



*Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how “We the People” interact with the government and each other. Let’s help each other expand our civic literacy.*

Elections are perhaps the most visible aspect of the American democratic system. Every two years, we head to the polls to vote for our representatives at various levels of government, and every four years we choose the next president of the United States.

One important thing to remember about elections is that they are an example of federalism in action; power over elections is shared between the state and federal governments.



The regulation of elections - deciding who can vote, where people vote, how people vote, and how many places there will be to vote - has generally been a power of the states or local governments under the [10th Amendment](#). One of the most important powers of the states on elections has to do with how we vote. [How we vote is not uniform throughout the country](#). Some states use paper ballots, while others use electronic voting systems. A number of states allow early voting. This allows voters to cast their vote before Election Day. Some states allow vote-by-mail ballots for any reason, while others restrict when you can use a vote-by-mail ballot and

others do not allow vote-by-mail ballots at all. [Studies have found](#) that no matter how voters vote, actual voter fraud around mail-in ballots is very rare and voting is pretty secure no matter the way it is done.

The federal government officially established Election Day as ‘the Tuesday after the first Monday in November’, though states can set the date for state and local elections. Through the amendment process to the U.S. Constitution, the federal government has expanded [voting rights](#) to



**Take Part in the 2020 Mock Election!**  
If you are in **Florida**, join us with [KidsVotingFlorida!](#)  
Somewhere else?  
Check out [DoubleClick Democracy](#) for a program near you.

Black males, women, and most recently 18-year olds.

While amendments to the Constitution have expanded the right to vote over time, states still retain some control over who can actually vote. [For example](#), some states allow 17-year olds to vote in primary elections if they will be 18 by the day of the general election, while a few cities and towns have allowed 16-year olds to vote in local elections. No state, though, can legally [add restrictions to the right to vote except for one group of people: ex-felons](#).

[In some states](#), people convicted of a felony lose their right to vote and may not be allowed to get it back after completing their sentences. Other states, though, let ex-felons get their right to participate in elections back immediately or after going through a process, and two states let inmates vote while they are in prison! This remains an ongoing debate at the state and national level.



**To Think and To Do:** Research your state’s election laws and compare them to two neighboring states. How do they compare? What do you notice about the similarities and differences in the laws between the states?

**Learn MORE** about elections. Free registration may be required.

- [Election Administration at State & Local Levels](#), from National Conference of State Legislatures
- [Voting and Election Laws](#), from USA.gov
- [Elections](#), from iCivics

