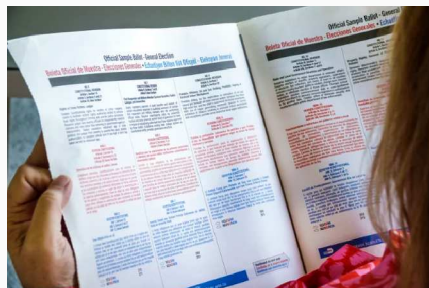


Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how "We the People" interact with the government and each other. Let's help each other expand our civic literacy.

Elections are perhaps the most visible aspect of the American constitutional republic. Every two years, registered voters head to the polls to vote for officials at various levels of government, and every four years, the next President of the United States is chosen. An important thing to remember about elections is that they are an example of **federalism** in action; power over elections is shared between state and national governments.



Article I, Section 4 of the U.S. Constitution, referred to as the Elections Clause, grants states the power to determine how to vote for members of Congress. However, it also gives Congress the power to change those state rules. The regulation of elections (deciding who is eligible to vote, where people vote, the format/method used to vote, and how many places there will be to vote) is a power of the states under the **10th Amendment**. Because the election system in the U.S. is decentralized, no two states administer elections in the same way. In fact, many differences exist in election administration, even within states. Differences may include things such as paper or electronic ballots, **who pays for the postage** associated with mail-in ballots, and how **mistakes** an individual may make while filling out their ballot are handled.

One state that has minimized those differences is Florida. Florida exclusively uses paper ballots. The design of both the primary and general election ballots in Florida is determined by state statute **1S-2.032**. This statute tells **Supervisors of Elections** which items must appear on the ballot and the order in which they'll appear. This is called uniform design, and it guarantees all election ballots in Florida look the same. So, no matter which county you live in, you know the voters in South Florida will have ballots structured the same way as voters in North Florida. Some of the design elements required by law for a Florida ballot include:

- Identification at the top of the ballot shows the type of ballot a registered voter is receiving, date the election is held, and county where the voting is taking place.
- Primary ballots must include political party at the top, general election ballots must include political party abbreviations in capital letters to the right of the candidate's name in parentheses for partisan races.
- Ballot instructions and information about how to fill in the ovals and what to do if you make a mistake. Voters in Florida are allowed up to three ballots if they make a mistake. Per **newer state election laws**, mail-in ballots that do not follow directions may not be counted.
- Contest titles are ordered by federal, state, county, and city offices that are up for election. These contests are followed by special district, municipal, nonpartisan contests (like retention elections for justices of the Supreme Court), and any public measure registered voters must decide. In a general election, the placement of the party candidates is determined by the party of Florida's sitting governor. As the current governor is a Republican, Republican party candidates are placed at the top of all election contests in which a Republican is running.
- There must be consistency in margin placement, font style and size, and use of capital and lowercase letters in the names and party affiliations of the candidates.
- Placement of the ovals, called voter targets, must be placed to the right of the name of the candidate and must be in the oval shape.

An additional area where we see elections demonstrating federalism in action, and Article I, Section 4 come into play, is ballot language. **Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act** requires states and local governments to provide voting ballots, registration forms, and other election materials in more than just English.

According to Section 203, the protected language minority groups are limited to "persons who are American Indian, Asian American, Alaskan Natives or of Spanish heritage." Every five years, a list is produced by the **Census Bureau** to show the federally mandated requirements for translated materials. The Census Bureau uses **formulas** that examine English proficiency, education rates, and literacy rates when producing that **list**.

However, Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act leaves out languages such as Arabic and Haitian Creole, which are growing in popularity in the United States. For now, this is where state and local governments may play a role. In Florida, the law requires all ballots to be in English and Spanish. Miami-Dade County goes **above and beyond** the federal and state requirements and also offers materials in Haitian Creole as they are home to the largest population of immigrants from Haiti in the United States.



Take Part in the 2024 Mock Election!

If you are in **Florida**, join us with KidsVotingFlorida!

Somewhere else? Check out DoubleClickDemocracy for a program near you.

To Think and To Do:

*How might a uniform ballot design ensure a more democratically free and fair election?

*Some argue that by not making election materials available in all languages, this is a form of voter suppression. Do you agree or disagree? Explain.

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

