep informed of judicial decisions because there are few important political issues of the day that do not eventually end up before the courts. Often, it is the courts that ultimately define the nature and scope of our rights and freedoms.

## Participating in Politics at the State Level in Indiana

---

States existed prior to the formation of the U.S. Constitution. In fact, the first attempt at continental governance was the [Articles of Confederation](#). Most government power in this arrangement resided with the individual states resulting in a relatively weak national government. Ultimately, those seeking a stronger central government produced what is today the U.S. Constitution.

While the U.S. Constitution expanded the power of the national government, particularly with respect to commerce and war powers, the Framers intended the national government to be one with limited powers. This is evidenced in part by the [Tenth Amendment](#) which 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.” It turns out that this leaves states with power over a staggering number of public policy issues.

While the scope of state government power is considerable, it is limited by the **Supremacy Clause** which is located in [Article VI of the U.S. Constitution](#). This clause states that if national and state laws conflict, the national law is supreme. When the national government has passed a law, a state may not pass its own law that conflicts with the national government law.

State governments have extensive powers to write laws affecting people who live in that state. In many ways, state governments impact the daily lives of citizens even more than the national government. **There are currently fifty states in the United States, and each state has its own state constitution and government.** While they share many similarities, each is a little different.

On December 11, 1816, Indiana became the 19<sup>th</sup> state to join the United States of America. The current Indiana Constitution was passed in 1851. The Indiana state constitution creates a state government with **legislative, executive, and judicial branches** of government. Their broad functions are similar to the political institutions we see at the national level.

Much like its national counterpart, the [Indiana Constitution](#) contains a Bill of Rights. Many of the provisions found in the Indiana Constitution’s Bill of Rights mirror those found in the U.S. Constitution’s Bill of Rights (e.g., the right to bear arms, the right to a jury trial). Others, such as the right to hunt and fish (Article I, Section 39) are specific to the state of Indiana.

The Indiana state constitution can be amended, though the process is time consuming and does not involve direct voter participation. An **amendment** to the Indiana Constitution may be proposed by a member in either chamber in the Indiana General Assembly, the Indiana State Senate or the Indiana House of Representatives. If a majority of each house approves, the amendment is sent forward to the *next* General Assembly. If a majority of each house of that General Assembly approves, it is sent forward again to the *next* General Assembly. If a majority of this third General Assembly approves the amendment by a simple majority, then the amendment becomes part of the Indiana state constitution. In short, an amendment must garner a simple majority in three consecutive Indiana General Assemblies to pass. One virtue of this process is that it gives the public considerable time to express their support for or opposition to any amendment. However, it is worth noting that the public cannot directly initiate consideration of a constitutional amendment to the Indiana Constitution. The process must go through the Indiana General Assembly.

## Direct Democracy

**Referendums, Initiatives, and Recalls** are three mechanisms found in *some* states that allow for direct citizen involvement in the legislative or constitutional amendment process.

Some states have a **recall** process. This is a citizen-initiated process that allows for voters to remove a public official from office before the end of their term. If citizens gather enough

signatures, they can have the question of whether to remove an official put to a vote. This serves as a continuous check on public officials in between elections.

An **initiative** is a citizen-introduced effort to create a law or a constitutional amendment without the approval of the state legislature. If supporters can gather enough signatures from voters, they can have their proposal voted on by the people. Initiatives can be useful if the public feels strongly about a specific issue but the state legislature, for whatever reason, has not addressed it.

A popular **referendum** allows voters to petition to vote on actions taken by state legislative bodies. This allows citizens to potentially repeal or change laws passed by the state legislatures.

**The state of Indiana has *none* of these tools of direct democracy in its state constitution.**

A good starting place for information on the Indiana state government is the [state government web site](#). It contains links to state government officials, courts and legal information, and state boards and commissions.

## The Indiana State Legislature

The Indiana Constitution creates a legislature called the [General Assembly](#) with both a Senate and a House of Representatives. Currently there are 50 Indiana State Senators and 100 members of the **Indiana House of Representatives** in the Indiana General Assembly. All seats in the Indiana House of Representatives are up for election every two years. Indiana State Senators serve four-year terms, and one-half of the **Indiana State Senate** seats are up for election in every two-year election cycle. Members of the General Assembly are not term-limited so they can remain in office as long as they continue to win elections. For some, this can quite literally mean *decades* in office. Since 2011, the Republican party has held a majority of the seats in both the Indiana House of Representatives and the Indiana State Senate.

The General Assembly's [web site](#) allows you to [find out who your Indiana House and Senate legislators](#) are, follow the proceedings of both chambers, track legislation, and find publications and information on legislative committees.



## Who represents you in Indiana?

**In the Indiana House of Representatives?**

**In the Indiana State Senate?**

[Go online to learn more.](#)

Any member of the Indiana General Assembly may introduce legislation, and sometimes their ideas for laws come from the public or special interest groups who have specific public policy goals. Both the Indiana House of Representatives and the Indiana State Senate have a number of [standing committees](#) on a variety of subjects (e.g., education, agriculture, and natural resources) where bills go to be considered. Members of the public can seek to offer testimony or submit information before legislative committees. They can also offer their opinions on legislation to their representatives in the General Assembly. [To become law](#), bills eventually must pass both the Indiana House of Representatives and the Indiana State Senate in the same form and then be sent to the Governor of Indiana for the Governor's approval. If the Governor vetoes a bill, the General Assembly can override their veto with a simple majority vote in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. The bill then becomes law over the Governor's objections.

The Indiana General Assembly is a **part-time legislature** that meets each year in the [State Capitol](#), located in Indianapolis, Indiana. "**Short Sessions**" occur in even years and the main focus of these sessions is policy initiatives. In a "Short Session" the legislature meets in early January through mid-March. In odd-numbered years, the legislature meets in "**Long Sessions**." These last from January through the end of April, and the [state's biennial budget](#) is the primary focus of these sessions. The legislature is not strictly constitutionally required to pass a balanced budget, but there are statutory constraints designed to limit spending.

There are a number of good sources for economic and budget data for the state of Indiana. The Indiana State Budget Agency has information on the [state budgeting process](#) including [data for each biennial budget](#). The Urban Institute has a [good summary of economic and budget data](#) for the state of Indiana. And the [National Association of State Budget Officers](#) is a good source for a description of every state's budget process, including Indiana's.

## The Indiana State Executive Branch

The **Governor** is the chief executive of the state of Indiana. The office of the Governor of the state of Indiana is in some respects similar to the President of the United States, but there are also some important differences. Unlike the President of the United States who exercises considerable control over most federal executive branch agencies, many of the Indiana state [executive branch agencies](#) are managed by independently elected cabinet officials (e.g., [Indiana Secretary of State and the Indiana Treasurer](#)).

The Governor of the state of Indiana is **directly elected by Indiana voters and serves four-year terms in office**. The Governor is **term-limited** and may not serve more than eight years in any twelve-year period.

The state of Indiana also has a [Lieutenant Governor](#) who runs for office on a ticket with a gubernatorial candidate. The Indiana Lieutenant Governor serves as the president of the Indiana State Senate and can introduce legislation, participate in legislative debates, and vote in the event of a tie vote. The Lieutenant Governor also assumes the role of Governor if

the Governor resigns, dies in offices, or is removed from office via impeachment. The Lieutenant Governor also, per statute, serves on a variety of state boards and commissions.

The Governor of the state of Indiana must generally sign state legislation in order for it to become law. The Governor can also **veto legislation** if they disagree with it. A simple majority of both chambers in the General Assembly can **override a veto**. If a bill is presented to the Governor and they neither sign nor veto it, the bill becomes law without the Governor's signature on the eighth day after it was presented to them.

The Governor of the state of Indiana is also the **Commander-in-Chief of the state's militia**, more popularly known as the **Indiana National Guard**. Additionally, the Governor can call the Indiana General Assembly into special session. One example of this occurred in 2022 when the legislature convened in special session and considered additional abortion legislation in the wake of the United States Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. The Governor may also issue pardons for offenses committed against the state of Indiana.

More information about the office and the current Governor of the state of Indiana can be found on the [Indiana government web site](#).



**Learn more about Indiana's Governor.**

[Go online to stream the Governor's Annual State of the State Address.](#)

## The Indiana State Judiciary

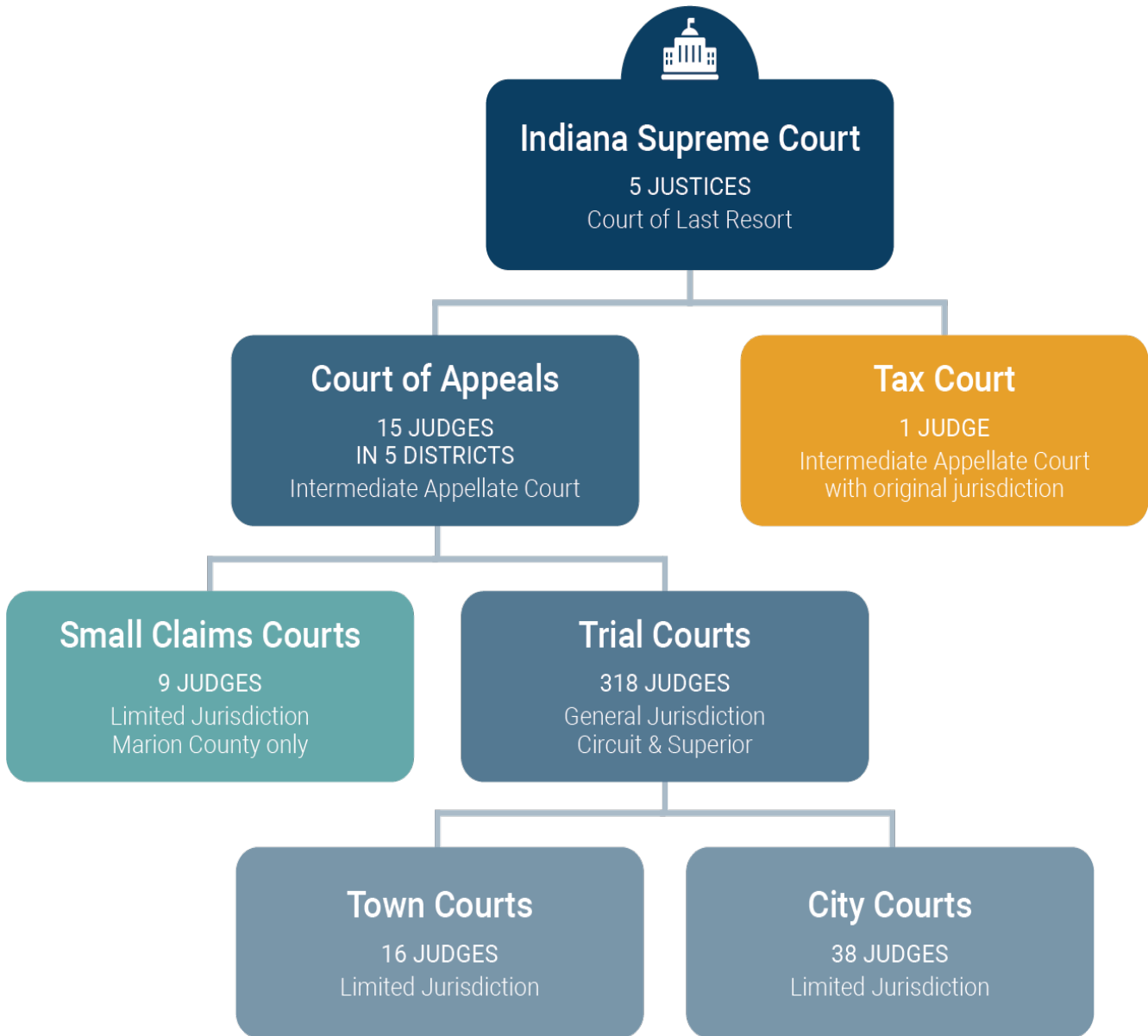
The judicial branch of government in the state of Indiana shares many characteristics with its federal counterpart, but it is also different in some respects. **First, state courts hear far more cases than federal courts.** All of the federal district courts throughout the United States only heard roughly a few hundred thousand cases in 2022, while Indiana state courts alone heard well over a million cases.

Indiana courts are specifically created in Article VII of the Indiana Constitution. It creates a **state Supreme Court**, a **state Court of Appeals**, **local Circuit Courts**, and gives the Indiana General Assembly the power to create additional state courts as needed. Indiana courts have primary jurisdiction of questions arising under the Indiana Constitution and Indiana statutes.

The [Attorney General](#) is the **chief legal officer** in the state of Indiana. The Attorney General is elected to a four-year term by voters across the state. The Attorney General's office issues advisory legal opinions to state agencies, represents the state in criminal and civil appeals, maintains a consumer protection division, and organizes victim compensation programs.

The [Indiana courts web site](#) has judicial opinions, video of oral arguments in front of courts, information on the various state courts, and public judicial records.

**Circuit Courts** and **Superior Courts** are the **trial courts in the state of Indiana**. Some cities and towns have City or Town Courts with limited power to hear local ordinances. Cases appealed from any of these trial courts can be heard by the Court of Appeals of Indiana, and sometimes the Indiana State Supreme Court.



Structure of Indiana State Courts (Source: [Indiana Judicial Branch Web Site](#).)

**The Indiana Supreme Court is the highest court in the state.** The placement of judges on the bench has changed significantly over time. Under the state's original 1816 constitution the Governor appointed judges to this court. When the Indiana Constitution was amended in 1851, Indiana voters were given the power to directly elect the justices for six-year terms. In 1970, the Indiana Constitution was amended once again and a new, hybrid merit system was created. Now, a **Judicial Committee** comprised of judges, lawyers, and citizens provides a list of three names to the Governor who chooses a name from that list.



In Indiana after two years, a justice must stand for a **retention vote**. This means that their name goes on the ballot and voters simply vote yes or no as to whether they should remain on the court. If a justice wins a [retention vote](#), they get to serve a ten-year term with additional retention votes every ten years.

---

While this may sound like an important check on judicial power, the reality is that judges and **justices rarely lose retention votes** unless they have done something controversial.

While federal judges serve life terms, **Indiana State Supreme Court justices must retire at the age of seventy-five**. This is done to avoid occasions where the justice is unable to perform their duties but refuses to resign. It also has the effect of creating turnover on the court and preventing justices from remaining in power for extended periods of time.

Like federal courts, [Indiana state courts](#) are also somewhat shielded from direct citizen participation, but there are avenues for the public to voice their opinions on judicial selection and judicial opinions. **Beginning in 2023, judges now have the authority to allow for cameras in their courtrooms if they wish**. This decision is solely at the judge's discretion and may be revoked at any time for any reason. Still, this change makes judicial proceedings more transparent to the public.

Voters in the state of Indiana have the power to [directly elect local Circuit Court judges](#), who serve six-year terms. In some counties, a local judicial nominating commission selects lower court judges.

There are a variety of ways that you might come into contact with the courts. You may become involved in a civil or administrative proceeding or be charged with a [criminal offense](#) against the state of Indiana. Or, you may be a victim of a crime or a witness in a criminal or civil case.

One very important way that people like you participate daily in the judicial process is through [jury duty](#). Article I, Section 13 of the Indiana Constitution guarantees the right of an accused to "a public trial, by an impartial jury." The ability to have a trial by jury is an important safeguard against the abuse of government power, and it is a responsibility that every eligible person should take very seriously.





## Participating in Local Indiana Government

While the news media spends a considerable amount of time covering national politics, the reality is that **local governments probably have far more impact on your life on a day-to-day basis**. Whether it is the pothole in the street outside your house, funding for the local elementary school, or management of the park where you exercise, these are all things largely handled by local government.

There are a variety of [local government](#) entities that exist in the state of Indiana. They are usually designated by geography and some of these local government entities overlap. Those who reside “out in the country” are governed by **county** and **township governments**. If you live in a city then you are governed by city, township, and county governments. Sometimes different local government entities will share functions such as economic development or emergency management services.

The Indiana Constitution places some limits on local governments. However, **Dillon’s Rule** states that localities depend on the state to give them the power to operate effectively. Local government entities in Indiana have considerable freedom to manage their local affairs and government so long as their actions are not inconsistent with the Indiana Constitution and statutes passed by the Indiana General Assembly. This is referred to as **Home Rule**.

## County Government

**Counties were created to be local appendages for state governments.** Counties are responsible for a number of important functions. These include overseeing the county courthouse, the jail, and mental health facilities. Counties also provide emergency management and child welfare services.

There are [ninety-two counties in the state of Indiana](#). **County government officials are often responsible for carrying out legislation passed by the Indiana General Assembly.** Counties have a variety of elected officials. Some, such as the County Clerk, Auditor, Recorder, Treasurer and Sheriff, are mandated by Article VI of the Indiana Constitution. The occupants of these offices are selected by voters for four-year terms.

Every county has a [County Council](#). This group of seven or nine people has primary responsibility for taxing and spending at the county level. They are elected to four-year terms. The County Council sets the salaries for county officials, controls the county budget, can borrow money in the county's name, and has some authority to impose local taxes like property and sales taxes. The [Department of Local Government Finance](#) has more detailed information on the fiscal activities of Indiana counties.

Each county also has **County Commissioners**. Members of this three-person board are elected by the voters in that county for four-year terms. They function as the executive body of county government. They supervise county departments, oversee construction and maintenance of county roads and bridges, and are responsible for county buildings, land, and property.

Counties also have a variety of boards and commissions. Examples include bodies that are responsible for water treatment, public roads, and public health.

## Township Government

Indiana is one of fewer than two dozen states that have [townships](#). **They are subdivisions of county government.** Townships are administered by a **trustee** who is elected for a four-year term. Townships can provide a variety of services, such as fire and ambulance, to unincorporated rural areas in a county. Townships are also responsible for providing emergency assistance to individuals and families in need.

## City Government

Per statute, cities in Indiana are grouped into classes based on population. Indianapolis, the state capital, is the only first-class city in Indiana. It is jointly governed by the Mayor of Indianapolis and a [City-County Council](#).

The remaining cities in Indiana are deemed either a second or third class city. Second class cities have a population between 34,000 and 599,000. Third class cities have a population below 34,000. There are some differences in the governance structures of second and third

class cities. For instance, a third class city has a seven member city council, whereas a second class city has a nine member city council.

**Cities may be distinguished from towns in that cities have a minimum population of 2,000. Cities are governed by an elected mayor and a city council.** These officials act as the executive and legislative arms of city government respectively. Generally, mayors have the power to veto city council initiatives, but these vetoes may be overridden as well.

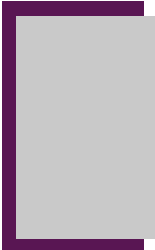
City governments often have responsibility for such things as local roads, parks, libraries, police, fire, and sanitation.

## Town Government

**Communities that do not have sufficient population to be considered a city may be incorporated as a town.** In many ways, towns functions just like cities, only on a smaller scale. A town is usually governed by a three or five-member town council. They are responsible for the town's budget and hiring and managing all of the town's employees. Some towns also employ a town manager to oversee the day-to-day functions of the town government. Towns in Indiana also elect a clerk and a treasurer to manage the town's finances.

Much like their state and national counterparts, these local entities and officials almost always have an online presence. Both town and city governments, for example, are likely to have a list of public officials and their contact information, reports, meeting minutes, and forms for obtaining permits online.

## Voting & Voting Rights

 While it is generally accepted that more political participation and voting is better because more people are making their voices and preferences heard, the **reality is that candidates for office, political parties, and many interest groups really want more voting and participation only from their supporters, not everyone.**

---

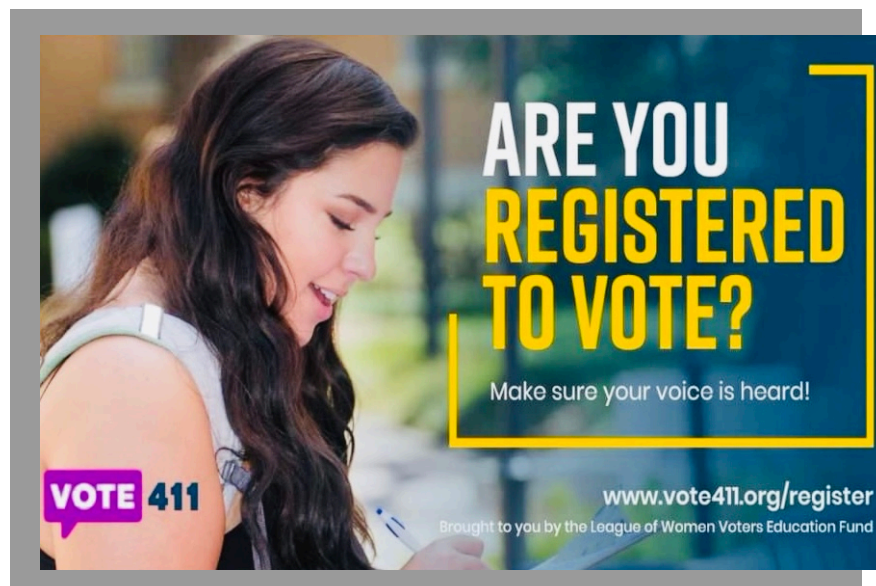
This is understandable because elected officials and political parties have agendas and policies they wish to pursue. **To this end, they attempt to mobilize *their* supporters to turn out and vote.** Unfortunately, some people and groups also attempt to suppress contrary opinions by discouraging those who do not share their views or positions from voting. This is not usually done openly. It is often done under the guise of protecting elections

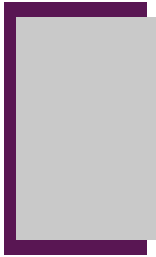
against voter fraud. **Yet, preventing voter fraud is important. This is one of the reasons why voters must register.** Voters need to be assured that elections are fair and that the person who won was truly the one with the most lawful votes.

***If people in a democratic society do not believe that that elections are fairly administered, they are more likely to lose faith in our entire system of democracy.***

Voter fraud can take a variety of forms including voting in an election where one is not eligible, or attempting to vote multiple times. **However, it is important to note that study after study shows that voter fraud of all kinds is very rare.** It does occur on occasion, but in today's elections there is no reliable evidence that widespread, systematic voter fraud exists in the United States. While additional regulations such as photo ID requirements might reduce instances of voter fraud, there is also evidence to show that additional regulations depress voter turnout.

**There are a number of good sources on the low prevalence of voter fraud.** The Heritage Foundation [Database](#) keeps track of recent voter fraud cases that can be accessed by state. This database lists only six instances of documented voter fraud in the state of Indiana from 2016-2022 that ended in a criminal conviction. Similarly, a detailed Brennan Center [report](#) examining voter fraud across the United States concluded that fears of widespread voter fraud were generally exaggerated. The Associated Press conducted an [exhaustive examination](#) after the 2020 elections and concluded that there was no significant voter fraud that impacted the presidential election.





Deciding who gets to vote and how that process is conducted is almost wholly a *state function*, with the exception of a handful of specific provisions in the United States Constitution which ensure that states cannot deny the right to vote based on race or sex.

---

**This state power over the voting process flows from Article II, Section 4 of the United States Constitution** which instructs that “The Times, Places and manner of holding Elections for Senators and Representatives, shall be prescribed in each State by the Legislature thereof.” **As a result, each state gets to decide where polling places are, under what circumstances absentee ballots are allowed, what voting hours are, and additional provisions such as whether one needs a photo ID to vote.**

The [Indiana Secretary of State](#) is the Chief Elections Officer in Indiana. The Secretary of State is elected to a four-year term by voters of the state. The Indiana Election Division of this office receives candidate filings, campaign finance reports, assists in the administration of campaign finance laws, and certifies elections.

The [Voting System Technical Oversight Program \(VSTOP\)](#) is hosted by Ball State University. VSTOP advises the Indiana Secretary of State’s office on the certification of voting machines used throughout the state of Indiana. It also conducts post-election audits to ensure election integrity throughout the state.

**One way to participate in elections is to become a poll worker. There is [minimal training required](#), and poll workers earn a stipend for their day’s work. You need to be at least 18 years old, a registered voter, and a resident of the county in which you would work. Indiana also has a program called [Hoosier Hall Pass](#) that **allows 16 and 17 year old high school students to serve as poll workers.****

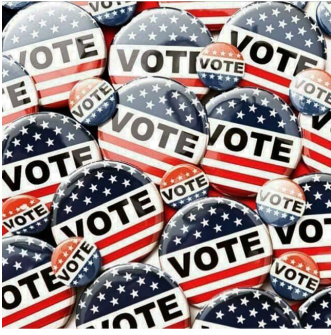


**Poll Workers  
Needed For The  
Primary Elections.**

Your community needs you to help support democracy by becoming a poll worker.

Contact your political party to volunteer.

No experience necessary, training provided.



There are basically two types of elections: **primary elections** and **general elections**. They share many similarities, but there are a few important differences.

---

In a **primary election**, multiple candidates in each party are vying for the opportunity to be their party's representative in the subsequent general election. Indiana is a "partially open" primary state. You can vote in either party's primary, but you have to choose one. While this can be considered a form of "registration" with that particular political party, it does not permanently bind you to that party. You can vote for anyone in the **general election** and change your affiliation and vote in the other party's primary in the next election cycle if you choose. Winners in the primary election move on to represent their respective parties in the general election.

If you do not want to declare a party affiliation in a primary election, you still have the right to cast a ballot on any public questions (e.g., tax levies) that might be on the ballot.

All eligible voters can vote in the general election. The candidates who win in the general election earn the right to hold the office they are seeking.

Indiana has a [Voters Bill of Rights](#) which is a good place to start to find answers to commonly asked questions about voting in Indiana.

## Who Is Eligible to Vote?

**You have the right to vote in Indiana if you meet all of the following conditions:**

- **You are a U.S. citizen.**
- **You are a resident of Indiana.**
- **You are at least 18 years old by election day.**
- **You are not currently incarcerated for a criminal conviction.**
- **You have lived in the precinct where you vote for at least 30 days.**
- **You are registered to vote.**

While you cannot vote while you are incarcerated in jail or prison, upon release your voting rights are not permanently affected. You may still register to vote as normal even if you are on probation or parole.



## How Do You Register to Vote?

Just because you meet residency and age requirements does not necessarily mean that you are automatically eligible to vote. **First, you must register to vote!** Generally speaking, registration is designed to prevent voter fraud like voting when you are not eligible, or voting more than once, or voting in the wrong district. Most states require prospective voters to register two to four weeks prior to an election in order to ensure that the voting rolls are accurate on election day.

The registration process varies from state to state. In some states you can register *and* vote on election day. Research shows that same-day registration increases voter turnout in states that have it.

**In Indiana, you can register in a variety of ways.** First, you can [register to vote online](#). You can also [obtain the voter registration form](#) and register by mail. Finally, you can register to vote in person at your [local county clerk's office](#) or the local Bureau of Motor Vehicles office. When you register to vote, you do not need to declare a political party affiliation.

In order to vote in either a primary or general election **you must be registered 29 days prior to the election**. If you miss this deadline, you can still register, but you will only be able to vote in subsequent elections, not the upcoming one.

**College students** may *either* register to vote at the address where they live while they are attending school *or* the address where they live when they are not attending school (i.e., usually “home”), but *not both*. [The Indiana Secretary of State's web site](#) has helpful information for college students on registering to vote.

As a **first-time voter** in Indiana, if you registered by mail you will be required to show proof of residence. Acceptable documents include an Indiana Driver's License/ID Card, or a utility bill, bank statement, government check, or paycheck with your name and address on it.

**If you register online** you will need to provide your Indiana driver's license number or your Indiana state identification card number.


**Once you are registered, you do not have to re-register for subsequent elections.** Your registration remains valid. **If you change your address you must update your voter registration.** This is extremely important because Indiana statutes allow for [voter list maintenance programs](#) which eventually allow voters to be removed from the rolls if their address is not correct. [The Indiana Secretary of State conducted a voter list maintenance mailing in 2023.](#)

## Where Do You Go to Vote? Be prepared.

The [IN.gov Voter Portal](#) and [VOTE411.org](#) provide online tools to assist you in finding out where your polling place is located. The **local county clerk's office** is the office responsible for running elections at the county level and they also have information on the location of polling places.

Voting areas are divided into geographically-based precincts throughout a county. **You must vote in your designated precinct, unless your county uses vote centers.**

Over half of the counties in Indiana now use [vote centers](#). Vote centers increase convenience for voters since they can vote at any of a handful of centers throughout the county instead of a specific precinct. Vote centers also save money since counties no longer have to staff dozens of precincts or have as many voting machines to maintain.



The infographic is set against a dark purple background with white and yellow text and icons. At the top right, it features the LWV logo with three stars. The main heading is 'check out your county election board!' followed by 'what do these boards/offices do?'. Below this, four icons represent the board's functions: a ballot box for 'administer elections', a dollar sign for 'oversee campaign finance', a document for 'manage candidate filings', and a hand holding a coin for 'provide election information'. A call to action states 'you can contact the board with any voting concerns you have!' and provides the link 'indianavoters.in.gov/CountyContact/Index'. The infographic is framed by a white line and includes social media handles '@lwvindiana' and '#empoweredanddefending' on the sides, along with two stars at the bottom.

check out your county election board! ★★ LWV

what do these boards/offices do? ★★★

- administer elections
- oversee campaign finance
- manage candidate filings
- provide election information

you can contact the board with any voting concerns you have!

find your county board at this link:  
[indianavoters.in.gov/CountyContact/Index](http://indianavoters.in.gov/CountyContact/Index)

@lwvindiana #empoweredanddefending



# What Is the Voting Process? Know your options.

## Absentee Voting by Mail

If you know that you will be unable to vote in person on election day, you may [request an absentee ballot](#). But the request must be *received* by the state at least 12 days prior to an election. Any application received after the deadline will not be processed even if it was postmarked prior to the deadline.

While over two dozen states offer “no excuse” absentee voting, **in Indiana, not everyone is eligible to vote absentee**. In other words, **you need a reason to request an absentee ballot** and it must be one that is listed in the Indiana statutes:

- “You have a specific, reasonable expectation that you will be absent from the county on Election Day during the entire 12 hours that the polls are open (6 am until 6 pm).
- You have a disability.
- You are at least 65 years of age.
- You will have official election duties outside of your voting precinct.
- You are scheduled to work at your regular place of employment during the entire 12 hours that the polls are open.
- You will be confined due to illness or injury or you will be caring for an individual confined due to illness or injury during the entire 12 hours that the polls are open.
- You are prevented from voting because of a religious discipline or religious holiday during the entire 12 hours that the polls are open.
- You are a participant in the state's address confidentiality program.
- You are a member of the military or a public safety officer.
- You are a "serious sex offender" as defined in Indiana Code 35-42-4-14(a).
- You are prevented from voting due to the unavailability of transportation to the polls.”

Now a voter must provide with any absentee ballot application either a photocopy of their identification card that complies with the [state's photo ID law](#) or one or more of the following voter identifications:

- The voter's Indiana driver's license number or Indiana identification card number; or
- The voter's unique voter ID number assigned to their voter registration record; or
- The last four digits of the voter's Social Security number.

If an absentee ballot application is defective or rejected, you will be notified by your [county election administrator](#).

If the absentee ballot application is approved, you will be sent a “ballot packet.” **Your completed ballot must be *received* by county officials by 6:00 PM on election day**. A ballot which is post-marked prior to election day but not *received* until after election day will not be counted.

An absentee ballot may be hand-delivered to the [county election board](#), but, generally speaking, only the voter or the voter's family may do so.

## In-Person Absentee Voting (Early Voting)

**Early voting, or voting in person prior to election day, is becoming more and more popular across the United States.** If you do not qualify for an absentee ballot, you still have the option to vote in-person prior to the election. **Each county clerk must make early voting available 28 days prior to the election up to the day before election day.**

Employers are not required to provide employees time off to go vote, so it is important to check with your employer on this front. If you cannot get time off to vote on election day, early voting may be a good alternative.

## In-Person Voting

On election day the polls in Indiana are open from 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM (local time). **It is important to note that if you have begun the voting process or are standing in line waiting to vote at 6:00 PM, you have the right to cast your ballot.**

**To vote in person in Indiana you must have a [photo ID required by law](#).** Not every ID with your picture on it will be accepted. *A college student ID may not qualify.* How do you know if you have an appropriate photo ID?

### The photo ID must:

- Display your photograph.
- Display your name. While the name must correspond to your voter registration record it need not necessarily match exactly.
- Display an expiration date and either be current or expired after the date of the last general election.
- Be issued by the State of Indiana or the U.S. Government.

It is important to know that **if you do not have the appropriate photo ID** (e.g., you forgot and left it at home) **you still have the right to cast a provisional ballot.**

As for the actual voting process, counties use different methods. Some counties still use **paper ballots** while others use **optical scan ballots** (i.e., fill in the bubble) and others use **electronic voting machines** of various types.

If you “spoil” a ballot (e.g., you vote for too many candidates in a particular race, or accidentally voted for a candidate for whom you did not intend to vote) you have the right to return that ballot and receive another ballot to cast your vote.

## Challenges and Provisional Ballots

**Someone's right to cast a vote may be challenged if the challenger thinks that person is ineligible to vote** (e.g., is not registered to vote, does not have the appropriate photo ID, or is voting in the wrong precinct). Each candidate or party may appoint one challenger per polling place to challenge the eligibility of a potential voter on the basis of identity.

Only a voter who is a member of that party may challenge a voter in a primary election on the basis of party. For example, only a registered Republican may challenge someone voting Republican in a primary election. A Democrat cannot challenge people voting in the Republican primary.

**A person may not be challenged solely on the basis of an individual's:**

- **Enrollment in an educational institution or registered at an address that is student housing; or**
- **Actual or perceived affiliation with a political party, political candidate, or position on a public issue.**

Anyone who challenges a prospective voter must, under penalty of perjury, complete an affidavit honestly explaining the reasons for the challenge. While on one hand, allowing for voter challenges can prevent voter fraud, challenges can also be unethically used to harass and intimidate prospective voters. **This is why it is important to know your rights, especially the right to cast a provisional ballot.**

## Provisional Ballots

**If you have been challenged** as being ineligible to vote or do not have an acceptable photo ID with you, **you may still cast a provisional ballot.** The provisional ballot contains the same races, candidates, and questions as the "regular" ballot. You complete it and submit it. A voter casting a provisional ballot will have ten days to provide the county election board the necessary documentation to show that you were eligible (e.g., a photo ID, or proof of address). You will subsequently have the right to ask the county election board whether your vote was counted, and if not, why not.

## Election Day Problems? Questions Before Voting?

Call or text 1-866-OUR-VOTE (866-687-8683) to speak with the Election Protection hotline.

English: 1-866-687-8683

Spanish: 1-888-VE-Y-VOTA (888-839-8682)

Arabic: 1-844-YALLA-US (844-925-5287)

# Ten Ways to Participate in Politics & Make an Impact

Political participation is at the heart of a democratic political system and there are a variety of ways in which you can contribute to political discussions and the policy making process.

---

## #1 BECOME INFORMED.

**It is easier than ever to get access to information on politics and public policy with the rise of reliable Internet.** The default in a democratic political system is that government information should be available to the public unless there are good reasons to withhold it (e.g., personnel decisions, private health information). There are laws such as the [Freedom of Information Act](#) which govern the release of government information. The state of Indiana has a similar statute called the [Access to Public Records Act](#).

## #2 BE AN ADVOCATE.

Advocacy is any general support for a position, idea, or cause. **The goal of advocacy is to educate others about an issue and raise public awareness of why that issue is important.** *Anyone* can become informed and advocate to anyone general positions on public policy issues. This can take the form of conversations with friends, posting something on social media, or attending a rally. Find something you are *passionate* about and share that with others!

However, once you move from supporting a general position or idea to seeking a specific vote or particular policy outcome from a government official or government unit, you have moved from advocacy to lobbying.

## #3 LOBBY.

**Lobbying is any attempt to influence a politician or public official on a particular issue, bill, or piece of legislation.** This can take a variety of forms: letter writing, meeting with public officials, or meeting with legislative staff.

While individuals can lobby themselves, groups often hire professional lobbyists in an attempt to get their preferred policy positions enacted. Paid lobbyists must [register](#) with either the federal government or the state of Indiana. If you hire a paid lobbyist, you must register as well. This is done to ensure transparency in the law-making process.

## #4 JOIN AN INTEREST GROUP.

**An interest group is an organization of like-minded individuals who seek to influence the selection of public officials and the policies they make (e.g., Indiana Farm Bureau, the American Heart Association, or the Indiana Manufacturers Association).** This is also a great way to participate in politics with like-minded people on a specific public policy issue.

**Interest groups differ from political parties** in that parties want to *run* government while interest groups instead seek to *influence* a part of it, often times through advocacy and lobbying efforts.

## #5 JOIN A POLITICAL PARTY.

**A political party is an organization that nominates candidates to compete in elections with the goal of implementing a specific slate of policies. These ideas are often articulated in a party platform.**

Political parties can be great places to find like-minded political activists and they can provide a host of opportunities to volunteer. Parties epitomize the idea that there is strength in numbers. The two main political parties in the United States are the [Republicans](#) and [Democrats](#), but there are numerous smaller parties as well.

Indiana [Democrats](#) and [Republicans](#) also have state and local arms of the national parties so citizens can get involved at any level of government.

## #6 LET YOUR OPINION BE HEARD IN A PUBLIC OPINION POLL.

**Public opinion polls are designed to capture peoples' opinions on important political issues. They can vary considerably in terms of quality and scope.**

Professional pollsters such as the [Gallup Poll](#) and the [Pew Research Center](#) use statistical methods that can produce reliable estimates of public opinion.

The [Hoosier Survey](#), the only regular, professional public opinion poll of political attitudes in the state of Indiana, is conducted by the Bowen Center for Public Affairs at Ball State University.

## #7 ATTEND OR STREAM A PUBLIC MEETING.

One of the hallmarks of democratic government is transparency. Part of this involves conducting government business in public. Most political jurisdictions have some type of [open meetings law](#) which requires government officials, legislative bodies, committees, and commissions to give notice of a meeting and a record of the proceedings. **The idea is simply that people should be able to watch government officials make decisions and review the results of those decisions.**

There are often set-aside times in meetings for public comments on various issues. While this provides an opportunity to directly communicate with government officials in public, you should note that the number of speakers, the time to speak, and the topics which may be addressed are often limited.

Twenty-first century technology now provides more access than ever to government meetings. **Many meetings can now be streamed online and are archived so that people who cannot attend in person can still watch the proceedings.**

## #8 CONTACT PUBLIC OFFICIALS.

The whole purpose of a representative democracy is that public officials are acting on behalf of their constituents. To act on their behalf, it is helpful to know what people are thinking. This is why it is important to contact your public officials and express your opinions on issues!

**There are a wide variety of ways to communicate with government officials: telephone, email, website, public meeting, schedule a one-on-one meeting, or writing a letter.**

There are a [variety of Internet sites](#) with good recommendations for [contacting public officials](#).

## #9 SERVE ON A JURY.

While some people might view jury duty as an inconvenience, it is an exceptionally important part of our criminal justice system. **Juries are an vital check against potential abuses of government power. When you are called, do your part.**

## #10 VOTE AND WORK THE POLLS.

**Voting is arguably the most important way that you can make your voice heard in a democratic political system.** Over four and a half million Hoosiers are registered to vote in the state of Indiana.

### Things to Remember:

- ❖ The first step is to [register to vote](#). If you think you are already registered to vote you can [check online](#).
- ❖ Consider [early voting options](#) either via mail or in person.
- ❖ Find out [where you vote](#) and [review the ballot](#) before you arrive. Research the candidates and the issues.
- ❖ Encourage friends and family to vote with you!
- ❖ Get involved and [work at the polls](#). Even if you are not old enough to vote the state of Indiana's [Hoosier Hall Pass](#) program allows sixteen and seventeen year olds to work the at the polls on election day.
- ❖ Web sites such as [VOTE411](#) can help you register to vote, verify your registration, research candidates, and more.







Scan the QR code for an online version of LWVIN Citizens' Handbook.

Printed May 2024.

