

Voting: Democracy Defined by the US Constitution

“For more than a century, the League of Women Voters has stood as a trusted, nonpartisan source of election information for voters across this nation.” - Dianna Wynn, President of the League of Women Voters US

Democracy is generally understood as a government in which the citizens participate in making the decisions, but the function of democracies in different countries varies greatly. To understand the value and power of voting in the United States, it is important to know how our government is organized. The US Constitution defines the structure and operation of the federal government. It establishes the United States as a representative democracy requiring that US citizens elect individuals to represent them in government office.

Candidates running for election may debate issues and ideologies, but the rules that govern our democracy are laid out very clearly. US democracy depends on three co-equal branches of government that can check and balance each other.

- The Legislative branch is responsible for making laws and has two houses: the House of Representatives (elected for 2-year term) and the Senate (elected for 6-year term).
- The Executive branch is tasked with representing the country internationally and domestically, signing bills into law, and ensuring that the laws are executed faithfully. This branch is lead by the President and Vice President (elected for 4-year term).
- The Judicial branch settles disputes by interpreting and determining the constitutionality of the law. Supreme Court Justices are nominated by the President, confirmed by the Senate, and are appointed for life.

By creating the US government in this way, the framers of the Constitution guaranteed a certain kind of stability. Citizens elect new officials, but only some of the government officials change at each election. Additionally, no one branch of the federal government can hold power over the other branches. The President and other government officials take an oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States, not an individual or political party, making our democracy different from a monarchy or some other authoritarian form of government.

“Since our founding, our organization has been dedicated to preparing voters to cast their ballot in each election and to exercise their right to participate in democracy.” - Dianna Wynn, President of the League of Women Voters US

Another important aspect of our US democracy as defined by The Constitution involves the rights and freedoms guaranteed to US citizens in the first ten amendments to the Constitution, often referred to as the Bill of Rights. These provisions give us not only the right, but the responsibility to hold our government accountable to us and to the law.

To preserve our democracy and the freedoms we enjoy as US citizens, it is necessary to support the structure of our government as well as our personal rights defined in the US Constitution and Bill of Rights by voting in each election.

“We stand firmly against policies and actions that threaten the integrity and inclusiveness of the democratic process. White nationalism and efforts to move our government toward authoritarianism threaten the very foundation of our democracy.... Our country is at an existential crossroads, and voters must make a critical decision about the direction of our nation.” - Dianna Wynn, President of the League of Women Voters US

The League of Women Voters of DeKalb County provides nonpartisan information on voting, elections, and the candidates. You will find resources at our website: [LWVDKC.org/vote](https://www.lwv.org/vote).

<https://www.lwv.org/newsroom/press-releases/lwvus-commitment-protecting-democracy-2024>