

# Glossary of Terms: Government & Elections

**Absentee Voting:** If you cannot cast a ballot in person due to one of six pre-approved reasons (such as long-term illness, disability, military service etc.), you can apply for and receive a ballot that can be mailed to your town or dropped into a ballot box.

**Affidavit:** A written statement where a person swears that the information is true and accurate. This statement is usually made in front of a public officer or a judge.

**Amendment:** A change or addition to a law, a proposed law or a legal document.

**Appropriation:** Money that is assigned to government departments for specific use.

**At-Large election:** An at-large election is a type of election where a public official is chosen from a larger election district instead of a smaller subdivision within that district. This means that voters from the entire district can vote for the same candidate, rather than just those in a specific area. For example, candidates may be elected at-large, meaning that all voters in a city can vote for any candidate, rather than just those in a specific ward or district. This type of election can be beneficial for promoting diversity and representation, as candidates may be more likely to appeal to a wider range of voters. However, it can also make it more difficult for candidates from minority groups or less populated areas to be elected.

**Ballot:** A list of candidates, proposals, or measures that is meant to be voted on. Usually these are in the form of paper ballots or digital ballots cast on machines.

**Bicameral:** A system of government where the representatives who write the laws are split into two different groups. Usually, these two groups have different responsibilities and have to collaborate with each other to pass laws.

**Biennium:** For example, candidates may be elected at-large, meaning that all voters in a city can vote for any candidate, rather than just those in a specific ward or district.

**Bill of Rights:** The first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution that give people basic rights such as freedom of speech.

**Bipartisan:** When representatives from both political parties in a two-party system agree on something.



**Board of Aldermen:** A "board of aldermen" is a governing group that makes decisions for some towns or cities. The people on this board are usually called "aldermen." They make decisions and laws for the community.

**Calendar:** This type of election can be beneficial for promoting diversity and representation, as candidates may be more likely to appeal to a wider range of voters. However, it can also make it more difficult for candidates from minority groups or less populated areas to be elected.

**Candidate:** Someone who is actively campaigning for a government position.

**Caucus:** A casual meeting of a smaller sub-group of members who come together based on commonalities such as political party, gender, race, location, or issue.

**Census:** An official count of a population to collect information about each person. The U.S. Census is taken every ten years.

**Checks and Balances:** A system where the three segments of the government (President, Congress, and Supreme Court) monitor each other so one doesn't get too powerful.

**Cabinet:** A group of experienced advisors who help the President (or other head of government) make important decisions.

**Civics:** The study of what people can do and should do in their communities.

**Committee:** Committees are groups of Members appointed to investigate, debate, and report on legislation. While they are not mentioned in the Constitution, committees have become an important part of the legislative process since their introduction during the first Congress in 1789. Committees were created to help Members organize their work. There are five different types of committees—standing committees, subcommittees, select committees, joint committees, and the Committee of the Whole.

**Congress:** Congress is the largest law-making body in the United States. Made up from representatives from each state, namely Congressional Senators and House Representatives.

**Constituent:** Members of the public who are represented by a specific legislator or public official

**Constitution:** The main laws and ideas that a country or state follows to decide how the government is set up and what rights the people have.



**Die in Committee:** When a bill does not forward because the committee does not return it to the main legislative body for further action.

**Disenfranchisement:** To take away someone's right to vote.

**Dissenting Opinion:** When a judge or justice writes out their disagreement with the main decision the court made on a specific case.

**District:** The specific area or region within the state that is represented by a legislator and is determined either by a number or by its physical boundaries (location).

**Early Voting:** A period of time before election day when voters can cast their ballots in person.

**Effective Date:** When a law becomes official.

**Elect:** To pick someone for a political office by voting for them.

**Electoral College:** A group of representatives that each state chooses to decide who the president will be. While we vote for who we want to be president, the constitution requires that the states, through these 538 representatives, ultimately choose who the president will be. While most of the time the popular vote and the electoral college agree on who the president is, there are times where the electoral college decides differently or members of the electoral college vote differently than how their state wants them to vote.

**Executive branch:** The part of the government run by the President who passes laws and makes sure they are followed.

**Federal Election Commission:** A group that watches over how money is raised and spent in national elections.

**Filibuster:** When a member of congress talks for a really long time to try and delay a decision in the government.

**Fiscal Note:** A document that attempts to explain or estimate in dollars how much money a proposed law might make or spend, and what it means for government finances now and in the future.

**Floor:** A section in the legislative chamber where only certain members are allowed.



**General Assembly:** The Connecticut General Assembly is the decision-making governmental group for the state of Connecticut. It's made up of two parts: the House of Representatives, which has 151 members, and the Senate, which has 36 members. Together, they work to make laws and decisions for the state.

**General Election:** The regular election of candidates for public office that occurs on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November; General Election 2024 is November 5th.

**Grand Jury:** A group of people who look at the evidence first to decide if there's enough to charge someone with a crime before bringing it to a larger criminal trial.

**Hearing or Public Hearing:** A public meeting for people to talk about and voice opinions on a proposal or bill, usually scheduled by a committee.

**Incumbent:** The person who's currently in a public office.

**Introducer:** The person, often a lawmaker, who presents a bill or resolution to be considered. Others who join in are called co-introducers.

**Joint Favorable Report:** When legislators from both the CT Senate and House believe a bill is good enough to be voted on by the entire general assembly then they vote to give it a Joint Favorable Report.

**Journal:** The official record of the events and actions that occur in the Connecticut General Assembly, Senate, and House on each session day. There are separate journals for the Senate and House.

**Judicial Branch:** The part of the government that uses courts, such as the Supreme Court, to decide if laws are okay and follow the Constitution.

**Jurisdiction:** An area or zone where a country or group can make and enforce laws.

**Legislative Intent:** Purpose of a law or decision made.

**Legislature in Session:** The set time when the legislature comes together to discuss and pass those laws.

**Line of Succession:** When an elected official in the executive branch (President, Governor, Vice President, etc.) dies, resigns, or is removed from office before their term is complete, another person has to take their job. The specific order in which the position is given to other officials is called the order of succession.



**Legislation:** The process of making and passing rules or laws by the government or an official group.

**Legislative Branch:** The part of the government where people we vote for in state elections make the rules and laws for everyone.

**Legislature:** A group of people we vote for who make laws for our state or country.

**Majority Leader:** A member of the party that occupies the greatest number of seats in that specific chamber, chosen to be the leader.

**Minority Leader:** A member of the party that occupies the least number of seats in that specific chamber, chosen to be the leader.

**Ordinance:** A local rule or law made by a city or town.

**Point of Order:** A question from a member to the Speaker or presiding officer pointing out a mistake in following the rules or order.

**Nomination:** When someone is officially suggested to run for an office.

**Nominee:** Someone who has been picked or suggested for a position.

**Penalty of Perjury:** When you testify in court or to a legislative body you swear or affirm to tell the truth. When you lie on purpose to these groups you are committing perjury.

**Political Party:** A group of people who have similar ideas about how government should be run and they suggest people to be leaders or officials. In the United States, the two major political parties in the U.S. are the Democratic and Republican parties, but there are many different political parties.

**Presidential Preference Primary:** A presidential preference primary is an election where people vote for the presidential candidate they want to represent their political party in the general election in November.

**Provisional Ballot:** If a polling location cannot confirm your registration or you register same day, you are given this temporary ballot that may or not be counted. If your registration is confirmed, then the ballot is counted but if your registration is not then your ballot is not counted.

**Public Act:** Legislation signed into law that applies to all; All CT laws once passed become known by their public act number and not their bill number.



**Preamble:** An intro or opening that explains why a law or official paper was made usually but not always referring to the US constitution

**Primary Election:** A first-round vote to pick who will be the main candidates for a general election.

**Quorum:** When a group of lawmakers gathers, the minimum number of members needed to do official work or take a vote when a group of lawmakers gathers.

**Referendum:** A special vote where the people in a region or country are asked to directly decide on a specific issue or question, such as a new law, a change in the constitution, or a major policy change.

**Roll Call Vote:** Calling out the names of members one by one in alphabetical order and recording their vote for the record.

**Same Day Voter Registration:** A convenience for eligible voters to register to vote either during early voting or on election day

**Ranking Member:** The top member (usually the longest serving) of a committee or subcommittee that's not in the majority in the minority party.

**Rights:** Things people should be free to do or have without being stopped or treated unfairly.

**Secretary of the State:** The Secretary of the State is a constitutionally required position that is elected. The Secretary of the State (SOTS) in CT helps manage public records, business licenses, and oversees the administration of state and federal elections. The SOTS is elected to 4-year terms each election.

**Senate Pro Tempore (Pro Tem):** While the Vice President is in charge of running the U.S. Senate, they are not always able to, and so the President Pro Tem of the Senate is elected to run the senate in their place. While this position often goes to the longest serving senator from the majority party, that is not always the case.

**Speaker:** The title "Speaker" is given to the person elected as the head of the House of Representatives in Connecticut.

**State Senator:** State Senators are representatives who are elected to two-year terms, help make laws in the Connecticut State Senate, work alongside the Connecticut House of Representatives, and assist the Governor in creating the budget, among other duties.



**Statute:** A law made by the government that is written down unlike a rule or unwritten law, so that it is more permanent.

**Separation of powers:** Splitting the government into different parts so no single part becomes too powerful.

**State Representative:** State Representatives are legislators that are elected to two-year terms in the Connecticut House of Representatives. These legislators help make laws alongside the CT State Senate, pass laws that involve taxes and spending, and help balance out the Governor's powers

**Suffrage:** The permission or ability for someone to vote in an election.

**Volunteer:** A person who chooses to help (participate) in an act that benefits their community or others.

**Write In Vote:** When you write the name of a person on the ballot who is not already listed as an official candidate for that position.

**Veto:** The ability of one branch of government to say "no" to a decision or a suggested law; it is a way for one person or group to stop something from happening by refusing to approve it.

**Voting Rights Act:** The Voting Rights Act is a federal law that helps protect people from discrimination in the voting process based on race, national origin, sex, disability, and other protected groups. This happens by requiring certain jurisdictions to provide language assistance to voters in communities where there is a concentration of citizens who do aren't proficient in English and requires Federal election examiners and observers for certain jurisdictions where there is evidence of attempts to intimidate minority voters at the polls.

**Yeas and Nays:** A method of voting in which each member of a legislative body verbally states their vote either in favor (yea) or against (nay) a particular issue or proposal.

