

---

# United States Government

The United States has a representative democratic government. This means people elect those who represent them in the government. We call these people elected officials. People elect officials at local, state, and national levels. At every level, people's consent is what gives the government power to act. The Constitution defines how elected officials work together. It defines the principles and structure of our government.



Countries face many problems. Some solutions may be good for most people but limit the freedom of others. A representative democracy must balance individual rights with the common good. Effective leaders work to meet the needs of citizens and protect their rights.

In the United States, we have a **federal government** that leads our country. The federal government shares its power with state governments. The federal government has the power to:

- print money*
- declare war*
- build the military*
- make treaties (agreements with foreign countries)*
- make rules for doing business between the states and foreign nations*
- create post offices and issue postage*
- make laws to enforce the constitution*

**State governments** control laws within each state. They also have elected officials. The leader of the state is the governor. The governor appoints officials and signs or vetoes bills passed by the state legislature. The governor is also the commander-in-chief of the state's military. Each state has its own constitution. Like the United States Constitution, state constitutions must enforce laws in ways that protect the rights of citizens.

We also have **local governments**. They lead our towns, cities, and counties. Cities and towns elect leaders called mayors. People also elect city managers, town councils, and county commissioners. These officials address community concerns, help out in the community, and act as a voice to the community. Local governments are in charge of police and fire departments, public bus systems, road maintenance, community parks, trash removal, and building codes.

---

# Being Informed

As good citizens, it is our responsibility to learn about what is happening in our community, state, nation, and world. This means understanding social, political, cultural and environmental issues. There are different ways to stay informed. One way is to read and watch the news. There are different news sources available today. You can read newspapers and magazines. The news is also available in print and on the internet.



The best way to stay informed is to research a topic. You can investigate issues to learn more about them. You can explore many sources and opinions to better understand the issue. Staying informed also means choosing news sources carefully. Make sure to choose sources that are credible, or reliable. That way you know the information is correct. You can also talk to an expert in the field to help you understand a topic more clearly.

Staying informed is a very important responsibility for all citizens, especially when it comes to voting. Citizens must be informed of the opinions of candidates and how they will address community issues. Then, citizens can make the best decision when voting in local, state, or national elections.