

# GOVERNMENT

## BONUS CHAPTER



*This section is a bonus chapter about the governments of the three Pacific Northwest states. It is optional for residents of Oregon and Idaho. Washington State requires a study of the Washington State Constitution as part of Washington State history, so **you should complete this section if you are resident of Washington.***

### LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

There are three levels of government: federal, state, and local. The federal government is the highest authority, then the state government, and then the local government.

### STATE GOVERNMENTS

All three of the Pacific Northwest states have state governments that operate with three branches like the three branches of the United States federal government.

### GOVERNMENTAL POWER

Before we talk more about the governments of the Pacific Northwest states, we are going to review the governmental power granted by the Constitution.

### JAMES MADISON

James Madison is considered the father

of the Constitution because he wrote most of it. Read through three of his quotes one by one in the box below and see if you can figure out what they mean. The quotes are simplified under each for younger readers:

"The essence of Government is power; and power, lodged as it must be in human hands, will ever be liable to abuse."

Simplified: At the core of government is power, and power in the hands of people leads to the temptation to use it for bad purposes.

"In Republics, the great danger is, that the majority may not sufficiently respect the rights of the minority"

Simplified: In a republic where people elect their leaders, there is danger that the many will ignore the rights of the few.

"I believe there are more instances of the abridgement of freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachments by those in power than by violent and sudden usurpations."

Simplified: People's freedom is more likely to be taken away slowly and gradually than by a sudden event.

## LIMITING POWER

As they considered what type of government would be best for the United States, our founding fathers were very concerned about individual rights and freedom. They knew that people are sinful, and once a person has power, he almost always wants more power. Those in power don't always consider the needs of the people. Our founding fathers didn't trust large government and looked for a way to limit the power of the government. They were also concerned that the majority (greater number) of people would do whatever they wanted to the minority (lower number), and they wanted a system that was fair to all.

## HOUSE REPRESENTATIVES

In order to make sure that the minority were not victims of the majority, the Legislative Branch was separated into two houses: the House of Representatives and the Senate. The House of Representatives always has 435 representatives. The number of representatives per state is determined by the number of people who live in each state. Larger states have more representatives than smaller states. The number of representatives per state can

change after each 10 year census (counting the number of people in each state). Each state has at least one representative. States like California have the most representatives. In 2024, California had 52 representatives.

## SENATE REPRESENTATIVES

Representatives are different in the Senate. Each state gets exactly the same number of representatives: 2. This ensures that the smaller states have a voice and are able to have some say in the nation's laws. Without equal representation in the Senate, the larger states could do whatever they wanted, and the smaller states would have no power to do anything about it. This is a very important safeguard for individual freedom.

## CHECKS AND BALANCES

Because our forefathers sought to limit power of the government, they created the three branches of our government. Each branch has checks and balances over the other two branches. This means that no one branch is able to have more power than the other two.

Each of the branches has very clear duties. If they overstep their duties or do something unconstitutional, the other branches are able to limit their actions. See the charts on the next two pages that show how the different branches are able to check and balance each other.





We the People

# THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC

## Three Branches of Government

Article 1

### UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION



Capitol Building, Washington DC



The White House



United States Supreme Court

**LEGISLATIVE BRANCH**

Makes Laws

Approves Presidential Appointments

**CONGRESS**  
2 Houses

**Senate**

100 Senators - 2 senators per state

**House of Representatives**

435 State Representatives based on state population

**EXECUTIVE BRANCH**

Carries Out Laws

Nominates Cabinet

Signs & Vetoes Laws

Commands Armed Forces

Conducts Foreign Affairs

Appoints Federal Judges

**PRESIDENT**

Vice President  
(Breaks a tie if the Senate has an equal number of votes)

**Cabinet**  
(The 15 member Cabinet advises the President)

**JUDICIAL BRANCH**

Evaluates Laws

Decides if laws are constitutional

Can overturn rulings by lower court judges

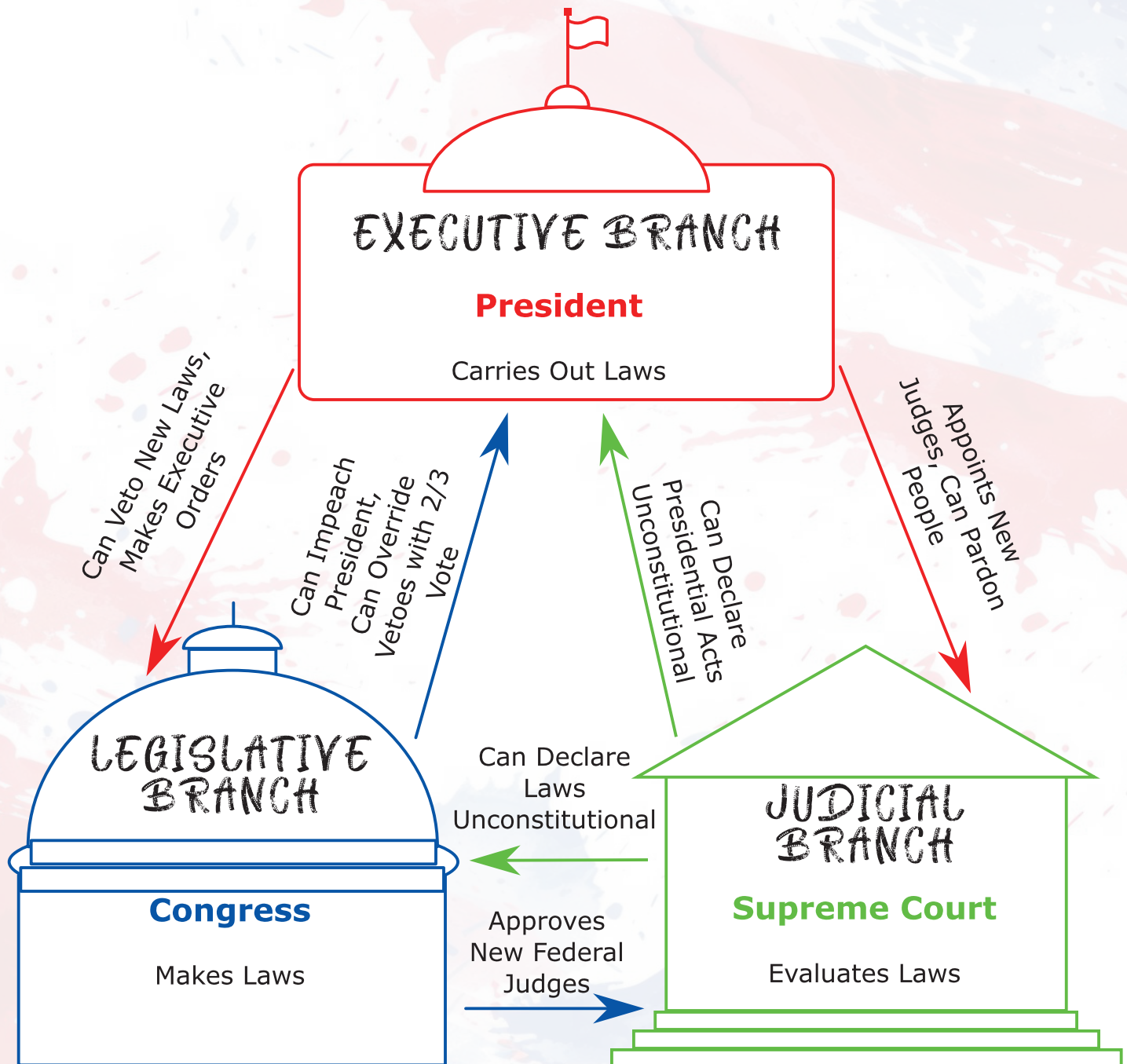
**SUPREME COURT**

9 Justices, appointed until they resign

**Other Federal Courts**



# CHECKS AND BALANCES



# LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

As mentioned previously, the governments of all three Pacific Northwest states have the same branches as the federal government and work about the same.

## REPRESENTATIVES

Each state's legislative branch has a different number of representatives in the Senate and House of Representatives. Each state is broken into congressional (voting) districts, and each district elects one senator to represent them in the State Senate and two to represent them in the House of Representatives. Senators serve four-year terms before they are up for re-election. There is no limit to how many terms they can serve as long as they

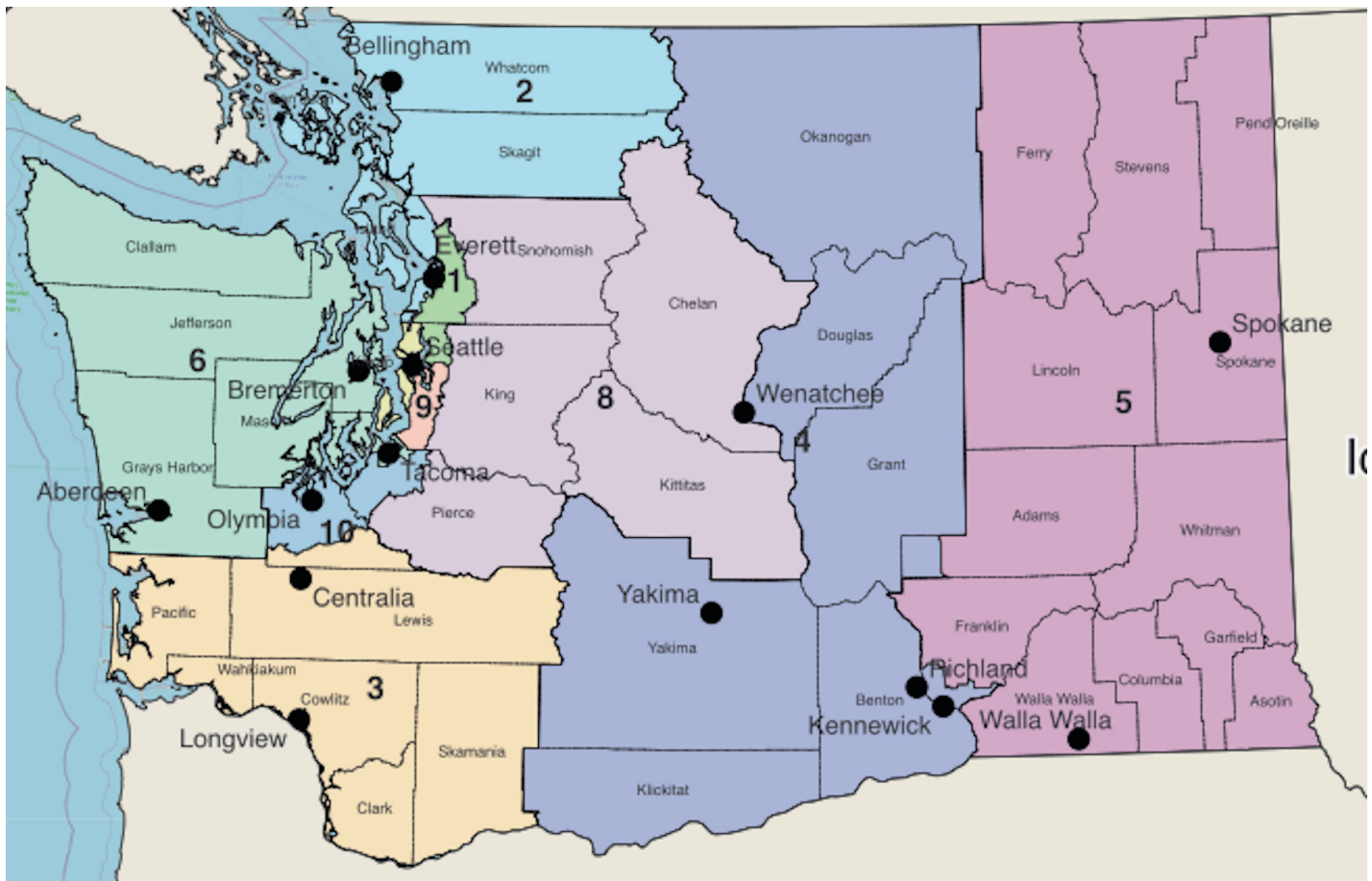
continue to be elected. Half of the senators are up for re-election every even-numbered year.

Because the number of voting districts varies by state, each state has a different number of representatives in state government.

## VOTING DISTRICTS

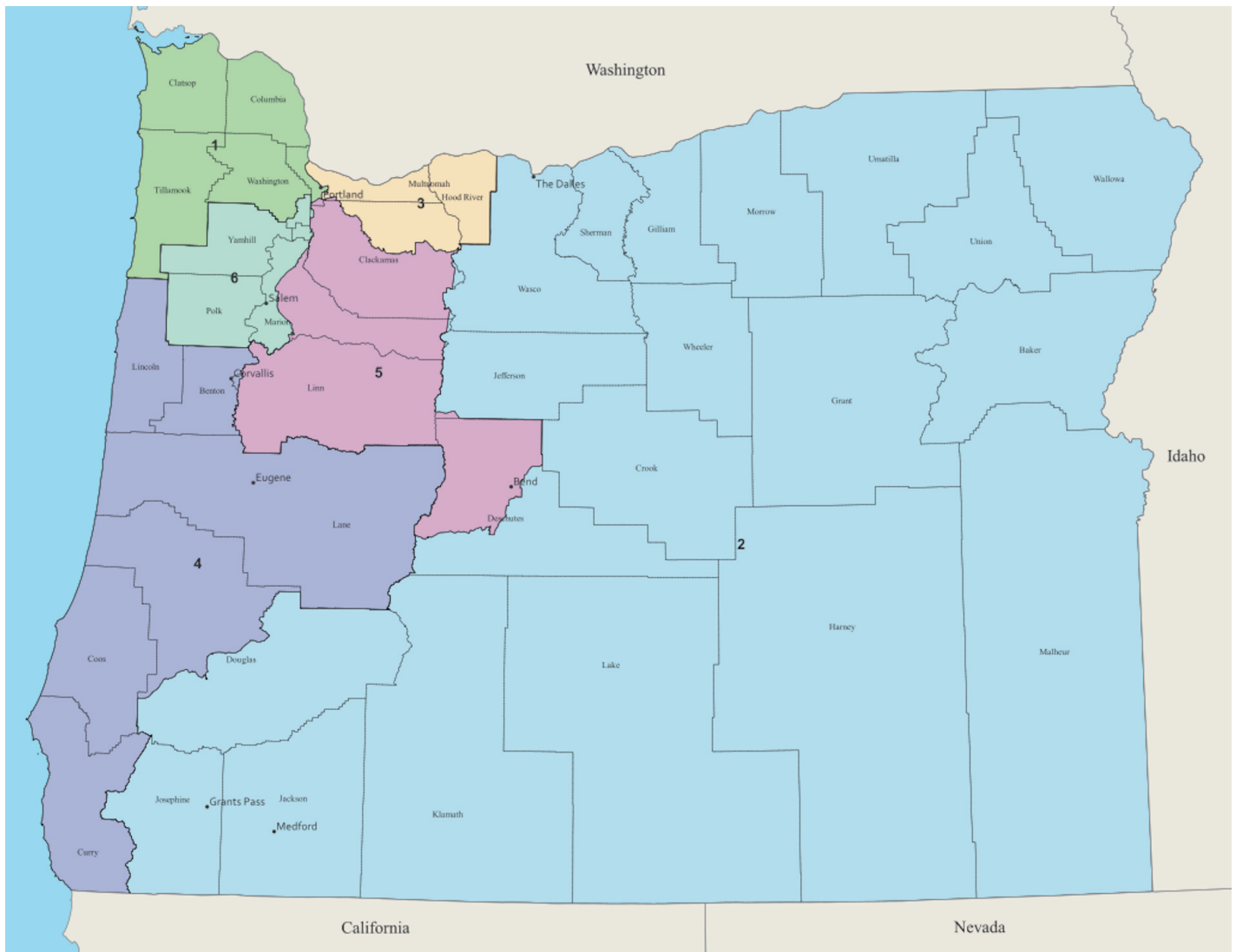
Washington State has 49 congressional (voting) districts, so it has 49 representatives in the State Senate and 98 in the House of Representatives. You can see these districts on the map below.

Oregon has 30 congressional districts across the state, so it has 30 representatives in the State Senate and 60 representatives in the House of Representatives. You can see these



Washington State's Voting Districts, ZachSolomon1, Edited, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons





*Oregon's Voting Districts, AveryTheComrade, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons*

districts on the map of Oregon above.

Idaho has 35 congressional districts, so it has 35 representatives in the State Senate and 70 in the House of Representatives. You can see these districts on the map of Idaho on the next page.

## STATE CONSTITUTIONS

Each state has its own constitution with rules of procedure for state government. All state constitutions are considerably longer than the Constitution of the United States because they have more details about the interactions between

the government and the people who are governed. While the US Constitution is under 8,000 words in length, average length of state constitutions is about 39,000 words.

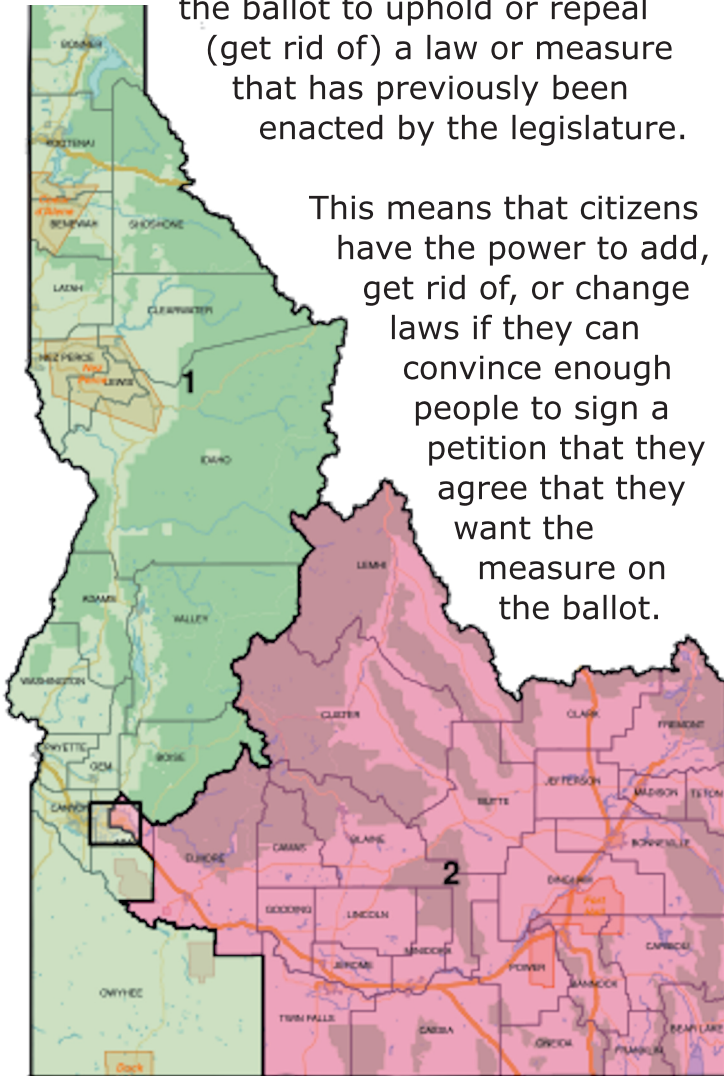
The state constitutions can be amended (changed or added to) with legislative action by the Senate and House of Representatives and a public vote. The Washington, Oregon, and Idaho State Constitutions have all been amended many times. Washington's Constitution has been amended 108 times, Oregon's Constitution has been amended 259 times, and Idaho's Constitution has been amended 142 times.

## CITIZEN-INITIATED BALLOTS

Along with 23 other states, Washington, Oregon, and Idaho are all states that provide for citizen-initiated ballot measures. This means that citizens can get together and try to convince others to sign a petition to add a new law or measure. If enough signatures are collected for the petition, the measure is added to the ballot to be voted on.

These states also all allow a veto referendum, or a citizen's veto. This means that citizens can collect signatures to add a measure to the ballot to uphold or repeal (get rid of) a law or measure that has previously been enacted by the legislature.

This means that citizens have the power to add, get rid of, or change laws if they can convince enough people to sign a petition that they agree that they want the measure on the ballot.



Oregon's Voting Districts, AveryTheComrade, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

## THE OREGON SYSTEM

The state of Oregon has introduced new reforms in many areas. The ability of citizens to impact laws directly instead of just through the legislative process of the Senate and House of Representatives started in Oregon in 1902.

Known as the "Oregon System," Oregon passed voting reforms that allowed citizens to put any measure on the ballot if they had enough support. This gave voters more power to make direct changes to government. This was important to Oregon citizens because they thought that politicians represented corporations and large businesses and were corrupt. Citizens wanted a way to counteract corrupt politicians.

At the beginning of the Oregon System, ballots for Oregon were much longer and more complicated than ballots in other states, which was often confusing for voters. However, the number of measures on the ballot decreased after World War I, and 23 other states adopted the Oregon System, including Washington and Idaho.

## CITIZEN-INITIATED AMENDMENTS

The Oregon System was adopted by all three Pacific Northwest states for new initiatives and referendums (getting rid of measures that had previously been enacted), but of the three states, only Oregon allows for citizens to initiate amendments to the state constitution. Washington and Idaho only allow changes to their state constitutions through the legislative process of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

## HOW STATE LAWS ARE PASSED

Laws are made or changed at the state level like they are at the federal level.

State legislatures create new laws, change existing laws, and approve the yearly budget for the state. The amount of time that legislatures meet is determined by the state constitution. In Washington State, the legislature meets 105 days starting in January during odd-numbered years. It meets 60 days on even-numbered years. Why do you think the legislature meets longer during odd-numbered years? Remember, half of senators are up for re-election every two years, which always falls on an even-numbered year.

Legislators serve on various committees. Committees can be Senate Committees, House Committees, or Joint Committees (with members from both the Senate and the House of Representatives). These committees are made up of legislators who get together and talk about things relevant to their committee. Committee topics include: agriculture, education, natural resources, business, energy, health, housing, labor, human services, and many others.

For a bill to become a law, it first must be introduced in either the Senate or the House of Representatives by a member of the legislature. It is given a number and sent to a committee, where it is studied, discussed, and altered. If the committee recommends passing the bill, it is sent to another committee called the Rules Committee, which can decide whether or not to add it to the schedule.

If the Rules Committee adds it to the schedule, it is presented as a second reading to the Senate or the House of Representatives. Legislators discuss it, debate it, and often make amendments to it.

The bill is then revised and sent back to the Rules Committee again. If the Rules Committee adds it to the schedule again, a third reading takes place, the bill is again discussed and debated before a vote is called. If the bill is passed by a majority vote, it is then sent to the opposite legislature (Senate or House of Representatives), where the process is repeated.

If a bill passes both the Senate and House of Representatives, it is sent to the Governor. The Governor can either sign the entire bill into law, approve part of the bill and sign it into law, or veto the bill.

If the Governor vetoes the bill, the Senate and House of Representatives can override the Governor's veto if 2/3 of BOTH the Senate and the House of Representatives vote in favor of the bill.



*State Capitol Building, Olympia, Washington*



# EXECUTIVE BRANCH

At the state level, the governor functions in the executive branch like the United States president at the federal level. The governor is elected by the people and is responsible for carrying out the laws made by the legislative branch. The governor is the person who speaks for the state. The governor reviews bills passed by the legislature and either signs or vetoes them.

In many states, the governor also appoints key leaders of state government, departments, or agencies. However, some states, including all three of the Pacific Northwest states, restrict the power of the governor with a divided executive branch where the people vote to elect between five and nine key positions in state government.

## WASHINGTON

To the right are Washington's nine elected offices.

Elected Office	Description
Governor	Speaks for the state. Signs or vetoes bills. Makes sure laws are carried out. Appoints heads of some state departments and agencies. Submits budget recommendation.
Lieutenant Governor	Acts as the governor if the governor is absent. Presides over the Senate. Serves on several important committees.
Secretary of State	Supervises state and local elections. Registers corporations in the state. Collects and preserves historical archives and library of legislative bills.
State Treasurer	State's chief financial officer. Provides banking, investment, and financial services. Collects and distributes state agency revenues and funds.
State Auditor	Provides accountability for every public dollar spent by state agencies. Performs regular audits of state agencies and local governments.
Attorney General	The state's chief legal officer. Heads the state law firm. Provides legal counsel to state officials. Advises and assists local prosecuting attorneys.
Superintendent of Public Instruction	Administers the state's public and private schools. Oversees education budget, programs, curriculum guidelines, and accreditation.
Commissioner of Public Lands	Manages millions of acres of public lands. Regulates logging, forestry, and mining. Oversees wildlife conservation and fighting wildfires.
Insurance Commissioner	Regulates insurance companies in the state to make sure consumers are protected. Collects special tax from insurance companies in the state.

The number of elected officials and their positions varies depending on the state.

## OREGON'S ELECTED OFFICIALS

While Washington has nine elected officials, Oregon only has five: governor, secretary of state, state treasurer, attorney general, and labor and industries commissioner.

You can find four of these on the table on the previous page. The fifth elected office is different. The labor and industries commissioner manages the programs of the Bureau of Labor and Industries. This includes enforcing anti-discrimination laws, ensuring businesses follow state employment laws, and providing apprenticeship and education programs for higher education.

## IDAHO'S ELECTED OFFICIALS

Idaho has seven elected officials: governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general, secretary of state, treasurer, controller, and superintendent of public instruction.

Idaho's elected officials include two finance officials: the treasurer and the controller. The treasurer receives and distributes public funds and invests public money.

The controller position used to be the state auditor, but it was changed in 1994. The controller is basically the checkbook for the state. The controller maintains accounting and financial records, pays bills, prepares annual financial reports, and provides internal pre-audit controls. The remaining duties of the state

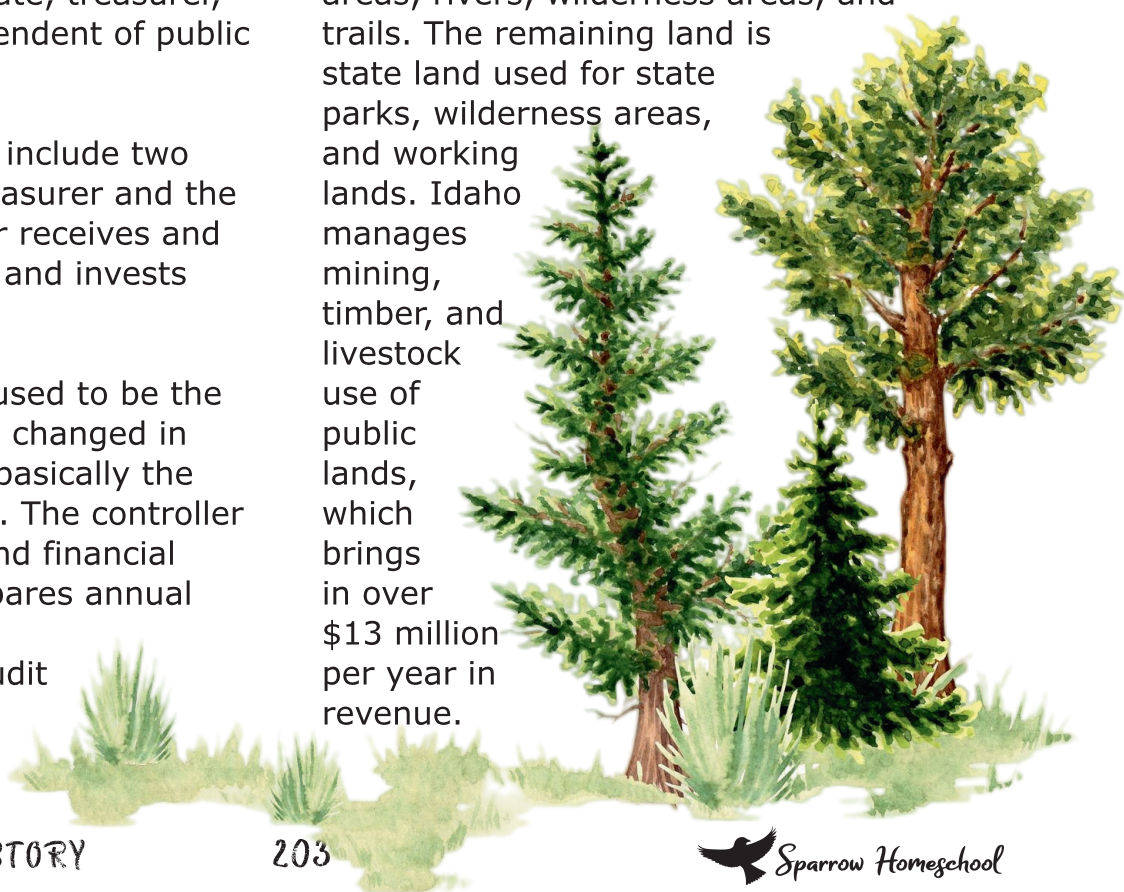
auditor are carried out by the audit division of the state legislature.

## PUBLIC LAND

Over 28 million acres of land in the Pacific Northwest is public land. That means it is owned and managed by the states. The United States Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages this vast amount of public land. This land is used for recreation, forestry, mining, water, fishing, hunting, science, and cultural purposes.

Oregon and Washington's 16 million acres of public lands are managed together by the BLM. This land is used for recreation, wildlife protection, wilderness, forestry, mining, and livestock.

In Idaho, the BLM manages 12 million acres of public land, which is 22% of the state's total land. About 3.5 million acres are national monuments, conservation areas, rivers, wilderness areas, and trails. The remaining land is state land used for state parks, wilderness areas, and working lands. Idaho manages mining, timber, and livestock use of public lands, which brings in over \$13 million per year in revenue.



# JUDICIAL BRANCH

The judicial branch of state government determines if a law violates the state constitution. Voters elect judges who serve in the court system. Washington, Oregon, and Idaho each have four or five different levels in their judicial system.

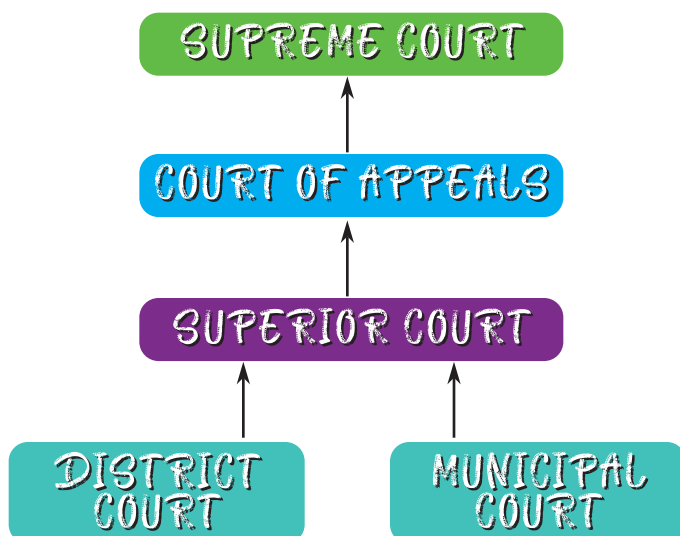
## SUPREME COURT

The highest level for all three states is the State Supreme Court. Each of the three Pacific Northwest states has a different number of justices (judges) who serve in the Supreme Court. Washington has nine, Oregon has seven, and Idaho has five. Why do you think it is important that there is an odd number of justices? This way there will not be a tie.

The Supreme Court primarily only hears cases that have been appealed from a lower court. This means that someone didn't like the verdict in the lower court and appealed to a higher court to retry the case.

The lower courts vary a bit in their structure in each of the three states.

## WASHINGTON COURT SYSTEM



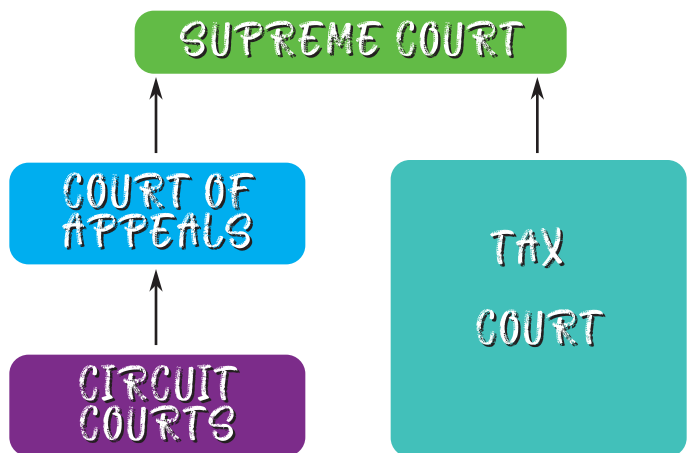
In Washington, there is a superior and district court for each of the 39 counties.

In addition, some cities have established municipal courts for traffic violations and misdemeanors. They cannot hear civil lawsuits. Judges of municipal courts are appointed by a mayor or city council and serve for four years.

District courts hear cases involving traffic violations, misdemeanors, and civil matters involving less than \$100,000. Superior courts can hear all civil and criminal charges, felonies, family law, and estate matters. They also hear appeals from district or municipal courts. Judges are elected for district and superior court and serve for four years.

The State Court of Appeals is required to hear all appeals from superior courts. It cannot choose to not hear an appeal. Judges are elected and serve for six years.

## OREGON COURT SYSTEM



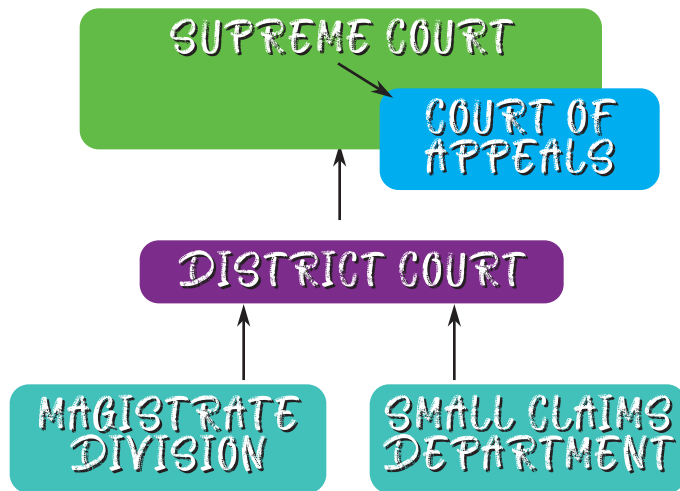
Oregon's judicial system is a little simpler. There is a circuit court in each of the state's 27 districts. Some districts cover just one county, and other districts cover several counties. The circuit courts are trial courts and hear all cases except



tax cases. All cases related to state tax law are heard by the Tax Court for the state.

The Court of Appeals hears cases from people who appeal a decision made by a circuit court.

## IDAHO COURT SYSTEM



In Idaho, the small claims departments hear civil actions involving less than \$4000. Magistrate judges hear the small claims, and there are no attorneys or trials.

The magistrate divisions hear civil claims up to \$10,000, traffic violations, felony preliminary hearings, family law, estate matters, and small claims.

District courts hear cases involving felonies, personal injury and civil claims, contracts, property disputes, and appeals from magistrate divisions, small claims departments, and state agencies.

The Supreme Court hears appeals from district courts and administrative agencies. Unlike Washington and Oregon, the Court of Appeals in Idaho is not a mid-level court, but instead it functions as support for the Supreme Court. It only hears appeals from the district court

that have been assigned by the Supreme Court.

## CITY AND COUNTY GOVERNMENTS

Locally, cities and counties provide services to their citizens. They provide law enforcement, police and fire departments, emergency services, water and septic systems, libraries, education, roads and transportation, court services, and building permits.

They also have assessors to determine property value for property taxes and treasurers to collect taxes and provide financial services to distribute the funds.

## TAXES

Government services are paid for by taxes at the federal, state, and local levels. Federally, taxes mostly come from payroll taxes. States gather taxes through state income taxes (Oregon and Idaho), sales tax (Washington and Idaho), and property tax.

The majority of sales taxes are allocated to states, but a smaller portion of sales tax remains local to support government programs. The local tax rate varies by city, which is why sales taxes are higher in some cities than others. In Washington, there is no sales tax on food or prescription medication.

Property taxes pay for local services, including schools, fire and emergency medical services, city and county services, libraries, and parks. In Washington, over half of property taxes go toward public schools. You can see the breakdown of where taxes go on the charts on the next page.

## PROPERTY TAX DISTRIBUTION

You can see how taxes are distributed in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho on the charts to the right. For Washington, city, county, and local services include roads, emergency medical services, fire protection, hospitals, ports, libraries, and other services. For Oregon, special districts include fire services, roads, libraries, water, hospitals, and parks.

## STATE CONSTITUTIONS

As you can see from this chapter and from the comparison chart at the end of chapter 24, all three of the Pacific Northwest states operate their state governments similarly, but there are distinct differences between the three. These differences are possible because of each state's unique state constitution.

## WASHINGTON STATE CONSTITUTION

Like the US Constitution, the Washington State Constitution starts with a preamble.

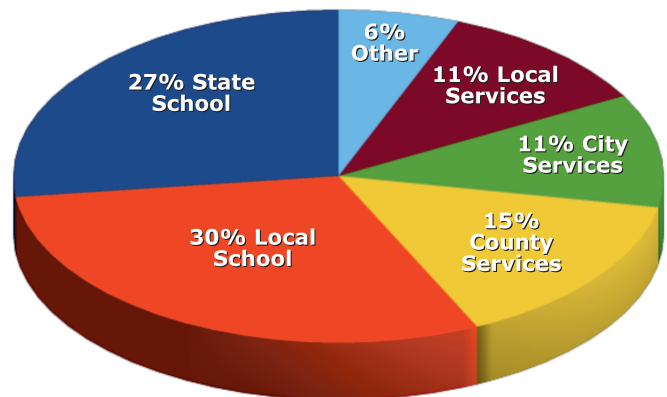
### PREAMBLE

We, the people of the State of Washington, grateful to the Supreme Ruler of the universe for our liberties, do ordain this constitution.

### ARTICLE I

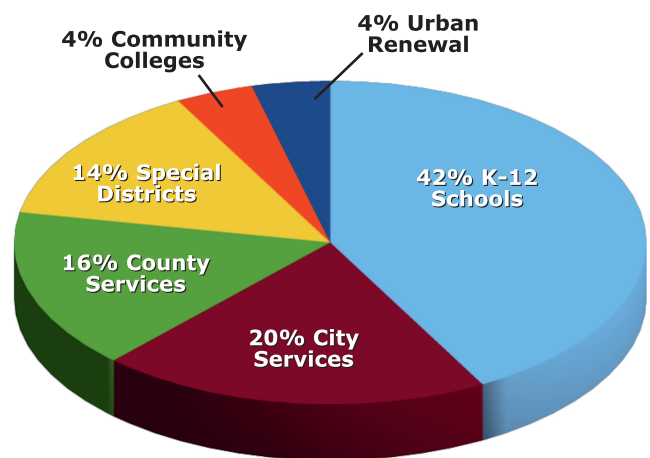
The first article is a declaration of rights. There are 35 sections that specify the rights of the citizens. Section 1 shows the people's mistrust of government and determination to ensure that citizens could fight back politically against the government if needed. This section says:

## WASHINGTON PROPERTY TAX DISTRIBUTION



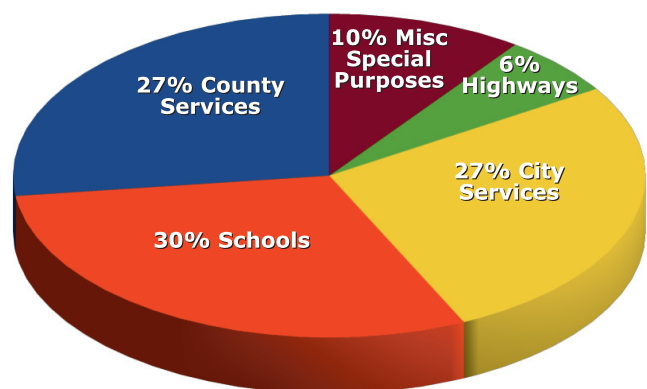
Breakdown of where Washington property taxes go

## OREGON PROPERTY TAX DISTRIBUTION



Breakdown of where Oregon property taxes go

## IDAHO PROPERTY TAX DISTRIBUTION



Breakdown of where Idaho property taxes go

*All political power is inherent in the people, and governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, and are established to protect and maintain individual rights.*

Section 2 acknowledges that the US Constitution is the supreme law of the land. Section 3 and 4 are about people's rights to due process and to assemble. Section 5 is freedom of speech. Sections 6-10 are about oaths, invasion of private property, and the rights of those who are accused. Section 11 is about religious freedom and begins with:

*Absolute freedom of conscience in all matters of religious sentiment, belief and worship, shall be guaranteed to every individual...*

This section about religious freedom has been amended three times.

Sections continue with equal treatment under the law, bail, convictions, private property rights, debt, limitation of military power, freedom of elections, trial by juries, the right to bear arms, prohibiting a standing army in times of peace, how elected officers can be recalled, and victim's rights.

## ARTICLE II

Article II concerns the Legislative Department, that is the Senate and House of Representatives and how laws can be passed.

## ARTICLE III

Article III concerns the Executive Department and specifies the nine elected key positions of government. The duties and details of the governor's

position are outlined in sections 2-14. Sections 15-25 detail the duties and compensation for the other 8 elected positions, the seal of the state of Washington, and which offices may be abolished.

## ARTICLE IV

Article IV concerns the Judicial Department. Sections specify judicial power and duties, the Supreme Court, elections, jurisdiction, and specific details for judges, court positions, and juries.

## ARTICLES V-VIII

Article V is about impeachment and removal of elected officials from office. Article VI is about elections. Article VII is about taxes and the budget. Article VIII is about state debt and conservation assistance.

## ARTICLES IX-XXI

Article IX is about education and the public school system. Article X is about the state militia. Article XI is about the organization of counties, cities, and towns. Articles XII-XXI are about new corporations, state institutions, the location of the state capital, harbors and waterways, public lands, the state seal, public health, and water rights.

## ARTICLES XXII-XXXII

Articles XXII-XXXII are about how the senatorial districts are divided and represented, amendments, state boundaries, jurisdiction, land held by Indian tribes, change of governments from territorial to state, salaries for elected officials, investment of pensions, equality, and special revenue financing.