

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.

Across the country, state and local elected officials have terms of office which are set by their state’s constitution or statute. This means individuals elected to serve do so for the time stipulated by law. However, there are **19 states** that allow their voters to effectively end a term of office prematurely through a process called **recall**.

The recall process of removing a state or local elected official is determined by state law. While there may be some differences in how the recall is conducted, the process largely consists of:

1. Citizens circulating petitions to secure a minimum number of registered voters’ signatures by a state-determined due date
2. Submitting the petitions to election officials who then verify the signatures
3. A recall election is scheduled once a sufficient number of signatures are confirmed as valid



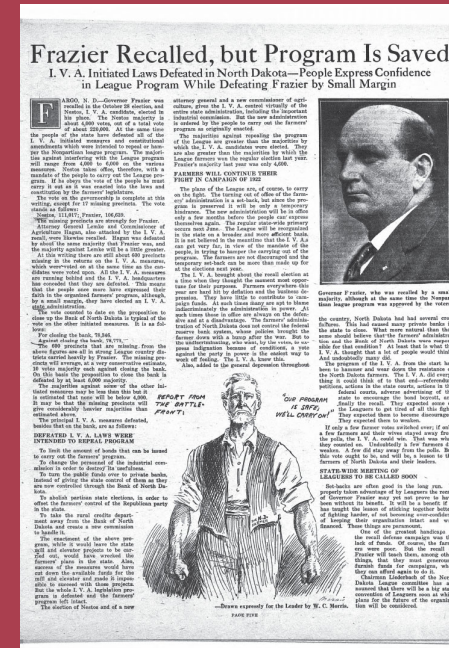
19 states with a recall process

The history of the recall goes back to the turn of the 20th Century during the **Populist movement**. The idea behind its use was to make elected officials more accountable to the people who elected them than to their political party. After all, an elected official works to represent ALL citizens, not just for those that elected them or for their political party. Elected officials who the people believed were not acting in their best interests could be recalled before their term of office officially ended. Today, **11 of the 19** states that allow recalls do not have specific grounds for initiating the recall process. This means that any registered voter could start a recall petition for any reason.

Despite its foundation in populist politics, use of the recall does have its critics. Some suggest that it undermines political independence and leads to ineffective governance, that it erodes trust in the judgment of the electorate and provides a platform for special interests to exercise undue influence over the recall process.

Throughout its history, the recall election has been used most successfully against local elected officials. When it comes to state elected officials, while successful, it is used far more sparingly. Since 1913, the recall has been used **29 times** against state legislators, 18 of which were successful in the recall.

Since 1921, It has been used four times against state governors, two of which were successful (**Lynn Frazier**, North Dakota and **Scott Walker**, Wisconsin, 2011; **Gavin Newsom**, California, 2021).



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recalled in 1921; Gray Davis, California, recalled in 2003), and two of which failed (**Scott Walker**, Wisconsin, 2011; **Gavin Newsom**, California, 2021).

**To Think and To Do:** Evaluate the arguments for and against the use of the recall process. Which side of the debate do you support? Explain.

Learn **MORE** about recall elections.

- **Recall of State Officials**, from the National Conference of State Legislatures
- **What are recall elections?**, from The Economist
- **Recall**, from Ballotpedia



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