

## Government 101 |

The U.S. federal government is broken into three separate branches: Legislative, Executive and Judicial.



National  
Congress of  
American  
Indians

EVERY  
NATIVE  
VOTE  
COUNTS

### **The Legislative Branch** ▶▶▶▶

The Legislative Branch, called the U.S. Congress, creates laws and allocates funding that federal departments and agencies use to carry out their mission and programs. It is broken up between the House of Representatives and the Senate. Members of the House serve two-year terms, while members of the Senate serve six-year terms. Every two years each seat of the House is up for election, with the Senate having one-third of its seats up for election. There are no term limits on how many times a person can serve in the House or Senate. Each legislative body creates its own rules to punish members who break rules and they can expel members from the legislature in extreme cases. There is no way for the public to remove a member of the Legislative branch, other than to vote them out in the next election cycle.

### **The Executive Branch** ▶▶▶▶

The Executive Branch enforces the laws passed by legislature and also conducts foreign affairs with other nations. The President of the United States (President) is in charge of the Executive Branch, with each cabinet member running a department of the government with the various agencies and programs reporting to the secretary of that department. The President, running with his/her chosen Vice President, can only be elected to two consecutive terms. The President can be impeached by the House. Cabinet members are nominated by the President and then approved by a vote of the Senate. Most Cabinet members only serve under the President that appoint them and will resign when a new President comes into power. Other positions, like the head of the Federal Reserve Bank, have set terms, and once confirmed, serve no matter who is serving as President. The Cabinet members serve at the discretion of the President, who has the ability to fire or ask for a Cabinet member to resign for any reason.

### **The Judicial Branch** ▶▶▶▶

The Judicial Branch interprets the laws and determines if laws are unconstitutional, as well as how narrowly or broadly applied a particular law is, depending on the case. The highest court is the Supreme Court, with 13 appellate courts and 94 district courts below it. Federal judges are all nominated by the President and then approved by vote in the Senate. All judges are given lifetime appointments upon confirmation by the Senate and can only be removed through impeachment by the House and conviction in the Senate.



Most state governments are made up of the same three branches, but this can vary from state to state. For example, Nebraska only has one legislative body as opposed to the typical two. Timelines for state legislative sessions also vary from state to state. While some states have year-round legislatures like the federal government, most states only have sessions that meet a few months out of the year.

All states have a legislative body made up of a Senate and House of Representatives, which can also be called a General Assembly. The governor of the state is the head of the executive branch in his or her state and each state has its own state supreme court with its own system of lower courts similar to the federal system. Length of service for both the state legislature and governorship vary and some states have term limits on one or both branches. In addition, some states will have elections for judges as opposed to being appointed by the governor and approved by the state legislature.

At the local level, county and city government structures can vary as well, but the basic three-branch system typically exists across all levels of government throughout the United States.

# Elections 101 |

How to run for political office.



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## I want to run for office ▶▶▶▶

When a person decides to run for political office, they will need to formally file to run for the office they seek with their state's office of elections or secretary of state. Besides formal paperwork, they may need to have a certain number of signatures from residents within the legislative district or state where they are running.

## Political Parties ▶▶▶▶

When registering to run for office, the person can run for nomination for a political party or choose to run as an independent. If you choose to run for a nomination of a political party you may need to run against others for the nomination in a primary that usually takes place months before the general election. Primary elections can be open to all voters or closed to only voters who are registered to that political party.

Republican

Democrat

Independent

## Campaign ▶▶▶▶

Once you are formally registered to run for office, you will need to start reaching out to voters for not only their support but also for funding to help run your campaign. Traditionally, anyone running for office will need a campaign manager who will be the right-hand person and be involved in every aspect of the race. The size of a campaign staff will depend on the level of the office one is running for. Anyone running for office will need a fundraising manager who will be in charge of all efforts to raise funds for the campaign and track spending. Other needs include a communications person who will work to get press for the campaign and raise the candidate's profile among voters and the general public. Again, depending on the level of the office one is seeking, it may be necessary or helpful to hire political and policy advisors to help shape the campaign's platform on a number of issues. A field director is a person who will be in charge running outreach by volunteers and/or paid staff to speak directly to voters to persuade them to support and/or volunteer for the campaign.

## Consultants ▶▶▶▶

Consultants can also be hired by the campaign to assist in number of areas. Polling is a way to measure how well known the candidate is and how strong or weak their support is. They can also message test slogans, issues, and attacks that will either help or hurt support for the candidate. Advertising firms can help to create advertising that will help spark interest support for the candidate, as well as disseminating messaging against their opponents. Advertising firms can create mailers, radio ads, TV ads, emails, and social media ads to be sent out to targeted voters within the legislative district or state.

