A SMALL BOOK FOR EVERYBODY

Your Vote, Explained Simply

Written by **TINA BERRY**

“Chancellor of UEOA”

What the House does. What the Senate does. What the President does. What judges do. And when it is your turn to vote.



For teenagers, first-time voters, and every adult who wants voting to make sense without a big, confusing book.

The one idea to remember: In America, the people are the boss. Voting is how the boss gives the orders.

START HERE

1. The People Are the Boss

Think of the government like a team that works for the people.

Voting is how the people **hire** leaders, **keep** the good ones, and **replace** the ones who are not doing the job.

Plain words:

You do not vote just to pick a famous name. You vote to pick a **person for a job**. Every job on the ballot has work to do for your home, your town, your state, and your country.

You are voting for a job, not just a person. So the best question is always:

“What is this job? And what will this person do in it?”

That is what this whole book answers, one job at a time.

THE BIG PICTURE

2. Three Branches, Three Jobs



Branch	Plain job	Who is in it?
Legislative (Congress)	**Makes** the laws	House + Senate
Executive	**Carries out** the laws	President + agencies
Judicial	**Explains** the laws and settles fights about them	Courts + judges

Each branch can also **check** the others. That is called **checks and balances**. It stops any one branch from getting too much power.

Easy way to remember:

Congress **writes the rules**. The President **runs the rules**. The courts **referee the rules**.

3. The House: The People’s Fast Voice

Full name: U.S. House of Representatives. People in it are called **Representatives**.

Question	Answer
How many?	**435** voting members
Who do they speak for?	One **district** - a smaller area inside your state
How long is the job?	**2 years**
When do we vote?	**Every 2 years - every seat, every time**

What the House does:

- Helps make federal laws
- **Starts** bills about taxes and spending money
- Can **impeach** - formally charge - a president or judge who breaks the rules

Why 2 years? So the House must listen to the people often. If your Representative stops listening, you get a new vote very soon.

YOUR STATE + THE HOUSE

When Is House Voting Time in Your State?

Your House vote happens in **two rounds**:

1 **Primary election** - earlier in the year. Voters pick who will run for each party in the final race. **Your state sets this date**, so it is different in every state.

2 **General election** - the Tuesday after the first Monday in **November**, in every even-numbered year (2026, 2028, 2030...). This date is the same all over the country.

How to find your dates and your House district:

- Go to **vote.gov** and pick your state
- Check your voter registration
- Look at your **sample ballot** before Election Day
- Find your district number - it tells you which House race is yours

States also run early voting and mail voting in different ways. Your state election office and vote.gov show the rules for your state. Never guess the date - always check.

4. The Senate: The Slow, Steady Voice

People in the Senate are called **Senators**. They speak for a **whole state**, not just one district.

Question	Answer
How many?	**100** - exactly 2 for every state, big or small
How long is the job?	**6 years**
When do we vote?	About **one-third** of Senate seats are voted on every 2 years

What the Senate does:

- Helps make federal laws (a bill needs both House and Senate)
- **Confirms** - says yes or no to - judges, Cabinet leaders, and ambassadors picked by the President
- Approves treaties with other countries
- Holds the **trial** when the House impeaches someone

Why 6 years, in turns? So the Senate changes slowly and stays steady, while the House changes fast and stays close to the people.

YOUR STATE + THE SENATE

When Is Senate Voting Time in Your State?

Your two Senators are **never voted on in the same year** (unless one seat becomes empty early). They take turns.

Year type	What happens
Every 2 years (even years)	About 33 or 34 Senate seats are up, across the country
Your state's turn	Depends on which "class" your Senator is in - Class 1, 2, or 3
General election day	Tuesday after the first Monday in November

How to know if it is your Senator's year:

- Check your **sample ballot** at vote.gov or your state election site
- If a Senate race is listed, it is your turn to vote for Senator
- If it is not listed, your Senators' seats are not up this time - your next Senate vote comes in a later even year

Primary dates for Senate races are also set by your state, earlier in the same year.

THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

5. The President: The Nation’s Manager

The Executive Branch **carries out** the laws Congress makes. The President leads it.

Question	Answer
Who?	President + Vice President, plus departments and agencies
How long is the job?	**4 years** (a President can serve at most 2 terms)
When do we vote?	**Every 4 years** - 2024, 2028, 2032...

What the President does:

- Signs bills into law - or **vetoes** (says no to) them
- Runs federal agencies: defense, health, housing, education, and more
- Leads the military as Commander-in-Chief
- **Picks** federal judges and Cabinet leaders (Senate must confirm)
- Speaks for the United States with other countries

State managers too: Your **Governor** does a similar job for your state. Most governors serve 4-year terms and are voted on in midterm years, but a few states vote in odd years. Check vote.gov for your state.

6. Judges: The Referees - You Do Not Vote for Federal Judges

This surprises many people: **federal judges are not voted for at all.**

Step	How it works
1. Pick	The **President chooses** a judge
2. Check	The **Senate votes to confirm** (say yes) or reject
3. Serve	The judge serves **for life**, during “good behavior” - until they retire, pass away, or are removed

What judges do: They explain what the law means, settle fights about the law, and protect the rights in the Constitution - even when that is unpopular.

Why life terms? So a judge can be fair without fear. A referee who could be fired after one unpopular call would not be a fair referee.

Your vote still reaches the courts: You vote for the President who picks judges, and the Senators who confirm them. And in **many states, state and local judges ARE voted for** - that part changes by state, so read your sample ballot closely.

THE CALENDAR

7. When Do We Vote? The Whole Calendar on One Page

Race	Term	How often you vote
U.S. House (all 435 seats)	2 years	Every 2 years
U.S. Senate (about 1/3 of seats)	6 years	Every 2 years, when your seat is up
President + Vice President	4 years	Every 4 years
Federal judges	Life	Never - appointed, not elected

The big day: Federal general elections are on the **Tuesday after the first Monday in November**, in even-numbered years.

- **Presidential years** (every 4): President + all House + about 1/3 of Senate
- **Midterm years** (the 2 years between): all House + about 1/3 of Senate, no President. This is the people's halfway check-in.
- **Primaries:** earlier the same year, date set by your state
- **Special elections:** any time a seat becomes empty early

FOUR WORDS THAT CLEAR UP THE CONFUSION

8. Primary, General, Midterm, Special - Made Simple

Primary election = pick the player. Each party chooses who will run for them. Think of it as tryouts.

General election = pick the winner. Everyone’s chosen players face off, and the people pick who gets the job. This is the big November vote.

Midterm election = the halfway check. The general election that comes 2 years after a President starts. No President on the ballot, but all of the House and about a third of the Senate are. It is how the people say “keep going” or “change course” in the middle.

Special election = fill an empty seat. If someone leaves early, the state holds a special vote to fill the seat for the rest of the term.

Tryouts first. Then the championship. A halfway check in between. A fill-in game when a seat opens. That is the whole system.

PRIMARIES, EXPLAINED

Primaries: The Tryouts Before the Championship

Think of an election like a tournament. The general election in November is the championship game. The primaries are the tryouts that come first.

In a primary, each party picks who will carry its name into the final race. If several people want the same seat under the same party, the primary narrows it to one. Those winners face off in November.

Why primaries matter: in many races, the primary is where the real choice happens. Where one party usually wins in November, whoever wins that party's primary usually wins the seat. Skip the primary, and a smaller group picked your choices for you.

Who can vote? It depends on your state. Open primaries let any registered voter vote in any party's primary. Closed primaries only let party members vote in their party's primary. Some local races are nonpartisan — no party labels, everyone runs together.

Primaries happen earlier in the year, on a date your state sets. Check vote.gov for your state's primary date.

Bottom line: the general picks the winner, but the primary picks the players. Vote in both.

YOUR BALLOT + HOW TO VOTE

9. What Is On Your Ballot - and How to Vote, Step by Step



One ballot can hold **federal** races (President, Senate, House), **state** races (Governor, state lawmakers, judges in many states), **local** races (mayor, school board, sheriff), and sometimes **ballot measures** - yes-or-no questions the people decide directly. Local races touch your daily life the most.

- [ ] Check you are registered (vote.gov)
- [ ] Read your sample ballot before you go
- [ ] Make a plan: early, by mail, or on Election Day
- [ ] Vote - and you may leave a race blank if you are unsure; the rest still counts
- [ ] Check that your vote was received, if your state offers tracking

THREE WAYS TO VOTE

Early, by Mail, or on Election Day

Your vote counts the same all three ways. Pick the one that fits your life:

Vote early in person. Many states open polling places days or weeks before Election Day. Same vote, often shorter lines.

Vote by mail. Ask for a ballot, fill it out at home, and send it back or drop it off. Ask for it early and return it on time - a late ballot may not count.

Vote on Election Day. Go to your polling place during voting hours. Bring what your state requires. In line when the polls close? Stay in line - you still get to vote.

Your state sets the rules. Which options exist, the dates, ID, and deadlines are different everywhere. Check **vote.gov** - never guess.

If your state offers ballot tracking, use it to confirm your vote was received.

THE WHY

10. Why Your One Vote Is Powerful

Local races are often decided by a handful of votes. The smaller the race, the bigger your one vote is.

Your vote reaches farther than the names on the ballot. The President you help pick chooses judges who serve for life. The Senators you help pick confirm them. One vote can shape the courts for decades.

Voting is also how leaders learn. When young people and first-time voters show up, every leader pays attention to what they care about: jobs, housing, school, safety, and cost of living.

Not voting is also a choice - it lets other people choose your leaders for you. Your vote is your voice in who gets hired. Use it.

Who can vote, what ID to bring, and the exact deadlines are set by your state. Find yours at vote.gov.

TAKE THIS PAGE WITH YOU

Your One-Page Cheat Sheet + Quick Check

Job	Job in 5 words	Term	You vote?
Representative (House)	Speaks for your district	2 yrs	Yes, every 2 yrs
Senator	Speaks for your whole state	6 yrs	Yes, when seat is up
President	Runs the country day to day	4 yrs	Yes, every 4 yrs
Federal judge	Referees the law fairly	Life	No - President picks, Senate confirms

Quick check - say the answers out loud:

- Which branch makes the laws? *(Legislative - Congress)*
- How long does a Representative serve? *(2 years)*
- How many Senators does each state get? *(2)*
- Do we vote for federal judges? *(No)*
- When is the big November vote? *(Tuesday after the first Monday in November)*

Words to know: District - your smaller area for House races. **Constituent** - a person a leader speaks for (that is you). **Veto** - the President saying no to a bill. **Impeach** - to formally charge a leader with wrongdoing. **Ballot measure** - a yes-or-no question voters decide directly.

Sources to check your facts

Congress.gov, “Election Day: Frequently Asked Questions”; U.S. Senate, “When a New Congress Begins”; Legal Information Institute, “Staggered Senate Elections”; House history from Encyclopedia.com, “House of Representatives.” Find your registration, dates, and sample ballot at vote.gov and your state election office.