



Why do elections matter?



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- CALIFORNIANS WAIT TO VOTE AT A POLLING PLACE IN LOS ANGELES' VENICE BEACH DISTRICT, NOVEMBER 4, 2008.

Elections help ensure that power passes in a peaceful, orderly manner from citizens to their elected representatives—and from one elected official to his or her successor.

The U.S. Constitution gives certain powers to the national (or “federal”) government and reserves others for the individual states, and the people. In many countries, national governments set education and health policies, but in the U.S., the 50 states have primary responsibility in these areas. National defense and foreign policy are examples of federal responsibility.

The Constitution requires that each state have a republican form of government, and it forbids states from violating certain specified rights (e.g., “No State shall...deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”). But states otherwise retain considerable power.

The American system can appear complicated, but it ensures that voters have a voice at all levels of government.